

**Should it stay or should it go? Negotiating value and waste
in the divestment of household objects**

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Thesis submitted for the PhD in Sustainable Futures

September 2012

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Acknowledgments

To what extent do we attribute achievement to the individual, or to the circumstances that enable their success? This is a question that pervades education, politics, and society at large. Preparing and writing a doctoral thesis is a greater single task than most will have pursued when they take it on. An extended project of self-directed research such as this may only have one author, but there are many contributors without which, no such document would exist. This thesis is no exception.

Firstly I would like to acknowledge the support of the University of Technology Sydney, for providing me with a postgraduate scholarship with which to pursue this project. This award allowed me to focus on the research full time, something I truly valued.

I was fortunate enough to pursue my candidacy in the postgraduate study program at the Institute for Sustainable Futures. Ably led by Professor Cynthia Mitchell, Dr Juliet Willetts and Dr Kumi Abeysuriya, this program has given me a unique opportunity to pursue research amongst a community of scholars from a range of backgrounds – all of whom are committed to sustainability outcomes. The program values practices of reflection and mutual learning, something that benefitted this research immensely.

My participation in the Social Change Climate Change working parties at Lancaster University throughout 2009 & 2010 was also particularly influential in my thinking - I'm grateful for the opportunity to have taken part in those.

As my external supervisor, Professor Gert Spaargaren provided valuable direction in the initial stages of the project.

I was fortunate enough to have Associate Professor Chris Riedy as my supervisor throughout my candidacy. I cannot thank him enough for his persistent support of my research. I value his direction and feedback on all aspects of my work, as well as his encouragement and enthusiasm to create sustainable futures.

To my grandmother, Beryl, who passed away in December 2010. I have so many fond memories of drinking tea with her and my grandfather Bill on their front verandah in the winter sun. She was my window to the past, and an example of how to live life to its fullest.

Finally, to Bethany. I am so grateful for your friendship and inspiration in all the time that I've known you. You have given me all the support I could ask for. Thank you.

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Key

This research project draws from a variety of direct and indirect sources including existing published research literature, interview transcripts, print and electronic media, policy documents and websites. The text in this document will appear according to the following guidelines:

‘Words within single quotation marks’ (Author, date, page) - Indicate a direct quotation from research literature, including citation.

‘Words within single quotation marks’ – Indicate a novel, colloquial or noteworthy concept as judged by myself, without citation.

Words in italics within quotation marks’ – Indicate a direct quote from a primary source i.e interview

Words in italics and “double quotation marks” within single quotation marks’ – Indicate a participant conveying speech from themselves or another person.

“***Bold*** words in italics within quotation marks” – Indicate a participants emphasis, as perceived by myself

Word with [square brackets] – Indicate modification of primary source material to be consistent with linguistic or grammatical conventions.

Words ... with multiple full stops in between – Indicate a conjoining of source material, for the purposes of clarity or brevity.

Abstract

This thesis concerns the practices of material divestment for household durable objects; with the aim that understanding these practices will assist in making them more sustainable in the future. The role of consumption, waste, and material divestment is discussed in the context of global disparities in resource use and living standards. Informed by a theoretical framework based on social practices, the role of the individual is de-centered, with focus shifting to competencies, meanings, materials and rules. These elements of practice are also subject to variation in scale, intensity, trajectory and form. Understanding everyday practice in this way allows the research to conceptualize dynamics of change as re-configurations of the elements of practice.

Empirical investigation is conducted through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and media and document analysis. Households and providers of divestment related services in Australia and the Netherlands are consulted to develop a grounded theory account of the systems of material divestment. This approach yielded four different systems of practice: retainment, altruistic divestment, return-oriented divestment and ridding.

The negotiation of value is found to be central to all practices of divestment, albeit varying in different contexts and spaces. Practices of storing, making-do, treasuring, donation, passing-on, online and auction selling, garage sales, decluttering, leaving-out, and disposing are described as distinct, yet interrelated avenues for divesting durable household objects.

The potential for divestment practices to be made more sustainable is discussed by way of initiatives that would promote a re-engagement with waste materials through increased visibility and reduced distancing with practitioners. The alignment of practices is also advocated as a means to promote material and object re-use, thereby reducing overall waste generated. As trends toward economies of access emerge, collaborative forms of material use and appear to offer new ways of promoting sustainable consumption. Further research avenues are explored, with a renewed and revised concept of waste, and its implications for public policy.

