Rethinking shopping, repairing waste

Session 15

The ByeBuy! Shop – how changing values can change the shopping scapes of the future – Kirsty MÁTÉ

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The ByeBuy! Shop – how changing values can change the shopping scapes of the future

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Overconsumption has resulted in a variety of human, environmental and economic problems that have resulted in the reduction of natural resources while increasing pollution, global economic inequality and a fragmented community and society (Humphery 2013). The ByeBuy! Shop, a pop-up shop held for seven days in a vacant retail space in Launceston Tasmania, Australia in 2014, was established to test ideas on a variety of sustainable consumer exchanges. Using the theories of Shalom Schwartz, Ronald Inglehart and intrinsic/extrinsic values, this paper discusses how, through observations made at the ByeBuy! Shop, values play an important role for a cultural shift in consumer behavior and how curiosity, could be an important trigger for priming values concurrent with sustainable consumerist behaviour. These explanations provide useful discussions in leading societal paradigm changes to the way we shop and aid in the design of future shopping-scape environments.

Keywords: sustainable consumerism, values theory, curiosity, retail design
Introduction

“Shopping is arguably the last remaining form of public activity. Through a battery of increasingly predatory forms, shopping has been able to colonize – even replace- almost every aspect of urban life” (Koolhaas et al. 2000).

To make consumerist behaviour more sustainable we (in the developed world) need to consider changing not only what we consume but how and where we shop and the places we shop in. We measure the wellbeing of most of our societies in the developed and developing nations, indeed our economy and our nation, by how much we consume. Shopping scapes designed to promote consumption, have subsequently become physical representations of the wellbeing of a nation and society. These spaces do not promote a sustainable lifestyle nor a sense of community, without the need to purchase (Máté 2013). This is clearly not a paradigm that will succeed if we desire an ecologically, socially, culturally and economically sustainable future.

The ByeBuy! Shop (established for seven days in Launceston Tasmania, June 2014) was conceived to test ideas for a sustainable consumer paradigm focusing on increased social engagement and reduced consumption without the use of money for exchange. A temporary pop-up shop (the interior created using industrial waste from the retail industry) tested new ideas on the values of consumerism and consumerist actions through four key trading interactions: Swap Shop; Story Exchange; Repair Deli and Slow Market. Swap Shop addressed the values of possessions, where objects were swapped with no monetary value with their histories supplied by the original owner. Story Exchange used story to challenge the purchase of goods for emotional satisfaction. Repair Deli and Slow Market provided new skills for repairing and making with a greater appreciation and value for the objects being repaired and/or made. These interactions increased the value of possessions, social engagement and reduced consumption.

The ByeBuy! Shop replaced the homogenised designs of contemporary shopping scapes with one that facilitates engagement and re-values the exchange of possessions, using diverse activities as part of an interactive community. The diverse forms of exchange that this new paradigm exemplifies will challenge designers, operators and managers to rethink the typology that is the current ‘shopping scepe’. These design forms captured by the age of consumerism will be transformed into new ‘productive hubs’ that facilitate a renewed value system of reduced consumption, social innovation, positive wellbeing and a strong sense of community (Máté 2013).

Values Theory

Understanding human values and how they may impact on behaviour is an important aspect of understanding what matters to us as individuals and societies (Sowey 2013) and how these values may be changing and influencing behavioural shifts, in this case consumerism. Many researchers agree that values correlate to mobilizing environmentally responsible or sustainable behaviour (Thøgersen and Ölander 2002; Giacalone et al 2008; Urien and Kilbourne 2011; Holmes et al. 2012; Crompton 2013). From this it is argued that by priming existing individual values predicated towards pro-sustainability behaviour, it may be possible to shift a society through an increase in value participation, to a sustainable dominant paradigm.

Schwartz’s 1992 Basic Values Theory (1992; 1994; Schwartz and Sagie 2000; Schwartz and Bardi 2001; 2004; 2006; Schwartz et al. 2012), based on the initial theories of Rokeach (1973) and his own extensive empirical research, defines (initially) ten broad values through the goal or motivation that underlies each. This is best
captured in his values continuum (Figure 1) – a circular diagram capturing the ten value groups as they relate to their motivational goals and their relationships to each other. This circular structure also demonstrates where values are congruent or conflicting. That is, values that lie next to one another are motivationally more congruent and those opposing, conflicting. These congruent values are then further grouped into two bipolar dimensions, conservation vs openness to change and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement (Schwartz 2012). In a paper in 2012, Schwartz refines and expands on these initial ten values to a set of nineteen and further expands on the relational dimensions to include personal focus vs social focus and growth/anxiety free vs self-protection/anxiety-avoidance (Figure 2) (Schwartz et al. 2012).

Figure 1: Schwartz’s (2012, 9) theoretical model from 1992 with ten motivational types of value

Figure 2: Schwartz’s 2012 revised theoretical model including 19 values (Schwartz et al. 2012, 669)
Inglehart’s research (1971; 1977; 1990; 1995; 1997) provides a lens on how societal value changes are moving towards value systems that are more closely linked to pro-sustainability behaviour. Inglehart’s main thesis is that Western societies are moving from what he terms ‘materialist’ values, of “…law and order, a stable economy, affluence and control…” to ‘post-materialist’ values where “…economic security is taken for granted and values are focussed on quality of life issues, a sense of community and a concern for the environment” (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004, 377).

The importance of understanding the broader concepts of Schwartz’s theory for this paper lies in their relational associations and the importance of values in the self-transcendence dimension, particularly universalism and benevolence, to the motivations and behaviours supporting pro-sustainability (Thøgersen and Ölander 2002; Urien and Kilbourne 2011; Holmes et al. 2012; Crompton 2013; Murray 2013). Universalism is characterised by the defining goals of “…understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature” (Schwartz 2012, 7). In his more recent refinement, Schwartz et al. (2012) has suggested three subtypes of universalism: tolerance, societal concern and protecting nature to further distinguish this value group. Benevolence, in contrast to universalism is concerned with those people in close contact, as opposed to “all people” in universalism. Its defining goal is concerned with “…preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with who one is in frequent personal contact (the ‘in-group’)” (Schwartz 2012, 7). This value has also since been divided in his more recent research into caring and dependability (Schwartz et al. 2012). For this paper, Schwartz’s value definitions, most specifically universalism and benevolence, will be used as a lens to explain observations of individual pro-sustainability behaviour at the ByeBuy! Shop.

Another aspect of values theory that is important to mention at this point are ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ values. Research has shown that people who prioritise extrinsic values, values that require external rewards or approval such as achievement, money, power and status are less likely to prioritise pro-sustainable behaviours to people who prioritise intrinsic values, values that are inherently rewarding such as community concerns, importance of friends and family and a connection to nature (Crompton 2013).

Using the theories of Schwartz and Inglehart, this paper discusses how, through observations made at the ByeBuy! Shop engaging values that stimulate pro-sustainable behaviour, plays an important role for a cultural shift in consumer behaviour.

**Concept of the ByeBuy! Shop**

The ByeBuy! Shop was established to test concepts on sustainable consumerism through a series of transactions that involved no money exchange, seeking to increase social engagement and reduce material consumption. These forms of trade were based around three (paradigms 1, 2 & 4) of the four major sustainable consumer paradigms identified by the author in a 2013 publication –

1. Community orientated consumption
2. Ethical and political consumption
3. Product Service Systems
4. Prosumption
The forms of exchange that participants engaged in over the duration of the ByeBuy! Shop included -

• Swap Shop (paradigms 1 & 2 - items were exchanged one for one with no monetary worth)

• Story Exchange (paradigms 1 & 2 - stories replaced the emotional exchange of ‘retail therapy’)

• Repair Deli (paradigms 1, 2 & 3 - information exchange on how to repair rather than replace)

• Slow Market (paradigms 1, 2 & 3 - information exchange on making items from recycled materials)

The shop was open normal retail operating hours and largely social media (Facebook and webpage) was used to promote the shop and its activities.

**Design of the ByeBuy! Shop**

The shop was contained within an existing yet long-term vacant retail space and furnished using almost 100% reused or found materials and objects with a particular focus on industrial waste found within the retail sector or related areas where possible. This was done to not only reduce material waste for a seven day pop up event, but to highlight the amount of usable waste and underutilised materials and products found within the retail sector.

Many of these materials and objects were therefore imbedded with a different set of values from something that was considered waste, of no further use, to something of continued value. As such these materials and products had a history, a story to tell and so made a connection to the participants of the pop-up shop.

The layout of the ByeBuy! Shop was rectangular in plan with a full height glass window at the street overlooking a park. A worktable (for Repair Deli and Slow Market activities) was placed within the window space for passers-by to witness activity and draw curiosity. Recycled plastic cup sculptures framed the window to again create interest with a changing activity program written in chalk on the glass window. The Swap Shop was situated around this worktable towards the front half of the shop. The rear of the shop had another worktable and surrounding a disused fireplace (within which a fake fire was placed) were comfortable found chairs and beanbags for the Story Exchange activities. At the very back of the shop, to hide a storage area hung a gold foil curtain made from printer’s waste (Images 1-4).
Image 1: Street front of ByeBuy! Shop
Image 2: Interior of ByeBuy! Shop at night, showing Swap Shop shelving from reused packing boxes; front worktable and chairs (all borrowed); front desk (found) with handpainted shop signs behind (found) and milk crate gondolas

Image 3: Interior of ByeBuy! Shop at night, showing Story Exchange seating area with found chairs and bean bags from billboard waste, reused shop signs and found ‘blackboard’ for daily activities
Curiosity as a primer for ‘universalism’ and pro-sustainable behaviour

One of the value markers for pro-sustainable behaviour is an intrinsic disposition. From observations and reflections of the ByeBuy! Shop a common intrinsic motivator emerged, instigating a reason to visit the shop and/or engage in its activities: curiosity. Curiosity as an intrinsic motivator could be an initiator for further engagement with pro-sustainable consumer behaviour and as such is of interest to this paper. Recent research shows that curiosity can be piqued for a number of different reasons: Human drive – i.e. hunger; incongruity between something and an existing point of view; a gap in knowledge or understanding; a tactile experience with something we may be able to change (Rowson 2012). As well, curiosity can be identified into two broad dimensions: perceptual and epistemic where perceptual refers to largely environmental experience and epistemic to the search for knowledge. This can be further broken down into
diversive and specific where diversive is more exploratory and specific is concerned with a distinct question. (Rowson 2012). Using these definitions and explanations of curiosity we can explore further how curiosity was piqued within the ByeBuy! Shop and how this led to behaviours associated with Schwartz’s value of Universalism, congruent with pro-sustainability.

General curiosity to visit the shop was triggered through social and local media, word of mouth via friends and family and general passers-by. This is supported by people remarking on having seen Facebook posts, heard radio interviews or newspaper articles and so thought they would “…come down and see what it was all about”. Others remarked that a friend or family member had been and so decided to come and “…see for themselves”. Passers-by intrigued by the alternative appearance of the shop, entered tentatively observing their surroundings, before asking about the concept of the shop. One woman remarked at the opening of the shop, “I didn’t understand what this was about. My husband was trying to explain it to me… but I didn’t get it until I came here.” This same woman came back to the shop at least twice over the duration with family and friends to participate. The perceived uniqueness of the shop, supported by comments in local media, “…challenge the idea of traditional retail in Launceston” (The Examiner, Fairfax Media 2014) and participants “What a great idea!”, “Novel concept!”, “…lovely idea… I think it’s enchanting…what a wonderful feeling you get in this space…a magical fairyland feeling…” supports the perceptual and epistemic dimensions of curiosity, incongruity and a gap in knowledge, that encouraged participants to seek out the shop and enter.

In the Swap Shop participants were asked to provide a short history of the item they wished to swap on a card (the cards themselves waste from a local printers) so that the item and the short history were passed onto the new owner. This included six short questions (initially inspired by research carried out by Otto von Busch’s Italian Avlus (2003)) about the item (Image 5). The reasoning behind these questions was to reconnect both the original owner and the new owner with values other than need or desire. Through observations and remarks by the participants these miniature histories played an important role in the experience of the shop, the reaction to the items as objects and to the broader conceptual notions of consumerism. Curiosity was invoked through the stories some reading the short histories with great interest and seemingly less interest in the objects themselves. An emotional connection was formed with the item of joy, empathy, wonder even sadness or pity that created an engaging ‘consumer’ experience prompting a curiosity beyond the item itself supporting an epistemic dimension of curiosity, incongruity and in some cases a tactile curiosity.

“I like the story behind the objects. When you buy something in a shop it doesn’t have that, it’s just new and doesn’t have a history behind it”

“The stories are sentimental. You can see the meaning behind it and makes you keen to hold onto it”

“I like the unexpected and surprise you find in the [stories]”

“The stories personalised it.”

“The stories are really emotional.”
The Repair Deli and Slow Market ignited a tactile curiosity in how things were made and put together providing participants with the knowledge and skills to build and repair their own items, supporting epistemic forms of curiosity. Story Exchange stimulated interest and curiosity in the narratives of fact or fantasy supporting both perceptual and epistemic dimensions of curiosity.

From this it can be seen that curiosity pervaded many aspects of the ByeBuy! Shop, providing an important motivator for participation and engagement. If we relook at curiosity in conjunction with Schwartz’s value continuum, we see that curious is a value item used to measure ‘self-direction’ and later further refined as ‘autonomy of thought’ (Schwartz et al. 2012). Interestingly, ‘autonomy of thought’ sits closest to ‘universalism’ on Schwartz’s value continuum, universalism being a strong indicator for pro-environmental behaviour. This observation is relevant when it is understood that priming values can positively impact on other values in close proximity on Schwartz’s value continuum and decrease association with those opposite (Crompton 2013).

Curiosity may therefore be an important trigger for priming values concurrent with sustainable consumerist behaviour. This concept has been supported by recent research focusing on curiosity as a positive influence on behaviour towards energy consumption (Rowson 2012).
Connecting the values of Universalism and Benevolence with the ByeBuy! Shop

It has previously been noted that there is a strong connection between the value of universalism and benevolence to pro-sustainability behaviour. How were these values represented at the ByeBuy! Shop, where paradigms of sustainable consumerism were being tested?

The diversity of activities, the inclusive design and relaxed atmosphere within the ByeBuy! Shop encouraged engaged conversation with many of the participants rousing universalism values of tolerance, societal concern and protecting nature and benevolence values of caring as participants engaged in the conceptual ideas behind the shop.

During the seven days the shop was open, between 350-400 people visited, more than 450 articles were brought in to be swapped, with approximately 300 swaps taking place. Approximately 60 people partook in the activities of the Repair Deli, Story Exchange and Slow Market.

Comments by participants related to universalism include:

“We don’t need so much stuff!”

“We need to be able to survive if there is an environmental or economic catastrophe. The concept behind this shop will help us do this.”

“I like the recycling concept”

“The amount we consume is the norm, why?”

“This is the future, this is where we are headed into the future!”

Through the increased level of engagement within the shop, values of benevolence were perhaps more prevalent. Connections were formed between complete strangers, people lingered within the shop not only to participate in the various activities but to just be in a safe and inclusive environment. One afternoon a group of mothers with babies and toddlers spent a couple of hours in the shop, knowing that the space was safe, there were things to do, they didn’t have to spend money and there were other adults they could engage with. These women were repeat visitors to the shop. Another group of people who benefited from the shop were those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who were able to maintain their pride whilst upgrading or swapping items for more needed ones. An example is a woman who was able to swap a poorer quality warm jacket she was wearing for one of superior quality and shoes for boots. Other participants to the shop also commented on how the swap shop benefitted this demographic, remarking on how charity shops were becoming too expensive.

Comments from participants related to benevolence include:

“Need to trust and share more.”

“No money exchanged is a good thing because sometimes second hand is too expensive.”

“It’s interactive…gets people chatting and doing things.”

“I live alone and don’t talk to people much, I can get too involved in work…this place connects us.”

“We need a space to get together without the pressures of buying something.”

“It’s about giving – giving back to each other, trust and honesty.”
Most people visiting the shop, wanted it to remain open permanently and nearly forty people signed up to an email group to address how the ByeBuy! Shop could be a permanent or ongoing venture. While this proposition remains in progress, there are a number of ‘spin-offs’ that have occurred as a direct result of the ByeBuy! Shop that continue these values. This has included the entire design of the Swap Shop with remaining items being given to a local indigenous community group to set up their own Swap Shop, a kids swap meet, an art swap venture, a regular regional swap meet, a clothes repair and learning to sew group, a sustainable living support group and a blog for finding local workshops.

Conclusion

Through observations at the ByeBuy! Shop, a pop-up shop testing concepts on sustainable consumerism paradigms, curiosity was found to have played an important role in piquing interest and participant engagement. This was seen to be an important primer to engage Schwartz’s motivational values of universalism and benevolence, values that have been found to be related to pro-sustainable behaviour. These values were observed through the actions and comments of the participants of the ByeBuy! Shop. It can therefore be suggested that the ByeBuy! Shop reflected current findings on values as related to pro-sustainable behaviour through an increased value of possessions, increased social engagement and reduced consumption. These findings also reflect Inglehart’s theory of a growing post-materialist society, where the importance of values are focussed on quality of life issues, a sense of community and a concern for the environment.

The ByeBuy! Shop has shown that by eliminating monetary value and therefore values of power and/or achievement that dominate current consumer paradigms, values of universalism and benevolence are allowed to flourish. This supports Schwartz’s value continuum and provides valuable information for changes in retail design that support these values and pro-sustainable consumer behaviour. A deepened engagement within the exchange process of products and services through multi-dimensional forms of curiosity; opportunities for discursive and informational interaction; integrated performative involvement and inclusive participation are features for a pro-sustainable form of consumerism.

The design of shopping-scapes therefore, instead of being places of consumption supporting the values of power and achievement through money and ownership, can be transformed into ‘productive hubs’ that facilitate a renewed value system supporting universalism and benevolence, of reduced consumption, social innovation, positive wellbeing and an engaged community.

References


Kirsty Máté is passionate about interior design and sustainable design – believing that this under recognised profession has a crucial role to play in providing motivating spaces for the well being of people and the planet. Her work as an academic, writer, designer and consultant consistently demonstrates this passion. Her research areas focus on environmental, social and cultural sustainability in the commercial sector.
Share + repair = care. Recoding reuse and establishing dematerialization practices by design

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Design Psychology

The waste management discourse has been at the epicenter of sustainable studies for decades and habitual redirection regarding the disposal of reusable materials has been addressed and studied extensively. Nevertheless, by placing great deal of weight on recycling and upcycling, dematerialization activities such as sharing and repairing have rarely been chosen as approaches so as to redirect people’s perception of what is waste and most importantly disengage them from the perpetuation of the production-consumption-waste cycle.

The lack of research evidence in relation to the potential of repair and share to redefine waste became the main instigator for the design and realization of a funded research project titled ‘Handled With Care: Developing The Paradigm Of A Culture Of Repair And Share in Brisbane, Australia’. In contrast to existing approaches that support instrumental models of behavioral modification concerning waste, this project’s objective was to re-introduce repair and reinforce the adoption of sharing by recognizing their capability to transform users’ ontologies; to re-evaluate and re-code the practice of everyday life by promoting the importance of holding on to something by repairing it (material longevity) and simultaneously letting it go by sharing it (material detachment). To achieve this, an online map was designed and incorporated in a digital platform, which depicts the existing community of repairers and sharers who are located in the central suburbs of Brisbane. Businesses and organizations, exchange of users’ experiences, ideas, articles and events linked to repair and share, were made available to the public via digital tools (a digital platform and an App, which include the map and a complimentary blog).

This paper discusses the conceptual framework, methodological processes and findings of the project. Apropos of the method, the author used a descriptive case study design to detect and report on the existing repair businesses and repair organizations. The outcomes presented, expose a progressively growing community of skillful craftspeople and indicate alternative modes of approaching ‘waste’; they additionally uncover the prospect of the expansion of this project with additions of more suburbs to the existing map, the implementation of the process to other Australian cities, and the creation of satellite events, such as workshops and exhibitions. Finally, the paper examines the implications of the breaker and the broken and the shift to more dematerialized lifestyles that ontologically will design the possibility of a new, anti-wasteful, psychology.

Keywords: Waste, Repair, Share, Care, Dematerialization
Introduction

Waste is not an evocative word. It does not inspire strong emotions despite its negative connotations and, by default, has been established as such, weak and unthreatening, in human consciousness. In addition, dematerialization as a concept directly related to waste is defined as ‘the process of fulfilling society’s functions with a decreasing use of material resources over time’ (Voet, Oers and Nikolic 2004, 122) but not as a condition of acknowledging that material resources and humans are made out of the same fabric and that the former is part of nature’s metabolism.

Before discussing how notions of waste and dematerialization need to be redefined it is important to evaluate the framework that has led to these definitions. The ‘civilized’, ‘progressed’ and ‘developed’ countries have set the example for the rest of the world on how to work, produce, consume, communicate, use the body and mind. Hence, they make rules, create cultures and are inhabited by individuals with the same needs; to possess and replace. This reality in combination with speed, fragmentation, overspecialization, techno-literacy and homogenization has led to the appropriation of matter to the level of over-explicit purposefulness, which has stripped away the essence from things, making impossible for them to reveal their nature to humans. This loss has generated the schema of the ‘present shape of things, subjugated and internally deformed into their opposite’ (Adorno 1997, 17), utterly compromising their ability to be conveyed.

Consider as an illustration the era before and during the early days of industrialization. In that period of time, the material’s course of life was to become an object and then be fully consumed either via disintegration or re-use, making unnecessary the use of words ‘recycle’ and ‘upcycle’; the material in the form of an object unconcealed as ready-to-hand to its users (for example, the tree as timber) and invited them to discover its potential uses. Discovery existed in the disclosure of its nature, the truth of objects; the experience of the thing and the contemplation on its nature was what connected human beings with the beings-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1996). In the post-industrial era, the naturalization of the unnaturalness of things legitimizes the user to act upon the object and create rules defining its nature. Objects are not perceived through contemplation and experience but as instruments in the service of humans. After the artifact fulfills its purpose, it is up to the user’s discretion to waste or partially (via recycling or upcycling) consume it.

As a result, modern societies fail to recognize that ‘each species, by virtue of its own carnal structure has its own unique sentience or “chiasm” (interexchange) with the flesh of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty rephrased in Abram 1988, 112) with the latter being both human and non human. The changes brought by the Industrial Revolution have fostered a fragmented understanding of nature and disrupted a holistic perception of life, preventing things to be seen as sentient bits of the world’s flesh, cherished and cared for. Due to this shift, humans have distanced their existence from ‘caring for being as a whole’ (Heidegger referring to Periander’s quote ‘meleta to pan’, in Zimmerman 2003, 79) and reflecting on the being of beings.

Unquestionably, this (‘caring for being as a whole’) is easier said than done. On the one hand, detecting the insufficiency of the sustainability discourse to step away from the causality imposed on it by modern society and projecting the vacuity of green-washing jargon makes visible that which intentionally or unintentionally gets disregarded on a daily basis; the failure of modern reason. On the other hand, romantic notions of an idealized pre-industrial past that can only be gesturally revived, are being perceived by the majority of people as a travesty which empowers technologized approaches of
saving the planet. In light of these notions, this paper presents the theoretical incentive, method and findings of a research project based on a modest approach of reintroducing ways of mending the broken relationship of human with material beings through repair and share. Its starting point is a concept of dematerialization suggesting the intensive use of human sentience and cognitive abilities of care, concern and contemplation in respect to materiality and human survival. To conceptualize waste, this paper employs the argument developed by John Scanlan (2005, p.22), that "to waste" is equally to squander in the distinct sense of not making the best use of something (time, opportunities, resources and so on) where the opportunity in question makes itself known but is ignored. Finally it rejects the idea of recycling and upcycling being activities independent of the nature of things, where people get to decide what to do with them after they served certain ends, and adopts the position of 'attentive awareness' (Heidegger, 1977, xxxii) meaning people opening themselves to the possibilities of things.

Project description

A project titled ‘‘Handled with Care’: Developing the paradigm of a ‘culture of repair and share’ in Brisbane, Queensland was designed so as to provide research evidence attuned to a non capitalist and sign value driven (Baudrillard, 1981) understanding of materiality. This abstract description has worked as the initial motivation to activate new waste management strategies dictated by repairing mechanisms grounded in care. A ‘repairing mechanism’ in this context doesn’t signify the instrumental aspect of the practice but it refers mostly to means of mending social, cultural, ethical and political attitudes in a broken world-starting with the ‘micro-world’ of a Western city located in an affluent developed country. Another aim of this project was to make people see the value of repair and share through examples that they can relate to. For that reason the project was designed to investigate the existing presence of a culture of repair and share in the central suburbs of Brisbane and make easily accessible the participant facilities via an online map, in order to provide its citizens the opportunity of exploring other forms of engaging with or disengaging from things. As a means of communicating the outcome of this investigation, a custom made online map and an online digital platform (www.handledwithcare.org.au) were created to represent the repair and share facilities that agreed to be part of the study. A mobile phone application (iOS App) was also part of the selected modes of publicising the map as well as an experiential forum, which was embedded on the digital platform so as to encourage an active interaction between potential and existing repairers and sharers.

Method

For the realization of the project the descriptive case study method (Yin, 2013) was selected. The main questions to be answered were around the identification of the culture of repair, what is currently being repaired and shared in existing facilities, if there is a particular geography around repair and share, if there are any specific obstacles preventing the existing culture of repair and share from growing and what kind of skills and competencies a culture of repair and share requires. The literature review that was conducted in order to theoretically inform the project and provide information in relation to research relevant to repair and share focused on issues of dematerialization, waste (management and strategies), sustainable behavior and

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3 The project was funded through the 2014 New Researcher Grant Scheme (Griffith University).
habitual change as presented by books, published research outcomes and scholarly essays. A substantial gap of knowledge regarding repair and share was revealed through this process, exposing a lack of much-needed studies supporting them with research evidence. Still, activities of repair and share that are happening in several locations nationally (Australia) and internationally were found and explored.

The design for the collection of data entailed the identification of the physical location of the study (twenty-five suburbs consisting zone one and two of central Brisbane\(^4\)) and the population from which the sample was selected. The population was indicated by several mediums (online search, yellow pages, published and digital information via blogs and articles) during the preliminary phase of the study and the sample was consisted of facilities that agreed to participate in the study after being contacted and informed about its purposes. All the documents and processes used for the recruitment of the participants were cleared by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number: QCA/06/14/HREC). Facilities were separated into distinct groups according to the kinds of repair (furniture, shoes and clothes, electronics) that were acknowledged through the identification of the population and share. The collection of data was realized within two months (September-November 2014) and as supporting material for the purposes of the study were gathered documents, information from the facilities’ websites, testimonials in the form of interviews and photographs depicting sites and objects related to repair and share. The interviews’ questions were products of the literature review and for each group a different questionnaire was created. Representatives from each participant facility were interviewed by predefined pairs of volunteer researchers with the use of structured questionnaires.

Analysis

The copies of the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. For the analysis of the content of the interviews categorical aggregation was adopted as a tool to identify themes. This strategic way of analyzing data signifies the quest for a group of examples coming from the gathered evidence where meanings reappear and allow their interpretation as a distinct class, and involves their aggregation into categories (sub-themes) from which themes get created (Stake and Savolainen, 1995). The validity of data was established from other sources (photographs taken during the visits to the physical locations of the facilities, notes taken from observation and comments made by the participants outside the recorded session). Eleven themes were generated from categories found in the evidence. Also, descriptive statistics were used to analyze information that was possible to be quantified\(^5\).


\(^5\) A detailed discussion on the results of the descriptive statistics can be found in ‘Handled with Care: Repair and share as waste management strategies and community sustaining practices’ (Kalantidou, 2015).
Results

The data depicting general findings and the number of practices per kind that participated in the study are summarized in table 1. For the purposes of this paper, not all research questions will be answered but emphasis will be placed on the outcomes of the categorical aggregation and the themes generated from the analysis so as to provide a response to what obstructs the culture of repair and share from growing, and what skills and abilities are required for a culture of repair and share to maintain itself. Through the interpretation of the participant repairers and sharers’ answers, patterns emerged that demonstrate a different understanding of materiality, closer to dematerialization as outlined in this paper.

Table 1: Number of practices and percentages per kind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALL PRACTICES</th>
<th>Repair (clothing/shoes)</th>
<th>Repair (furniture)</th>
<th>Repair (electronics)</th>
<th>Share</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Included</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.51%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not</td>
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<td>32.50%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.56%</td>
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<tr>
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Themes

1. Fee policies (Repair and share)

The sharing facilities are run predominantly as Non-Profit Organizations. Sharing physical space, donations, pay for running costs and rent per hour apply. Regarding the communal gardens’ policies people can choose to rent their own bed, share it with a group of people and become members by paying a monthly or annual fee. The fees for repair are based on case-by-case evaluation (depending on labour fee/piece rate/per hour or per kilogram) and quotes, and are strongly related to the cost of materials.

2. Community activities (Share)

Sharing facilities expand their activities outside the cycle of their members by running skilling workshops (e.g. composting, soil management), hosting artistic performances, organizing working bees and BBQs. They also facilitate activities for children and activities involving disadvantaged people and immigrants' support. Other initiatives held by sharing facilities are the running of a bulk buyers co-op, weekly food trucks and crowd-funding events.

3. Educational workshops (Repair and share)

Educational workshops differ from the community activities due to the fact that they have solely educational character, a formal structure and they usually involve a fee. The workshops target audiences from all ages (adults, children). Other educational programs include the paid mentor program, the food sense program, permaculture
courses, school visits, artist's residency programs for kids, the supported gardening program, private cooking classes and info nights.

4. Social responsibility practices (Repair and share)

As social responsibility practices were identified all formally established practices followed by the facilities as a means to create a positive relationship with the local community. Concessions for seniors and students, pay as you feel, member discounts, free use of garden and space, no fee, social support (food, legal services) and community development (refugee assistance) are implemented by the participants as part of their efforts to support their communities. Most of the repair facilities have not established formal social responsibility practices but adjust their fee to the financial situation of the customers and occasionally offer free merchandise. The ones that formally adopt such practices, offer discount to pensioners and subscribers.

5. Re-use of underused space (Share)

A lot of the sharing facilities demonstrate a non-waste approach in relation to space. The sharing of facilities with the community by encouraging group meetings and lease of unused space, a shared house that also incorporates a community space and a library, an underused school ground turned into a community garden, a food truck in a car park and a re-claimed footpath transformed into a garden are cases in point.

6. Waste management (Repair)

The repair facilities have embedded waste management strategies in their practices such as selling unused material as scrap, re-using remaining materials, gathering unwanted materials for collection (from governmental or private bodies from the waste management industry), restoring, up-cycling and using recycled materials. They also have adopted ‘trade in and get discount’ policies, avoidance of packaging and sourcing products from op-shops.

7. Materials used for repair practice (Repair)

The participant furniture repairers appear to understand the importance of sourcing local and using recycled, second hand and natural materials (bee wax, shellac). Inescapably, polishes, glues, chemicals and PVC plastics are part of their arsenal too.

8. Offer of apprentices (Repair)

The issue of apprentices for repair facilities is complicated because of four main reasons: Most of the repairers are trained within the family or learned traditional practices informally meaning that they do not have accredited qualifications, their facilities do not meet the standards of the health and safety government regulations for apprenticeship programs and apprenticeships are not cost-effective and of low demand.

9. Informal/traditional knowledge (Repair)

The repairers were mostly trained via apprenticeships, informal learning within the family or are self-taught. Traditional knowledge was acquired both via apprenticeships or handed down by the previous generation.

10. Sources of materials used (Repair)

Repair materials are sourced from local and international suppliers. Certain materials (electronics) are mostly imported. It was indicated that a lot of materials are recycled or donated, come from demolition yards, garage sales, occasional demolitions, upcycling and recycling of old parts. The conventional approaches of getting materials from the
hardware and timber store were also mentioned.

11. Modes of advertising (Repair)

The repair facilities follow the trend of using social media and online advertising while they continue employing the traditional flyer/pamphlet and yellow pages approaches. Nonetheless, word of mouth remains important.

Discussion

The description of the themes disclosed information that exhibits the existence of an encouragingly strong culture of repair and share in the investigated location that faces the challenges of a society living in conditions of uncritical consumerism and green altruism. For the members of this culture sharing and repairing are not profit oriented but self and community sustaining activities. Modest fees of membership allow people to share land and learn how to grow their own food. And while repairers acknowledged that their practice is struggling to remain alive, with discounts and pay as you feel policies they show an intention to keep their practice all encompassing. As a result, things are being fixed and people in need do not buy a cheap equivalent of a broken item. The engaging nature and skilling capacities of the presented culture were made obvious by the variety of occasions that invite people to interact while learning a new skill, to help others and find economically and environmentally sustainable ways of existing. Professional repairers do recognize that manual labour signifies hard work these days; still, they are pretty keen to train young people hoping that they will continue their craft. This is connected to a certain pride that appeared in their answers, for practices acquired through trans-generational training and for traditional techniques that have almost become obsolete. The sustainable attributes of traditional ways and means of repairing were contrasted with contemporary practices that damage products and shorten their lifespan. According to the evidence collected, everything should be maintained and nothing should be wasted, even space. This mentality is validated by the facilities’ waste management strategies, which include responsible and sustainable sourcing and choice of materials for their practice. Moreover, it is proved by their critical stance towards consumer laws that encourage obsolescence (by minimizing, for example, the time period that distributors are required to have spare parts for electronic devices). Thus, the examined culture sees waste as a state of mind and understands the importance of respect and care for humans and non-humans as part of the sustaining process of all beings.

Despite the non-extensive presentation of the collected data and their analysis, this paper illustrates the existence of a culture that opens paths for deconstructing the psychology of the breaker and for humans to be more cognizant about lessening any form of environmental harm. The objective of this paper has not been to portray an ideal situation; this culture is still growing and trying to find ways to work around waste management, use of unsustainable materials and be more community-driven. It consists though a paradigm of change, of an ontology that sees waste as a waste of the self and should progressively move from the fringes to the sustainability agendas of private and public bodies.
Acknowledgements

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References


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Considering ‘Thing-Power’ in Practices of Household Waste Engagement: Repair and Re-purposing

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Disposal, changes in consumption lifestyle.

Based on in-depth interviews focusing on practices of repair and repurposing within the household, this article discusses the vulnerability of objects and their transforming expressive and material components as central to productive waste, following Bennett (2010), to term ‘thing-power.’ Foregrounding thing-power to debates on the race to zero waste is a way to surface an overlooked dimension of material things: their material transformation, genealogies and citizenships in their capacity to be repaired and repurposed.

Keywords: object-oriented – disposal – productive waste
Practices of Repair and Repurposing

This study considers practices of repair and repurposing within households and identifies the related forces, following Bennett (2010), to term ‘thing-power’ that hinders or facilitates repairing or repurposing. In this study, repair is restoring by replacing a part or putting together what is torn or broken. Repurposing is creating a new or a second life for an existent object by making some transformations to it. Contrary to recycling, practices of repair and repurposing do not require infrastructures and energy outside of the household to reprocess the original material and, unlike reuse, these practices draw on forms of engagement with the objects of no immediate use, the unwanted, worn down, deteriorated, broken, or outdated items that would otherwise be discarded.

Household waste or surplus material is central to current debates on sustainability (Cherrier, Szuba et al. 2012, Cherrier 2009, 2010, 2012). Studies have discussed issues of throwaway culture shortening the life cycle of an object, with an increasing number of still functional objects being discarded for aesthetic or minor functional improvements (Cherrier 2010). In response, governments have invested in waste management, treatments and recovery as recycling and re-manufacturing. In this process, household enrolments to waste management have been tied to awareness raising and financial incentives around separation of recyclates and use of appropriate recycling bins and collection services. Along diverting waste from the landfill, another, yet less prevalent approach, has been to address waste reduction via waste prevention through the implementation of refillable packaging, home composting or reusable nappy promotions (Cox, Giorgi, Sharp, Strange, Wilson, and Blakey 2010). Whilst these programs have undeniably reworked household waste attitudes and recycling actions, the focus has been to reshape household practices, which has left aside considerations of existing practices that contribute greatly to waste reduction (Burley and Gregson 2009).

With this study, we consider current household waste engagement practices. Whilst values may start at the manufacturing of an object, practices of repair and repurposing that consumers often perform extends the value of object through different regimes of value (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2013). Considering the re-assessment of value in waste at the micro-level of everyday life of households broadens the debate on waste reduction to include definitions of waste as engaging.

Waste and Disposal

Understanding domestic waste requires considering individuals’ practices of disposal. Household disposal studies have often focused on how individuals shift things from the inside to the outside their home, looking at why individuals let go of their objects in the interest of aesthetic or minor functional improvements (e.g. Sheth, Sethia et al. 2011), at what influences individuals to let go of their objects using recycling infrastructures (e.g. Kidwell, Farmer et al. 2013), or at how individuals move their objects along by giving to family members, friends or charities and selling via second-hand networks (e.g. Gregson, Meltcalfe and Crewe 2007).

However, considering disposal as a shift from the inside to the outside of the home has recently been re-assessed. Notably, Hetherington (2004) argues that disposal should be understood as a question of placing absence. He points that objects stored or forgotten in the house have moved through a process of presence to absence and argues that this movement should be considered in disposal studies. Likewise, Parsons
(2008) understands disposal beyond a question of moving object outside of the home to consider value re-creation in the transforming and re-using of objects. Another point we are raising within studies on disposal and waste is the current focus on the subject side whereby subjects dispose of the object when they no longer see value, which we believe comes at the cost of the object side whereby the object triggers or hinders disposal.

To date, most studies on disposal focus on the subject’s side and imply that strategic choices of when, to whom and how to dispose of objects are orchestrated by consumers to create a desirable memory, gain symbolic immortality, and re-construct and legitimize their relations with certain people. For example, during times of transitions, disposing of material objects helps consumers cut ties with their previous roles and adjust to new roles by cleansing the person from the old self and stabilizing the new identities (Schouten 1991). In the context of old age, consumers dispose of objects to negotiate the continuation of legacy and self-extension (Marcoux 2001).

Whilst numerous studies consider how subjects dispose of objects as means of self-expression and identity work (Belk 1988; Arnould 2000), few studies have considered how objects may act in the process through which consumers dispose of their objects. Other work helps consider the symbolic constraining and determinist power of the dominating marketplace and its aesthetic sphere (Baudrillard 1996). For example, sociological studies discuss that things, objects or possessions respond to dominating classifications of order/disorder and tidiness/untidiness (Douglas 1984) and categorizations of pure/impure (“pure et impure”) and clean/dirty (“propre et sale”) (Collignon and Staszak 2004). Further studies show that objects can act-back and disrupt disposal (Gregson, Meltcalfe and Crewe 2007). An object’s unknown history or particular material features, for example, can prevent it to be disposed as intended by consumers.

Our study extend our current understanding of disposal by considering the material constitutions of objects and how it may play a role in disposal. Our findings show the capacity of objects to act as forces of their own, thus orienting, altering or interrupting disposal. In the following discussion, we position this study along Latour, Bryant and Bennett’s work and propose that objects can be actants during disposal. Following the details of the study, we provide the three prominent themes that emerged from the hermeneutic analysis.

**An Object-Oriented Perspective**

Predominately inspired by Jane Bennett’s vibrant matter and Levi Bryant’s democracy of objects, we examine disposal from an object-oriented perspective. That is, we consider the object’s identity and its endo- and exo-relations. Exo-relations are relations an object enters into with another object. In contrast, endo-relations or domestic relations are relations that structure the internal being of an object. Our object-oriented model provides a framework for understanding how objects might authorize or allow disposal, that is, how they may direct being repaired or re-purposed instead of thrown away. Importantly, we do not claim that objects do things instead of the subject but we argue, along with the object-oriented thinkers, that objects are participants or actants in the course of disposal. As such, we break from the object-consumer dualism to consider disposal where both subject and object are participants in the process.

Notably, we align with Bryant (2011) and Bennett (2010) for whom the world is not made of merely passive and lifeless matter. In her exploration of Vibrant Matter,
Bennett (2010) discusses how debris, junk, stuff, unwanted objects and all organic as well as inorganic matters abandoned on the street are not dead stuff, passive objects or passive entity, but are, instead, live presence that regenerate through agency of assemblage (p. 5). She highlights the capacity of objects to act as quasi-agents or forces with “trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (p. IIX). This tendency does not result from the subject’s quantification, prediction and control but rather from the incalculable, which Bennett identifies as energy that provides life to the object.

To understand this energy, we turn to Bryant (2011) who argues that objects become alive through “an immense abstract machine of generativities” (p. 118). This “abstract machine of generativities” represents the self-transforming and self-organizing aspect of objects. The principle rests on the notion that all objects experience more or less interconnected relations with each other. The relations between different objects provide opportunities of various assemblages that operate for the sake of the process of generativity itself (Bryant 2011). That is, objects become alive through various assemblages and seek to preserve or prolong their life in the process. Importantly, these diverse assemblages of matters do not derive from the human labor creating and shaping the inert matter of pre-given objects. Instead, the assemblage of matters consists of a nonhuman dynamism. This nonhuman assemblage results from the “thing-power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (Bennett 2010, p. 6). The thing-power represents the force of the objects to persevere in its own being. It is an “active impulse” to remain and persist in being alive (Bennett 2010; Bennett 2012). Bryant (2011) describes these generative mechanisms as forms of power. For Bryant, the real feature of objects themselves is power that represents the being of objects rather than the being of objects for us (p. 51). In discussing the generative mechanisms of objects, Bryant put forward the notion of regimes of attraction. For Bryant (2011), the concept of regimes of attraction entails that to know objects and discover the powers hidden within them, we must vary their environments or their exo-relations.

The Study

Ten in-depth interviews focusing on practices of repair and repurposing within the household inform this study. The interviews lasted approximately 85 min. on average. Informants varied in their age, gender, social class, occupation, education, family composition and housing. The interview started with grand-tour questions around the way individuals made sense of repairing or re-purposing some objects and not others. The questions focused on the type of object, its materials, and its indexical connections. Another set of questions related to the informant’s perspective on sustainability, waste, and consumer culture. The aim was to capture the possible socio-material tensions that emerged in practices of repair and re-purposing and how these tensions were negotiated. This second set of questions allowed revealing the possible constraining influences that cultural imperative to waste have on practices of repair and repurposing.

The “Thing-Power” in Practices of Repair and Repurposing

Our informants were very enthusiastic about re-purposing and repairing objects. They discussed external support mechanisms provided by the government and local administrations such as free public arts and crafts courses on sewing, knitting, glass and fabric painting, jewellery design, and even some repair-work. Popular TV shows
and online blogs on D.I.Y. and craft were also mentioned as encouraging to “make use of” rather than to let go of things. Moreover, our study shows that practices of repair and re-purposing respond to the transformation of things in terms of material elements deteriorating and corroding in interaction with human and nature. We also note how the genealogy of the object and its citizenship impact practices of re-purposing and repair.

**Material Transformation**

Rather than relating to one object as a whole, informants often discussed repair and repurposing in relation to the diverse material elements that are constitutive of the object. Important to repairing or repurposing the elements of an object is that when one object is broken, the boundaries of the object assemblage blurs and its material elements start interacting with other (and usually broader) assemblages in the household. Our informants explained object deteriorating, breaking, or becoming outdated in interaction with their environment such as a wooden chair rotten in interaction with humid weather or a dress stained due to human usage. The transition from something of value to declining worth not only fostered new evaluation but also led our informants to re-consider not the object itself as a whole but its constitutive elements. We heard stories of informants disposing of some of the elements of an object whilst keeping the other parts that were deemed repairable or transferrable to a new object assemblage. For example, when disposing of his beloved car that had been damaged during a car accident, Marc explained de-assembling the engine from the tires and the body. He kept the engine and disposed of the other elements of his car with the intent to repurpose the engine. Similarly, Sally mentioned going through her cloths to check for and separate re-usable parts such as buttons or zippers. Lelise further explained disposing of parts of her mobile phones whilst keeping the phone chargers.

From this theme, we note that objects transform because of their material constitution interacting with other materials, material nature and humans. Object are thus in constant movement through which they deteriorate, shift and are re-evaluated as components of different material assemblages – buttons in a drawer, a car engine in a garage. Gregson, Metcalfe and Crewe (2007) show how surplus of things are moved through specific conduits that can act back on the consumer. We support that objects move along different conduits and note that the movement occurs because objects deteriorate, shift and are re-evaluated in response to the passing of time and environmental changes.

**Genealogy**

When discussing repair and repurposing, informants were also considering the future possibilities of particular material elements as with Lelise who often mentioned the differently possibilities for the destination of objects and wondered with excitement about what her once functional object could become. Broken things, outdated items and even unused items were often inspirational, leading to repurposing. Sometimes, an object’s past and projected future with consumers interacted and complicated its disposal as illustrated by Fanny’s attachment to her suits:

*Fanny: I have a few suits I cannot dispose. I liked them when I first bought them and they fit me very nicely then...not that they are extremely valuable or anything, but I keep them. I feel maybe I can wear them if I get thinner. They are like 10 years old now.*
Fanny’s suits do not only embody a past where she remembers to have had a better appearance but, after many years, they have also obtained an important role in her fantasies depicting her future self as “older but thinner.” It is not simply the case that Fanny is projecting a future upon her suits. Rather, the suits, which are aging while preserving their appearance as “they still look nice and new,” project on Filiz an ideal version of getting old, challenging her to do the same and sidestepping their own disposal in the process.

The idea of objects having genealogy requires understandings of the objects not as bundles of qualities nor as subject’s emotional attachment, but rather in term of ongoing stories of objects across time and space. As illustrated by Fanny above, with the passing of time, the object derives its significance from the persons and events to which it is connected, thus developing more or less valuable relationships with the subjects. These relationships do not reflect a subject having power over the object but rather subject-object relations in which objects have power to act.

Citizenship

Clear to our informants’ stories is that practices of repair and repurposing were reflective of an engagement with the citizenship of the object. As citizens, objects actively connect with the future well-being of their group, their society and their planet. Our data reveals that objects have responsibilities toward their loved ones in terms of and maintaining a pleasant / safe environment. The responsibility to contribute to a safe life for consumers was a prominent factor in disposal.

Informants also discussed their material belongings in connection with broader issues such as the depletion of natural resources and guidelines for environmental preservation. In the narratives, objects belong to categories of matter and as such carry responsibilities toward their specific belongings in term of their environmental impact. Alice’s washing machine “blew up” and thus transformed from being and acting as a “washing machine” to being an “appliance.” As an appliance, the object takes on new roles and responsibilities. One of the responsibilities of an appliance is its recyclability and as such, the object requests specific caring practices, such as to place the object in a recycling facilities or, as in Alice’s case, to de-assemble the object and keep some of its part for repurposing, thus not only extending the life of some of the object’s parts but also benefiting the natural environment. Importantly, the citizenship of the object problematizes disposal by questioning how the object aligns with waste politics, waste regimes and problems of waste impact.

Along responsibility toward owners and the planet, objects also connect with the well-being of society as a whole. While objects provide consumers with a comfortable life, their accumulation can also highlight social inequality and imply wastefulness. From the data it was clear the practices of repair and repurposing were experienced with the delighting feeling to not having to purchase, to accumulate, and thus to contribute to our overconsumption society. Objects thus carry within themselves the responsibility to share and participate in the well-being of humanity.

This theme emphasizes the citizenship of objects. Whilst individuals negotiate the value and the symbolic of the object during processes of disposal, the object is in constant interplay with human sensibility in account of its owner, social justice and environmental degradation. Instead of being passive, each object discussed in this study plays a role in our collective future in ways of enabling, constraining or directing disposal.
Implications:
This paper contributes to the current governmental efforts to reduce household waste by considering practices of “repair and re-purpose” within households. The focus shifts away from removing waste to embracing waste as productive and engaging. Rather than consumers discarding objects as means of self-expression, group affiliation, remembrance, and self-projection (e.g.: Schouten 1991; Price et al. 2000), our study shows consumers responding to “thing-power” (Bennett 2010). We note that material objects are not passive, succumbing to the functions, role and imprint ascribed by the subject. In contrast, we argue that objects are actants and as such impact disposal. Objects impact disposal as they transform to the passing of time, changes in interaction with their environment, are embedded in genealogies and have responsibilities as citizens of the world. We also highlight that because an object transforms and changes in relation to its environment, it may create guilt, anxiety, and issues of care, and thus orient disposal.

References


