

Shopdropping is an exhibition that both catalogues and instigates the insertion of art into public places of commerce (specifically, conglomerate retail stores). The artwork—ranging from social sculptures to gentle gestures of gift-leaving—is presented in the exhibition in the form of multiples/duplicates or audio/photo/video documentation. Using beauty, humor, and intimate address to invite shoppers' self-reflection and second glance, the works eschew a reductivist commodity critique in favor of complex strategies that *detourne* situations, present alternatives to normative systems of exchange, and graft together alternate economic regimes.

One tactic characterizing interventionist art is a reliance on the artwork's (re)assimilation into the language and space of hegemonic symbolic systems. Packard Jennings's *Il Duce Action Figure* involves both the insertion of a hand-made Benito Mussolini doll into Wal-Mart and documentation of the ensuing comical conundrums (a spycam video of confused workers assigning a value to the item, the manual entry of 'Mussolini' onto the receipt, etc.).

An alternate strategy employed by interventionist art is the insertion of a “mute” or “impotent” commodity—a commodity whose non-functionality rejects or halts the flow of signification/consumption. For instance, Steve Lambert's ultra-genericized cereal boxes employ the language of advertising to create a meta-commodity. Devoid of purpose or motive, Lambert's art works like an insect's abandoned carapace, pointing out the absence of what was.

In *Lost in the Supermarket*, a collaborative led by Marijke Jorritsma, involving instructors (Marisa Aragona, Melissa Orzolek, Tara Foley) and youths from the Boys & Girls Club of San Francisco, hand-crafted ceramic commodities (lotion, dishwashing soap, spice bottles, soup cans) were reverse-shoplifted into a local grocery conglomerate—a process that offers a delightfully humorous narrative of the encounter between shoppers/workers with these “inadequate” or “fallible” products made by kids. But perhaps more importantly, the process proved wildly startling for youths, ranging in age from 7 to 14, who were fascinated by the prospect that “you could really do such a thing” (i.e., that you could put something “not real” onto the shelf with other “real” products). For youths, then, to realize their agency within the economy, by extension comes the demystification of commodity logic.

Many interventionist artworks situate themselves not as “disruptive” (a term which, for some, can connote a privileged position at the expense of the unwitting shopper) but as gestures of “gift-giving.” For **Shopdropping**, various text-based artists and writers were asked to create labels or tags that were later pinned to garments in a local upscale department store. Asked to incorporate elements of site-specificity and intimately address the shopper, the tags are intended to function as stowaway gifts. Commenting on the characteristic of the gift to connect with its receiver, the anthropologist Lewis Hyde writes, “It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary

connection... a gift makes the connection.”¹ The shopdropped tags, then, can be considered a process of bestowal that symbolically imports the logic of gift exchange into the realm of commodity exchange.

Ultimately, **Shopdropping** expands the discourse and field of interventionist art, asking us to consider its nuanced range of representational strategy, intention, context, and references.



¹ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*. (London: Vintage Press, 1999), 56.