



EXCHANGE 2006 A Performance of Resistance Nancy Nisbet

This project exchanges the studio for the roads, truck stops, border crossings and cities of North America. Through the untidy weaving of politics, surveillance technology and identity construction this performance engages critique. Over time and with the combined effort of exchange participants, resistance, solidarity, and artistic critique emerge.

Politics: *Exchange* engages in cross border, person-to-person, trade negotiations. It offers artistic resistance to international economic agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Surveillance: *Exchange* critiques and exposes Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. Fears of terrorism, national security, and identity authentication have bolstered the demand for RFID.

Identity: *Exchange* questions and disrupts correlations between corporate consumer data and personal identity through the dispersal and exchange of personal belongings (corporate data elements).

As the world of advertising so clearly demonstrates, consumer items are marketed as expressions of identity. Corporations use the cumulative record of an individual's purchases as the identifying feature of the consumer. In the databases of corporations Barbara Kruger's famous quote "I shop therefore I am" has evolved into *I am what I buy*.

Jeremy Crampton, author of *The Political Mapping of Cyberspace*, discusses the globalization of corporatized information. He extends the Foucauldian concept of "technologies of the self" and "technologies of power and domination" by proposing a "contact point" between them. Through the use of commercial RFID tagging for exchanged personal belongings, this project provides multiple contact points for resistance.

In preparation for the 6 to 9 month performance of *Exchange*, Nisbet will RFID tag and inventory all her personal belongings. Her belongings will then be hauled in a commercial shipping container and will be freely traded throughout Canada, the United States and Mexico.

The performance includes the day-to-day travel and activities associated with driving a commercial transport truck and contact with people and communities along the way. Trades may take place anywhere from truck stops to rest stops to prearranged 'exchange events' along the route. The trip and exchanges will be extensively documented and published on the Internet. Of particular political interest will be the experiences of crossing international borders with ever-changing personal belongings carried in a commercial truck.

Throughout *Exchange*, people, places, and things become entangled and newly connected. The artist's initial collection of belongings is dispersed and continuously shifts to accommodate components of another's "identity". Through the division and exchange of belongings, there is a multiplication and blurring of identity.

Radio Frequency Identification technologies are being increasingly used to improve profit. From tracking commercial goods as they are transported around the globe to discouraging theft of retail merchandise, RFID has been hailed as a secure replacement to the barcode. Preliminary use of RFID in retail markets has many concerned about infringements of personal privacy. By intentionally choosing to wear or carry one of the exchanged items into various commercial establishments (and potentially setting

off security alarms), the items and participants become "performers" in further expressions of culture jamming.

The role of RFID in global politics and economic concerns for security and surveillance is of immanent significance. Capitalizing on the propagation of terror, the rapid development of surveillance and identity authentication systems such as RFID is well underway. Unfortunately, the North American population is still generally unaware of or unconcerned with this technology and the social issues it raises.

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- *Exchange* confronts free trade. In contrast to multinational business, this performance trades personal belongings through individual negotiation.
 - *Exchange* questions the value of RFID purchased at the cost of personal privacy. Is loss of control of privacy worth the touted advancements to security?
 - *Exchange* resists expectations of a fixed identity connected to geography. Crossing borders and dispersing belongings questions the benefit of international trade agreements such as NAFTA.

Exchange aims to build international community and solidarity through creative critique.

Interested in hosting and Exchange Event? Contact:

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Nancy Nisbet is a multi-disciplinary artist whose practice weaves between the political, the technological and the personal. She received her MFA from the California Institute of the Arts and is Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at The University of British Columbia.
