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

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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.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures 11

Key 13

Abstract 15

Introduction 17

1.1 Sustainable Futures 17

1.2 Consumption 19
1.2.1 Partaking, Possessing and Participating: The Spectrum of Consumption 21
1.2.2 Needs and Wants – Unpacking Consumption Priorities 24
1.2.3 The Consumption Landscape: Visions and Perspectives 30
1.2.4 Escalating Levels of Consumption 33
1.2.5 Consumption & Identity: Overstated or Under-researched? 35
1.2.6 Concluding Remarks on Consumption 37

1.3 Waste 38
1.3.1 Contesting Waste 38
1.3.2 Narratives of Waste 41
1.3.3 Durability and Disposability 42

1.4 Divestment 44
1.4.1 Disposable Durable Goods 46

1.5 Conclusion 47

Theoretical Framework 51

2.1 Introduction 51

2.2 Foundations of Practices 52

2.3 Understandings of Practice Theory 55

2.4 Practices as Configurations of Elements 57

2.5 Characterising the Elements of Practice – A Tentative Framework 61
2.5.1 Scale 61
2.5.2 Intensity 62
2.5.3 Trajectory 62
2.5.4 Form 63

2.6 Systems of Practice 65

2.7 Conclusion 68

Research Design 71

3.1 Introduction 71

3.2 Paradigm 71

3.3 Methodology - Grounded Theory 73

3.4 Research Agenda 76

3.5 Methods 79
3.5.1 Households 80
3.5.2 Providers of Divestment Practices 82

3.6 List of Interview Participants 87

3.7 Data Analysis 88

3.8 Ethical Considerations 90
3.9 Conclusion 90
Practices of Retainment **91**
4.1 Introduction 91
4.2 The nature and appraisal of value 92
4.3 Storing 95
4.4 Making Do 100
4.5 Treasuring 107
4.6 Conclusion 111
Altruistic Divestment **113**
5.1 Introduction 113
5.2 Charity begins at home – expectations in the practices of donation 113
5.3 Bins, and the business of donating 116
5.4 Managing demand for donation 120
5.5 Charity Shops as a site for intervention in practice 124
5.6 Passing-on 126
5.7 'Passing-on' to the known unknown 131
5.8 Conclusion 134
Return Oriented Divestment: Selling **137**
6.1 Introduction 137
6.2 From classified to online selling 138
6.3 Auction Houses 142
6.4 Garage Sales 144
6.5 Conclusion 149
Ridding **153**
7.1 Introduction 153
7.2 The Life Politics and Practice of Decluttering 154
7.3 Sifting through the 'Council Clean-up' 162
7.4 User expectations of bulk waste removal 165
7.5 Kerbside Reuse in the context of Waste Management Practices 170
7.6 Institutional Rules for Waste Management 175
7.7 Disposal – Tips, bins, and the perception of finality 179
7.8 Conclusion 182
Integration and Dynamics of Divestment Practices **185**
8.1 Introduction 185
8.2 Elements of Divestment 188
8.3 Reassessing Value in the Context of Practice 192
8.4 Conclusion 194

Intervening in Practice for Sustainable Consumption **195**
9.1 Researching Divestment 195
9.2 Re-designing Waste Infrastructures for Sustainable Practices 200
9.3 Co-location of Practices – Divested Presence on the Kerbside 203
9.4 Competing and Collaborating Practices 206
9.5 Reflections on Practice Theory 210
9.6 Limitations of Research 212
9.7 Contribution to Original Knowledge 214
9.8 Opportunities for Future Research 215

Bibliography **219**

Appendices **229**
Appendix A – Invitation to Participate In Research *230*
Appendix B - Participant Consent Form *233*
Appendix C - Household Interview Questions *235*
Appendix D - Provider Interview Questions *237*
Appendix E – Sample Interview and Coding *239*

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Basic Consumption Distinctions	23
Figure 1.2 The relationship between subjective wellbeing and GNP	29
Figure 2.1 Social Practices as the Intersection of Agency & Structure	54
Figure 2.2 Differences between behaviour and practice	56
Figure 2.3 – The Elements of Practice	60
Figure 2.4 Characteristics of the Elements of Practice	64
Figure 3.1 The Systems of Divestment	78
Figure 3.2 The Abductive Research Process	89
Figure 5.1 Charity bins in Sydney	117
Figure 7.1 – Kerbside Re-use in Utrecht, Netherlands	167
Figure 7.2 'Free' sign, Sydney	168
Figure 8.1: Practices and elements of the four systems of divestment	189

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.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Sustainable Futures

Sustainability is a term whose attractiveness belies its complications. Simultaneously a point of principled consensus, yet in practice it evokes competing and occasionally contradictory goals. What, precisely, do we wish to be sustained? Who do we wish to be sustained? And how do we go about doing it? These are not trivial questions and they have real world ramifications for individuals and policy-making institutions alike. The most commonly cited definition of sustainability is one that has stood the test of time – that offered by the Brundtland Report, handed down in 1972, which claimed that sustainable development is:

> ... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987).

This articulates the key principles of intergenerational equality that underlie most definitions of sustainability. Of course, this definition is not without its problems – chief amongst them the ability of present generations to predict the needs of future generations. As new technologies emerge, it becomes increasingly difficult to describe plausible future scenarios in a globally interconnected society. However, substantial research is currently underway to understand the impact that present society is likely to have moving into the future.

Recently attempts have been made to quantify the sustainability of global civilisation by calculating our ecological 'footprint' – a measure of the rate of depletion of 'natural capital', as defined by the authors Wackernagel & Rees (1996). This refers largely to the ability for natural ecological systems to regenerate when partially depleted, and to absorb pollution. In other words, by calculating the total human demand for ecological services – such as clean drinking water, fertile soil, clean air – the overall impact of civilisation on the natural world can be determined. Recent evidence indicates that current rates of consumption are unsustainable. In 2008, annual global resource consumption was approximately 1.5 times the renewable capacity of the earth's natural resources (World Wildlife Fund 2012). This figure is not uniform across the global population, however. Developed nations such as Australia, the United States, Canada and Great Britain have per

capita footprints of between five and eight, whilst less developed nations such as India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Kenya consume less than one. The ecological footprint measure makes explicit the stark differences between the various populations of the world, and the extent to which high living standards are particularly resource intensive and, to use a different term, largely 'unmaintainable'.

Not only are current consumption levels not maintainable, the situation is predicted to become more severe as growth in economic activity and material consumption increases, fuelled by an ideological commitment to maximising growth. Jackson (2009) argues that this commitment to growth is misplaced, given growth's diminishing returns in relation to overall prosperity. Daly (1996) goes one step further, claiming that growth itself must be halted, as anything beyond a 'steady state' economy is unsustainable. And yet, growth in economic activity remains one of the primary goals of governance institutions throughout the world (see International Monetary Fund 2012).

Defining the term sustainability also requires an understanding of the consequences of 'unsustainability'; that is, actions in present that compromise the integrity of future generations well-being. For instance, scenarios involving global climate change as a result of anthropogenic activities are predicted (and, in some instances, have been demonstrated) to have a significant impact on vast numbers of the global population (IPCC 2007). The 'peaking' and subsequent depletion of non-renewable fossil fuels, particularly oil, may also substantially reduce the overall standard of living if it substitutes are not found. Oil functions as a primary source of energy for transport, agriculture and manufacturing (Urry 2010). Therefore, the consequences of remaining unsustainable should be cause for unprecedented concern amongst institutions and individuals alike.

The potential for a sustainable human civilisation is directly related to the way we structure our economic and social activities. The actions of social actors, extrapolated on a global scale, entail substantial effects on the natural world such as deforestation, the emission of greenhouse gases, increases in groundwater and soil salinity, and depletion of finite and non-renewable resources. The antecedents to these circumstances will be examined through the analytical lens of 'consumption'. Understanding the consumption actions and processes that lead to environmental decline are central to questions of how sustainability can be achieved.

1.2 Consumption

Consumption has arguably emerged as a type of 'meta-issue' for sustainability. Many researchers have argued that the pressing issues for sustainability today are deeply intertwined with issues of consumption (Gram-Hanssen 2009; Jackson 2005, 2009; Princen et al. 2002; Princen 2005; Shove 2010; Spaargaren 2003). For instance, interpreting many of the sustainability challenges outlined above through the discourses of consumption, Princen et al.'s *Confronting Consumption* (2002) highlights the ways in which contemporary trends in consumption have led to unintended, yet damaging consequences for the environment and society at large. A process that has been instrumental in contemporary consumption is the 'commoditisation' of products that are marketed and exchanged for the purposes of maximising profit rather than instrumental value (Manno 2002). The unsustainability of these products is further masked through 'distancing', where the real world consequences of the products available to consumers are separated from those who acquire and make use of them, both culturally, and geographically (Clapp 2002). Together these processes have resulted in foreign 'sweat shops', in which products are manufactured by workers in overwhelmingly poor conditions – unbeknownst to those purchasing them (Klein 2000). Consumers therefore make decisions to consume without full awareness of the environmental and social implications, leading to unintended negative impacts.

Issues surrounding the sustainability of various consumption patterns inevitably turn to the palpable discrepancies in consumption levels between different populations throughout the world. Yet, as Humphery's *Excess* (2009) points out, there are few ways to distinguish between these groups in a way that accurately reflects the nature and dynamic of the consumption that has, is, and will occur. The term 'The West', often used to point to those countries with higher levels of affluence and correspondingly higher levels of per capita consumption, is becoming increasingly blurred, and geographically inaccurate. Emerging, large-scale markets for energy, water and consumer goods in what would otherwise be referred to as 'The East' – China and India in particular – lend little credence to the notion that global consumption can be divided in these historical terms. A distinction between a wealthy global 'North' and a poorer 'South' is similarly imprecise, given the relative affluence of Australia, New Zealand, and others in the southern hemisphere. Global circumstances are also more complex than a division based on 'developed' and 'developing' economies. This dichotomy obscures the trajectories of consumption growth, and assumes an inherent desirability of the 'Western' model of development, with all of its consequences. Indeed, each of these distinctions also obscures the vast spectrum of material consumption

that occurs within nations. Humphery (2009) offers a more useful distinction, between the 'Minority', and 'Majority'. This definition more accurately reflects one of the key gulfs in the nature of unsustainable global consumption - that it overwhelmingly pertains to a Minority of the world's population, whilst a Majority consume resources to fulfil basic needs.

Hamilton & Denniss (2005) have attempted to characterise contemporary developed world consumption as a type of disorder, which they and others have referred to as 'affluenza'. They go on to identify both individual motivations for overconsumption, such as the desire to purchase infinitely more material commodities, and broader societal drivers, such as the 'addiction to economic growth' (Hamilton & Denniss 2005, p. 3). While this analysis focuses primarily on Australia, it clearly mirrors other critiques of consumption such as Schor's *The Overspent American* (1999), and Herman Daly's *Beyond Growth* (1996), each of which pinpoint the affluent consumer lifestyles of those in Minority world economies as key drivers of unsustainability.

The affluent minority's levels of consumption are highly disproportionate when compared to the rest of the world. Researching, critiquing and engaging with the most conspicuous and overt displays of overconsumption is therefore a worthwhile pursuit, even if only a small fraction of the world's population are able to partake in its excesses (Elliott & Urry 2010). The most affluent minority world lifestyles are both carbon and resource intensive, and therefore highly problematic for sustainable living patterns. Because these places are not merely places for consumption, but also for employment, and habitation, these patterns of consumption are therefore embedded in the culture, and people come to rely on their existence, however unsustainable it appears to be. Further, despite being aberrations in terms of general consumption levels, minority world lifestyles may also serve as a means to escalate consumption expectations in those that cannot afford to partake. As a result, the legacy of the minority, through the type of consumption that they advocate, extends far beyond their direct consumptive footprint. Excessive forms of consumption must be held to account and made 'reasonable', if we are to prioritise consumption in the pursuit of sustainability (Kronenberg 2007).

Consumption has been identified as a driving force behind many of the environmental, as well as social issues that challenge human sustainability. Because "consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production" (Smith 1869, p. 715), we must recognise that the two processes are linked by necessity. In this light, climate change, for instance, can be seen to be largely the result of consumption patterns whose by-products contribute to the

destabilisation of the atmosphere in one way or another. Whether the focus is on the greenhouse gas emissions associated with particular practices, or the depletion of biological systems capable of absorbing those emissions, both of these processes have consumption at their root. Issues of resource depletion are similarly, at their core, issues about consumption.

Consumption has also been of considerable interest to researchers attempting to describe (post)modernity (Bauman 2000; Baudrillard 1970; Featherstone 1991), as well as to those attempting to discern the meaning of consumption practices in everyday life (Douglas & Isherwood 1979). However, as highlighted in the foregoing paragraphs, an increasing amount of contemporary research is being devoted to understanding the social and environmental impacts of consumption patterns, particularly those associated with materially affluent populations throughout the world. Given the vast differences in material wealth throughout the world, questions concerning sustainable futures must inevitably turn, at some point, toward the nature, scale and direction of consumption.

1.2.1 Partaking, Possessing and Participating: The Spectrum of Consumption

Although the term 'sustainable consumption' is now used widely in research and certain policy arenas, it is not without its problems. Peattie & Collins (2009, p. 107) contend that 'consumption' refers to the using up, the destroying of something, which lies in direct opposition to the goal of 'sustaining' something. Whilst this may seem true, it obviously does not capture the entire spectrum of 'consumption'. Rather than offer a similarly limiting definition of consumption, it seems appropriate to clarify what consumption refers to in a more practical sense. This allows for a clearer understanding of how consumption is implicated in everyday life, as well as for identifying the possibilities for the much sought after, yet ever elusive 'sustainable consumption'.

Consumers in modern industrialised economies are faced with a vast array of phenomena that can be construed as forms of consumption. Much of what we undertake in daily life involves consumptive elements, even if we ourselves do not 'consume' the object or substance in question. The list of what could, directly or indirectly, constitute an act of consumption is virtually limitless. Travelling, eating, shopping, recreation, and any number of other practices are all forms of consumption, constituting what Schatzki (2002, p. 88) describes as a "dispersed practice"- a set of seemingly diverse social and material arrangements that are nevertheless linked in at least one significant aspect. The challenge for

researchers, therefore, is to map the consumption 'terrain' in a way that reflects both the experiences of consumers as well as the broader social structures that mediate their actions. I present three categories - 'consumables'; 'durables'; and 'experiences' - as a useful framework for distinguishing between different consumption practices.

'Consumables' refer to those goods that are themselves consumed in the act of their consumption. Under this definition, consumables may refer to anything that is eaten, drunk, inhaled, injected or applied. Waste may remain after the consumption act takes place, but the partaking and 'using up' of the good itself is what defines it as a consumable. Food, drink, pharmaceuticals, drugs and alcohol are the most intuitive examples of this type of consumption.

Sharing of consumable goods is possible, but requires that the good be divided – and the amount consumed by each person subsequently reduced. Obviously, the ability to re-use these goods over time is limited, given their characteristics of being used up in the process of consumption. This is one of the key contrasts between 'consumables' and the second consumption category: 'durables'.

'Durables' are those goods that retain their functional material form beyond their initial use. These are goods that we can manipulate, control, or interact with, such as tools, televisions, clothes and appliances. Durables tend to become 'broken', 'worn out' or 'obsolete' and although their functional life may expire, they are never completely 'used up' in a material sense. Of course, the resources used in the production of the goods are "used up" (Princen 2002, p. 38), but from the consumer's perspective, the goods persistence allows them to be subject to continuous use over time. As Chapman (2005, p. 149) points out, "we do not consume [durable] matter; we engage with it". These characteristics allow a range of opportunities for increasing the life and utility of durable goods, such as sharing, exchanging, or renting, which do not exist for consumable goods. Durable goods are generally acquired, possessed, used and eventually disposed of. Thus durable goods occupy a physical space, as they are material objects, but also a temporal space because of their persistence through repeated use. Only the latter applies for the third consumption type, which I define as 'experiences'.

Whilst the term **'experiences'** may seem very general, given that one could claim all types of goods are 'experienced' at some level, it simply refers to forms of consumption where the activity is not entirely dependent on the material goods involved. Air conditioned

climate, radio shows, theatre productions, counselling and guided travel are all examples of 'experiential consumption'. Whilst almost all involve interaction with consumables and/or durables when their consumption takes place, these goods are incidental to the experience being sought after by the consumer. This reflects the blurred distinction between forms of consumption, despite the many differences detailed above. Experiences may be shared, depending on situational arrangements between producers and consumers, but cannot, by definition, be re-used. Experiences can be said to differ from the more conventional categorisation of 'services', since it is not necessary for them to be provided by another party, as is generally the case with services.

In the research literature of consumption a commodity simply refers to anything that can be bought or sold in a market exchange. As such, all three of these consumption types may be considered commodities, regardless of their respective forms. In fact, it has been argued that contemporary consumption practices are characterised by increasingly 'commoditised' arrangements, where preference is given to the most marketable end products of an industry over less marketable ones (Manno 2002). Furthermore, the process of 'commoditisation' sees more and more goods and services brought into the sphere of the market including those that, in the past, may not have been subject to monetary exchanges.

Figure 1.1 Basic Consumption Distinctions

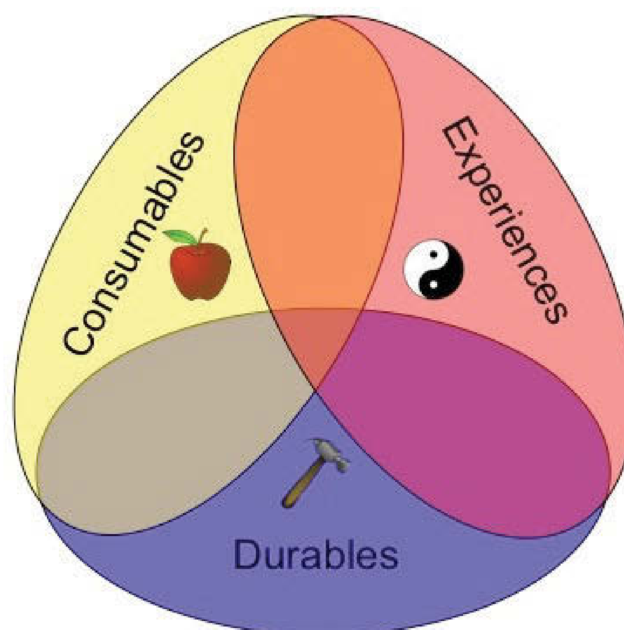


Figure 1.1 maps the types of consumption contemporary consumers engage in, yet it also recognises that many goods and services are resistant to classification. The overlapping areas of the ovals reflect the 'hybridity' of many goods and services that we encounter in everyday life. For instance, it is not at all clear whether a drug of any type would simply be considered a consumable, given that the user takes it into their body, or also an experience, given the altered states of consciousness it elicits. Such 'consumable-experience' hybrids are represented by the orange shaded area. Similar cases are found with 'durable-experiences' shown in purple: consumer electronics such as laptops, music players and mobile phones clearly have a durable material form yet they are primarily devices that facilitate communication and access to media and software, whose focus is therefore experiential. The grey area encompasses 'consumable-durables', such as bottled beverages whose contents are consumed whilst the durable packaging may be kept for later use. Finally, activities may be characterised by all three types of consumption. The experience of driving, for instance, also uses durable goods (cars) as well as consumable goods (petrol, oil).

Drawing out the distinctions between consumables, durables and experiences facilitates an approach to consumption research that focuses on specific 'practices' (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2002; Shove et al. 2012); an approach discussed in detail throughout Chapter 2. This approach is necessary in order to capture the various aspects of consumer 'agency' as well as the socio-material reality in which they operate. However, not all types of consumption are pursued with the same intensity. Nor do we accord all forms of consumption equivalent priority. How, therefore, do we decide what forms of consumption to partake, possess, or participate in? The following section will address these issues of competing needs and priorities.

1.2.2 Needs and Wants – Unpacking Consumption Priorities

The distinctions made in the previous section allow us to conceptualise consumption as a diverse set of practices, involving various combinations of consumables, durables and experiences. Yet, this says nothing of the differing priorities we attach to these forms practices. Do we, for instance, prioritise consumables over durables? Instinctively we might be inclined to agree, as food appears to satisfy a fairly basic 'need' when compared to material objects. Yet such a crude generalisation soon breaks down when we consider how essential certain objects are for some people – such as a visually impaired person's walking

stick. Therefore, a close examination of several established accounts of 'need' is required in order to determine their relevance to the needs associated with consumption.

One of the more difficult distinctions to be made in discussions about consumption is that between 'needs' and 'wants'. While no precise definition is agreed upon in this context, it is possible to intuit some key characteristics that provide further insight. Neo-classical economics assumes that 'wants' are infinite, and the central problem is the allocation of finite resources to satisfy those infinite wants (Anderton 2008). It is then clear that the market theory of wants and the sociological accounts of needs have very little in common (Douglas et al. 1998), yet both are used to describe the motivating forces behind consumption in a number of contexts. Under the neo-classical economic framework, wants rest on their manifestation in the expression of preferences. We buy what we want, and we want what we buy. Whereas wants are closely associated with individual rational choice, needs are not necessarily so. Yet it is possible, as the following frameworks will demonstrate, for needs to be unacknowledged by a consumer at any given point.

Here, I utilise two prominent frameworks for assessing human needs, set within the context of consumption. The widely cited framework of Abraham Maslow (1970) offers a hierarchical approach to the issue, thereby suggesting that certain needs are more necessary than others. Manfred Max-Neef's (1991) alternative framework is, by contrast, explicitly non-hierarchical in its structure. By comparing and contrasting these two frameworks, we can gain a greater understanding of the role of needs in motivating various forms of consumption.

Perhaps the most renowned theory of need is Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow proposes five 'levels' of human need. The most basic needs associated with survival form the lowest, or base level. Second level needs are associated with safety - namely health, protection and comfort. Third level needs begin to acknowledge social needs, referred to as belongingness. This incorporates the need for love, affection and acceptance that is met through interpersonal relationships. Fourthly, Maslow believes that humans require self-esteem, arising out of prestige and status that comes from acceptance by others. Finally, at the highest level of the hierarchy of needs is that of 'self-actualisation'. This need arises when the other more basic needs have been fulfilled, and the individual is left feeling as though life "has no meaning", or that they are yet to reach their full potential (Trigg 2004, p. 395).

Given the broad spectrum of consumption practices outlined above, it seems clear that many of the levels in Maslow's hierarchy are relevant. The dynamic nature of Maslow's hierarchy, in the sense that it acknowledges that needs change as circumstances change, is particularly insightful. As lower order needs are satisfied, higher order needs become a priority. Maslow also recognises that once we are striving to satisfy higher order needs, often the lower order needs can be subordinated. Thus, individuals in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment become willing to forgo satisfaction of some of the more basic needs, at least temporarily, in order to accomplish this.

Maslow's concept of needs also does not appear to conflict with the consumption typologies presented in Figure 1.1. Consumables, durables and experiences could be located throughout the hierarchy of needs, with no particular hierarchy being offered by this framework. For instance, durables could be positioned virtually anywhere within the hierarchy, depending on the type of object and the experience to which it connects. Durable clothing may be acquired to provide basic warmth and protection from the elements, thereby satisfying a lower level need. However, it may also serve a more social purpose, to signify certain meanings to other people, which Maslow would suggest is a higher level need.

It has been argued, however, that Maslow's hierarchy may not be dynamic enough to account for the social malleability of needs. For instance, Trigg (2004, p. 403) suggests that a more realistic account of needs requires an acknowledgment of the role that social learning and external influence plays in shaping how one perceives needs. Attention must therefore be drawn to the malleability of needs when they are placed in specific social contexts (Groves & Kahalas 1975). Similarly, although with reference to the rationing of health care within a society, Barry (1999: p. 124) suggests that one must acknowledge an element of relativism in any theory of need. Barry cites the difference in the level of health care that is considered 'needed' between a first and third world country as evidence that needs are necessarily relativistic. Hence, needs are not universally identifiable in the way that Maslow implies, but rather they are subjectively chosen to a substantial degree. An account of needs that recognises their malleability and dynamic nature is likely to be the most sociologically informative. Equally, an account of needs must specify how these needs are met.

While each of these criticisms raises useful arguments, they do not themselves undermine Maslow's hierarchy. Different societies, depending on their wealth and circumstances will clearly attempt to satisfy needs in different ways. However, it is difficult to reject the assertion that needs retain some degree of hierarchy across cultures. Barry's claim

that health care is provided differently in different societies can be used to support Maslow's theory. Since provision of some form of health care is common across societies as a basic right, however differently they deem certain procedures 'necessary', this in itself suggests that some form of health care is a basic need for all people. Hence, the hierarchy of needs remains a useful framework for understanding how various needs are satisfied - as Maslow defines them - through consumption.

All of the aforementioned needs, both 'high' and 'low' level, are satisfied through consumption. For instance, basic needs for drink can be satisfied through consumption of water. However, often other levels may 'intrude' onto this seemingly low level need. Someone may be thirsty, but the consumption of alcohol may be a more acceptable form of satisfying that need in a particular social milieu (e.g a bar). Here, a perceived need for social acceptance has a close relationship to how a more basic need for drink is satisfied. Even some of the so called high level needs, such as self-esteem, may be satisfied through consumption, for instance through of one of the many forms of therapy offered in a market society.

The second framework for human need is that conceived by Manfred Max-Neef (1991), who proposed an account of needs within an overall approach to what he referred to as Human Scale Development. Max-Neef argues that humans have nine primary needs: Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Understanding, Participation, Idleness, Creation, Identity, and Freedom. While each of these is somewhat self-explanatory, there is another series of needs that complement these nine. They are the existential needs of: Being, Having, Doing, and Interacting. Thus, each of the latter four needs is present within each of the nine primary needs. For example, in attempting to satisfy the need for affection, one must pursue satisfiers that have elements of being, having, doing, and interacting. This needs 'matrix' offers an arguably more sophisticated framework for needs than Maslow's, acknowledging that needs can (and must) be satisfied in various existential ways.

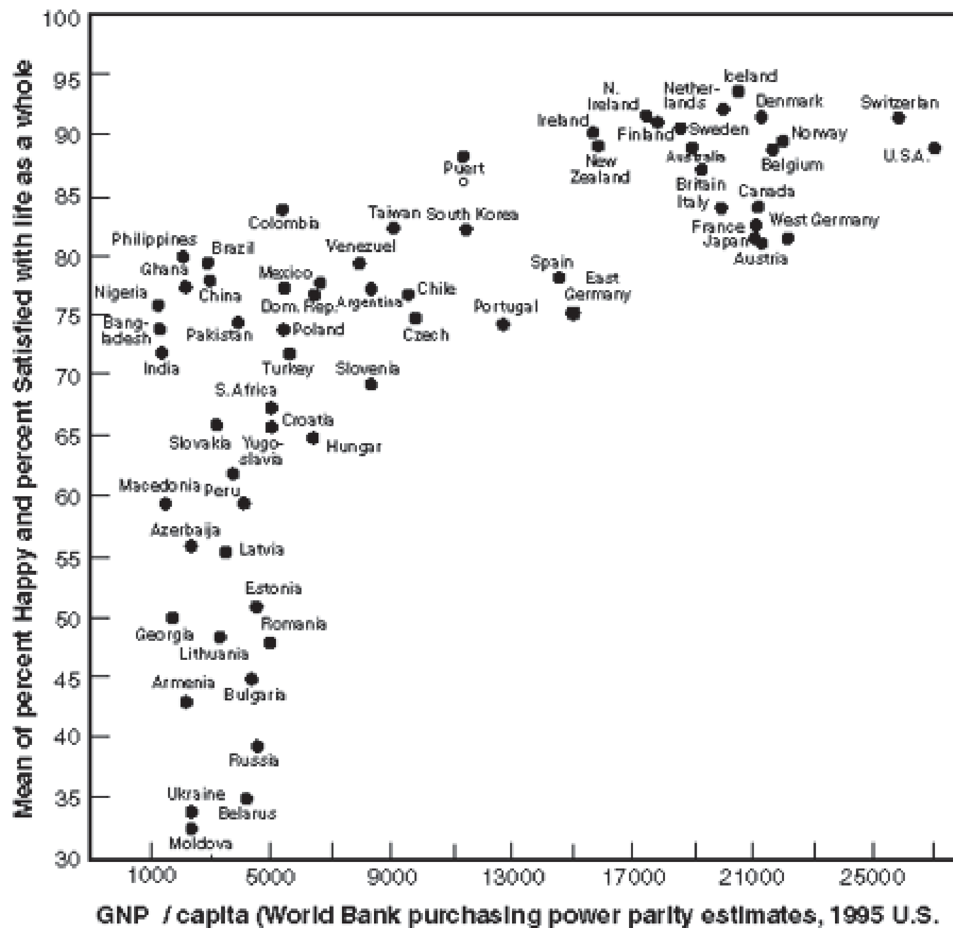
Max-Neef (1991) also suggests that any account of human needs must make the distinction between a need on the one hand, and the phenomena that satisfy that need – which he refers to as 'satisfiers' - on the other. The distinction is important for several reasons. Firstly, it is possible for a satisfier to satisfy more than one need simultaneously. As a consequence, it is possible that more than one need can be satisfied by one particular good, activity or form of consumption. However, it is also possible that satisfiers of one need may prevent the satisfaction of another need. Such phenomena are 'violators' or 'destroyers' of

needs. Drawing out this distinction between needs and satisfiers is also a powerful way to distinguish different forms of consumption from one another. It allows us to draw distinctions between different instances of consumption, in a way that may illuminate the spectrum between Majority world and Minority world consumption levels.

Max-Neef is very clear to point out that fundamental human needs are 'finite, few, and classifiable'. This is in stark contrast with neo-classical economic accounts of consumption that differ in both terminology and in characterisation. Both Maslow and Max-Neef's framework place very obvious limits on the concept of needs, arguing that they are far from the infinite wants described by neo-classical economics. In contrast to Maslow, Max-Neef (1991, p. 37) is adamant that none of the needs have a hierarchical structure to them, and that if left unsatisfied, the deficit in any of the needs will be experienced just as harshly. However, the need for subsistence still resides at a level that is even more basic than the other needs he proposes. Without a basic level of subsistence, it is not even possible to contemplate many of the other needs, such as affection or understanding. Here, Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains useful, as it does give primacy to the most basic of human needs of survival and ongoing physical health, or at least the absence of debilitating physical harm; recognising that this basic need is the foundation for all other human needs. Reconciling these frameworks for human needs and well-being with alternative frameworks - beyond that of economic growth – is therefore a crucial step toward bringing about more sustainable consumption practices.

Consumption is rarely, if ever, a goal in and of itself for the consumer. More often than not, consumption practices are undertaken for instrumental goals, in order to accomplish something, even if, as Max-Neef might argue, that goal is thought to be satisfied only by the particular form of consumption engaged in. Most generally, consumption is undertaken for the further enhancement of our well-being. Yet, many have challenged the notion that material consumption relates to well-being. Jackson (2005) claims that beyond a certain level, material consumption offers diminishing returns for the happiness of those doing the consuming. Ingelhart's (1997) analysis of the World Values Survey compares the perceived life satisfaction of nations, depicting an ever diminishing increase in mean life satisfaction once a certain threshold of affluence is reached (using national per capita gross domestic product as a proxy; Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 The relationship between subjective wellbeing and gross national product per capita (Inglehart 1997)[1]



As Figure 1.2 indicates that while countries from the Minority world tend to occupy the high consumption / high happiness positions, a number of countries - such a Columbia, Phillipines and Ghana – appear to have high levels of happiness despite comparatively low to moderate levels of consumption. While such data needs to be confirmed to account for cross-cultural biases, it does tend to suggest that continuously increasing consumption is not the only approach to achieving well-being. Statistics such as these lead Jackson (2005) to conclude that there would be a 'double dividend' for more sustainable consumption policies and practices – the social benefit of living better, along with the environmental benefit of consuming less.

[1] http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder_published/article_base_56 accessed on 03/03/11

1.2.3 The Consumption Landscape: Visions and Perspectives

The 'double dividend' philosophy that Jackson argues for informs a number of movements devoted to more sustainable forms of consumption, including 'voluntary simplicity', 'green consumerism', and 'critical consumerism'. Anti-consumerist movements of 'voluntary simplicity' and 'downshifting' frame themselves as rejecting contemporary mainstream consumption practices. Promoted by early writers such as Thoreau (1882), and more recently by authors such as Elgin (1982), Grigsby (2004), Trainer (1995), and Doherty & Etzioni (2003), voluntary simplicity makes a now-familiar anti-materialist argument against consumerism. Proponents of voluntary simplicity argue that many of the modern conveniences we associate with the consumer society lead to dependence, rather than liberation from excess labour as promised. The necessity of many forms of consumption is questioned, under the notion that many goods and services are superfluous for a life of fulfilment and satisfaction. And, critically for sustainability, they highlight the environmentally destructive side effects of many types of consumption. Similarly, the concept of 'downshifting' questions the necessity of participating in the rat race – the "treadmill of consumption" (Spaargaren 2006). Downshifters cast off Minority world expectations of working a full time workload, living in a large house, and purchasing many goods and services, thereby rejecting many of the images embedded within consumerism. While the various incarnations of voluntary simplicity movements have received considerable attention in the literature on sustainable consumption, they do not appear to have extended beyond a small proportion of the population as a whole.

The phenomenon of 'green consumption' has been more successful in reaching the mainstream, with many products and services being touted for their environmental credentials. Many of these products are characterised by more environmentally benign materials, more efficient energy and resource use and organic production. Notably though, the practices associated with these goods often remain largely untouched. Manufacturers often seek to reduce the environmental impact of their goods through improvements in resource efficiency, rather than attempting to cultivate a transition in the practices that the good is used for. For instance, hybrid cars retain almost all the functions of petrol-powered cars, yet they are preferred by sustainability conscious consumers because of their low fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Ironically, such 'green' alternatives have been criticised for their susceptibility to the rebound effect, and Jevon's paradox – the tendency for more efficient alternatives to *increase* overall consumption, due to increased use following a perceived efficiency gain (Polimeni et al. 2008).

The purchase and use of greener goods and services is part of what Sassatelli (2007) refers to as 'critical consumerism'. Given that the market for these goods is a form of advocacy for environmental issues, their rise constitutes an emerging aspect of political democracy that exists outside the traditional governance institutions. A popular incarnation of this idea is the emergence of fair trade goods and services, reflecting the consumer's desire for just and equitable working conditions for those involved in the production process. Similarly, purchasing organic food might reflect an environmental concern about the use of pesticide and genetically modified organisms, or a perceived health benefit for the consumer. Under this framework, consumers are said to use their purchasing power to advocate particular social, economic and environmental concerns. Although it is unlikely the sole motivator, it follows that green consumption may also be critical to the pursuit of social status.

However, consumer choice and consumer sovereignty retain practical challenges to the realisation of critical consumerism. First, Sassatelli's vision of critical consumerism relies on transparency of production processes for all goods and services, not just the more favourable 'green' goods that are marketed to consumers. This is problematic in light of the aforementioned phenomenon of 'distancing' (Clapp 2002), referring to the processes and circumstances of the production being removed, both culturally and geographically, from the consumer. For example, we tend to empathise with those closer to us culturally, yet many of the goods and services we consume today are on a global market. Therefore, our capacity to identify with those distanced from ourselves is diminished. Geographically speaking, when production occurs in places that the consumer is never likely to see, and hence will never see the consequences of environmental degradation that is a result of a production process, consumers are removed from any negative feedback that might otherwise occur if those consequences were affected closer to home. While information on distant production processes has become more available in recent years - promoted by investigative critiques and corporate transparency initiatives such as Patagonia's *Footprint Chronicles*[2] - it is difficult for the average consumer to judge the veracity of this information, and there are still relatively few products that provide such information.

Furthermore, there are many competing criteria for which a given good or service could be said to be more or less sustainable. For example, 'Food Miles' is an increasingly common way to measure the ecological footprint of a particular food or crop. Food that is

[2] http://www.patagonia.com/us/footprint/index.jsp accessed on 9/10/2010

not grown locally, and must therefore travel greater distances from production to consumption, is said to have a high 'food mile footprint', due to the distance it travels and the ensuing transport costs[3]. While locally grown food would then appear to be the choice with the lower ecological footprint, it may also be the case that other criteria contribute more to a good's (un)sustainability. Food grown locally in a climate that requires excessive irrigation, fertiliser or energy use may end up being more ecologically burdensome than an imported product. Such issues complicate the ability for consumers to choose the most ethical and green choices at the point of consumption.

Another key assumption of the critical consumerism movement is that consumers will inevitably purchase goods and services that are consistent with their values. A consumer's ideals are assumed to guide their advocacy through the market, and to be consistent with their purchasing decisions. However, there is empirical evidence to suggest that the relationship between ideals and consumption decisions is not so clear-cut, and that consumers are more likely to purchase based primarily on price than any particular 'green' credentials of a particular good or service (Devinney et al. 2010). This indicates that consumption related values articulated in surveys, where there is little cost to espousing them, do not translate into purchasing practices in the majority of cases. Such discrepancy between espoused values and actual consumption practices poses serious issues for the practical application of critical consumerism. It is increasingly realised that although movements like voluntary simplicity, green consumerism, and critical consumerism have presented alternatives to the ongoing growth in material consumption, none of these movements have been successful in halting consumption growth. They remain niche pursuits, and further research is needed if sustainable consumption is to be realised.

The resource intensity of Minority world consumption practices is problematic on several levels. There are obvious implications for intra and intergeneration equity, as many of the materials used to sustain these lifestyles are finite and depleting. Despite this reality, and the lack of betterment of human wellbeing, there does not appear to be a present or forthcoming plateauing to overall levels of consumption. In fact, consumption, in many domains, is escalating, in stark contradiction with the needs frameworks of both Max-Neef and Maslow outlined above. It appears that while need satisfaction may be desirable and beneficial in both these frameworks, this is not being achieved at a societal level in relation to

[3] http://www.choice.com.au/reviews-and-tests/food-and-health/labelling-and-advertising/sustainability/food-miles.aspx accessed on 9/10/2010

the consumption of resources. In other words, growth in consumption is not meeting human needs at the global scale, yet it is putting unsustainable demands on the planet. The nature of the escalation of consumption must therefore be investigated if we are to understand what must be done to pursue a more sustainable, less resource intensive, future.

1.2.4 Escalating Levels of Consumption

The central issue for sustainability is not consumption itself, but the *growth* of consumption worldwide (Jackson 2009). In fact, substantial growth in consumption levels is predicated to accompany even a seemingly modest economic growth of 4% annually. In the Majority world, much of this consumption demand will be material, stemming from the introduction of basic goods and services that contribute to an increased standard of living; in terms of access to nutrition, shelter, and clothing. In the Minority world, where many of these basic services are already met for the vast majority of the population, a range of other factors that extend beyond basic provisioning arguably drives increased consumption. Shove & Warde (2002) distil five key drivers for this latter type of consumption escalation: Social Comparison, Identity, Novelty, Diderot Effect, and Specialisation. I will review each of these drivers; important because they not only account for why consumption occurs, but also elucidate the mechanisms for the ongoing escalation of consumption.

1.2.4.1 Social Comparison

The notion that consumption allows individuals to emulate or distinguish between others has persisted in social theory for some time. Most notably, Veblen (1899) analysed social class dynamics in these terms, suggesting that conspicuous consumption of certain material goods was the primary way in which a ruling class could differentiate themselves from classes lower in the socio-economic hierarchy. Those who are emulated are constantly trying to distinguish themselves from others, while those same others similarly attempt to emulate the distinguished. More recently, Bourdieu (1984) described the many ways in which material objects and consumptive taste are used to establish and maintain one's position in society. The pervasiveness of consumptive social comparison is also now reflected in common usage, with phrases such as 'keeping up with the Joneses' often used to describe consumption patterns of the working and middle classes.

1.2.4.2 Identity

Consumption has been described as central to the process of identity formation, with social theorists positing that "consumer goods give material form to a particular narrative of self identity" (Giddens 1991, p. 81). This is one of the characteristics of late-modernity, where people are increasingly judged in a social context by choices related to consumption. Simply put, our consumption defines us. Bauman (2004, p. 85) goes further, suggesting that one's identity is never fixed, but constantly "on the move"; an ongoing replacement of material goods that complement one's ever-changing identity. A personal transformation is therefore merely a few consumer choices away.

1.2.4.3 Novelty

The pursuit of stimulation has been linked to consumption in the form of novelty. Acquiring and possessing new objects gives pleasure to consumers who seek it through novelty. Many aspects of fashionable consumption appear to be associated with this driver, among others. While an object may offer increased performance, ergonomics, or accomplish new tasks, it may also be attractive merely by virtue of its contrasting with what has appeared before it. Consumption based on the pleasure derived from interaction with novelty offers a clear link to escalation of consumption beyond basic needs.

1.2.4.4 The Diderot Effect

Named after the philosopher Diderot, this refers to the tendency for acquired new objects to make others appear old by comparison, thus precipitating replacement of those objects to match the new one. In the original story from which the phenomenon was coined, Diderot was given a new dressing gown as a gift. The 'newness' of this gown made his other clothing and furnishings appear worn and shabby by comparison. This inspired him to gradually replace these objects, in order to match the newness of the recently acquired gown (McCracken 2006). It is clear how such a rationale might justify an ongoing escalation of consumption; with goods ageing over time, and at different rates, replacement of comparatively old and worn items becomes an imperative for those wanting to ensure that the ensemble of their objects are matched in age and appearance.

1.2.4.5 Specialisation of Practices

Many of the practices we undertake in daily life, be they work, domestic or leisure related, have undergone increased specialisation in recent times. Clothing and equipment utilised in these practices is often highly specific to its intended use. Assisted by a market eager to

promote the benefits of such specialised goods and services, consumption tends to increase as the type of equipment used for accomplishing these practices becomes considered more necessary. For instance, one could feasibly accomplish a range of active practices with one set of clothing and shoes. However, consumers with sufficient purchasing power are more likely to acquire different sets of clothing for work, leisure and time at home. Even within particular practices there is specialisation; in the case of photography, an enthusiastic amateur might consider owning both an single lens reflex and a compact camera, to be used in different situations that are appropriate for one or the other.

It should be noted that many instances of consumption could be ascribed to more than one of these drivers. For instance, consumption based on the Diderot Effect may be pursued with the overall goal of establishing certain identity-based characteristics. The desire to possess matching goods could be part of an overall strategy for communicating the consistency and stability of self. If one's ensemble of goods is mixed in their age, style and quality, then others are less likely to be able to discern a coherent identity based on these cues. Similarly, under consumption based on novelty and specialisation of practices, goods designed for specific purposes can be acquired for those purposes, but also bring with them pleasure based on their novelty for the owner. These five drivers for the escalation of consumption should therefore not be seen as mutually exclusive – two or more might operate simultaneously. Furthermore, the five drivers should not be seen as an attempt to categorise individuals. While some people may use consumption for the purposes of identity creation and maintenance, it is unlikely that this would be the only driver for all of their consumption practices. More realistically, individual consumers would incorporate differing degrees of each of these drivers in various spheres of consumption.

1.2.5 Consumption & Identity: Overstated or Under-researched?

The extent to which consumption choices are driven by the pursuit and maintenance of identity remains highly controversial. Among others, Giddens (1991) and Bauman (1998, 2000, 2001) argue that consumption choices are intimately involved in identity creation, in that what individuals choose to eat, drink, wear or drive reflects who they *really* are. In this sense, consumption serves as a symbolic vocabulary, facilitating communication between individuals and groups (Elliot 2004; Featherstone 1991); thereby allowing the expression of taste(s) in a way that is difficult to otherwise accomplish. By extension, a material object can arguably be tied to the self conceptually, as humans and non-humans quite literally 'keep

each other alive' (Bonekamp et al. 1998). At the broader level, the primacy of material objects in terms of social identity is epitomised by Mary Douglas' now-famous statement that consumption stands as the "arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape" (Douglas & Isherwood 1979, p. 57). The freedoms of consumer choice however, also come with the responsibility that others will assess us based on these choices. Making the wrong choice – by wearing the wrong clothing, consuming the wrong food or drink – means an individual would bear the burden of criticism, since the choices were primarily of their own volition.

The extent to which all types of consumption are driven by a desire for identity has been called into question. For instance, a significant proportion of consumption related 'choices' might not really be 'choices' in the way that Giddens and Bauman would describe. Warde (1994) argues that many people simply do not engage with consumption as identity formation, such that consumption choices may be more accurately be described as 'selections', having little consequence for a person's sense of self. In these instances, the principles and rationales that would inform identity based consumption choices - such as a 'right' choice to make in such a situation, in terms of assembling one's identity - are simply absent from consideration. Equally there is no wrong choice, since something can be chosen for the sake of convenience, for instance, rather than being indicative of a broader imperative to maintain a coherent sense of self. Further, there may be no space for consumer choice, as technical or institutional requirements effectively 'lock in' certain consumption decisions, with the individual consumer having little agency to pursue a different course.

Championing research on 'inconspicuous consumption', Shove (2003) has also been critical, albeit implicitly, of the focus on conspicuous consumption and identity formation. In particular, energy and water intensive systems that underpin everyday 'normal' life are key forms of consumption, yet there is a tendency for these systems and practices to go unnoticed by those researching consumption. Such systems are rarely explicitly 'chosen', but tend to be ever present throughout the life-course, and are therefore generally taken for granted by practitioners, researchers and policymakers alike.

Because consumption itself is such a broad a term, covering all manner of goods and services that we engage with both frequently and infrequently, it is clear that not all consumption decisions are equal in how much they reflect on our notions of self. Forms of consumption that are not as prominent in our social spaces are less likely to be reflective of, and contribute to, our identity. Shove & Warde (2002) argue that wall cavity insulation, for

example, does not carry with it the same contingency for one's personal identity as a very conspicuous good such as a car would, despite the importance of function and cost for both investments. On the one hand this is due to its 'invisibility' in use, since we would rarely notice the appearance of the insulation, the invisible effects of its presence inside our walls. Yet it is also the *lack* of choice in this type of good that negates the possibility for identity creation. It is in large part due to the multitude of possibilities for car ownership in the present day that facilitates the close association with identity. Certain forms of 'inconspicuous' consumption may play a greater or lesser role in the creation and maintenance of identity. Shove & Warde (2002) suggest that energy and water consumption, space heating, light bulbs, washing machines, and fridges and freezers have virtually no role to play in the formation of one's identity. However, this analysis was undertaken almost 13 years ago, and it could be argued that circumstances have shifted to bring these forms of consumption further into the realm of identity and association with selfhood.

Energy Star ratings on white goods have become ubiquitous in recent years, with marketing campaigns now lauding the efficiency and "environmental credentials" of their product's performance. The phasing out of incandescent light bulbs, and the increasing popularity of LED globes as a 'green alternative' to halogen bulbs suggest that light bulbs are just one example of a previously inconspicuous good that could also be implicated in the assembling of the identity of a 'green consumer'. One of the key characteristics of this development is the infiltration of values consistent with sustainability into evermore facets of daily life. As our understanding of energy, water & resource use in daily life matures, so too will the reflexivity of that understanding. As Spaargaren (2006) points out, the 'greening' of one's lifestyle is contingent on there being possibilities for sustainable alternatives. Consumption choices that may have offered no such possibilities in the past (such as light bulbs and washing machines) are now open to be incorporated into a more sustainable lifestyle. Ironically, it may partially have been the type of research that Shove & Warde were promoting (namely, on inconspicuous consumption) that ultimately undermined their previous claim regarding the lack of a link to personal identity.

1.2.6 Concluding Remarks on Consumption

Sustainable consumption is clearly crucial for sustainability in general. Consumption is therefore increasingly relevant to environmental, social and economic issues. However, the myriad of forms, degrees and intensities of consumption render it so broad a concept that it

resists specific conclusions. It is likely that the various interpretations of exactly what 'sustainable consumption' constitutes will only partially overlap at best. Should policy initiatives focus on consumables, experiences or durables? Should they focus on Minority or Majority world consumption? Can movements like voluntary simplicity, green consumerism and critical consumerism bring about broad-scale sustainable consumption? Should the focus on conspicuous consumption be maintained, or does the substantial contribution of inconspicuous consumption demand further inquiry? These are but a handful of the ways in which to map the landscape of consumption, each with their unique focuses and blind spots.

Pursuing a sustainable future must, at some level, deal with the dispersed practices of consumption. This demands that policy initiatives, whatever their origin, must re-engage with the satisfaction of human needs as the primary means for social and economic interaction; taking preference over abstract priorities such as growth in economic activity that have proven to be poor predictors of human well-being (Figure 1.2). To do this in a way that resists the uninhibited escalation of consumption is a necessity for both Minority and Majority worlds. In the following section, I begin to focus on the aspects of consumption that will be the subject of this thesis: waste and material divestment.

1.3 Waste

Inherent to many practices of consumption is the reality of generating waste. When we acquire durable goods, partake in consumables, or participate in experiences, there is the potential to create waste in some form. Indeed, waste may be unavoidable for some consumption practices, and hence it demands our attention.

1.3.1 Contesting Waste

Waste has many guises - detritus, litter, garbage, rubbish, refuse, junk, slag, trash. While each of these terms has an intuitively appropriate designation – litter is generally found on the street, whilst rubbish is usually in a bin - they do little to illuminate the actual nature of waste, nor why we designate something to be waste. To explore these imperatives, I describe two examples of what one might consider waste.

Throughout the history of fossil fuel development, natural gas was often flared off at the wellhead in the process of oil extraction. The volatile substance had no apparent use to

oil producers, and it was therefore considered a 'waste product'[4]. However, under the conditions of rising fossil fuel prices and energy demand, natural gas has become a commodity in itself. This change has come about not through any internal change in the substance, but by a shift in the priorities and capabilities of society.

The second example draws from the term 'wastelands', originally used to describe the vast swathes of undeveloped space in and around cities (Valaskakis et al. 1979). These spaces remained devoid of industrial and residential development by the nineteenth century, and were perceived to have little value by virtue of that fact. However, while this was once considered 'wasted space', it has now, in many parts of the world, become a valued asset; for its value as 'green space', providing an aesthetic balance to dominant urban landscapes, or for a variety of ecological system services that such undeveloped land may perform, such as carbon dioxide sequestration.

The lesson from these examples is that our notion of waste is highly subjective and context dependent, depending on the criteria by which we assign value. Waste connotes a substance or material for which no use can be found at the time, and it reflects our inability, and occasionally our unwillingness, to deal with it in our everyday lives. The term waste should also be considered a prescriptive term, rather than simply a descriptive one. Waste not only describes what is gotten rid of, but also prescribes what *should* be gotten rid of. It reflects an array of social and economic norms that have been established over time, the only common characteristic being 'that which is not valued'.

The 'lack of value' definition for waste is seemingly contradicted by recent developments in the waste management sector, which seek to reframe waste products as a 'resource'. For instance, one of the aims of the Australian Government's National Waste Policy is to "manage waste as a resource" (EPHC 2010, p. 3). A prominent example of this is the ability to harvest biogas from sanitary landfill sites for combustion and electricity generation, as is common throughout Australia. Arguably, this constitutes an example of waste that does have value. It could thus be said that once a use or value for a particular substance is found, then that substance ceases to be a waste product. Instead, it must be reframed as merely a 'by-product', since utility can be derived from the substance previously thought to be useless. This new utility can be achieved by developing technology, changing commodity prices, or evolving norms of social acceptance. The common aphorism "one man's trash is another man's treasure" suggests that subjective differences define waste,

[4] http://www.naturalgas.org/overview/history.asp accessed on 26/10/10

according to these and many other criteria. As Reno (2009, p. 29) points out, an exploration of waste reveals the competing understandings of human and material potential. Each of these subjectivities will remain in flux, as our notion of waste is continually renegotiated by those who generate, manage, source and trade it.

Waste has also become closely associated with environmental management of pollutants, and utilisation of scarce, or soon to be scarce resources. This is reflected by the various institutional entities devoted to dealing with waste, but also the set of evolving ethical frameworks linked to consumption and identity more generally. Indeed, it has been argued that environmental campaigns have implicated waste in the formation of "new circuits of guilt and conscience and practices of self-regulation" (Hawkins 2006, p. ix). Hawkins claims that identity isn't constructed in the objects we get rid of (or hold onto), but also by the myriad of ways we go about accomplishing that end. Thus, someone's identity as a 'recycler' is constituted in the bodily actions and habits associated with various material and technical apparatuses – such as paper packaging, plastic bottles, labelled receptacles, and recycling machinery. The myriad of ways in which we manage our relationship to waste, both individually and collectively, helps us to define our notion of self. Through the process of "keep(ing) chaos at bay" (ibid, p. 4), we better understand and maintain our (in)dependence on the material world.

Partly due to the emerging morality of waste, waste is not a neutral term in any sense. A key complication is that the verb form of the word - 'to waste' – carries with it a number of negative connotations in the moral system that Hawkins describes. That is to say, wasting, as something that is 'done', is rarely, if ever, applauded; the term reflexively condemns the practice or behaviour to which it refers. For example, to describe someone's behaviour as 'wasting water' is, by implication, to suggest that they could be utilising that water more wisely. In this instance, the wasting of water implies that the speaker has some idea of an appropriate amount of water to be used, and that the person in question is likely to have exceeded that subjective assessment. Embedded within the idea of wasting is a series of normative frameworks that serve to position the practice, in whatever context, as generally undesirable.

1.3.2 Narratives of Waste

It is clear that the definition of waste is a highly malleable and context dependent. However, there are several key narratives that have emerged in the literature for how to grapple with the increasing material waste being generated through the practices of consumption.

The first focuses on the notion of what we might call the 'extension of durability'. Articulated in detail by the Dutch organisation *Eternally Yours*, it envisions products that are 'immortal' in their material integrity. Durable objects must be not just built to last, but must be built to 'age with dignity' (Hinte 1997). The evolution of more durable objects requires an appreciation and tolerance for objects that are no longer new. More sustainable forms of consumption and waste are achieved in this scenario by increased life spans, and a reduction in the throughput of such goods in their use phase. A similar, although not identical, vision for product sustainability is provided by Tim Cooper, in his research on *Longer Lasting Products* (2010). He argues that while many new objects may perform superior functions to those of the past, there are few instances where a product is intended to, or actually does, last longer than those acquired in the past. While he too seeks to extend the life of many consumer goods, he also acknowledges the many systemic barriers that prevent certain goods from retaining use-value after a certain period of time. These might include a lack of compatibility with new operating systems, lack of product support from producers, or broad technological innovation that simply renders certain products obsolete as to their original intended function. However, rather than assigning such objects to the waste stream, he advocates a product stewardship system based around repairs and upgrades, to ensure that such products remain functional in subsequent future scenarios. Waste generation is therefore managed by the maintenance and curation of durable objects, increasing their life spans substantially.

Whilst these visions for product durability both focus on the extension of product life, there are others that explicitly reject such notions in the pursuit of sustainable consumption and waste. McDonough & Braungart (2002) argue that the present 'linear' industrial system is ultimately flawed – after they are used, even with an increased lifespan, objects are still destined for the landfill, where their value is not utilised. The practices of waste minimisation and sustainable consumption, McDonough & Braungart argue, are misguided in their attempt to constrain human potential and innovation:

> "Is our goal to starve ourselves? To deprive ourselves of our own culture, our own industries, our own presence on the planet, to aim for zero? How inspiring a goal is

> that? Wouldn't it be wonderful if, rather than bemoaning human industry, we had reason to champion it? … If modern societies were perceived as increasing assets and delights on a very large scale, instead of bringing the planet to the brink of disaster?" (McDonough & Braungart 2002, p. 90)

The position articulated here seeks to transform industrial production and consumption in order to parallel many of the biological processes that exist in nature, such as the purification of water and sequestration of carbon dioxide. When human industry becomes capable of doing this, and its processes are benign of pollutants, then McDonough & Braungart argue that the notion of 'waste' becomes meaningless. Any by-products of the consumption and production process would simply be re-integrated into ecosystems, providing nutrients for further growth. Innovation and renewal are key to this vision of sustainability, just as evolution and reproduction are essential processes in natural systems. This 'Cradle to Cradle' rationale emphasises reintegration and reincarnation of material objects, as opposed to 'cradle to grave' systems that emphasise linearity and ultimately, a final death for objects.

These narratives challenge many of the existing arrangements for the waste generated through the consumption of material goods. Both appear to offer pathways to a more sustainable future, albeit through markedly different approaches. McDonough & Braungart anticipate large-scale change to technologies for the production of consumer goods, and appear to advocate for products that are inherently 'disposable', but whose disposal generates biological 'food' rather than polluting 'waste'; while Minte & Cooper call for an increased durability of material goods, with extension of life seen as the way to reduce consumption waste. This distinction is particularly important for contemporary modes of production and consumption, particularly current trends in product life span.

1.3.3 Durability and Disposability

"Disposability was a king of convenience, and a metaphor for freedom." (Strasser 2000, p. 268)

As stated earlier in this chapter, consumption can fall into one or more of three categories: consumables, durables, and experiences. Within the category of durables, however, there is substantial differentiation between the longevity of objects, with implications for divestment and the generation of waste. There are many examples of things that endure multiple uses over time: cars, furniture and appliances, to name but a few. One

of their defining characteristics is their durability – an ongoing resistance to disposal due to an ongoing perceived value by the user. Yet other objects are defined by precisely what the durable objects lack - disposability. Paper plates, plastic cups, tissues – these are all products that are implicitly or explicitly disposable. Their flimsy construction and inexpensive production costs implore the user to discard them after a single use. While some users may endeavour to re-use these products more than once, there is often little incentive to do so, particularly when the design of such objects assumes a rapid material decline after use.

Current evidence suggests that disposable products emerged earlier than the post World War 2 consumerism they are commonly associated with. Strasser (2000) notes that paper collars were common as early as the 1870's, and that 1903 was the date of Gillette's marketing debut of the disposable razor. Despite these initial offerings, disposable goods transitioned to the mainstream in the 1950's and 60's, with disposable paper towels, pillowcases and even dresses becoming popular in domestic life.

Many of these disposable products are still available and widely used today, yet there is also an increased blurring of the distinction between the disposable and the durable object. There has been a recent interest in the phenomenon known as 'fast fashion' – clothing acquired, worn and discarded with high frequency. Here, the 'fast' refers to several aspects of the production and consumption process. Firstly, the time taken to design, manufacture, and distribute the clothing is very short by other clothing standards – often as little as two weeks. Secondly, fast also refers to the acquisition of these items, as they are anticipated to be purchased very shortly after arriving at the retail outlet. Finally, fast refers to the speed at which these garments are expected to fade from fashionable status, beyond which consumers are likely to have little interest in wearing them. The combination of these three elements leads to an extremely high throughput of clothing consumed by (primarily young) consumers (Morgan & Birtwistle 2009). This fast consumption generates an inordinate amount of material waste in the form of discarded clothing. Fast fashion therefore represents blurring of the distinction between durable and disposable goods. The material integrity of the clothing itself does not substantially degrade after one, or even several uses. The use of cotton and synthetic materials (as opposed to paper or plastic) suggests that the clothing maintains a durability that common 'disposable' products do not. In this sense the clothing can be seen as durable. Yet there are myriad other factors that frame the clothing as disposable for consumers. Items are mass produced, relatively inexpensive, and have a rapid stylistic turnover. Materials are often lightweight, and cheap production is sourced from

Majority world labour markets. The combination of these elements amounts to these items of clothing having fleeting careers of possession, and a correspondingly high amount of generated waste. As Hamilton & Denniss (2005) point out, waste can often be central to a particular practice or form of consumption, rather than merely an unfortunate consequence to be minimised. In other words, while merely clothing oneself is not necessarily a wasteful practice, the practices around fast-fashion appear to be inherently wasteful, given the high throughput of materials and embedded energy in the garments, their distribution, and their short lives of usability.

Given these complications with contemporary consumer goods, how is it that waste comes to be designated as such? In confronting such a question, it seems likely that it would reflect aspects of our own personal sensibilities, as well as the broader contemporary social milieu. This is not to say that it would necessarily conform to what holds the highest value in society – plenty of objects hold high personal value for people without any significant exchange value. Waste does depend, however, on some broader consensus about what should not be valued. Put simply, if it were valued, it would not be waste. This theme of value, and how it is constructed, is central to Chapters 4-9 of this thesis.

The process by which a material good, or set of goods, becomes waste is not pre-determined from the outset. Very similar goods can chart remarkably different life courses, as they are produced, distributed, acquired, and used in different contexts. Yet it is these final stages, as an object transitions from being used to un-used, from being valued to de-valued, which appear to constitute the creation of waste. This process is one I shall herein refer to as divestment.

1.4 Divestment

Not all objects trace a similar trajectory toward waste. Gregson (et al. 2005; et al. 2007; 2007) has pioneered ethnographic research into this area; specifically how people divest material objects without necessarily disposing of them and creating waste. Instead of merely discussing the disposal of objects, Gregson characterises the divestment of material objects from the home as 'ridding'. This incorporates practices of re-use and resale, acknowledging the range of 'post-use' practices that durable goods often pass through. One of her key observations is that objects are "continually becoming in the home" (Gregson et al. 2009, p. 266), meaning that objects are rarely fixed entities in terms of their 'place'. The value of

objects, and hence their potential for being viewed as waste, is dynamic across space and time. This is central to the practices and narratives of divestment of objects, as there is likely to be a multitude of discrete practices rather than a homogenous 'behaviour' that people engage in.

Much like acquiring objects, there is likely to be a broad spectrum of variability with regards to what is done in the lead up to, during, and after the moments of divestment. While Gregson isolates distinct routines for 'ridding' (such as 'cleaning out one's wardrobe' and donating clothes to charity), there are other moments that present unanticipated disruption to daily life, and hence habits do not have the potential to coalesce. Objects breaking, or suddenly receiving significant damage, can throw this process of becoming in unpredictable directions (Gregson et al. 2009). These moments of disruption often serve as pivot points in the life course of an object – one day being simply 'part of the furniture', the next day relegated to the rubbish pile. However, Gregson also makes the point that when an object, or set of objects is 'rid' from one household, this need not be regarded as the final stage of its life. In the book *Second Hand Cultures* (2003), Gregson & Crewe trace the 'post-ownership' of objects into thrift shops, car boot sales, bazaars, pawn shops, and charity outlets. This work highlights the potential for material objects to extend beyond being 'gotten rid of', showing the reader the existing (and potential) avenues for material objects to be re-exchanged and re-used.

As a result of engaging in this research around practices for reuse, Gregson has become critical of the concept of the 'throwaway society' - patterns of society-wide wastefulness, planned obsolescence, and material carelessness, originally put forward by Vance Packard in *The Waste Makers* (1963). However, such terms appear to have little empirical basis, and diminish the extent to which households save, repair, reuse and preserve material objects (Gregson et al. 2007). While it is clear that the concept of the 'throwaway society' does appear to over-generalise, I shall refrain from making any assessment about either's claim at this point.

While acknowledging Gregson's choice to pursue the concept of 'ridding', I have elected to retain the term 'divestment' as an all-encompassing term to describe the practices of my research. After initially investigating the nature of 'disposal', I found this to be too narrow a term, implying a finality that did not appear to reflect the alternative paths of divestment. As will be elaborated on in more detail in Chapter 7, 'ridding' became similarly narrowing. My research indicated that only a subset of objects should be characterised as

having been 'gotten rid of', whilst many others were divested with significantly more care and concern than the term 'ridding' would suggest. Passing-on goods to friends and family, as well as selling goods for a financial return, indicated that the term 'divestment' was the more appropriate term to encompass all forms of deliberate material dispossession. Broadening my research to all forms of material 'divestment' also gave more opportunity to make connections with theoretical developments in social practice theory (Shove et al. 2012; Strengers 2010; Ropke 2009), which shall be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.4.1 Disposable Durable Goods

Although the production of disposable items can be traced back as far as the 1860's, and began to escalate significantly in the 1950's, recent decades have seen the emergence of a larger array of explicitly disposable goods, including batteries, plates and cutlery, sanitation products, and cameras. Yet this by no means represents the totality of what consumers divest themselves of over time. Many durable goods find their way into various waste streams, or are passed on to others for little to no cost. Computers, clothes, refrigerators, cars, furniture, sporting equipment and books are just a few examples of goods commonly divested by consumers by various means. As I alluded to in section 1.3.3, this suggests that durability and disposability are not mutually exclusive categories. In this way, material goods may be simultaneously durable and disposable.

The characterisation is, of course, contradictory in that a quality of durability seems to negate the possibility of disposability. The contradiction is intended, as it reflects a corresponding paradox in the real world conditions of modern divestment practices. Namely, that the lifespan of many goods are incommensurate with the messages of lasting satisfaction and 'emotional durability' (Chapman 2005). Similarly, a good's appearance or functionality offer only limited information as to whether they will remain in an owner's possession throughout their life. Often it is not the good itself that renders the product disposable, but the various technical and normative systems in which the good is found. Common social understandings about desirable and appropriate forms of consumption for the time may cause objects to be divested, despite retaining any amount of functional value. Rather than any consequential material degradation in the object, transient notions of 'taste' and 'style' may dictate when an object is no longer of use to its owner. A separate, though in many cases overlapping phenomenon of evolving socio-technical systems also plays a significant role in the divestment of durable objects. Goods subject to rapid technological

innovation are rarely expected, by producers or consumers alike, to last more than a few years. This has escalated in recent decades, with a burgeoning number of products becoming 'high tech trash' (Grossman 2006).

In this sense, 'to last' rarely refers to the ability of the object to retain its basic structural integrity. Instead, the constellation of goods with which the object is expected to interact 'moves on' before material degradation takes place. This may be reflected by changes in operating systems, conversion from analogue to digital transmission, or 'upgraded' networks. Personal computers, for instance, struggle to process the increasingly data intensive navigation of Internet content as they age.

Many durable consumer goods are also subject to processes of ecological modernisation (Mol & Spaargaren 2000), and subsequently marketed on the basis of their reduced environmental 'footprint'. Hybrid cars, Energy Star rated refrigerators or computers constructed from non-toxic materials are all examples in which an older, less 'green' object may become less desirable, perhaps more costly, and hence more disposable by comparison to a newer model. This is especially problematic when the explicit goal, ubiquitous in marketing strategies, is to reduce a consumer's overall environmental impact.

Each of these evolving systems of taste, technology and environmental impact presents a way in which consumer durables have become more likely to be divested. Divesting something paves the way for acquiring something new in its place and is therefore an integral part of processes of consumption. This means goods that share characteristics of disposability and durability are particularly relevant for the challenges discussed earlier in this chapter, in terms of how consumption is confronted in initiating moves toward sustainability.

1.5 Conclusion

In order to achieve a sustainable future, global society must confront a number of existing, emerging, and yet to be recognised challenges to ecological, social, and economic well-being. By viewing these challenges through the analytical lens of consumption, they are seen as intertwined with the daily practices of everyday life. As humans, we utilise these resources in a variety of ways to satisfy our needs, from the most basic needs for subsistence to higher level needs around personal fulfilment and achievement.

There are different satisfiers for each need, and some of these satisfiers are more resource intensive than others. Global research into wellbeing across nations suggests that many of our needs can be met with reduced consumption, with little to no substantial decline in overall life satisfaction. One key challenge for sustainable consumption is to determine which needs can be met through less resource intensive satisfiers, in order to reduce our overall ecological footprint. This overall reduction in consumption is pursued through a number of means. Some of these, such as voluntary simplicity, seek to challenge prevailing discourses on affluence and material accumulation. Others, such as critical and green consumerism, are subtler in their attempt to shift dominant consumption patterns, whilst still maintaining that sustainability can be achieved. Researchers have also identified some of the key drivers of growth in material consumption in the Minority world. Sustainable consumption practices must overcome many of these drivers as incremental growth, over the long term, leads to substantially higher rates of resource use.

A substantial part of society's footprint is contributed by the production, distribution, acquisition, use and divestment of durable material goods. These goods are ubiquitous for those living in Minority world economies. Material wealth, combined with cheap labour markets in the Majority world, has made consumer durables abundant in many households. And yet, not all objects are treated in the same way once they enter the home. Dynamic regimes of value and usability render some objects to become waste sooner than others. While they may remain materially intact, some objects appear to be inherently more disposable than others. Indeed, the practices of divestment may be closely intertwined with personal forms of subjectivity, as well as broader social and economic imperatives to create waste.

The paradox of many household goods is that they are at once disposable *and* durable. They are goods that share characteristics of durability, in that they are not 'used up' in a single instance, but also disposability, in that there are numerous other factors that might render them waste after a relatively short period of time. This may be due to technological innovation, ecological modernisation, fashion, or other systems in which these goods are embedded. I distinguish these household objects from other parts of the regular domestic waste streams, such as food scraps and packaging, which are more readily designated as 'waste', and so are likely treated in ways that are different to materials that still retain their identity as an intact object. For now, it is sufficient to convey that my interest lies in durable household material objects that are capable of being divested in numerous ways.

Chapter two describes the overall theoretical framework that I have used to approach this research on the divestment of durable material goods from the domestic sphere. This framework conceptualises divestment as part of day-to-day social practice. This framework provides a useful way to conceptualise consumption and divestment, and is well equipped to contemplate how these activities might be made more sustainable moving into the future. The highly resource intensive nature of Minority world lifestyles means that it is crucial to find new forms of consumption that can be maintained in the long term.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Confronting consumption, waste, and divestment is critical to research and policy initiatives in the pursuit of sustainability for our globally integrated society (Chapter 1). Consumer goods are acquired, used, and eventually divested, creating waste that must be dealt with at all levels from the individual household through to trans-national arrangements. Yet the consumption of resources and the ensuing creation of waste is rarely, if ever, an end in itself. Waste is rather a product of ongoing practices that may be inherently wasteful, or where efficiencies are yet to be implemented that would eliminate waste.

Practices of divestment also vary according to the amount of waste they generate and, by extension, the demands they place on the consumption of natural resources. Material objects that are used repeatedly over time are likely to consume less primary resources in comparison to the process of breaking them down and reconstituting through recycling. Understanding the practices of divestment – how and why household material objects move out of the possession of their owners – is therefore crucial to understanding the generation of waste and consumption of natural resources with regard to sustainability.

Building on the foundation of 'social practice theory', this chapter develops a conceptual framework to grapple with the issues of material divestment from the domestic sphere. In this chapter, I discuss the epistemological basis for this framework, its conceptual coherency, and its precedent for informing research of this kind. Social practices theory here refers to the loosely connected body of literature that revolves around the concept of 'practices' (Bourdieu 1977; Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 1996, 2002; Shove & Pantzar 2005; Shove et al. 2012; Warde, 2005). While the term 'practice' is often used in place of 'behaviour' in lay discussion, these terms differ substantially in their ontological assumptions about social reality, and how change comes about. It is critical to clarify the distinction between these two concepts, as this delineation forms the foundation for how I conceptualise change toward sustainability in this research project.

Behaviour is a concept focused on the individual, or a group of individuals, for understanding a particular part of social reality. Actions are thought to emanate primarily from individuals, acting on particular drivers that cause them to behave in certain ways. While behavioural accounts may focus on factors that are external, the primary focus is on the actions of the individual, or group. In general terms, behaviours are observable responses to stimuli. Environmentally significant behaviours are those that "change the availability of materials or energy from the environment or alter the structure and dynamics of ecosystems or the biosphere itself" (Stern 2000, p. 408).

Attempts to change certain 'consumption behaviours' thought to be environmentally significant tend to, when following this actor-centric approach, focus on changing the motivations or orientations of the individual(s) in question – either through persuasion, incentivising, or coercion if necessary (Sustainable Consumption Roundtable 2006). Individuals may be even be 'nudged' towards more desirable behaviours, yielding occasionally dramatic shifts in outcome through carefully planned 'choice architecture' (Sunstein & Thaler 2008). In each of these scenarios there is an overwhelming assumption that individuals are exercising choices, and that policy interventions must therefore target those choice-making individuals to bring about behaviours that are less environmentally problematic. Many such approaches are grounded in the assumption that the individual makes ultimately rational decisions, such as the 'Theory of Planned Behaviour' (Ajzen 1991), and 'Theory of Reasoned Action' (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980).

Hence, the concept of behaviour can be understood as emanating primarily from the *individual*, as a result of his or her various *motivations,* and the exercising of particular *choices*. While choice may not be the sole arbiter of outcome – behavioural theories recognise the influence of social constraints or 'barriers' – it is nevertheless central to the approach. The concept of practice, on the other hand, de-centres the individual from discussion, along with the associated notions of motivation and choice. It points to the crucial role of entities that exist outside the realm of 'individual choice', primarily in the various forms of social structures and dynamics (Shove et al. 2012).

2.2 Foundations of Practices

Underpinning this research is a concern with how to initiate change toward sustainable consumption practices. As discussed, this question has previously been approached in ways

that prioritise the individual. Emphasis for change towards sustainable consumption practices has also been placed on the innovation of socio-technical 'structures' that could be imposed upon individuals (see Huber 2004). Spaargaren (2006) argues that both structural and behavioural approaches have their limitations, and that policy initiatives are more likely to deliver lasting outcomes toward sustainability if they integrate insights from both approaches. Individualistic approaches, aiming to create change solely from the 'bottom-up', often fail to achieve mainstream success, outside those particularly willing and able people from whom the approach(es) originated. This is to say that targeting individuals to make better, more sustainable consumption *choices*, may not yield widespread change if those choices do not appropriately 'fit' in the broader socio-material landscape. For instance, there may be a perception that 'greener' laundering products do not perform to the requirements of contemporary standards of cleanliness (Shove 2003). Changes that conflict with 'normal' everyday life face a tougher path toward acceptance than those that do not.

Structural approaches, on the other hand, aiming to achieve change solely from the 'top down', may be rejected, misinterpreted, or negotiated around by sectors of the population, undermining their success. An example of this can be found in the imposition of fuel consumption standards on motor vehicles, whose effect has been diminished substantially in the United States by the introduction of light trucks to the consumer market, which are exempt from these consumption regulations (Sivak & Tsimhoni 2009).

A theoretical approach that focuses on notions of practice, rather than behaviour, may offer a starting point for more appropriate interventions toward sustainable consumption – and in the case of the current project, sustainable divestment. While not a theory of change per se, Giddens' (1984) theory of 'structuration' offers a sound theoretical basis for understanding the nature of social reality, and provides the foundation for an account of practices that is useful in the present context. Structuration reframes the traditional debate between individualism and structuralism by arguing that these terms are neither mutually exclusive nor oppositional in nature. To the contrary, social structures are shaped and maintained by 'agents' (people) through their ongoing 'actions'. In other words, structures are not independent of people's actions; rather, they are constituted through them.

Structure is defined as the explicit and implicit norms and rules present in society. Structure is therefore not merely a constraining force on people's agency but also a facilitating one, by allowing actors to produce actions that are intelligible and meaningful (Giddens 1984). For example, language, as a set of rules governing communication, is a

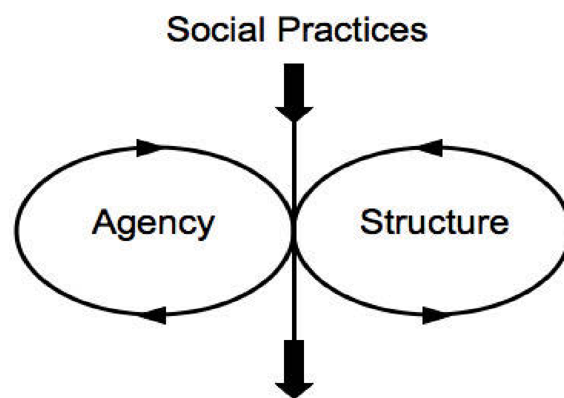
social structure that shapes and mediates action. In this way it imposes a constraint on people's agency, by shaping and mediating the way they communicate. Yet language also facilitates communication by providing the resources and common understandings with which people can interact. As with all social structures, language is maintained through its ongoing application (practice), by practitioners exercising actions (agency).

Giddens claims that the object of social inquiry should not be agency or structure per se, but the intersection of this duality:

> "…the basic domain of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time." (Giddens 1984, p. 2)

In this account of social reality, the individual is neither completely determined by their surroundings, nor are their actions completely freely volunteered.

Figure 2.1 Social Practices as the Intersection of Agency & Structure



The dynamic and interactive nature of Giddens' theory of structuration is characterised in Figure 2.1. Social practices are simultaneously the outcome of existing arrangements of agency and structure, but also the means by which those entities are amenable to change. As practices are actualised, perceptions about their legitimacy or appropriateness are incorporated into subsequent repetitions or variations of the practice. New structures may emerge in response to this, as may new forms of subjectivity.

A focus on social practices differentiates itself from individualist approaches focusing on *behaviour* (e.g. Cook & Berrenberg 1981). Instead of asking 'what do people do?', the question is reframed to simply ask 'what is done?'. Alternatively, we might say that social practices refer to 'the doing of something', rather than 'someone doing something'. In the case of consumption, the focus moves away from 'consumers', to 'consumption practices'; decentering the subject (individual), by recognising the ubiquitous role of social and material structures in the ongoing (re)production of social practices. It also forces us to recognise that practices are entities that exist independently of their practitioners (Shove et al. 2012, p. 14).

It should be noted that Giddens concept of 'structure' referred primarily to forms of social organisation such as institutions, norms, conventions, and laws. He sees structure as both 'rules' and 'resources', but does not give a detailed account of how the material world also structures practice. I argue that material structures perform a similar role in structuration to social structures: they offer both the potential to constrain and facilitate action, depending on the particularities of the practices involved. The interaction between materials and practices will be an ongoing theme throughout this thesis.

2.3 Understandings of Practice Theory

Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) defines *practice* as that which emerges from "forms of bodily activity, forms of mental activity, things and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion, and motivational knowledge". It is important to note that this definition of social practices incorporates far more than that of behaviour, as illustrated in Figure 2.2. For instance, 'things and their use' here refers primarily to material objects and infrastructures, which are seen as constitutive of a practice, rather than something external to it. Approaches that recognise the constitutive role of material objects and infrastructures, such as 'Actor Network Theory' (Latour 2005), are thus likely to share common ground with theories of social practices.

Figure 2.2 Differences between behaviour and practice (Darnton 2010)

Behaviour	**Practice**
Individual as Origin	Individual as Carrier
Caused by Drivers	Co-evolving
Consequentialist	Recursive
As if for the first time	Within continuous flow of activity
Contextual Cues	Emergent Rules and Resources
Individual Choice	Shared, Social
Values / Beliefs as Underlying Foundations	Needs / Desires as Outcomes

Practice theory straddles the conceptual divide between individual agency and structure. Change, therefore, would not come from the 'top down' or the 'bottom up' (or a combination of these), but from the 'middle out'. Conceptually, practices are considered to constitute a web of interconnected entities; "a 'bundle' of activities…. an organised nexus of actions" (Schatzki 2002, p. 71). This is to say that delineating where one practice ends and another begins is often unclear. This is made apparent by Schatzki's distinction between 'integrated' and 'dispersed' practice.

For Schatzki (1996, pp. 91-92), a 'dispersed' practice is one that is found to be existing in many different settings, across many different parts of life, and likely across cultural divides. The process of 'explaining' might be once such practice, as it is required in many different settings such as teaching, training, supporting or socialising. The point being that the skills, objects, and routines involved in this practice are applicable to these different settings, while clearly maintaining their own identity as a practice in their own right.

'Integrated' practices (Schatzki 1996) are more complex collections of practices that, when actualized in a particular configuration*,* will amount to an entity that is distinct from its constituent parts. Sporting practices, cooking practices, washing practices - these are all examples of integrated sets of practices that require a particular arrangement of 'sub-practices' for their existence. For instance, sporting practices may require competence in a variety of other practices, such as walking, talking, arguing, coordinating, dressing, etc.

The nature of social practices is, however, more complex than Schatzki's dichotomy would suggest. The divide between integrated and dispersed practice is often not clear, and in many cases may not exist at all. This seems to be the case for divestment practices, as divestment occurs as part of many other practices: cleaning, travelling, socialising, doing business, or governing. Yet it is also an integrated practice in itself, requiring practices of negotiating, donating, packing, searching, and transporting, to name but a few. Thus, rather than viewing integrated and dispersed practices as inherently distinct entities, they should instead be used as conceptual tools for describing practices as they exist in their real world settings. Social practices may be best thought of as multi-layered and interconnected – in other words, they reflect the complexity of action in everyday life. These terms – of interconnectivity, complexity, and emergence – are also core concepts in the field of systems thinking. The link between social practices and systems will be developed in Section 2.5.

2.4 Practices as Configurations of Elements

Social practices constitute the reality everyday life. Rarely do we engage in activities that are entirely novel, and even activities that might be described as such draw from aspects of existing practices to create novelty. Routines and habits are common, as they allow us to exist without having to make complex decisions about every possible option available at a given moment. In this sense, there is no possibility of a neutral point for initiating truly novel ways of living.

More often than not, practices share something in common with other practices. It may be a certain piece of equipment, or linguistic device, that is common across more than one practice. For instance, the concept of 'competition' is common across an array of social practices, from football, to market-analysis, to applying for employment, to international resource negotiations. In a similar vein, piped domestic water is integral to social practices of washing, laundering, cooking, and gardening. These two phenomena – competition and piped domestic water – are examples of what Shove et al. (2012) refer to as 'elements' of a practice. Social practices are comprised of a particular configuration of these types of elements, which allow a practice to be ongoing over time and exist across different spaces.

Amongst theories of social practice, there is some differentiation in how a practice should be conceptualised in terms of its constituent elements. Reckwitz (2002) suggests the elements of practice consist of body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse, structure/process,

and the agent. Strengers (2010) on the other hand posits four types of elements: practical knowledge, common social understandings, rules, and material infrastructures. Shove et al (2012), in an alternate attempt to simplify the investigation of the dynamics of social practices, proposed three types of elements: competence, meaning, and material. These frameworks have a significant degree of overlap.

Reckwitz's 'body', 'agent', and 'knowledge', Shove et al.'s 'competence' and Strenger's 'practical knowledge' encapsulate the knowledge and skills that actors employ on a day-to-day basis to carry out practices; knowledge that is often taken for granted. This represents the procedural knowledge that has been accumulated through experiences, which can be applied to subsequent events and circumstances as they unfold. Giddens (1984) recognised the importance of this, referring to it as 'practical consciousness', and suggesting that actors are often unaware, or only semi-aware, of its role in everyday life. Generally, actors will be able to base their justifications of what they are doing on this knowledge, but the assumptions that the knowledge is based on are far less likely to be questioned. Competence/practical knowledge appears to have the curious property of simultaneously being requisite for a practice, but also the product of enacting it. Throughout this thesis I use Shove at al.'s term of competence, as it more accurately reflects the characteristics of an element that is based on both physical and non-physical procedures.

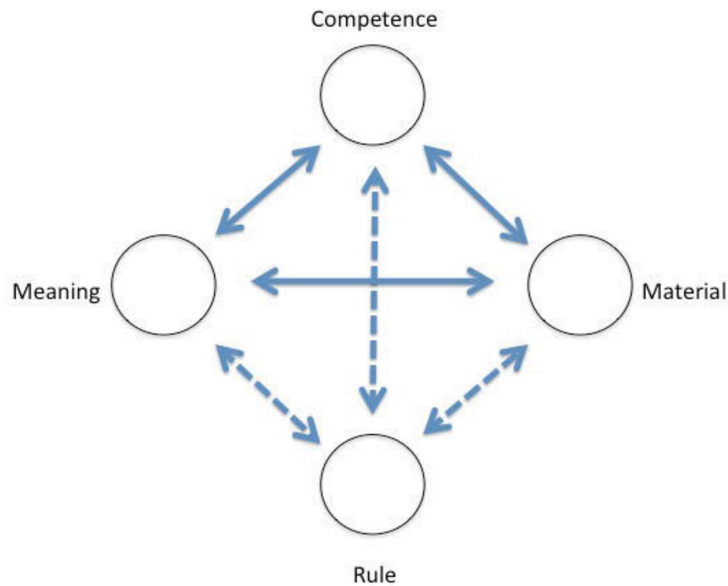
Shove et al.'s 'meaning' and Strenger's 'common social understandings' are the norms and conventions that are also critical to the ongoing existence of practices. Reckwitz's concept of 'discourse' appears to correspond to these elements, while his concept of 'mind' does so in a manner more focused on the individual. Each of these terms represent the mutually agreed upon ways of doing things, such as how one must act in a particular situation. They legitimise practices by ensuring that something is normal – or at least not entirely unusual – in a given time and space. It should be noted that these meanings/understandings, need not be universal. Practices considered normal to everyday life in certain times and places may seem utterly absurd in others, and hence they have their own geographical distribution. For this reason, I will use Shove et al.'s term 'meaning' to designate this type of element, recognising that meanings are not always held in common, as Strengers' terminology would imply.

Reckwitz's 'things', Shove et al.'s 'material' and Strenger's 'material infrastructures' all refer to the constellation of physical artefacts that are ubiquitous to so many everyday practices. It's important to note that these are considered as embedded in the practice itself –

not something that is external that might shape a practice in a particular way. Once again, I shall adopt Shove et al.'s term of 'material' as more consistent with the thrust of practice theory itself. Each of these elements discussed thus far are 'infrastructures' of sorts – entities that structure daily life, functioning to both facilitate and control practices. Since materials are no different, it seems unnecessary to designate infrastructures as unique to material elements of a practice.

The point at which these approaches to practice theory differ is on the type of element that Reckwitz describes as 'structure/processes' and that Strengers designates as 'rules'. These are explicit formulations for how to act, and therefore have a role in how practices are carried out. Rules can be codified in law, instructions, regulations, or formal guidelines. Generally they require some formal institutional or bureaucratic framework to come about. Rules will generally reflect common social understandings of appropriateness, but it may also be the case that this relationship is mutually reinforcing. For example, Shove (2003) provides a detailed explanation of how formalised rules around thermal regulation have co-evolved with common social understandings of comfort. However, Shove et al. (2012) make little reference to this type of element; it seems to have been subsumed into other elements, perhaps because rules may sometimes be regarded as strongly shared meanings that certain segments of society have agreed to institutionalise. This likely reflects the selection of practices that Shove has chosen to illustrate her articulation of practice theory – snowboarding, Nordic walking, cycling – many of which have little in the way of explicit rules to potentially interfere with or enable their performance. However, there are many other practices that are decidedly more prone to arrangements set by institutions of power and governance, and for whom designating rules as a distinct element is a necessary step in theorising social practice. This is likely the case for the social practice of divestment, and I will therefore incorporate 'rules' as a fourth and final element of practices, while recognising that it is not necessary to all types of practice. Practices that have non-existent or powerless institutional bodies that might regulate and mediate them can be recognised as such in this framework. Equally, where such forms of institutionalisation exist and exert influence within practices, they can also be recognised as a distinct type of element.

Figure 2.3 – The Elements of Practice: showing necessary dynamics (solid connections) and practice dependent dynamics (broken connections). Adapted from Shove et al, 2012, p.25 with the addition of 'rules'.



Four types of elements may therefore form social practices: competence, meanings, materials, and (potentially) rules. These necessary elements are arranged to form a practice, along with the inclusion of rules as an optional element, subject to the specific practice in question (Figure 2.3). The constitution of a practice is not merely the presence of these elements, but their specific configuration – or the way in which they 'hang together'. The manner in which these elements hang together will determine how a practice emerges, is sustained, or becomes extinct. Shove (2010) argues that change, of the sort required to achieve sustainable forms of consumption, requires a re-configuration of the elements that constitute practices. This may be accomplished by the manipulation of one key element such as the provision or removal of a critical piece of infrastructure, which could potentially disrupt an existing configuration and, hence, result in a change in practice. Alternatively, multiple elements may be manipulated contemporaneously, with new practices potentially emerging as a result. Either of these interventions will change the dynamics of the social practice itself, and potentially other practices with which it has some association. Yet, the complexity of how elements are linked makes prediction of outcomes difficult, if not impossible, in precise terms.

2.5 Characterising the Elements of Practice – A Tentative Framework

The framework for practice theory articulated in the previous section describes how the integration of distinct elements forms a more complex entity than the elements alone– a practice. So far, this framework has not attempted to theorize the nature of these elements themselves. This section provides a critique of existing practice theory approaches by offering a supplementary framework that focuses on elements. In thinking about how elements are integrated into various forms of practice, I argue that the elements that constitute any given practice arrangement are not homogenous entities themselves. While particular elements can be present across diverse practices, it is likely that these elements will figure differently across different settings. This stems from the inherent historicity of practices, as they are carried out in a continuous flow of activity that is unique to their spatial and temporal location. For instance, various cohorts of practitioners may interpret rules differently; materials may be interacted with in a different way in different settings. This is due to their having their own specific temporal and spatial histories, and their being embedded within other practices.

Here, a framework is proposed for describing the key characteristics of elements as they are positioned in practices. Developing this framework affords the possibility of distinguishing between otherwise similar elements, and gives the potential to more accurately target any interventions with the goal of changing a practice (or system of practices). This framework identifies four distinguishing characteristics of the elements of practice: scale, intensity, trajectory, and form. These characteristics, and the types of questions they demand, are shown in Figure 2.4.

2.5.1 Scale

The scale of a particular element of a practice refers to the extent to which it is replicated across geographical and cultural space. Elements which are unique to particular locations, with few comparable cases elsewhere, would have a small scale, whilst elements that are globally ubiquitous would have a much larger scale. The scale also refers to the extent to which that element persists in other practices. Smaller scale elements have a much narrower spectrum of applications than larger ones, which could be used in multiple and varying applications. Examples of this may be the use of bicycles, which in some cultures are used for leisure, transport, and competition, whilst in other cultures they are primarily used for transport. Determining the scale of a particular element may allow policy makers to

identify its sphere of influence and contemplate possibilities for the rearrangement of elements in their own areas of influence.

2.5.2 Intensity

Reckwitz (2002, p. 252) claims that elements are "indispensable resources" to the carrying out of a practice – indispensable in that they cannot be done without if the practice is to remain recognisable as such. However I argue that not all elements are as equally indispensable as each other. There must be a recognition of which elements are more central to a practice, and those that are less so. This spectrum is what I shall refer to as an element's 'intensity' - the extent to which it is central to the carrying out of a practice. If an element is encountered, or employed with high frequency and significance, then it would have a higher intensity compared to those that are used infrequently or less significantly. To illustrate this, I shall use Reckwitz' own example of the elements of the practice of football. One might say that the presence of a ball is a higher intensity element to the practice of playing soccer than is a corner flag. The reason for this is that soccer can be adapted to exist without corner flags, whilst removing the ball would make it unrecognisable from its present incarnation as a practice[5]. In other words, higher intensity elements carry much higher consequences for deviation than do lower intensity elements. To use the same example, a high intensity element for soccer may be the rule of no hands touching the ball. The penalties associated with this reflect the high intensity, and are substantially more enforced than rules regarding incidental physical contact. Therefore, not all elements are equally weighted in their composition as a practice, and there is a requirement to understand what is substitutable (or dispensable) and what is not. The characteristic of intensity reflects this, allowing a more nuanced understanding of a given element in its position in the overall practice.

2.5.3 Trajectory

Shove et al (2012) have characterised practices as subject to more or less constant dynamics of change. Whether that change is in the composition of its carriers, or evolving meanings associated with it, change is seen to be an integral component of practices. However, while an overall practice has its own evolution, individual elements also have their own change dynamic – their own 'trajectory'. The trajectory describes the path of an element across time, often with respect to the previous two characteristics of scale and intensity. Elements may be said to have a trajectory of decay if their scale and intensity is perceived to be dwindling over

[5] One could argue that removal of soccer flags may change the formality of the practice. For instance, competitive soccer is more reliant on flags than park soccer. In this case, the intensity of an element is dependent on how tightly one defines the practice.

time. An example of this would be the role of the paper-based book as an element in the practices of reading. While its scale and intensity may still be high, the rise of competing alternatives for reading practices, such as e-books, would suggest that the paper book carries with it a very different trajectory than it did before electronic reading technology had emerged. The use of the term 'trajectory' is preferable to other terms focused on time such as longevity. A practice may persist in a niche setting over a long period of time, but never gain widespread adoption. In this instance, a practice's longevity is a poor signal as to its real world effects. The trajectory of each element is likely to be multi-faceted, and potentially non-linear. Elements may have 'peaks' of integration into a practice, such as trends in clothing in distinct and defined time periods, and 'lulls' of abandonment. While some elements may have an easily identifiable starting point, such as the passing of a law enabling certain practices to take hold, others may have a more complicated history that offers multiple, and potentially conflicting, historical precedents.

2.5.4 Form

The 'form' of an element describes the way in which it has come to be actualised in practice. This involves the recognition of key real world differences in implementation and orientation that shape how a practice has come to be carried out in its present form. An element may sit in the public domain, available for use and adoption by all. Alternatively, it may be in the domain of private ownership, and thus subject to more restricted interaction with practitioners. Also crucial to an element's form is its genesis. For instance, elements may be initiated by purposeful activities by grassroots individuals. Examples of this include training in a skill or craft, such as woodwork or gardening, which gives competencies to groups of people that may enable a practice to take hold. Alternatively, an element may be the result of deliberate government policy, such as the building of infrastructure specifically designed to bring about the adoption of a practice. Examples here may include the government provision of subsidised housing insulation or energy efficient light bulbs. In other words, how an element has come about is necessary to understanding its implementation in practice in the present day. In describing the key features of an element's initiation and implementation we gain an understanding of the overall architecture of the practice, arguably leading to a more informed view of why a practice may have succeeded in certain contexts and not others.

Some representative examples of research questions that may be asked in relation to the characteristics of the elements of a social practice are outlined in Figure 2.4. These will

be addressed implicitly during throughout this thesis, and explicitly where a particular characteristic requires particular attention due to its significance for the overall practice.

Figure 2.4 Characteristics of the Elements of Practice

	Competencies	Meanings	Materials	Rules
Scale	How widespread are the competencies for carrying out this practice?	Are the meanings of this practice local, regional, national or global in their reach and relevance?	Are the materials involved in the practice unique to specific to particular locales, or are they found elsewhere?	Are the rules associated with this practice local, regional, or global in nature?
Intensity	Are the competencies involved in this practice required or merely optional?	Can the meanings accompanying this practice be substituted with alternative meanings?	How ubiquitous are the materials to the practice? Can they be substituted, or redesigned, whilst maintaining the practice?	How are the rules associated with this practice implemented? Do they carry incentives for participation, or penalties for deviation?
Trajectory	Are the competencies used to carry out this practice in decline, stable, or emerging? What is the rate of this change?	Are the meanings for this practice in decline, stable, or emerging? What is their rate of this change?	What developments (historical, present, and predicted) are relevant to the material infrastructures of this practice?	Are the formalised rules associated with this practice in decline, stable, or emerging? What is the rate of this change?
Form	How have the competencies used in this practice come to be used in the current context? Are such competencies transmitted through specific initiatives, or are they acquired in more subtle ways?	How have the meanings for this practice come about? Are they embedded in any particular events or histories that saw them become part of the practice?	How did the materials involved in this practice come about? Are they publicly or privately owned? Are they profitable or do they require subsidisation?	How did the rules associated with this practice come to be enacted? Were they the result of democratic deliberation, or imposed from sectors of power onto the practicing population?

2.6 Systems of Practice

Using a theory of everyday actions (social practices) that emphasises the complexity of reality with regard to the duality of agency and structure, we can begin to understand how everyday life is both maintained and transformed. These social practices may be co-dependent, interconnected, but also competing and mutually corrosive. Social practices are characterised as being a unique configuration of several types of elements, each of which 'hang together' in a particular fashion that promotes their ongoing enactment. These theoretical frameworks (detailed above) implore a distinct form of thinking and approach to problem solving, based around 'systems'.

While hints of systems thinking can potentially be traced as far back as Aristotle, the earliest forms are commonly thought to originate with the field of cybernetics in the mid 1950's (Ramage & Shipp 2009), as figures such as Gregory Bateson and Norbert Wiener began to theorise the dynamics of interaction between humans and machines. From this early period an understanding of what came to be known as General Systems Theory emerged, where issues of interdisciplinarity, emergence, and system boundaries were brought to the fore. In recent decades, distinctions have been made between 'hard' systems approaches, characterised by clear boundaries, and 'soft' systems approaches, where boundaries are more difficult to define and regarded as a function of the research process. Systems thinkers, and by extension, systems thinking, has application across a range of traditional disciplines, while also being considered as a discipline in itself.

There are, however, inherent difficulties in attempting to define systems thinking in anything but the most general terms. The very act of defining can be constraining to what systems thinking might constitute in any given context, blinding practitioners to that which is omitted from a stated definition (Ison 2010). Moreover, one can become a systems thinker/practitioner without any formal recognition of the intellectual history associated with it. Rather, this 'systemic awareness' can be demonstrated through an understanding of several broad concepts that are pertinent to systems thinking (Ison 2010). Adapting systems thinking to the research presented in this thesis, I propose that the critical characteristics that define a system are as follows:

- *Connectivity* – Seemingly discrete elements of reality may have links that are causal or interdependent, the totality of which may be described as 'systems', 'cycles', or 'networks'.

- *Emergence* – The specific dynamics of a system may produce characteristics that are largely as a result of its connectivity, rather than originating from external influences.
- *Unpredictability* – Initial goals associated with a given system may result in outcomes and consequences that are difficult to determine in advance of their realisation.

The generalised form of systems thinking described here highlights the systemic thinking inherent to a theoretical approach of social practices, as described earlier in this chapter. Social practices, by their nature, are systemic entities, involving the integration of various social and material elements into particular arrangements. Furthermore, social practices do not exist in isolation; their connectivity can be seen when they are 'bundled' with other practices, as indicated by Schatzki's (2002) notion of an 'integrated practice'. Practices often display what Shove (2010) refers to as 'obduracy', offering the potential for emergent change but also a 'stickiness' for existing ways of doing things. Approaches based on social practices and systems thinking recognise the potential for unpredictability, based on the assumptions of connectivity and emergence (Shove & Walker 2010).

Applying systems thinking to issues of sustainability and consumption is not without precedent. For example, Meadows (2001) made the case for a systemic approach to thinking about issues of global development, using the metaphor of a dance to illustrate how systems have their own particular 'beat'; while they cannot be controlled they can nevertheless be 'danced with'. Learning about systems, understanding their dynamics with humility and openness, can lead us to identify 'leverage points' that may offer the possibility for initiating broader systemic change from relatively modest means (Meadows 1999).

The sentiments and approach taken by Meadows regarding systems thinking closely parallel those of social practice theory. Shove et al. (2012) claim that policymakers cannot hope to control social practices in their entirety, but by subtly intervening in the arrangement of the elements of practice can steer a system toward more sustainable ways of life. Such interventions are rarely predictable, and thereby lead to a less ambitious, but no less important, role for public policy in the configuring and re-configuring of practices. Furthermore, Shove places special focus on understanding the temporalities of practices, asserting that social practices have their own unique 'rhythms' that govern how we go about daily life (Shove et al. 2012).

Attempting to apply systems thinking to a theoretical approach based on social practices is somewhat tautological. Thinking about, and researching social practices necessarily implies a form of systems thinking, simply because these two approaches emphasise so many of the same dynamics for researching complex problems. I argue that the approach to investigating material divestment is no different. In describing discrete elements, and articulating how those elements are integrated into practices/systems, a researcher can gain understanding into how they might be subject to change from within and without. This fulfils the core obligations of both systems thinking and social practices theory.

Another issue that is critical to both systems thinking and social practices is that of boundaries. Judgments regarding boundaries are unavoidable in systems thinking. Even if these judgments are not made explicit, they are revealed in what an analysis includes and omits (Rammage & Shipp, 2009). Articulating the boundaries of a system is also indicative of the approach taken. Boundaries contribute to understanding how an issue will be framed; yet boundaries are also determined by this initial 'framing'. This is not to say that any particular approach to defining boundaries is correct, but rather that boundaries must be understood as a function of the research process, rather than something external to it. This forms the basis of Checkland's (2000) approach toward 'soft' systems thinking, where the concept of a system is largely a function of interpretation and learning rather than of positivism and a singular 'reality'.

Boundaries, or more specifically the lack of boundaries in the context of globalisation, limit opportunities for analysing social systems that are not intertwined with others in some way or another. The transmission of competencies, meanings, materials and rules across geographical and cultural spaces makes infiltration and cross-fertilisation inevitable. System boundaries involving the social world must therefore be seen as at least somewhat porous, and potentially contestable. With these caveats in mind, it is nevertheless useful to establish boundaries of investigation for the research on material divestment from the outset.

Fortunately, social practices theory allows for a relatively intuitive way to determine the boundaries of the system of divestment. To be included within the boundaries of this system, for the purposes of this thesis, a phenomenon must be directly linked to the carrying out of the social practices of divestment. In other words, the elements of the social practice of divestment, in various realisations, constitute the system of divestment. If an element of the social practices of divestment is 'bundled' with another practice, then it is likely that it will be considered part of the system of divestment. For example, online communications

will be shown in the following chapters to be crucial for the divestment of material goods, particularly for the social practices of 'passing-on' and 'selling'. Online communications directly enable these practices to occur, and without them, these forms of divestment would be severely hampered. Yet these same technologies are also used for numerous other purposes, such as business, socialising, learning, and recreation. In so far as online communications are considered inside the system for divestment, their alternate uses, or contexts, are considered outside this system. The boundaries described here ensure that the research remains relevant to the topic of concern (divestment), without positing a system that is so broad as to lose meaning.

It could be said that most, if not all, elements that are entailed in the carrying out of a social practice have aspects that would be viewed as inside the system. Yet these same elements would simultaneously have aspects that are viewed as outside that system (and likely part of another system). For instance, garbage bins might be considered as central to a system of material divestment. Undoubtedly this is true, as many people do divest goods into garbage bins. Yet they can also be viewed as parts of a local government infrastructure, which is an institution that serves functions other than those associated with material divestment and waste management. In this way, elements within a systemic approach to social practices always have the possibility of being framed in a way that transcends the boundaries of any one perspective of what constitutes a system.

2.7 Conclusion

Social practice theory is well suited to understanding the complex and interconnected reality of consumption and divestment in everyday life. A social practice perspective posits change as being emergent, and policymakers as being embedded within the very systems they are attempting to influence (Shove et al. 2012). Initiatives to change patterns of consumption are therefore unpredictable, and crucially dependent on the specific historical and cultural setting in which they are promoted. By analysing how practices come about, how they are carried out, and how they have increased or declined, change can be understood more thoroughly in a historical context. It can be recognised as endogenous, where the potential for disruption and evolution may be embedded within a practice itself, rather than solely the result of 'external' forces (Shove 2010). Social practice theory recognises that many of the actions undertaken by people are done in a continuum of previous experience. This means that

rituals, habits, and patterns are likely to play a far more influential role in the day-to-day actions than approaches emphasising 'choice' and 'rationality'.

I argue that a social practice approach is particularly suited to the case of material divestment, as it will be interpreted in this thesis. While people may divest an object once (although this is complicated by more 'collaborative' forms of consumption, discussed in the final chapter), they tend to employ many of the same processes throughout time. How, when, and why we have divested something in the past is likely to have some effect on what we do in the future.

The role of competence, meaning, material and, potentially, rules for divestment cannot be understated; these elements of practice 'hang together' in arrangements that configure the practice itself. Differentiation in the specific role of each of these types of elements can be further, and more accurately described through the characteristics of scale, intensity, trajectory, and form. This recognition, that practices are complex entities with connections both within and beyond their boundaries, leads to my conclusion that social practices are a reflection of a type of systems thinking. Equipped with this theoretical framework, I now turn to the research design that informed and guided this project.

Chapter 3

Research Design

3.1 Introduction

Emphasising the constitutive nature of both agency and structure in ongoing social practices, and the congruence between practice theory and systems thinking, I have developed a theoretical framework for exploring the social practices of divestment from the domestic sphere (Chapter 2). In the present chapter, this framework is applied, through an epistemological paradigm of social constructionism and methodology based on Grounded Theory, to key research questions addressing the topic of divestment. I discuss the specific methods by which these questions were investigated, and the manner in which empirical data was collated and analysed, informing my rationale for the subsequent structure of chapters in this thesis.

3.2 Paradigm

Given the breadth of sustainable consumption as a research field, a uniform epistemological stance is neither desirable nor, in all likelihood, feasible. On the one hand, claims about resource depletion, greenhouse gas emissions and ecological functioning refer to the natural world, and demand a degree of scientific objectivity that excludes political or social imperatives. For instance, the 'Ecological Footprint' (Wackernagel & Rees 1996) attempts to calculate and quantify the sustainable levels of consumption in terms of global levels of productive land, available resources, and absorptive capacity of natural systems. Whilst the terminology and categorisations used by ecological footprint researchers to describe these phenomena may be constructions, they nevertheless constitute an attempt to reflect a material reality based on the natural world, which these researchers assume exists independently of society[6]. This suggests a goal, likely an idealised one, of objectivism, as

[6] Here the term 'independence' is used to demarcate between those parts of reality that are only constituted by social interaction, and those parts of reality that would retain an existence were those social interactions to cease. It is not intended to dismiss the notion that humans are reliant on the natural world, or that we are part of it.

researchers attempt to know and convey (ideally) objective information about these natural systems.

However, much of sustainable consumption research involves the study of social interactions and arrangements. In this sense, some form of constructionism seems most appropriate, which Crotty defines as:

> ...the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (Crotty 1998, p. 42)

What, then, is the critical difference between the natural and the social world that changes the type of knowledge we expect to come across? Giddens (1976) claims that the social sciences are separated from the natural sciences by the 'double hermeneutic'. This refers to the requirement for social researchers to interpret their subjects, who themselves are social actors interpreting the world. It often requires the researcher to grasp the subjectivity of others, and reconstitute this subjectivity into new frames of meaning and conceptual schemes.

This is not to say that all natural science generates purely 'objective' knowledge. As indicated above, all researchers undoubtedly bring an element of subjectivity to research through their choice of methods and the influence of their overall worldview. However, the difference between research agendas that must deal with a 'single hermeneutic' of the natural world and the 'double hermeneutic' of the social world – including that of 'social practices' in the terminology of Chapter 2 – must also be recognised.

The double hermeneutic is particularly relevant to researchers of sustainable consumption engaging in interview situations with consumers and stakeholders. Informants may be less willing to describe their own unsustainable practices to an interviewer if there is a perception that the interviewer is an advocate for green practices. Similarly, informants may give undue emphasis to infrequent or inconsequential practices they believe to be sustainable if they are seeking approval from a sustainability-minded researcher[7]. In both cases, the double hermeneutic is at play, suggesting that any knowledge that the researcher gleans is constructed in the process of this social interaction.

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[7] This significance of this in the context of conducting research into ridding, waste, and other environmental issues will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Therefore, based on Crotty's (1998) definition of constructionism, and Giddens' (1976) concept of the double hermeneutic that distinguishes between knowledge of the natural and social world I adopt a 'social constructionist' epistemology. This understanding recognises the constructed nature of all knowledge (following constructionism), with the additional assertion that knowledge is not produced in isolation, but through shared understandings, languages and practices (Schwandt et al. 2003). It is also apparent that the extent to which knowledge is constructed is not equal for all types of research. Applied to the natural sciences, the constructionist case points to the worldviews and conceptual 'baggage' that scientists bring to their research as evidence for the unattainability of objective knowledge. However, with social research the critique must go beyond this, since the very nature of social reality is that it is constituted through ongoing and evolving practices (Giddens 1984). Hence, objectivity is even less possible, since both the subjects and the researcher have their own interpretation of reality.

3.3 Methodology - Grounded Theory

Social practices theory should be regarded as an approach that opens up new possibilities for conceptualising social change (Shove 2010), rather than prescribing how those change must occur. Change is dependent on the (re)configuration of elements as they constitute practices, which are unique to their particular context. Theoretical claims regarding the dynamics of social practices are drawn directly from empirical data of previously researched practices. In other words, they are 'data driven', as existing and unknown dynamics of practice wait to be conceptualised by the social practices researcher. Given this, I have chosen to pursue a methodology that is similarly data driven; one based in 'Grounded Theory' (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Glaser and Strauss originally proposed Grounded Theory as a methodology for generating theoretical claims that are based in empirical research. From this foundation two distinct approaches to Grounded Theory have emerged, based on differences between the two original authors.

The Glaserian approach (Glaser 1998) emphasises the maxim that 'all is data'. This means that researchers should not feel restricted to solely analysing the transcripts of qualitative interviews conducted in the process of their research. Researchers should be willing to absorb varying sources of information that are relevant to their topic, including

quantitative data if required. The Glaserian approach is also highly committed to the ‘groundedness’ of the data, going so far as to suggest that researchers should refrain from reviewing literature prior to conducting the empirical research. Glaser (1998) reasons that the information gained in doing this distorts the proper, untainted emergence of theory from the data. Hence, rather than a sequential approach of data collection, analysis, and theory development, Glaser advocates an iterative process of developing theory in conjunction with reviewing the data and relevant literature. This process should be iterative, with deeper analysis of the data (of which literature is now a part) leading researchers to develop more refined theoretical claims. The end point of this process, Glaser suggests, is when the data is no longer capable of adding or changing the theory that has been established.

The Straussian approach to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998), on the other hand, emphasises the systematic collection and appraisal of qualitative data from interview sources. Data should be coded openly (grouping data), axially (drawing connections between codes), selectively (assessing relevant codes and connections), and then theoretically (making theoretical abstractions from all of the above). These steps must be applied sequentially in order to facilitate the development of the most valid and robust theory possible. The Straussian approach also regards data collection, analysis, and theoretical development as separate entities that should not be conflated, in stark contrast to the approach of Glaserian grounded theory.

Certain aspects of both Glaserian and Straussian approaches appear suited to exploring the social practices of divestment. On the one hand, a Glaserian approach that deliberately ignores relevant literature until the data collection process is underway is simply not compatible with the demands of the PhD candidacy, where a detailed literature review must be presented early in the candidature timeline. Yet the integration of theoretical development with data collection and analysis, together with the notion that ‘all is data’, closely aligns with the aims of this thesis, and with a practice theory approach in general. As has been stated earlier, practice theory gives a vocabulary to conceptualise change in ways that others may not, without making content-specific claims about any particular practice, or set of practices.

Emerging from the gulf between the Glaserian and Straussian approaches is a third position, articulated by Charmaz. Known as “Constructivist Grounded Theory”, this approach recognises the data collection process as being located in ‘temporal, spatial, social and situational conditions’ (Charmaz 2006). Data is recognised as being ‘constructed’ in the process of conducting research, rather than ‘extracted’ from reality. Charmaz argues that

although Glaser, for instance, views data as largely 'unproblematic' with the view that generalisations are justifiable and necessary such assumptions are to be cautioned against, as different researchers investigating a similar topic are likely to construct different narratives from the data collection. Constructivist grounded theory also regards interviews as at least partially performative. Interviews can strategically reflect particular narratives, based on participants' or researchers' worldviews and agendas. This is particularly relevant for the present case of divestment and waste, which elicited responses that appeared highly sensitive to certain social norms. Once again, this point will be returned to in Chapter 9. Charmaz's approach to grounded theory therefore recognises the co-evolution of the researcher and the data, suggesting that it is necessary not to conceal the way in which either of these may shift throughout the research process.

The project-researcher nexus evolved throughout the research presented here. Initially commencing research on the topic of 'disposal' of material goods, I soon established that such a term was itself a reflection of a particular narrative concerning the 'throwaway society' – that the primary way people get rid of things is to dispose of them. In response to this, and upon more extensive review of literature, I adopted a term coined by (Gregson et al. 2005) - 'ridding' - a concept that encapsulated more forms of material dispossession, including those of reuse and resale. However, this too proved too narrow to accurately describe the spectrum of practices that I encountered in my empirical research. Ridding appeared to describe a particular set of social practices that concentrated around the more urgent jettisoning of objects from the household. This term was therefore at odds with practices that preserved the value of material goods through redistribution. As such, I describe ridding in Chapter 7 as a particular set of practices that exist within the broader system of material divestment. In this research, then, divestment is a term that encompasses disposal, ridding, and many other practices involved in the dispossession of material objects.

This transition of terminology was accompanied by a shift in theoretical approach, away from a more psychologically grounded approach to an approach based in and around the concept of practices, as developed in Chapter 2. The research emphasis was therefore on de-centering of the individual, with a shift to understanding the meanings, competencies, materials and rules that constitute the practices of divestment.

Ultimately, whether a theory is used to inform a particular research process, or whether the research process informs the development of a particular theory - or, as Charmaz argues, some combination of these two routes is employed – is not of paramount

importance. What is crucial is that these two parts of the theory/data dualism are internally consistent. For example, a researcher advocating a theoretical approach of social practices could not embark on a series of interviews enquiring solely about participant beliefs and values. This is not because either of these entities (the data collection or the theoretical framework) is flawed in any particular way, but simply that social practices theory necessarily entails a data collection and analysis process that investigates a broader set of phenomena, of which beliefs and values are only a part.

The research presented in this thesis uses a constructivist grounded theory methodology applied through a social constructionist paradigm. The grounded theory orientation is evident in the shift from psychological theories of consumption to social practice theory during the course of the research. While social practice theory framed further lines of inquiry, the research remained open to alternative framings. In this way, the manner in which divestment practices were described and categorised were able to 'emerge' from the data. The research presented herein recognises the potential of qualitative interview data to provide insight, whilst also acknowledging that the data gleaned from such methods is selective, contextual, and ultimately, constructed by all actors involved.

3.4 Research Agenda

Based on a theoretical framework of social practices, a paradigm of constructionism, and a methodology of constructivist grounded theory, a number of specific research questions underwrite the empirical findings presented in this thesis. Following social practices theory, these questions were oriented in a way that emphasises the complexity of everyday life. Questions of 'Why' a particular practice may or may not be taking place are largely absent from this research, with deliberate intent. Given that social practices recognise the potential for multiple meanings to coexist in a practice, the question of 'why' is simply regarded as one element of practice, rather than an overriding motivational factor. Conceptualising all of the elements of practices allows for a more nuanced understanding of object divestment. The research questions that guide and inform this research project are as follows:

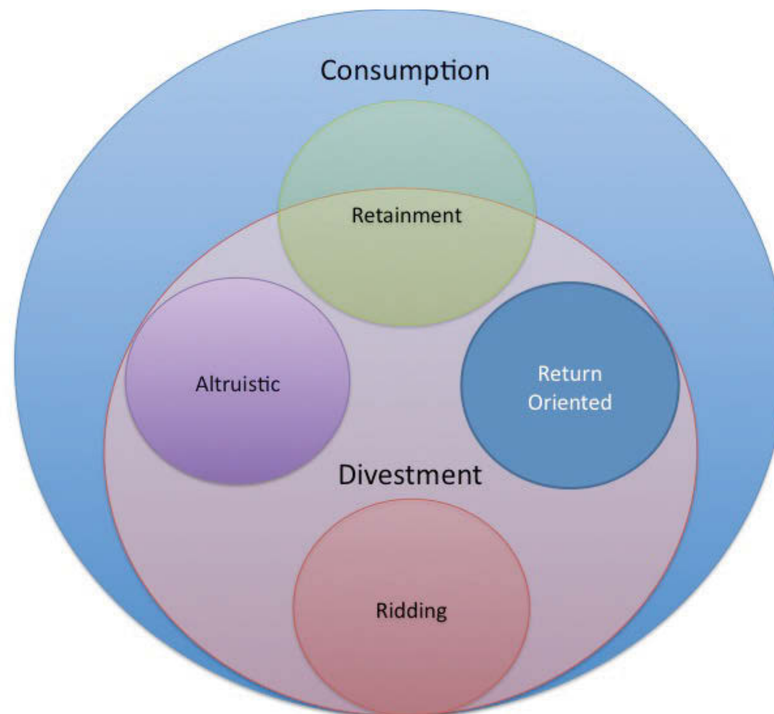
1. **How are domestic practices for divestment of durable material objects carried out in everyday life?**
2. **What distinctions can be made within the overall system of divestment that reveal individual social practices?**

3. **What are the competencies, meanings, material, and rules evident in the constitution of divestment practices?**
4. **How does the arrangement of these elements, and their characteristics, structure the practices of divestment?**
5. **What are the dynamics of change that pertain to the practices involved with material divestment?**
6. **How do practices of material divestment interact with one another, and with other practices during the course of everyday life?**
7. **What opportunities are there to intervene in the practices of divestment in order to bring about more sustainable ways of living?**

The first question guides the overall direction of the research project. It is both a reflection of the theoretical approach developed in Chapter 2, as well as the methodology and methods described here. Distinctions within systems and practices, central to question two, structure the empirical chapters (4 – 8) of this thesis. Questions three and four emphasise the discerning of elements of practice and their arrangement; an ongoing theme in this research that directly informs Chapters 4 – 8. The dynamics of change, addressed in question five, are central to an understanding of social practices. In this thesis they are most evident in Chapter 6, but will be discussed throughout. Question six recognises that practices exist only in the context of one another, and as such, interaction between practices both related and unrelated to divestment will be a particular focus for Chapter 8. Finally, a discussion of potential interventions for divestment in practice – question seven – will be addressed in Chapter 9.

Research Question 2 posits that distinctions can be made within the practices of divestment. This question is addressed in part by the very structure of the empirical chapters of this thesis, as they are organised around these distinctions. This allows for divestment to be regarded in a systemic fashion, both as a subset of the overall system of consumption, and as an integration of four sub-systems of practice: retainment, altruistic-divestment, return-oriented divestment, and ridding (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 The Systems of Divestment



This thesis conceptualises various systems and sub-systems comprising the practice of divestment (Figure 3.1). Consistent with the framework developed in Chapter 1, the broad-level system of consumption is constituted by practices of extraction, production, distribution, acquisition, possession, and divestment (of which only divestment is illustrated in Figure 3.1). The system level of interest for this project lies in divestment, in which four sub-systems are identified herein. Three of these are specific forms of divestment in themselves. 'Altruistic divestment', to be discussed in Chapter 5, refers to practices of material divestment that primarily benefit others. 'Return oriented divestment', elaborated on in Chapter 6, deals with selling practices that offer some benefit to the divestor. 'Ridding', which forms Chapter 7, deals with the practices of divestment where dispossession is found to be the overriding meaning. These represent relatively distinct systems of practice that utilise different arrangements of the elements of practice. The fourth sub-system of 'retainment', developed in Chapter 4, does not entail actual divestment. Retaining goods, in the way it is conceived here, is a set of practices characterised by continued possession of material goods. However, the practices of retainment precisely dictate whether or not a good will be divested; once a good ceases to be retained, it is, by definition divested. Therefore,

the inclusion of retainment is fundamental to a discussion of the overall system of divestment.

3.5 Methods

As discussed in Chapter 1, this thesis focuses on the divestment practices of durable household goods, rather than all forms of waste that could include such items as food waste and packaging. To implement this focus, it was specified that goods must be capable of removal from the household without specialist equipment. Items regarded as fixtures of the household were generally not investigated. Examples of the types of durable goods considered in the research include:

- **Clothing** - shirts, shoes, pants, sweaters, jackets, dresses, hats
- **Consumer electronics** - desktop computers, laptops, iPods, televisions, VCR's, DVDs, mobile phones
- **Furniture** - couches, tables and chairs, stand alone wardrobes, cupboards, dressers, bed frames, mattresses, rugs
- **Appliances & Toys** - refrigerators, washing machines, dryers, lamps, crockery, bric-a-brac, exercise equipment, sporting equipment, clocks, tools, books.

In order to answer the research questions outlined above, several methods of qualitative research were employed, including interviews, participant observation, and reviews of relevant media and documentation. Yet, research into social practices demands a depth of understanding. Thus, in order to understand the elements of divestment practices, and how their configuration constitutes day-to-day life, researchers must engage with practitioners in a way that allows these complexities to be understood. This requires data that is rich, holistic, and in-depth, reflecting the 'lived experiences of the participants'. Such experiences would not be reflected in a larger sample employing survey data and quantitative methodology (Punch 1998; Morse & Richards 2002).

3.5.1 Households

The most effective way to understand practices at a household scale, within the constraints of a single researcher undertaking a PhD project, was to recruit practitioners for a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This allowed for data that achieved some spectrum of practices, whilst maintaining the level of depth required to understanding social practices.

To recruit participants for household interviews, a letterbox drop of approximately 300 information and 'invitation to participate in research' leaflets (see Appendix A) was conducted. Leaflets were distributed in the week prior to a bulk kerbside waste collection (where appropriate), to capitalise on the likelihood that households may have been engaging in divestment around the time of the interview. It was reasoned that recent or imminent divestment would assist participants in recalling particular instances of divestment during the interview. No other effects from recruiting at these times were anticipated or found.

Information leaflets were distributed in the suburbs of Sydney in NSW, Australia, and Amsterdam and Utrecht, the Netherlands. The international spread of participants was partly due to my own anticipated change in living circumstances, but, fortuitously, also enabled understanding of practices at a level beyond those that may have been unique to either place. Investigating cultural variation in practice between Australia and the Netherlands was not the goal of the research, but is noted where it was pronounced. The relatively similar standards of living between these two locations, including the provision of similar waste management services, served to ensure that these were not grossly different pools of participants. Interviewing households in both Australia and the Netherlands therefore provides a more thorough understanding of the types of practices undertaken in Minority world economies.

After the letter box drop, willing participants made contacted directly through email or telephone, and interviews were scheduled at their convenience. A total of 17 households were interviewed, 8 of these in Australia and 9 in the Netherlands. This number reflected a practical commitment to undertake approximately 30 interviews total, of which a substantial proportion were to be with divestment providers (below). It also reflected a saturation of data in my ongoing analysis of transcripts, with relatively few novel themes emerging in later interviews compared with earlier ones.

Interviews were with all available adult members of a household where possible, otherwise with a single adult representative. Household interviews were conducted in the

homes of participants, as this allowed them to better recall items that they had divested, and the associated practices. Interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. This allowed sufficient time to develop an understanding of practice, whilst being short enough to allow participants to remain attentive and responsive to questions. Participants were requested to sign an accompanying Participant Consent Form (Appendix B) to indicate their participation in the interview. The format of the interviews was semi-structured in that a common list of prompting questions was used to ensure that most interviews would cover similar areas (Appendix C), yet informants were not required to strictly answer a fixed set of questions. This was designed to allow participants to describe practices in their own terms, with less interference than a structured interview format. It should be noted that not all interviews covered each of these topics with the same emphasis. The participant and their practices directed the discussion to some degree, in pursuit of points that may have been unique to their situation.

In the course of the interview, participants were asked to recall examples of particular objects they had divested recently. Notably, they were encouraged to recall *specific objects* and *specific divestment practices*. This was to ensure that discussion focused on actual practices that had taken place, rather than idealised practice. Participants were additionally asked about practices of reuse and repair, and when divestment was not carried out. Issues of the temporality of divestment were also discussed, in terms of when households were most likely to divest themselves of something. Finally, participants were asked about the implications of their divestment, and whether this was considered in the practices themselves.

Throughout the household interviews there was no intention to convert data to numerical values that can be generalised to a broader population. Instead, the aim was to depict an 'authentic interpretation' of household divestment, whilst acknowledging that the analysis, and claims subsequently generated, are embedded in a social and historical context (Neuman 2003; Strauss & Corbin 1998).

The establishment of rapport with participants is vital in many approaches to qualitative research. This is particularly the case with household interviews researching social practices, as participants must be willing to convey information about their daily habits and routines; some of which they may be reluctant to divulge to others. Similarly, informants may give undue emphasis to infrequent or inconsequential practices if they perceive that a researcher is an advocate of particular, in this instance 'sustainable practices' – a reality that will be addressed in Chapter 9 as a limitation to this research. As Walker (2006) points out,

researchers must be conscious of not privileging particular discourses during the course of the interview. This is not to say that the researcher should appear disinterested in the topic itself, but rather they should seek to remain neutral about issues that may lead to interview biases. Based on these assumptions, the posture of inquiry assumed for household interviews was that of the 'passionate participant' (Lincoln & Guba 2003) – someone who is able to engage and empathise with informants about their existing and intended practices, but whose advocacy for particular avenues toward sustainable consumption and divestment practices is generally withheld.

3.5.2 Providers of Divestment Practices

In addition to interviewing household representatives about their perceptions of their divestment practices, 'providers' of divestment were also investigated. This was particularly important in order to extend the research beyond a focus on individuals and towards a focus on broader social practices. Therefore, a second group of interviews were with participants acting in their professional or voluntary capacity related to a particular organisation related to material divestment. Providers of divestment practices were contacted through telephone or direct approach, and given an invitation to participate in research, as well as a set of topic questions (Appendix D). This allowed participants to prepare any necessary information in order to make the best use of the time available.

Once again, interviews lasted one to one-and-a-half hours. Interviews were with representatives of organisations who had expertise in services related to divestment and the management of waste material. These interviews generally took place in the building of the relevant organisation, or in a location convenient to the participant. In the same way that semi-structured interviews were suited to understanding household practices, semi-structured interviews also allowed providers to describe circumstances specific to their services in considerable detail. The loose structure of questions did allow, however, for interviews to be conceptualised with a commonality – that of a 'provider' of services for the practices of material divestment.

Provider participants were commonly asked to describe the specific services they provided as they related to household material divestment. In particular, providers were asked to describe specific infrastructures they deployed, and any broader legal frameworks in which they operated. Participants were also asked to describe changes in consumer practices, as well as their capability to adapt to those changes. Finally, providers were asked to describe what role, if any, they saw their organisation as playing in measures toward sustainability.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 providers of divestment services. These providers were selected on the basis that householders had used or described their services in some way. This allowed for the research to understand specific practices from multiple perspectives – that of the household, as well as that of the divestment provider. An inherent limitation of this approach is that not all providers of divestment services available to Australian and Dutch households are discussed in this thesis. For instance, none of the household participants happened to use for-profit second-hand shops or pawnbrokers as a way to divest goods. Likewise, no significant data on divestment through illegal dumping from those who practiced it was gained; unsurprising, given the strong social taboo (and legal penalties) against the practice. Based again on the limitations of research, I felt it was more appropriate to describe practices only if I had evidence of participation in that practice from households. In this way, the household interviews were used to inform my selection of provider interviews – but I acknowledge that there are other possibilities for divestment beyond those described here. Providers engaged with, and the specific methods employed in interviewing them are as follows:

3.5.2.1 Charities

Large charitable organisations such as St Vincent De Paul and the Smith Family encourage donations of clothing and other goods for redistribution amongst disadvantaged people. However, preliminary investigation suggested that many of the donations they receive are unusable for charitable purposes (ABC News 2008). In order to confirm this assertion, as well as to gain broader insight into practices of donation, several participants that represented charitable organisations were recruited. Moreover, several of the households interviewed had used charities as routes to divest material goods.

Four charity representatives from three different organisations were interviewed. Firstly, the manager of a charity-operated retail store in Sydney was interviewed, in order to understand how individual stores deal with donated goods. On advice from this participant, a representative of a distribution centre for this same charity, also in Sydney, was contacted and interviewed. In this interview the procedures for refurbishment and redistribution of goods donated throughout the Sydney area was demonstrated. This also facilitated the comparison of the testimony of the retail store manager with that of the distribution centre manager, each of whom experienced different aspects of the donation/reuse process. A charity case worker was also interviewed on this occasion. One of the household participants in the Netherlands also managed an independent charity shop, so she was interviewed in this

capacity as well. Finally, an additional independent charity and retail store based in Utrecht, Netherlands was interviewed. During this interview their practices for sourcing donated goods and how their store functioned as a charitable enterprise were exhibited and explained. These five interviews covered a range of charitable organisations that deal with divested goods; depict a large organisation with multiple retail stores, as well as independent organisations. Different positions within the charity were consulted, from retail managers to central distribution centre managers. This yielded a wealth of information, subject to the constraints of the number of interviews that could feasibly be undertaken.

3.5.2.2 Decluttering

'Declutterers' provide a service for households to reduce the number of material goods in their possession. Declutterers are employed by households to assist in rationalising their possessions, and to facilitate ridding of goods that are deemed unnecessary. When they are employed (which is still relatively rarely in terms of the overall Minority world population), declutterers become a key leverage point in divestment practices in the domestic sphere for certain individuals.

One declutterer was interviewed for this project, based in Sydney's eastern suburbs; deemed (within the constraints of the research) to be sufficient to understand the practice itself. The data from this interview was supplemented with a review of industry association websites and newsletters, along with those of individual decluttering enterprises. These websites were reviewed to find themes that were common to each other, as well as to the testimony derived from my interview. In the course of the interview, the declutterer described her business enterprise, and the types of household situations she and her employees encounter in their work. She described how divestment could be discouraged and promoted, and the role that divestment plays in personal identity.

3.5.2.3 Municipal Waste Management Services

Local governments provide various services for kerbside divestment of domestic consumer goods and operate 'transfer stations' or landfills. In kerbside 'bulk waste collection services', households place unwanted goods outside their residences, awaiting 'clean-up' by council employed removal. Anecdotal evidence suggested that this also functions as an informal opportunity for exchange of goods, and that household divestment and acquisition practices may change as a result.

Interviews with representatives from nine different local government municipalities were conducted. This number was required in order to gain the perspective of municipalities that provided different forms of waste management services, particularly a range of waste collection arrangements, each with specific contractual agreements governing them. During the interview, enquiries were made about the various services that local municipal government provided for divestment and waste management. Participants were invited to discuss present, past, and future arrangements for kerbside bulk waste collection in particular. Over the course of the research, this began to present itself as a key issue in practice, and later interviews reflected more detailed discussion of this particular practice. The involvement of other stakeholders in waste management was also discussed, particularly those involved in more informal collection of bulk waste material. To support this enquiry, two specialist 'gleaners' of kerbside clean-ups, both based in Sydney, were interviewed. They were asked to describe how they went about gleaning goods from kerbside bulk waste collections, and their relationship with the formal waste management services. It was hoped that these interviews would provide a different perspective to the occasionally hostile perceptions of gleaners that were discerned from municipal representatives.

3.5.2.4 Localised Goods Exchanges

Localised goods exchanges tend to lack institutional organisation or representatives as they are organised spontaneously by households (garage sales), or cooperatively (flea-markets). Due to the lack of formal institutionalised representation, these practices of divestment were investigated primarily through participant observation. Data was derived from observing two annual events that are used as occasions for divestment and reuse: Queen's Day (Koninginnedag), Netherlands, on April 30th 2009 and the Garage Sale Trail, Sydney, on April 10th, 2011.

Multiple sales and markets were perused on these days, with observation of the types of objects being divested, and what types of items were and were not selling. Queens Day markets were observed in central Utrecht, which offered high concentration of market stalls. Garage Sale Trail was observed in the suburbs of Kensington, Randwick, and Bondi, as these also offered the highest concentration of sales on the day. Attempts were made to note how divestment was incorporated into the other festivities present on the day. Media coverage of these events was also reviewed, paying particular note to the meanings being promoted.

3.5.2.5 Online and Auction Sales

Online websites for the sale of household goods and auction houses act as facilitators of exchange, rather than repositories of divested goods. Whilst they are managed formally as businesses, user experience once again appeared to be the most useful way of understanding how these systems serve to mediate divestment practices. Household interviews provided a wealth of useful data on this system of provision. Participants engaged in discussions about how they went about deciding what items to sell, and how they began to do so. One participant was particularly adept at selling goods online, and provided considerable insight into the practice of online reuse. This data was supplemented with analysis of websites mentioned by my household interviewees - eBay, Gumtree, Maarktplaats (Netherlands), as well as market mechanisms and rules, drawn from relevant websites. Particular attention was paid to differences between the sale of household durable goods and other methods for which there is no financial return, such as donation.

3.6 List of Interview Participants

Household Interviews[8]

Rita (female, 31), Sydney

Frank (male, 33), Amsterdam

Trent (male, 34), and Lucy (female, 29), Amsterdam

Evelyn (female, 35) and Larry (male, 31) Utrecht

Denise (female, 55), and David (male, 57), Utrecht

Jennifer (female, 91), Sydney

Richard (male, 21), Amsterdam

John (male, 21), Amsterdam

Tracey (female, 27), Amsterdam

Monica (female, 34), Arnhem

Karin (female, 39), Utrecht

Michael (male, 51), and Saskia (female, 50), Sydney

Kerry (male, 72), Sydney

Jeff (male, 78), Sydney

Penny (female, 63), Sydney

Ross (male, 67), and Madeline (female, 66), Sydney

Peter (male, 36), Sydney

Provider Interviews

Charity Shop Manager, Sydney

Charity Distribution Centre Manager, Sydney

Charity Case Worker, Sydney

Charity Shop Manager, Utrecht

Declutterer, Sydney

Recycler, Sydney

Waste Education Officer, Hills Shire, Sydney

Waste Strategy Coordinator, Willoughby, Sydney

Environmental Officer, Marrickville Council, Sydney

Waste Project Officer, Ashfield Council, Sydney

Waste Services, Wollongong City Council

Waste Education Officer, Parramatta City Council, Sydney

Environment Officer, Waverly Council, Sydney

Waste Management Coordinator, Randwick Council, Sydney

Waste Education Support Officer, Hornsby Shire Council, Sydney

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8 All personal names used here are pseudonyms, as specified in the approval of the UTS Human Ethics Research Committee (Appendix E)

3.7 Data Analysis

Where possible, interviews were recorded into digital audio format. When this was not possible, primarily in participant observation, written notes were taken. Interview data was transcribed manually, and written notes were copied into digital word processing documents. Using the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO, the text of interviews was subject to initial coding. In this process, a participant's testimony is reviewed line-by-line, and broken into phrases or sentences called 'incidents' (Charmaz 2006). From this, it was possible to distinguish between transcript material that was tangential, or unrelated to divestment practices.

Following this, a focused coding process was undertaken, which was more directed, selective and conceptual than line-by-line open coding (Glaser 1998). These codes turned out to be many of the elements of social practices, such as particular actions they described, or meanings they attributed to certain phenomena - albeit isolated at this stage and as yet unable to be integrated in theory. An example of this is given in Appendix E. This more focused coding process facilitated the direction of subsequent interviews in ways that would cover topics that were in need of clarification or more detail. This was particularly the case for local municipal waste management services, as multiple households referred to the kerbside bulk waste collection service provided by them. After initial interviews, more time was devoted to discussing this practice, rather than those of kerbside recycling, for instance.

These focused codes were then subject to coding, - a process of relating codes to each other around an 'axis' of commonality (Strauss 1987). This process gave rise to many of the descriptions of discrete practices, such as 'leaving-out' and 'passing-on'. However, while this form of coding served to integrate elements of practices, further analysis was required to describe the data in the way that it has been presented in the following chapters.

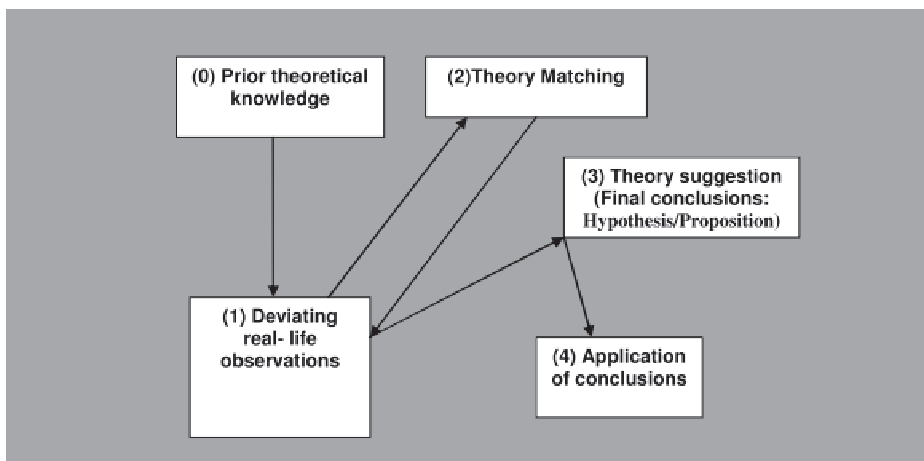
In the course of coding and analysing the empirical data derived from interviews, participant observation and interviews, divestment was not initially conceptualised as four discrete systems of practices. Individual practices were intended to be discussed around axial codes – those of 'leaving-out', 'decluttering', 'throwing away', 'donating' 'passing-on', 'selling', 'making do', 'treasuring', 'storing' – simply as variations within the broader practice of divestment. The aim of this process was to describe the various elements of practice that would pertain to each of these, in order to demonstrate a relatively broad spectrum of possibilities for divesting material goods. Upon subsequent reviews of this data, however, it became clear that these practices were best described in terms of particular systems of practices. Distinction could be drawn between different meanings that pertained to certain practices but not others. For

instance, donating and passing-on were linked by meanings concerning the welfare of others. The various ways of selling goods online, at garage sales and flea markets, and through auction houses shared meanings of recouping costs and making money from a sale. Practices that featured prominently in interviews around treasuring, making do, and storing, all shared the characteristic of not actually divesting goods, despite there being a potential to do so. Practices of divestment that were characterised by urgency, or an otherwise lack of concern for the destination of the object, also coalesced with each other at this point.

Thus, although initial attempts to theorise divestment practices suggested they were in need of no further categorisation, subsequent difficulties with the process of developing a coherent divestment framework invoked further reflection on the data and produced a refined set of theoretical claims around the four systems of practice. This framework better reflected the integration of the elements of practice, as perceived in the various data sources that were pursued. This process of generating theoretical claims about empirical data through an ongoing and iterative approach (depicted in Figure 3.2) is reflective of Charmaz's abductive approach to theory building. :

> ...a type of reasoning that begins by examining data after scrutiny of these data, entertains all possible explanations for the observed data, and then forms hypotheses to confirm or disconfirm until the researcher arrives at the most plausible interpretation of the observed data. (Charmaz 2006, p. 186)

Figure 3.2 The Abductive Research Process (reproduced from Kovács & Spens 2005)



3.8 Ethical Considerations

Interview participants signed consent form prior to formal interviews, which were developed with the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee. Personal habits and sentiments were a substantial part of this research, and anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and interview transcript security.

Participant observation was undertaken without reference to specific individual cases. The actions of only groups of individuals were described, in events such as the Queen's Day flea market and Garage Sale Trail. This lack of reference to individuals in the course of the research did not, therefore, require the same degree of confidentiality when compared to protecting interview participants.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the research design for this project. Adopting the paradigm of social constructivism, and a methodology based on constructivist grounded theory, seven key research questions are identified, reflecting a theoretical framework based on social practices. These questions were pursued through a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both households and providers of divestment practices. Participant observation of certain key divestment 'events' was also incorporated, as was review of relevant documentation and media related to divestment practices.

The structure of the following chapters reflects how I have conceptualised divestment at a theoretical level; as comprising of systems of practices of retainment (Chapter 4), altruistic divestment (Chapter 5), return-oriented divestment (Chapter 6), and ridding (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 integrates these systems of practice, into the overall system of divestment. Chapter 9 addresses the potential for divestment practices to be made more sustainable, discusses limitations to the research itself, and raises avenues for future research agendas.

Chapter 4

Practices of Retainment

4.1 Introduction

Practices of divestment necessarily involve owners dispossessing themselves of material objects. Divestment is a distinct phase in the life cycle of a material object where there is potential for the object to enter the waste stream, or be reused by subsequent owners. Yet the divestment of objects is never assured from the outset. Certain practices involving 'non-divestment' have a direct impact on the likelihood that something will be divested, and are highly relevant to the overall system of divestment. I shall refer to this set of practices as 'retainment' – identified in Figure 3.1

Although it is tempting to regard the issue of retainment as merely the exercise of making a set of individual choices about discrete objects, the concepts gained from practice theory suggest that such a view may be inherently limited in its scope. Indeed, retainment is ripe with possibility for discussion in the vein of social practices and the terminology presented in Chapter 2. Firstly, there are specific forms of 'competence' required to maintain ownership of existing objects that are unevenly possessed by practitioners. Secondly, there are certain positive, negative and ambiguous 'meanings' associated with continued ownership, which must be negotiated throughout the practice. Further, the specific 'materials' available to retainers, including the material integrity of the object itself, are crucial to any practice of retainment. And finally, 'rules' also provide powerful directives on the viability of retainment as a practice. Each of these points to phenomena that exist beyond the individual, without diminishing the possibility for individual agency entirely.

Practices of retainment are distinct from merely maintaining possession through the normal use of objects. Retainment refers to particular situations where the subject-object relation has realigned somewhat, but not enough to warrant divestment. Objects that may seem to be on a trajectory toward divestment can be 'rescued' or 'diverted' from that course of decay in ownership by being retained in one way or another.

Three practices of retainment will be discussed in detail in this chapter. 'Storing' practices refer to the means by which objects are kept in specific spaces both inside and outside the

household. 'Making do' describes the practices of retaining existing objects in their current function, in favour of replacing them. Finally, 'treasuring' articulates retainment practices based around the preservation of value and attachment to existing objects. The goal for this chapter is to describe the practices of how and why objects are not divested, even if the potential for doing so is present to some degree.

4.2 The nature and appraisal of value

Many of the practices discussed in this chapter have the concept of 'value' embedded in their meanings, in some form or another. The ability to assign and assess a value of some kind to an object is crucial to the practices of retainment and divestment. For some forms of practice, such as selling, the accuracy of an exchange-value (the value accorded to an object in the context of an exchange) is central to the practice of divestment. The selling and buying of second hand goods requires agreement of a specific market value, and where a desired exchange value is not perceived by the other party, goods may be kept until a later date, or indefinitely. Other accounts of how objects are valued argue that one's material possessions cannot not simply be translated into a single market value.

The phase over which a material object is acquired and subsequently used has been described as a process of 'appropriation'. Throughout this process, an object turns from a market valued 'commodity', into an individually valued 'thing' (Ilmonen 2004, p. 36). Graeber illustrates this by distinguishing between a house, which is primarily valued according to its status as a commodity, and a *home*, which is the emotionally loaded and unique value for that particular entity (Graeber 2001, p. 32). This form of value, then, is grounded in the experiences and interactions that characterise the subject-object relation. This phenomenon is most commonly expressed in value according to sentimentality, whereby those objects linked to memories and experiences are retained, even if they are acknowledged to be otherwise non-valuable.

Recognizing that the value of objects is embedded in practices, practices theory would describe value as being highly contingent on the practical knowledge of those around the object, rather than the object itself. This creates an arena for contest in the practices of divestment, where the 'perceived value' of an object is often just that. Some forms of practices that will be discussed in later chapters, such as 'leaving-out' and 'selling', subject the object to numerous different value appraisals. Others, such as disposing, minimise the potential for contested valuation, and thereby limit the potential for an object's involvement in other practices of re-use.

In any case, the perceived value for many of the material objects that were discussed in the course of householder interviews was highly contingent on the competencies of those divesting them. Put simply, if an owner lacks the competency to accomplish a particular task that might lead to retainment of an object, this object will inevitably tend to hold less value for them. Maintenance and repair skills may be employed to renew an owned or potentially acquired object, but that practice is contingent on the employment of those skills in that context. Similarly, moving house may result in the de-valuing (and hence divestment) of an object, but only in cases where they cannot be transferred into the new home. Thus, without access to certain 'materials', such as adequate transportation vehicle, and the requisite 'competence' to retain it, the object faces a dramatic decline in value and is far more likely to be divested.

There are numerous 'pathways of value' that can be taken in the course of possession. Of course, the owner's perceived value of an object may decline rapidly. The object may break suddenly, interrupting what may otherwise have been a long career of possession and valuation. Alternatively, the object may become obsolete as new objects render them superfluous or redundant. Yet they may also be subject to periodic 'peaks', as interest is renewed or discovered throughout their life. Objects may be increasingly treasured over time, as their age invokes new possibilities for higher perceived value. These examples of pathways of value serve to demonstrate how value is neither constant, nor pre-determined. Regardless of the initial value of an object, there remains the potential for value to be negotiated in different ways throughout its career of possession.

These different pathways of value also serve to demonstrate that both the material and social aspects to possession and divestment are implicated in our understandings of how values are negotiated. Based on this, it is more useful to discuss the 'subject-object relation' in divestment and retainment, rather than a separate focus on people on the one hand, or material objects on the other. Such an approach follows from Whatmore's notion of 'hybrid geographies' as "heterogeneous entanglements… that refuse the choice between world and word" (Whatmore 2001).

Similarly, Latour's (1993) concept of sociality as 'coproduction' between human and non-human actors, highlights the futility of attempting to demarcate these as two entirely separate realms. The concept of the subject-object relation recognises that value is mutually constructed by both the social and the material world, and rarely one of these in isolation.

Material objects themselves may break or degrade, but they do so in particular social environments that will have a substantial influence as to how that object's pathway of value has been, and will continue to be, negotiated. Gregson et al. (2009) describes this as a more or less continual process of 'becoming', as objects are related to in different ways through possession and ownership. She highlights the material and non-material aspects of object maintenance (and defacement) and repair within the home. This chapter pursues a similar subject matter, although informed by an explicit vocabulary and conceptual approach of social practice theory. In this case, as well as in Gregson's, the research seeks to describe how both realms, the human and the non-human, are implicated in the divesting and retaining of objects.

The type of value present in a subject-object relation is highly likely to confer particular narratives onto objects if they are facing the prospect of being divested. In turn, these narratives appear to inform which practices take place in such situations. In the terminology discussed in Chapter 2, these narratives constitute 'meanings', which can play a substantial role in the types of social practices engaged in. Some objects may be deemed 'too good to throw out', suggesting that the career of possession had been thwarted in some way that was not entirely detrimental to the integrity of the object itself. Here, some form of divestment other than 'throwing out' may be employed, in an attempt to preserve the value of the object, even if not for the possessor. Alternatively, the object may be retained in some way, as the description of the practices of storing and treasuring will reveal. In a similar vein, some participants were concerned with 'finding a good home' for something, suggesting that it should be treated and used in a manner befitting of its value. Yet clearly not all objects are valued sufficiently to warrant these practices being carried out. Some less valued objects are deemed to be 'not worth the effort'. In this case, objects may be seen to have some exchange or use-value, but this may be so minimal or unlikely to be realised that it did not warrant any other option than simply getting rid of it. Such forms of practice will be discussed in Chapter 7 on ridding.

Rather than a prescribed monetary amount, or even its non-monetary 'emotional' equivalent, value is inevitably a contested notion that is inexorably tied to subject-object relation. The popular dictum that 'one man's trash is another man's treasure' undoubtedly holds true, through the negotiation of 'politics of value' between interested parties in material culture (Reno 2009). The co-presence of competencies, meanings, materials and rules – in other words, a relevant set of practices - allows value to be bestowed onto an object and to determine whether it is retained or divested. The first of these practices, where the negotiation of value appears to play a strong role in the negotiation of the subject-object relation, is 'storing'.

4.3 Storing

It may seem obvious to state that not all owned objects are used with the same frequency. More often than not, some objects pass out of routine interaction with their owners whilst still remaining in their possession. Objects may be placed in specific locations during these lulls of engagement, only to be re-introduced at a later time. This practice, which I have termed 'storing', takes several different forms both within and beyond the domestic space.

Rita (31, Sydney) has an ensemble of clothing that has outgrown her wardrobe's capacity to contain it. Her employment in various temporary secretarial positions –*'temping'* - demands that she have an array of different, up-to-date outfits. She has different clothing to suit the particular workplace she is temping at, as well as factors such as the weather and her mood. Variety of clothed appearance is not unusual to professional women, unlike the generally daily acceptance of the business suit for men. Perceived expectations – 'meanings' – for owning and wearing a range of clothing options leads many women in this sort of position to assume certain strategies for management of clothing in quantities excess of other expectations and systems for management.

While Rita infrequently conducts partial 'culls' of her clothing, she has now taken to having a *'winter wardrobe'* that is stored in summer, and a *'summer wardrobe'* that is stored in winter. At some transition point between seasons, say a particularly cold day in autumn or an unusually warm day in spring, Rita will *'flip wardrobes'*; clothing that is appropriate for the upcoming season will be retrieved from storage boxes at this point. These boxes sit in the bottom of a built-in wardrobe unit, and are swapped out for the clothing that is less likely to be worn in the months ahead. Such a practice is made possible in large part by the capacity to store an excess quantity of clothing and to have it readily accessible at the points where it is required. Without these storage facilities, it seems unlikely that Rita, or other people in similar positions, could engage in these types of practices without the overflow of stored clothing infiltrating their living space.

The type of storage seen here is largely perennial in nature. Some items may be divested during this wardrobe 'flip' that may have aged physically or fashionably during their hibernation. However, Rita's seasonal storage strategy also allows her to retain items that she might otherwise decline to keep. She claimed that occasionally the retrieval of stored clothing gave her a renewed appreciation for clothing that she may have been growing tired of the previous year. In this case, an absence does appear to 'make the heart grow fonder', as Rita's clothing was periodically 're-

valued' through a time of non-use in the practice of storing. The seasonal routine of wardrobe swapping makes this possible, and offers an example of objects deviating from a trajectory of declining value in the eyes of their owners. Items that appear to be on the verge of divestment may, after an extended storage period, make a triumphant return the following year. Here, seasonal rhythms of value are more important for ongoing use, with no obviously discernible 'life-span' for the item in question.

However, not all storage practices follow these same principles and routines. In many cases, storage is a transition point to divestment, where objects are assigned to certain spaces that signify their future absence. Frank (33, Amsterdam) shares a two-bedroom apartment with his sister. The living space is generally uncluttered, a fact that Frank attributes to his desire to generally have things '*in their proper place'*. He claims that the apartment occasionally descends into states of mild mess, upon which he will embark on '*cleaning missions'*, returning things to their rightful spaces so that *'...if I need something, I can find it straight away.'* Yet there are several parts of the generally tidy apartment that stand out – a cupboard adjacent to the internal laundry room, and the space at the far end of the balcony. Both of these spaces tended to be occupied by more objects than Frank was comfortable with, or objects that he wasn't sure how to deal with. Frank elaborates that these are, in a way, storage spots for objects that are *'tricky to find a place for'*. He claims a chair that was residing on the balcony was one that had *'fell out of the loop'*. His mother had given it to him at a time when he had no furniture, but has since acquired a matching set of chairs; and despite liking the chair itself, he cannot find a place for it inside. Frank placed it outside as a temporary location over a year ago while he tried to '*figure out where it should go'*, but the chair itself has now been weathered and has little likelihood of returning to the indoor setting. Since then, that end of the balcony has attracted several other objects that Fred claims are '*just out of the way for the time-being*'.

This type of storage space is vastly different from the perennial storage space that Rita used to manage her clothing. Spaces such as Frank's balcony are more transitional in nature, where objects are have no defined place in terms of their ownership and use in the everyday. They can function as waypoints for goods 'in limbo' – where their ultimate destination is undecided, and contingent on the personal circumstances of the owner or their acquaintances. Aesthetically, Frank's balcony was able to reside in a more cluttered state than was acceptable for the rest of the apartment. While he was not entirely comfortable with it, its designation as a type of 'transitional storage area' made it tolerable for the standards of tidiness for the rest of the domestic space.

Frank's balcony is not the only type of 'transitional storage space' of this kind. The far end of Frank's balcony was relatively out of the way in terms of the apartment design, and one could feasibly visit the apartment and not notice the cluttered nature of this space. This was not the case at Trent (34) and Lucy's (29) apartment, also in Amsterdam. Trent was an avid collector of objects from the streets around his home and on his daily commute to and from work. He would acquire these things for his own use, but also for his friends and acquaintances. Trent paid close attention to the material needs of himself and those around him, and often found useful things on the kerbside that he would then redistribute based on his knowledge. To achieve this, Trent required a space for these goods as they passed through his household, potentially on their way to friends, or back to the kerbside. However, contrary to designating a space that was out of the way like Frank's balcony, Trent used a small landing at the top of the stairs to store these objects. Although this was occasionally inconvenient if the collection ever got too large, Trent described the reasoning for his using this spot:

> *'If I put stuff in a cupboard, or somewhere where I don't see it, then the stuff would probably just pile up and I would forget about it. This way I get to see it every day, and it has to stay at a manageable amount'.* (Trent, 34, Amsterdam)

The visibility and centrality of this storage space made it difficult to ignore for both Trent and Lucy, who were both committed to the reusing of objects, although Lucy sometimes got frustrated with the awkwardness of the '*stuff on the stairs'* in contrast with their otherwise tidy and spacious living space.

While at a glance the temporary storage spaces of Frank and Trent & Lucy are similar, they contrast in several ways that are relevant to practices of retainment. The location of Frank's space made it easy for him to ignore for extended periods, resulting in objects residing there for longer than was originally intended. Objects became weathered, and unattended to, making it less likely that they would be re-used, even though this was something that Frank would like to have seen. In Trent & Lucy's case, the visibility, and possibly the inconvenience of having objects on the staircase landing constantly compelled them to 'deal with' the things they had acquired. Forgetting, or neglecting these things was far less desirable because it would immediately clutter the apartment. As a result, Trent had incorporated the reuse of these transitional objects into his daily routines, such as commutes to work, sport practice, and shopping. He would frequently re-distribute the objects to friends that he had communicated with, or collect things that were simply *'too good to leave'*.

Practices of storing have a long history, as anthropological and archaeological findings will attest. Hendon (2000) notes how storage practices can inform researchers of various cultural meanings. Identity can be constructed through storing items in particular ways, according to appropriate space and time. Similarly, moralities can be constructed through understanding storage practices that indicate the perceived needs of a social group. Such moralities can be seen throughout the testimonies of the research participants. Frank's valuing of order and neatness, Rita's pragmatism for managing excess, and Trent & Lucy's tolerance only for concentrated clutter – their storage practices reveal distinct moralities about the role that these objects play in their lives. This illustrates how, in terms of the characteristics of elements, spaces can be distinguished by their particular *form*. In these practices of storing, not all spaces are regarded as equally appropriate for being occupied by particular material objects. How these spaces are initially conceived – whether as temporary waypoints, out-of-the-way spots, or seasonal holding – plays a crucial role in constituting storing as practice.

Many domestic storage facilities that embody these differentiations in form are now commonplace in the home – built-in wardrobes, cupboards, attics, cellars, lofts and bed-drawers being some of the more common. Vacuum-seal bags offer the ability to 'shrink' clothing and compressible items to their minimum possible volume, allowing for more efficient storage capacity in the space available. These innovations can actually be seen as enlarging the home – keeping stored items out of the way of everyday life, but easily retrievable if needed.

While storage infrastructures have existed outside living spaces since early in pre-history in the form of storehouses, recent surges in storage practices outside the home suggest that the elements of storage practices are nevertheless in transition. Many of the described practices – of perennial storage of items, of storing bulky items in transition, of 'making space' in the rest of the house – have been extended even further beyond the walls of the domestic household. 'Self-storage' units have facilitated additional storage possibilities outside the home. Industry statistics claim that up to 5.7% of general population respondents in Australia and New Zealand currently use self-storage facilities, up from 4.3% in 2008 and 3% in 2006[9]. Such statistics indicate an overall increasing *trajectory* in the *scale* of these elements of practice, as storage units are increasingly seen as a normal material of practice. Units vary in volume and cost, although the meanings associated with self-storage are common throughout. Storage units are promoted as a way to "reclaim" one's home from objects, and to "free up" domestic spaces for use[10].

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[9] http://www.selfstorage.org.au/2010-demand-study/ accessed on 20/12/2011
[10] http://www.selfstorage.com.au/household/ accessed on 20/12/2011

This frames the meaning associated with the domestic sphere in a number of particularly curious ways. In the context of options available for storage, the household is contested territory – between the material 'stuff' occupying the spaces necessary for living, and the owners who have been removed or ejected from certain spaces in their own property. By containing possessions away from the home through self-storage, people are framed as now being able to utilise the spaces that have been taken away by their possessions. While one could simply state that these are instances of people acquiring too much stuff, it also points to the assertion made elsewhere – that material objects are not passive entities in the constitution of practices. Rather, 'stuff' has a form of agency that has the ability to configure practices that appear to threaten the notion that we, as owners of 'stuff', are entirely in control of proceedings.

This section illustrates that storing is a practice that retains material goods in the possession of their owners, evading divestment for at least some period of time. The architecture of this practice can be seen in the arrangement of elements (competence, meaning, materials)[11], and their associated characteristics. Competencies for storing are evident in the allocation of discrete spaces within the home, and the ability to manage those spaces in such a way that they do not interfere with daily life. Swapping items, rearranging items, or partially divesting selected items, may be carried out seasonally, periodically, or sporadically – therefore, they each have their own trajectory that is inherent to the practice itself. Storing competence may appear central (high-intensity) to the practice, yet there remains the possibility to out-source these skills to personal organisers and 'de-clutterers' (to be discussed in Chapter 7). That these forms of competence can be transferred to others suggest that this is a lower intensity element of the practice.

Storing objects is constituted by a variety of meanings. Since the practice, as defined here, is relatively devoid of inherent meaning, it is up to each practitioner to imbue the practice with their own meanings. This is in contrast to the practices of 'making do' and 'treasuring', discussed in the following sections, which appear to have certain general meaning in their designation, upon which practitioners will imbue more specific meanings as it pertains to their own circumstances. In contrast, the practice of storing is loosely encircled by the concepts of 'time' and 'order'. Managing the household through storing, temporarily retaining objects 'for the time being', reclaiming space from one's objects – each of these point to specific articulations of meaning that direct how the practice of storing is carried out in a given instance. Impressions of

[11] Storage remains primarily a practice conducted within the home. Since there are minimal interactions with formal institutions outside the domestic sphere, it is unnecessary to discuss a 'rules' element of practice for retainment. External storage facilities may be utilized, but impose little by way of rules other than the necessary costs involved.

scarcity are evident with Trent's gleaning objects from the street before they *'disappear'*. These various meanings may take on forms that pertain to specific purposes – the images of household reclamation and de-cluttering, for example, have been harnessed in the marketing of storage equipment and facilities. This type of initiative suggests a relatively large-scale recognition among storage practitioners, for the meanings conveyed must be somewhat recognisable to potential consumers of storage products. The expansion of self-storage facilities points to an upward trajectory in their acceptability by practitioners.

Material elements for storing can be seen in the objects themselves, and infrastructures utilised in the practice. Large, bulky and irregularly shaped objects are less likely to be subject to storing if spaces are constrained. Facilities, such as spare bedrooms, wardrobes, cupboards, balconies and landings, serve as storage infrastructure. Form-wise, these may be integrated into the home itself, or appropriated as an external arm of the domestic sphere. Self-storage facilities offer a market oriented, 'pay-as-you-go' addition to a household's storing capacity, while the construction of a shed, attic space, or house-extension makes increased storing space a relatively permanent fixture. This difference in form is therefore also illustrative of the trajectory of particular elements. Once a permanent storage fixture is established, new norms for the amount of 'necessary' storage space may co-evolve with the additional spaces made available. This is consistent with existing research on stored objects, where smaller dwellings are often perceived by their owners to have less 'clutter' than larger detached homes, despite less actual space for storing objects (Fear 2008).

This discussion illustrates contrasting examples of storage practices for objects in transitional states of value. From objects that are perennially returning to uses of value, to those whose state of value is uncertain – they are nevertheless retained for the time being.

4.4 Making Do

The practice of locating and relocating objects in particular ways for the purposes of retainment, rather than divestment, relies upon the maintenance of the subject-object relation. However, when the subject-object relation is threatened by breakages, wear and tear, technological innovation, or obsolescence, there remains the potential for not acquiring new things to replace them. In many cases, this is a practice of 'making do' with existing possessions. Elements of this practice, as it is carried out in the home, are again illustrated through the narratives of several research participants.

The subject-object relation is often prone to unpredictable circumstances. In the case of breakdowns in frequently used materials, such as white goods and appliances, the window of opportunity for competing practices to capture people can be narrow. In other words, the necessity for everyday life to resume as it was means that those practices that are the most prepared, rehearsed, or convenient, are likely to be the ones that become enacted. The occasions where the option arises to make do with an object already in possession may be relatively infrequent. Indeed, normal everyday life rests on a relatively stable set of infrastructures that allow for the development of habits and routines. When materials fail, and the subject-object relation is threatened, acute episodes of object maintenance and repair may be necessary in the practice of making do.

A lack of competence for repair and reuse prior to breakdown events can often precipitate divestment and replacement. However, while knowledge of an object's functioning, possession of the skills and equipment necessary for maintaining usability, and confidence in one's ability to achieve the desired outcome facilitate a practice of 'making do' when everyday life is disrupted, it is not always the case that such competencies must have been acquired beforehand.

Evelyn (35) and Larry (31, Utrecht) found themselves in this position when their otherwise reliable washing machine had broken down. With both of them lacking experience in this type of repair, they were initially sceptical of their ability to fix the problem. However, Evelyn searched for solutions on the Internet, where she discovered that only a small rubber o-ring needed replacement. The practice of fitting the o-ring itself took less than fifteen minutes – a fraction of the time that would have been necessary to acquire a new washer, or to pay for a repairman. Evelyn herself was surprised at the ease with which she was able to accomplish the maintenance task. Lacking any specialised expertise herself, she was able to rely on the advice and practical knowledge of others who were willing to share it.

Stories such as Evelyn and Larry's demonstrate that the element of competence should be defined much more broadly than individual skills and knowledge. Shared knowledge about practicing thrift and repair with materials leads to much more diffuse and transferable forms of competence than may have been available in the past. The website iFixit[12] has taken on the ambitious task of developing user generated repair manuals for all household objects. Manuals are catalogued according to their make, model, and the problem faced in proper functioning. Users can upload their successful repair endeavours, for subsequent viewers to browse and gain competence from. The ultimate goal of iFixit appears to be an ongoing catalogue of repair

[12] www.ifixit.com Accessed on 23/3/2012

solutions for consumer electronics and appliances. The step-by-step manuals, and problem-solution posts are pragmatic sources of knowledge based on the experiences of others.

Another prominent source of shared competency for making do are the numerous video based accounts of repair and maintenance available online[13]. These offer a visual representation of the process of making do, with users often narrating the necessary steps required for repair and maintenance. Such videos can offer a richer guide to these procedures, as viewers can see any intricacies of repair and maintenance that may be difficult to convey in a manual format.

Shared competency may also be found in more experiential accounts of making do. Journals and weblogs are popular vehicles for sharing personalised accounts of repair. Narratives about successful projects, describing the lived experience of making do to others, offer a form of shared competency, but also solidify the meanings of this practice. Testimonials of those engaging in a practice help to establish normality. By developing shared meanings, they confirm to potential practitioners that it is not an unusual thing to do, and may in fact offer tangible benefits over competing practices such as replacement. In terms of the characteristics of elements, the *form* of these competences is crucial to their replication. Many these 'how to's' are user-generated, and therefore less likely to be perceived as a possibility only for those with particular expertise.

It is no co-incidence that many of these examples of shared competency are based online. The ability to conduct rapid search and retrieval of desired information, on all manner of different competencies, renders this format ideal for the unexpected contingencies of breakdown and repair. Shared competency, such as that acquired by Evelyn, spreads the body of knowledge to a much larger pool of potential practitioners instantaneously. By sharing competencies in this way, practices reach far beyond the extent of their localised enactment. Scale, as a characteristic of these competences, can be distributed further. In this way, competences become increasingly social, as they draw on, and contribute to, a continuum of practice that is dispersed in space and time, but integrated in material, competence and meaning.

Of course, not all attempts to make do with existing things are successful. Objects with a higher threshold for skill-based repair – where repair or refurbishment require more sophisticated skills and equipment – making do with an existing object may require the involvement of the manufacturer or a specialist repair service. This is particularly the case for computerised devices, where the sheer complexity of materials and circuitry make making do less

[13] See www.youtube.com/howto for examples. Accessed on 20/3/12

attractive for people to attempt on their own. Tracey (28) recalled her experiences at being disheartened by not being able to fix her digital camera, since she frequently mended and modified clothing and textile furniture with relative ease. This lack of competency for repair of computerised equipment is likely to become more widespread in the future, as more consumer objects (such as appliances, clothing, cars) have complex electronic circuitry built into their functionality.

While the subject-object relation may break down suddenly, as was the case for both Evelyn and Tracey, other circumstances may involve a more gradual decline in an object. In these situations making do takes on a less urgent directive, but one that still retains a similar arrangement of elements as those we have discussed so far.

Material objects rarely take care of themselves. Rather, regular maintenance can be a necessary part of possession, if the object it to be retained over time. Denise (55) and David (57, Utrecht) live in a medium sized, two story house on the outskirts of a small rural village on the fringe of Utrecht. The ground floor of their house is a grid of tightly arranged wooden tiles (parquetry flooring), installed in the early 1970's. The condition of the floor suggests that it is highly durable, and they expect it to last another forty years – a relatively long lifespan when compared to many other consumer goods commonly found in households. Such durability, though, comes with the task of annually *'waxing and oiling'* the floor to ensure that the wood does not warp and move out of place. When the floor becomes chipped or scratched, a wood-filler is used to maintain the appearance of the floor. Spills must be attended to quickly, to ensure no seepage into the gaps between tiles. These are the tasks of maintenance and making do that are required to ensure that the subject-object relation remains intact, thereby thwarting the possibility for the floor to be replaced by something else.

These practices of making do may merely postpone the divestment of an item until a later date. Yet they can also imbue the subject with a sense of accomplishment and personal fulfilment that serve to make divestment even less likely. Making do with existing possessions can elicit satisfaction that may surpass that of acquiring newly produced goods for some owners. For Denise and David, the tiled wooden floor is symbolic of their own personal history and identity as a family. The continuity and resilience of the wooden floor is seen as a part of the home, rather than a material fixture residing within it. They admitted that the work required to maintain it was inconvenient, and required a certain degree of persistence. They considered replacing it with a *'lyno'* floor covering when their children were growing up, with the frequency of cleaning required from inevitable spillages and mess. However they were proud to have made

do with the wooden tiles, and claimed that they would now be even less likely to replace it in the future.

Here, the practices of making do can serve as a means to retain those goods, as the laboured possessions become part of an 'extended self' (Belk 1988) that retains an experiential meaning - that is, a meaning grounded in personal experience - for its owner. While making do can often mean tolerating objects initially, the associated meanings can evolve as the practice itself is carried out. For instance, Evelyn's success in repairing her washing machine, described earlier in this section, gave her a new found confidence to attempt other repairs and instances of making do. Carrying out the practice appears to have extended her perceived abilities to realms that were not recognised in the past. In this way, objects can take on new meanings, grounded in the experiences of 'making do' with other household objects.

These meanings for making do with existing objects appear to have a variety of bases. They may be grounded in an ethics of environmentalism, reducing the need to use additional resources to produce new objects to replace existing ones. Such a meaning sits in contrast with what has been called 'green consumerism' - where goods tend to be replaced with more efficient and environmentally benign ones, in favour of retaining existing ones. Practitioners of making do that assign these meanings must therefore evaluate whether the efficiencies gained from purchasing greener products are worth additional resources, if an existing solution can be found in the form of making do. As the message from eBay's recent 'green team' initiative claims: '…the greenest product is one that is already made'[14]. Making do also affords a more general expression of anti-consumerism, minimising the need to participate in the market economy except where essential. By making do with existing objects, one can step off the 'treadmill of production' (Mol & Spaargaren 2005), resisting the relentless acquisition of material goods that are promoted in contemporary, minority world, market economies.

Individual economic circumstances may also encourage 'making do' if the monetary incentives warrant it. Where one is prepared to invest their own resources into maintaining or repairing their possessions, they reduce the amount of income needed to acquire new objects. Narratives about making do with existing things persist strongly in elderly participants who grew up during the economic depression that gripped much of Australia and Europe in the 1930's. Jennifer (91, Sydney) recalled that during her childhood her family would rarely divest clothing. Instead, items passed through the family unit as a matter of practice. These *'hand-me-downs'* meant that Jennifer, being the second youngest of four girls, rarely acquired anything that hadn't already

[14] http://www.greenbiz.com/blog/2010/02/16/why-ebay-green-giant accessed on 7/4/2012

been worn by older siblings. Repairing items was also an affordable way of extending the life of woollen socks – a task that Jennifer recalls her mother seemed to be frequently occupied with.

Some of these practices, and their associated meanings, persisted even after their family's financial situation improved as the economic depression eased – a demonstration that practices do not always reflect the immediate context in which they are carried out but may reflect the legacy of prior experiences. To this end, there may be a trajectory of residual meaning that lingers in the routines established, meaning that practices of making do can be found in unexpected places, echoing circumstances of the past.

Values of frugality, thrift, self-sufficiency, and the maxim of 'living simply' all sit comfortably with the types of practices described here. It is therefore apparent that the practice of making do has an array of different meanings, while appearing similar, if not identical, in the majority of instances. This is indicative that meaning is a low-intensity element for the practice of making do. Provided that those meanings do no sharply conflict, practices can be simultaneously enacted with different meanings, as well as shifting their meanings over time. Considered as a practice that persists over time, making do can be found in times of both material scarcity and abundance. Meanings may differ - from economic necessity to environmental activism – yet making do continues to exist in locally reproduced configurations that make it recognisable as a practice.

The commonly cited behaviours of repairing, maintaining, and reusing can therefore be grounded to a common practice – that of making do. Attaching meanings to the actions of individuals and groups is important for understanding what is being achieved in the carrying out of a practice. Retaining ownership of objects in the ways described may fulfil personal motivations that drive purposeful activity. But it is more likely that the meanings are shared, reflecting particular conventions that exist independently of those that carry them. Transmission of these meanings between actors, and the competencies utilised to embody them, is made all the more social with enhanced sharing capabilities. This serves to demonstrate how the forms of competence can be crucial to understanding the practice as it is carried out. These online technologies permit rapid dissemination of knowledge and experience for repair and maintenance that was previously passed down through much smaller circles of kinship. As such, their scale is increasingly broad. Further, as the example of Evelyn indicates, gaining of such competence can be rapid and straightforward, dependent on certain base capabilities of searching, and the ability to deploy acquired knowledge.

Material elements of making do are also crucial to its existence as a practice. This can be seen in the composition of the object itself, such as whether its material composition is conducive to repair. Denise and David's wooden tile floor allowed for individual tiles to be replaced in the event of sections being damaged or heavily worn. This allowed them to make do with the overall floor, by maintaining and replacing only the worn parts. This is also indicative of a lower intensity of this particular material element; individual tiles were substitutable without compromising the integrity of the whole floor. Here, the practice of making do is facilitated by a versatile material composition of replaceable tiles, allowing for overall floor maintenance and the contingency of repair by the owner.

This arrangement is to be contrasted with Tracey's broken digital camera. This predicament offered little in the way of making do options, as the primary function of the camera was contingent on a material apparatus that had broken. This is indicative of a high-intensity element, as the camera's purposeful status as 'as device for taking digital photos' was unable to be substituted or repaired by Tracey using her own capabilities.

The materiality of practice can also be seen in the type of washing machine that Evelyn attended to. Her machine was less sophisticated than others on the market, but this allowed her to acquire sufficient competence to repair it. The amount of knowledge required to repair a computerised machine, on the other hand, would have made such a practice far out of reach. Even if she acquired such knowledge about the intricacies of a sophisticated machine, the possibility of her undertaking to repair it herself would remain low, since the tools and procedures for repair also become increasingly complex. This is a very clear example of how the scales of competencies for making do are unevenly distributed across different material objects, and even within classes of objects, not merely across individual practitioners.

In the case of imported objects, there is often a discrepancy in the cost of labour between the location of an object's production on the one hand, and it's acquisition and use on the other. In the case of imports from Majority world to Minority world economies, labour costs in the consumer's location are so much higher than the location of production, such that the cost of paid repair services can resemble, or exceed, the cost of acquiring a new replacement. As such, these objects have a much shorter lifespan than in the past, or than one might expect (Cooper 2010b). If this is the case, it appears that the trajectory of key elements of the practice of making do may be in decline. Meanings around the expectation of life-span are likely to influence the design of objects, potentially inhibiting the ability of practitioners to make do – through obsolescence, lack of backward compatibility, less-durable materials and construction, or more

rapid cycles of novelty and taste differentiation. Where such life-span trajectories exist, the meanings associated with making do can nevertheless persist – but the practice itself is likely to remain niche due to competing practices of replacement and acquisition.

As a social practice, making do with certain things gives meaning to the more neutral actions of repair, maintenance, and reuse. In the next section, I discuss how objects are bestowed with meaning in retainment through another practice, that of treasuring.

4.5 Treasuring

Thus far practices of retainment have been discussed in terms of storing and making do. These practices demonstrate different configurations of elements, linked by the commonality that material objects are not divested despite the potential for doing so through realignment of the subject-object relation. Yet this relation is not inevitably on a downward trend from the moment of acquisition to divestment. While some objects clearly become less valued through the course of their career of possession, others have very different trajectories of value.

The social practice of treasuring is one example of such an alternate trajectory. Items acknowledged to be otherwise mundane might be kept, attended to, repaired or salvaged long after a similar item has reached the end of its career of possession. In such cases 'treasuring' involves objects that have what Chapman (2005) terms 'emotional durability'. He characterises contemporary forms of material consumption as: "...a process in which we attempt to know familiarise and, ultimately, outgrow the wonder of artefacts" (Chapman 2005, p. 48). The challenge for more sustainable forms of consumption may therefore be to ensure that material products are able to adapt to the evolving sensibilities of their owners. This would discourage divestment, Chapman maintains, as material goods would continue to enchant their owners and provide continuing use-value beyond current perceptions of product life span.

While Chapman's scenario is based on fundamental redesigns of the systems of producing, distributing and acquiring consumer goods, there are nevertheless some examples of extant practices that embody these ideals of treasuring and emotional durability. In this section, I describe two forms of the practice: treasuring largely as a result of how the object is acquired, and treasuring through ongoing patterns of usage in the subject-object relation.

Frank (33, Amsterdam), whom I referred to earlier in the context of storing, claimed that his family, like many other families he knew, had always given gifts to each other. As mentioned

above, Frank was the recipient of a chair from his mother when he first moved into the apartment. Frank had retained this chair despite a mild frustration that it failed to match the table and chair set that he had purchased shortly afterward. Initially, he kept the chair largely out of respect for his mother, whose kindness in the act of giving him the chair trumped any desire he might have to divest himself of it. Frank also had received several books as gifts from friends and relatives that contained personal messages written in their front covers. For Frank, the books status' as gifts was far more critical to them being kept than any useful information they may contain. The written messages served as reminders of his valued personal relationships – to sell them, or divest them in any manner, would be to deface those relationships in some way, even if he believed that the gift-giver would not mind it being gotten rid of. Both of these examples suggest that this practice of treasuring is less for the object itself than for the relationships that gave them significance. Gifts appear to be treasured more so than other, similar objects as they embody strong social bonds. When objects are both gifted and highly valued by the owner, their career of possession is likely to be maintained long after similar possessions have fallen by the way side. If an object loses its use-value for someone, but was a gift, it may nevertheless be retained - provided that the relationship with the giver has been maintained.

Once again, this is illustrative of the characteristics of an object's (material) form as being an important predictor of whether a practice is carried out. In the form of a gift, Frank's books and chair are treasured in a way that leads to their retainment. Were these same objects to have a different form – say, simply a purchase – it seems unlikely they would be retained in the same way, because they are devoid of certain meanings that warrant it.

While gifts are a notable way of promoting the emotional value of goods, there are other forms of acquisition that lend themselves to treasuring. The experience of going about acquiring goods can have particularly strong influence over how they are perceived and treated in their career of possession, including decisions about the option to divest or retain. Several participants described items that were not easily acquired, and were subsequently more valued. Richard (21, Amsterdam) recalled working for an entire summer student vacation to purchase a laptop computer. While he owned other objects that had similar monetary value, this particular laptop held an additional significance for him due to the extended process of working and saving toward its purchase. The time and effort invested in acquiring the laptop made Richard reluctant to upgrade to a new machine, despite its now somewhat dated technology.

These examples suggest that the more an object had been imbued with personalised significance in its acquisition, the more likely it will be treasured, and retained. Objects that were difficult or memorable to acquire were similarly more valued than those that were not. Richard also recalled cycling across the city of Amsterdam in the rain to an obscure music shop to purchase a CD that is now one of his most treasured. This experience stood out for him, one that would likely prove influential in retaining the CD into the future. If acquisition is conceptualised as the initiation of the subject-object relation, then it seems clear that this phase is formative for how an object may be treasured throughout its career of possession. This is not merely an example of an economically minded 'invested cost' leading to higher rates of retention. It is more akin to Appadurai's notion that the social life of things is intertwined with those of our own – in other words, when the subject-object relation has substance and history (Appadurai 1986). When we inscribe things with significance, we encode a politics of value that embodies the practice of treasuring.

However, while treasuring has been characterised as being forged from the moment of acquisition, this is not a necessary aspect to the practice. The second form of treasuring to be discussed in this section results primarily from the subject's own experiences in relating to the object during the course of ownership. Here, the subject-object relation can be enhanced by, and through, actions of modification, refurbishment, use, and repair.

John (21, Amsterdam) had made several customised covers for his favourite literature novels, because while he enjoyed the stories, the books appearances did not appeal to him. Modification after acquisition was a way of imparting his own sensibilities – parts of himself - onto the books. He saw the time and attention to this practice as a form of making the books '*more mine*', in that ownership was an ongoing process throughout the career of possession, rather than merely at the moment of acquisition. Unsurprisingly, these were the books he retained when moving from the United Kingdom to the Netherlands to attend university. This complicates the notion of ownership beyond standard legal definitions we tend to assume. If we propose that ownership is iterative, or a process that emerges through subject-object interaction, then the practice of treasuring would be central to this.

Tracey had similarly modified items over the course of their possession. As a Masters degree student on exchange in Amsterdam from Canada, Tracey was taken with the presence of flea markets that filled the streets near her student accommodation on weekends upon arriving in Amsterdam. She enjoyed browsing, acquiring and owning second hand clothing purchased from the flea markets, as opposed to spending time in the shopping mall. Tracey would then modify

her favourite pieces to suit the season, or for a particular occasion such as a party. In picking apart, trimming and sewing these articles of clothing, she felt herself become more attached to these items. Treasuring, it seemed for her, was simultaneously the process and result of a more personal level of interaction with the materials of her practice. Tracey summarised the reasons for why she believed some objects have, in her words, a *'staying power'*:

> *'People are interested in things having a story. There can be a history to things, even if they're totally mundane. Something more interesting than "I went to Wal-Mart and bought it".'* (Tracey, 27, Amsterdam)

These stories can be generated from unique circumstances or practices in the production, acquisition, or use of an object, which hold some significance beyond its instrumental capacity. McCracken (2006) has observed that through consumption, we do not merely come to know objects with more intimacy and detail. Instead, he argues that objects allow us to know ourselves, which he reasoned was the 'evocative power of things'.

Such sentiments appear to have an empirical basis beyond the present research as well. Schultz-Kleine et al. (1995, p. 341) argue that the manner in which a possession is acquired is a strong predictor of the type of attachment (i.e value) one has. Furthermore, such antecedents of attachment are largely idiosyncratic, insofar as they are not predicted by particular types of objects valued, or the types of persons valuing them. If this is indeed the case, then it is likely to be true for practices of treasuring. Whether through the inscription of value via gifting, or continued forms of modification and customisation, resilient subject-object relations are constituted through the practice of treasuring. Material objects retained in this way serve as symbols of valued relationships and valued states of being.

Treasuring therefore describes an ongoing and evolving practice of appreciation for certain material objects that defies the tendencies of disinterest and devaluation. This appreciation is expressed through various states of mind, such as valuing, caring, and even feeling responsibility toward a given object. These meanings can be shared, as was discussed in the context of making do. However, treasuring is likely to elicit a more experiential form of shared competence than specific 'how-to' manuals. In terms of the characteristics of elements, meanings for treasuring are for this reason of particularly high intensity. The meanings associated with treasuring are highly central to the practice itself, as treasured objects tend to serve as symbols or proxies for held values and specific experiences.

Treasuring is also the deployment of a series of competencies toward the material itself – through customisation, tinkering, repeated use, reviewing, maintaining, or renewing. In this way, material possessions can come to constitute an 'extension of the self', as practitioners 'learn, define, and remind' themselves through the subject-object relation (Belk 1988, pp.144, 160). Materials that offer more sophisticated types of subject-object interaction are potentially more likely to evoke the meanings and competencies of treasuring. As a social practice, the treasuring of material objects directly competes with those of divestment – objects retained are those not divested – at least for the time being. Understanding treasuring as a practice gives the opportunity to articulate why attachment to certain objects is more powerful than others.

4.6 Conclusion

The social practices of retainment come into play when there is a potential realignment of the subject-object relation. When the configuration of meanings, competencies, and materials threaten this relation, then practices of retainment can be carried out. These offer many opportunities for sustainable forms of consumption. Since continued use of an object requires no resources for redistribution through divestment, and no replacement is required (aside from the use of minor parts in some instances), considerable resources can be saved when compared to alternative practices of divestment. Practices of retainment appear to resemble what (Cooper 1994) refers to as the 'Longer Life Option'. Cooper recognises that collaboration for such a project can often only go so far by users of objects. If product longevity is to be embraced as a means to change consumption practices, it requires the commitment of stakeholders further up the production and consumption 'chain', such as manufacturers and designers (Cooper 2010). Only with an integrated approach to object retainment can these practices flourish.

Such integration is indicative of practices as being systemic entities, with implications and dynamics that reverberate beyond the actual storing, making do and treasuring going on in individual households. The extent to which competences can increasingly be shared between practitioners, and the potential for what is considered 'normal' practice to be revised as a result, is suggestive that systems principles are useful for understanding their complexity. This view sees divestment practices as co-evolving with other practices within a broader system of production and consumption. Expectations of how and when objects will be divested are, in this sense, attributes of the system itself. Cooper appears to recognise this, having isolated product longevity as a leverage point that, if adjusted appropriately across practices, has the potential to 'tip' the system of consumption and divestment toward sustainability.

Object retainment also raises the possibility of other forms of use that become lost once an object is divested. Opportunities for loaning, sharing, and using objects collaboratively arise when objects are retained and maintained for ongoing use in practice. In these forms of 'collaborative consumption', the use of objects becomes a more social affair, as multiple users have the opportunity to use an object over the course of its life (Chapter 9).

Chapter 5

Altruistic Divestment

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes a set of practices of material divestment that have a real or perceived orientation toward altruism. The term altruism, first coined by August Comte in his *System of Positive Polity* (1875), is now generally understood to mean *"disinterested or selfless concern for the well-being of others, esp. as a principle of action"* (Oxford English Dictionary[15]). Positing a system for altruistic divestment does not solely refer to the motivations of individuals for divesting goods. Although understanding motivations is clearly *necessary* for understanding altruistic behaviour, it is not *sufficient* – additional elements must be explored if altruism is to be understood at a systemic level.

Consistent with practice theory, the description of altruistic divestment presented here describes the integration of competencies, meanings, materials and rules, as discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, while 'assisting the poor', or 'helping someone out' in the course of divestment may be considered individual motivations for altruistic divestment, they may also be considered as more common 'meanings' if others hold such sentiments to any significant degree. Likewise, the 'materials' and 'competencies' for charitable and altruistic divestment are viewed as co-evolving with the other elements of social practice, rather than existing solely within individuals. This chapter describes several practices that constitute a system of altruistic divestment.

5.2 Charity begins at home – expectations in the practices of donation

Altruistic divestment has been institutionalised to a great extent by charitable and welfare organisations throughout Australia and the Netherlands. In Australia, the organisation investigated was nationwide, collecting clothing and goods in order to redistribute them for welfare purposes and for resale. In the Netherlands, an independent charity shop that received and resold goods at the same venue was interviewed.

[15] http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/5857?redirectedFrom=altruism#eid accessed on 19/5/2012

Charitable organisations have a recognisable presence throughout many urban landscapes. In terms of material, this presence takes the form of large charity 'bins', designed as receptacles for items that are donated to charity. Items are also frequently donated directly to charity or 'opportunity' shops ('op-shops'). However, these arrangements and infrastructures for donating demand certain forms of competency in assessing the value and condition of the divested goods. As will be explored below, differing competencies and meanings relating to the assessment of value can be problematic for the viability of donating practices.

Practices of donating were found to be a common way for household participants to divest themselves of items that were of declining, little, or no use to them. However, as several participants suggested, donating items to charitable organisations is overwhelmingly seen as a way to salvage use-value out of items that are *'still good'* (Monica, 34, Arnhem). This is to say that donated objects are recognised to have a use-value, even if their own particular subject-object relation has broken down. Altruistic divestment of this kind requires subjects to draw conclusions that are largely empathetic, such as whether someone else will value an object enough to warrant them donating it. These conclusions may be drawn from their own personal circumstances, based on their own tastes and perceptions of acceptable quality of usable goods.

Based on the household interviews and interviews with charity shop managers, clothing is undoubtedly the most frequently donated class of item. Clothing is generally perceived to be something that charitable organisations would redistribute to others, whether domestically or abroad. Most participants assumed that their donation would go to 'good use', but acknowledged that they had little by way of verification for this. Unsurprisingly, charitable organisations are viewed with a significant amount of good will, and participants trusted that they would re-distribute donated goods to those in need.

However, there are clearly occasions where charitable organisations and donators do not share a similar vision of what is '*still good*', and where the competencies for charitable use is limited or lacking. Rachel, a store manager at a Sydney charity shop, points out that soiled, worn, and damaged clothing is still regularly placed in charity bins, and outside charity shops. Items that were subject to product safety standards, such as children's car seats, could also not be accepted. Peter, a manager at the distribution centre for one of Australia's largest charities, claimed that 30% of the items donated (by weight) are unable to be sold in their shops or redistributed to those in need due to poor quality or condition. Such claims are supported by

public statements, lamenting the use of charities as 'dumps' for rubbish rather than donation of useable items[16].

These are not merely *different* expectations regarding the quality of donated goods to charitable causes. Rather, they are *competing* expectations about the nature and use of donated goods. When social actors hold lower value thresholds for what they consider to be *'still good'*, and donate items according to these standards, it directly undermines a charity's ability to collect other goods that are in useable or sellable condition; charities must devote resources to the sorting, and removal of unusable items, and redirect them into the waste stream:

> *'It's our biggest cost actually – waste removal. More than wages, sometimes ... It's very expensive to pay for waste dumped on us by people who don't understand, or don't care, that we can't take rubbish'* (Rachel, Charity Shop Manager, Sydney.)[17]

Redirecting significant quantities of donations to the waste stream may also give rise to unintended flow-on effects that may undermine the goodwill that charitable organisations hold within the community. As the manager of a charity store in Sydney, Rachel was concerned that people may be less likely to donate overall if they perceived that charities were discarding significant proportions of their donations into the waste stream. While the disposal of unusable or unsellable goods was problematic, the prospect of any significant reduction in donations overall was equally, if not more, concerning for the economic viability of the charity, and their capacity to carry out welfare projects. In this way, charity shops in these circumstances must perform a delicate balancing act with regard to their 'feedstock' of donations; they must educate the community about the amount of waste generated by receipt of unusable donated items, while simultaneously ensuring that confrontation with this waste does not undermine people's goodwill to donate.

The dynamics described here are indicative of a systemic approach to social practices research. Existing reuse and waste generating practices are held together, in part, by the expectations of participating actors. Were any of these expectations to change significantly, one could then anticipate significant changes to the nature of the practices being carried out. Charitable donation – when viewed as a channel for material re-use and potential waste reduction - requires an continuous renegotiation of expectations with other actors in the system. The following section describes such a transition, in the practices of goods redistribution.

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[16] http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/12/30/2456368.htm

[17] It is unknown whether this problem exists, or is as pronounced, in the Netherlands

5.3 Bins, and the business of donating

Most household participants interviewed claimed to have donated items to charity on various occasions. Even those who regularly engaged in re-use practices tended to find themselves in situations where divestment was necessary, and donation was often the most appropriate channel to accomplish this. Regimes for household donation varied somewhat, depending on household routines, but also according to the different systems of provision (materials) present.

Frank (33, Amsterdam), for instance, would co-ordinate his donation with a periodic *'cleaning out'* of his wardrobe. He would then deposit the donation items in the large charity bins conveniently located at the end of his street. Tracey (27, Amsterdam) similarly packed donation bags as part of her occasional cleaning routines, but did not live near any bins that could be reached on foot. This meant that her bags would often sit and pile up in a corner of her apartment for some time, before eventually being placed in the bins when she was able to transport them, usually in a friend's car. These examples demonstrate notable differences in practices that are largely due to the location and convenience of the donation materials – in this case, bins. Frank's donations are likely to be more frequent but smaller in quantity, whereas Tracey's are likely to be larger but more infrequent – both as a result of the relative (in)convenience of accessing the bins, and the tendency for donations to accumulate in the home prior to their actual divestment. While such differences in practice are common across households, they also point to how charity bins can act as critical nodes in the system of altruistic divestment.

The design and installation of charity bins has been subject to innovation over time, as bins have been improved to enhance their security and usability. Peter (Charity Distribution Centre Manager, Sydney) claimed that donations in previous designs were frequently caught at the mouth of the bin, resulting in items being placed beside or in front by users. Not only did this expose the donations to degradation due to weathering, but also some municipal authorities considered it dumping. This forced charities to redesign the opening of the bins to ensure that they did not become clogged.

Figure 5.1 Charity bins in Sydney. Signage specifies them as 'Charity Operated'.

Charity bins may also have to 'compete' for donations, with other bins run for commercial purposes. Peter argued that often these bins were run by for-profit enterprises, often to sell lower quality material – *'rag'* – to foreign buyers. It is therefore important for charitable organisations to increasingly distinguish themselves from non-charitable organisations (through more clearly identifiable signage and logos, e.g. as seen in Figure 5.1), as their status in the community holds significant 'pulling power' for potential donations.

This difference – between 'charity operated' bins and bins operated for profit – reveals a notable difference in how the *form* of an element of practice can yield different outcomes. While the physical appearance and locations of these two types of bins (materials) are very similar, their patronage differs on the basis of which organisations gain benefit from them. In this case, the form of the donation bins - who controls them, what are their motives, and what standing do they have in the community – are important to distinguish.

It is worth recognising that although this 'bin based' donating may achieve its primary goal - of charitable organisations receiving goods for redistribution – it offers very little participatory feedback to those engaging in it. Once goods are placed into a bin, they effectively disappear from the life of those divesting them. As Karin (39, Utrecht) said: *'I tend to forget about things after I get rid of them'.* This is a crucial point, as it highlights an example of "distancing", where the real world implications of one's consumption practices are obscured from view, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Donating items into bins in this manner mirrors many of the characteristics of modern market based consumption. Just as one can acquire goods with little to no information about their production or distribution process, one can also donate and divest items with the same deficit of information. Far from being a unique personal characteristic of Karin, *'forgetting'* about goods after they are donated appears to be encouraged by the materials and arrangements for charitable donation. While many of the participants felt they were competent at sorting and redistributing items appropriate for donation, testimony from the charities suggests that such competence is not widespread. Furthermore, bin donators remain largely uninformed about the destinations of their donation – and are therefore distanced from the real world effects that those donations might be having.

It may be tempting to regard charity bins as merely the passive receptacles of a largely uniform stream of donations. This seems intuitive, since the bins themselves are of similar size, shape and construction. The design of the bins prescribes a fairly narrow set of interactions with the users. Items are generally placed in bags in the home, and these are then brought to a bin and 'dropped' into a clearly labelled hinged flap at the top of the unit. Bins are periodically cleared by the charities with varying frequency, based on charity's previous experiences of how often they are filled. Yet this uniformity of practice belies a far more complex set of norms and expectations (meanings) that only become apparent once the bags are collected and sorted by the charities themselves.

As has been discussed, charitable donations are subject to different and sometimes competing understandings of value. The quality of the goods that are donated in charity bins varies across time and space. The quality and quantity of donated goods was perceived to have declined in 2009 following the global financial crisis and general public concern for economic stability. Both Peter and Rachel felt that people were '*holding onto things for longer*', and so were divesting themselves of things only if they felt they had to. Charity workers also felt that differing localities varied according to the quality of their donations, with wealthier areas perceived to be donating lower quality items and engaging in more dumping[18]. However the most heavily emphasised predictor of the quality of charity bin donations appears to be the particular land use that the bin is situated on, or the amenities that it is adjacent to. Rachel describes the trends:

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[18] Some of the information I gleaned from interviews on this topic was ambiguous, contradictory, and appeared to be more heavily biased in ways that may not be accurate. For instance, several local government areas in Sydney's wealthier east and north shore were referred to by Brodie, a charity caseworker who dealt with deceased estates, as being inhabited by *'certain types of people'* who are *'less caring about community needs'*. As there is little concrete reliable data regarding the quality of donations in different areas, it is difficult to assess the validity of these claims.

'When [we] empty the donation bins, the sorters will fight over a bin that's based at a school or a church, and try to turn away the donations that have come from a bin in a car park or supermarket. The quality of the stuff depends on where the bin is. It really jumps around. Supermarket bins are the ones where we get dirty nappies, dead cats, and other nasty stuff.' (Rachel, Charity Store Manager, Sydney)

Peter echoed this observation, claiming that bins located on public land were overwhelmingly used as '*dumping areas'*, whilst those associated with churches or schools are far less likely to have poor quality items deposited in them.

These observations suggest that charity bins must be viewed not as distinct entities occupying their own anonymous space, but as deeply embedded in the local geography and culture. While their material structure is clearly demarcated, and easily identified, their potential as non-human actors within a broader socio-technical network is far broader. The marked difference in contents suggests that charity bins are common elements in subtly different forms of donating practices. In terms of interpreting how material objects may 'script' particular forms of behaviour (Latour 1992), the charity bin is simply one node in a localised network of elements that give rise to, and maintain, social practices of charitable donation.

Based on such a theorising of charity bin 'embeddedness', the norms and practices of adjacent institutions may become entangled in their day-to-day interactions with charity bin donators. Individual donators in schools and church groups may have certain forms of competence that assist them to make appropriately valued donations to the bins located on their premises. Families with school children are likely to be engaging in more frequent divestment; children outgrow clothing and toys more frequently, and families gain practical knowledge through this experience. Church members may assist with welfare causes, or be more attuned to the needs of those for whom donations are directed. Both of these forms of competency are likely to contribute to the higher standard of donations to bins at these locations.

Both Rachel and Peter noted that there was little to stop other members of the community from using these bins, nor to stop churchgoers and school families from donating in other bins. However, they argued that the convenience associated with locating bins at frequently visited locations suggests that they are more likely the recipients of donations from people associated with these institutions. This demonstrates the interconnectedness and co-location of practices, where participation in one – such as church attendance – can increase the likelihood of participation in another; namely donation. It is indicative of a systemic account of daily life, where practices that are not directly associated with divestment nevertheless have a degree of involvement in it.

Both churches and schools place strong emphasis on social networks of individuals and families. While each may have practices specific to its own institution (worship and education, respectively), both also work to establish social communities within those contexts. These institutions are thereby able to provide direct feedback to their respective communities regarding the practices of donating. With bins located on their premises, it is in their own interest to ensure that the bins remain tidy. Charities also have a known point of contact, such as a church leader or school principal, who they can raise concerns with about inappropriate types of donations being deposited into the bins. In contrast to this, charity bins located on public land, such as parks or shopping centre car parks, have no means to provide feedback to donators about appropriate donation standards, aside from signage on the bin itself.

Chappells & Shove (1999) demonstrate how dustbins are reflective of the common understandings of waste throughout their history. In contrast, this research, suggests that existing charity bins, despite their rather similar material construction and appearance, can be the subject of highly divergent practices with respect to the divestment of material goods.

5.4 Managing demand for donation

A crucial aspect for positing a system of practices for altruistic divestment is an understanding of the means by which that system is able to change over time – in other words, the dynamics of social practice. Whether such changes could be perceived to come from within, or outside, the system largely depends on how the system is defined as a whole. Practices are defined by a configuration of elements, many of which reside within the system while simultaneously involved in other practices (Chapter 2). This resembles the boundaries of a 'soft' system, as argued by Checkland (2000), where interactivity between systems is possible.

This section describes some of the temporalities and trajectories of demand that characterise the practices of altruistic divestment. It should be noted that in the case of charity groups that both acquire and redistribute material goods, the meaning of supply and demand may be unclear. For instance, goods donated to charities by individuals or households may be regarded as a form of 'supply', since these goods are subsequently sold or redistributed based on the 'demand' of the store customers or welfare recipients. However, since this research is primarily concerned with material divestment from the home, the nature of demand is defined differently.

Demand, in the context of this research, refers to the expectations of the individuals and households to be able to divest their goods in a particular (in this case charitable) way. Scenarios of high 'demand' would therefore be those in which individuals and households are divesting more goods, and hence require the increased 'supply' of charitable services that are capable of accepting these goods. This reflects situations where users may be actively seeking the absence, or divestment, of goods rather than their acquisition. Such throughput of goods is integral to the ongoing development of modern consumerism.

The previous section discussed how charity groups rely on large metal bins as a form of material infrastructure to assist in the receipt of donations. These bins provide a common point of interaction between households and the charitable institution, as a means for divesting material goods. However, they remain a relatively 'inelastic' form of donation infrastructure – that is to say, their ability to deal with concentrated periods of high demand is limited. The location and installation of these bins remains relatively fixed over time. Once bins reach capacity, donations are likely to be left adjacent to the bin, increasing the likelihood that they will be perceived as 'waste' by municipal authorities and the general public alike. As has been discussed, such public perceptions can undermine a charity's primary resource of donations, and charities prefer to avoid these perceptions if possible. Additional bins can be rolled out to locations where and when donations are high (or moved out of low donation areas), but installation of additional infrastructure is both time consuming, expensive, and likely to require negotiations with relevant bodies in advance of any surge in demand.

Rachel identified the period around the annual Christmas holidays to be a period of increased demand for charitable donation. She also claimed that school holidays and public holidays saw their own (smaller) 'peaks' of divestment, based on the quantity of donations received directly into her from individuals, bags left on her shop front overnight, and the deliveries from local bins by her own charity workers.

However, not all charitable donations are received in such a passive manner. Some charitable groups may solicit for donations at certain times, by being more active with their deployment of donation infrastructure. For example, charity groups in Karin's area of Utrecht (Netherlands) would periodically drop large plastic donation bags into her letterbox. The delivery of these bags – a 'material' of sorts – prompted her to re-evaluate what clothing she would like to keep. She would then fill the bag, and leave it for street collection several days later by the local charity groups.

It is unclear what rationales are behind such initiatives, but speculation is possible as to the potential effects that this may have on the demand for donated goods. Firstly, the delivery of bags directly to households may serve to 'smooth out' the demand for charitable donation. If charitable systems are potentially disrupted by peaks in demand - as evidenced by overflowing charity bins, or an excess of store donations – then bags delivered and collected during 'non-peak' periods may reduce the potential for systemic disruption. If these bags prompt households to donate, as is the case for Karin, then bags can be strategically distributed and collected throughout the year in a manner that most suits the charity. Donation bags can thereby be seen as a 'demand management' strategy, which re-orders the temporality of donated goods across time, and 'buffers' the system against potential peaks in demand that may undermine the system as a whole.

Another potential rationale for charity bags being delivered directly to households may be largely the opposite. Instead of smoothing out demand, bags may be seen as a way to capitalise on these same 'peaks' in demand, to ensure that charities are the recipient of as many donated goods as possible. Bags may be delivered at known times of divestment, such as Christmas or public holidays, to prompt households to donate at times that they are most likely to anyway. This synchronises a known practice (donation) with an enhanced infrastructure (bag delivery and collection), and is likely to result in more donations to that particular charitable organisation. This rationale, of course, assumes that the potentially higher peaks in demand can be absorbed by the charitable storage and redistribution system itself. In either case, material divestments by way of charitable donations have can be seen to vary both temporally, with demand fluctuating in ways that are both predictable (Christmas) and unpredictable (global financial crisis), and spatially, particularly in relation to the cultural geography of the donation infrastructure

Thus far, charity groups have primarily been discussed in terms of their capacity to receive goods. However, in order to sustain themselves financially, and to carry out welfare assistance, charity groups rely on the proceeds from the sales of donated goods. While something donated to a particular store may also be sold at that same store, it is more than likely that items will be redistributed in some way. This redistribution, occurring at different scales and for different rationales, is another characteristic of the systems of altruistic divestment.

Rachel (Charity Store Manager, Sydney) claimed that '*established*' stores were the recipients of vast quantities of constant donations, often in excess of what they could sell themselves. Stores were categorised as established primarily as a function of their age – those stores that had maintained a presence in an area over a significant period of time were more widely recognised

amongst the local community, and more likely to have items donated to them. Peter (Charity Distribution Centre Manger, Sydney) argued that this was, in part, due to their physical location within these communities. Established stores were often located in retail strips, close to public transport and main roads. They tended to be accessible by both public and private transport, resulting in a much greater proportion of the local population passing through their proximity in their day-to-day movements. This was in contrast to '*newer*' stores, which struggled to maintain even a base inventory of self-acquired items. Many of these newer stores were located in self-contained shopping centres, or lots that were less central to community hubs. Peter revealed that this was a result of historical property establishment in central locations throughout towns and suburbs. Acquisitions were previously made on the basis of accessibility and centrality to public transport and other shops, whereas new stores were limited in their possibilities for acquiring hi-traffic leasable spaces. As such, these newer stores received less patronage for donated goods, with a culture of donation and re-use yet to be established. This marked disparity in donations between stores has meant that older stores transfer vast quantities of their acquired donations to newer stores. This is done to ensure that all charity stores, regardless of their age or degree of establishment, have a reliable inventory of saleable items.

Once again, the extent to which a particular element is constitutive of practice can be discerned from historical antecedents. In this case, some charity shops have a known and identifiable place in a local community, having established a spatial and cultural presence over longer periods of time than newer shops. The difference then, between established sand newer shops, is one of this elements form. This is important to understand, as it demonstrates how new elements of practice, such as new charity shops themselves, cannot simply be introduced in the same way as one that has been integrated over time.

As a result of this, donated goods are redistributed between stores on criteria related to their saleability as well as their quantity. Shop workers that sort items benefit from experience working at different store locations, as they can make judgements about an individual item's ability to sell in a particular store. Rachel describes how this process happens in her store:

> *'Adele [store worker] has a [mental] map of what our customers will pass [i.e. be interested in], and what [they] won't. It varies big time from store to store... things [clothing] we put out [on display] here we would never have put out at Bankstown.... in Newtown they can sell anything!'* (Rachel, Charity Store Manager, Sydney).

In this case, the charity groups' ability to redirect goods to other outlets based on locally differentiated perceptions of taste and fashion provides further adaptability to the varying demands for charitable donation.

Much of this redistribution is made possible by the recent development of a distribution centre, located in the western suburbs of Sydney. Having this facility has increased the amount of donated inventory that the charity group is able to hold at any one time. This means that any of the aforementioned 'peaks' in donations can be accumulated at the distribution centre while they wait to be sorted and redistributed at a time of lesser demand. In April the redistribution centre was seen to have numerous Christmas toys, decorations, and other paraphernalia being stored at the facility, which had been donated at the start of the year. Peter indicated that these items would be held until the pre-Christmas period, at which time they would be sent out to various stores for sale.

Centralised distribution also offers the potential for individual stores to request certain types of items from the pooled accumulation of the charity as a whole. Instead of relying on their own donations, or those transferred from another store, they were able to draw from a much larger set of items, allowing them to maintain a balanced inventory of varied stock. This is important for the income of stores as a whole, as it allows them to be more competitive with retail stores that sell new items. As Peter says:

> *'We're not in retail. Our main role is to receive all the donations, sort it, and make as much from the excess as we can'.* (Peter, Charity Distribution Centre Manager, Sydney)

By linking each of the 276 charity stores in the state of New South Wales, the centralised distribution centre integrated the redistribution of donated goods. In this way, donation becomes far more systemic, as discrete performances of practice are integrated with each other through this redistribution according to demand – of those buying, selling and divesting goods.

5.5 Charity Shops as a site for intervention in practice

In describing the many ways in which charity groups cope with fluctuations in demand for their services it is apparent that material goods are nevertheless regarded with some degree of scarcity – they are seen a resource that must be allocated appropriately in order to fund their own costs, as well as various welfare initiatives that form part of their charter. However, not all charitable groups share these imperatives to the same degree. This became evident following a discussion

with householder Evelyn, who had previously run a non-profit second hand *'Free Shop'* for several years. She describes how people interacted with the store:

> *'I had to be strict, and say: "Don't bring anything broken". And they didn't. But it was too much! That was the problem. Big mountains to work with... and it was so much, and so good! And yeah, people were happy to take some, but [the] people that brought stuff were more happy. They were more happy to get rid of things than to get them.'* (Evelyn, 35, Utrecht)

Contrary to the perceptions of scarcity among the Australian charities interviewed, donations to Evelyn's store were viewed in terms of their overwhelming abundance. The shop could simply not cope with the sheer volume of goods that were donated to them on a weekly basis. As the shop had very little costs, and few specific welfare obligations, they frequently 'on-donated' items – passing them on to other charity groups to assist in maintaining their own services.

This increasing accumulation of donated items was made all the more remarkable by the fact that items were not sold for a monetary value, but were available for free – the only proviso being that one person could take no more than three items at any one time. Once goods began to accumulate faster than they were being taken, the limit was increased to five, in an attempt to cope with the rising demand for material divestment. The restrictions on the acquisition of donated goods from the 'shop' were made for several reasons. The first was largely practical – to discourage professional traders from on-selling large quantities of items that were donated for charitable purposes. However the second rationale was far more ambitious, attempting to question some of the underlying assumptions of contemporary market economies – namely that the amount of goods that one can acquire is only restricted by the amount of resources (money) one has.

Evelyn claimed that one of the goals of running the store was to *'confront people with their own greed'*. Her husband Tim recalls his experience of the store:

> *'When I went there, it's very confronting. You feel greed coming up... "I want it all!"... and because there's no money involved, it confronts you directly, that you want all these things... It's a good lesson to learn. "Do I want all these things?"'* (Tim, 34, Utrecht)

Here we can begin to see how practices, structured in appropriate ways, may facilitate changes in the outcomes of divestment. The 'Free Shop' provides a contrasting alternative to most other market based forms of exchange. Those donating goods to the shop tended to stay to also browse for potential goods to acquire. The absence of any currency exchange, the sheer quantity and quality of goods available, combined with only a nominal restriction on the number of items

that one can take, provided a destabilising mechanism for people's consumption practices. Evelyn suggested that when people witness the overwhelming abundance of donated goods in the shop, they may think more critically about their own divestment (and acquisition) practices.

Meanings of donating as 'doing good', or 'helping someone out', are likely to be held when the fate of donated material goods is unknown to those divesting them. However, these assumptions may not hold true if a charity is overburdened with goods, or, as previously discussed, there are competing thresholds of value that lead items to be discarded rather than reused by those in need. Donation practices can, particularly in comparatively wealthy countries such as the Netherlands and Australia, serve as a palliative for unwanted things when divestment systems shade or obscure the real world effects of the practice. In this way, practices of donation may share elements of practice with simply 'getting rid of' durable goods – a practice to be discussed in Chapter 7. Different forms of donation clearly vary in this respect. Charity bins devour donations with little feedback given to the user – a function of their material construction and the broader urban landscape in which they reside. On the other hand, donating directly to Evelyn's unique 'Free Shop' provides concurrent information about the donation practices of others, due to the presence of items in the shop, and the interactions with staff and other donators.

There are several key points to note regarding the elements of donation practices. 'Meanings' concerning the preservation of value, and assisting others appear to be broad 'scale', as evidenced by household interviews in both Netherlands and Australia. Charity bins in their present 'form', while they may be perceived by some charities as a 'high-intensity' material infrastructure to the donation process, are not essential. Direct donation offers alternative forms of practice that shift 'meanings' of donation to be more engaging, and more transparent for those involved. This can also be achieved through specific rules, such as the limit on item acquisition at Evelyn's shop that were adjusted to suit the circumstances of their donation stockpile. Rules may also be broader in scale, such as the illegality of dumping that may direct additional unwanted objects to charities as a more legal form of divestment.

5.6 Passing-on

Donation is not the only form of divestment where there is a real or perceived benefit to others. Within the system of altruistic divestment lies another set of practices, cantered on the concept of 'passing-on'. As discussed, charitable meanings, competencies, materials and rules mediate

donation practices significantly. The likelihood that someone will derive use out of a donated good is dependent not only on the good itself, but the socio-technical systems in place to redistribute that good for charitable purposes; if such systems are absent or deficient, then altruistic divestment may simply amount to the generation of waste. In contrast, the practices of 'passing-on' represent more direct means of divesting goods altruistically that do not involve such socio-technical systems of redistribution and allocation.

In cases of divestment where goods retain a perceivable use-value, the practice of 'passing-on' can be used to redistribute these goods for at least partially altruistic purposes. Items passed on to others are seen to no longer serve the needs of the divestor and, through direct or third party communication, an arrangement is made to transfer possession without any significant monetary exchange. As is the case with practices of donating, there is often a desire on the behalf of the divestor to see the item(s) used, and to thereby satisfy a particular need, or set of needs, of the recipient.

Karin, who had recently fallen pregnant and was subsequently inundated with offers of baby-related clothing and equipment by friends and acquaintances, described practices of 'passing-on':

> *'There's a lot of trade that goes on in the pregnancy area. Whenever I tell someone I'm pregnant they say "Oh, do you need things?", because they have clothes, or a cot, or a bed for later on. Anything – I can get anything borrowed. And the interesting thing is they don't want them back. They say just "Pass them on to the next person you meet who's pregnant".'* (Karin, 39, Utrecht)

The passing-on of baby-related items is illustrative of a broader point about this type of exchange that pertains to the subject-object relation. Often it is the changing circumstances of the owner that renders an object unusable, rather than any particular defect or degradation inherent to the object itself. Clothes may become torn or soiled, toys may break, and games may lose their pieces, and thereby become unwanted. Yet, as Karin experienced, often it is simply that the objects become irrelevant to their owners. Families that no longer have babies, no longer have a need for baby 'stuff'. Yet they are acutely aware of the needs of families with newborns, having been through the process of acquiring baby-related items themselves. Thus, the practice of passing-on is carried out with significant attention devoted to the needs of those who are receiving.

While it may be difficult to describe the precise time at which the subject-object relation realigns, there are clearly points at which a rapid transition is most likely. These tend to occur around what shall herein be referred to as 'junctures' – events or changes in the day-to-day lived experiences of people – that precipitate changes in practices. Examples of such events may be a pregnancy, separation from a partner or spouse, new employment, or changes to one's accommodation. Junctures hold a similar meaning to the concept of 'moments of change' (NEF 2011). This report discusses how junctures can be harnessed as opportunities for facilitating behavioural change toward sustainability, as they are times when habits are broken, and new routines are made in adapting to changing circumstances. The term 'junctures', rather than moments of change, more accurately captures the nature of social practices as proceeding along particular trajectories, entrenched by repetition and precedent. Junctures represent opportunities to forge new paths of practice, and the divestment of material goods help to constitute these changes[19].

The lived experiences of Michael and Saskia reflect how these junctures are dealt with, and the practices they permit. Michael (51, Sydney) had recently accepted an offer of employment overseas. He, his wife (50, Sydney), and their three dependent children were in the midst of the packing for their new life when they were interviewed. Amongst the many decisions about what to take with them, and what to leave behind, was a project of photographing and cataloguing a range of items that they valued, but could not justify keeping. Books, clothing, furniture, appliances and electronics were to be placed on a website, which was intended to allow their extended family to browse for items that they may wish to have. It was thought that family and close friends should have first preference for many of these things, as they preferred passing these items on to loved ones, rather than '*strangers*'.

As with the passing-on of baby related items, Michael and Saskia and their children were at an obvious life juncture. While some of their daily routines may have survived the move, their resolve to transport their possessions in only one shipping container meant that many objects had to be jettisoned, though no deterioration in the objects themselves had occurred. There were some *'hard decisions that had to be made'*, as Michael put it. However, in being willing to transfer ownership of many of their possessions to family, they were able to pass on many of the things they cared about, to people they likewise cared about. Interestingly, Penny (63, Sydney) had

[19] Retail companies have similarly identified junctures, such as the early stages of pregnancy, as times when new acquisition habits and practices are formed. Marketing initiatives can be directed to consumers at these times, at which they are thought to be particularly open to changes in brand loyalties. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/magazine/shopping-habits.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 accessed on 15/03/2012

engaged in a very similar within-family photo mailing following another 'juncture' – the rationalisation of the family estate following her mother's death – reiterating the sentiment that she would *'rather it went to family than strangers'*.

So far, passing-on has been characterised as primarily reactive, with the practice largely being carried out as events demand it. However, passing-on may also be planned for, to a greater or lesser extent. Certain items may be kept 'just in case' a family member or friend finds themselves requiring them. Frank (33, Amsterdam), for instance, doesn't throw away his old mobile phones because of the likelihood that one of his friends will lose theirs at some point, and may email him needing to borrow a spare. He claims to have '*sent that email before, as well'*, suggesting that the experience of being the beneficiary of objects passed on (even temporarily), was one worth repeating for others in similar circumstances. In Frank's case, this seems to be just one way in which friendships are maintained; through non-monetary exchanges of goods that are closely aligned to satisfaction of the material needs of those people.

The role that passing-on of goods plays in the sociality of individuals also appears in other settings, such as the family. Monica suggested that being attuned to the material needs of her siblings and other relatives is part of what 'being family' is:

> *'…within a family, you know if someone is looking for a couch - because it's my family. At the moment my brother shares a house, and he's in a very little room, and he doesn't have any furniture apart from a bed. So I would know that he's looking for a couch.' (Monica,* 34, Arnhem)

While Monica would not necessarily see herself as the one who would pass a couch onto her brother, she would attempt to 'match' different peoples needs to acquire and divest things if such a situation presented itself. She recalled visiting a friend who was lamenting the state of her old couch – how worn and unfashionable it was – only to hear other friends the following week despair at the price of new couches for their yet to be furnished apartment. As it happened, these two parties were previously acquainted, but did not know each other's circumstances well enough to form an exchange. Only after Monica 'matched' them in this context was the couch passed on.

Trent (34, Amsterdam) and Kerry (72, Sydney) frequently engaged in similar practices for passing-on things to friends and family members. However, unlike Monica, they both actively sourced items that were perceived to be worthwhile by gleaning from kerbsides. Trent was often *'on the lookout'* for things that could be of use to his friends, who were frequently in need of

furnishings for the often-cramped living arrangements in Amsterdam's urban environment. This was facilitated by Trent's varied work schedule, where he was contracted to various jobs throughout the city, enabling him to cycle through many different neighbourhoods as part of his daily commute. Likewise, Kerry would scour the kerbside collections on his way to and from the shops on his electric mobility scooter. Retired and struggling to walk outside the house, Kerry had nevertheless collected an assortment of objects including clocks, mirrors, tools and children's toys. He would fix or clean them as they required, passing them on to those family and friends whom he thought would get the most benefit from them.

The structure of this research draws a distinction between altruistic divestment (Chapter 5) and return-oriented divestment (Chapter 6). This is based on a grounded theory approach to the research, where these emerged as largely distinct forms of divestment, based on different understandings and relying on divergent skills and infrastructures. However, just as there appears to be some overlap between 'donation' and 'ridding', there is also some commonality in the practices of passing-on things altruistically, and selling things in order to gain a return.

John (21, Amsterdam), for instance, sourced several items of furniture for his student accommodation from Tim, a member of his sporting team who was moving house at the same time John was moving in. John bought these items from Tim, but since they were friends, and Tim needed to divest himself of the items quickly, they were sold *'so cheap[ly]'* that John viewed the monetary transaction to be token. Knowing how small a price he had to pay for them in the first place meant that he viewed these items as closer to being passed on to him than sold. As such, he would be unlikely to try to sell them for any more when he no longer needed them, despite the obvious higher market value for those particular items. Instead, John would prefer to pass them on himself, as he *'favoured his friends, over getting money from strangers'*.

The practice of passing-on has been described here as largely informal and highly dependent on existing social relations – indeed, at least partially constitutive of those relations. Passing things on altruistically can contribute to the building, and maintenance, of social capital within a community – characterised by the ability of a group of people to engage civically in matters that are of mutual benefit (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Passing-on social actors to assist in fulfilling the material needs of others that they are already acquainted with – through family, friendship, or through a mutual connection that can 'match' someone's needs to specific items being divested.

In this way, passing-on has far less institutional rules and material infrastructure requirements than other forms of altruistic divestment, such as charitable donations. Because exchange is made directly between participants, potentially with a mutually known third party 'matcher', the possibility for distancing is reduced since the nature of the practice involves recipients of the goods being known by those divesting them. Of course, objects may be discarded if they are subsequently found to not be appropriate for use. In this case, recipients may not wish to threaten an existing relationship by making the divestor aware of this occurrence.

In the absence of any significant institutionalised rules, passing-on is far more contingent on the 'meanings' and 'competencies' of those directly involved in the exchanges. In passing-on, the 'meanings' of the practices are crucial, as they can express notions of generosity, reciprocity, solidarity and friendship. Meanings about the status of used goods are also important to passing-on. Those participating in the practice must be open to accepting used items from others and willing to forgo any potential perceived stigma associated with owning second hand goods. While none of the participants interviewed for this research indicated that this would prevent them from passing things on, or receiving them, representatives from charities suggested that second hand ownership of things was still associated with poverty and dependence in certain contexts. In other words, the scale of these meanings is by no means universal. As the interviews demonstrate, empathy, as a form of 'competence' allows someone to understand the needs (and junctures) of others, and is perhaps the most crucial element of passing-on. Of course, the 'material' means to transfer possession of the goods themselves is sometimes necessary; access to a car or trailer may be necessary in the case of heavy or bulky goods. Yet these elements are only likely to come into consideration once some initiation has been made to enable the passing-on to occur.

5.7 'Passing-on' to the known unknown

The social practice of passing-on, and the system of altruistic divestment more generally, is designed to satisfy the needs of others. By increasing the life of goods through subsequent 'careers of use', the overall consumption of resources is reduced. Passing-on has thus far been characterised as a practice that lacks substantial systemic organisation or infrastructure, made possible by capitalising on existing social bonds, at specific junctures when someone's needs for divesting an object can be matched to another's needs for acquiring that same object. The possibilities for successful passing-on would thus appear to be limited to existing acquaintances -

or at most, with an intermediary 'matcher'. However, there are initiatives that have attempted to promote this type of divestment and acquisition for a broader audience.

One of the crucial aspects to passing-on is communication between those divesting and those acquiring. In the past, communication between two interested parties was largely reliant on existing acquaintance, with little possibility for passing-on outside of these relationships. Community notice boards and newspaper classifieds offered limited potential for passing-on, often with a specific declaration that items were being given 'for free', as opposed to being sold for a cost.

The advent of online communication, and specifically, peer-to-peer channels for exchanging goods and services, has collapsed erstwhile limitations of passing-on as a social practice. Botsman (2010) argues that new 'collaborative' forms of consumption are emerging as a result of these technologies, revolutionising the potential for various forms of commerce and sociality:

> We are now able to match 'haves' with 'wants' online, reducing geographical boundaries. This has the potential to create an opportunity for efficient exchanges and generates the social glue to build trust between strangers, eliminating the need for middlemen and bureaucratic barriers. (Botsman 2010)

The implications of such a transformation are evident for the practice of passing-on material goods, described above. Online exchange forums have the potential to substantially extend the *scale* and scope of the 'audience' for goods to be passed-on.

There are many forums designed to facilitate the direct exchange of goods and services between individuals[20]. For the purposes of this analysis, reference is made to the one that is most closely aligned to the social practice of passing-on: 'Freecycle'. Freecycle is an online forum for exchanging goods at no cost:

> Our mission is to build a worldwide gifting movement that reduces waste, saves precious resources & eases the burden on our landfills while enabling our members to benefit from the strength of a larger community. [21]

This closely parallels the characteristics of the social practice of passing-on, in its ability of this type of divestment to match needs with wants, reduce waste, and also to strengthen social bonds

[20] See http://www.collaborativeconsumption.com/the-movement/cc_antenna/ for a comprehensive list

[21] http://www.freecycle.org/about/missionstatement accessed on 20/5/2011

in doing so. The service itself is searchable by item type and location, with item listings offering a basic description and an indication of whether it is being 'offered' (divested) or 'wanted'. Goods are traded on a first come first served basis, with transport or pick-up arranged between the two parties. As with more informal examples of passing-on, the needs of both divestor and acquirer are met in the exchange. Freecycle merely acts as a facilitator of divestment and passing-on, rather than a director of it. The potential for goods to be redirected in ways unknown to the divestor (as was the case for charitable divestment; Section 5.4) is neutralised, as the exchange functions on a peer-to-peer basis. In this way, Freecycle demonstrates how emerging online communication can extend the scope of the practice of passing-on to those outside one's immediate social context. With a broader 'audience' for divested material goods, there is increased possibility of re-use by another party.

The peer-to-peer nature of Freecycle's passing-on, however, presents several key drawbacks when compared to the practices for charitable divestment. There is little scope for organised redistribution beyond the level of each individual exchange. Unlike a charity with a centralised distribution centre and numerous store outlets, Freecycle has an inherent inability to cope with peaks in demand for similar types of goods. Despite there being no practical limit to the amount of items able to be offered at any one time, the success of the system relies on a commensurate number of recipients for those items. If an item is not passed on by a certain time – because it faces competition from other similar items, or no recipients can be found – then it is likely that someone will resort to other means of divestment. The only method for the Freecycle system to absorb such peaks in demand would be private storage of unwanted goods, until such a time that they could be posted with more success in divestment. While it is possible for divestment to be delayed somewhat, the tolerance for unwanted goods may also be short-lived, particularly if certain life junctures make continued possession difficult.

The final distinction between systems for charitable donation and for passing-on relates to the needs that are being satisfied by each form of divestment. Charitable groups, by their nature, exist to assist people in satisfying their most basic needs. In redistributing divested material goods, charities have a guiding principle that prioritises essential needs over peripheral needs or wants. Charitable donation then, offers the greatest potential for achieving social justice, by ensuring that divested goods are channelled to those most in need. Passing-on, on the other hand, offers an entirely different rationale for altruistic divestment. Whether goods are passed on through existing acquaintances or through a peer-to-peer forum such as Freecycle, there is far less consideration of the necessity that a divested good fulfils for a recipient. Because exchanges

occur on a first come – first served basis, there is little way of distinguishing how necessary an object is to one person's livelihood over another's. Divestors can make such judgments if more than one known party is a potential recipient, but this ability diminishes in the context of a broad online network of 'wants'. Items passed-on are generally offered to those who indicate some degree of need, but priority is otherwise accorded merely to timely presence. Those known to the divestor will otherwise be prioritised over the unknown, regardless of who has the greater need.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter describes a set of practices referred to as altruistic divestment. The overriding 'meanings' associated with this system is to ensure that the recipient will derive some benefit from the goods themselves. Divesting oneself of items that still hold some use value offers the opportunity to help others, whilst also reducing the waste created by unwanted goods entering the waste stream. The elements within this system of practice are overwhelmingly devoted to these ends. These meanings have a broad 'scale', with most interview participants citing concern for material wellbeing of others as a relevant factor to the way they chose to divest them. Based on the current analysis, two distinct sub-systems that comprise different dynamics of social practice have been identified: charitable 'donation', and 'passing-on'.

Systems of practice for charitable donation are characterised by a higher level of centralised bureaucracy and rationalised distribution. They offer the potential to absorb unpredictable 'trajectories' of material demand, through the use of pro-active prompts for divestment (such as donation bags), as well as an ability to store and redistribute goods as they see fit. This allows charitable groups to ensure that material goods are allocated in a manner that accord with the basic needs of people, as well as ensuring their own ongoing viability from the proceeds of sales.

As a result of this level of redistribution, individual goods donated through these channels are often difficult to trace to their destination. While charities aim for re-use of donated items, a large proportion of the material received is disposed of, or used for lower value purposes. However, certain configurations of charitable donation offer increased transparency, to the point that existing practices may be disrupted. Evelyn's 'Free Shop' provided highly visible normative feedback regarding the abundance of donations. By reducing the extent to which donated goods are distanced from consumers, the real world effects of divestment practices become more apparent. New information about the 'post-ownership' life of goods may have the potential to

change 'meanings' around donation in the same way that knowledge of supply chains do for product acquisition.

Practices of passing-on are far more streamlined in their ability to channel divested goods to known recipients. The peer-to-peer nature of passing-on eliminates much of the redistribution inherent to charitable networks. In divesting something, the immediate fate of an item may be known directly by the user, as they have participated in the exchange with the recipient. Such simplicity, however, comes at a cost. Passing-on proves useful in circumstances when there is a balance in demand between 'haves' and 'wants'; between divestors and recipients. Once a surge in demand for divestment occurs, either overall or for a specific type of item, there is little means to deal with excess goods. Furthermore, often items are allocated on the basis of circumstance rather than necessity. While goods may satisfy certain needs, passing-on often misses opportunities for achieving social justice through deliberate redistribution of divested goods.

Altruistic divestment practices, while not necessarily undertaken on a day-to-day basis, nevertheless form part of the system of practices that constitute everyday life. As several participants showed, passing-on is both a way of divesting objects as well as forming or reinforcing existing social bonds. As a system, altruistic divestment incorporates a range of elements that can script particular practices in ways that go beyond the motivations of individual actors. Charity bins, bags, sorting facilities, retail stores, urban landscapes, online exchange forums – these all play a role in steering different material goods toward particular recipients. The system is characterised by formal institutions, such as charities, as well as informal peer-to-peer exchange. These each have their own dynamics and capabilities when it comes to the redistribution of goods, able to fulfil different roles according to the type of divestment carried out.

Clearly, altruistic divestment holds significant opportunities for sustainable consumption practices. Many of the 'meanings' and 'competencies' associated with this system of practices, such as the preservation of material use value, are consistent with forms of consumption that are less resource intensive. The overwhelming focus on the re-use of products in altruistic divestment suggests that these practices offer viable alternatives for policymakers seeking to describe more sustainable lifestyles.

Chapter 6

Return Oriented Divestment: Selling

6.1 Introduction

Divestment practices are enacted when there is a realignment of the subject-object relation, with these practices both enabled and constrained by the configuration of the elements of meanings, materials, competencies and rules present. Within these constraints, there is competition for practitioners, or carriers between the possible practices of divestment. The outcome of this competition is influenced by the scale, intensity, trajectory and form of the four elements of practices. Practices of retainment (Chapter 4) are characterised by elements that facilitate continued possession of an object rather than its divestment. Practices of donating and passing-on (Chapter 5) are characterised by altruistically oriented meanings, with supporting competencies, materials and rules that channel divested goods to others for little or no cost. This chapter aims to investigate yet another set of divestment practices, those of selling, primarily characterised by return-oriented meanings that direct goods in ways that allow those divesting them to obtain some monetary value for the goods.

The obvious distinction between selling goods and other forms of material divestment, such as altruistic divestment and retainment, is the characteristic of having money exchanged in the process. Where the owner perceives some remaining exchange value or use value, they may be sold. In doing this, objects return to the commodity status that they previously had prior to their acquisition (Kopytoff 1986, p. 65). Of course, if the benefits of selling are perceived to be outweighed by the costs or time consumed in selling, the item may also be disposed of – a practice addressed in the latter part of Chapter 7.

While the practices of one manner of selling goods – that of periodic car-boot sales – have been researched ethnographically (Gregson & Crewe 2003), the participants interviewed here did not sell goods in this way, the focus of the discussion herein will be directed towards other specific practices of selling encountered: classified and online selling, auction houses, garage sales and an annual flea market. Some of these have been the subjects of substantial transitions in practice, a theme that underscores this chapter.

6.2 From classified to online selling

Social practices cannot simply appear on the scene of everyday life as fully formed entities. As Shove et al. (2012, p.32) argue, "new practices involve novel combinations of new or existing elements". There is always a transfer of at least some elements from past practices, which are then incorporated in different arrangements. The emergence and ongoing existence of practices, therefore, depends utterly on the requisite configuration of elements that exists. Yet the reverse is also the case: "elements are nothing unless integrated in practice…" (Shove et al. 2012, p. 62). 'Meanings', for example, must be attached to carriers that are capable of acknowledging or expressing them. Practices and their constituent elements are, therefore, two sides of the same coin - co-dependent for dynamics of transition or relative stability.

The dynamics of practice take many forms. Processes of change may be characterised, for example, by a practice of subdivision, as practitioners make distinctions between sub-practices within a practice as a whole. Cycling is an example of this type of division, as one can now identify track cycling, road cycling, mountain biking, BMX riding, among others, as distinct practices existing within the broader 'original' practice. These practices share some elements in common: handlebars, two wheels, balance, pedalling (i.e high intensity elements), while also maintaining elements of their own.

Practices may also attach to themselves new meanings, competencies, and materials in order to create a new practice that can exist alongside the original, without necessarily being considered a 'sub-type' of that original practice. Shove et al. (2012), for instance, cite the example of aspects of skiing, surfing and skateboarding, as converging to produce snowboarding. They argue that snowboarding did not descend from any one of these practices, and likely recruited carriers from all three, as well as new participants. This represents a type of dynamic of convergence, where practices meet but do not replace one another. Finally, evolutions in practice may also largely replace past practices, capturing sufficient transferring recruits such that the past practice ceases to be carried out in any significant way. This dynamic is characterised not merely by the adoption of new elements, but by the severing of links with past elements (Shove et al. 2008). This is often evident with transitions based on technological innovation, which, as will be demonstrated, can be particularly disruptive to existing practices.

Changes of this sort are evident in the practice of the selling of household goods. Newspaper and magazine classifieds, along with community message boards, were the common way of reaching potential buyers in the past. Objects for sale were generally grouped in classified advertisements according to their product type, and buyers were required to browse all available

objects manually in search of their desired purchase. Advertisements stated basic information about the object being sold, its offering price, and contact details for the seller, but little more. While these forms of classified advertising and selling still exist in media specific to particular practices, they are rapidly being replaced by the practices of online selling.

The most prominent Australian newspaper solely devoted to the selling and buying of second hand goods, the Trading Post, started publication in 1986. In 1996 an accompanying website was introduced, signifying the growing trend of online trading. As of 2009 it ceased all print publication, citing the declining popularity of the newspaper in favour of online advertisement[22]. The trading post website continues to be used by buyers and sellers, however it now has many competitors that were not present in times past. A similar transition can be seen in the practice of second hand goods stores. Used-goods trader 'Cash Converters', established in 1984, now has a parallel online presence to supplement its bricks-and-mortar sales[23]. In many ways, the transitions here are analogous to the present disruptions to traditional newspaper based media.

Household selling of material goods has undergone a rapid transition in practice in recent years, primarily reflecting the rise of online communication and e-commerce. A clear trajectory of growth in these technologies, and the practices they enable, has mean that their scale has burgeoned in the context of selling divested goods. This section traces how the practice of selling household goods has shifted, and discusses how it is carried out today.

The most popular avenues for selling household goods currently include web-based exchange sites such as eBay, Gumtree, Craigslist and Maarktplaats ("Marketplace") in the Dutch context. Items are posted according to different criteria, depending on the particular website being used. They may be posted at a fixed asking price, mimicking traditional classified posting where a seller wishes to obtain a certain return. Indications of price flexibility can also be advertised ('price negotiable', 'or near offer'), potentially signalling a stronger desire to be rid of the object than to achieve a specific price for the sale. Alternatively, goods may be posted in an auction format, where buyers engage in open bidding for the item until a specified end time is reached. Items may also be sold in a combination of these two formats, where they are offered with a price to purchase outright, alongside an open auction.

Newspaper or magazine classified sale advertisements were usually posted with minimal detail. This was largely a function of the cost required to print large and detailed advertisements,

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[22] http://www.tradingpostaustralia.net/ accessed 12/09/2010
[23] http://cashconverters.com.au/aboutus/ accessed on 15/03/2011

as expensive advertisements could negate the return from all but the most valuable sales. Thus, the more extensive availability of online advertising 'space' has increased expectations of what an advertisement must include. Along with the type of object, desired price, and sale location, online sales are often expected to include photographs of the sale item. This expectation has come about in concert with the rise and democratisation of the practice of digital photography, as the necessary materials (cameras, memory cards, photo management software) have been acquired and used by larger proportions of social actors. Competition has been further intensified by the aggregation of items in the viewable digital online 'space'. As online sales can be drawn from a much larger geographical area than a local community paper or message board, and are often selling to a nationwide or worldwide market, competition is undoubtedly more pronounced. Such broad bodies of potential purchasers also greatly increases the probability of a divestor of a more specialised product finding someone else interested in such specialised goods.

With photographs providing unparalleled detail about an item's appearance and condition, the ability to prepare and present items for sale becomes another valuable competence for selling. Objects may be cleaned and repaired to be more attractive to potential buyers; however this is not the only dynamic of their preparation. While something is more likely to be sold if it is photographed favourably, defects may also be deliberately shown to indicate that a seller is not trying to mislead a potential buyer. This element of trust between participants in online selling is crucial to the ongoing practice (Botsman & Rogers 2010).

Some trading sites promote additional means to establish and maintain trust between participants. Systems such as eBay's 'feedback' allow buyers and sellers to rate other users with whom they have traded in terms of their favourability. In this way, a user can generate a reputation as to their trustworthiness, based on the nature of past transactions. The establishment and maintenance of this reputation, a competence in itself, can be crucial to ongoing divestment through selling, as buyers may be wary of purchasing items from unfavoured users, particularly because these transactions may take place without the seller and buyer ever making direct contact. A lack of trust may result in an unwillingness to purchase, or a general lower price paid for items from sellers without a positive online reputation (Resnick et al. 2006). This suggests that mechanisms for establishing and evaluating reputation are high intensity elements in the practice of online selling where buyers and sellers do not make direct contact.

Selling items in this way can also demand that sellers develop a more sophisticated level of knowledge about the product. Conveying information about the object's condition to prospective buyers is assisted by photographs, but written descriptions are still required. This

may be relatively straight forward, but objects that are perceived as 'antique' or 'collectible' often require more detailed grading of a products condition. Vintage toys, for example, have up to six condition grades, which also refer to approximations of devaluation from 'mint' condition'[24]. Specific object categories may possess classifications that are only known to those experienced in an object's field. An item's value may also be dictated by meanings regarding its rarity, where even more sophisticated competence is required to assess its market value. Competencies for assessing the value of such objects exist in the form of professional assessors or handbooks, however these may be expensive and give conflicting information. These various elements of practice suggest that selling is a more complex practice than it may otherwise appear. Individual enactments of practice add further detail, demonstrating rationales and procedures that may not be intuited unless they are encountered directly.

Nathan (25, Wollongong) is a bike enthusiast, who has practiced various forms of cycling since his childhood. His evolving cycling practices demand an ongoing throughput of bicycle equipment, from BMX riding as a teenager, to competitive cross country mountain biking, downhill riding, and his current enjoyment of fitness-focused road cycling. Nathan has become adept at buying and selling bicycle frames and components to suit his current practices. He can easily identify *'bargains'* if they appear on line, and is quick to purchase them even if they are not useful to him in their entirety. His proficiency at bike maintenance allows him to swap components out, to build complete bikes from parts that he acquires '*on the cheap'*, and to re-sell complete ensembles, often for a profitable return. His knowledge gained from online bike trading means that he is confident at selling other unwanted items, such as old computers and unwanted furniture.

While the rise of online markets would suggest that they have a relatively low barrier to participation, many of the competencies discussed above are based on skills for interaction with information technology and a general familiarity with online navigation. It is unsurprising then, that younger participants tended to engage in this form of direct selling more so than the elderly. Wariness about deception, difficulty with set-up conditions, and a general lack of procedural experience were clear barriers to participation in online selling for older people.

These deficits in practical knowledge are not insurmountable however. Jeff (78, Sydney) lacked many of the skills for navigating online services until his son assisted him in setting up his personal computer for video conferencing while he was travelling overseas. Having become confident in the basic skills for online navigation, he sought his son's advice for selling some

[24] http://reviews.ebay.com/Vintage-Toys-Grading-System?ugid=10000000009402940

excess garden tools that were cluttering his shed. These were surplus to his immediate needs, but he felt that someone should '*get good use out of them*', since he had maintained them well over the years. His son walked him through the practice of online selling, clarifying his reservations about seller feedback, the bidding process, and secure payment. Having overcome those initial barriers to selling, Jeff was able to successfully divest his tools for a modest return.

Selling is unique amongst divestment practices in that sellers have expectations placed upon them by recipients of the exchanged goods. These expectations are largely absent in the case of donation, since nothing is expected in return. In order to sell an item, a divestor must persuade a recipient to purchase it. If the good is being sold on an open market with similar goods being offered, the seller must attempt to distinguish it in some way from others.

This section has demonstrated how the practice of selling through classified advertising has largely transitioned to online selling. This is not a mere transfer of participants from one vehicle for divestment to another. The migration to new online technologies has been accompanied by a host of new elements that bear only partial resemblance to the practices of the past. Changing expectations regarding the visibility of sale items, flexible pricing arrangements, and mechanisms for establishing trust between participants have likely contributed to the observed rise in recruitment. This is not to say that online markets are the sole sites for the practice of selling goods. Other forms of the practice exist, fulfilling particular gaps that online selling is yet to, or simply is unable to fill.

6.3 Auction Houses

Despite the growth of direct online sales from individual practitioners, selling is not always undertaken directly by those divesting items. In some cases, particularly where someone is intending to sell many items at once, goods may be sold by-proxy. This involves paying another party, usually an auction house or pawn broker, to sell your unwanted goods for a nominal fee, or proportion of the final sale price. This suits situations where people come to be in possession of many more goods than usual, such as inheriting estates from deceased relatives. This 'outsourced' form of selling removes some of the perceived burden of responsibility that people may have for selling goods, particularly if they lack some of the competencies discussed in the last section.

Penny recently had her elderly father pass away, and subsequently had the responsibility of divesting and redistributing his possessions. Aside from the grief of losing her father, she was uncomfortable at the prospect of trying to sell every individual piece of furniture and ornament

herself – particularly given that many of the items were of exceptional quality but difficult to put a monetary value on. She was uneasy about the prospect of selling them on eBay, since they may end up being sold for next to nothing. When a friend suggested that she take them to an auction house for sale, she was relieved: *'It meant that they would have a better chance at going to a good home'.* (Penny, 63, Sydney)

In Penny's case, the monetary return was not the sole motivator for selling the goods. Penny felt a responsibility to her father to steward his possessions in a manner that was becoming of their value. Hardwood furniture, silver utensils and china crockery were items whose materials and craftsmanship were especially worthy of the same care and respect that her father gave them. With a comparatively large market of patrons (including final purchasers and dealers), Penny believed that the auction house provided a strong likelihood that the high quality items would be purchased for a price indicative of their value. Items were unlikely to be undervalued in the way that an individual online sale might, since the company held dedicated auctions for specific types of items – furniture, jewellery, paintings, and many others.

Auction houses[25] such as these sell large amounts of goods on a weekly basis, sourced from many different individual divestors. Items that cannot be sold above a specified reserve price the first time are auctioned on several more occasions before being rendered unsellable, and returned to their owners or gotten rid of in some other manner. The company also possesses relevant competence in the form of appraisals, indicating whether or not an item is sale worthy or whether another form of divestment is more appropriate.

In Chapter 5, it was argued that the ability to store donated items and redistribute them according to demand was a characteristic that defined large charity organisations. This increased the likelihood that a donated good would find a suitable owner if one could not be found initially, as they could be reallocated to different locations or retained until a later date. In many ways, auction houses serve a similar role. They function as aggregators of individual divestment practices, taking dispersed distributions of sellable goods and channelling them into concentrated times and spaces. Auctions can be held over time in the auction house's storage space, and made available at periodic intervals that attract likely buyers. In this way individual divestment practices become co-localised as 'events', which, as we will see in the practice of garage sales (Section 6.4) and gleaning from bulk waste collections (Chapter 7), can change the nature of the practice, as well as the cultural presence of divestment.

[25] For an example see http://rkta.com.au/auctions/about-our-auctions/ accessed on 12/9/2011

6.4 Garage Sales

Selling practices have been subject to relatively rapid trajectories of change, exemplified by the evolution of the practice from one conducted via community message boards and newspaper classifieds to online selling .as information technology and Internet based communication have become increasingly integrated into daily life. Personal divestment through selling is traceable to much earlier forms of practice, but the scale and intensity of the present online practices, and the different arrangement of elements, means they are distinct and discrete forms of selling in themselves. Another practice that shares this characteristic of transition and expansion, albeit to a lesser degree, is the practice of holding garage sales.

Garage sales have been a cultural fixture of the Australian suburban landscape for some time. Handbooks of how to go about holding garage sales in the past can reveal the elements of earlier iterations of the practice. Rofe's *Have a Garage Sale and Make Some Money* (2000) demonstrates many of the characteristics of garage sale practice as it existed prior to the mainstreaming of online communication and sales. Practitioners are instructed to place advertisements in the newspaper, on notice boards at the local shops, and via letterbox drops and street signage. Advertising should specify the type of sale, suburb, address, day, date, time, and any particular items of interest to be sold (Rofe 2000).

The handbook also gives advice on how to price one's goods, advising sellers to keep items cheap:

> I sell a lot of things at 50 cents rather than actually giving things away for free. Sometimes people like to give you at least something, just to make it seem like a bit of a business transaction. (ibid, p.60)

This suggests that while these events are undoubtedly 'sales', the relatively small price of many goods reflects less of a desire to explicitly make money than with individual or online sales. Garage sales are often seen as a way to 'clean out' the domestic space, whilst recouping some of the costs of those goods at the same time. Rofe points out that she placed leftover items on the kerbside with a 'free' sign, in a divestment practice reminiscent of 'leaving-out', to be discussed in Chapter 7. Many of these competencies for holding garage sales can still be recognised in contemporary practices.

Ross (67) and Madeline (66) had recently made the decision to move to a smaller unit nearby in the northern suburbs of Sydney. They had made this decision on the basis that their children had recently left home *'for the last time'* and that their house was simply too large to justify their continued habitation:

'It just feels empty with the two of us here. When you're got three kids running around then you don't notice… but it's quite an old house, and we just have so many rooms that we don't even use anymore.' (Madeline, 66, Sydney)

When a new unit had been purchased, and the decision to '*down-size'* finally materialised, Ross & Madeline decided to hold a garage sale. They attached posters to power poles and street signs in their neighbourhood, and placed a classified advertisement in the local weekly newspaper. They placed large items in their driveway, and smaller items on their front porch, with stickered price tags on each item. Some items were moderately priced, such as books for $1, whilst other more '*precious'* items had more ambitious price points - $50 for a tray-mobile, $70 for a crystal glassware set, and $70 for a lawnmower. The sale on Saturday morning started well, with a few dozen people turning up at the publicised start time of 8:00am. Ross thought that at least some of these were professional traders, looking for items to on sell. They sold some of their additional silverware to these people, but claimed that few other things took people's interest over the course of the morning. They recognised a large proportion of patrons as people from their own street, or that they knew they lived nearby.

The preparation and execution of Ross & Madeline's garage sale appears to be largely typical of weekend garage sales as they have been carried out in the past. The methods of notification were primarily local, unlikely to be seen by those outside their neighbourhood, perhaps with the exception of seasoned traders. As a result, the majority of attendees lived close by, limiting the audience for their sold objects to a small, localised market. Ross & Madeline held their sale independently, with no coordination sought elsewhere. It's timing on a Saturday morning was rationalised on the basis that this would be the time of the week that most people would be likely to attend.

Several local municipal authorities in Sydney, such as Willoughby and Hornsby councils, indicated in the course of being interviewed that they formally recognise the role that garage sales play in divestment, and their potential for material and resource reuse. Individual sales are given publicity and supported through subsidised advertising in the local newspaper, along with providing a list of 'helpful tips' on how to hold a good sale. Some councils with an area-scheduled kerbside bulk waste collection only offer this advertising and support material on the preceding weekends – encouraging households to divest their possessions through garage sales for reuse, rather than into the waste stream.

The 'traditional' form of the Australian garage sale as a more or less isolated, localised and independent event persists to this day. However, similar forms of selling directly from the home are practiced elsewhere in ways that are more social, integrated, and broader in scale. An example of such a practice is the flea market held on Koninginnedag - 'Queens Day' - in the Netherlands, at which I conducted participant observation in April 2010. On this day of the year, residents are permitted, and so tradition has it, to sell unwanted items directly from the front of one's house. This practice has become a cultural fixture in the festivities of a national public holiday, as the sidewalks become crowed with makeshift stalls in the cities and larger towns throughout the country. Those that live outside the cities may also set up temporary stalls in available spaces in the city centre. Concerts, food stalls, road closures and a party atmosphere contribute to the event's notoriety among Dutch residents and tourists alike.

The Queen's Day sales appear to follow a similar trend to garage sales, with professional traders and second hand goods enthusiasts combing the streets earlier in the morning, and more casual buyers perusing stores later in the day. However, as practices of divestment and reuse these markets are temporally concentrated as they are only permitted to occur once per year. This enables a high intensity of practice, as, unlike the traditional Australian garage sale, all practitioners must hold their sales at the same time. For many households that divest goods in this way, goods are retained (stored) to sell on this occasion, rather than trickling out of the home throughout the year. The medium to high-density terrace housing that is so prevalent in the Dutch streetscape also means stalls are in close proximity to one another. These characteristics, of temporal and spatial concentration, result in a veritable flurry of divestment and re-use.

The meanings and rules associated with Queen's Day ensure that practices of divestment by selling and re-use become central to the public consciousness for a brief period of time once a year. With many streetscapes literally taken over by practices normally constrained to market squares and second hand shops, exposure and participation in these forms of divestment and re-use becomes much more widespread. The flea market occurs on a national scale, with more goods divested and exchanged on this single day than any other throughout the year. Estimates of the value of exchanged goods range up to 290 million Euros, with over half of the national population indicating some intention to purchase something on the day[26]. In having this practice so widely participated in, and so closely tied to the festive atmosphere of a national holiday, it seems likely that it is seen as a socially acceptable – and therefore normal, practice; more so than

[26]http://www.ing.nl/nieuws/nieuws_en_persberichten/2011/04/nederlanders_rekenen_op_290_miljoen_op_vrijmarkt.aspx

if sales were scattered, independent, and easily avoided. One of my Dutch interviewees acknowledged this as a widespread practice, although she had not sold anything herself on the day:

> *'Oh yes, it's quite fun to go and see what everyone is selling. It's a good atmosphere – and* ***so Dutch'*** (Karin, 37, Utrecht).

In the establishment of this form of practice as an annual event, the differences between it and the traditional Australian garage sale become apparent. While individual household garage sales in Australia may be numerous, they lack any substantial presence in the public discourse about consumption and waste. Their localised and isolated form gives them little chance to be accepted as appropriate practice by institutions and actors that don't already participate in them. From a systemic point of view, this prevents the practice from exerting influence, at least at a discursive level, to the broader systems of production and consumption.

Recently, however, the configuration of elements of traditional garage sales in Australia has shifted, enabling several innovations in practice that increase their potential as occasions for divestment and reuse. A modest transition in the form of the garage sale is the ability to search for individual sales online, according to location and date[27]. Websites also offer tips and recommendations for good practice, not dissimilar to the handbook cited earlier in this section. This improves the visibility of the practice, extending the potential market for sales to those beyond the local area. However, the majority of the garage sale's characteristics remain intact. Sales are dispersed over time, without any significant cultural presence that might facilitate transitions in practice.

The 'Garage Sale Trail'[28] offers a more ambitious innovation in practice. Whereas garage sales such as Ross and Madeline's had previously been isolated, independent and localised, Garage Sale Trail attempts to re-invent the garage sale into a more social, integrated, and broad scale practice. The establishment of an Australia wide 'garage sale day' on a Saturday April or May coordinates the numerous dispersed enactments of the practice into a temporally specific, cultural *event*. The official website describes the initiative as:

> "… a program that enables the peer-to-peer exchange of assets, resources and money on a hyper local level but with a national scale… [Garage Sale Trail] is about sustainability, creativity, community, and micro-enterprise… a perfect ways to discover treasure, de-

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[27] http://www.egaragesales.com.au/

[28] http://www.garagesaletrail.com.au accessed on 2/05/2012

> clutter, have fun, make money, make a positive contribution and make neighbourhood connections."("Garage Sale Trail" 2012)

Registered participants are given information and promotion material similar to what councils have provided in the past. In coordinating numerous garage sales onto one day, and positioning the initiative as a cultural and community building event, Garage Sale Trail imports many of the elements of practice from the Queen's Day markets in the Netherlands. Simultaneous, nationwide practices of selling goods channel a larger market of potential buyers into a single occasion, and use the occasion as an opportunity for community building.

Those holding sales are encouraged to upload the details to a centralised website, with all the expected details of a traditional sale. Sale locations are then imported into mapping software that allows buyers to see the location of all the sales happening nationwide on the day, as well as integration with mobile device applications such as True Local[29]. This is designed to encourage divestment and re-use by allowing buyers to form a 'trail' of sales that they may attend on the day itself. As with Queen's Day, there is an emphasis on the building of community through these practices, as schools and other groups participated collectively, holding fetes, barbeques and markets on the same day. These too have the effect of establishing a culture of re-use, as garage sales and second-hand shopping gradually become normalised as the practice is carried out over time. In this way, the associated meanings can shift, from a niche practice to something that is more readily practiced by a larger proportion of the population. While it is unclear how many recruits Garage Sale Trail will capture, growth in its initial years from 126 sales in 2010, to 1600 in 2011, to over 7000 in 2012 suggests that it has gone some way to becoming a broadly entrenched cultural practice in Australia[30].

However, this growth has also been highly uneven in the trajectories of its distribution. To use Sydney as an example, registered sales were numerous in the eastern suburbs. This is likely a reflection of Garage Sale Trail's origins in the eastern coastal suburb of Bondi, where it began as a local event before expanding nationwide in subsequent years. Sydney's city, inner west and northern beaches also had a higher concentration of sales, whilst far less abundant on the north shore, northwest, central west, and outer suburban areas. However variation can also be found roughly according to the sponsorship of local municipal authorities, with those local governments that actively supported and promoted the event garnering increased sale registrations. For example, Blacktown Council sponsored the event, and garnered a notably

[29] http://www.truelocal.com.au
[30] www.garagesaletrail.com.au accessed on 9/5/2012

higher concentration of sales than adjacent municipalities[31]. This suggests that a failure to participate in the practice could, at least partially, be the result of a simple lack of awareness of the event rather than households being unwilling or unable to participate. The unevenness in the scale of promotion between local areas is important to note, and potentially more revealing than an overall rate of participation. It indicates that gaps in participation may be susceptible to increase in subsequent years, as the Garage Sale Trail gains prominence in throughout the city.

As annual events as well as social practices, the Garage Sale Trail has yet to achieve the level of cultural ubiquity in Australia that the Queen's Day markets have in the Netherlands. The generally lower density of Australia's urban and suburban living arrangements makes navigating the Garage Sale Trail a sparser and less immersive experience. When considered as an element of practice, the material configuration of the streetscape as venues for garage sales and flea markets does not have the concentration – and hence intensity – that it might otherwise have. With markets more dispersed, buyers must travel further to consult fewer sellers than those packed onto the sidewalks on Queen's Day. It remains to be seen whether the Garage Sale Trail is a practice that can recruit participants in other ways, so as to become a broad scale transition in social divestment practice.

6.5 Conclusion

Domestic divestment practices of selling material goods have transitioned substantially over time, as a result of the rearrangement of elements, and changing characteristics of elements. The materials of online communication (computers, internet connections) and selling networks have broadened in scale and intensity, becoming affordable for more people and more integrated into many aspects of daily life. As competencies for online navigation, bidding, photographing and presenting become established, online selling has become increasingly normalised. Through ongoing enactment, buyer and seller reputations can be established, with sales further entrenched by ensuring their security and mutual benefit. These meanings increasingly legitimise online selling as a practice. The systemic nature of these practices is evidenced by their interconnection with the mainstreaming of online communication technologies, as well as the digitising of photography that both work to facilitate informed exchange.

Auction houses, on the other hand, are relatively stable in the elements of practice. Selling is outsourced to professional auctioneers, who possess the competencies for valuation, appraisal, and item presentation. Material in the form of large storage spaces ensure that items can be kept

[31] www.garagesaletrail.com.au/lga accessed on 9/5/2012

and stored at the appropriate time to ensure the highest return. In allowing auction houses to sell items on behalf of those divesting them, this allows certain meanings to persist, particularly regarding the preservation of value.

In the case of garage sales, practices continue to be carried out in ways that are traditional, whilst others are highly innovative. While garage sales may simply be regarded as broadly isolated and opportunistic occasions to divest, recent coordination in the form of the Garage Sale Trail has integrated meanings of sustainability, festivity, and local community development into the practice. Co-locating garage sales onto one day annually encourages a nation-wide scale of practice, coupled with a high intensity of participation at that particular time. As with online sales, collation of individual sales using the materials of online registration allows for greater awareness of the distribution of garage sales, and potential for reuse. The trajectory of this practice appears to be one of growth, but its long term dynamic and integration as a cultural event remains uncertain.

This chapter discussed several dynamics of practice: subdivision, convergence, and replacement. These terms assist in describing how everyday life changes over time and space in different ways. The practice of online selling is largely replacing traditional classified selling when viewed in the context of material divestment. However, the dynamic of replacement is not inherent to the practice of selling, in the way that the characteristic of exchange of goods and services, is inherent to it. In characterising the practice of online selling as having a dynamic of replacement, this is merely a reflection of the practice as it exists in the overall system of material divestment. Online selling has, for a vast majority of individuals, replaced another form of selling[32]. However, when viewed in the contexts of other systems of practice, 'online selling' may not reflect this particular dynamic.

For instance, when discussed in terms of the practices of selling generally, online selling is more likely to be regarded as an emerging specialisation of the practice, alongside traditional retail selling, and mail order catalogue selling. Alternatively, when discussed in terms of the system of practices around domestic Internet usage, online selling may be also seen as an instance of specialisation, alongside media consumption, social networking, gaming, and research. In this way, how one characterises the dynamics of practice is largely dependent on the system that it is seen to be a part of. Were one to approach the topic of online selling within a different system of practices, it is likely that they would observe a different dynamic of change.

[32] Specialist items may still be sold offline, a practice most likely to occur through a practice specific publication, such as a magazine or newsletter.

This helps to recognise that dynamics of practice can be construed as artefacts of the orientation of the research process, rather than characteristics of the practice that are universally knowable. This suggests that theories of social practice are reflective of 'soft' systems thinking, whereby practices are necessarily perceived in the context of a particular approach, rather than observable universally. Checkland (2000, p. 18) argues for research to incorporate a 'declared worldview', where problems are 'perceived' rather than merely 'exist'. This would allow the dynamics of practices to be understood as functions of particular systems (such as divestment), rather than inherent to the practice itself.

The dynamics of practice for the Garage Sale Trail are also subject to competing narratives. I have characterised it as a convergence between the practice of holding 'traditional' garage sales, as has been carried out for decades in Australia, along with an 'eventisation' of the practice of selling, as seen in flea markets of Queen's Day in the Netherlands. While such an analysis may be coherent and empirically accurate, it is also a reflection of my two chosen research settings: Australia and the Netherlands. One could plausibly describe different dynamics of practice for the Garage Sale Trail, were a different approach to research taken. This is not to say that attempting to understand the dynamics of practices is a pointless exercise. However, the dynamics of practice are, to a certain extent, constructed in the process of researching them. Attributing particular dynamics to particular practices may be contested by subsequent research. This only serves to reinforce the notion that theories of social practice, as a form of systems thinking, recognises the complexity inherent in social life.

Chapter 7

Ridding

7.1 Introduction

Once the subject-object relation reaches a point that threatens ongoing possession, objects transition into one of four systems of practices. They may be retained, by renewing the subject-object relation through practices of treasuring, storing, and making-do (Chapter 4). They may be divested altruistically, through donation or passing-on, either through direct or indirect means (Chapter 5). Objects may also be divested for a financial or other form of return, through selling or trading (Chapter 6). Each of these first three forms of divestment preserves the value of objects to some degree. This chapter deals with the fourth system of practices, referred to as 'ridding', in which the value of objects is preserved to a notably lesser degree.

Gregson et al. (2005) coined the term 'ridding' as part of their initial aim to research practices of material divestment. These authors used the term to describe divestment practices generally, as a way to distinguish from practices of 'disposal', which they argued is a term that connotes the creation of waste. However, their research found considerable evidence of households reusing and maintaining material objects, and provided an alternative to the commonly held narrative of the 'throwaway society', which can be traced to popular critiques of consumer society such as *The Waste Makers* (Packard 1963).

Initially this project adopted the same terminology as Gregson et al., taking the term 'ridding' as a description of the practice of all forms of domestic material divestment. During the course of the research, however, it became apparent participants were describing many practices of divestment that were not consistent with common connotations of the term 'ridding'. Participants were certainly not using the verb 'to rid' in all cases of divestment and it did not seem to adequately cover the diversity of divestment practices discussed. Instead, I have re-appropriated Gregson et al's term to a narrower connotation; one that refers to a more specific set of practices within the overall system of divestment.

In the context of this project, ridding refers to the divestment of material objects where the rationalisations and meanings present are, first and foremost, directed to the expelling of possessions from the domestic sphere. Rather than ensuring objects are transferred to

appropriate destinations, or that some benefit is derived from the practices (as in altruistic divestment), ridding simply refers to the 'getting rid of something'. For objects that are 'rid' in this way, practitioners look less at the 'opportunities' afforded by divestment, such as monetary return or the wellbeing of others. Instead, the divestment is itself the opportunity, which allows individuals and households to relieve any burdens that their material objects may be placing on them. These burdens may be practical or existential, but ridding is concerned primarily with the dispossession of goods more so than any subsequent acquisition of them.

Of course, boundaries between practices of ridding and other practices of divestment are blurry – much as any approach based on 'soft' systems would suggest. Opportunities for donation, passing-on, or selling may present themselves when a practice of ridding is in the process of being carried out, resulting in a different divestment outcome. Therefore, the system of ridding also refers to the materials and competencies involved in the process of getting rid of something. Where these elements are primarily devoted simply to removal of objects from the domestic sphere, and the practice occurs on a widespread basis, that system of practice can be regarded as one of ridding. This chapter will examine the systems of practice that have emerged to facilitate the ridding of material goods in this way.

7.2 The Life Politics and Practice of Decluttering

As a means to divesting material objects from the home, 'decluttering' is a relatively recent phenomenon that has since established itself as a social practice. The elements of decluttering reveal what the practice entails, as it has come to capture an increasing number of carriers over the past three decades. Relevant 'meanings' to decluttering can be identified in the name of the practice itself – excessive amounts of objects are seen to have the effect of 'cluttering' the home, breeding disorganisation, untidiness, and discomfort. This 'material' clutter – books, paper, ornaments, bric-a-brac, and toys - must be removed if one is to lead a less burdensome life within the home. While one may possess the skill and 'competencies' to accomplish this task, it can also be outsourced to professional 'declutterers'. These professionals assist individuals who are incapable or unwilling to divest objects, despite it being in their interest (as judged by others and/or themselves) to do so.

Although it may remain a niche practice for some time, given the considerable costs to those owning the objects, decluttering is an emerging service industry in many Minority world

economies such as the United States, Great Britain, and Australia[33]. Denise runs a successful '*home preparation and relocation'* company in Sydney. Employing seventeen staff, Denise assists clients in organising and removing unneeded or unwanted objects from their homes. This involves direct assistance and dialogue with the homeowners as to what objects can be divested, along with provision of removal and transport of objects to various destinations. Denise claimed that requests for her company's services fell into two broad categories. The first are those consultations that are made around life 'junctures', a concept developed in Chapter 5. Junctures refer to points in the life course that disrupt existing living circumstances, at which time new arrangements and practices are forged. Clients often sought Denise's services during or prior to these junctures. Deceased estates were a common type of consultation, as families struggled to deal with the possessions of the recently passed. Moving house, and particularly moving to smaller living space (down-sizing), was another common juncture that required material divestment.

The second type of consultation Denise described relates to more problematic instances of an excess of objects and materials occupying the domestic space – what she referred to as '*clutter*'. In these cases, a singular event may motivate a client, or an acquaintance, to request assistance with managing and divesting an accumulation of objects in the home. The severity of these cases varies, but all were linked by the commonality that the 'retained' objects were interfering in the lives of those inhabiting the domestic space. Denise described some of the scenarios that might lead to this sort of request:

> *'A lot of the people that contact us, it's a family member, or boyfriend or girlfriend that calls us to do it. There's a change in their circumstances that makes them need us… Sometimes they've become embarrassed to be in their own home, and they can't invite people over for dinner anymore. Or they've had some form of crisis, where they used to be a neat person and now they're not'* (Denise, Declutterer, Sydney).

Cases such as these demonstrate how the meanings associated with decluttering frame object management and material divestment as inevitably linked to social wellbeing. This undermines Veblen's (1899) notion of 'conspicuous consumption'. Instead of acquiring and possessing goods to ensure social acceptance, the framing of 'clutter' as problematic suggests that too many of these acquired goods may be undesirable. Considering material goods as elements of practice, then, their *scale* in the household may reach an upper limit, beyond which they become regarded

[33] For this research, I was only able to interview one professional declutterer. In conjunction with this testimony, I also consulted the websites of several industry association groups and companies. Further research in this area, particularly with individuals who employ declutterers, is a recommended topic for the future.

as clutter. The primary concern for Denise's consultations is the organisation and ridding of unnecessary objects from the household, while ensuring the wellbeing of the client. This lends weight to the notion that objects exist within a network of socio-material relations. Above a certain threshold, however, objects may transform into a collective nuisance.

Denise observed that many of her clients had failed to divest objects because they claimed that they could not find appropriate destinations that would justify their value. This mirrors narratives described in earlier chapters, wherein something is seen as 'too good to throw out', or 'in need of a good home'. While the primary goal of a decluttering consultation may be 'to get rid of' excess objects from the home, Denise recognised that such sentiments can be a barrier to divestment if an appropriate destination is not available or easily accessible. Often, clients would prefer to retain an object than to be rid of it in the wrong way. This results in an accumulation of objects in the home, giving resonance to the concept of 'clutter' as a key meaning in this practice.

With this in mind, Denise's decluttering consultations make visible the destinations for each object. She has her employees set up boxes for items to be gotten rid of, but labels each box differently. A box for items to be taken to auction is first, as this *'gets them excited, because they might find something they can sell'*. Following this is a *'charity'* box for items to be donated. A box is assigned to close friends and family members, in case anything can be passed on. A *'rubbish'* box is filled with that which is of little perceived value, along with a *'maybe'* box for items that are difficult to assign. This process may take place with the assistance of the client, or in their absence, depending on their preference. Nothing is gotten rid of without approval of the client however, and ultimately the final decision to get rid of each and every object is theirs.

This can become problematic with clients who are highly attached to objects, despite their poor condition or the abundance of substitutes. Denise recalls how she and her employees may have to attempt to coax clients into divestment when it appears to be against their interests to retain something:

> *"We ease them into the process, and then we start looking at each box and we ask questions: "When was the last time you used it? How long have you had it for?" It's the process of helping people make decisions… helping them come to decisions themselves, but pulling them along the way"* (Denise, Declutterer, Sydney).

In cases such as these, Denise claims that declutterers such as her face a *'love-hate relationship'* from their clients. Many feel resentment when they have been referred by a friend or family member, rather than initiating the move to divestment themselves. Denise described phases of '*resistance'* to their interference, followed by '*acknowledgement'* of their predicament, and finally *'acceptance'* of

the assistance in some form or another. Denise claimed that the expert competence her service provides was able to achieve some level of preferable outcome in all but the rarest of cases. Only on several occasions had she encountered domestic situations that were in need of her assistance, but where the occupant was unwilling to accept her services. She suspected that on these occasions, occupants were psychologically or socially unstable, and most likely in need of assistance from a trained counselling or psychology professional.

While these insights make Denise's assisted divestment and decluttering appear arduous, it is not always the case. She describes how some clients request her assistance because they want to start *'a new life'* – another meaning crucial to the practice of decluttering. In those cases, objects that are connected to someone's past, such as gifts from a divorcee, may be gotten rid of eagerly, with little persuasion necessary.

Yet while the degree of resistance may differ, there remains the fact that for many people, possessed objects often have value beyond their instrumental purpose. Whether through stories attached to their acquisition, or continued interaction over time, objects become imbued with personal meaning. This further supports the notion of value through 'appropriation' (Ilmonen 2004), discussed in Chapter 4. Denise and her employees inevitably bear witness to these meanings, finding that clients would often become particularly open about their life histories. Denise suggested that for some people, the practice of decluttering and the opportunity to recount these personal narratives was '*like therapy'*. As such, she employs staff that are capable of acknowledging the importance of this therapeutic dialogue, with some having backgrounds in counselling services. These competencies distinguish decluttering professionals from other junk removal and disposal services.

Decluttering and home organisation practices are unique when considered as practices of material divestment, because of the extent to which the provider is invited into the home. Other systems of provision for divestment practices, such as charities, second hand shops, online sales and municipal waste services, all remain at arm's-length from the domestic space. Practitioners are generally required to transport divested items outside the home. Decluttering services, on the other hand, physically enter the home to assist in divestment. It is no surprise that the elderly and immobile are overrepresented in Denise's clientele compared to younger cohorts. As Hawkins and Muecke argue, divestment and discarding "is fundamental to the ordering of the self" (2003, p.xiii). When individuals are incapable of that divestment, expert forms of competence may be recruited to conduct what we would otherwise consider to be a task undertaken personally.

Indeed, Denise launched her business to assist people in relocating, but before long found that there was a market for decluttering services on their own. She was initially sceptical of the potential for that part of her business to succeed – a view shared by her friends. However, she pointed to a key social trend that opened up the possibility for her niche market:

> *'People love outsourcing, and I think [decluttering] is just another service that can be outsourced.'* (Denise, Declutterer, Sydney)

Denise recognises that the rise of decluttering is part of a broader trend toward paying for professionals to undertake the tasks of everyday life in place of ourselves. Such trends have also been described by Hochschild (2012) as an increase in the commercialisation of practices and significant life events. Hochschild notes how many Minority world markets now offer opportunities to outsource tasks that may be considered highly intimate, and indeed, constitutive of the self. Hochschild points to professional organisers, along with wedding planners, baby-namers, life coaches, and matchmakers as evidence of a development toward *The Outsourced Self* (2012). Other divestment practices described in the foregoing chapters leave a degree of agency and responsibility with the individual. Those wanting to divest themselves of something generally carry out many of the requisite tasks, albeit through their own competencies. Decluttering, however, erodes the degree of responsibility and action required to carry out the practice. Instead, practitioners willingly transfer the procedures and labour of material divestment to paid professionals, whose competency can enable divestment where it may not have otherwise occurred.

Denise's company is part of a broader industry, devoted to domestic organisation, which has developed in conjunction with increased demand for decluttering services. The National Association of Professional Organisers (NAPO), founded in 1985 with just five members, now boasts 4200 members across the United States and internationally, with a mission to "develop, lead, and promote professional organisers and the organising industry"[34]. NAPO promotes home organisation through awareness raising initiatives such as 'Get Organised Month', and school presentations[35]. Australia's national equivalent, the Australasian Association of Professional Organisers (AAPO) is more modest, with only 180 members[36], but appears to serve similar functions in terms of education and advocacy for the industry. Given the increasing number of people the industry employs, it is not surprising to find many specific and targeted meanings that are disseminated through the media related to the professional organisers associations. These

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[34] http://www.napo.net/who/ accessed on 12/02/2011
[35] http://www.napo.net/who/involvement/ accessed on 12/02/2011
[36] http://www.aapo.org.au/blog/may-organising/ accessed on 11/02/2011

characterise the consumer, divestment, and the household in particular ways that are reflective of how the practice of decluttering has emerged. The following excerpt describes why someone may wish to use a home organiser to declutter their home:

> …consumers are struggling to manage their days and conquer the clutter and chaos building up in their lives… Professional organisers help individuals and businesses take control of their surroundings, their time, their paper pile, their lives! (NAPO, 2012)

Here, meanings for decluttering are prominent. Domestic spaces are framed as chaotic, crowded, and having ceased to be in the control of their owners. Accumulated possessions are no longer to be viewed assets, and must instead now be 'conquered' through decluttering and organisation so that consumers can 'take back' their lives. Denise echoed this theme of reclamation when she described what her service did for people: *'We help people to reclaim their space, and reclaim their life'* (Denise, Declutterer, Sydney). This meaning of 'reclamation' is also found in other organisational practices such as storage, discussed in Chapter 4. It also relates the practice of decluttering with another common narrative assumed by the home organisation industry: 'time-poverty'.

Professional organisers overwhelmingly describe consumer's lifestyles as 'time-poor'. Australian based professional organiser 'Clutter-rescue' summarises the goal of its service as *'Moving mums from BUSY to Balanced'*[37]. NAPO claims that *'consumers are facing more and more demands with less and less free time'*[38]. In these examples, excess clutter is framed in terms of the excessive amount of time required to maintain and keep track of it. Denise offered a similar assessment of the lives of people for whom clutter was problematic:

> *People are time-poor, doing more socially… They thought they were always going to do it [declutter], but it's everyone's nightmare chore... Instead of beating themselves up every time they get home, they can just get it done.* (Denise, Declutterer)

These meanings are central to the practice of decluttering as divestment. A perceived 'lack of control' promotes the need for assistance in overcoming clutter. The prospect of 'reclaiming' one's personal space, and indeed, one's life, suggests that these things have been taken away at some point, and should be rightfully returned to the consumer. However, one must enlist the services of a trained professional, as consumers are now too 'time-poor' to undertake the task themselves. This is made socially acceptable by the increasing trajectory toward outsourcing more everyday tasks, even those that may have previously been considered highly personal in nature.

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[37] http://clutterrescue.com.au/about/ accessed on 2/3/2011
[38] http://www.napo.net/our_profession/ accessed on 12/02/2011

Of course, the issues presented by clutter and the desire to be rid of it is overwhelmingly Minority world concerns. One could legitimately characterise clutter as a problem that arises out of material abundance, made possible only by the comparative material wealth and affluence of those possessing it – a symptom of what some refer to as 'affluenza' (Graaf et al. 2001; Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). Such issues may appear trivial when many parts of the Majority world face the exact opposite problem, that of material poverty.

However, divestment through decluttering could also be seen as a way to escape affluenza. Denise notes that '*downsizing'* by relocating to a smaller residence often requires people to jettison many of their material possessions that simply would not fit in a smaller, more sustainable, living space. Services like those provided by Denise may actually assist in this process, allowing those who might not otherwise have been willing or capable to downshift, to do so. Her motto of '*as little to landfill as possible'* also means that the value of objects is preserved where possible, by donating, selling, or passing-on objects that can be redistributed and reused.

The ability to divert materials and objects from landfill is a central part of the decluttering service that Denise provided. Ultimately, however, she derived legitimacy and motivation from the very real and measurable effect that she witnessed from interacting with clients:

> *"We take people at face value. We're there to help them… Last week we were basically saving a marriage… sometimes, we really change people's lives"* (Denise, Declutterer, Sydney).

Decluttering can be viewed as both a practice in itself, as well as an instance of intervention in practices. Practices of outsourced material divestment have developed in conjunction with connected service industries of professional organisation. The nature of decluttering, as a practice of paid outsourcing to assist in the divestment of excess material possessions, suggests that it is likely to remain a practice whose scale is relatively niche for some time. However, so long as excess material objects are acquired, crucial meanings associated with clutter are intact, and the acceptability of outsourcing this form of competence remains - it is likely that a trajectory of growth in the professional organisation industry will continue. Decluttering's form is that of a private, personalised service negotiated in the marketplace. It can be seen as an outcome of several broad trends in Minority world economies, including the cultural acceptability of outsourcing, the perception of time poverty, and a perceived inability to control and manage the accumulated material possessions in the home. Industry association and advocacy groups such as NAPO and AAPO promote these meanings through media engagement and awareness programs; establishing decluttering's legitimacy as a socially appropriate practice.

Declutterers, when viewed as a provider for material divestment, operate by rearranging the elements of the domestic sphere with their presence. Introduced expert competencies for organising, evaluating, allocating, and removing material objects act as a substitute for those that may otherwise be possessed by an individual. These disrupt existing practices of indecision, procrastination, and tolerance for clutter by changing many of the meanings associated with divestment. Objects that a client may think were 'going to waste' if they were divested can be assured more value-preserving destinations, such as auction or charity. These competencies for divestment become refined over time, through subsequent enactments of the decluttering process. This can include the acquisition of necessary material infrastructures for divestment, such as boxes and trucks for redistribution of objects. Each of these contributes to the ongoing formation of decluttering as a practice.

The specific procedures of Denise's decluttering service are also notable for the integration of to the various systems of practices developed throughout this thesis. Divestment practices that preserve value, such as donating, passing-on, and selling are merged into the decluttering process. While the primary goal of decluttering is to rid the owner of some of their excess objects in order to 'reclaim their space', these alternative 'destinations' can be used to facilitate divestment by being more acceptable to the divestor. This demonstrates how practices are often not mutually exclusive, and that practices can reside within other practices. Understanding how practices interact is a complex endeavour, since they may overlap and infiltrate one another in unexpected ways. Recognising this allows for an acknowledgement of the complexity of social practices as 'networks' of elements, which exist as both systems themselves, and within broader systems of consumption. These systems are reproduced concurrently in the course of everyday life.

In this section, I have described decluttering as a market-oriented practice for the outsourcing of material ridding. Engagement with these services is therefore relatively small in scale, since many engage in ridding without being recruited to the practice of decluttering in this way. While professional declutterers are not high intensity elements to the practice of decluttering (one can declutter one's own life without paying a professional to do so), their existence, and increasing trajectory, is reflective of a practice that is increasing in scale in those parts of the world able to afford it.

As has been demonstrated, this practice of divestment can potentially facilitate avenues of object and material reuse – despite the primary concern being the ridding of material objects. This serves to reinforce the notion that decluttering – like all the other practices described in this

thesis – is not an entirely discrete practice, but one that incorporates elements from other parts of a broader system of divestment. Other forms of ridding practice offer similar potential for reuse, albeit used by a much larger proportion of households in some form or another. These publically administered services for material divestment take the form of kerbside bulk waste collections.

7.3 Sifting through the 'Council Clean-up'

As discussed throughout this thesis, materials, along with competencies, meanings and (potentially) rules, make up the social practices that constitute everyday life. Practices do not merely exist against the background of certain material objects and infrastructures – these materials are constitutive of the very practices themselves. Not only does an object allow certain practices to emerge upon its acquisition, it may also signify the end of particular practices when it is done away with. The object in question may be the crucial factor in the demise of the practice; for example, when it ceases to function. It may also be that practices have shifted in some way, moving away from the object such that it goes unused for a period of time. In either case, these objects often still retain their identity as 'things', rather than merely as 'waste'. As I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, narratives regarding the status of objects as 'too good to throw away' or 'in need of a good home' indicate that such objects are subject to a different set of rules and norms when compared to other waste such as food scraps and packaging. If an object is deemed insufficiently valuable to retain, donate, pass on, or sell, it is likely to be gotten 'rid' of. One of the main channels for this type of object is the publically administered kerbside bulk waste collection - what has become colloquially known as the 'council clean-up'.

Most urban municipal authorities provide a service that is designed to complement the weekly removal of general household waste, in both Australia and Netherlands[39]. Whether material is directed to this particular service, or is merely part of the 'general waste' stream, may be determined by several factors. One basic consideration is the size of the general waste bin. Municipal waste service websites suggest that bulky waste is the non-recyclable and non-organic material, which is not able to fit into this general waste bin. However, since regular 'general' waste will also be occupying this bin space, it would be more accurate to describe it as the material that will not fit into the remaining space of this bin. A household with less available space in their general waste bin is more likely to take advantage of a bulk waste collection than a

[39] Some rural areas do not provide this service, relying on households to transport their own bulk waste to landfill. Some high-density multi-story dwellings may also not be provided with a municipal service as this is seen as a service to be provided by strata management.

household with more remaining space. Likewise, households with surplus bin space may place larger, intact items into the general waste, even if they might typically be regarded as bulky items that could equally be included in the bulk waste collection.

Another consideration for the material constituency of bulk waste collections is the extent to which households prefer this method of disposal to placing those objects into the general waste bin. This may be the result of individual preference, or shaped by a broader cultural understanding of how one should divest material objects. Bulk waste collections appear to be regarded as a less 'final' route for objects to exit the domestic sphere, as evidenced by the practice of 'leaving-out'. Interviewees carrying out this practice commonly regarded placement of objects on the kerb outside their residence as an opportunity for something no longer desired to avoid landfill or destruction. This sentiment was expressed by Frank, who claimed that: *'If I put something out on the street, then guaranteed it'll be gone within an hour or two"* (Frank, 34, Amsterdam). Thus, while the bulk waste clean-up can be seen as a more institutionalised, formal arrangement for rubbish removal in accordance with particular municipal arrangements (rules), it also presents an opportunity for less formal material reuse. The extent to which these two functions can conflict with or support one another will be discussed later in this section. Regardless, the opportunity for kerbside reuse is likely to vary depending on the particular type of clean-up arrangements in place in a given area. Whilst the general goal of the bulk waste collection is similar across local government areas, municipal waste services differ markedly in how they execute this service. Arrangements generally fall into three broad categories: area-scheduled, appointment, and hybrid.

Under 'area-scheduled' arrangements, households are allocated a certain number of clean-ups annually by their municipal waste services authority. Allocation tends to be scheduled at the 'sub-suburban' level, where small residential areas will have their collection scheduled contemporaneously. Households are directed to place unwanted items on the curb outside their residence in the week prior to collection, which may be notified months in advance. The scheduled clean-up therefore synchronises the divestment practices of households in a given area, resulting in a relatively high concentration of unwanted goods lining the streets for a short period of time.

Area-scheduled clean-ups appear to offer financial cost-benefits to some municipal waste services authorities. Since the material is concentrated in defined areas each week, the cost of transportation to landfill is lower than with other arrangements. Parramatta Council had recently changed to an area-scheduled collection, primarily for this reason, due to the relatively large

suburban area that the municipality covers. However this trend is not uniform across all local government areas. Hills Shire council had transitioned away from the area-scheduled system, citing costs as a major issue:

> *'Because we don't have a [volume] limit, the streets were basically lined. And it would take 2, 3, 4, 5 weeks to collect 1 zone. So just enormous amounts of material [were] placed at the kerb, we believe unnecessarily'* (Senior Coordinator of Waste Management, Hills Shire).

In this case, area-scheduled collections were seen to promote the divestment of waste material, with associated landfill costs that could not be reconciled financially, as well as environmentally. This system was abandoned in 2008, in favour of an appointment style collection.

Bulk waste collection based on an appointment system forgoes the mass provision of a service, instead offering an 'on call' system. Residents are advised to contact waste management services to request the service, usually by phone or a web-based form from the municipal authorities. These appointments may be free, or be subject to a fee. Often, households are allowed a certain number of appointments (usually 1-2) per year that will not attract a fee. Additional appointments made during that year may then be charged a fee, so as to limit the number of clean-ups for each household to a manageable number. Appointment-based services are therefore 'opt-in', in that individual households must actively engage with municipal authorities to have their service provided. This tends to contribute to divested material being more spatially dispersed, as residents in a given area do not need to conform to an imposed calendar for the collection.

Transitioning to an appointment-style arrangement after an area-scheduled collection has been practiced can have complications. For example, Wollongong City Council transitioned from area-scheduled clean-ups to appointment style collections in 2010. Despite notifying residents of these changes, they still have numerous incidents of 'unauthorised' material being placed on the kerbside. Often this takes place in streets where one resident has made an appointment, and placed waste in accordance with the on-call procedure. Other residents appear to assume that a collective waste removal system is still in operation, and place material kerbside based on this assumption. This strongly suggests that many residents rely on social cues for their information about clean-up waste, rather than the newsletter and website based channels that local councils typically rely on to communicate service arrangements.

Lastly, several local municipal services have adopted bulk waste collections that incorporate features from both the area-scheduled and the appointment type arrangements –a 'hybrid' arrangement. Under a hybrid collection, households in a given area are still allocated

designated clean-up dates, although this number is generally less than in an area-scheduled municipal area. Residents are then also offered several additional appointments for waste removal, should they require it. Thus, a 'hybrid' system shares aspects of the material synchrony associated with area-scheduled collections, as well as the dispersed material of the appointment style collections.

Representatives of councils using hybrid systems suggest that it accounts for a broader range of divestment practices, giving many of the user related benefits whilst avoiding many of the drawbacks. For instance a representative from Ashfield City Council noted that many residents in that local area were of a non-English speaking background. This presented complications with communicating waste management arrangements to them, as council policies may not be understood clearly enough. Instead, they tended to rely on the social cues provided by other residents placing unwanted items on the kerb. Equally, she described that many residents may be reluctant to initiate contact with the council to make an appointment for a waste clean-up for similar reasons. The hybrid system allowed for these types of residents to divest goods in the 2 scheduled collections, whilst also offering the on call service.

A representative of Waverley Council noted that they presided over a relatively transient population, with many households changing occupancy on a short-term basis. A scheduled clean-up did not always coincide with these key junctures for material divestment, and the hybrid system allowed households to take advantage of the scheduled clean-up if it occurred at the right time, but also gave households the opportunity to use the appointment clean-up if they were moving between these dates.

These three bulk kerbside waste collection arrangements – area-scheduled, appointment, and hybrid - suggest that local areas have different requirements for management of their divested objects and materials. These may be based on geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics of the area and the governing institutions that oversee waste management. These different arrangements also support different social practices related to divestment and reuse.

7.4 User expectations of bulk waste removal

In addition to understanding the services available, it is critical to understand how households interact with the various types of services provided in order to conceptualise this type of ridding as a social practice. Kerbside bulk waste collection is somewhat unique among ridding practices, in that the outcome of items left for collection cannot be assured until the point that they are taken by collection vehicles. With no container to conceal them, and the public location of the

kerbside, items are more open to the contestation of value by others passing by, or specifically searching for divested objects. This fosters different user expectations about the collection, which may or may not be anticipated by local municipal authorities. Among interviewees, a practice of 'leaving-out' emerged as a commonly used strategy for getting rid of material objects in the kerbside bulk waste collection. Rather than considering these items as disposed of, users place objects on the kerbside prior to collections with a view to their possible (or likely) acquisition by a third party.

More often than not, those that leave things out for others are unsure as to the outcome of their rid items. James describes how he had left some treated wood, fittings, and an old children's bicycle on the kerb:

> '*Well, I put the stuff out on the nature strip on Saturday afternoon, and by late on Sunday morning it was gone. The council doesn't come until Monday morning, and there was still some not-so-good things leftover. So I assume someone took the rest!'* [laughs] (James, 37, Sydney).

The particular arrangement of municipal services for kerbside bulk waste collection (area-scheduled, appointment, and hybrid) can have substantial influence over the expectations for household practices of 'leaving-out'. However, the extent to which someone might leave something out was also dependent on the 'normality' of kerbside gleaning. In areas where kerbside reuse was common, it was generally assumed that objects left beside the road were placed there for the purposes of reuse, regardless of whether a kerbside waste pick-up was imminent or not. Both Frank (33, Amsterdam) and Karin (39, Utrecht) were insistent that any object left on the kerbside of their urban residences would be '*gone within hours*' (Frank) or '*very quickly*' (Karin). While Frank would occasionally attempt to leave things out on clean-up days (when it was most likely that someone would find it prior to pick-up), Karin saw no such need, as the number of people perusing the streets for re-use items was so high that it was "*virtually guaranteed*" that something would be taken. Incidentally, not long after our interview concluded, Karin confirmed this with an email and photograph (Figure 4.1):

> *'...This morning, the neighbours across the street put out their waste. Between eight and nine [o'clock] two men came by, one after the other, to inspect the goods. I caught the second one on camera from the upstairs window, so here's your visual proof of this strange phenomenon ;-)'* (Karin, 39, Utrecht).

Figure 7.1 – Kerbside Re-use in Utrecht, Netherlands

In areas where re-use may not be as common, it may be unclear as to whether an object is left out for the taking. If there is any perceived ambiguity as to the status of the objects that are being left out, some signification may be used to encourage gleaning from those passing by. Often this takes the form of a simple 'Free' sign, to indicate that the owners are divesting themselves of the items(s), and that they are available on a first come first served basis. Where the functionality of the object may not be apparent on first inspection, signs may also be used to clarify whether objects are in working order or not (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2 'Free' sign, Sydney

The practice of 'leaving-out' is particularly interesting for an analysis of divestment, as it offers a stark example of the contestation of value for different objects. Practices of deliberately 'leaving-out' reflect some perceived value from the point of view of the ridder, although generally not sufficient value to warrant another practice, such as selling, or donating. Leaving-out appears to share some common characteristics with 'passing-on', in terms of the perception that someone else is likely to find some use value out of the object, albeit to a stranger who shows interest, rather than a social contact of the ridder.

Here it is worth highlighting that objects often possess value not so much in themselves, but in the present or future capability of people to find use in them. This relation, between the subject and the object, is particularly relevant for goods that are 'left out'. Those getting rid of goods by leaving-out may acknowledge that while the subject-object relation has broken down for themselves, there is still potential for such a relation to be established elsewhere. For

example, Richard described how his temporary living circumstances whilst studying at university were not particularly conducive to permanent ownership of certain objects.

> *'I got most of my furniture from [the kerbside] around here when I arrived. I'll probably just put it back out there when I leave – not because it isn't any good, but just because I won't have any need for it any more.'* (Richard, 21, Amsterdam)

Objects left out may be done so with the assumption that someone else will glean and find use for them, despite the obvious potential for them to be discarded into landfill. This was a common theme for several participants, who saw that someone else benefitting from finding an item was an better outcome overall than disposal, whether for reasons of environmental concern (Evelyn, 35, & Larry, 31, Utrecht), thrift (Trent, 34, Amsterdam), or simply that they themselves had found things in this way in the past (Richard, 21, Amsterdam).

However, not all experiences with leaving things out on kerbsides are this positive, and there are potential points at which this type of re-use may be undermined. Peter had left out a table and three accompanying chairs on the kerbside prior to a scheduled pick-up for his local area. While gardening in the front yard, he observed another man inspecting the items, and subsequently loading them into the boot of his car. Peter was shocked however, when the man asked if he was getting rid of the fourth chair, so he could take the whole set:

> *'I said 'Mate, you've got three chairs, isn't that enough?'. Who does he think he is? He's getting all this stuff for free, and he wants the other chair!'* (Peter, 36, Sydney)

Peter explained that he previously didn't have any particular issue with people taking items from the clean-up, but this episode had tainted his view of the practice. He claimed that he has since taken items to the tip, '*so tightarses like him don't get all my stuff for free*'. Such sentiments suggest that the practice of leaving-out requires the collaboration of different actors, whose interests may be destabilised by unfavourable interactions.

Practices of leaving-out are characterised by their open-ended nature. While prior experience of ridders may suggest that certain re-use outcomes are likely, this is by no means guaranteed. Items on the kerbside can become weathered quickly, reducing their potential for functional use in a short period of time. This narrows the possibilities for re-use, which may have been likely if they were passed on, sold, or donated.

'Leaving-out' also exposes items to forms of post-ownership practices that may not be the most resource efficient. Items left out may be sourced for their constituent materials (such as precious metals) for recycling, despite having the potential to be re-used in their existing form. Leaving-out items in this way places no burden on those gleaning them. For instance, goods that

are purchased second hand may require a re-user to cover the cost of purchase by preserving their value. Those accepting goods that are passed on may perceive a personal obligation to use them appropriately, also preserving value. However, gleaning places no such imperatives on the preservation of value, and objects are more likely to be relegated to practices that are the most expedient or financially lucrative, rather than the most suited to their 'use value'.

There was a general tendency among interviewees to view kerbside bulk waste collections as avenues of ridding, but also for re-use. Missing from this view, of course, is the reality that most, and in some cases all, material will enter the waste stream as a general waste collection would[40]. These and other practices of ridding that result in little to no opportunity for re-use, which I will refer to as 'disposal', will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to recognise that many households engage with this service with some expectation of waste reduction through reuse. However, the spatial and temporal aspects of these reuse practices are mediated by the specific arrangements for waste management established by local municipal authorities.

7.5 Kerbside Reuse in the context of Waste Management Practices

Municipal representatives working in the provision of waste services tended to be aware of the practices of reuse associated with kerbside bulk waste removal. Overwhelmingly, they recognised that these were occasions and spaces not only for divestment, but also for acquisition. However, despite this recognition, there was considerable divergence in how legitimate councils perceived them to be, and what role, if any, they should play in the overall waste management of their local government area.

Councils appear to take one of two broad positions with regard to kerbside bulk waste re-use. It can be discouraged, with steps often taken to minimise the potential for the practice being carried out. However, local governments may also tolerate re-use if it is recognised as a practice that synchronises with any environmental goals that they may have. Indications of a local government's approach to kerbside bulk waste re-use are evident even in the way the practice is described. This demonstrates how different stakeholders contest the meanings of the practice. For instance, waste management representatives from Willoughby, Hornsby and Hills tended to refer to kerbside re-use as *'scavenging'* – a term they used with some disdain. This is likely a

[40] Some local government area's provide recycling services for select items placed in this collection, such as mattresses.

reflection of their kerbside bulk waste removal arrangements, which had been designed, or redesigned, to discourage this type of practice:

> *'There's a lot of scavengers out there. A lot of the metals are gone before we get there… the company that collects our waste only has an issue when scavengers make a mess of the pile of waste on the kerbside.'* (Waste Education Officer, Hills Shire)

As this case clearly illustrates, re-use was being discouraged because it made removal of the waste more difficult. The Waste Education Officer at Hills Shire claimed that scavengers would tear at the collection piles in order to access their desired goods and materials, leaving an unsightly mess. This was seen to undermine community education efforts about placing waste material neatly on the kerbside, both for aesthetic reasons and for ease of removal. However, kerbside re-use may also present a more fundamental problem. Another municipal waste representative describes the competing interests around kerbside re-use (and recycling) practices and their implications:

> *'We do get a lot of commercial operators looking for saleable material. One van in particular, he beats all our trucks. And it affects us, because the sale of metal is part of our revenue. If he's taking that, and pocketing the cash, we don't see it. It's ripping off the ratepayers, and that money isn't going back into educations programs, and other things.'* (Waste Strategy Coordinator, Willoughby Council)

This predicament has led Willoughby council to indicate that they would abandon a scheduled pick-up in the near future, in favour of an appointment style pick-up. Such an approach would likely have the effect of reduced kerbside re-use practices, since appointment pick-ups dilute demand across a broader area within a given municipality at a given time. With appointments becoming scattered and unpredictable, re-users have more difficulty in sourcing objects and materials than when smaller, concentrated areas are using the service contemporaneously. As it is, the locations of clean-ups in Willoughby are not advertised to the public. The council's website allows one to search for bulk waste schedules for individual streets, but no comprehensive listing is available. This, the Willoughby representative claims, is precisely to discourage this form of '*scavenging*' from occurring, as it makes the location of local collections more difficult to discern in advance.

Doug (39, Sydney) works as a self-employed recycler, relying in large part on kerbside waste collections for metal. Doug navigates the streets of Hornsby Shire in his modified light truck, scanning kerbside piles for objects that are wholly or partially constructed from metal. He also sources metal objects directly from homes, advertising his service by dropping business cards in letterboxes when collections are not as prevalent in his area. He strips these objects

down, and sells them to a recycler for income. Working this job full time between five and six days per week, earns Doug '*enough to get by'*.

Doug described how his trade had changed in the last five years. With the price of raw material increasing, so to came competition from other operators. He estimated that where only *'half a dozen'* trucks were *'doing it'* when he stared, there were *'around fifty'* now. When asked whether he had any interference from local councils, given their view toward informal gleaners of kerbside collection piles:

> *'Mate, they'd be stuffed without us. I see so many piles that are half the size the night before collection day. If we just stopped what we're doing, they'd just get swamped.'* (Doug, 39, Recycler, Sydney)

This suggests that operators like Doug play a significant role in the management of waste, despite not being recognised as formal, or even legitimate actors by some municipal authorities. Whether they are embraced or maligned by local authorities, Doug maintained that recyclers like him would continue their profession until it ceases to be financially viable.

Despite local municipal authorities discouraging these forms of re-use, they do not appear to be against re-use per se. Hills, Hornsby and Willoughby Councils promote local swap meets as activities that both promote community interaction, as well as reduce consumption and the amount of material directed to landfill. Hills Council described some particularly innovative waste education programs that sought to promote more sustainable forms of consumption within the community, particularly in the area of food. Hornsby Council posted several display boards in local shopping centres with a message of *'Think Before You Buy'*, in an effort to stimulate consumer awareness of sustainable consumption practices. Willoughby Council had supported a re-use centre on a waste transfer station, until issues of liability for volunteers recently made the initiative unviable. Willoughby Council also offers residents subsidised signage and media advertising for garage sales, to promote re-use practices in the weeks prior to a scheduled clean-up. These examples suggest that material re-use can be promoted by councils in a number of ways, of which kerbside re-use is merely one.

However, there are other councils for whom kerbside re-use practices are not perceived to interfere, or compete with municipal waste management. Indeed, there are local government areas where kerbside re-use is viewed positively and seen as contributing to both social and environmental outcomes that the community values. Ashfield Council is one such local government, where the residential make-up of the area, combined with certain characteristics of the arrangements for collections, result in kerbside reuse being not only tolerated, but somewhat

encouraged. This was first indicated in an interview with a municipal representative, through the use of the term *'sharing'* to describe kerbside bulk waste reuse, rather than *'scavenging'*:

> *'Here, in our community, it's quite acceptable to go through people's waste and re-use. And we encourage that. From the council's point of view, we don't' have to pay for it, and it's re-use.'*
>
> Interviewer*: 'So you don't have a problem with it?'*
>
> *'No. Here, we obviously don't want a mess, but you want things to be re-used, and you know there's people in the community that need it. We've got [government] housing, it's a very diverse community… Here we have more high density, and that's where more sharing goes on"* (Waste Project Officer, Ashfield).

The view that kerbside bulk waste collections are opportunities and spaces for 'sharing', promotes a much broader understanding of what this form of 'waste management' entails. Acknowledging the collections in this way recognises them as occasions for objects and materials to be exchanged, rather than simply divested. By promoting these different meanings, Ashfield Council is bringing about a noticeably different form of practice, despite no substantial difference in the material arrangements or competencies involved. Encouraging 'sharing' in this way can itself build competence, as residents may come to acquire re-use strategies when municipal authorities encourage them. Whether households are 'leaving-out' items specifically for others to pick up, or merely attempting to dispose of them, the collections are opportunities for the value of items to be renegotiated.

Ashfield Council itself offers two scheduled collections per year, along with up to four appointment collections. This hybrid system allows for material re-use through sharing during the scheduled clean-ups, whilst also offering the flexibility for residents that comes with appointment based collection. As the Ashfield Council representative alluded to, the collections are also able to assist in satisfying discrepancies in material needs that are not otherwise met through the market, or the provision of government assistance. She claimed that Ashfield contains a broad spectrum of households across the socio-economic spectrum, and that scheduled collections allowed material objects to be gleaned from those that no longer require them. For those households struggling with costs of living, this practice promotes a more community-based approach to material provisioning. While is it unlikely that collections will meet the needs of all households – particularly those that lack the mobility or awareness to glean from collections – it may take pressure off other sources of assistance provided by government, charitable groups, and families.

This type of sharing is also facilitated by higher density of households, allowing for a correspondingly high concentration of unwanted goods to be shared between local households. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the streetscape and the urban environment facilitate practices of 'leaving-out'. A higher density of households offers increased awareness and opportunity for kerbside re-use, when compared to lower density residential living. This appears to be the case because practices of re-use are more tightly integrated with each other geographically, but also with associated practices not directly related to re-use. When commuting practices are carried out amongst the sites and spaces of re-use they can more easily encourage those re-use practices. This was evidenced in Chapter 5, where Trent (34, Amsterdam) and Kerry (72, Sydney) described how they would often reclaim items from the kerbside on their daily commute.

These types of collections do not merely capture waste. The arrangements for kerbside bulk waste collection actively mediate the temporal and physical dispersal of divested goods into the urban landscape. This mediation can have substantial implications for the social practices around consumption, divestment, and re-use. Where collections are predictable and concentrated in a given area, re-use practices are far more likely to emerge and persist. However, despite re-use practices being recognised by households and municipal authorities as occurring on a broad scale, there is no formal recognition of such practices in policies pertaining to the reduction of waste output.

For instance, the New South Wales State Government has mandated for municipalities to divert 66% of waste from landfill by 2014 (DECCW 2011), p.32). This legislation was acknowledged by all Australian local government representatives that took part in this research as forming the basis of their waste management policies. These representatives also pointed out the limitations of the target, since it did not recognise certain waste streams (such as composting and organics) that they felt obligated to provide collection services for. In the case of kerbside bulk waste collection, none of the material placed on the kerb is considered to be diverted from landfill under the Department of Environment Climate Change and Water's frames of reference. As one municipal representative described, waste must be in the possession of municipal authorities if it is to have any relevance to recycling targets:

> *'[The waste] hasn't technically been diverted, because we never had to start with. We never had the figures to be able to say what it is.'* (Waste Education Support Officer, Hornsby Shire Council)

As a result, performance for waste diversion may be significantly underrepresented, given that the formal targets only consider material that is collected by formalised waste management services. Objects that are placed kerbside, and subsequently re-used by gleaners, are not

considered to be ‘diverted’ from landfill – despite those objects being destined for landfill had the re-use practice not occurred. Local governments that have established practices of informal re-use in the kerbside waste collection will not have those practices reflected in the guiding performance metric. Indeed, communities that re-use objects more, and hence reduce the need to recycle them, may perform worse on the ‘diversion from landfill’ targets when compared to those communities where abundant material enters the waste stream and is subsequently diverted through formal recycling procedures.

Waste management representatives attributed this state of affairs to their inability to quantify the amount of kerbside material re-used prior to collection. Without relatively accurate measures of material rid to the kerbside, municipal authorities are in no position to judge the amount that is diverted from landfill through re-use practices. This raises the issue of precisely when various relevant actors consider objects and materials to be ‘waste’. Such designations are increasingly contentious, particularly as waste is increasingly framed as a ‘resource’ in the industries devoted to managing it. Here, legally binding *rules*, considered as elements of practice, are crucial to understand as key parts of the overall system of ridding.

7.6 Institutional Rules for Waste Management

The diversity of arrangements for bulk kerbside waste collection – between area-scheduled, appointment, and hybrid – appear to be grounded in the perceptions of municipal authorities regarding the needs of the community, as well as meanings regarding the appropriateness of certain forms of practice. Meanings of environmental responsibility also inform these arrangements, with an imperative to reduce waste and pollution – although often differing on how to go about achieving it. Concerns about the maintenance of a clean urban landscape can be a key factor in determining to what extent local governments will tolerate the presence of kerbside waste. However, there are other factors as well, particularly regarding the negotiation of formal arrangements for waste collection, which have similarly formative implications for household divestment and re-use.

Local governments have different contractual arrangements for the collection and disposal of kerbside bulk waste. In some cases, municipal authorities may employ a private contractor to collect, transport, and dispose of waste materials. Other local governments have their own services, preferring to control collection services ‘in house’. While it is unnecessary to understand the intricacies of these contractual arrangements in the current context, there are certain characteristics that directly affect the practices of kerbside re-use, and by extension, divestment.

The most crucial feature of these arrangements, for our purposes, surrounds the question of legal ownership of the waste material at various stages of the divestment and disposal process. For instance, Willoughby Council has its kerbside bulk waste collection contracted to a private waste management company. The contract arrangement, negotiated in 2003, was for four scheduled clean-ups annually (two general waste, one organic, and one metal & white goods). However, within this arrangement is the stipulation that the waste management company takes ownership of the waste material once its owner places it on the kerbside for collection. This guarantees the company an element of control over the waste, since valuable materials can be sold for supplementary income. However this particular arrangement – where ownership of kerbside waste is granted to a provider – places re-use practices in direct conflict with this legal transfer of ownership of waste items and materials. As a result of feedback by residents – primarily complaints of the 'mess' around kerbside collection - the representative from Willoughby Council indicated that they were likely to move to an appointment style collection that would reduce informal reuse.

In the vocabulary of social practices, it appears that the formal 'rules' of kerbside collection, negotiated via contract with a waste management provider, have important flow on effects. These rules appear to shape, and be shaped by, certain social 'meanings' regarding the status of kerbside waste. This is evidenced by the labelling of kerbside re-use as a practice of 'scavenging', subsequently discouraging practices that conflict with existing contractual arrangements. Such measures can have a direct impact on household material divestment practices, since practices of 'leaving-out', discussed earlier in this chapter, are often undertaken with an assumption that objects are likely to be re-used when placed on the kerbside for pick-up, rather than going to landfill.

However, not all collection arrangements conflict with kerbside re-use, and specific divestment practices in this way. Ashfield Council's collection and disposal contracts were negotiated with an explicit aim of retaining control over key parts of the process:

> *'Some [other councils] like a one-stop-shop… we want the best outcome. It's not going to be easy, but it's better in the long run'* (Waste Project Officer, Ashfield).

This different approach meant negotiating separate arrangements with different companies for the provision of collection & transport, recycling, and landfill disposal. Ashfield Council was able to successfully negotiate viable contract arrangements because of collaboration with other nearby councils, as well as favourable council support that prioritised more *'environmental'* waste management practices. It also enables the municipality to gain revenue from resale of waste

materials, instead of that revenue stream being forfeited to a contractor, as was the case in Willoughby. Retaining ownership of the waste product ensure Ashfield Council's commitment to pro-environmental outcomes is expressed by a waste management arrangement that supports kerbside reuse as *'sharing'*, rather than conflicting with kerbside reuse as *'scavenging'*. These specific rules, and the meanings associated with re-use and divestment that they enable, demonstrate how elements 'hang together' to constitute ongoing social practices in everyday life.

The purpose of this section has not been to advocate for certain arrangements over others, with regards to maximising re-use in divestment practices. As most municipal authorities acknowledged in their interviews, re-use practices are notoriously difficult to quantify. The environmental implications of specific forms of divestment and re-use over others, are perhaps even more difficult to comprehend, and certainly beyond the scope of this project. In terms of overall sustainability of practice, kerbside bulk waste re-use presents both potential for and obstacles to sustainable practice.

Changes to these arrangements do occur over time, although the most substantial of these occur at points when waste management service contracts are renewed or renegotiated. At these points, a waste management department may change the type of collection arrangement without the added cost of changing it mid-contract. That no consensus view of 'best practice' for these arrangements exists is perhaps not surprising, given the differences in population type and density that each local government is responsible for. All bulk collection arrangements could be justified according to environmental principles. Hills Shire's comment regarding the area-scheduled collections as *encouraging* disposal, rather than it simply providing a service to capture waste, is noteworthy. It suggests, as has been argued throughout this thesis, that practices of possession and divestment are intertwined in a systemic manner. In other words, alterations to the waste management systems may have flow on effects on household divestment, which, in turn, may shift patterns of consumption and re-use.

In all types of arrangements discussed so far, re-use of divested objects and materials can take place at a hyper-local level, such as between neighbours, with goods being placed and re-claimed with minimal effort and a high preservation of material integrity. This is particularly the case for when divestment and re-use becomes more social, through synchronisation of practices at coordinated times and spaces. However, kerbside divestment also leads to a far less certain outcome for re-use. Objects can become weathered in short spaces of time, resulting in a decline in the object's value to the point that re-use becomes unlikely. Without any material, or institutional means to steward objects whilst they are in transition, practices of 'leaving-out' can

easily become practices of 'throwing away' – such is the uncertainty that is embedded into the kerbside bulk waste collection.

Social practices that operate in and around the kerbside clean-up are illustrative of how the elements of practices can be arranged to achieve particular outcomes. How specific rules are arranged with waste management services can lead to dramatically different practices of divestment and re-use. These rules may have particular trajectories, such as attempts to encourage or discourage informal kerbside re-use. However, practices may not always conform to these rules where possibility for deviation exists. As was found in Wollongong, divestment practices relied on social cues over council notifications as to when objects should be placed kerbside.

In the kerbside clean-up, materials exist at a variety of scales to enable or disable a practice. At the micro scale, individual objects that are durable and resilient to weathering and continued use are most likely to be re-used from the kerbside clean-up, when compared to more disposable, or perishable goods. The materials of practice can also be conceptualised at a much broader *scale* of the physical geography and layout of the urban environment. Residential configurations of medium to high-density housing offer ample opportunity for gleaners to source items, whereas lower density layouts permit much lower concentrations of divested items. Practices of re-use tend to be higher in spaces where opportunities synchronise with other aspects of daily life, such as commuting.

Competencies for kerbside re-use possess certain trajectories, depending on the arrangement of elements in particular contexts. As households recognise re-use occurring in their local area, they may adjust their divestment practices in order to maximise the potential for re-use. In this way, expectations of the purpose of bulk waste collections evolve over time, in conjunction with the enactment of the practices themselves – that is to say, they have their own trajectories. Relevant actors, such as households, informal recyclers, municipal waste authorities, gleaners, and waste management contractors, therefore reveal that waste management is more than simply an 'end of pipe' service.

As I have discussed, kerbside bulk waste collection – or the 'council clean-up' – is a site of ridding and, potentially, reuse that is subject to variations in practice over time and space. Such findings are supported by research conducted by Lane et al. (2009), where surveyed residents of Melbourne were said to be hopeful that items placed in bulk waste collections would be reused, since they viewed this as a more socially and environmentally responsible outcome. Likewise, Alexander et al (2009) argue that significant gains in material reuse can be made in bulk waste

collections with enhanced links between waste management services and other organisations involved in reuse such as charities and second hand shops.

While opportunities for reuse exist in this particular practice, it is less likely in other forms of ridding. This final system of practice, around disposal, forms the last section of this chapter.

7.7 Disposal – Tips, bins, and the perception of finality

In the practices of ridding, the primary concern of practitioners is the removal of objects from the domestic household. In the absence of materials and competencies that can support a higher value divestment practice, ridding is distinguished from other forms of divestment by the immediacy with which this outcome achieved. While the presence of objects may be tolerated for some time before they are donated, passed on, sold, or traded, ridding on the other hand, seeks to expel these things in as short a time frame as possible. Decluttering achieves this by the provision of expert competence, meanings, and materials imported directly into the home to facilitate divestment. Municipal bulk waste removal encourages households to place unwanted material at their own kerbside, allowing for potential re-use, but also for the convenience of immediate ridding from the domestic space.

Disposal practices are characterised by this same tendency toward immediate divestment, along with a substantial realignment of the subject-object relation. Those objects disposed of are often done so with an assumption that they are unworthy of any further attention or value. Disposal entails placing unwanted goods into spaces that are unlikely to be gleaned for re-use, where a rapid decline in the use or exchange value is expected.

Disposed objects may be transported by the user to a waste management centre or landfill. Alternatively, 'junk removal' services can be employed to take material directly from one's home, in a practice reminiscent of decluttering but with minimal consultation to homeowners about their attachment to possessions. Goods may be deposited into a waste receptacle for collection by waste management services, or simply 'dumped' at an unauthorised location. Unsurprisingly, little information has been gleaned about dumping, primarily due to its illegality and the strong normative bias against it[41]. This research will therefore focus on legal disposal practices.

To a certain extent, disposal is open-ended in a similar way to practices of 'leaving-out'. Goods left out in a kerbside collection, for example, may be diverted from landfill, whether or

[41] http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/warr/MUDDumpResearch.htm provides an example of research into awareness and perceptions of dumping.

not the owner's intention was for them to be removed as part of formal waste management procedures. Although the possibilities for re-use are narrowed once a good enters the waste stream, disposal may not necessarily entail items being destined for landfill or incineration. Certain municipal arrangements offer the possibility of resource recovery, either by manual diversion of valuable materials from landfill deposits, or mechanised separation of waste into streams for recycling. In this way, the environmental and resource preservation practices of 'throwing out' are largely at the behest of the systems and infrastructures present, rather than the intentions of individuals. For example, Wollongong City Council operates its own landfill and employs a manual sorter, stationed onsite. This sorter works whenever the Council's trucks are depositing material into the landfill, extracting valuable materials from truck loads and diverting them to a recycling or re-use pile. The representative from Wollongong Council claimed, however, that the trucks often damaged goods that may be valued if they were intact, and so diverted material primarily consisted of scrap metal.

Disposal of items is often carried out when items do not fall into easily identifiable categories that could be divested through another form of practice. John, for instance, describes the benefits of disposing of things when he had an assortment of waste types that needed getting rid of quickly and easily: broken and weathered children's toys, garden materials, some sheets of plastic, and some old carpet. Although now too old to confidently drive with a trailer, he used to occasionally take a pile of these sorts of unwanted items and materials to *'the tip'*, located on the outskirts of his suburb:

> *'It's nice to be able to get rid of a lot of stuff at once, ya know? Makes it feel as though you've done something for your day's work!' (John, 78, Sydney)*

Convenience is critical for disposal practices such as this. Waste management facilities and general waste bins are largely indiscriminate in their acceptance of all but the most dangerous forms of material waste. This means that disposal can be a veritable 'one stop shop' for situations where the elements of practice are not present for other forms of divestment. Objects can be done away with, with minimal fuss to households. However, the convenience of disposal services provided by municipal waste management authorities may come at the expense of a broad community awareness of the waste-generating capacity of daily life:

> *'Unfortunately we've provided them with a very easy option on how to dispose of, and get rid of stuff… They don't need to think about whether it could be re-used, is it still useful, to [them] or anybody else.'* (Waste Education Support Officer, Hornsby Shire)

Rubbish bins, as they are conventionally designed, not only conceal waste from those that are disposing, but also those who may potentially source objects contained within. Consistent with Douglas' (1966, p.50) definition of dirt as "matter out of place", bins capture and retain waste in definable, manageable spaces. Social taboos for gleaning from the kerbside may be open to contestation if objects are exposed, but the stigma of uncleanliness associated with re-using the contents of bins is far more secure. As such, disposing of objects into bins is a practice characterised by meanings of convenience for the household, but promotes little in the way of reflection or connection with the generation of waste.

Convenience is not, however, a characteristic solely related to the practice of disposal. It may also be conceptualised as a failure of alternative divestment practices to adequately capture practitioners. In cases where the elements of practice are not present to enable donation, selling, or otherwise, disposal presents itself as a viable alternative:

> *'I think I would just put it in the bin because it's easier for me, and it doesn't take any time. And I'm actually not sure if it's actually used for charity or if someone makes money out of it, or whatever. That doesn't matter too much.'* (Monica, 34, Amsterdam)

Monica argues that she is sceptical about the real world effects of donating goods to those in need, and that because of this uncertainty it is simply not worth her time and effort to divest them in that way. Such portrayals of disposal as an undesirable practice of 'last resort' were common in this research, even if they may not be entirely accurate for every individual. The creation of waste remains a strong social taboo when discussed in terms of divestment, a finding that will be discussed in the final chapter. This is particularly so for disposal practices, given that they are so closely implicated in the waste-making process.

Despite this association with the creation of waste, it would be inaccurate to portray disposal as the most undesirable practice, from an environmental and resource conservation perspective, for every case of ridding. As pointed out in Chapter 5, charitable organisations can often become overburdened with donations, particularly items that are in poor condition or unlikely to be re-used. In such cases, donating inappropriate goods can merely be transferring the practice of disposal and waste making onto these charitable groups, the additional costs of which undermine their ability to reduce waste by accepting and redistributing usable goods.

Several participants expressed regret at disposing of certain things, primarily due to the negative associations with waste created in the process. Karin had recently purchased a new bed to replace her existing one that did not hold her mattress properly. She had intended to disassemble the bed to leave out on the kerbside for reuse, or take it to the local charity shop.

However, she discovered that the bed had been designed in such a way that it discouraged disassembly and reuse:

> *'You couldn't really take it apart, there's this screw that IKEA has, it's also in the kitchen cupboards, and it kind of locks. Once you lock it, it's very difficult to turn it back. And this wood that IKEA uses in the beds… if you put too much force onto it, it splits.'* (Karin, 39, Utrecht)

Here, disposal appears to have been scripted into the material design of the object itself, thwarting any competency that one might have in disassembling and reusing the bed after its initial use. The use of particleboard veneer wood resists prolonged possession by its lack of durability, while the single use screws provided in the package ensure that alternative configurations of the bed are discouraged. Examples such as this point to the broad range of elements that might be implicated in the practices of disposal. These extend far beyond the individual household, to broader systems of production and consumption arrangements that promote single and short-term use items, and cheap construction materials that wear quickly. Disposal practices are held in place by meanings, including the consumer's expectation of how long a product should last and the producer's perceptions of market demand.

Disposal is a practice of ridding characterised by placing objects in spaces that make their material demise likely. These spaces vary according to their potential for re-use, depending on the procedures of waste management. Disposal is also defined, in this research, by a degree of expectation that an object is unworthy, or simply unlikely, to be re-used. Competencies for object retainment may not be present. Such competencies may reside with other agents, but accessing that competence may be overly expensive or troublesome. In this case, the meanings for retainment are insufficient to prevent material objects from being disposed of. The power of competing elements – such as the institutionalised competence of the waste management industry for dealing with unwanted things – can serve to negate alternative practices that preserve value of the object. Disposal is also mediated by meanings concerned with the creation of waste. As matters of pollution and environmental responsibility continue to rise in the public discourse, disposal practices are increasingly difficult to discern. These configurations of elements for the subject-object relation constitute the practice of disposal or the practice of its alternatives.

7.8 Conclusion

As it is defined here, ridding entails domestic material divestment that emphasises timely and convenient expulsion of materials from the home. In previous chapters, discussion focused on

how practices of divestment are carried out with identifiable goals in mind for the divested objects. In the case of ridding, these goals are far less pronounced. The benefit of 'getting rid of' something is overwhelmingly the absence of that same thing. This practice was identified in several forms during the course of this research.

Decluttering, and the service industry with which it has co-evolved, has recently emerged as a practice that has captured a number of practitioners in the Minority world as an increasingly 'normal' way of going about divestment. Meanings concerning the presence and detrimental impact of domestic material 'clutter', along with a willingness to outsource tasks of daily life to professionals - has led to the creation of a practice that would seem otherwise unlikely in a different socio-economic context. Excess objects are rid from the domestic sphere under the expertise of professionals. Often other forms of divestment are incorporated into this ridding strategy, illustrating how practices can integrate and overlap in everyday life. This is once again indicative of a systems view of practices, given their complexity and interconnectivity in different forms of material divestment.

However, there are other ridding practices that are far more entrenched in the general population, with scales involving the participation of most residential households in some form or another. Kerbside bulk waste collections are the setting for other practices of divestment, such as leaving-out. Specific arrangements of the elements of practice can either facilitate or discourage these forms of divestment and re-use. These elements can be cultural norms regarding the acceptability of the presence of waste in the urban landscape. Yet they may also be made (and unmade) by rules, such as specific conditions specified in the contract negotiations for waste management services. This demonstrates how elements of practice can be relatively discrete entities, capable of influence by certain actors, or highly embedded in culture and resistant to deliberate manipulation.

Finally, disposal describes practices of ridding that minimise the opportunity for re-use by divesting objects to spaces where an object's value is subject to rapid decline. Landfills, transfer stations, bins, and dumping each offer divestment solutions that are indiscriminate in their acceptance of waste, and often with an element of convenience for unwanted objects.

Chapter 8

Integration and Dynamics of Divestment Practices

8.1 Introduction

The foregoing chapters describe four distinct systems of practice that reside within the broader practice of material divestment of household objects. Chapter 4 described several practices involved in the retainment of these objects: storing, treasuring, and making do. In Chapter 5, the practices of altruistic divestment were revealed in the practices of donation and passing-on. Practices of selling as divestment followed in Chapter 6, describing the transitions toward online selling and innovations in the practice of holding garage sales. Finally, practices of ridding were discussed in Chapter 7 in the practices of decluttering, leaving-out, and disposal. Gregson et al. (2007) have claimed that commonly held notions of the 'throwaway society' are broadly untrue, and that practices of domestic disposal are generally outweighed by practices of re-use, repair, and object maintenance. The object of this chapter is to discuss how the various systems of practice interact within the broader systems of divestment and consumption.

Throughout this thesis the concept of the 'subject-object relation' has been employed as a locus for understanding the practices of material divestment. This was done to ensure that in any given case of divestment, causality was not attributed to either a human agent 'choosing' an outcome on the one hand, or a material object 'forcing' an outcome on the other. Drawing on the concept of hybridity from the likes of (Latour 1993) and Whatmore (2001), divestment through a realignment in the subject-object relation was characterised as a co-productive – a socio-material – reality.

This same approach is captured in an understanding of social practices as being constituted by particular competencies, meanings, materials and, where appropriate, rules. This framework is based on the theorising of Shove et al. (2012) and Strengers (2010), and recognises this hybridity in much the same way, highlighting elements that are similarly co-produced between human and non-human actors. Social practices theorists point to the role of object and infrastructure design in 'scripting' particular outcomes, which is itself a collaboration of the social and the material.

The understanding of a co-produced, socio-material reality that underlies social practices theory also conceptualises the dynamics of change in ways that are less centered on either the human subject, or the material object. Change is argued to come about vis-à-vis the re-configuration of the elements of practice. Elements have their own dynamics, since they often reside in multiple systems of practice. In this way, changes to one system of practice can ripple into others in ways that are unpredictable, and ongoing. Understanding how practices interact, then, is of similar import to understanding the practices themselves. Seeds of change may also reside within a practice itself, facilitating dynamics of endogenous emergence to a shift in practice despite any perceptible "external" influence (Shove 2010, p. 1). These dynamics suggest that while we can undoubtedly describe practices as distinct entities – such as cycling, cooking, or reading – their systemic nature is that of 'extending out' in ways that may be subtle, or even imperceptible to those investigating them.

The practices of divestment, as defined here, are no different. While this research has undoubtedly focused on practices related to the dispossession of material objects from the home, it must also be acknowledged that divestment is, at another level, a continuation of the practices of possession. To this end the practices of retainment are described as a system, as a way to distinguish from those practices that actually do divest objects. This is illustrated in Figure 2.3, where retainment is seen to reside across the system of divestment and the broader system of consumption – more specifically a system of practices around 'possession'. In the practices of storing, making do, and treasuring, these are examples of situations where objects have the imminent potential to be divested, but are instead diverted from divestment and retained in continued possession. These connections point to a more novel way of conceptualising how divestment comes about.

Accentuating the links between possession and divestment reveals how rearrangements in the elements of the practices of possession – that is, of owning and using material objects – are the primary mechanism for transitions to the practices of divestment. This type of transition differs from broader socio-technical transitions in practice, such as those represented using the multi-level perspective (Geels 2002). Transitions relevant to this research are ongoing practices that constitute the divestment, or not, of individual material objects. Therefore, these transitions are locally enacted reconfigurations of elements, thereby altering the dynamic of the subject-object relation. Reconfigurations may have trajectories of elements that are reflective of broader social dynamics, or unique to that particular enactment of the practice.

Objects may be reclassified as worthy of divestment by changes to any of the relevant elements of practice of possession. It is also the case that these elements, given their nature as constitutive of practice, are rarely insulated from one another. 'Material' degradation of an object, such as wear and tear or breakages, can render once useful 'competencies' incapable of continued object interaction. Likewise, lack of 'competence' to maintain an object can contribute to its 'material' degradation. Either of these dynamics can shift 'meanings', such as instrumental value or sentimentality, in the subject-object relation. Yet the inverse may also be more accurate - that changes in perceived 'meanings' about the object shift the interaction of 'competence' and 'material' in the first place. Where relevant 'rules' for owned objects exist, such as product guarantees or safety expiration dates, these add yet another dimension to the dynamics of practice. 'Rules' may be reflective of practice, basing themselves on established expectations of use and divestment; or they may seek to shape and shift practice through their enforcement.

The dynamics of individual elements can be conceptualised in terms of their characteristics: scale, intensity, trajectory and form. Scale describes the extent to which an element resides in other practices, as well as across physical space. Intensity describes the indispensability of an element as part of a practice. Trajectory refers to the dynamic of a particular element in terms of the rise, stagnation, or decay of its incorporation into a practice. Finally, an element's form is synonymous with its implementation, and the mechanism by which it has come to exist in practice. These four characteristics dictate the specific dynamics of elements, and offer a vocabulary in which to conceptualise their ongoing arrangement and rearrangement.

The dynamics of elements and their characteristics that lead to a shift from ongoing possession of material objects to potential divestment are largely co-evolutionary. Yet while the dynamics of elements are useful to describe how transitions may occur, change can also be conceptualised at the level of the interaction of practices. There are different dynamics that are possible here.

For example, certain practices can 'crowd-out' other practices, by successfully competing for the attention of a practitioner at the expense of another. This may be found in clothes being replaced by other similarly functioning or looking clothes, restricted by an individual's ability to wear only one set of clothing at a time. Equipment used to participate in a time-consuming hobby may be crowded out by changes to a work schedule that restrict one's ability to carry out that hobby. In other words, when objects related to that practice become unused, or unattended to as a direct result of the encroachment of another practice, they may hold less value ('meaning')

for the owner, and become more likely to be divested. Competencies may also degrade as a result of the practitioner not continuing to practice that competence. While some skills can be readily picked up again, others need to be regularly maintained.

Practices may also 'evolve' over time through relatively gradual transitions of elements, but these changes can accumulate into broader change that render certain objects obsolete, unfashionable, or out of date. For example, computer equipment may be compatible with current software for some time, after which backward compatibility is no longer supported by producers. Clothing may fit one's body for some time, but eventually become too small (or too large) for it to be readily worn. In these cases there comes a point, specific to each enactment of a practice, where change culminates in divestment.

It is also the case that more general practices of day to day living that do not directly engage with an object may similarly precipitate a transition from possession to divestment. Shifts in practices of habitation, such as when moving house or downsizing ('junctures', as discussed in Chapter 4), are examples of this. In the course of carrying out these broader practices, individual objects may not be specifically considered, but may have to be sacrificed through divestment to enable the general practice to occur. In the case of moving house, large and bulky objects that have only minimal or moderate instrumental or sentimental value may be the first to be divested. Practices of habitation, in this instance, negate the likelihood that a practice of possessing these objects can occur.

These dynamics point to the systemic nature of practices, as occurring at multiple levels concurrently. The interactions of the elements of practice constitute systemic mechanisms by which a practice may shift endogenously, due to the particular manner in which those elements are arranged. However, since elements can concurrently reside within multiple practices, inter-practice linkages and dynamics are inevitable. Whether one practice is crowding out, evolving, or simply negating another, these dynamics are ongoing in the course everyday life.

8.2 Elements of Divestment

Using testimony from in-depth interviews with households and providers of divestment services, along with an analysis of industry and media related material, a number of social practices have been described in a framework that was grounded in qualitative data. The findings of this research are summarised in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1: Practices and elements of the four systems of divestment

	Meanings	**Competencies**	**Materials**	**Rules**
Retainment				
Storing	Preservation Seasonally appropriate usage Neatness Organisation	Prioritising Redistributing Organising	Wardrobes Shelves Vacuum seal bags Vacant spaces Transport Storage Facilities	Storage facility hire conditions
Treasuring	Preservation of value Personalisation History Uniqueness	Maintaining Narrative construction	Signs of use Polishes, Oils, Paints	
Making Do	Thrift Independence Ingenuity Anti-consumerism Expense Avoidance of waste	Maintaining Repairing Searching	Tools Replacement Objects Manuals DIY repair manuals	Product guarantees
Altruistic Divestment				
Donating	Goodwill Value Alleviating poverty Avoidance of waste	Packing Prioritising Value appraisal	Charity bins Bags Charity shop fronts Collection drives	Disposal costs Product safety standards
Passing-on	Assistance Value Mutual Benefit	Recipient finding Empathy Transportation Online navigation	Re-usable Objects Online social networks	
Selling				
Online Selling	Profit Cost recuperation Preservation of value	Online navigation Knowledge of product field Photographing Presenting Establishing Reputation Appraising	Online computers / mobile devices Digital Cameras	Website transaction fees

Auction Houses	Preservation of value Convenience	Outsourced Expertise Value Appraisal Bidding Transportation	Storage facilities Auction Schedules	Auction House commission
Traditional Garage Sale	Cleaning out Downsizing Transition	Publicity Presentation Pricing	Street signs Newspaper Community advertisements	
Integrated Garage Sale	Cleaning out Community Development Waste Reduction Sustainability Fun / Festivity	Registration Presentation Pricing Distinction from other sellers	Signs Garage Yard Footpath	Coordination for specific day
Ridding				
Decluttering	Freedom Reclamation Time poverty Organisation Urgency Concern of waste	Prioritisation Reallocation Transport Outsourcing Empathetic engagement	Destination Boxes Removal Trucks Labels	Costs Industry standards of practice
Kerbside Leaving-out	Avoidance of waste Convenience Kerbside 'mess' Cleaning out Waste Sharing Scavenging	Knowledge of arrangement Scheduling Value appraising	Kerbside Space Urban streetscape Weather	Pick-up arrangement Formal ownership of waste Diversion from landfill targets
Disposal	Finality Worthlessness Convenience Non-attachment	Assessing Transportation	Trucks Bins Landfills / Waste Management Centers	Landfill / Tip Fees Local Government Diversion from landfill targets

Reconfiguration of the elements of the practices involved in possession can represent realignment in the subject-object relation. This dynamic can be characterised in terms of the rearrangement of elements, as well as the interaction of related practices exerting particular

mechanisms of influence. However, the subsequent practices of divestment or retainment are not determined prior to their actualisation. Multiple routes of divestment, differing in their potential for reuse and likelihood of waste creation, are possible for any subject-object relation.

As can be seen in the summary of practices (Figure 8.1), there are numerous occasions where elements are found across different practices, and even across systems of practice. For instance, themes of organisation are found in both practices of storing and decluttering. This shows how elements themselves can be incorporated into vastly different practices. Meanings around the notion of 'getting organised' can be attached to practices of finding places for object within the home, when they are complemented by appropriate storage spaces and facilities (materials), and the competence to go about the tasks of object allocation and redistribution. Yet these same meanings can be incorporated into a practice of ridding through decluttering, when oriented in a different arrangement of elements. In such cases, when storage facilities and spaces are inadequate or overburdened, the concept of 'getting organised' can lead to urgent and rapid divestment, potentially with outsourced forms of competence in the form of professional declutterers. Co-present meanings may also help to enable an outcome of decluttering, such as that of reclamation of the domestic space along with a lack of time to attend to one's possessions.

Meanings around the concept of the value preservation are particularly noteworthy for their presence in many forms of divestment, as well as retainment. Treasuring material objects aims to preserve value through continued possession and attention, with value potentially increasing over time. Value preservation may be expressed in the donation of objects, when framed as an alternative to disposal. Sale of objects preserves some market value, allowing one to be monetarily compensated for a divested object's value. Kerbside re-use allows objects to be left out with an expectation that their value may, or is likely, to be preserved through gleaning. In these various incarnations, the meanings associated with value preservation represent the desire of many practitioners to avoid the generation of waste – irrespective of how likely it is that preservation will occur.

In the same way that meanings may co-reside in different practices, competencies can be deployed in different scenarios of divestment. The ability to accurately appraise the value of objects was found to be useful for online selling. Knowledge of an objects potential market value may assist in its saleability, such as the setting of an appropriate reserve or asking price. However, similar forms of competence are necessary for practices of donation. Charity groups pointed out how a lack of competence for appraising whether an object is donation-worthy is a

significant cost for their own organisation, and may often lead to increased waste. The forms of competence discussed in this research are generalised, in that they often do not pertain to only one specific practice.

Many of the materials involved in divestment are also not exclusive to one practice. Having access to readily available means of transportation capable of moving household objects can enable objects to be passed-on to acquaintances. However, that same transportation may be used to take objects to landfill if no recipients can be found, if it is stipulated as dangerous by authorities, or an object is perceived to be of little to no value. Once again, this characterises practices as being constituted by an arrangement of elements that are at once part of the practice itself, but also concurrently integrated into other practices.

Moving from the dynamics of elements to the dynamics of practices, there are similarly complex engagements. As was discussed in Chapter 6, the practice of online selling has largely replaced that of traditional newspaper classified selling of domestic objects. That is to say, the trajectory of online sales has increased at the expense of a corresponding decline in newspaper classified advertisements. The population of carriers that had participated in newspaper classified selling appears to have now transferred to online selling. It has also attracted many new participants, given the rise of e-commerce and online communication. The capacity to arrange online sales as auctions may also have recruited participants from formal auction houses; since competencies of bidding and appraisal can be transferred to this medium.

8.3 Reassessing Value in the Context of Practice

Throughout the research, the concept of value in to the subject-object relation was found to be central to that of divestment. That is to say, the impetus toward the 'preservation' of value was, while not always paramount, nevertheless acknowledged when discussing divestment with participants. Of course, what constituted the preservation of value was unique to each participant. Indeed, individual participants were unlikely to maintain a uniform concept of value, instead this was dependent on the particular type of object involved. While the four systems of divestment practices have not explicitly been devised in relation to their ability to preserve value, they do so in ways that are often competing and contradictory.

Practices of ridding appear to offer the least potential for the preservation of value. When objects are gotten rid of with urgency, and their disappearance from the household is a central meaning to the practice, it seems likely that the preservation of value may be undermined by meanings of expediency and convenience. When infrastructures and provisions are made to

facilitate the rapid evacuation of objects from the household, practices of ridding and disposal may be carried out in preference to other practices.

Practices of retainment, on the other hand, can be characterised by the preservation of value, or even the extension of it. Storing practices, whilst open to a variety of meanings, use the spaces within and beyond the home to enable retainment. When removed from storage, and returned to use after a sustained idle period, objects can be attributed new meanings that warrant their continued possession. Such meanings can be found in the renewed interest of objects after seasonal storage, or forgotten objects with previously imbued significance. This supports the notion of objects undergoing an emotional absorption into our personal lives (Ilmonen 2004, p. 38).

Practices of altruistic divestment and practices of selling both attempt to preserve some value, although they accomplish this in different ways. Selling attempts to maintain an object's exchange value by divesting it through market mechanisms. This relies on the monetary investment made by the buyer to preserve the value of the object, since they have a sunk cost in any object acquired by this means. Altruistic divestment, on the other hand, preserves emotional value somewhat, by non-market redistribution, relying on the perceived needs of the recipients to ensure that an object's integrity and functional use is maintained.

In each of these systems of divestment there are possibilities for the preservation of object value to be undermined. Retainment does not guarantee that the functional value of an object will be maintained. Objects stored idly in the home may be better redistributed to other locations, to ensure they are used in some way. This is particularly the case for objects that are perceived as having become burdensome for their owners, where an attempt to preserve the value of an object may actually have the effect of causing harm through the perception of a home that is cluttered.

Attempts to redistribute objects through altruistic means or through sale may similarly undermine the possibility of preserving value. As has been discussed, the imperative to preserve value in donated goods that do not warrant it can undermine a charitable organisation's practices. When goods unfit for use or resale, are donated charities must absorb the cost of disposing of them.

Goods acquired through sales appear to be one of the more reliable ways of preserving value, provided there is a sufficient competitive market for them to be valued by buyers. However, items sold very cheaply in non-competitive markets, as is often the case at garage sales, lack this competitive market aspect that might preserve the value of a divested object. Where

selling is token and opportunity based, there may be significantly less competition – in these cases, as described in Chapter 6, this practice may be somewhat akin to ridding rather than selling, since divestment is prioritised over monetary income.

8.4 Conclusion

This research attempts to construct an empirically grounded account of the divestment practices of material objects from the home. This framework is general and mechanistic, rather than forming a comprehensive account of the specifics of all divestment practices, since it relied on a relatively small sample of interviews with voluntary households, interviews with providers of divestment infrastructures, and discourse analysis of selected media relevant to the practices. Common elements and dynamics were revealed that span multiple practices. This in many cases, results in practitioners engaging in multiple forms of divestment, despite self-characterisations as 'hoarders' or 're-users'.

The recognition that competencies, meanings, materials and rules are deployed in the performance of all forms of divestment suggests that there is considerable potential for innovations in practice. Were these elements largely discrete between the four practices of divestment, their potential for rearrangement and integration into new forms of practice would be limited. Given that the same meanings involved in a practice can lead to vastly different outcomes in terms of the preservation of value and the creation of waste, there are significant opportunities for news ways of going about divestment. The following final chapter discusses how some of these new forms of divestment and consumption might occur, in light of the accumulated findings of this research project.

Chapter 9

Intervening in Practice for Sustainable Consumption

9.1 Researching Divestment

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, it was established that halting the global growth of consumption is a critical challenge to sustainability. However, continued escalation of consumption is underpinned by the ability to divest goods that have been previously acquired. Understanding the practices of material divestment is therefore necessary to confronting consumption. A theoretical framework based on social practices that could inform an approach to this task was introduced in Chapter 2. Elements of competencies, meanings, materials and rules were appropriated from existing research literature in the pursuit of a social practices approach to domestic material divestment. This concept of elements was central to my approach, and so a supplementary layer of these elements characteristics – those of scale, intensity, trajectory, and form – was then developed. This enabled more specificity with regard to understanding the elements of practice, potentially revealing additional dynamics and conceptualisations of practice.

In Chapter 3 the research agenda was developed, based on a paradigm of social constructionism, and a methodology of constructivist grounded theory. Using in depth semi-structured qualitative interviews, the topic of domestic material divestment with households in Australia and Netherlands was investigated. Providers of divestment practices were also interviewed, namely charities, local government waste services, a declutterer, supplemented by participant observation at two events where material divestment was being carried out: 'Queen's Day' in Netherlands, and 'Garage Sale Trail' in Australia. In conjunction with this, various divestment related media were reviewed, in order to understand the practice beyond the perspective of individuals.

In Chapter 4 it was argued that in order to understand divestment, there must be some account of the practices of object being retained. Practices of storing enable objects to resist divestment, through seasonal rotation, external self-storage, or the management of spaces within the home. Practices of making do emphasise the role of competence in repair and maintenance, and the development of shared forms of competence that enable it. Treasuring emerged as a

practice of retainment where meanings of value were attributed to objects through ongoing maintenance, customisation, and the association of objects with meaningful experiences. Each of these practices promote object retainment, by diminishing the likelihood of divestment in different ways.

An account of altruistic divestment was then developed, where material objects were divested with meanings of assisting others (Chapter 5). Charitable donation emerged as one such practice, offering a more institutionalised route for divested goods with systems that permitted redistribution and reallocation according to needs. However, the configuration of material elements, particularly charity bins, was found to have the effect of distancing divested objects from donors. As a result, considerable waste occurs, with charities being forced to bear significant waste management costs for 'overvalued items'. Other practices of altruistic divestment are found in passing-on, a means to directly exchange unwanted material goods. This was found to occur informally, within existing networks of social actors, and even manifest as an expression of those interpersonal relationships. However, passing-on is also increasingly enabled by online networks such as Freecycle, increasing the potential of re-use through exchange to a broader pool of participants.

Return oriented divestment comprised Chapter 6, capturing several notable dynamics in the practices of selling. Online selling has, for the most part, replaced the practice of traditional classified selling for household objects. Through the infusion of online communication, digital photography, and a number of prominent forums for exchange such as eBay, Gumtree, and Craigslist, these material adjustments mean that objects can be marketed to a larger pool of buyers than in the past. For those unaccustomed to this form of selling, specialist auction houses offer an expert form of competence to sell unwanted goods. Practices of selling were also seen in local goods exchanges, in the form of Garage Sale Trail (Sydney, Australia) and Queen's Day (Utrecht, Netherlands). Such divestment events offered the potential to capture practitioners, as they became increasingly prominent in the cultural activities of an area.

Chapter 7 developed an account of the practices of ridding as, contrary to existing literature, a particular form of divestment where the absence of the object was the central meaning. This was evidenced in the practice of decluttering, as professional providers of competence are recruited to assist in divestment. Decluttering is enabled by meanings of reclamation of space, time poverty, and the desirability of outsourcing as a mechanism for carrying out the tasks of everyday life. Chapter 7 also discussed the practice of kerbside bulk waste collections as sites of material ridding, re-use, and the contest over the ownership and

management of waste. The convenience associated with ridding of objects is found in disposal. This is found in the ease with which something can be disposed of, as many of the waste management arrangements encourage a lack of engagement with waste materials. Disposal of waste appears to be scripted into some material objects, making alternative practices of re-use less likely.

How these practices tessellate with one another was the subject of Chapter 8. Many practices, whilst having divergent outcomes in terms of material re-use or waste creation, share many of the elements of practice. This demonstrates that they are not independent practices, but parts of a broader system of material divestment; which, as the integration of the practices of retainment show, are part of a still broader system of practices of material consumption.

Having established these findings, I return to the seven research questions stated in the research agenda of Section 3.4. These core questions described the overall direction of this project, and will be addressed in turn:

1. How are domestic practices for divestment of durable material objects carried out in everyday life?

Throughout the project, it has been demonstrated that the practices of divestment vary significantly in many respects. Divestment is a system of practices, rather than a singular practice in itself. Common to all practices, however, is a reconfiguration of elements that constitutes a realignment of the subject-object relation. When such realignments occur, practices of possession and use may be abandoned to enable divestment. However, this does not mean that practices of possession and use no longer have relevance. Often these practices configure how a given object will be divested. Meanings of an objects value are grounded both in use and divestment, with value being a crucial element in the type of divestment undertaken.

2. What distinctions can be made within the overall system of divestment, which would reveal individual social practices?

Divestment practices are characterised by the integration of elements of competence, meanings, materials, and (potentially) rules. This integration may result in the retainment of objects within the domestic sphere, facilitated by practices of storing, making do, and treasuring. However, when objects are divested, it may be accomplished in a number of ways. These divestment practices can be carried out altruistically, where objects are donated or passed on to others for their benefit. They may also be carried out for return-oriented purposes, such as online selling, auction house selling, or at local goods exchanges. Finally, objects may simply be gotten rid of,

where the central meaning is the absence of the goods themselves. This is evidenced in the practice of decluttering, leaving-out, and disposing. Thus, four distinct practices that make up the system of divestment emerged from my data: retainment, altruistic divestment, return-oriented divestment, and ridding.

3. What are the competencies, meanings, material, and rules evident in the constitution of divestment practices?

4. How does the arrangement of these elements, and their characteristics, structure the practices of divestment?

Elements are constitutive of practice, just as they are constituted by it. The elements identified for the different practices of divestment are summarised in Figure 8.1. Competencies enable certain forms of divestment over others. This is particularly the case for repair and maintenance of objects, potentially thwarting (or facilitating) an opportunity for an object to be divested. These forms of competence may be held by the divestor themselves, or exist as a form of expert competence that can be employed – such as a declutterer, or auction house seller.

Meanings allow practices to be legitimised socially, by giving a structure of appropriate conduct to a particular action. Meanings may be particularly strong and almost ubiquitous, such as a desire to avoid waste. Alternatively, they may be highly niche, such those that are grounded in a particular individuals experiences with an object.

Materials can be understood as both the object itself, as well as the surrounding infrastructure that would encourage or discourage a particular form of divestment. Understanding materials ensures that practices are not overly focused on the individual, as they are often designed and implemented by other social actors.

Finally, rules can be constitutive of practice, although this is not always the case. Rules are most relevant where there is institutional interest in the practice of divestment. Rules can be structured to facilitate outcomes that support certain practices over others, occasionally with significant impact on the generation of waste material.

These elements may be unique to one practice of divestment, or common across many. Elements may also be common to practices not primarily associated with divestment, indicating that these practices are embedded within the routines and patterns of everyday life.

5. What are the dynamics of change that pertain to the practices involved with material divestment?

In this analysis of divestment, there have been several dynamics that are revealing of social practices generally. These dynamics assist in conceptualising how practices come about, how they can evolve over time, and how they may decline.

Whilst not evident in all practices of divestment, dynamics of change were notable in several practices discussed in this research project. Selling practices were particularly in flux, as new technologies enabling goods to be bought and sold online have been particularly disruptive for traditional classified selling. This illustrated a dynamic of replacement, where population of carriers has largely defected from one practice to another. However, the transition in practice is also characteristic of recruiting more practitioners that did not participate in traditional classified selling. In this way, online selling replaced captured both existing and non-existing practitioners.

The practice of garage sales is also presently evolving, incorporating the synchronisation of practices that enable participation by a larger population of potential carriers in the form of the Garage Sale Trail. Here, elements of an existing practice have been deliberately preserved – such as meanings around 'cleaning out', 'making money', and the material setting of a garage or yard – whilst shifting others, from isolated and dispersed occasions to social, synchronised events. This is an example of how transitions in practice are inevitably the result of existing practices, reconfigured in different ways that can lead to vastly different outcomes and participation.

Decluttering is also gaining a population of carriers, albeit largely confined to households in the Minority world. Through the proliferation of inexpensive material goods, and enabling meanings of time-poverty, reclamation of space, and broader cultural trends toward outsourcing, de-cluttering has gained significant participation over the last 30 years.

6. How do practices of material divestment interact with each other, and with other practices during the course of everyday life?

Reflecting the recognition that practices exist only in the context of one another, interaction between practices both related and unrelated to divestment was discussed in detail in Chapter 8. This is reflected in the negotiation of value, as an evolving subject-object relation can prove critical to the pursuit of retainment or divestment practices. The primary mechanism by which practices interact with each other is through the integration of various elements. These elements may reinforce and amplify each other, such as the advent of online communication, digital

photography, and online forums, the integration of which contributes to the rapidly burgeoning practice of online selling.

Elements of the practices of material divestment may also negate or erode one another. The convenience associated with waste disposal systems, and the distancing of waste that they promote to users, can erode the engagement with unwanted goods necessary to many forms of re-use. The meanings of waste as undesirable, unclean, and generally taboo, undermine widespread participation in waste management practices.

Divestment practices can interact with other non-divestment practices throughout the course of everyday life. This is evidenced in the practice of passing-on, as divestment can form part of social interaction, either through direct exchange or a third party matching those divesting with those acquiring.

7. What opportunities are there to intervene in the practices around divestment, in order to bring about more sustainable ways of living?

This final question is the subject of the following sections, as I discuss the potential to reconfigure existing elements of divestment practices for outcomes that may promote a less resource intensive use of material objects.

9.2 Re-designing Waste Infrastructures for Sustainable Practices

Although this research has focused specifically on the practices of divestment, opportunities for intervention must also engage with the practices that surround divestment. This is indicative of a systems thinking approach, where certain 'leverage points' can be harnessed to promote change on a scale that is broader than previously recognised (Meadows 1999). Given that elements reside in multiple practices contemporaneously, and those practices are systemic in nature, it stands to reason that attempts to engender transitions toward sustainable practices must recognise divestment *in-situ*. Practices of production, manufacture, acquisition and use all have the potential to script divestment, as do many other practices not directly involved in the use of these objects.

Practices of divestment share many characteristics with practices of consumption. Warde (2005) argues that consumption is not a practice in itself, but is rather a moment in many practices. In other words, consumption is rarely, if ever, undertaken for its own sake. If one has a desire to consume, it is only a factor of that consumption being embedded into desired social

practices. In this regard, it can be argued that the generation of waste holds a similar conceptual status. Waste generation is not itself a practice, but a result of how the elements of practices are configured in a particular instance. This is exemplified in the practices of charitable donation, discussed in Chapter 5.

A finding acknowledged at the outset of this research project, and confirmed throughout, is the discrepancy between what many individuals perceive to be (re)useable donations, and the ability of charitable groups to use those donations. While donated goods may have altruistic meanings associated with them, they are not intrinsically helpful by virtue of their being donated. Goods unable to be redistributed for welfare purposes, or resold in charity retail shops, are otherwise transferred to landfill (or incinerators) at significant cost. This cost is distanced from the donator, with charities having few effective opportunities to inform households of the eventual fate of donated goods.

Distancing was most evident in the practice of donating via large charity bins, situated in various urban and suburban locations. These are the largest single source of donations, and the primary resource for charitable enterprises upon which their welfare and commercial interests stand. Yet these same bins produce excessive amounts of unusable products. The design and integration of these bins as nodes in the practice of donation appears to contribute to this. Charity bins, like most other bin designs, function to conceal waste, not merely contain it. Their metal, non-transparent enclosures and hinged deposit flaps ensure that donations 'disappear' in the eyes of divestors. It is unsurprising, then, that some users may treat charity bins in much the same way as other garbage bins – as waste deposits rather than routes for reuse and redistribution. Bins of this kind embody the values of the waste system generally; to separate the consumer from waste and to minimise engagement with it (de Coverly et al. 2008; Chappells & Shove, 1999). Donating, or simply getting rid of, material into charity bins demands this same lack of engagement with the implications of divested goods.

Charity bins offer no opportunity for unusable goods to be refused by a charity. With the imperative to provide conveniently located bins to attract donations comes the elimination of the need for engagement by donators. Users are also deprived of the opportunity to witness and understand the process of donation and redistribution, and therefore any prospect for cultivating competencies for making more appropriate donations. This is more easily conveyed when donations are made directly to a store or redistribution centre. Here, charity workers have the opportunity to refuse objects, but also to inform and discuss the enterprise of charitable distribution with donators. In this configuration of the practice, competencies for knowledge

about usable goods can be built, and applied to subsequent occasions of donation. Informing the user about appropriate practices, whilst similarly changing the meanings of this particular course of divestment, may lead to a shift in the quality of material goods that are received. Of course, such a transition must also acknowledge that the removal of the convenience associated with donation bins may lead to a substantial reduction in the overall quantity of donated items. Users accustomed to this convenience must be consulted if donation levels are to be maintained.

Although not directly linked to the practices of divestment previously discussed, there are examples of interventions into practices through the design of user experiences with bins in other settings. Transparent bins have been designed and implemented by the University of Technology's 'Designing Out Crime' Centre. Named the 'Safer By Design Bin'[42], they feature transparent enclosures that allow a bin's contents to be made visible to external view. The imperative for this design and its implementation is one related to crime and the threats posed by terrorism in public spaces. Transparent bins limit the possibility of dangerous materials, such as explosives, being concealed in crowded public spaces. These bins have been installed in many of Sydney's railway stations, as they make their contents 'visible' whilst also containing waste into manageable spaces.

This presents an interesting opportunity for the integration of materials across practices. Most bin designs are characterised as having the effect, intended or not, of concealing waste from users. This limits the extent to which bins can act as signifiers of appropriate, or inappropriate, practice. Transparent bins, as have been designed and implemented for general waste in public places such as railway stations, offer similar possibilities to shift practices of donating. The meanings of what constitutes 'normal' donating practices can more easily be recognised when users are able to witness divested material from other users, as well as their own. At the very least, divested material would become increasingly 'visible' to users, with the possibility of promoting a more general transparency of the courses that material goods take once they are divested.

Attempts to make the practices of divestment and post-use more transparent go to the broader issue concerning the separation of users (divestors) from the social, environmental, and economic implications of their practices. Princen et al. (2002b) claims that through the displacement of consequences, and the severing of feedback loops, the obscuring of practices that are consumptive or waste-producing, unsustainable practices have been allowed to emerge. This has come to define the dominant waste management practices, although in recognising this

[42] http://www.designingoutcrime.com/news/16/ accessed on 18/11/2011

there are prospects for how the elements of these practices might be configured for sustainability.

9.3 Co-location of Practices – Divested Presence on the Kerbside

One of the defining characteristics of modern societies is our ability to manage and control waste. As previously discussed, the bin is one of, it not the primary interface in which we delineate waste from the socio-material world. Households are provided with bins for general day-to-day waste, but these do not serve all our divestment practices. In Chapter 7, the practice of kerbside bulk waste collection was discussed, along with the way in which specific arrangements made by local municipal authorities could configure particular forms of divestment and re-use. In doing so, it was argued that the kerbside was a space in which waste was subject to contest by its mere presence in the urban streetscape. Whether by opportunistic gleaning by passers-by, dedicated re-sellers, or professional (but un-authorised) recyclers, kerbside bulk waste collections were the site of multiple forms of re-use. These consequently had the potential to change divestment practices as expectations about what might be taken prior to formal waste collection were incorporated into rationales and meanings for 'leaving-out' objects on the kerbside by divestors.

In Chapter 6, I discussed how traditional practices of holding garage sales in the Australian context have, through the establishment of the Garage Sale Trail, recently become more integrated as social and cultural events. This incorporates many of the elements of the Queen's Day flea market, observed in the Netherlands, which gains significant participation across the population each year. The widespread participation and history of this market appear to have contributed to its perception as a culturally acceptable practice. While both of these events were classified as forms of selling, it is clear that many other meanings are attached to these practices as well – community building, festivity, and, most importantly for this research, sustainability.

These practices of divestment – kerbside bulk waste collections and garage sales – share many elements that may offer prospects for innovations in practice. This also suggests that there may be opportunities for convergence between the two practices, with a difference in outcome overall. Both forms of divestment are often used to jettison materials that retain some identity (and value) as objects, rather than simply waste material. The spaces in which these practices take place are also similar, at the transition between the private space inside a home and the public space of the street. Scheduled kerbside collections can occur *en masse* periodically, synchronising individual performances of the practice into concentrated periods of time. This follows a similar

temporal footprint to the synchronising of individual sales into a Garage Sale Trail, or Queens Day flea market. These 'cultural divestment events' could be incorporated into overall waste management strategies, by ensuring that such events take place immediately prior to bulk waste collections. Integrating practices in such a way better reflects the imperatives of the "waste hierarchy" (EPHC 2010, p.6), where reduction and re-use are recognised as being preferable to disposal.

Of course, attempting to align practices in this way is subject to the specific rules concerning the transfer of material from the domestic sphere to a waste management facility. If waste material placed on the kerbside is not legally considered to be the property of municipal waste services, or the private contractors they employ, then this material becomes open to many forms of re-use - before it formally enters the waste stream. While this may be viewed as a relatively minor change for the negotiation of waste contract arrangements, its implications are far more significant. Facilitating - or at least not preventing - kerbside re-use practices results in an approach to waste management that incorporates a greater number and diversity of stakeholders, as well as a greater number and diversity of opportunities for the value of divested goods to be negotiated rather than merely disposed of.

When waste slips away undetected, as some bulk collection arrangements are attempting to encourage, there is little opportunity for engagement by potential re-users. Divested materials are shaded from their owners and the community at large. While some local governments remain concerned about the persistent appearance of waste in their streetscape, this can be ameliorated to some extent by concentrating the persistence of material into specific divestment 'events'. As discussed previously, broad scale participation in these divestment events, where unwanted materials become visible in the streetscape, offer the potential to shift meanings around waste – from that which should be concealed, minimised and maligned, to something that individuals, households and communities can engage with on their own terms. Making waste 'reappear' in the public consciousness may also go some way to reducing the effects of distancing, where the negative effects of consumption are removed from those carrying them out.

The implications of the 'reappearance' of unwanted material goods were captured, in another setting, in Section 5.5. The 'Free Shop' - where goods were donated but also made available for no cost - was explicitly designed to promote reflection about the disappearance of waste material. With abundant excess goods made available to customers for free, the logic of a competitive market economy is inverted. In the Free Shop, goods are abundant and free, while in the marketplace they are priced on the basis of scarcity. To those who visit it, the implications of

minority world consumption practices are made apparent – that our problem is not one of a scarcity of goods but an excess of them. These alternative forms of exchange, which promote recognition of the life cycle of material goods, can challenge dominant modes of acquisition, such as the shopping mall. When divestment, and its implications in the form of waste, is co-located with those of acquisition, there is the potential for consumption patterns to change to be more sustainable.

This principle of attempting to align practices in ways that promotes more sustainable ways of life can also be generalised to other aspects of divestment. By attempting to 'co-locate' practices that are otherwise separated in time and space, links can become established that may lead to different forms of practice. For instance, practices of re-use were often undertaken during the course of other practices in daily life, such as commuting. This is not merely a point related to convenience. Rather, it is that elements of practice are easily transferred across multiple practices. In this case, the competence to navigate the streetscape for commuting is easily applied to seeking out the most fruitful spots for gleaning, and potentially also divesting unwanted goods.

Many of these pairings of practices exist where an existing skill set (competence), material infrastructure, or abstract meaning can be transferred to more sustainable ways of doing things. Skills for material acquisition and 'shopping' such as searching for 'bargains', and meanings around the satisfaction of specific tastes, can equally be applied to second hand markets along with conventional retail markets. Recruiting new carriers to the practice of shopping at second hand markets is more likely, however, if the gulf between these two practices is minimised. This can be promoted by the integration of second hand stores into centres of first-hand retail sales, thereby presenting re-use as merely a branch of retail acquisition rather than a completely different practice. Presentation and cataloguing of second hand items will further assist this, a strategy that some charity shops are embracing already.

The same can be said of divestment practices concerning ridding and disposal. Certain waste management facilities promote reuse at the point of disposal. By stationing a re-use centre at landfill locations, users are given the opportunity to undertake a practice of re-use at a site otherwise devoted to disposal. Objects can be re-used in these instances without significant changes to the elements of practice. By attempting to co-locate practices in this way, policy makers may be able to shift consumption and divestment outcomes without the need for social actors to transition to entirely new practices.

9.4 Competing and Collaborating Practices

As this research has corroborated, throughout the course of a subject-object relation material goods often transition from assets to liabilities. As competencies, materials, and meanings shift and realign throughout their life-course, their value to their owners changes. This value may increase, as seen in the practice of treasuring, but it may also diminish. In other words, the progressive accumulation of durable consumer goods sees only limited application in contemporary Minority world economies.

Such a claim contrasts with some previous accounts of the value of unwanted material goods. For instance, Thompson (1979, p. 9) argues that: "it is decidedly advantageous to own durable objects (since they increase in value over time whilst transient objects decrease in value)." He claims that the durability of objects is a reflection of the power of those who own them, and that transience is closely linked who ultimately lack power. However, in the context of this research, durability can often be seen as a liability, with objects persisting in the lives of their owners who find it difficult to divest them. Of course, durable objects may occasionally see increases in value over time, such as antiques or those that acquire some 'kitsch' value. Here, durability is a prized attribute, precisely because it's value is embedded in the circumstances the past. Mass-produced consumer objects are far less likely to exhibit such increases in value, at least not on the scale that would lead to their widespread preservation by consumers.

Bauman, in contrast to Thompson's account of how consumer goods are valued, argues that society has become increasingly 'liquid' as individuals, groups, and institutions adapt to evolving circumstances; and with that, those who are best able to divest goods, do:

> In a remarkable reversal of the millenia-long tradition, it is the high and mighty of the day who resent and shun the durable and cherish the transient, while it is those at the bottom of the heap who – against all odds – desperately struggle to force their flimsy and paltry, transient possessions to last longer and render durable service. The two meet nowadays mostly on opposite sides of the jumbo-sales or used-car auction counters. (Bauman 2000, p. 14)

Bauman acknowledges that this is not representative of a decline in conspicuous consumption, but merely the evolving taste of consumers trending toward the flexibility enabled by continuous acquisition and divestment. In other words, the preference for durable goods that both Veblen (1899) and Thompson (1979) claimed was characteristic of power and class, is withering under the shifting preferences of consumer culture. As Hawkins (2006, p. viii) observed: "constant serial replacement works because a fashion system and certain forms of identity underwrite it".

In other words, the shift has occurred systemically, as structural elements orient themselves toward consumption practices that anticipate shorter and shorter life spans. Modern consumerism, with its relentless promotion of goods that are innovative, technologically advanced, and fashionable, entails a high turnover of goods. This necessitates ongoing material divestment; practices that serve to provide ample feedstock for second hand / used goods markets.

However, this same promotion of new goods can make older used goods seem unattractive and shabby by comparison. As the philosopher Diderot observed, objects often seem less desirable the moment they are accompanied by newer ones (Diderot 2001). In other words, the practices of consumerism appear to both support and undermine practices of object re-use; consumption of the new and novel presents itself as an alternative, more desirable form of consumption, but also as the primary resource from which reuse practices can be sustained. To some extent, the practice of acquiring new objects competes for carriers at the expense of those who could, potentially, engage in second-hand acquisition and re-use. Both practices share meanings of materialism – that material objects are necessary to the human satisfaction of needs. However, individuals are also limited in their capacity to carry out practices that compete against each other for carriers; in this case to acquire, store, and use material goods.

Indeed, Rifkin (2000) argues that the regimes of economic activity are increasingly shifting from that of long term ownership to short term limited use of assets. He forecasts 'The Age of Access', whereby consumers will come to own less durable goods than in the past. The drive to accumulate possessions as part of one's life project will be abandoned in favour of short-term leases, rentals, memberships and other service agreements. The implications of this are far reaching:

> …in a world where personal ownership of property has long been regarded as an extension of one's very being and 'the measure of a man', its waning significance suggests a formidable change… [it] is likely to produce a very different kind of human being (Rifkin, 2000, pp. 6-7).

In such an economy, objects are valued only for their contribution to enabling certain experiences, rather than being valued in and of themselves. This shift can be understood in the way consumption was illustrated in Figure 1.1. This figure distinguished between consumption of durables, consumables, and experiences, whilst also acknowledging that many forms of consumption incorporated more than one of these aspects. The shift to an access economy strengthens this notion in relation to durable goods, as they become enablers of experiences

rather than simply objects to be possessed. Whilst one could argue that this situation already exists, or even that it has for some time, Rifkin sees an acceleration of this trend at the expense of long term ownership of material objects.

The outcomes that this shift entails are not clear when their implications are considered for the generation of waste and global environmental integrity. There remains the possibility that consumer durables will continue to operate in a socio-economic system based on exclusive ownership, with shortening life spans and increasing disposability. Unless industrial processes can transition to properly re-integrate divested goods into the manufacturing process, as envisioned by McDonough & Braungart (2002), waste generation will continue to increase. However, alternatives forms of object divestment and use are emerging, without such fundamental changes to the industrial process having taken place. Facilitated by the rise and integration of online communication technologies into everyday life, goods are coming to be used in ways that depart from the exclusive ownership model that has dominated consumer culture so far. Described by Botsman & Rogers (2010) as part of a broader trend toward 'collaborative consumption', they argue that multiple actors can use goods across their life cycles. The time in which it is in the possession of an individual may be short, but it may pass through many individuals in its life course.

Online networks permit seamless transfer of goods from those seeking to divest, to those seeking to acquire, in ways that were simply not possible in the past. This is reflected by online trading sites such as eBay and Craigslist, discussed in Chapter 6, but also in networks that promote the sharing and renting of consumer goods for shorter periods of time. The 'Open Shed' network, for instance, argues that consumers prioritise access to household consumer goods for their instrumental value, over ownership, claiming, "Why buy when you can share?"[43]. Such initiatives may encourage object retainment, where objects can be rented out repeatedly over time whilst kept in storage. Collaborative forms of accessing material goods are themselves not novel. Community libraries have, for some time, enabled multiple actors to gain instrumental use of goods without the need for purchase or exclusive ownership. Practices such as this change the meanings surrounding material goods, making them more likely to be perceived as material assets rather than liabilities.

These collaborative forms of consumption appear to be gaining momentum, both in terms of the number of people participating in them, and the range of goods and services they seek to provide collaboratively. The potential for them to recruit new participants appears high in many

[43] www.openshed.com accessed on 20/4/2012

different groupings. A survey conducted in Amsterdam suggests that 84% of respondents indicated their willingness to participate in some form of collaborative consumption (van de Glind 2013). However, as will be discussed in Section 9.7, there may well be a substantial difference between a respondent's expressed intention to participate, and their actual participation. While it is difficult to predict whether collaborative forms of consumption can provide a viable alternative to an established consumer culture, it appears that many of the elements that caused it to remain niche in the past are now being overcome. In particular, the rise of internet and mobile based communication facilitate these types of exchanges; as this research described in the practices of selling and passing-on. At the very least, collaborative consumption challenges us to recognize the possibility of alternatives to exclusive ownership and disposal of used material goods.

It is also the case that people who engage in these and other alternative forms of material consumption do so in a way that is often not reducible to easily identified motivations. Williams & Windebank (2005, p. 317) argue that economic necessities as well as agency are often intertwined in the rationales of those who use charity shops, second hand shops, and flea markets. This suggests collaborative and alternative consumption is unlikely to be predictable solely on the basis of economic purchasing power, when other attractive elements – such as fun, novelty, sociality and distinction - can be achieved in ways that are not found in the markets for new goods.

Of course, these forms of repeated use and divestment through multiple actors demand a certain degree of material durability. Not all objects are equally capable of prolonged use over time. Design for sustained and repeated use, maintainability, reparability and upgradeability are characteristics that must be incorporated into consumer products to ensure they are able to persist in everyday life, without the need for disposal. While improvements have been made to the efficiency and recyclability of many consumer goods, their longevity has waned over time in most product categories (Cooper 2010b, pp. 3-4).

This reinforces the argument made throughout this thesis that material divestment is not simply the result of discrete decisions made by individuals exercising particular choices. To facilitate practices of retainment, or value-preserving forms of divestment, requires the appropriate material persistence, the ability to curate and maintain those objects, and an appropriate rationale for doing so – that is, the elements of practice.

9.5 Reflections on Practice Theory

This research project has sought to employ the theoretical assumptions of social practices theory (Shove et al. 2012; Strengers 2010; Schatzki 2002), a loose but developing body of literature that seeks to de-centre the role of individual agents, as well as social structures, when attempting to describe activities such as divestment. In this section, the use of practice theory for this particular research project is evaluated on the basis of applicability to both the research topic, and studies research related to sustainable consumption more generally.

Central to the concept of a practice is the notion that day-to-day activities are not isolated incidents capable of being analysed individually. Rather, the role of habits and routines are central to understanding consumption related activities, since many of these operate according to these principles. That is to say, it makes little sense to conceive of an activity that we take part in everyday under the assumptions of 'choice', since we are unlikely to make explicit 'choices' about these every time we enact them. Activities such as this operate at what Giddens (1984) calls 'practical consciousness', whereby we know how to go about such activities without having to consciously evaluate them. This is not to say that consumption practices are carried out unconsciously, since Giddens also recognizes the capacity to evaluate the merits of participating in them; or what he refers to as 'discursive consciousness'. However, such concepts do reveal the importance of distinguishing between different types of consumption practice, since they are likely to be subject to different mechanisms, and therefore different opportunities for interventions for sustainability.

In the context of this particular research project, a question that remains is: To what extent can domestic material divestment be conceived of as a practice? To attempt to answer this, I draw upon several findings of the research itself, and attempt to evaluate them in terms of the characteristics that practice theory assumes.

In Section 5.6, the term 'junctures' was introduced to identify points in a life-course that entailed significantly more material divestment than others. Changes in the life-course such as moving house, divorce, death of a family member, or a change of employment, tend to be occasions for existing objects in the household to be divested. When viewed in the context of practice theory, it seems questionable as to whether such a phenomenon could be considered a practice. Having defined junctures as infrequent disruptions of the day to day, it would be difficult to describe the habits and routines associated with such a non-habitual, and non-routinized event.

In the realm of these junctures, divestment does appear to be characterized more by personal and social values, rather than a particular divestment practice that one has been recruited to. Here, theoretical approaches such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) may be more useful, since the experience of divestment is a departure from routine activity. As the participants indicated in this research, they had little to 'fall back on' in the form of prior knowledge or competence, and many options for divesting their possessions were 'on the table' so to speak. In the case of Michael and Saskia, the values of avoiding waste, and that of valuing family and friends, lead to their cataloguing of their unwanted possessions prior to their overseas migration. Having never been in the position of having to divest so much before, this was the most attractive 'choice', since it aligned with their values most closely. Indeed, it was an expression of those particular values, and one that they had not had the opportunity to enact prior.

Other parts of the research did reveal types of divestment more akin to the practices theory account of consumption. The annual flea market at Queen's Day in the Netherlands, having an established cultural history as a community event for divestment, is an example of a practice having normalized over time in a particular social setting. In this case, divestment is embedded into other social phenomenon, such as the performance of tradition and festivity, allowing it to acquire a degree of routine-ness and normality. The chapter on retainment similarly revealed how certain practices can solidify with repetition and habituation. In Section 5.4 – Making Do, Evelyn noted how a developed competence for repairing her washing machine has lead to a notable difference in how she approaches the question of divesting objects. By succeeding in making do with her existing washing machine, she claimed that she was more likely to perform similar tasks in the future, and thereby altering her perception of what is worthy of being divested.

Both of these examples are characterised by activities that are ongoing in nature, and therefore more appropriate to practice theory. The extent to which domestic material divestment is a practice largely depends on the type of divestment being discussed. Just as the consumption practice can differ markedly in the extent to which they are carried out at the level of practical consciousness, or whether it is the result of considered and reasoned evaluation, so to it is the case with divestment. When activities are participated in for the first time, or people are called upon to make explicit choices in a way that has not been encountered before, then it appears that other accounts of decision making activity may be more useful. While practice theory is undoubtedly a powerful approach for understanding the complexities of certain types of

consumption, this more the case for the routinized and habitual activities, rather than activities that have little precedent in the eyes of practitioners.

Throughout this thesis I have also attempted to integrate systems thinking, as described in Section 2.6, into an account of practices. Consistent with viewing this as an approach to 'thinking' about the issues of consumption & waste, rather than an explicit theoretical approach, this is less explicitly made than my description of the elements and characteristics of practice. This proved to be beneficial, as the tendency to view practices systemically – which is to say complex, overlapping and interconnected – informed much of the analysis presented. It also allowed the research to conceptualize certain leverage points that, if intervened in appropriately, could stimulate broader change to the systems. Practice theory and systems thinking both proved useful in this context, recognizing the role of disparate social and material elements in constituting a system of interaction, reproduced through continuous activity.

9.6 Limitations of Research

As with many research projects of this nature, the practices of material divestment were limited by research capacity. Although interviewing 17 households yielded a reasonable spectrum of divestment and re-use practices, a larger sample of household may have revealed further variations in practice.

This research was with households in two locations: Australia and Netherlands. This itself present difficulties in how one analyses the data from participants across these two countries. For instance, it may not be immediately clear to the reader when the practices described here are indicative of one or both countries. This is complicated by the fact that practices may vary within one of these locations more so than between them. Practices clearly exist across geographical spaces, it seems of little value to assign a 'location value' to each and every practice if it is not unique to particular arrangements in a given location. For instance, the 'free shop' (Section 5.5) was described by a participant in the Netherlands, but I did not interpret this as a necessarily Dutch phenomenon. However, the 'Queen's Day' (Section 6.4) did appear to be a uniquely Dutch event, albeit one that Australia appeared to be developing in the form of the Garage Sale Trail.

In this sense, the desire to pursue this research in two distinct locations may have unnecessarily complicated the account of divestment practices I have developed. Were the research to focus on a single location, such as a case study, these uncertainties would be less

likely to be present. However, a case study may also limit the extent to which the researcher is willing to make conclusions that go beyond their specific case study location. That is to say, case study research of consumption practices may be highly relevant to other locations, but it's framing as location specific research inhibits the extent to which the research is deemed relevant to other locations.

In addition to the differences between Australia and Netherlands, there are substantial differences in per capita consumption between Minority and Majority households. Further research into the practices of Majority world households would likely yield a range of practices not captured in this project.

Another limitation to this research is one that is shared by many other research initiatives, concerning the value-action gap. This can be defined as:

> "…the observed disparity between people's reported concerns about key environmental, social, economic or ethical concerns and the lifestyle or purchasing decisions that they make in practice". (Sustainable Consumption Roundtable 2006, p. 63)

The part of this definition with the most relevance for this research is in the stipulation of reported concerns about these issues. The 'reporting' here generally refers to instances of social research, where people are asked to describe, in varying degrees of sophistication or quantification, their internal states of mind – their values – with regard to these issues of sustainability. This research was no exception, relying (in part) on individual testimony to understand consumption and divestment practices.

Practices of material divestment are closely associated with the generation of waste, as highlighted throughout this thesis. With the notion of waste, and 'being wasteful' so universally maligned, it may have been the case that participants avoided discussing those practices that were inherently waste-creating. Were this to be the case, researchers could be under the impression that re-use and retainment were overwhelmingly practiced in preference to ridding and disposal. Such a biased outlook can, however, be overcome by the approach taken in this project. By asking household participants to describe actual instances of divestment, rather than abstract values, the value-action gap is less likely to play a role in revealing idealised, rather than actualised, actions. Further, a social practices approach emphasises the role of elements that go beyond individual motivated actions. In this way, the individual is simply one aspect of the consumption, divestment, and waste creating practices that go in everyday life. By interviewing

both households and providers of divestment, this research has contributed to a more balanced understanding for the breadth and emphasis on different forms of divestment.

9.7 Contribution to Original Knowledge

This research project sought to understand how practices of divestment for material objects from the domestic sphere were carried out in everyday life. In doing this, it attempted to ground what one might call divestment and re-use 'behaviours' into 'social practices'. These are actions that not only incorporate the material and institutional elements of everyday life, but also describe them in terms that have meanings for those who carry them as passing-on, donating, leaving-out, and decluttering – to be carried out. Divestment practices were understood from the perspective of households, as well as providers of services and infrastructures. As systems of divestment are still generally under-researched relative to other consumption practices, when compared to the practices and rates of material acquisition, this research is a contribution to addressing that knowledge gap.

Many of the divestment practices are similar to concurrent research by Waston and Lane (2011), in their analysis of routes of re-use. Watson and Lane describe these various practices according to a scale from more to less mediated. This reflects the necessity (or not), of involvement with external institutions and infrastructures in the process of object reuse. In contrast, divestment practices in this thesis are described according to the aforementioned systems of practices: retainment, altruistic divestment, return-oriented divestment, and ridding. Practices were characterised to reside within one of these systems of practice, albeit with some elements shared between more than one. This shows that works of Grounded Theory based research add to the growing body of literature in the study of social practices. Further, in this research my exploration of the specific dynamics of these social practices adds to our collective understanding of the general dynamics of practices, as well as points to ways to intervene in practices for more sustainable outcomes.

A theoretical framework based on social practices theory explicitly informed this research. In conjunction with the elements of practice conceptualised by Shove et al. (2012) and Strengers (2010), this framework was supplemented with a concept for the characteristics of elements. These characteristics of scale, intensity, trajectory and form offer another layer of understanding how elements hang together in practice. These characteristics were addressed both explicitly and implicitly throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis, with the aim of increasing understanding of how elements might differ from one another when embedded in a practice.

The characteristic of an element's scale is revealed by how widespread or localised a particular element is incorporated into practice. This was evidenced in household perceptions about the meanings of appropriateness of kerbside re-use – that in some areas it would be deemed inappropriate, whilst in others it was considered normal. Understanding the scale of an element in practice assists in describing how a practice is carried out in different contexts.

The intensity of an element to practice is seen in how central, or replaceable it is to that particular practice. An individual's competencies for repair and re-use were initially thought to be central to an object's retainment. However, the intensity of that element is lowered through various forms of shared competency, through various how-to and repair manuals increasingly available online.

An element's trajectory aimed to capture how particular elements of a practice had their own dynamic that may only partially reflect the dynamic of the overall practice. This trajectory depends on the elements integration in a particular practice; however it may also have a trajectory outside the practice that does not share the same dynamic. For instance, while online communication technologies have been established for some time, their integration into collaborative forms of consumption is still emerging. This suggests that the integration of elements may lag behind elements that have been ubiquitous for a longer period of time.

Finally, the characteristic of form reveals key real world differences in how an element exists in practice. Examples of this are municipal area variations in the rules associated with kerbside bulk waste collection. This research showed how seemingly minor variations in how rules governing waste management could lead to highly different rates of re-use, as well as divergent meanings of scavenging versus sharing.

9.8 Opportunities for Future Research

The practices of material divestment, and the role they play in various economic and social systems, offer significant opportunities for shifts toward sustainable ways of life. Innovations in practice may come through any of the dynamics described above, as well as replacement, convergence, or others not captured in this research. The shift toward an access economy offers many forms of collaborative consumption, which may erode existing practices that make inefficient use of existing material objects. Indeed, collaborative consumption is itself an emergent practice that requires further research to understand how it is emerging and how it might be sustained to deliver sustainability outcomes. Making waste material and its post-use

consequences more visible to the consumer may also promote engagement with more sustainable consumption and divestment practices.

The persistence of durable goods in the biosphere is a hidden, although escalating issue. As existing locations for landfill-based waste disposal become more expensive over time, there is an imperative to find alternative ways of managing the material objects that we use on a daily basis. Waste management authorities are able to calculate the amount of material that enters formal waste streams with some precision, with targets for diversion of this material guiding policymakers at all levels of government (EPHC 2010). Far less understood, however, are the post-divestment routes and circulation of materials that do not enter this waste stream.

Numerous organisations and practices exist that would not be formally considered in the realm of waste management, and yet which contribute significantly to the reduction of material entering the waste stream. As this research has pointed out, charities, second-hand trading mechanisms and storage facilities are all examples of alternative divestment practices of which there is little to no acknowledgement in formal waste management policies or practices. The extent to which these organisations contribute to the reduction (or increase) in the amount of material that would otherwise be directed to landfill is unknown at this point.

Attempting to integrate these stakeholders into future waste management policy arrangements would go some way to filling the gaps in policy to make actual practice more consistent with an emphasis on reduction and re-use over re-cycling and disposal. This necessarily involves re-conceptualising the role of formal waste management authorities as the sole provider of these services. Instead, a more integrated approach to waste management is advocated. Such an approach must recognise the active role of non-state actors in effective governance for sustainability – consistent with Biermann's argument that agency must come from "beyond the state" (Biermann 2007, p.332).

In addition to these more institutionalised forms of divestment, there are informal practices that exist in and around municipal authorities own kerbside bulk waste collection, such as gleaning, sharing, passing-on, re-selling, and recycling. Evidence from this research suggest that they play a significant role in reducing the overall amount of waste material directed to landfill by waste management services, but this preliminary finding demands further attention. This would require extensive survey and interview data of households (divestors) and re-users, in order to understand the practices of kerbside bulk waste collection in a manner that better reflects the practices of kerbside waste diversion. Households would need to be asked to record estimates of their divested material (size, weight, number of items, materials) as soon as it is

placed kerbside, and a follow-up estimate of the amount immediately prior to final collection. This would give a basic set of metrics associated with diversion from kerbside bulk waste collection. Ensuring that households in area-scheduled, appointment, and hybrid collections were surveyed would yield more specific information as to which type of arrangement encourages the most diversion and re-use.

The future research agenda proposed here would allow for a more sophisticated understanding of the material trajectories that are 'post-use' but arguably 'pre-waste'. Research such as this may go some way to exploring how changes in practices of divestment and re-use come about, persist, or fade over time. This provokes broader questions concerning how 'cultures' of sustainable divestment and consumption are established, particularly in the realm of stewarding material objects over time. This may be a question of devising novel ways of dealing with goods; yet opportunities may also be found in analysis of practices that existed in the past.

Broadening these issues still further, there remains the question of precisely how sustainable consumption and divestment practices would co-evolve with dominant social and economic institutions. As many practices of divestment entail informal re-use, they are largely unquantifiable. It is unclear to what extent these practices benefit, or even harm, the economic and social interests of society, as they are perceived today. In a globally integrated society where the demands posed by climate change, resource depletion and ecological integrity are likely to render certain patterns of living unsustainable, the search for viable alternatives is becoming ever more pressing.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Invitation to Participate In Research

About Disposal

We all have to get rid of things from our homes at some point. After all, things tend to break sooner or later, or they wear out after prolonged use. We grow out of some things, and some things just get very old.

How do you decide what to keep, and what to throw out? Do you sell things, or just give them away? Or perhaps you donate some things to charity? I am interested in these questions about daily life, and would greatly value your input.

"Do you ever feel like you have too much 'stuff' around the house?"

Possible outcomes of Research

Not many researchers have been interested in why people get rid of things. Most research has focused on why people buy things! Hopefully this project will help us learn more about the way people relate to the objects in their home, and what disposing actually means for people.

How Will the Research Be Used?

The findings will be published in a number of forms, including a doctoral dissertation, journal articles, books and presentations, in both electronic and hard copy.

"Is there anything that you would never get rid of?"

Ethical Practice

Real names of yourself, or anyone you refer to, will not be used in any reports or publications. In other words, you will remain anonymous in any research findings.

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney, Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research you may contact the UTS Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer, [tel: 612 9514-9615]. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Taking Part

I plan to interview about 12 households in the Netherlands, and 12 in Australia, in order to learn about the differences and similarities between people's disposal practices in these two countries. Participants can be of all ages over 18 years, and from any social, cultural or religious backgrounds.

"Should I just throw this out, or perhaps we should donate it to charity?"

What will the interviews involve?

Initially, the interviews will take between 45-60 minutes, preferably at your place of residence, although if this is not possible then at a place of your convenience. These will take the form of an informal chat about disposal practices, guided by 9 broad questions. If possible, we would like to do a follow up interview in several months time, which would be of similar length.

Further Information:

If you would like to participate, or have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact:

Andrew Glover
0407951790
Andrew.Glover@uts.edu.au

Disposal: How we get rid of things

Invitation to participate in a research project

Appendix B - Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM – A research project into the domestic disposal practices of material goods

I ____________________ agree to participate in the research project being conducted by Mr Andrew Glover part of his PhD degree at the Institute Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney. I understand that the purpose of this study is to describe and understand how people go about disposing of material goods in the household setting.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve a face to face interview that will last no more than 60-90 minutes, with a follow up interview of similar length if agreed to, in which Mr Andrew Glover will discuss with me the practices of disposal of material goods. I give my permission for the audio of this interview to be recorded to assist with note taking, and digital photography of material objects.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way and understand that I will be given the opportunity to review any material attributed to me before it is used in published research, and that I may elect to clarify the material, or withdraw my consent to use it, if I do not agree to its publication.

I am aware that I can contact Mr Andrew Glover, or his supervisors Dr Chris Riedy and Prof. Gert Spaargaren, if I have any concerns about the research (contact details are provided below). I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish without reason.

Contact Details:

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____ ____/____/____
Signed by

____ ____/____/____
Witnessed by

Note:
This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: +61 2 9514 9772 Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au)

Appendix C - Household Interview Questions

[à indicates the follow up questions to elaborate on a particular theme]

Introductory
"Can you tell me about anything you've gotten rid of recently?"
à Did you buy anything to replace it? How did you go about replacing it? Did you want to replace it?
à What was it about the old thing that made you want to get rid of it?
à Can you tell me what you mean by something being "(too) old'?
à Are there some types of things that you tend to get rid of more than others?

Material objects inside & outside the household
"Are you comfortable with the amount of 'stuff' in your house?"
à Do you like to maintain a 'clean' household?
à Do you ever feel like there's too little or too much stuff in the house?
à Do you feel that some things 'clutter' your home? What things? What do you do about 'clutter'?
à How does it make you feel to have old things around your house?
à Did you ever feel that you 'outgrew' any of your things?
à What do you think changed that made you want to get rid of those things?

"Do you store anything outside the household, like at a self-storage facility?"
à Why are you storing them there?
à Can you tell me about why you store these items rather than getting rid of them completely?

"Have you ever had anything repaired that might have otherwise been disposed of?"
à Were you satisfied with the repair? If so, why? If not, why not?
à Would you get it repaired again if needed?
à What made you want to get it repaired, rather than replacing it?

Material & Emotional Value
"How do you feel about how long some of your things 'last'?"
à Can you give me an example of something that did 'last'?
à Can you give me an example of something that didn't 'last'?
à Ignoring the cost to replace things for a moment, would you prefer things to last a shorter or longer amount of time? Why?

"Do you value some things in the house more than others?"
à Would you say that you're 'attached' to some things? Is that because of some reason?
à So you sometimes like to buy new things? / So you sometimes prefer the old things?
à Do you like to get rid of some old things? What is it about getting rid of things that you like?
à Is there anything that you wouldn't be willing to get rid of? Can you tell me what things? Why do you keep them?
à So …….. means that these things are irreplaceable? Are they 'special' in some way? How did you come to have them?

Junctures
"Can you recall any points in your life when you got rid of lots of things, or anything significant?"
à Perhaps moving house, or just one day you decided to have clean out?
à How did you decide what to get rid of and what to keep?
à Can you give me some examples of what you kept, and what you got rid of?

Social Practices
"Have you ever?:
a) sold something on ebay
b) donated something to charity
c) had someone help you get rid of stuff in the house (declutterer)
d) sold or traded something at a swap meet
e) taken something to a recycling facility
f) put something out for council clean up"

à What was is that you got rid of?
à What made you choose that particular way over the others?

Implications of Disposal
"Do you think about what happens to goods after you get rid of them?"
à Does this affect how you get rid of something?
à Would you be more likely to buy something if you knew that it was recyclable, or able to be used by someone else? Why?
à Can you think of anything that might help people like you to get rid of their things in a better way?

Appendix D - Provider Interview Questions

"What do you see as the main role of [Provider X]?"

"I'm looking at [Provider X] as a way in which people tend to get rid of things from the domestic sphere. As a representative of X, do you see yourselves as being involved in that?"

"Can you explain how your service is involved with people at the household level."
à "For example, someone wants to use your service to get rid of something. How do you see them going about that, and using your service?"

"What service or infrastructure do you provide to people?"

"What benefits does Provider X offer over other providers of disposal?"

"Can you describe any significant trends in the use of your service? For example, is it's use growing or declining, rapidly or slowly?"

à "Do you know why these trends are the case?"

"Are you aware of what consumers expect of your service? Is there any case where consumer expectations differ from the reality of the service you provide?"

à "For example, people donating clothing to charity because of a desire to help those less fortunate, but the charity may in fact be overloaded with contributions of that sort."

"How do you, as a service provider, respond to changing consumer sentiment or behaviour? Can you give me an example of this?"

"Has there been any legislation, be it local, national or international, that has affected your service? Can you describe how this has changed the nature of the service you provide?"

"Have you noticed any recent changes in the use of your service, particularly in the context of the current economic situation?"

"How does Provider X view itself in relation to the green / sustainability movement?"
à "Do you think Provider X could play a role in these movements? What might such an involvement look like?"

Appendix E – Sample Interview and Coding

This appendix provides an example of the qualitative interview data analysis, by way of coding of a transcript of a household interview. Codes assigned to short passages of data are indicated by {}. Analysis of how these passages were integrated into the thesis is provided periodically throughout, identified by **bold** text.

This is provided so that the reader can gain an understanding of how prominent concepts in the thesis emerged from interview data through a grounded theory approach. This process is also discussed in Section 3.7.

Frank, Amsterdam. Male, Single, 33 years. Professional, but presently without employment. Shares apartment with sister.

Andrew: Like I said, you know the research is about disposal, and getting rid of things, so the first question I have is 'Can you think of anything that recently you've had to make a decision about getting rid of, by whatever means. And when I say 'something', I'm not just talking about the weekly taking the trash out, like food waste…

Frank: I see, like plants, or clothing, or furniture or whatever..

A: Yes

F: Well, plants is one example, I've got about 6 plants. My sister's boyfriend went and replaced all of our plants, and so I've got some crappy, half dead plants on my balcony {Spaces}. And I need to do something with them {Avoiding}.

A: So you haven't done that yet…

F: I just put them on my balcony, because I can't bring myself to throw them away {Spaces, Avoiding, Reluctance}. But probably the next step is to throw them away, or replant a couple that still have life.

A: So they're out on the balcony, that's kind of a space that..

F: For sure. Although I like to keep space on the balcony, there's a bag of trash on the balcony {Spaces, Trash, Bags}, and then I tend to forget about it {Spaces, Forget). But generally I like to

keep the balcony pleasant {Spaces, Clean, Pleasant}, so that when I go out I can enjoy it, but it also does become like a depot for trash temporarily {Spaces, Trash, Temporary}, and then some things I just don't know what to do with {Unknown, Stuff}. Like old crates, and old chair, so there's a bunch of random stuff on my balcony

Frank has drawn attention to particular spaces in his apartment that have objects that are less used, and potentially trash-worthy. The balcony seems to function as space for unwanted objects, as they are not encountered on a day-to-day basis; but Frank also claims to enjoy this space. The role that particular types of spaces play in keeping and divesting is discussed in Section 4.3. Frank's 'out of the way' space was contrasted with Trent's space for excess objects that were more present in the living space, to ensure they were dealt with appropriately.

A: Right, so can we talk about some of the stuff that is there, let's go with the chairs.

F: There's one chair out there that my mum bought for me, that's probably the biggest reason I haven't thrown it away {Stuff, Gift, Throw Away, Keep} is because it was a nice style design chair that she got at the department store, and it was good, and at that point I didn't have any furniture that was consistently part of my living room, or that matched a set or anything like that. And then I got these, and this chair sort of fell out of the loop {Consistency, Style} I guess. So I found these on the street {Find, Street, Spaces} as well, I brought them in, and so I kept these, and put that out on the balcony, not having any intention of throwing it away {Throw Away}, just keeping it out of the way {Spaces} for the time being. And then it got weathered, and now it's really weathered, and so I need to throw it away, but I can't bring myself to do it {Reluctance}, because…. I mean I can, if I really thought about it I would, but every time I look at it I'm 'Ah, that's the chair my mum bought me' {Gift, Sentimental, Family}, so I don't throw it away.

Here Frank makes the point that it is not simply the object itself that determines whether it is worthy of divestment or retainment, but the manner in which it is acquired. This suggested that, in the context of this particular object, value was multi-dimensional. Gifting was one way for an object to have value bestowed on it beyond it's utility. However, Richard pointed out that his laptop was closely valued because of the laborious process of saving for its purchase. These points are made in section 4.5, both under the practice of Treasuring, as a means of assigning an alternative value to objects that are retained.

A: So that's pretty much the reason?

F: That's the reason I haven't thrown it away at this point, but I will throw it way, because she wouldn't care, she doesn't care at this point, it's not worth, it's ruined now.

A: And you said you got these (chairs) off the street…

F: Just off the street

A: Were you out looking for chairs?

F: No, I don't look for things off the street, but every now and then I'll find something that's valuable {Find, Street, Value}. There's an old school Singer sewing machine in the hallway, that I found maybe 6 years ago, on the street, and one of my friends said 'You need to take this back with you!', and I was like 'Yeah!'. But the thing is it's really heavy, so the two of us dragged it up there. So it's more that, it doesn't function at all {Aesthetic, Value, Utility}, but it just sits there as a piece of furniture.

Yeah, so, the things that I get from the street, like, my friend Tim is a good example. He's always collecting stuff from random places, and then he throws stuff away when he gets tired of it. So I'm not much of a street collector, but if I do see something that's pretty cool… {Find, Opportunistic, Taste} I like the style of those chairs, and there were three of them, so I grabbed them.

Frank discusses the difference between 'opportunistic' gleaning of items from street kerbsides, and more deliberate appropriation of these items.

A: So would you consider leaving, say that chair, out on the street, or anything else out on the street?

F: Oh sure, if I were to remove something that still had value... generally for clothing, and for shoes, and towels, and things like that… I think we have a bag going on over there… that's for the Salvation army {Charity, Donate}, that's sort of my default built into me, that if you have extra {Excess} clothes, that can be used by other people {Donate, Utility, Value}. Like, don't put them on the street for homeless people to rummage through {Poverty, Leave, Street, Scavenge}, put them in a bin for organizations to deal with {Charity, Donate, Bin}. And there's a bin here, and it's Salvation Army {Charity}, and if it were a different organization then I would put it there too. I'm not particular to them, but for me it's packaged and dealt with {Deal, Bag}. So I do that.

A: And you said you prefer doing that than leaving it out on the street?

F: Yeah, I don't like leaving it out on the street {Leave, Street} for 2 reasons, one is that there's a chance that it just gets thrown away, if nobody recovers it {Throw Away, Dispose, Scavenge, Street}, and two, I like the fact that there are organizations, as far as I know, I haven' researched it, but they probably have systems by which they take out the clothes, they probably wash it, and then distribute it, to people who lock onto the organization. So for me, that's more structured, and more efficient than leaving it in the street {Organization, Structure, Charity, Efficiency}.

A: So a better chance of a good outcome, in your view?

F: Yes. But then other things, like for instance these black chairs, I'm probably going to get rid of them in 4 months, but the only reason I keep them is that there's always a lot of people over here, and so I need a lot of chairs {Excess, Stuff, Friends, Social}. But I don't like their state anymore {Degradation, Style}. I mean, they're not that bad, but they're getting a bit run down {Degradation}, and they scratch my floor a bit, and they're a bit too low. So when I get rid of them, I'll make sure it'll be on a trash day, for 2 reasons, one is that you have to put things out on trash day, and the other is that on trash days, people rummage {Street, Trash, Scavenge}, and so I wouldn't be at all surprised if someone came and took them {Scavenge, Recover, Find, Street}. And I would hope for that. So I would put them out quite early. {Leave, Time, Scavenge}

A: When you say a trash day, what is that? Is that a weekly thing?

F: Twice a week you can put… I don't know exactly what the rules are, but Wednesday nights, Thursday morning, and Monday mornings trash gets picked up. And one of those days is bigger trash {Trash, Street, Bulk}, like lots of construction trash, and stuff like that. There's also rules {Rules}, like you probably have to make an appointment {Street, Bulk, Appointment, Time, Trash} with them, and say I've got a big pile of solid waste {Trash, Street, Bulk}.

Frank flags a point about how different arrangements for waste removal result in different items being placed kerbside, and how they may or may not be gleaned.

So Wednesday and Sunday is when I would put them out, sort of neatly {Neatness, Leave, Trash}, maybe put a note on them, saying 'feel free to take. Or I'll put 'still working' on it. {Leave, Free, Utility}

A: So you think that people go around on the trash day and scavenge…

F: I know for sure. I have every confidence that if I leave these chairs out there, then it'll be picked up by someone {Leave, Scavenge, Trash}, and if it's not, then I feel like I've done the best I can to get rid of it {Effort, Trash}.

I could probably bring it to a second hand shop, I could probably do that, but it's too much effort {Second Hand, Effort} for me, and I feel like it has a very good chance of going outside.

Frank is confident that items placed kerbside will be gleaned prior to their removal by waste services. He sees this as a convenient option with good outcomes for ensuring that items are not wasted. He mentions several steps that he would take to increase the likelihood of their being gleaned, such as 'free' or 'still working' signs. This partially informed my discussion of 'leaving out' as a practice of ridding, discussed in section 7.3.

A: So you said a lot of people do it here, have you lived anywhere else where it's comparable in that regard?

F: Before here I lived in Boston, I think it was similar, in that the structure was similar, but when I got to Holland I just realized 'wow, there just a lot of good stuff to be had on the streets', and more here than ever, so I think it's part of a… almost like a culture of recycling through trash {America, Netherlands, Scavenge, Trash, Culture, Recycling}. Whereas in the states, or in Boston at least, you're not going to bike around on trash night {America, Bicycle, Trash}. Whereas there are plenty of people here that would.

A: What do you think the difference is? You mentioned that there's more of a culture here. What do you mean by that?

F: Maybe it's because everything is smaller here, and you have a 20 min bike ride, and you've covered 6000 houses, maybe that's part of it. Maybe it's just, the city structure, {Netherlands, Density, Bicycles} the streets a lot busier and bigger, and it's just more likely that you're going to be able to stop and look at something {Density, Scavenge}. Also maybe just because it's more accepted here {Scavenge, Culture}, that when you're digging through the trash in Boston you're an absolute scumbag {America, Culture, Scavenge}, but here, you're resourceful {Netherlands, Culture, Resource, Scavenge}. I'm not sure about that, but it could be.

Here, Frank speculates on particular cultural differences in scavenging practices based on his experiences in living in both America and Netherlands. He claims that such practices are more acceptable in the Netherlands, and that one is seen as 'resourceful' rather than simply 'a scumbag'. While this cultural difference was an interesting claim, I did not feel I had sufficient evidence to make any such similar claims from my research.

More broadly, however, Franks point about their being differing degrees of acceptance for scavenging and kerbside reuse informs much of the discussion in section 7.3.

A: Can you think of anything that you've replaced?

F: I haven't replaced much recently. I've just come back from a trip to Central America, and it made me realize how much stuff I have! I'm just not in the mood to buy much stuff these days. I think my trip to Guatemala had a big influence on me. {Travel, Stuff, Buy} You look at how

much stuff they had, and you look at how much stuff you have, and don't really need, you know? And that changed my outlook {Stuff, Worldview, Need}.

Before that I decked my apartment out, I bought the big TV, the big receiver {Buy, Need, Stuff}, and I was like, ok. I've never been a big acquirer of stuff, and gadgets, though of course I have this iPhone!

I've got two old phones {Stuff, Phone, Excess, Keep}, and I just don't throw them away, because every so often I'll get an email from one of my friends, asking if anyone has a spare {Spare, Stuff, Excess, Friend, Social} phone for a couple of weeks. And I've sent that email before in the past too, so I don't throw away cell phones because they don't take up any space. I can just put them away, and I don't have to deal with them or see them… That's a big part of throwing things away for me, is how much space they 'take up', and how it fits in my plan for the house {Space, House, Storage}.

Like take those books, I have a bunch that I'm ever going to read, but right now I'm not short on book space, so it's fine. Because I like things that are tight, and organized, and…clean {Clean, Neat, Organize}.

Once again the role of domestic space, and it's (un)availability to store items is described. Several rationales for retaining excess items are given, including that of passing items on to friends if needed. This provided an early indication that existing social networks were obvious routes for material objects to be 'passed on' (5.6) when they were divested.

Have you heard about this thing called the 'Camo-car?' It makes this terrible noise, like an ice cream truck, and it makes this trip through the neighbourhood, and what it does is pick up old batteries, oil, paint, just all that stuff, so it's a good option for people in the city for people who don't know how to get rid of that stuff {Knowledge, Stuff, Rid, Trash}. And it's a big truck, and it's got the same song, and they say 'Attention, the camocar is driving in your street, please bring your trash outside'. So if you're home, you'll know it's around.

And for instance a can of paint, or a battery, I would never throw in the trash {Trash, Waste}.

A: And that seems helpful, that you can go to someone and presumably that have more knowledge about it than you.

F: Yes. It would be more helpful if they emailed me. They may have that service, but I'm not sure. But I'm just glad they have that service, because then you at least have an option for that kind of trash.

I like to be the one making the decisions as to where the proper trash goes {Decisions, Trash, Independence}.

A: What about ebay? Have you ever sold anything using ebay, or a similar service?

F: Yeah. My parents had a really big house, and a bunch of old stuff that they wanted me to get rid of {House, Home, Large, Space, Stuff, Excess}. So I spent quite some time taking photos of it all, writing descriptions, and I put it on Craigslist {Craigslist, eBay, Sell, Photos, Describe, Internet}, which is huge in the states. I put some old china crockery set on there, and a whole set of National Geographic atlases, and I put that out there for free, and nobody responded! So I got quite discouraged by that, and eventually they took it to the dump {Free, Trash, Dump, Internet, Discourage, Rid}, because there they have a spot for stuff that is still valuable, and other people come and pick it up. So I think most of the stuff when they moved to a smaller house went there {House, Move, Small, Large, Family}.

Frank's use of internet based exchange forums, and the preparation required to pursue it, suggested that selling in this way may be considered a practice in itself. It also pointed out how there is some crossover between practices of 'selling' and 'passing-on', as discussed in Chapter 8. This passage also provided an indication that moving house was an occasion for divestment, something confirmed in subsequent interviews with Michael & Saskia. This, in turn, led to the identification of 'junctures' in the life course, discussed in section 5.6.

I'm trying to think of what I would do if I had to move into a much smaller apartment right now…

I'm a big fan of passing stuff on to people {Passing, Friends, Family, Stuff, Excess}. So if I had to get rid of these bookcases for example, I would put them on craigslist. Or Maarktplaats. I would never put something this good, I mean they're not great, but I would never put them on the street, unless it was a real need situation.

A: So it seems that you can always rely on your network of friends, both to take some stuff, but also to get stuff you need.

F: Right. But for me it's much more giving than taking, since I kind of want this place to be minimal {Minimal, Stuff, Clean, Home}. We had some friends that were moving, and they had a bunch of stuff they had to get rid of, and they packaged it all up, let everyone know, saying 'It's all free, first come first served' {Move, Home, Free, Friends, Stuff}. And I said to him, well, if you need someone to take the books… And there were plenty of others who wanted them more that me, but I was just thinking of how I could help him get rid of them.

A: Ok, let's talk about books. What do you do with your books?

F: Ah. It's hard for me to throw away a book. And books, a lot of them were gifts, or ones that I've purchased, and I still want to read.

I'm pretty sure that there's books there that I've gotten, that I'm pretty sure I'll never read. But I can't bring myself to throw away a book {Book, Gift, Throw Away, Utility, Difficult, Reluctant}. If there were a bin, next to the thing that said "Books for Africa', then I would be much inclined to gather up 50 of my books and pass them along. I'm never going to throw them away, because that's a waste {Throw Away, Waste}.

A: So the fact that its a book, that it has stories or information in it, is that significant?

F: For sure. No doubt. I'm a big proponent of recycling paper {Recycling}. I don't understand why people don't recycle paper. Like the other day, I found a big bag of old magazines out the front of my house, and I brought them back inside, and left them there, for 2 days, just to make the point to the Neighbour like, 'you don't throw this away'. And then eventually I put it in the paper recycling. I just feel that it's so damn easy, and we live so close and it's such a waste of trash space {Throw Away, Waste, Trash, Value}.

But yeah, the fact that it's a book… Like, I have a lot of books here that have no sentimental value, that are just taking up space. So I probably should get rid of them {Space, Trash, Rid, Value, Sentimental}.

A: When you say 'taking up space', what do you mean?

F: Ah… The idea of having stuff in your house that you don't use, or don't plan to use, to me, is annoying. It's like, I don't have a storage area in this apartment, which is a great thing for me. It means I don't have to keep things. Space is a commodity in Amsterdam, it's considered valuable. But I don't like clutter, and I don't like having things that.. there is no reason to have them. {Utility, Stuff, Value, Clutter, Spaces, Netherlands}

Frank's discussion of space within his home, and it's tendency to be viewed as a commodity in Amsterdam, leads to him mentioning the concept of 'clutter', as a type of object that has found its way into the house but which remains unused for periods of time. This lead to my pursuing an interview with a home organizer, or 'declutterer', in order to gain further insight (section 7.2).

A: Are you generally happy with the amount of stuff in the house?

F: I'm getting happier with the amount of stuff in the house. The question for me is 'Am I happy with the stuff in the house'. {Stuff, Happiness, House, Home, Spaces}

A: Is there anything that you feel that you've outgrown. So perhaps you got it as some stage, and then..

F: Yeah, I know what you mean.

A: What about clothes?

F: Clothes are a good example. I have a very big closet, so I'm able to keep plenty of clothes {Spaces, Keep, Stuff, Excess}, and generally when I buy clothes it's because I'm in the mood {Buy, Style, Stuff, Clothes}, and I'll buy a whole bunch at one time. It happens maybe once of twice a year. Um, when new clothes come in, it doesn't mean old clothes go out. I could go through and get 2 trash bags full of clothes that I just don't wear anymore. I've got like, 9 pairs of jeans, and I wear 3 maximum {Excess, Clothes, Replace, Wear, Style}. So I could easily get rid of a bunch of clothes. Some were given to me, most of it I've purchased.

I guess that's the only sentiment I have in getting rid of old stuff is clothing. I don't want to get rid of it, because I think 'oh, I used to wear this in high school {Clothing, Sentimental, Value, Old, Wear, Rid, Time}, or I used to wear this all the time 5 years ago'. And I think 'will I wear it now? Maybe'. And then I just keep it, knowing pretty sure that I'm not going to wear it.

A: So the old clothes serve as, a kind of bridge to the past?

F: Maybe, sure. Old clothes more than anything else I would say.

I'll make the decision, and say 'I need more space, so I'm going to clean up all my clothes {Clothing, Spaces, Excess, Old, Wear, Style, Time, Clean} and then I'll have a whole bunch of space, and actually, that would be a nice thing to do because in the past I've thought 'I don't really need to do it, because I've got space'. On the other hand, my sister lives here too, and she's got this small room, with a small closet, she's got lots of clothes, so it would be almost like a favour for her if I went and cleaned out my closet and said 'you've got all this space to put all your stuff, she'd be totally psyched. And for me, it would be quite good because I'd get rid of a whole bunch of stuff that I don't wear, and it would probably make me value the clothes that I have a lot more, because I tend to… well, I feel like I'm quite sloppy with my clothing. A lot of my favourite clothing has a stain or something on it. Even then sometimes I'll keep it, just for sentimental values, or I'll wear it underneath something else. But yeah, there's definitely sentimental value in my clothing.

I could easily get rid of pounds and pounds of clothing right now {Sentimental, Value, Clothing, Wear, Utility}.

And you don't bring yourself to throw something away unless you're consciously doing a clean up of your clothing. I don't, at least. I tend to get something out, and say 'oh, that doesn't fit me very well', and then I'll just put it back, instead of putting it in the Salvation Army pile {Charity, Keep, Rid, Donate, Bag}, which would be a better way to go about it.

Bedsheets, and linen, I keep a spare set of those just because you never know when you'll need those {Excess, Stuff, Space}, and I have space for it. And I don't like spending money on new linens so I'll keep the old ones. {Buy, Thrift, Keep, Value, Utility}

A: Can you think of something opposite to that, something that has no sentimental value?

F: Ah yeah. I've got some clothes, and I purchased it, and it didn't fit. And soon after I realized I didn't like the cut. So I like it, I like the cut, but the neck is tiny, ad the fit isn't quite right. So I rarely wear this shirt. And I bought it in South America, so I probably didn't pay much. But I bought it, and I payed money for this shirt because I thought it was a good fit, and I thought 'I like it'. So I won't throw it away, because I bought it, and I made the choice, it would feel like a bad purchase if I were to get rid of it! {Buy, Regret, Rid, Value}

A: But you said you didn't pay much for it.

F: Well, this would be a bad example because I don't buy much clothing for cheap. But the same applies for a bunch of clothing that I have, it's that it's to long, or that it doesn't fit right, or whatever, and so I don't wear it. I just, do not choose to wear it. But yet I will not throw it away, because I made the choice to buy it, and to then by it, and not having worn it at least 10 times, and then throw it away, I'm validating the bad purchase aspect. I guess that's the mental breakdown of it. I'm coming to terms with the fact that I've made a bad purchase. Which I don't really want to do. {Wear, Throw Away, Regret, Keep, Buy}

A: So good purchase it dictated by how much you use it?

F: How much I use it, sure. And then I just don't like to think about bad purchases. But I think what you're after is that if I used it a certain amount of times, then it's a good purchase. {Buy, Value, Utility, Wear}

A: But you still don't want to throw it away yet?

F: I still don't want to throw this one away yet because maybe,at some point, I may think 'oh, the neck isn't that bad, it's like of like my style'. Because my style has changed over the past 10 years. I used to be into really baggy clothing, and not at all concerned about how I looked, and more recently I've been into really styley shirts, t-shirts, trying to put a bit of effort into how I look. And so who knows, probably that fits a bit more into that style. {Style, Change, Wear, Aesthetic, Utility, Value}

There's another shirt, I have, and it's a nice long sleeve shirt that I got from JCrewe online, and I put it on and I'm like 'damn, this thing is comfy', and so I'll probably wear it as a pyjamas shirt or something, rather than throwing it out.

Probably the biggest reason I don't go through my closet is that there's a lot of confrontational material in there. I'll see 'oh, I spent a hundred euros on that!'. It's confronting!'. {Confront, Value, Buy, Regret, Clean, Spaces}

Frank's discussion of clothing here partially informs the discussion of value, and how it can be viewed in terms of a subject-object relation. He describes how his style has changed, in terms of clothing taste, whist simultaneously having those objects wear and potentially falling out of his style. Frank also flags the concept of thrift, which is noted in several parts of the research including making do (section 4.4).

Frank's discussion also points to the notion that practices are highly systemic, in that their implications can be felt long after they have been enacted. Re-evaluating past purchases in terms of subsequent use indicates that divestment, use, and acquisition are interconnected practices of interacting with material objects, not separate and distinct phases of consumption.

I think stuff can be a big burden. I really think it's important to know your stuff, and know where it is. {Burden, Liability, Stuff, Space}

A: So when do you think stuff becomes a burden?

F: Yeah, when I have to look at it, when I have to look at things that are not part of the flow of the house. My sister has a bunch of stuff on the table here, and stuff here, and under the chair, and I say 'you've really got to get rid of that stuff for me, because it really irritates me.'. I might be some sort of OCD thing, but it doesn't sit well with me if things are just sitting there temporarily.

Cleaning out and cleaning stuff, is like therapy for me. {Clean, Therapy, Temporary, Time, Stuff, Spaces}

Frank links the process of divestment to those of maintaining a clean household, and even psychological wellbeing. This was reinforced by my interview with a declutterer, who emphasized that decluttering as a practice could bring significant enhancement of contentment among it's practitioners.

END