



**Fix It Book 6**

Sifting through hidden boxes of a dusty and dank Toronto bookshop, thinking about a paper I was soon to present at the American Psychological Association's annual conference, I discovered one of Joseph Stalin's more notable essays, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. This small volume now sits atop a pile of collected discards as part of the piece *Fix It Book 6*, one in a series of box constructions that contain items from the streets of Helsinki, Tampere, Toronto, Chicago, and Glasgow. Stuff gleaned from four random cities, unconsciously at first—for the fun of it—until I later came to realize they were centers for workers and social democracy movements in Finland, America, and Scotland. These cast-off and thrown-out objects, when combined together, develop a kind of gritty aesthetic to honour the industrial forebearers of the cyber age.

*Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning a living, they change all their social relations.*  
Karl Marx

The above quote is taken from Stalin's essay. I find it compelling that both Marx and Beuys called for a revolution of theory through a reconsideration of basic social relations. Marx through economic means in service of a socialist ideal, and Beuys through a call to change our understanding of aesthetics by developing a new social-evolutionary practice embodied in new ways to imagine and to take action.

The Fix It Book series is influenced by both Marx and Beuys and makes use of discarded materials found in alleys, streets, and garbage bins. These disparate materials are put

together to form an *assemblage* or sculptural piece that asks the viewer to consider their individual and newly coupled meanings. The series makes no use of purchased art supplies, using only objects collected from consumer discards. These objects are not precious and are unlikely to be considered traditionally beautiful. Once collected and assembled however, they begin to take on a meaning separate from their individual origins. Not necessarily seeking to please, this work is meant to encourage questions about the *materials and ideas* we discard and how those materials and ideas can be formed into new objects and concepts that might challenge established norms, and traditional notions of aesthetics and art.

The challenge is not meant to be an intellectual exercise limited to a cognitive reappraisal of aesthetics, however. It is part of a broader questioning of how society might reuse, regenerate, and rethink ideas, objects, city lots, neighborhoods, concepts, and the arts. The Fix it Book series is but one project from one member of the Cultural Reuse Research Collaborative ([www.culturalreuse.org](http://www.culturalreuse.org)). This international group of artists and social scientists, established in 2004, is interested in questioning our assumptions about the arts, and in creating new avenues to study and explore cultural reuse outside of customary boundaries.

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