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**An embarrassment of riches:
rekindling desire for obsolete furniture**

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Design

Massey University, Wellington

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Abstract

This exegesis tells the story of my Master of Design project, *Embarrassment of Riches*. During this project I have gleaned obsolete furniture pieces and operated on them to present new possibilities. This text discusses the body of work I have created in the context of three main ideas: the use of gleaning, intervention and the role played by memory in rekindling desire.

I have focussed on making in a heuristic, research-through-design practice, testing ideas through making/reflecting and then developing my ideas further in new pieces. Combining this action-research method with bricolage has enabled me to critically self-reflect on my practice. Through this I have discovered that I can continue to design and create objects in an age of overproduction and consumption. With ecological considerations in mind I can make obsolete objects desirable (again) by encouraging people to feel intimate with them. I intervene in the objects' interstices to suggest histories that kindle engagement and attachment. The interstice has been a rich source of inspiration, not only as site of intervention, but as site where experimentation occurs, a process by which objects are found and a space where new genres develop.

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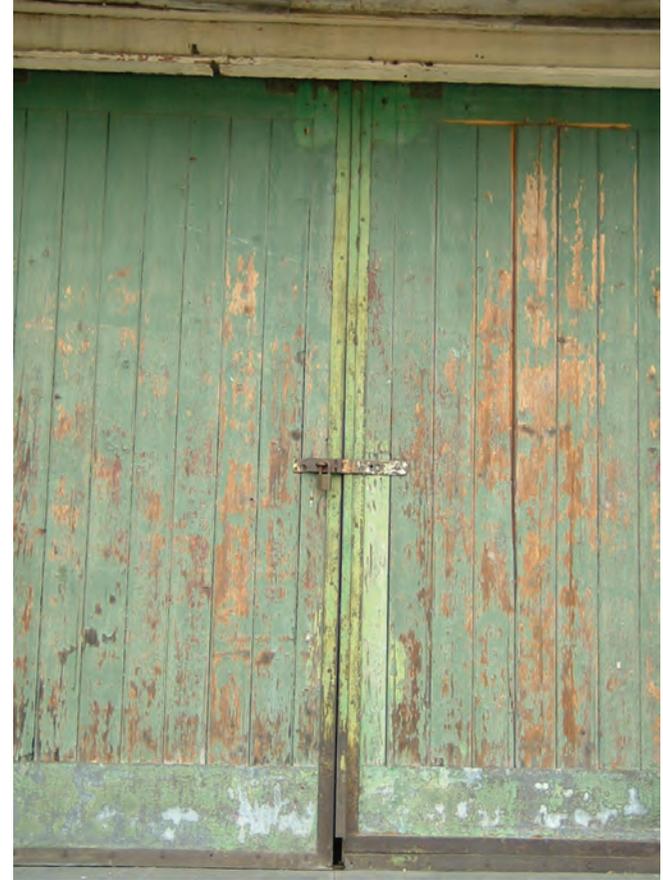


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Introduction

The intent of this Master of Design project is to breathe new life into unwanted pieces of furniture, to make them desirable again. People are always throwing away furniture. No longer desired, obsolete, these pieces often finish their lives in a gully at the tip. I find these pieces, before they arrive at that place, through rituals and practices of gleaning. I live with each piece for some time, seeking an interaction with it that will make it relevant and appealing again.

Ownerless things – the owner’s intent has been clearly expressed: they have deliberately abandoned them.¹

A deeper question drives this project: How I can be a designer when I think that the world has already enough things? How can I go about creating more, when I think there’s plenty already? What do I do with myself, my skills, my sensibilities? With the awareness of overproduction, overconsumption, with the surfeit of good and bad design, and particularly with the intensity of advertising, manipulation of style, and loss of authenticity all of this entails, I could choose to stop producing anything. This project is an experimental foray into designing with full knowledge of all that. I neither want to stop making things, nor consider myself exempt from the ecological results. I find obsolete items intriguing and I’d like to change the way that other people see these objects.

Material wealth is an issue that western society has been struggling with since before the industrial revolution. The idiom ‘embarrassment of riches’ was used by art historian, Simon Schama to describe the effect that increased production had on 16th and 17th century Dutch.² This phrase struck a chord with me as it seems relevant when applied to contemporary society; we have so much material wealth that we throw away useful yet obsolete items. The fact that I can find useful objects abandoned on the side of the road is one indicator of the discomfort we can experience

1. Varda, *The Gleaners and I: Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.*

Creative attending often begins with what is imperfect: with notes, jottings, hints at meaning rather than meaning itself. It is through these fragments that the representative art finally emerges.

Abbs, *English within the Arts: a radical alternative for English and the arts in the curriculum*

2. Sennett, *The Craftsman.*



3. Snodgrass and Coyne, "Models, Metaphors and the Hermeneutics of Designing."

4. Kincheloe, "Describing the Bricolage: Conceptualizing a New Rigor in Qualitative Research."

5. Tango dancer

6. Mostly vegetarian diet but includes fish

from having excess. I have named the project thus to draw attention to the proliferation of objects and waste, the anxiety attached to this proliferation and I have slightly twisted the meaning of 'embarrassment of riches' by using it as a collective noun for the group of objects in the same way that a group of geese are called a gaggle.

This project is led by a research-through-design process. I test ideas by making, reflecting upon that making and then developing these ideas further in new work. The process is heuristic, using experience-based techniques of immersion, action, reflection - immersion, reflection, action. I make an intervention on a piece, I stop for coffee and a smoke, I come back and adjust. The objects that I work on are real, and the relationship formed between myself and the object is informed through this heuristic approach.³

This heuristic process links with bricolage in the context of experience-based discovery. The French word bricolage describes something that is made or put together with whatever materials are available. For me the essence of all three words, heuristic, gleaning and bricolage, is discovery. The word bricolage is not only a descriptor for the objects that form this project but describes the method of research used as well. As a bricoleur I have made use of the tools available to complete my task in all areas of this project. In order "To better 'interpret, criticize, and deconstruct,' Denzin and Lincoln call for bricoleurs to employ "hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism".⁴ As a bricoleur I draw on my own life experience, my subject position in the world as a woman; pakeha, middle-class, lesbian, tanguera,⁵ feminist, pescetarian,⁶ artist, designer, environmentalist.

I have lived in the interstices, gleaning, struggling for meaning between street protests and my job in an advertising agency, creating furniture while working in refuges where it seems the world is always falling apart. When I was first becoming an artist/designer, I didn't give any thought to where I would get my materials. I went directly to the piles left behind by other students in

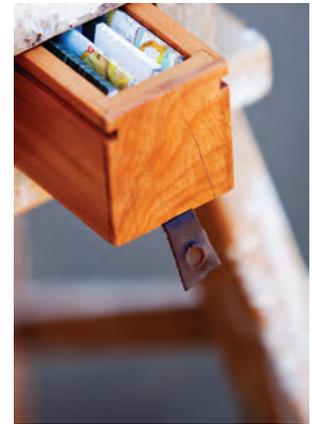
the workshops, finding abundant treasure (or an embarrassment of riches) just as I had done as a young traveller living on Australian leftovers. When I work with discarded materials I bring the sensitivity I learned through years of working with women and children in crisis. I am committed to the objects' integrity and new life. Throughout the process, I find myself in relationships with people who attach sensations and stories of their own. It is not a conceptual design process. It is a slow journey with these unwieldy objects moving through my house and all their ghostly owners and our inquisitive neighbours accompanying.

This text describes those journeys, discussing it through three main aspects of the project: gleaning, intervention, and kindling desire. In each section I discuss relevant theory, other artists and designers, and my own work, weaving these components together to create a whole. Two themes thread throughout every part of the project: interstice and embodiment. Embodiment refers to the tension and struggle between a world in which what is valued is increasingly digital, distant, and idealized and a world of everyday relationships, sensations, and mystery. An interstice may describe a space, or it may describe a process through which something moves.⁷ At the centre of my design interventions is the idea of working in the margins, on the edge, in the spaces between. This is reflected in the following text through the use of text and images in the margins, which includes a brief introduction to the objects.



7. Benjamin, "Opening the Interstitial: Eisenman's Space of Difference."

The Objects





Red Footstool

This object was cobbled together from bits and pieces lying around the workshop – nothing was originally furniture except the castors which had been salvaged from another object. In many ways this footstool was a pastiche, a tongue-in-cheek exploration into my ideas about feminising furniture, modernism and working with rubbish. Struggling with putting my ideas into practice, I decided to just start sketching three-dimensionally, using whatever I found, in an attempt to clarify my direction. This was an excellent start, helping me to understand the haptic relationship I have with my work, the heuristic spiral I work within. The finished object wheels its way around my house now, settling under other pieces of furniture when not in use.



Un/Screen

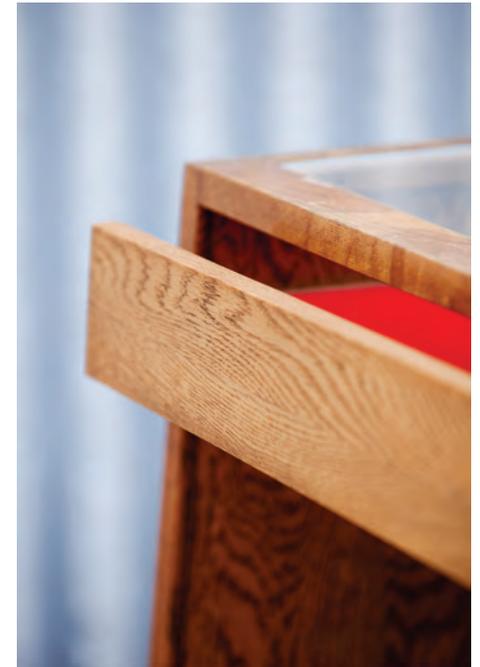
The Un/screen shows evidence of interventions by previous owners with the final intervention being a partial one; unfinished paint stripping and the beginnings of sanding which exposed the history of previous surfaces. The original fabric had been removed and the third piece had been misplaced or broken leaving two empty frames. The layers of different paint inspired me to reconsider the space where the fabric had been, musing on New Zealanders' interest in DIY and on our conviction that we can tinker with anything. I decided to make that space one that continues to be adjustable, so that the user can create their own mixture of textiles according to their mood or the room where it stands.





Shop Cabinet

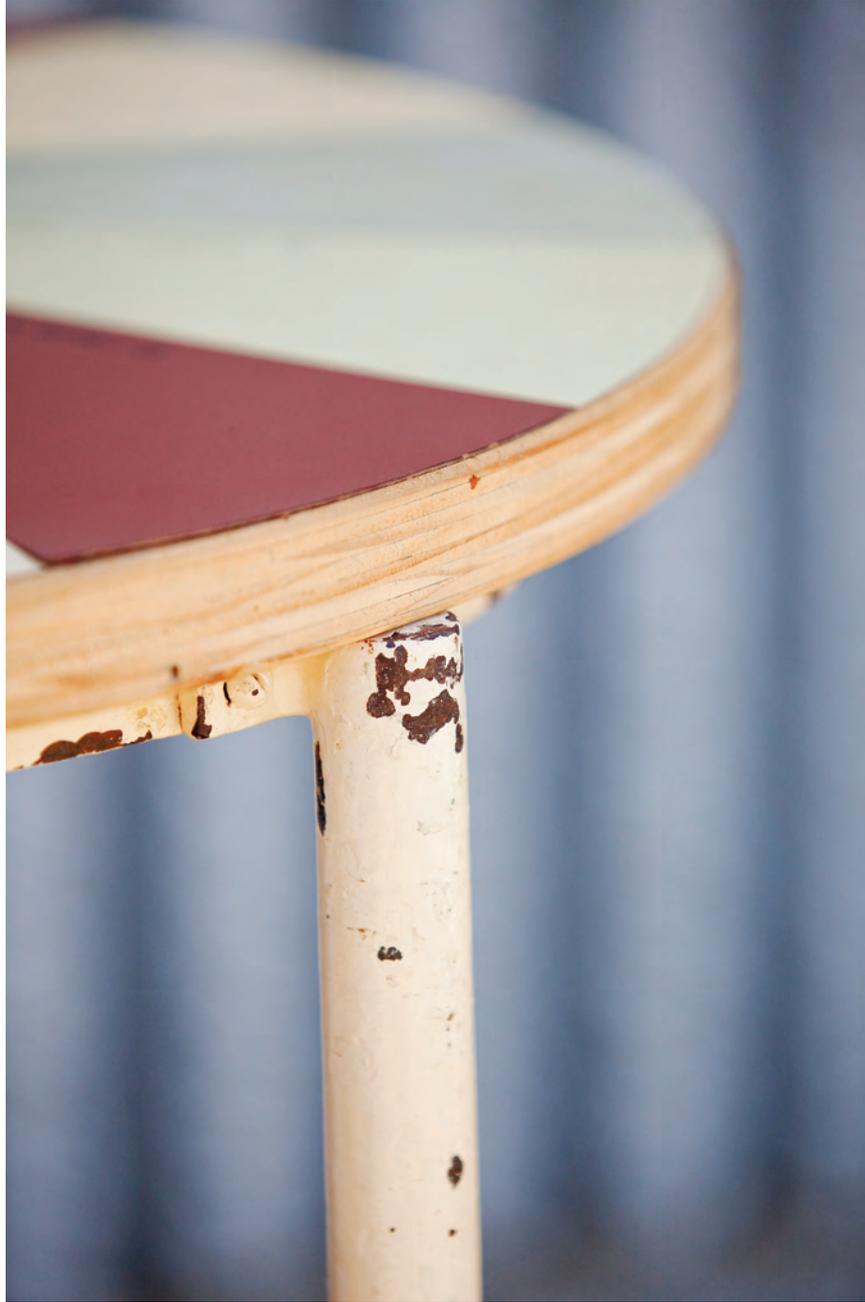
I rescued the Shop Cabinet from a second-hand shop in Paraparaumu where it was dustily standing amongst other cabinets, desks and chests in a large barn. The shape of the original doors made the internal space difficult to access so I removed them, opening up the space, then made a new shelf and a display drawer at the top of the cabinet. The display drawer has no visible handles, but when slid open allows the user to place objects there for viewing through the glass on the top of the cabinet.



Laundry Table

The Laundry Table is an assemblage using a laundry trolley that was floating around the Workshop and gleaned materials from the same source. Every time I saw this trolley it was in another corner or empty space of another room as though it had wheeled its own way there. Quietly sitting and waiting for someone to notice it. The trolley seemed a good height for leaning on, and as it was no longer functioning in this context as a laundry trolley I decided to see if it would like being a table. I found some construction ply for the surface and then used large Formica samples to 'veneer' it in a spiral pattern, retaining the names of the colour samples that were stamped on the surfaces. Once complete, it became a place where people congregated and discussed ideas, using the surface to map out their thoughts; a focal point of each workroom that I placed it in rather than an object to walk around and ignore. Workshop users who had walked past it every day asked where it had come from when I had finished the transformation. This piece has been released back into the world, as someone offered to exchange one of their own objects for it. It now resides happily in a home.





Wendy Neale. *An embarrassment of riches: rekindling desire for obsolete furniture.*

Office Chairs (Burlesque and Bach)

The office chairs were not office chairs, but when I saw them stacked up in the rubbish room, I read them as such. The

Burlesque and the Bach Chair both developed out of memories and feelings

as an adult in my working life; from seeing others at work and then in their personal lives. I see that we all create a professional persona, through which we establish ourselves, communicate and get through our working days, but inevitably our private persona seeps out in ways that we don't necessarily realise.

These chairs acknowledge this reality by revealing the professional as a surface, with other identities nearly bursting through.





Earthquake/Drama Table

The Earthquake/Drama Table evokes school drills and rainy-day forts, childhood time spent under tables, a space that almost doesn't exist for adults. I applied wallpaper to the underside of the tabletop, choosing a brick and ivy pattern which, to me, implied sturdiness, reliability, a feeling of security and comfort, strengthening the feeling of being enclosed and protected. At the same time I opened up this interstitial space, revealing the hidden, by creating a porthole in one of the rails under the tabletop. This allows the person on the outside to understand that there is an interior and allows the person inside to maintain context with the exterior. The lens distorts the view, so neither viewer can see or be seen clearly, retaining the essence of privacy for the occupant. I added a storage shelf for snacks, reading, and graffiti materials to provide sustenance and entertainment for the occupant.





Lecture Podium

I took a slightly different approach when working on the Podium, where I roamed and grazed for materials in the workshop after Semester Two had finished and the undergraduate students had left for the summer. The students had left a lot of wood and wood products in the workshop and seeing that material I felt an empty space where the students had been. Knowing that the Podium would be used by many of these students in the future, I decided to make it from their leftovers, creating simple four-sided boxes and then joining the boxes together to make a piece evocative of a shantytown dwelling. My idea was that the students would recognise the different woods, and would feel more comfortable and at home when using the Podium, alleviating the anxiety of formally presenting to their peers and staff.

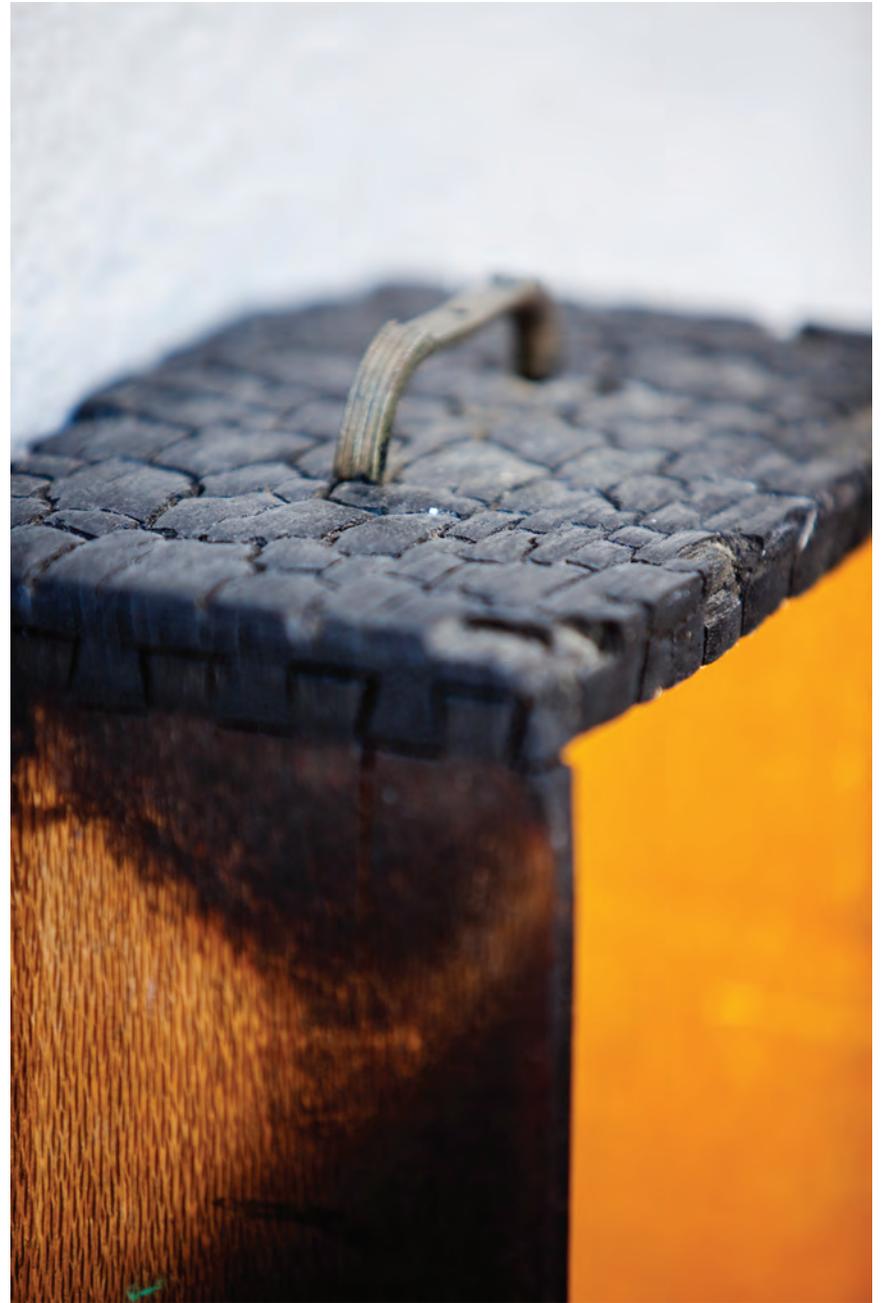




Icon Drawer

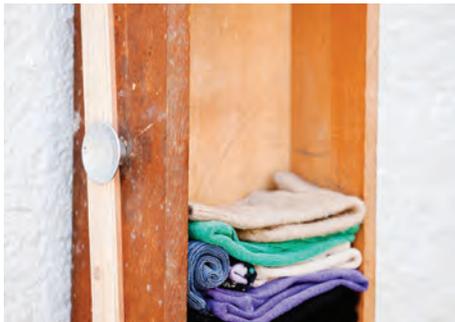
The Icon Drawer originally occupied part of the interior space of a chest (the chest also being the protector and container of the human heart) and defined and enclosed a smaller interior space within that. In removing it from this place I disturbed its usual role and then usurped it further by resting the Drawer vertically against the wall, supported only by two slender, delicate legs and the wall. In order to reference its special position as the top drawer, container of small precious things, I applied gold-leaf to the interior. This leaf reflects against itself, allowing the Drawer to glow, contrasting with the burnt exterior and giving the Drawer an iconic presence. Although this object has been through a house fire, where much of the owner's furniture was destroyed, the heart of it lives on.





Sock Drawer

The Sock Drawer is an iteration of the Icon Drawer theme, in that it is also raised up on two slender legs, and repositioned in a way that opens up the drawer space. The focus in this case is about wondering where all the single socks go when they have lost their partner. I often have one useful sock after losing the other or the other wearing out. These days, I'm unlikely to darn a sock to maintain its usefulness as a sock, so have a number of singles floating in my sock drawer, leaving me thinking that they need a space where they might meet another compatible sock and make a connection, allowing them to continue as a pair, or they might remain single and find a new owner/caretaker who only requires the one sock, or they may even choose to continue life with the un-darned other, happily living in this new interstitial space that I have created for them all.

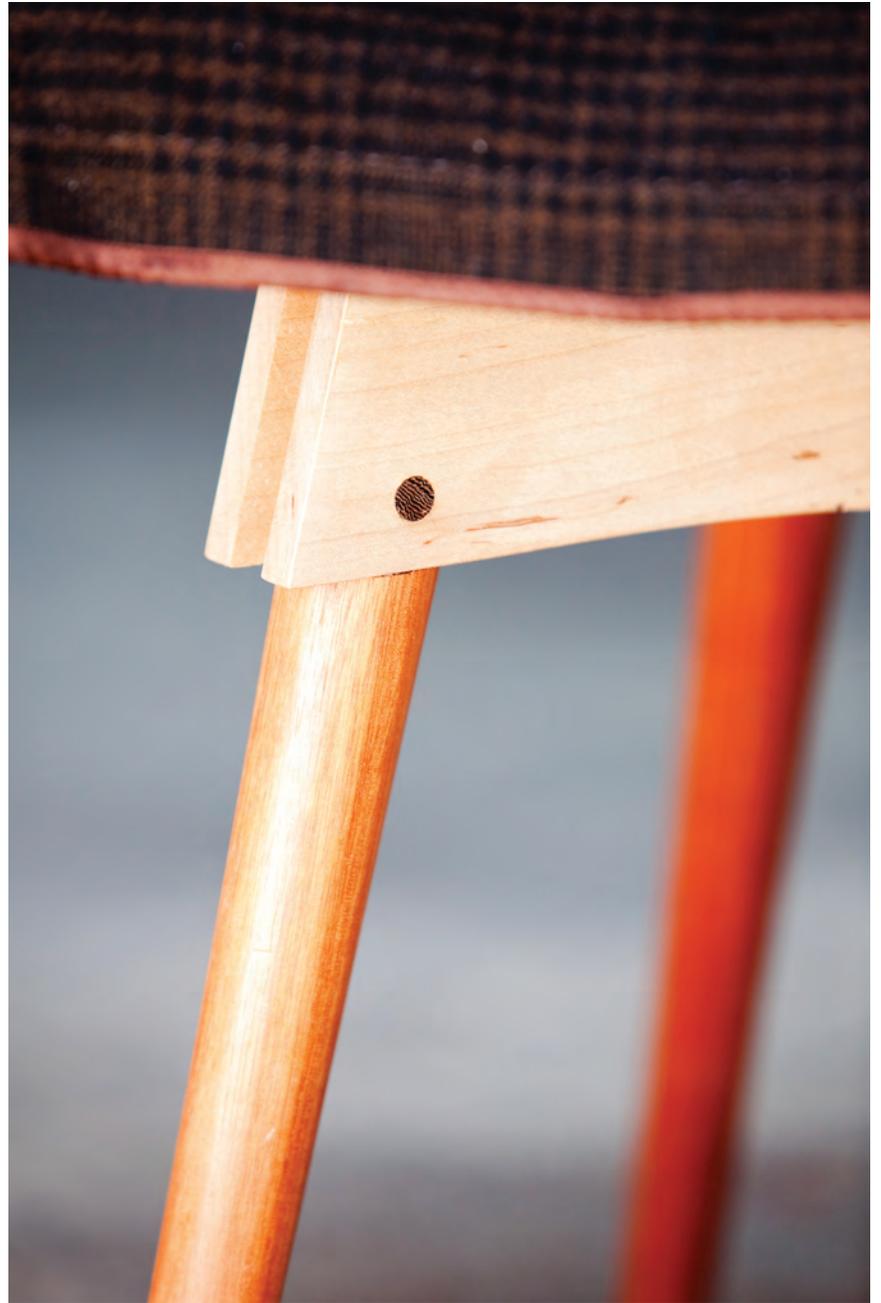




Please Sit

This chair was abandoned in an alleyway, left propped against a wall in the rain, and found by a friend who knew that I was looking for objects for this project. He lugged it to work one winter day and I left it in a warm place to dry out for a few weeks. With a broken leg and rotting upholstery, it was a sorry sight, though the potential was immediately visible to me. In those weeks of drying I pondered on the possibilities for this chair. As the leg was broken due to poor design, I decided to replace the legs and frame using timber that had been gifted to me. The upholstery did not dry out in the weeks that I left it, so I stripped it back to discover the seat was a simple plywood shell with cutouts evocative of a violin body. I left the rough plywood bare to contrast with the elegance of the well-crafted solid timber legs and frame, only covering the seat enough to make it comfortable to sit on. The upholstery fabric I used was from a 1950s winter coat, about the same age as the chair. I chose to shape it like a garment, almost as though someone had taken it off and draped it over the chair.



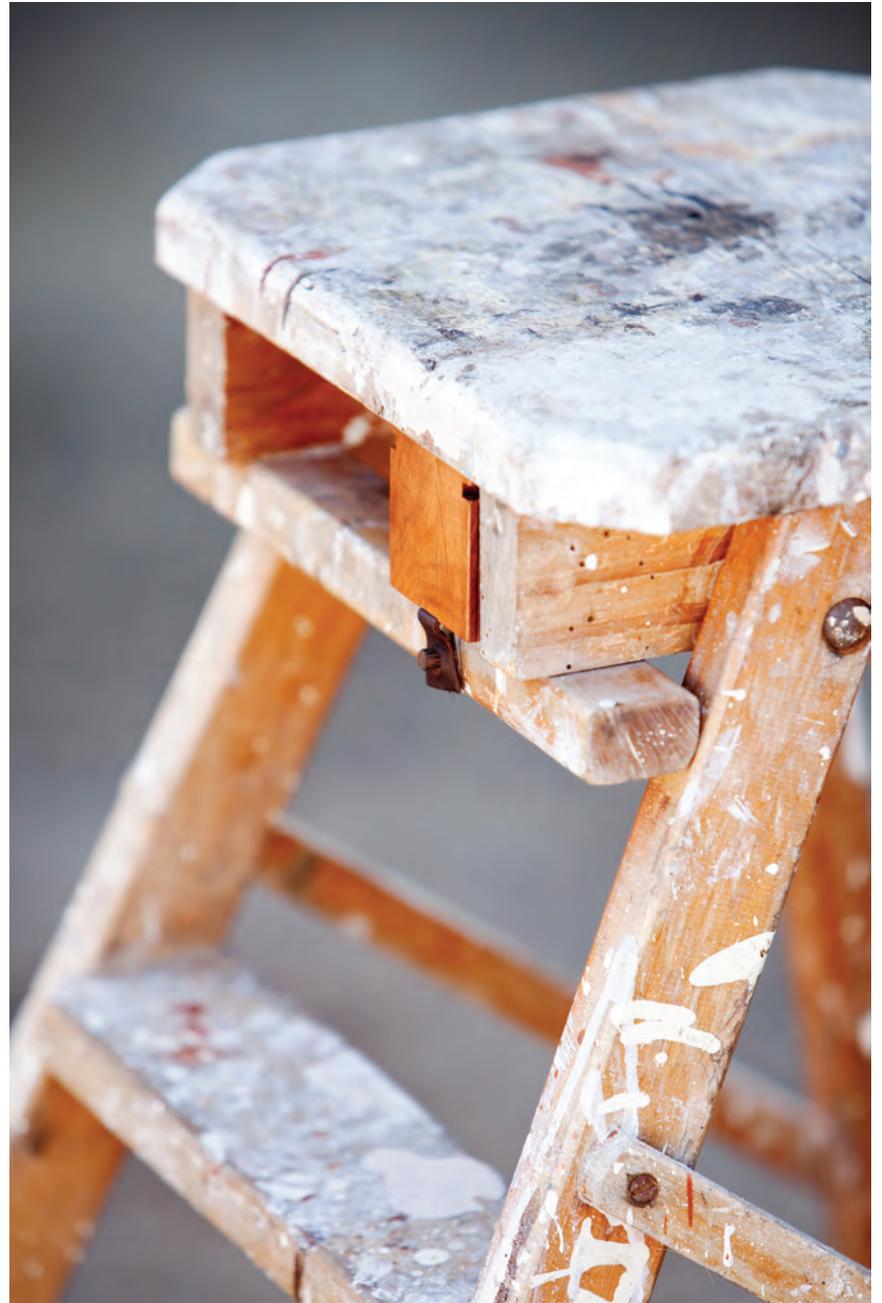


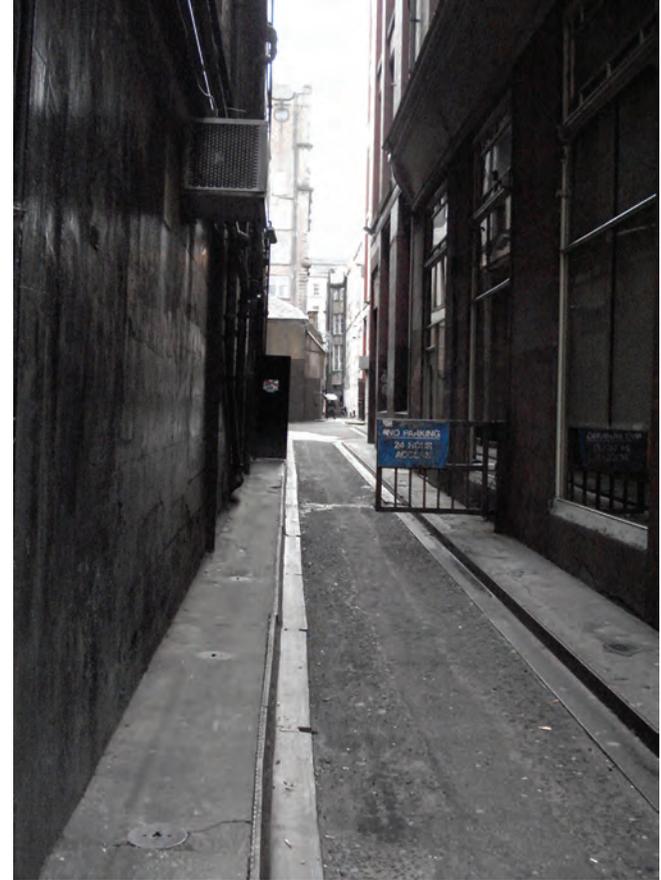
Stepladder

Found in a skip bin, this stepladder was obviously used when painting with the drips of colonial white, spanish white, pearl lustre, and other often used shades of house paint splashed on surfaces. I was reminded of a stepladder in my Granny's pantry that I used to sit on while playing with salt and peppershakers and crockery. We would chat while she was cooking and I would pass her things when she needed them.

It was a memory of having intimate conversations while doing other things, of giving each other privacy by not focusing face-to-face, while deconstructing, reconstructing and weaving our worlds together. In doing this, we created a private and serene space within the chaos of large family gatherings. I inserted a drawer in the interstitial space once again, this time under the seat. Crafting it carefully and beautifully to contrast with the roughness of the rest of the ladder, I created a space for small precious things.







Gleaning and Obsolescence

Salvaging is a matter of ethics for me because I find it utterly unacceptable to see all this waste on the streets.⁸

Obsolescence is a concept associated with consumer culture, where an object becomes disused or no longer in fashion. This project explores gleaning as a result of and a political response to obsolescence as well as a design process and strategy that is more sustainable than the standard practice of throwing things away when they become obsolete. Agnès Varda's movie, *The Gleaners and I*, explores the practice, enshrined as a right in French law, of gleaning food after the harvest. When I searched for information about gleaning, I found two repeated meanings: first; references which locked the word to a culturally distant, peasant, and gendered past represented in romantic paintings and second; the idea of spying, slyly collecting information. Varda turns the former lockdown of meaning into a window, taking her viewers on a conceptual voyage that begins with those very paintings and explores the lives of contemporary gleaners.

The encounter happens on the street. The object beckons me... People see it as a cluster of junk; I see it as a cluster of possibilities.⁹

A number of contemporary artists and designers use gleaning as part of their work: 5.5, junktion, Piet Hein Eek, Alexena Cayless, and Frederik Färg. A group of French designers, who are "Gleaners, bargain hunters, aesthetes",¹⁰ 5.5 doctored broken things found on kerbs or in thrift shops in their project *Réanim*. Collecting things that they came across, such as broken chairs and chair legs they then designed an interaction with the objects to create new, bricolaged objects. 5.5's project developed from a similar political and ethical position as mine as they sought to "reinvent the way we consume, produce and therefore design"¹¹ in an effort to change the way society deals with and perceives broken and obsolete objects.

8. Varda, *The Gleaners and I: Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.*



9. Ibid.

10. "5.5 Designers."

11. Ibid.

Wendy Neale. *An embarrassment of riches: rekindling desire for obsolete furniture.*



12. "Fernando + Humberto Campana / Design Museum Touring Exhibition :- Design/Designer Information."



Another designer who has also worked with discarded furniture, Alexena Cayless is a British designer, recently completing a project called *Fly Tip Furniture*. She found furniture that had been fly-tipped, or illegally abandoned in back streets. I like that she has chosen the interstitial space of the back street or curb to source her objects, and in doing so has made a difference, however small, to the urban environment by removing unwanted objects and reinserting them into the cycle of use.

Although Dutch designer, Piet Hein Eek doesn't design with obsolete furniture, he uses unwanted or obsolete materials in his new furniture. He gleans demolition timber, leaving the original paint or finish on it, preserving the signs of wear and tear or patina in his finished objects. Bricolaging that timber in a way that is evocative of patchwork, Eek makes objects that retain the essence of where the timber used to be.

Combining found objects or materials with new, the Campana Brothers are bricoleurs who have designed furniture for almost three decades, utilising old and new techniques and thereby producing very distinctive furniture. I like their attention to unwanted and abandoned things and how it inspires their work, but I find it problematic that they are then able to charge such enormous prices for these pieces. The example opposite, the Favela Chair named for the shantytowns of Brazil, was originally made using scraps of wood from these places and is now made by Edra and sold for \$US4,500 – I admire the audacity that allows these brothers to do this. They mine the culture of the poor in Sao Paulo, Brazil, claim it as a source of inspiration,¹² and attempt to address the social inequities that exist to create this source by giving some profit to local charities and engaging local artisans in making of parts of their work.

Designers and theorists, Naylor and Ball create objects from broken and obsolete objects and write about the process. I appreciate these designers for their inquisitive ways of looking at the world, challenging the idea of rubbish and proposing it as desirable and evocative. In the project

Form Follows Idea,¹³ Naylor and Ball sought to work on invisible, ubiquitous and discarded furniture such as the example opposite. The way they obtained these objects was similar to my method, looking in back streets, skip bins and in back yards, gleaning as they journeyed.

Like many of the people in Varda's film, I learned to glean with my parents and grandparents. When I was a child we used to wander through farms and collect mushrooms or pick rosehips as a family. Later, when my politics finally won the battle with my career I lived on communes and I resolved to not buy anything that I did not need. I went to Australia with two friends and we lived for 8 to 10 months, hitchhiking, sleeping outside, and swapping labour for food. So when I became an artist and designer, from the start I was getting my materials in the way I was used to. 'Look, here's a pile of materials in the workshop.' That was not an artistic decision for this project; that is how I have operated for years.

The way that I glean varies – sometimes I find things on the side of the road and other times I am offered materials and objects through the relationships that I have with other people with their own gleaning practices. In recent times, my cousin worked for a charity op-shop. Knowing my interest in unwanted objects and materials, he would offer to me whatever they decided to throw away, which is how I collected some wallpaper and fabrics. The people who work in Massey's Information Technology Services are gleaners who always keep me in mind when they are pulling apart equipment. They know I am always looking for things and that the students need materials, so will give me useful detritus that I either use or pass on to the students. Much of the timber I use is gifted, left over from someone's project, like a headboard that a student gave to me that I used for the Shop Cabinet.

French philosopher, Nicolas Bourriaud writes about what he calls 'relational aesthetics' where he discusses how the world has changed the way that we relate to each other in an information- and communications-focused society. He asserts that this new technology has served to separate

13. Naylor and Ball, Form Follows Idea: An Introduction to Design Poetics.



14. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.



us from each other, a position that I agree with. The example that he gives is that now that we go to the ATM to get our money, we expect professionals to behave more like machines, and we have a higher level of intolerance for people's personal foibles. But we miss out on all the opportunities to have those interactions that can be pleasant, or not pleasant, the experience helping you develop your social/relational skills.¹⁴ Gleaning, swapping and exchange for me are ways of recreating and enhancing relationships with people. The 5.5 designers also worked in a relational way in the *Réanim* project. They brought the found objects together in a gallery and invited visitors to the gallery to conduct operations with them, building relationships and having experiences with people while creating new objects from old.

I aimed to buy nothing for this project as I believe that due to our throw-away society riches can be found everywhere. As a result I collected a lot of material, an embarrassment of riches, that operates as a library for me, allowing me to bricolage my objects as the inspiration found me. Many of my fabrics come from my grandmother's fabric collection and I have a ragbag from Trelise Cooper's dressmaking operation. The gold leaf I used on the Icon Drawer is excess from another project. The little viewing glass in the Earthquake/Drama Table is from an overhead projector. At the end of the year, when the students leave, the workshop staff tidy up. As part of that, we identify what materials students might need and set them aside on the free shelves. Some materials we recycle in other ways, and some I use.

Gleaning is not always an illegal activity in New Zealand – while individuals are not allowed to take things from the tip-face due to safety and licensing issues, there are times when councils recognise the interest that people have in gleaning. For example, the Icon Drawer was an object that I found while on a gleaning expedition on Waiheke Island. Every two years the council arranges an inorganic rubbish collection day, when everybody who has large rubbish can put it out on the side of the road and the council picks it up for no charge. As in many places, the rubbish is put out during the week preceding this removal date and local people drive and walk

around 'shopping'. I knew the story of the house fire where the drawer came from. The chest and the drawers were all badly burnt and broken amongst other burnt objects piled haphazardly. This drawer was the one intact piece remaining and it immediately caught my eye. On the inorganic days, I always have the feeling that I will find treasure. In this particular instance, it was an intimate and tragic search. I was very aware that this was a pile representing somebody's misery, somebody else's bad luck. I was treasure hunting in tragedy.

What's good about these objects is that they have a past, they've already had a life, and they're still very much alive. All you have to do is give them a second chance...They're like presents left on the street, it's like Christmas.¹⁵

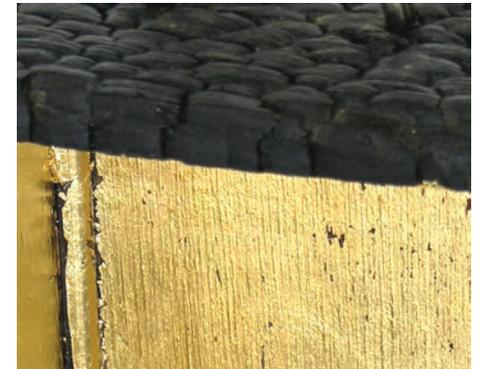
We talk about objects today as being designed to have built-in obsolescence. We accept that they might break quickly, and they are so cheap that it is simpler to buy a new one. Many of the things that I have found are obsolete just because there is something new to replace them, or someone has moved on emotionally or mentally from having that object. I understand that because I often want to redecorate my house according to how I am feeling at any one time. Obsolete objects are sad, no longer useful, no longer fit for their purpose within the previous context. I want objects to stop being obsolete, or to be in a new place, in a new iteration where they are no longer obsolete.

When I first met them, the objects that form the *Riches* project had become, as Avery Gordon describes it, "a sad and sunken couch that sags in just that place where an unrememberable past and an unimaginable future force us to sit day after day."¹⁶ They had become furniture with memories that people had rejected, or with memories tucked away within them but forgotten by the possessor of the object. My job as a gleaner is to pay attention to the things that no one else does, to recognise the potential of these objects, to listen to their stories, to explore their pockets, to imagine their possible histories and futures, and to get them home again.

Walking through urban space is like flipping through a furniture catalogue.

"konzept > barbara caveng: A.R.M - ein performatives gesellschaftsprojekt"

15. Varda, *The Gleaners and I: Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.*



16. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination.*

17. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics.*

18. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics.*



19. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics.*

Gleaning is not a gimmick for me. What is found is enough. It's not that I happened to find a few interesting objects, or that gleaning is a cool activity. It's not a hobby to drive around on inorganic day and find stuff. It's that for a long time I've been living in the interstices with a sense of sufficiency and richness and pleasure, and treasure.

Bourriaud refers to the term 'interstice', which Karl Marx used to describe "trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit."¹⁷ Recently Gibson-Graham updated our understanding of such trading communities by identifying the many forms of production, exchange, and consumption which exist outside market and employment calculations. Gleaning and salvaging is part of a dense network of unofficial economic activity.¹⁸ Some gleaning has a recognisable barter characteristic (such as my acquisition of the Screen in exchange for some carpentry), or something more subtle, such as some exchanges I have made in which the payment was a story, or simply a feeling of connection. Other salvaging transforms rubbish or waste into useful and beautiful objects, generating value outside the formal systems of production.

The system that we are in is a net which is fairly tight and controlling. There are always spaces in a net where things fall through, other things happen. Those are the interstices – the ignored places within our story and within our control system. Those places are desolate in some ways, but they are also places where the rules are not enforced. They imply both abandonment and impoverishment, but also freedom in a way that can become creative. This interstice "creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed upon us."¹⁹

The side of the road, or kerb, can be an interstitial location in that it is a space between; between the road and the house, a no-man's land. People treat this kerb as interstitial when they identify

objects as obsolete and leave those objects there. Rather than taking them to the dump, they are hoping that other people will take them or that the Council will remove them. I enter that space and redefine the objects. The interstitial space provides an opportunity for an experimental intervention into an accepted process. In the following section I explore the interstices as a site for intervening into the objects themselves.





Intervention

I have used the interstitial process of gleaning to collect the obsolete object and the interstitial spaces of the objects become the sites for my interventions. I find things that I think are attractive and need a little something for them to elicit that feeling for others that they are desirable again. At some point somebody chose this object and then, for whatever reason, they un-chose it. The challenge is deciding how to intervene with them.

Interstices

Intervening in the objects, I find myself attracted to the spaces in-between, the space inside, the space behind. With the Earthquake/Drama Table, it is the space underneath, the unseen space. For the Icon Drawer, the main place of concentration is the inside of the drawer. With the Office Chairs, the cushions and backs were splitting open and I was attracted to those spaces.

In urban sociology the expression “interstice” is currently used to describe places of “otherness” and informal practices. The interstice can also be defined as a space without precise use, located for an indeterminate period of time between functionally determined built configurations... In a world more and more mediated and virtualised, the interstitial condition notably offers the possibility to learn from the experience of a new type of wilderness...²⁰

I am exploring how to work within an interstitial location that has been abandoned, or never seen, and give it creative spark, make it a space that people want to be, a space from which new ideas and experiences come. It is a practice of enlivening an interstitial thing or location or changing the way that people might interact with that space. Interstices are desirable when they have a sense of concealment, suggestion, connection. The underneath of a table is an interstice. I have made it into a place, a conversation with the Earthquake/Drama Table. Also I invite people to interact with the



20. Luc Lévesque, “Interstitial Landscapes as Resources: A few Thoughts about a Tactical Approach to Urban Intervention.”

To follow performativity theory, the self is constituted in the relation with people... and in interaction with things.

Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture*

21. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Places.*



22. Benjamin, "Opening the Interstitial; Eisenman's Space of Difference."



23. Ibid.

...trying to negotiate the space between one's humanity and one's stereotype.

Williams, *Open House: Of Family, Friends, Food, Piano Lessons, and the Search for a Room of My Own.*

Drawers quite differently than they would usually, disrupting expectations. While I chose to open up these particular drawers, I often put small or secret drawers in my furniture to invoke a sense of treasure. Secrets are treasure, treasured horror or delight and "there will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box."²¹ The boundaries between exterior and interior are rich and productive. That boundary is where desire bursts forth, where longings are witnessed.

I am one of many who are intrigued with the idea of interstices. Architectural theorist, Andrew Benjamin talks about the interstitial as a space of difference when writing about Peter Eisenmann. Opening the interstitial is a way to talk about the difference between interior and exterior. "The interstitial causes terms such as interior, exterior, surface, new, old, void, etc. to break the hold of the literal and thus operate in different ways" The interstitial intervention is the generative between; it alters the perception and the practice of the object while at the same time "allowing for possibilities that were not determined in advance."²²

Obsolete objects are interstitial reminders of the past, of change, even of historic design and production processes. When I intervene with these objects, I am standing in a place between their past and their future, and my own. I experience these objects through the lens of my subject position; my own experiences, education, culture, world views. Moreover, I am attracted to the in-betweens of the objects themselves. It could be just obsolete, or it could be a place where new things happen. In understanding the interstitial as a space of difference, expectations are disrupted, opening up possibilities, allowing the furniture to be used and experienced in a new way.²³

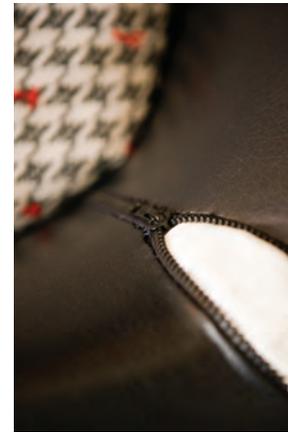
I am attracted to the interstitial because for much of my life I have been dealing with the expected surface of things, and the places where that breaks down or changes, or just isn't true. Regardless of the reality underneath or how committed we may be to an alternative reality, the surface is still part of the story and I see those spaces and tensions as interesting, informative, evocative. Our lives are full of fissures.

I started thinking about the split seams in the Office Chairs as glimpses of the inside, or a place where the inside was rupturing through the surface. I tried a range of fabrics and ways of working with the cushions, and eventually came up with a bricolaged possibility that sat well with the piece. I saw the Burlesque chair as embodying a professional woman, whose interior self is very feminine, stylish, and very vibrant. Though she tries to be the professional that Bourriaud refers to, she can't always keep her own personality stuffed under this required veneer of black vinyl.

Bachelard is a philosopher who thinks about interior spaces. He is interested in how interior spaces connect with our memories of intimacy or security. "With the theme of drawers, chests, locks, and wardrobes, we shall resume contact with the unfathomable store of daydreams of intimacy." He writes about the need for secrecy, a sense of hiding places.²⁴ I was attracted to the Icon Drawer which I recognised as the top drawer for these reasons. I take ideas about containment, interiors, secrets and intimacy and integrate that understanding into my design, investigation, and engagement with that existing object. This process is one of revealing, uncovering, opening into the interior spaces of the furniture.

A number of other artists and designers are working with gleaned or obsolete objects. Each of the designers or groups discussed below has worked with this furniture from diverse perspectives and they have succeeded in changing the way that other people perceive these objects through the interventions or changes the designer/s introduce.

In *Réanim*, 5.5 aimed to re-educate furniture, systemising their interventions through developing a range of adaptable prosthetics rather than restoring, repairing or transforming these objects.²⁵ In this example of their work (right) they fixed the broken leg of a Thonet chair by replacing it with an adaptable contemporary leg. The new part, a lurid green used by pharmacies in France, contrasts with the original object and draws attention to their intervention. This sharp contrast highlights the age and elegance of the original object. In this way, the parts of this new object don't talk to each other;



24. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Places.*



25. "5.5 Designers."

26. Kahn, "Playing Doctor: A Broken Chair is a Design Opportunity for Paris-based 5.5."



27. "about junktion."

28. "Inhabitat » Junktion Transforms Trashed Furniture into Treasure."

29. "Inhabitat » Reclaimed RE:cover Chairs by Fredrik Färg."



they are two different objects, but now they are in the same place. These designers chose to focus on furniture too, and I appreciate that they strove to keep their interventions simple and inexpensive.²⁶

junktion, a group of designers based in Tel Aviv, "believe that there is enough stuff in the world already"²⁷ and work with an assemblage or bricolage aesthetic. They pay attention to obsolete objects, but while 5.5 retain the use and change the form of the object, junktion may reassign use to the form; they are looking at the objects for their form, rather than for their function. They ask themselves how they can take an obsolete object which has a pleasing form, and make it still useful, and no longer obsolete? In the example opposite they have taken obsolete analogue telephones and turned them into standard lamps. They revitalise old objects, but with irreverence, by intentionally changing context, joining unrelated objects together or upside down to invite a reaction or response.²⁸

Another designer whose work interests me, Frederik Färg studied craft and design in Gothenburg, Sweden and has a strong interest in fashion, sensibilities he applies to his furniture. In a project called RE:cover he bought classic chairs from second-hand shops, restored them and reupholstered them using industrial felt, working with the inspiration of a man's suit, or a garment. He calls his work slow fashion²⁹ furniture, encouraging people to see the life cycle of this furniture extending calmly into the future, weathering fashion trends, whims and fancies along the way. In contrast to 5.5's and junktion's work, Färg's work appeals to me because he maintains the original form and function; he has a reverence for these objects, allowing them to retain their integrity.

Integrity of the object

The integrity of the object is important, its value generated partly by the act of discovery that is gleaning. I start to work with obsolete objects that I have adopted, attracted to interventions that are gentle and reverent, with a feeling that this object has a history and is full of stories, and I

am involving myself in stories. Drawing this object from the interstices of everyday life, I consider how to design with its history rather than despite its history.

Gleaned objects are precious because they are treasures. It's a treasure hunt. As children, my brothers and I drew treasure maps to objects that we had hidden. They would be strange, valueless things, but it was all about imagining them to be treasure. A gleaned object, even though someone has thrown it away, instantly gains this value, through the act of discovery. A discard is full of potential and possibilities; it becomes unique, even if it is a mass-produced object. This piece is no longer stocked in a shop where they have a stack of each object. It would be unlikely that I would find another Drama Table, and I could never find another drawer that is burnt like the Icon Drawer.

I usually live with the objects. I don't leave them in the workshop; I bring them home and I live with them for a while. I know them. I get an idea about what they are before I start working on them so that my interventions aren't haphazard even though I am working with a bricolage method. I am attracted to them for reasons which are not always clear at first. The Icon Drawer and the Earthquake/Drama Table instantly evoked my own memories. Whereas with the Office Chairs, it took a while to sit into, to find the space I would work, what I would do with them. I was initially attracted to the form, the wheeling and the spinning and the black vinyl.

In the past when I have designed, I drew and made models. It is a completely different process working with objects that already exist. I work with them directly, rather than imagining something, drawing it, and then making it. In this way I am "a 'flamboyant' worker, exuberant and excited, [who] is willing to risk losing control over his or her work: machines break down when they lose control, whereas people make discoveries, stumble on happy accidents."³⁰ From the moment of finding these objects, I am having a relationship with them, not with



30. Sennett, *The Craftsman*.



some abstract idea in my head. They aren't taking shape; they already have a shape and presence. It is a fully embodied process, rather than a formal one.

My intention is to work with and support the feeling of the original object which I see as preserving the integrity of the object. I don't introduce a striking difference or a new aesthetic; I like to develop the object within its own aesthetic. The zip that I put in the Burlesque office chair looks as though it might originally be part of the chair, but introduces the idea that something else is there. The little drawer that I placed under the seat of the Stepladder seems like another part of the structure of the seat, only contrasting because of the quality of finish that I applied to it. When I obtained Please Sit, a broken chair, I realized it had been made poorly, so I rebuilt the frame. I increased its value with reverence for its own form, for well-made things and for craft. If it's broken, I might repair it. If it's a fragment I find interesting, I will draw attention to its interest and beauty.

I like to blur the difference between the old and the new. It needs to be obvious that something has happened, but I don't want to do it in a way that is jarring or abrupt, not an aggressive intervention. I aim to shift things slightly, to create an intervention that might actually shift things a lot mentally or emotionally for myself or other people. I want an intervention that is subtle, that can be intense for people who are paying attention, but almost invisible to people who are not paying attention. I want to create a connection for the participants, not a spectacle. Tiny motions can be so dramatic for those who are involved.

One of the challenging aspects of the interventions is keeping them simple in this way. I want the objects to retain their original character and to be desirable in their existing form. Like Färg, I choose objects that still have integrity and character, and breathe new life into them. I have respect for the original design that is still there. I am not just looking for parts or being a weekend warrior,³¹ or inspired by the plethora of DIY programmes and magazine articles, though I have

taken a night class in upholstery while working on this project. At the same time, it's not veneration of the object. It's not refurbishing or restoration, which simultaneously wipes away the lived history of an objects use while locking it away into history as antique.

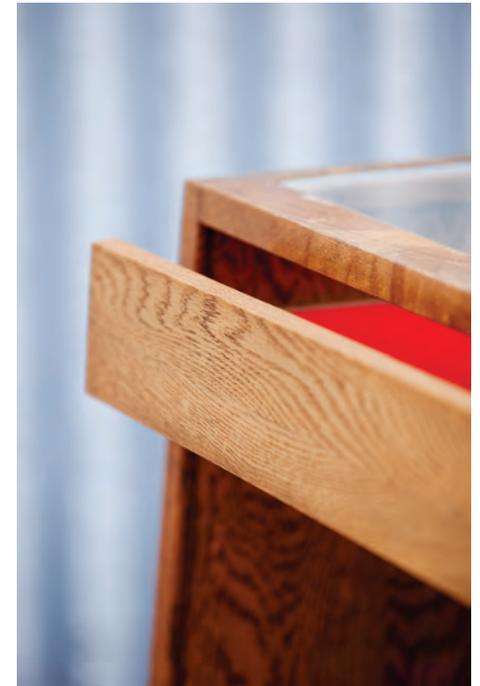
For an idea to have several dimensions means that there has to be space within its realisation for interpretation or contemplation.³²

On the other hand, my interventions with the Un/Screen and the Shop Cabinet were too subtle. I knew instantly why people were reacting the way they were toward them. With the Shop Cabinet, I was evoking the experience of looking in. Originally there were glass doors across the front - maybe it was a shop display cabinet, or china cabinet. By taking the sliding doors out, I opened up the space making it instantly accessible. Then I created the subtle drawer that invites you to look over and see what is in it, through the glass insert on the top. I enjoyed making that invitation but upon reflection, I consider that it did not enhance the character of the whole piece in a way that would give it that extra spark.

I took my interest in the possibilities of adding a drawer further in the Earthquake/Drama Table, in which it becomes more of an adventure, a surprise, a seeking out. With the Store Cabinet and the Earthquake/Drama Table, from the outside very little is different. In that way they are similar, but I feel more satisfied with the intervention within the table. The porthole gives you the idea that something is happening in there that is unexpected whereas there is not much of a surprise in the Shop Cabinet (yet).

Another important difference is that I didn't have a story for the Shop Cabinet, while I had such a powerful story for the Table. The story about the Shop Cabinet has not come yet and, as will be discussed further below, I realise that the story is essential to my process in this project. Even the incomplete pieces still have integrity. I don't force objects to completion. The Shop Cabinet

32. Naylor and Ball, *Form Follows Idea: An Introduction to Design Poetics.*



33. Varda, *The Gleaners and I: Two years Later.*



is without a story; I can't work with it yet. Its story hasn't come and I am not forcing a story on it. And I still love it. We have not matured together to the point where I am able to get it dressed up and send it on its way. Perhaps as a shop cabinet it has not spent enough time in a home yet.

The analyst's job...you really can call it a kind of gleaning...in other words, we pay attention to things no one else does...The analyst doesn't know beforehand what he'll glean.³³

I did have the seeds of a story for the Un/Screen. I helped a friend build a wall in her house one day and in the garage I found this screen which we swapped for my labour. What I liked about it is that different people have worked on it. And at some point, somebody gave up and as a result you can see the 1930s paint, the 1970s paint, and the original French polish. There was just that little bit of evidence of the next person starting to sand it all away. I was rapt that they stopped there (I think partly it's because they lost the third piece). I liked the surface of the paints and the history connected to that. I decided to create an object that the new user could define the use of. I inserted the rails into the two frames at different heights so that people could hang their own textiles in different combinations and formations. But the invitation was not clear enough. People looked at it and said "oh, what is that?" "Are you going to finish it off?" "When are you going to take the rest of the paint off?" That was interesting. I let it go. A student needed a screen as a prop for a play. I told him he could do what he liked with it, as long as he came back to tell me the story. When he finished with it he gave it to his parents who are making use of it in their everyday life.

I am patient. It takes me time to get to know the objects. But the intervention itself, ideally, I imagine it as quick and decisive. I have this idea about the process, that I could find these things; make some minor, small change that enhances the character, rather than disrupting it and then put it out there to be wanted and used again.

Craft

Rob Forbes, describes Eek's work as "poetic functionalism", focusing on the handmade processes he employs and the use of recycled wood and metals as indicators of this style.³⁴ Eek's attention to surface is paramount to his objects. His forms are austere, allowing the historic surface and texture to dominate. I like that this description focuses on the craft involved in Eek's work and the relationship he has with the materials he chooses.

Another designer whose work focuses on surface textures and my first teacher in furniture, Patrick Stronach is an Irish designer who trained at John Makepeace's Parnham School in England. His work is beautifully made and inspires me to honour the materials, the integrity of forms; to make graceful interventions, rather than aggressive ones. He also inspires me to make interventions that come from the craft of furniture-making. As Sennett says,

In the higher stages of skill, there is a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness, the tacit knowledge serving as an anchor, the explicit awareness serving as critique and corrective. Craft quality emerges from this higher stage, in judgements made on tacit habits and suppositions.³⁵

In this project, where I have taken the approach of working directly with the object, my crafting skills and understanding of the materials that I work with are essential. Working in a way that feels as though it is a dance; knowing the curve that I want to create for the legs of the Icon Drawer, planing the timber without needing to mark it out, feeling the way the timber responds to the plane and reacting accordingly. The relationship I have with the object and the materials is a reactive, inter-active one. The process is dynamic, embodied and synergistic; I realise that I have mastery with the materials and processes that I use. The feeling that is generated during this process, these actions, is a feeling of serenity. It is a meditative process which allows my body to work on one level and my mind to work on another while still connected to the process

34. "Studio Forbes - PEIT HEIN EEK."



35. Sennett, *The Craftsman*.





36. Sennett, *The Craftsman*.



Audre Lord's much cited dictum that the Master's tools will never dismantle the house... Perhaps what you can do with them is to take apart that old mansion, using some of its pieces to put up a far better one where there is room for all of us.

Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture*

of making. While wood has always been my first interest, I pay the same level of attention to other materials, pushing them a little but not working against them.

This awareness of craft, as Sennett defines it, was especially evident when working on the Please Sit chair. Rather than fixing the broken leg, or replacing it as 5.5 would do, I looked for the reason why the leg was broken and saw that the other legs would also potentially break due to a design fault. The intervention that I decided on honoured the intent of the Australian designer Grant Featherston when he designed a very similar chair in the 1950s. This was the most radical intervention that I had considered, and I had trepidations about doing so much and concerns that I might lose the essence that originally attracted me to this piece. In the process of developing this piece, I was once again reminded of the importance of allowing myself to experiment and make mistakes. In fixing the chair in this way, creating a dynamic repair,³⁶ I rescued Please Sit from being another poorly made imitation and created a strong base for it to stand on in the future.

Moving from interventions and interstices to desire, I now look at how Bachelard's emphasis on intimacy could suggest an approach to long-lasting design. Perhaps objects that touch us intimately become obsolete less often or more slowly than other, less alluring objects. If keeping objects alive is about encouraging people to feel connected with them (again), I propose that another approach to sustainable design is enhancing the intimacy through stimulating memory and therefore rekindling desire.



Desire and Memory

37. Ed Van Hinte, *Eternally Yours: Visions on Product Endurance.*

38. McDonough and Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things.*

39. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination.*



My aim is to glean objects, intervene in them and make them desirable again – following Belk et al I use memory to recover desire. Like the Eternally Yours designers and theorists I am adding a fourth word, retain, to the phrase reuse, reduce and recycle.³⁷ Cradle to Cradle is an important book which encourages designers to concern themselves with issues of sustainability from the start of the design process.³⁸ I agree that designers should create more sustainable things in this way but I also want to recover the things that are already out there.

There are a number of ways to rekindle desire. Doris Salcedo, a sculptor from Columbia, works in a detailed and caring way with objects which were originally furniture. She takes objects that are recognisably from inside houses and spaces. She is interested in what is still around us but is not talked about, reminding me of Avery Gordon's work. Gordon suggests that the things that haunt us are full of insights and we need to gently welcome these ghosts.³⁹ I appreciate the tenderness of Salcedo's work and that it is not literally narrative.

This cabinet, a wooden cabinet, with the rich story of its previous use marked on its surface, a surface which seamlessly becomes tartan fabric, with a zip. When I first saw this cabinet I was reminded of my Burlesque chair, where I chose to make the zip look almost as if it was always there.

Salcedo might keep things out of garbage dumps, but she is moving them from furniture into art, so her work is not about making the furniture sustainable as furniture. I love her aesthetic, the gentleness, the insight, and the beauty of the final work. I come to this practice with similar sensibilities, but with my own design aesthetic, and with a mission and a question. I want to be able to make these objects desirable again and I need to know if there is really work for

me to do. I am concerned that obsolete objects can be re-desired and re-enter the cycle of use, whether that be as a piece of furniture or an art object.

Enhancing the longevity of an object is not only about materials use, but also about enabling the same object to maintain its relevance. I want to redesign in a way that keeps the object alive, historically present, inviting re-engagement. I see myself in relationship with these objects as one in a long line of New Zealanders interacting with furniture. The object is in constant transformation through history, through time. That is my idea of sustainability. It is more than a logic of how not to waste materials; it is a question of how we continue to like these objects, how we sustain our desire for the same object.

I like the way that Färg compares his role as a designer to that of a children's book writer, saying 'It's all about adding layers of value that trigger the sense and fantasy, no matter the age.'⁴⁰ These layers work to make things desirable by connecting us with emotions, memories and stories.

Responses to design objects are as much dependant on people's beliefs and values as on their knowledge and understanding of the objects.⁴¹

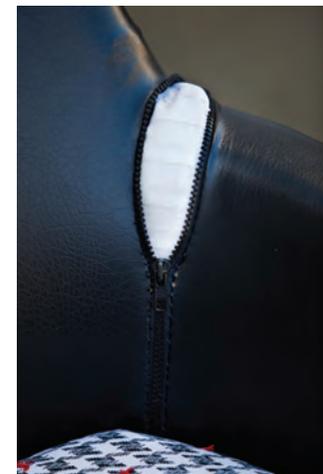
This chair, the Burlesque Chair, the one I am sitting on; it had no cushion and a ripped seam. A friend walked past it in my house every couple of weeks for a few months. When I put the zip in and inserted the fabric behind the zip, she asked "where did that come from? That's fantastic! It reminds me of chairs when I was hairdressing." Before that it was completely unnoticeable, and unattractive to her. I didn't do much to it and it went from being ripped and deflated to being complete again, in a new way, and attractive.

I am claiming here that I will make things desirable again. The desire was once there for these objects. Obviously that desire is gone; otherwise they would not be on the side of the road or



40. "Design: 2 (or 3 ...) Questions for Fredrik Färg."

41. Dillon and Howe, "Design as Narrative."



A story is a gathering of the gossamer of human experience; we make emotional connections with other people through sharing a past.

Cochrane, Patrick Hall

42. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard, "The Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion."

43. Varda, *The Gleaners and I: Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.*

44. Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life.*

in people's garages. But the potential for something in someone's garage to be desirable again is probably higher than the piece on the side of the road. If the object is in their garage they still have a little desire for it, or guilt, or hope that someone else will take it so they don't have to put it on the side of the road.

I am working out how to move through the space between obsolete and desirable. What generates desire? Some of the things I have found might be considered to be good design, even classic. What gives objects a staying power in the cycle of desire? We have all had the experience of seeing an object in a shop, somebody's home, on TV or the Internet; knowing we can't buy it or that we don't need it and then having it 'call our name' in the following hours, days, months or even years. This calling is the difference between a necessary object and a desired object. Belk et al's discussion of the 'transformative power of desire and the desired object' is particularly resonant for me as they suggest that memories and stories are intensely linked to our desire for some objects, and that these are linked to the social relations we all seek.⁴² In their new iterations the objects that form this project are desirable, and will enrich people's social relations through the connections with memories, nostalgia and stories. My key strategy for rekindling desire develops from this attitude to memory. I offer up the space for memories to grow within or around the object.

A gleaning attitude toward memories and history as well: gleaning...of images, impressions...gleaning is...a mental activity. To glean facts, acts, and deeds, to glean information.⁴³

When retired people move into supported accommodation they dispose of so many things, keeping just a few objects from their own home. They have been surrounded by some possessions all of their lives, but when it is time to move, there is so much that they throw away, sell or give away. What do they keep? They keep small objects that contain their memories.⁴⁴ Bachelard

proposes that objects can help us remember our memories, can locate and fix them so that we can access them: “Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are ... For a knowledge of intimacy, localisation of the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than the determination of dates.”⁴⁵ It doesn’t matter when it was, I can smell it; a whiff of the past.⁴⁶

The Stepladder’s new drawer, the drawer for precious things, now contains recipes written by some of the women in my life. I asked these women to write out a recipe that is evocative of special occasions we have shared. Folding these recipes up, I have tucked them into little cardboard folders and filed them away. Each recipe is a reminder of events where food is shared amongst us, of wandering intimate conversations, laughter, tears, bickering and love. They are evocative of long histories with family and friends, weaving in with my original memory of sitting on a similar stepladder and talking with my Granny as she prepared food for our family gathering. The drawer is only partly full, allowing space for new friends and family and the memories we build together in the future.

As the artists and designers, Cayless, Hall, and Maruyama, have used memory and story as part of their work, I also created stories with these pieces of furniture. I don’t require my story to be the only story. I want the viewer/prospective owner to imagine the object into their stories and histories and memories.

The aim of art is to tidy up one’s inner and exterior worlds.⁴⁷

A highly regarded Australian furniture designer, Patrick Hall’s work is about finding his place in the world. His work inspired me while I was studying at the School of Art in Hobart, where I first saw his work and continues to inspire me now. He examines his own childhood memories and relationships between people, “offering glimpses into how objects and their stories can tell us

45. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Places.*

46. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place.*



47. Varda, *The Gleaners and I: Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.*



48. Cochrane, *Patrick Hall.*



49. "Wendy Maruyama."



'what it is to be human',⁴⁸ through large cabinets with rich detail on the drawer-fronts. His work is literal, telling his own stories and others' in a wistful and whimsical way. All of his major works are contained; drawer, cabinet, boxes. They are all about interior spaces, with an intense and detailed craft aesthetic.

Another craft-reverent designer is Wendy Maruyama whose work with personal stories and memories resonates with me. She finds space for herself as an interstitial person between two countries as a Japanese American woman, and between idealized visions of women and her experience. Her work is simple, but evocative. She made a series of cabinets in response to her first trip to Japan, about her feelings of displacement, and the effect that the portrayal of women in Japanese Manga movies had on her at this time. Maruyama says she is "reverent ... and appalled...I vacillate between creating works that both emulate and satirize contemporary Japan."⁴⁹ At a conference in Perth, Western Australia, I heard her speak about this struggle, questioning how she could relate to these images of women in these movies as a woman in her 50s, a slightly fat, frumpy woman when the Manga women are young with extremely sexualised, idealised bodies.

Where Hall and Maruyama work in a similar way to me, by using their own life experiences to tell stories through their work, Cayless' interest in stories that are held in objects is also resonant with me. In the fly-tipped project she painted all the objects white and then screen-printed onto them images of where she found them. Cayless' simple paint treatments enhance the forms of the old furniture and act as a canvas for her illustrations. In doing this, she imposed a story over the object very literally; a story that draws our attention to discarded yet still useful objects and their history.

I attend to the memories I read in the obsolete furniture I find, using my own memories to stimulate a design intervention that then kindles other people's memories. The kindling of other people's

desire for the Earthquake/Drama Table is often sparked by the story. When I tell the story people go “ahhh!” remembering their own unique days under tables. In contrast, the Icon Drawer works on its own. People respond quite strongly to it when they first see it and then the story adds another, richer layer.

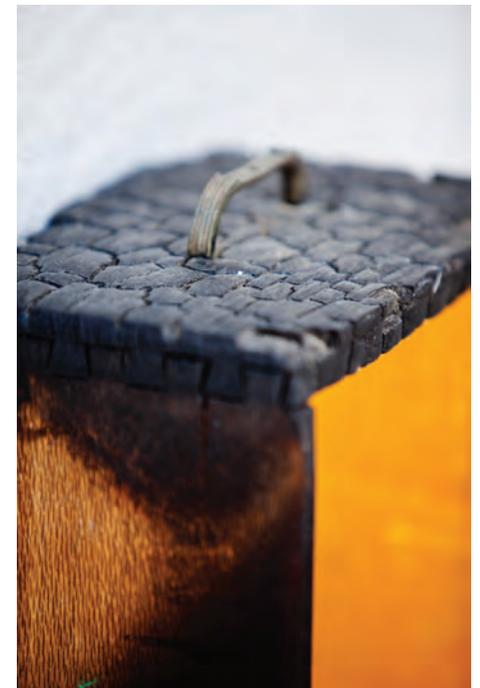
That drawer was the treasure from the tragedy. I had to honour it, those people, and their experience. It is the top drawer, from a very plain 1930s dresser. I could imagine it probably had three bottom drawers and then two top drawers and then a round mirror. It’s not that high. The top drawer is always special. The bottom drawers are bigger and they might have jerseys in them. People keep special things in their top drawers. The Icon Drawer stirred memories of my Great Aunt who sat at a similar dresser when readying herself for the day or evening or even taking a break during the day. I would watch her and we would talk. She sometimes showed me special things from the top drawer as she went through the rituals of applying powder, brushing her hair, putting on jewellery.

I have very strong feelings about tucking things away in that little top drawer. That is where my mother keeps her jewellery, special hankies, or gloves. My parents went to Balls when I was a child, and Mum spent a lot of time getting ready for them; smoothing on gloves, applying fake eyelashes, teasing her hair to enhance her 1970s hairstyle. The top drawer stirs all my feelings about women looking after themselves and paying attention to themselves. That is why I applied gold leaf to it. The Icon Drawer is precious on so many levels. It is the one piece that survived the fire, and it is also the top drawer, evoking the specialness of the things that were inside it, and of women’s special time with themselves. Applying the gold leaf was an enactment of this delicate, attentive ritual.

The Icon Drawer in its raw state had, as Bachelard says, allowed me to “resume contact with the unfathomable store of daydreams of intimacy.”⁵⁰ By opening up this Drawer, I have opened

Maybe the difficulty lies in the attempt to create objects that don't need explanations, but still keep the story that was meant to be told. And maybe when you tell the story, you discover yet another layer emerging before you.

Design: 2 (or 3 ...) Questions for Fredrik Färg



50. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Places.*

51. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Places.*

52. Varda, *The Gleaners and I: Two years Later.*

53. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Places.*

I suspect that functionalism - historically fixed in the physical world and powered by an economy of materials and means - is by now a quaint ism in need of a nice pair of earrings.

Laurel, Design Research: Methods and Perspectives.

54. "End of the line for iconic Kiwi lollies|Stuff.co.nz."

55. Benjamin, "Opening the Interstitial: Eisenman's Space of Difference."

up a new dimension – the dimension of intimacy which is now accessible to everybody, should they choose to accept the invitation.⁵¹ This object operates as a generative between.

They leave wonderful traces of ...I imagine...the relationship people had with these objects - Macha Makeïeff, *Gleaner of Inconsolable Things*⁵²

Another object that I found on the side of the road, the Earthquake/Drama Table also evoked memories of my Wellington childhood. At the start of every school year we had earthquake drills, where we rushed to huddle under our desks or to stand in doorways, waiting for the all clear. This memory also raised thoughts of rainy childhood days spent playing under the dining room table, where we created our own worlds. We would make a nest, and as Bachelard says, "a nest [...] is a precarious thing, and yet it sets us to daydreaming of security."⁵³ In this way, the space under the table becomes bigger on the inside than the outside yet remains an intimate space, the perfect size for a child. With these memories and thoughts in mind, I decided to concentrate on the interstitial space, the hidden space that almost doesn't exist for adults. Under the table is a place where little or no attention is given by either the maker or the user of a table, which often only children notice and use. By drawing attention to it, I transform and enliven the experience of this object.

While under the desks for the earthquake drills, reading or writing graffiti was often my only entertainment. I added a shelf with sliding doors, a secret space within the new interior place of the table. Anything small can be stored inside this new cupboard, such as books, comics, and treasures. I put snacks in there, little boxes of raisins and boxes of obsolete Sniffers.⁵⁴ Again, these stimulate memories – of school lunch boxes with little treats in them, comfort foods of days gone by, special snacks at the movies that may or may not be shared.

My intervention seeks not so much to change the object, as to change the perception and practice of the object, encouraging new ways of interacting with this table.⁵⁵ This object that would usually

be treated and perceived as only a surface –and an old and worn one at that – is now a place with interior spaces within spaces which can be used and mused about. It becomes a place for the daydreams Bachelard discusses.

The finished objects don't tell a literal story. They carry their own history and histories that I have read into them. I do use the concept of assembly, but what I assemble is a bricolage of evocative concepts that I am whispering about, and leaving threads of. My story is not foregrounded and I don't require people to understand my meanings, I want to achieve openness with this intervention so that people can bring their own story. Like the Eternally Yours designers, I believe that "...designers can in some cases restrain from trying to foresee every possible application and instead allow freedom of interpretation."⁵⁶

As discussed previously, people love hearing the stories I have attached to the Riches objects, but they often react quite strongly to the objects without hearing the story. I ran a peer review session with a number of colleagues and before I had told the stories about the chairs, they started discussing what they saw in the objects. It was satisfying that they all had a response that was emotive and interesting that everybody's experience of an object was based on their own history. It was also good to discover that my story can increase the possibility that they will have a story about it.

Earlier in this project I was defining these interventions through the term reframing. Now that term feels like a restrictive box as I am not remaking the objects. I feel more comfortable with the terms reinterpreting or re-contextualising. I like to work with memory in a way that is tender with the objects. There is a constant tension for me between literally telling people what the memory is and allowing people's own memories or affect to happen. When I talk about minimal intervention I mean that on a conceptual as well as a physical level. I am not dictating the whole

*Is inaccurate information better than none?
... A whiff of the past rather than a history
course is all that most of us want or have time
to take in.*

Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism,
Art and Place*

56. Ed Van Hinte, *Eternally Yours: Visions on
Product Endurance.*





Products need to express through design a story that one can identify with and explain to others. That is what makes them personal.

Ed Van Hinte, *Eternally Yours: Visions on Product Endurance*

idea and spelling it out. I want to evoke and open up the possibilities so that someone else can hook on their own story to the object and be drawn into it.

When I think about these objects as historical objects, which have associations for people, I realise that if I were to break the integrity of the object then I would be breaking the possibility that people can recognize it as their own history. If you put in a leg from a different history or style, then they are thinking “why?” instead of “oh, I remember that kind of table.” The experience becomes about the artist and trying to understand them, instead of being about the viewer’s familiarity. I want people to be immersed in their own story about the object. The purpose of my intervention is to stimulate their memories.

How do I encourage people to desire old, abandoned things? I choose to do it by inviting them to have a durable relationship with it. I keep the objects alive by maintaining other people’s relationships with them. If people are going to seek intimacy with the object, it has to invite their own story. The objects become desirable by a kindling of memories, thoughts, or emotions. To do that, the object has to be not too interrupted, which is what I call keeping the integrity of the objects. My own memories of my great aunt suggest that that drawer will trigger other people’s memories. This makes it desirable again, so they want to take it home and have it active in their life as a vessel for their stories.

Through my design interventions I am not creating desire for the object, but for the relationships that could be attached to the object. I am stimulating the desire for relationship in the context of object acquisition. I don’t want to be manipulative; I want people to want to have the object around them for a while, but I don’t want to sell them anything false. My aim is that the object will tap into a feeling, a memory that is already inside them, becoming an outward expression through the object, rather than something they get home with and feel hollow about, and then crave to buy something else new.

I have achieved my goal to stimulate desire for an obsolete object as five of the finished Riches objects have new homes waiting for them. These objects are not entertaining; they require work from the viewer. You have to seek an interaction with the object, to get yourself under that desk, open that drawer, put your hand in that pocket. It does not come to you.

I am now at the end of this journey. I have discussed the core themes of the Riches project: gleaning, intervention, and kindling desire in the preceding pages. In each section or chapter I have outlined relevant theory, other artists and designers, and my own work, weaving these together to create a full picture of the project.



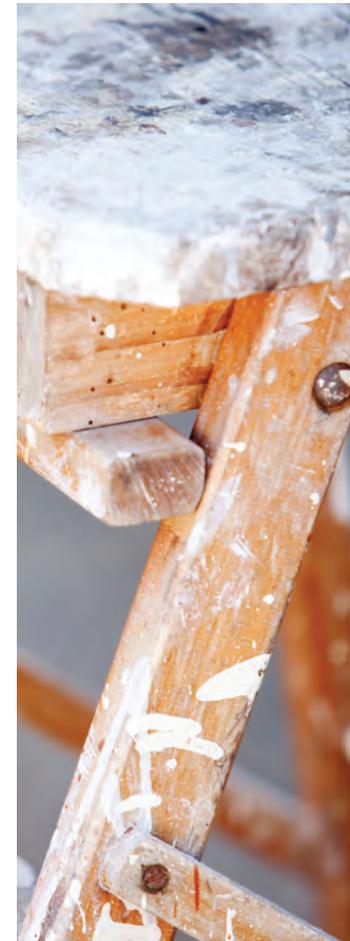


Conclusion

Engaging in the *Riches* project by combining an action-research method with bricolage has enabled me to critically self-reflect on my practice. Through this I have discovered that I can continue to design and create objects in an age of overproduction and consumption by gleaning through the embarrassment of riches available to me. With ecological considerations in mind I can make obsolete objects desirable (again) by encouraging people to feel intimate with them. This intimacy is invited by evoking but not dictating memories. I intervene in the objects' interstices to suggest histories that kindle engagement and attachment. The interstice has been a rich source of inspiration, not only as site of intervention, but as site where experimentation occurs, a process by which objects are found and a space where new genres develop.

In terms of where to from here, there are not enough thrown-away wooden step ladders with interesting paint splatters, or if there are, they are difficult to find. There is a supply problem with any particular waste item. For instance, if my Stepladder became popular, I would have to produce and paint it to spec, or spend a lot of time purposefully looking for them, maybe even employing other people to do that. Of course this is only a problem if I want it to be repeatable, or if I am trying to make a living, or match the desire that I have kindled. At least three people have said that they would like the Icon Drawer and I would love to let everyone have one. I don't want to create an auction or competitive situation to resolve this but neither do I want to create fakes, clichés or stereotypes.⁵⁷

Something all designers who work with gleaned materials face is that if success leads to a demand for your products, how do you scale up? If you are successful you are then faced with the fact that people then want you to produce. Hein Eek and the Campana Brothers started with waste and now pay for (in the first case) or manufacture (in the second case) the materials or components in order to keep up with demand for their objects. This dilemma is connected to



57. Walker, "Object lessons: Enduring Artifacts and Sustainable Solutions."

58. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard, "The Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion."

Cartoneros began appearing during the recession of the mid-1990s, when...marginally employed people began losing their jobs. They found they could make a meager living by collecting recyclable materials.
"VQR » The White Train."

59. "VQR » The White Train."

To fare on – fusing the self that wakes ...and the self that dreams.
Horan, Loving Frank

kindling desire. If an essential aspect of desire is longing for an object, then the rarity of these objects will help to enhance that longing. But if hope is also essential to longing, then the rarity of them is a disadvantage, unless the longing centres on the objects that are designed by me.⁵⁸

If people are not able have a particular object they have seen, they might instead hope to have another that I have made someday. Another possibility might be that they would hope to find their own obsolete piece of furniture to transform, thereby initiating or focusing their own gleaning practice.

Linked with this dilemma is what I consider to be the leading edge of this project, one that I have not fully explored which is about social relationships around gleaning and design. I like the way that 5.5 built relationships with other people in the *Réanim* project, so that design was not all about the experts. At the same time they suggested creative ways to keep objects current. The relational aspects of my project have been focussed within the gleaning process and the stimulation of desire. I would like to look at the space between these two activities, where the physical design and creation of the object sits and develop this interstitial space by making collaborative works with other artists, designers and gleaners. There are many places in the world, such as Argentina and Brazil where gleaners, or cartoneros, play a pivotal role in the rubbish/recycling systems.⁵⁹ I would like to learn how to work within these systems and develop ways of working with people such as the cartoneros that shifts what we are all doing into new markets and systems while retaining our livelihoods and our hope for the future. In doing so, my hope is that the phrase 'embarrassment of riches' becomes a descriptor of the past rather than continuing to retain its relevance.

I am now at the end of this project, on the threshold of something new, in a liminal state. I look forward to the next step, knowing that I have learnt so much in the last three years while working on this project; developing and contextualising my practice, enriching my theoretical knowledge and helping to change the world, one obsolete object at a time.

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