

LOCALLY PRODUCE → GROWN NATURALLY → SPARK FABRIC → FOLD WITH CARE

IT'S

HARD

BEING

RUBBISH

**how discarded objects' value can be restored**

salvage / play / value / transformation / performative

## ABSTRACT

The design explorations investigated in this research book aim to reduce the consumerist culture that is contributing to the climate change crisis. A design technique to combat this involves allocating value to waste objects that have lost their 'use value' but still hold significance beyond the monetary.

Modern mass production has created a disconnection between humans and trash. The public inability to engage with or reuse trash must be restored to reduce landfills. The act of collecting, archiving, and anthropomorphising trash objects in their original form celebrates the experiential truths of their past and present within society, transforming them into commodities with historical value.

Design outcomes explored in this book depict processes of transformation – where care, play, and performance are techniques used to apply value to objects and materials that have exhausted their initial purpose. Caring for an object through salvage and repair creates an emotional bond between human and object. A connection of equal value can be developed by interacting with the object through play. Performance as a medium shares the potential to create value – specifically through artistic and activist lenses – raising questions about capitalism's ability to determine value.

Through these explorations, the bonds between humans and waste materials reveal a symbiotic relationship, where trash collaborates with society to archive and narrate our material lifestyle.

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# INTRODUCTION



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My love, Ravi, for always encouraging me to push on and create work that I am proud of.

And of course, my trusty trash can, for collaborating with me on this journey.

With the disconnection between humans and trash expanding with the rate of consumerist culture, techniques to reconnect us to materials emotionally and spiritually must be explored. The initial collection of waste objects is the first step of care in changing the perception of what trash truly is.

Walter Benjamin's ragpicker and his process of archiving society's leftovers depicts stories about how we relate to trash. This displays Rose Salane's truth-telling narratives about how objects experience the world ontologically and how humans have collaborated in their stories. Emotional bonds can be restored to discarded objects when taken care of through repair, using labour time to meditatively make products by hand and create stronger relationships with materials. Play further transforms trash objects, as simulation initiates their imaginative value. The way trash objects are framed through fashion and glamour alters their context, transforming them from useless refuse into commodified goods. This performative framework depicts soft activism, highlighting the prejudices that

capitalism holds against its leftovers, and it offers techniques to use waste as a facilitator in changing human habits of consumption. Conversely, through the act of anthropomorphising the bin, a spiritual connection arises from the equality between human and object, alongside the realisation that without the bin our connection to consumerist culture is severed. Language further expresses how our seduction to spending and discarding is normalised in the evidence of transactions through receipts, however poems can arise from said receipts to create narratives of our lifestyle. Lastly, the exchange value through gifting illustrates how objects, new and old, can strengthen bonds between humans.

The design explorations mentioned above express how care, play, performance, exchange, and commodification link humans to waste objects. This offers techniques to reduce our effect on climate change, reducing the mass discarding of materials into landfills and improving the consciousness of consumerism and empathy towards our leftovers.

# THE TRASH PICKER

Frederick Le Roy's article *Ragpickers and Leftover Performances* (2017) discusses Walter Benjamin's philosophy of the historical leftover. The case study surrounds the idea of the ragpicker, who acts as a historical archivist by scavenging for items thrown away by the public and then displaying them at the front of his shack. In becoming a product of industrialisation and consumerism, the ragpicker aims to **preserve the cultural history of materialism as its figuration**<sup>1</sup> by archiving trash through design techniques over literature.

This inspired the first design exploration for this research book, which involved the collection of discarded objects within neighbourhood hard rubbish piles that held potential. An old telephone, drawer face, fan face, failed flowerpot, small light bulbs, and a child's painting were collected from the piles to investigate their worth. What warranted their potential greatly depended on my physical interaction with them: picking them up, feeling the quality of material, and communicating with the textures or forms. It is through the common gesture of touch that **"enables us to gather [and] to connect"**<sup>2</sup> to objects which can be applied to the objects that have lost their 'use value'. The potential of these items was also assessed by judging my skills of DIY to transform them physically into something greater or transformed mentally via my imagination.

Through the act of trash-picking like Benjamin's ragpicker, the scavenging and exhibition of waste objects offers them a chance to re-enter society as a valued commodity by reflecting how society engages with consumerist culture.



Figure 1: first week collection of objects from hard rubbish.

# HUMAN-MATERIAL CONNECTIONS

Narratives and associations are generated within each object's ontology between its own experiences and the experiences lived with their owners. Acacia E. Audell's thesis *One (Wo) Man's Trash Is Another (Wo)Man's Treasure: A Visual Exploration of Homeless Space-Making Through the Lens of Material Culture* (2020) highlights the connection and experiences that individuals struggling with homelessness have with second-hand objects. Taking knowledge from this research, the design exploration objects found in the hard rubbish piles hold **"database narratives [that] are significant for anthropological interventions,"**<sup>3</sup> and can be exaggerated as archived commodities. Owning certain items, whether functional or not, creates a sense of **identity and belonging due to their ability to carry memories or envisage who we wish to become**<sup>4</sup>. The old telephone and drawer face possess such qualities.

For this design exploration, contacts from my mobile phone were added onto the back of the old telephone. This action immediately attaches my connections to family, friends, acquaintances, and the device that helps uphold these relationships in the first place. A ring was drawn for each number that occurred in each contacts' number more than once, 4 being filled in first. Three buttons displayed at the bottom of the phone

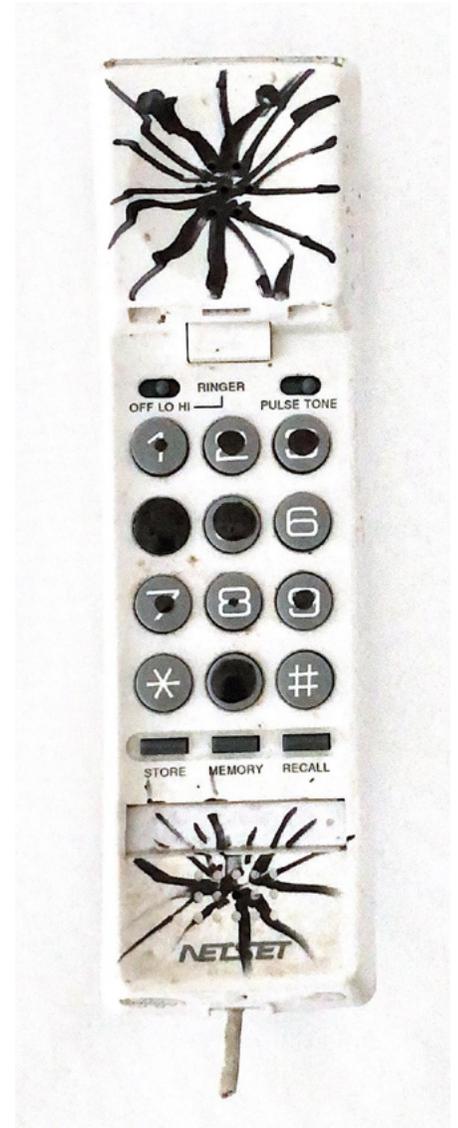


Figure 2: Old telephone displaying significant buttons that read: store, memory, recall.

read “store”, “memory” and “recall”, further emphasising how the human brain makes connections to people and memories through objects as its facilitator.

The drawer face exercise used a surrealist approach, where the use of automatic writing evokes an imaginative story where an assumed history of the drawer’s life reveals itself. This helped unveil possible truths that the disassembled drawer may have experienced, its unpolished historical narrative creating value through text.

These processes of storytelling reveal that objects, inanimate or not, create automatic connections as soon as humans interact with them and fulfilled their function. Even after function and purpose is lost, the memories and joy that items retain gives them value.



Figure 3: Old telephone displaying contacts' names, showing my connection to them through the device.

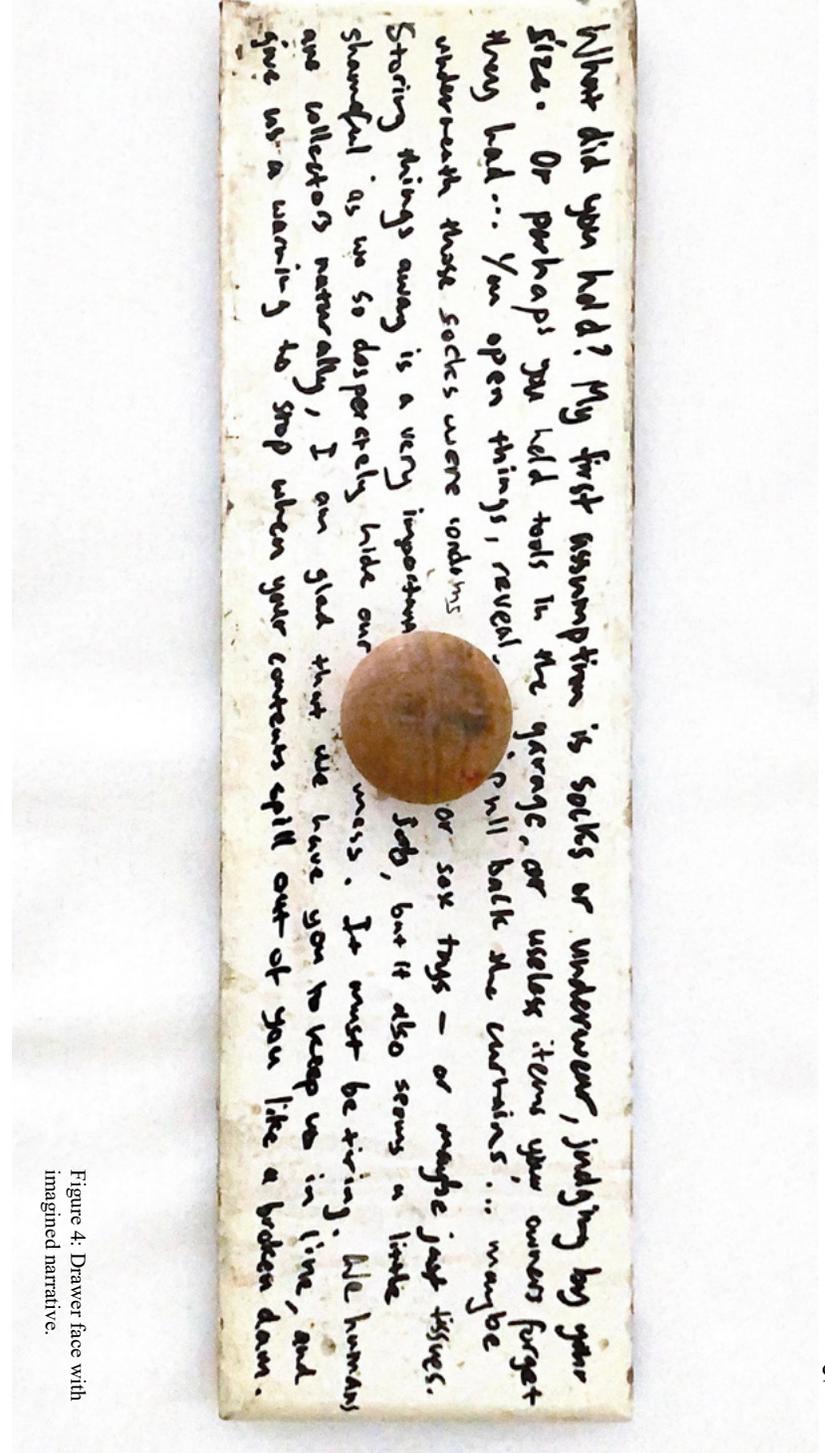


Figure 4: Drawer face with imagined narrative.

# PLAY POWER



Interacting with an object through imagination initiates an emotional bond between object and player. This transforms the object through play and expresses its value beyond its previous expectations. In chapter seven of *Facing Value: Radical Perspectives from the Arts* (2017), the author notes Roger Caillois' classifications of games and playing and how they can be applied to people and events: **play is free, its outcomes are uncertain, no goods or wealth are created, and is make-believe**<sup>5</sup>.

The collection of the young child's painting amongst the hard rubbish pile highlights these rules of play as it encourages imagination where no monetary value was earned. By utilising pareidolia as a technique and connecting with the make-believe behaviour that the child embraced when painting, I used a permanent marker to draw on the glass of the frame to create a somewhat grotesque bird-butterfly-elephant-echidna hybrid creature. This form of unfiltered play created an emotional and spiritual bond between the child that created the painting, the materials of the painting, my inner child, and my adult self.



Figure 5: Pareidolia imagined creature over the child's discarded painting.

Another design exploration investigated the world of **simulation and vertigo as a playful and child-like performance**<sup>6</sup>, transforming food scraps into fantasy human forms. People are taught at a young age not to play with their food, and those that do – particularly adults – are labelled as immature. Parodies of the human condition are prevalent in this exploration, as the unravelling of the banana skin peels off my leg, and the veins of the passionfruit flesh serve as my other eye. The materials were then arranged into imagined clothing to simulate a figure with a spoon as the body, the passionfruit flesh as a crown and the banana peel as a royal mantle. This untamed game emphasises the need

to reduce cultural shame surrounding play. This can be achieved by **keeping imagination alive and assigning value to new domains**<sup>7</sup>. Lastly, the impression of the word ‘enjoy’ on the banana peel before it was composted implies the cyclical nature of organic material and how after it has exhausted its purpose of nutritional value, it remains valuable to non-human beings such as worms or microorganisms.

These design explorations on simulation and the absurd highlight the emotional bond that arises when interacting with trash objects through the lens of the inner child. The process of play has the potential to engrave objects with priceless, positive, and intangible memories beyond the scope of their physical qualities and expected outcomes.



Figure 6: Playing with food.

## RE-USE

Forcing trash objects to transform into a renewed commodity by breaking them down into their basic material components erased all remnants of their original form and eliminates their social, cultural, and material values. This absolutist process is not always necessary. Staffan Appelgren’s *Building Castles out of Debris: Reuse Interior Design as a ‘Design of the Concrete’* (2019) explores the Swedish movement of ‘redesigners’ where the

designers and **“non-human forces... co-produce socio-material outcomes”**<sup>8</sup>. Their experiments depict the reuse of discarded materials in their original form. This collaboration between materials and humans encourages consumers to make do with what they already have and **spend time with objects to understand their qualities**<sup>9</sup>.

A favoured pencil was broken during the first week of class, and instead of discarding it due to the length being too short to write with, I aimed to repair it using different techniques and adhesives. Fitting the pieces like a puzzle, the pieces were attached together using tape, an elastic band, and blue tack. The most successful method of ensuring the pencil’s stability, however, was by attaching it onto the index finger as an extension of myself. The assembly of **existing materials reveals the agency they hold over design outcomes**<sup>10</sup>. To collaborate with materials, we must first allow them to show us what they can do, and not what we want them to do.

The care that should be taken towards repairing or reusing discarded objects uncovers the importance of creating connections between humans and materials. The experiment of using trash commodities as an extension of my physical form expresses the emotional bond which can be built from an appreciation of materials’ original value.



Figure 7: Repairing pencil to collaborate with it.

# SALVAGING NOT SCAVENGING

The excessive discarding of fabric waste in the fashion industry is one of the most prevalent indicators of how society consumes textile goods. Rute Chaves' workshop *Garments Against Waste: Bodies that Make* (2022) discussed the topic of waste, value, transformation, reuse, and collaboration between materials and machines in the textile industry.

Like Tejo Remy's *Rag Chair* (1991) where fabric waste is arranged into furniture, Chaves' PhD practice involves creating fashion commodities from general waste materials. Once an iteration is complete and documented, it

is then unravelled for future iterations, creating a work-in-progress that is never truly complete. The salvaged yarn that was used for the workshop tapestry became a **"transformative material"**<sup>11</sup> by collaborating with a 1960s domestic knitting machine and Adobe Photoshop hack. Participants were shown how the hack works, where machine, program and human create an open communication to express thoughts into a tangible form. Participants were able to add their sample onto the existing tapestry as an expression of collaboration or take it home "free of guilt" as an object to remember the workshop by.



Figure 8: Unravelling tapestry and being shown how knitting machine works with hack.



Figure 9: Knitted sample piece.

I was able to create my own sample piece, reading "Love Your Trash Today," calling for a change of attitude towards trash and items with exhausted value. During the middle of the process, Chaves' laptop died, creating a fragmentation along the word "trash". It is the design feature of unpredictability that gave the material extra value, where a **mishap is not considered a failure but a response to chance**<sup>12</sup>, that is out of the designer's control. This, in turn, creates an artistic charm unique to the experience of creating with materials that behave independently.

Each time the fragmented detail of the word "trash" on the knitted piece is observed, the memory of the uncharged laptop resurfaces in my mind. Salvaging materials and allowing them to show the designer their imperfect capabilities strengthens the value of the narratives and memories they participated in.

# DUTY OF CARE

A failed pot made by an unknown individual was found in another hard rubbish pile, and its function was obsolete as it refused to sit upright. Its holes were too big for a pencil holder, too small for a kitchen utensil holder, and the plaster porosity was not appropriate for planting. Despite the pot being void of functional purpose, the labour time spent making it and interacting with the plaster offers an opportunity to create a psychological bond with materials.



Figure 10: Interior of abandoned pot.

Caring for an object unconditionally shows great significance of value in emotional labour. The Rute Chaves sample knit “Love Your Trash Today” was now without practical purpose other than to serve as a memory placeholder,

just like the plaster sculpture. There is value in memory placeholder, however, the application of personal use can further enhance an object’s value. Time was spent hypothesising a transformation, whether it would be stitched onto a shirt, existing tote bag, or found frame. Upholstery fabric found in a different hard rubbish pile proposed a sturdy base to attach the knit onto.

Creating a personal tote bag as a commodity not only showcased my circular design values, but also highlighted the **“social relation between the products of labour”**<sup>13</sup>. By only using materials readily available such as the knitted piece, found upholstery, leftover thread and needles, and a friend’s sewing machine, I was able to break free of consumerist culture for a moment. The labour time spent hand-sewing, and the care taken in stitching the tote bag to life revealed a meditative process that rejected the fast-paced nature of production. Similarly, there was a sense of **healing by fabricating an object of utility**<sup>14</sup> for the self, as individuals are most familiar with objects being pre-made.

Transformation through making and mending produces an emotional bond between the creator and the materials. This duty of care translates into the reduction of waste products being discarded into landfills and therefore protecting the environment.



Figure 11: Sewing the tote bag to life, assembling its parts.

# FRAMEWORK



Figure 12: Dressing up with fan face and lightbulb nails.

Retail fashion is mostly concerned with wearability, whereas contemporary fashion has a greater extension of life beyond consumption. Matthew Linde's PhD presentation *Invitation to the Party: Lively Exhibition Making for Unruly Fashion Practice* (2021) challenges the window display, rejects the mannequin, and questions what makes fashion material.

By using the concept of framework as a tool to measure value in trash objects, a parody of fashion arose in my explorations. By giving trash objects a **platform and taking them out of their original context**<sup>15</sup>, value through fashion commodity emerges. Additionally, Lizzy Gardiner's *American Express® Gold card dress* (1998), and Balenciaga's torn *Paris Sneakers* (2022) depict how everyday objects found in landfills are transformed into high-end goods through glamorisation, illustrating high fashion's contradictory opulence.

For this exploration, a fan face and light bulbs found in the first week of collection were observed through the lens of Linde's 'mingler', where a mimicked re-enactment of history takes place. By symbolising the fan face as a hat and light bulbs as acrylic nails, the parody photoshoot reveals a social value between the viewer (as a consumer) and the fashion designer (as a trend-setter) who dictates what materials hold value for that season. The framing of objects in the phone camera's composition similarly magnifies the significance of context, highlighting the most important details within the digital border.



Figure 13: Getting ready into full outfit.



Figure 14: Lightbulb nails.



Figure 15: Peeling wall.

A peeling spot on the train station wall revealed a history of posters, graffiti, glue, and paint – all which would have been disregarded had it not been captured before being painted over once more. This framing of the wall highlights the “materials that are visibly vulnerable to the effects of weathering and human treatment”, and in this imperfection reveals a **“testament to histories of use and misuse”**<sup>16</sup> that would have otherwise been erased in favour of tidiness.

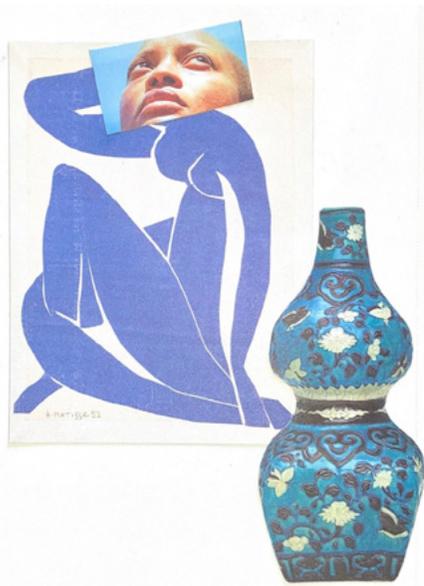


Figure 16: Art pamphlet collage.

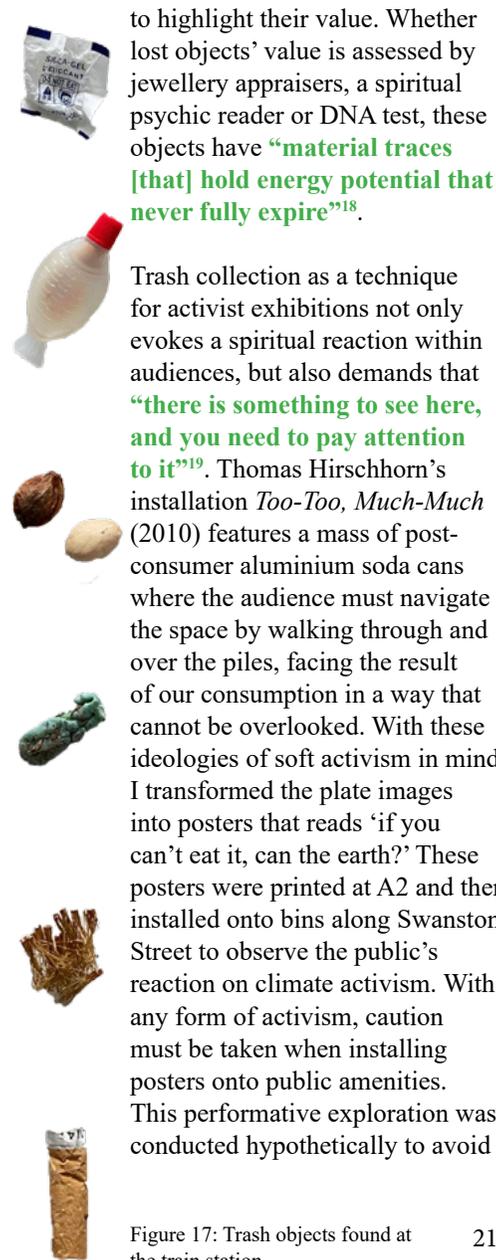
A blue-themed collage assembled from an old gallery pamphlet displays how rearranged objects provide new context, adding an energised perception on what was once old or forgotten. Although the combination of famous artworks into a single frame may diminish their original value, there is quantitative value in remixing artworks into a single entity as collaborative work.

Contextualising trash objects into a new perspective through fashion and framework offers insight to how social value affects their worth. The unexpectedness and displacement of trash objects further evokes intrigue due to its refreshing representation of consumerist culture and questions what makes materials high-end.

## SOFT ACTIVISM

Using activism to reduce our effect on climate change takes on many different modes, whether it is loud chanting, chaining oneself to a tree or writing blog posts to the public. There is similarly a way to practice activism in a behind-the-scenes manner, where squatting, graphic design, or arts n crafts can create awareness for social issues through soft activism.

Upon collecting trash items found on the train station platform, a theme of edibility revealed itself. Picking up a peach seed, pistachio shell, chewing gum, a soy sauce container, silica bag, cigarette, and dandelion piece, I noticed that none of these remains are edible for humans. Likewise, **microorganisms struggle to break down organic materials due to the lack of air and water needed in the atmosphere**<sup>17</sup>. These littered items were deliberately taken out of the context by placing them onto porcelain plates with knife and fork sitting beside them as a visual metaphor. This contradiction of trash versus fine dining could bring further awareness to how we consume goods. By placing the items in the centre of the image, the exhibition style can be compared to Rose Salane’s installation *Panorama 94* (2019) where 94 rings were found on NYC subways, collected, bought, and exhibited



to highlight their value. Whether lost objects’ value is assessed by jewellery appraisers, a spiritual psychic reader or DNA test, these objects have **“material traces [that] hold energy potential that never fully expire”**<sup>18</sup>.

Trash collection as a technique for activist exhibitions not only evokes a spiritual reaction within audiences, but also demands that **“there is something to see here, and you need to pay attention to it”**<sup>19</sup>. Thomas Hirschhorn’s installation *Too-Too, Much-Much* (2010) features a mass of post-consumer aluminium soda cans where the audience must navigate the space by walking through and over the piles, facing the result of our consumption in a way that cannot be overlooked. With these ideologies of soft activism in mind, I transformed the plate images into posters that reads ‘if you can’t eat it, can the earth?’ These posters were printed at A2 and then installed onto bins along Swanston Street to observe the public’s reaction on climate activism. With any form of activism, caution must be taken when installing posters onto public amenities. This performative exploration was conducted hypothetically to avoid

Figure 17: Trash objects found at the train station. 21

legal conflict with the City of Melbourne for possible vandalism, and the posters were only taped by the corners and kept on the bins long enough to take a photo before finally uninstalling them.

Through the persistence of graphic posters in performance activism, a more conscious awareness of consumption emerges, and the need to reduce our disposal habits is made clear. Despite the short-term nature of this performance, it proposed a way to explore my project on a larger scale and unveiled how it could be applied spatially. Site activism using trash objects could therefore create an entirely new value towards waste as a tool to evoke change.

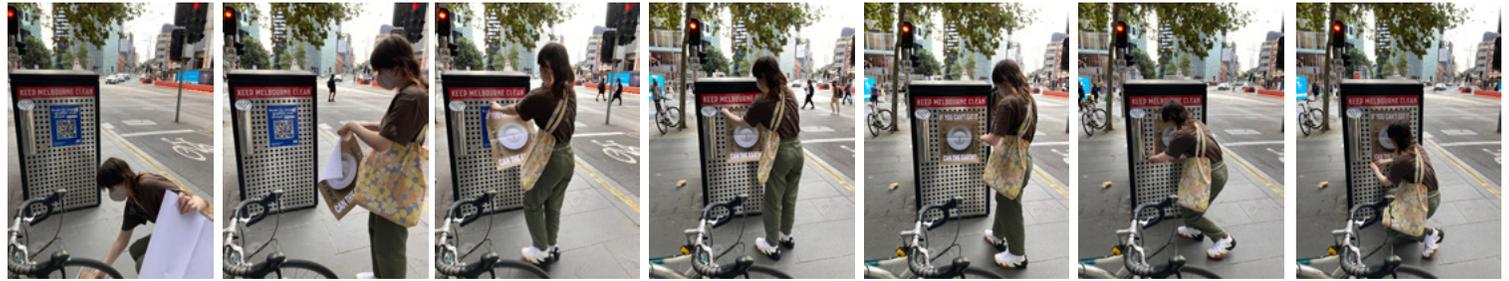


Figure 18: Poster template for each trash object.

Figure 19: (Above) Installing activist posters on CBD bins.

Figure 20: (Right) Graffitted public bins highlighting Melbourne's urban culture.



# ANTHROPOMORPHISING THE BIN

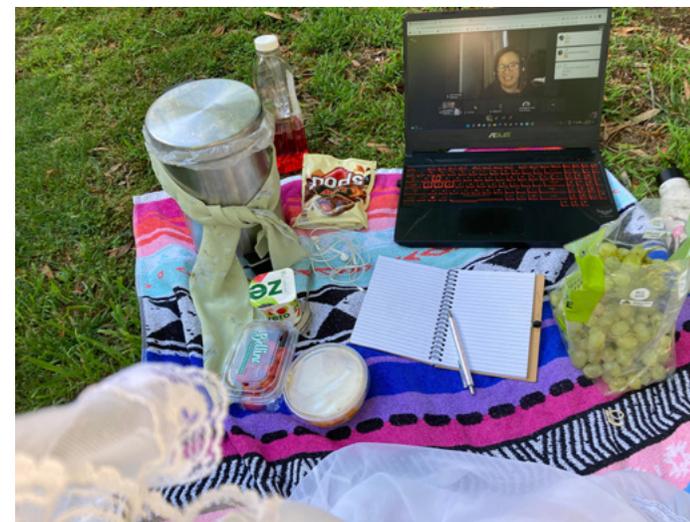


Figure 21: Having a glamorous picnic with my bin.

Companionship and acts of service can create an emotional bond stronger than any materialistic monetary value. In the film *Spirited Away* (2001), Hayao Miyazaki depicts the misconceptions of greed and how the illusion of value can hinder a situation as dangerous, while in contrast spending time with someone or something can initiate a reward. The spirit No-Face portrays consumerist culture by using materialism to seduce the bath house workers with fake gold, promising them wealth and prosperity the more he is fed and admired. In contrast, the Stink Spirit appears as a threat to the bath house as he appears impossible to clean. Despite this challenge, it was Chihiro's hard work and determination to help clean the Stink Spirit that revealed his true form as the River Spirit, who had been polluted by garbage over time and could not rid it on his own. It is through this selfless act of service that Chihiro is gifted a valuable herb medicine.

Spending time with my bin as my dependant by cleaning it, assembling it, dressing it up, taking it on a picnic, taking photos with it, and travelling with it on public transport elicits the process of anthropomorphosis. This personification of the bin proposes that it is not a simple tool to contain our waste, but also a tool that records how we consume and shares moments of refuse. Dressing up elegantly with the bin for an outdoor picnic took attention away from my online class and into the moment of enjoying my time in the breeze. An emotional bond was therefore created through the sharing of food, sunlight, and opulent fabric. During this performative exploration, the bin revealed that the inside of its lid had a mirror-like material, which created intrigue about its design, and would have been dismissed had it remained hidden underneath my desk. **Despite the material poverty, the event held spiritual richness<sup>20</sup>** in its glamour.

Figure 22: Picnic and online class setup.



Furthermore, when I was lacking motivation and in a time of doubt in my productivity, I turned to my bin as an equal – as a friend to lean on and freely express my thoughts. Questioning value in the context of productivity, a poem arose, wrapping around the bin’s surface in a spiral to reveal undesirable and trashy feelings. Perhaps rubbish bins feel these emotions occasionally, too, unsure of their importance. To reduce the stigma of waste and question what makes something ‘trashy’, the problem must be confronted by directly engaging with it: touching, turning, writing to, pouring emotions into... The full transcription and video of the poem being written can be found below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ht5bK8kcig>

It is through emotional labour and notions of equality that value is born between humans and objects. The product of spending time with trash (and objects that contain trash) transforms the act from being an absurdity to normalising their object-oriented ontology. The representation of vulnerability in trashy feelings or behaviour emphasises how we are not so different from discarded objects and should therefore be treated as a valuable being.

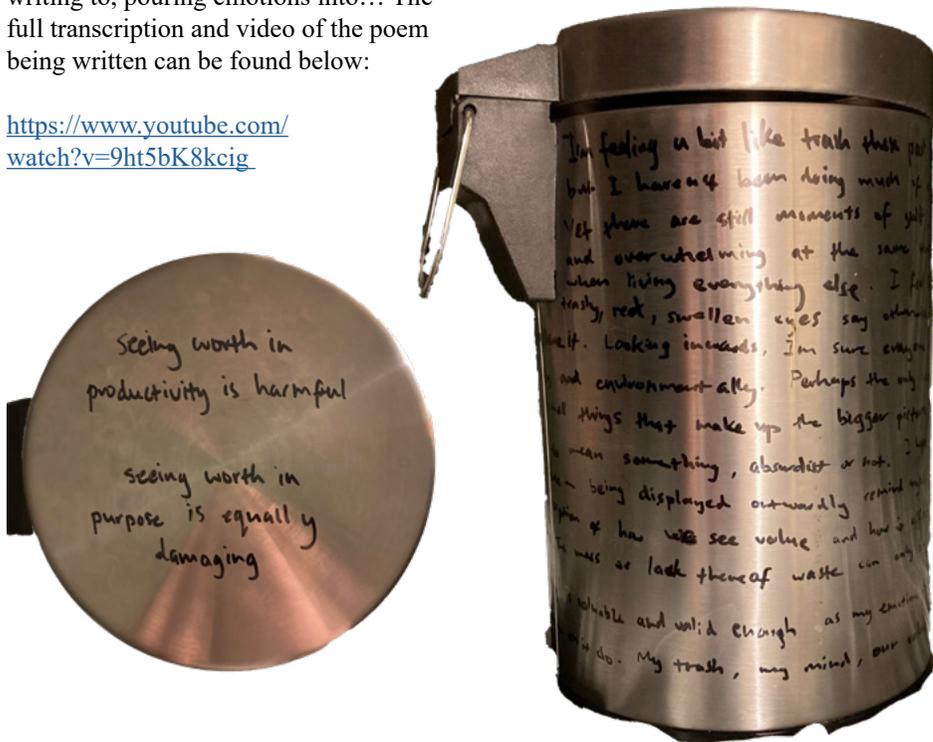


Figure 23: Trash poem written on bin.

## LONG-TERM PERFORMANCE



The design technique of long-term performance and design explorations that feature performative aspects both involves a sense of care, play and activism. Taking actions to reduce the effect of climate change as an individual is a practice that takes time, patience, and critical observation. However, passion and motivation must be present to conduct these actions successfully.

Following the anthropomorphosis of the bin exploration, the bin was taken with me on public transportation and university tutorials. It had now become a companion outside the context of the home. It was able to travel, move, exist, and consume alongside myself, like an

extension of the body by taking up space beside my hip or by attaching the handle to my hand. The bin was then further brought to future tutorials, accumulating a collection of trash entirely unique to me over the days and weeks. The personalisation of accumulated trash expresses that **all items hold truths and are witnesses**<sup>21</sup> to how I consume food, retail goods and organic material, typical to a university students’ habits.

With the absurdity of carrying a trash can around in public spaces and private classes, questions about motivations arose. These questions revealed a mild



Figure 24: Carrying the bin with me on public transport.

insecurity, and I found myself trying to justify not being crazy, however there was a woman on a tram that similarly held her own compost bin. The act of carrying a bin is not so absurd when Balenciaga's Winter 22 collection featured the models carrying black leather *Bin Bags* (2022) as a fashion commodity. Carrying the bin with me long-term displayed motivation to become more conscious about the rate in which I consume goods and discard of their leftovers. The physical attachment of the bin onto the body could also serve as a possible reminder to consume less.

Using long-term performance as a design technique revealed that absurdity provokes curiosity, and consistency provokes normalisation. The bin henceforth becomes a collaborator to showcase society's relationship with consumerist culture and this role highlights ways to reduce the effect of climate change.



## CONSUMERIST LANGUAGE

Figure 25: Collection of personal trash over one week.

Written and unwritten language found in everyday discarded objects portray narratives that speak to their experiences. After accumulating my trash for over a week, narratives from this collection uncovered that they can be imagined through both play and performance, such as the popsicle stick and wet wipe bride, or narratives evident through the writing on plastic food wrappers.



Figure 26: Framework and play transformations created from over a week period of trash collection.



Kenneth Goldsmith's practice involves the transformation of written language in everyday objects into conceptual poetry. His literature is fabricated to life from the objects that surround us, where **poetry found in a city full of words simply needs to be reframed**<sup>22</sup> for it to be claimed as artful poetry. The receipt is evidence of the consumer's spendings and can be retained for plausible future use. Although receipts are hoarded away in the possibility of exchanging goods, it is this optional attitude towards commitment that encourages mass consumption habits. The phrasing printed onto receipts such as "change your mind," "exchange," and "retain" seduces the public into a cycle of spending, rewarding the purchase with paper evidence to prove that the individual made use of their income and can track the transactions. Furthermore, the wording on receipts promising deals, sales, tax, and totals normalises spending without consequence.

To further investigate the language of receipts and their purpose, I transformed them into poems using an anarchist technique of cut-outs and rephrasing to contradict their intentions and reveal companies' possible ulterior motives. Coded language through numbers and barcodes similarly displays a dialect between technology and machines. The securing of the poems into my sketchbook with sticky tape resulted in a strange material effect on the receipt words. Receipt paper is made from

Figure 27: Receipt language revealing narratives. 31

thermal material with various dyes and acids and reacts differently to moisture compared to regular paper. The porosity of the receipt paper and adhesive of the tape repelled one another causing the ink to lighten or lift. The first receipt iteration that was collected in my bin smelt of rotten tea and to erase the smell, perfume was sprayed onto them which also caused a reaction where the paper blackened.

Phrasing can be rearranged into alternative narratives that provoke criticisms about consumption. The words in receipts could serve as a valuable material to combat our attitude towards spending and discarding of goods. Likewise, the rejection of DIY transformation with mixed mediums demonstrates capitalism's inability to co-operate with unglamorous chemicals. If these materials were able to collaborate harmoniously, capitalist intentions could become more apparent.

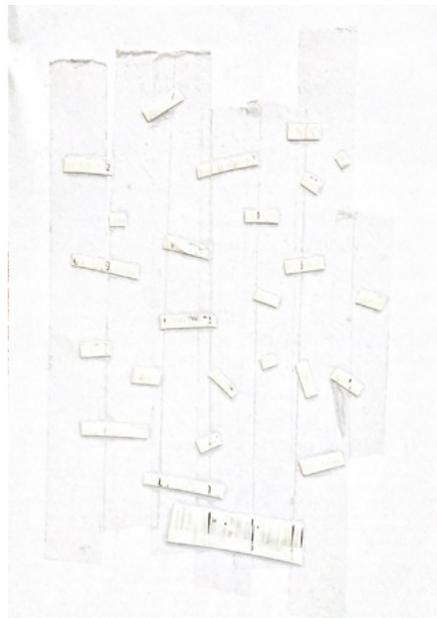
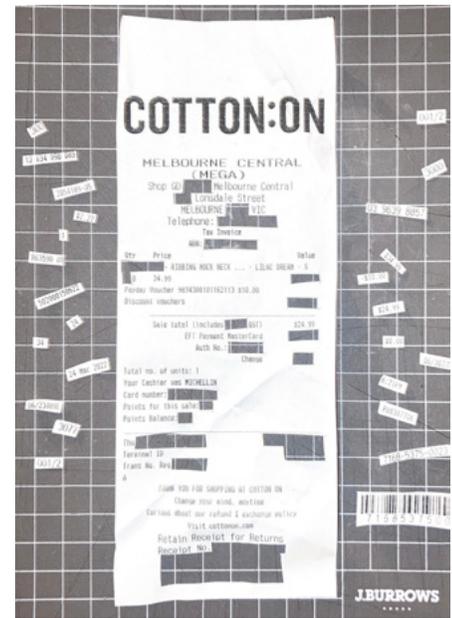
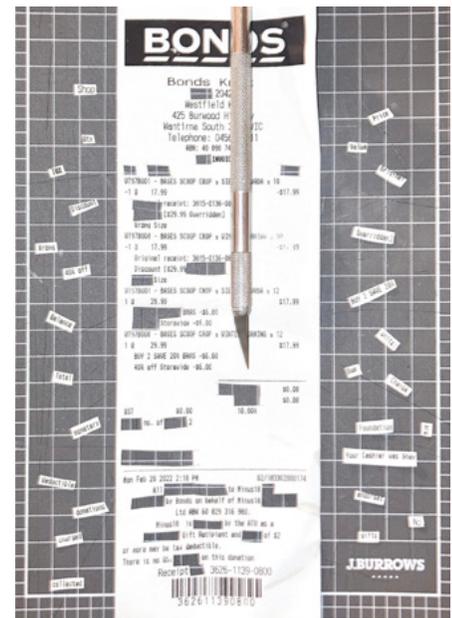


Figure 28: Chemical reactions depicting conflict of materials.



Figure 29: Receipt poems; English language versus coded language.



# GIFTING

The act of giving and receiving gifts proposes a relational value that overrules the monetary worth of the gift. It is through the generosity of donating or bestowing a gift that the exchange gives value to that moment between two people, and that the actual contents of the gift is simply a bonus.

Culturally, receiving gifts is an act of kindness, in hopes that the object brings joy, curiosity, or function. What makes a gift, however, is often judged by the **baseline of commodities under the gift category and how they're socially and objectively uniformed**<sup>23</sup>. This implies that gifts are worthy,

but the standard value decreases each time that conventional gifts are re-gifted. Despite this, the value in the exchange outweighs the gift itself when considering a human-human symbiosis. The human-material connections (mentioned in chapter two) created from second-hand sourcing creates a symbiosis where individuals facing homelessness **"assist objects through a second full cycle"**<sup>24</sup>. This transforms further into human-human symbiosis when items are left behind or gifted to other individuals experiencing homelessness, illustrating the pure nature of gift-giving when materialism is void.



Silicone scraps were offered to me from a friend that no longer needed them, and a sense of duty arose once they were in my possession. The high of receiving this gift wore off over time as they only held value visually, sensorially, and as a memory placeholder. An urge to make something from them remained, however the initial moment of joy when I held the scraps for the first time was euphoric. The relational experience between my friend and I could be extended to my classmates as a performative notion of value. By individually wrapping the silicone scraps in wrapping paper and glittery bows, I gifted these to two classmates and my tutor to record their reactions.



Figure 30: Wrapping silicone in birthday wrapping paper.



Figure 31: Hau unwrapping gift.



Figure 32: Indiana unwrapping gift.

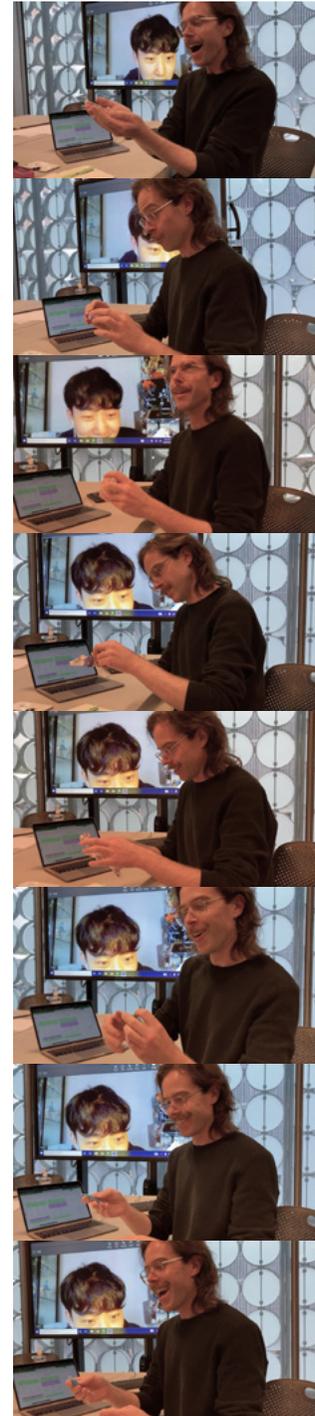


Figure 33: Nick unwrapping gift.

Hau was very patient and careful in opening the gift. She was very confused when the silicone revealed itself but smiled at its absurdity and appreciated the sensation of touching the green rubbery material.

Indiana was delicate and curious when unwrapping the gift. Yet, once the pink silicone revealed itself, she was filled with concern and confusion. She then proceeded to ask if she could give into temptation and rip the silicone in half and was satisfied from the results of destruction.

Nick was concerned about what I was about to gift him, wondering what it may hold or questioning if it was a 'bribe'. He tried to open it delicately and apologised for tearing it. Upon the reveal of the blue silicone, he appeared delighted and asked what it was, thanking me for the gift.

The reactions all began with curious delicacy while the final reaction of the receiver could not be predicted, giving their unpredictability a heightened sense of playfulness. By wrapping trash objects like a conventional present and gifting it to others, their skeuomorphic appearance evoked questions about what makes a gift a 'gift'. The shock factor similarly evokes the need for interaction, as touch could further initiate value between the gift, the giver, and the receiver.

# CONCLUSION

Value can be restored or enhanced to trash objects once their initial purpose has been exhausted through transformative techniques. These associations of value promotes the healthy habit of constructively questioning what makes something trash and consider its qualities before discarding it.

Through salvaging lost items by collecting them from hard rubbish piles, the processes of care and play creates empathy between human and materials, highlighting the emotional bond that emerges from these acts of kindness. The anthropomorphising of the bin elaborates the equality that must be established to appreciate the services that bins provide, archiving waste unique to the users. Gifting objects similarly uses this subject to connect humans to one another through the act of exchange. Framing waste objects in a refreshing and glamorous context generates curiosity and using this framework as a tool for soft activism further brings awareness to our disconnection between materials and the extensive habit of discarding. Lastly, the language of receipts portrays the seduction taken place when engaging with capitalism, noting that the system upholds the expectation to spend.

The transformative techniques forementioned illustrate how care, play and performance can assist in reconnecting humans to waste commodities. Likewise, these design methods propose how humans can reconnect with one another by using trash objects as the facilitator. Such processes highlight the positive outcomes in which empathetic and sustainable design practices can reduce our consumption habits and hence the effect on climate change. The greater trash is respected, the healthier our planet and communities will be.



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# APPENDIX



Tejo Remy, *Rag Chair*, 1991, modular sofa.



Tejo Remy, *You Can't Lay Down Your Memory*, 1991, chest of drawers.



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Too-Too Much-Much*, 2010, installation.



Kathmandu, *BioDown: Out There*, 2022, installation.



Rute Chaves, *Garments Against Waste; Bodies That Make*, 2022, tapestry and workshop.



Lizzy Gardiner, *American Express Gold Card*, 1995, dress.



Balenciaga, *Bin Bag*, 2022, leather bag.



Rose Salane, *Panorama 94: Person 31-60*, 2019, exhibition archive.



Rose Salane, *60 Detected Rings: Ring 25*, 1991-2021, exhibition archive.



Balenciaga, *Paris Sneaker*, 2022, sneaker.

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