

Markets: From the Bazaar to eBay

*A Symposium sponsored by the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies,
University of Toronto*

Full Program with Abstracts and Speaker Biographies

Thursday Mar. 6

MORNING: PANEL 1 - MODERNITY AND SPACES OF CONSUMPTION

Chair: Emily Gilbert (Geography, University of Toronto)

Discussant: Vanessa Mathews (Geography, University of Toronto)

9:30-10:00

Death, Decay, and Obsolescence in the Modern Marketplace

Jon Goss, Dept. of Geography, University of Hawai'i

This paper begins with the observation made by the workshop organizers that "bazaars produce their own virtuality; a sense of interconnectedness with the world beyond the physical space of the actor." It argues that commercial exchange has always involved traffic between materiality and meaning, and mediated between life and death, but that there is an apparently intensified morbidity of the commodity and its context in contemporary consumption. If the bazaar has always been associated with the possibilities of magical and material transformation, the phantasmagorical character of objects is increasingly about what Derrida calls "the possibility of spectral survival" (1994: 148). Visiting shopping centers and sites of virtual exchange, this paper explores the role of death, decay, and obsolescence in the production and consumption of value.

Biography: Jon Goss is one of the foremost Geographers working in the field of consumption studies. His main area of research is in the geography of popular culture, particularly analyzing landscapes of shopping, tourism and film. He is one of the few scholars to examine how contemporary, and clearly private, retail space relies on a commodity aesthetic that revolves around spatial archetypes of public space and the marketplace. His work exposes the ideological underpinnings involved in the production of contemporary landscapes of consumption and facilitates a progressive political engagement with the contemporary built environment.

10:00-10:30

Blogs, Boutiques, and the Public Square

Timothy Yu, Dept. of English, University of Toronto

This paper examines the role of blogs and email listservs in communities of North American poets, following one poet's claim that "blogs are boutiques, while the list is the public square." As poets' blogs have gained wider readerships, some have charged that the result is a privatized discourse controlled by individual authors and, at times, supported by advertising. But blogs have also been a productive forum for women,

minority, and diasporic poets, who have often been marginalized on large poetics listservs. Poetics lists and blogs offer an intriguing example of how market forces and metaphors shape and respond to questions of race, gender, and aesthetics online.

Biography: Timothy Yu focuses on the ways in which virtual spaces of literary interaction have become subject to the market vernacular and metaphors, suggesting that e-commerce is having a structuring effect beyond the realm of material exchange. Yu's approach, grounded in literary theory and cultural studies, and his focus on poet blogs stimulates debate among a diversity of perspectives concerned with the domain of the market

10:30-11:00

Bakelite and other Shibboleths: eBay listings and the 'policing' of Amateur Collecting Knowledges

Rebecca Ellis, Institute of Social and Technical Research, University of Essex

eBay, the online auction site, is composed of thousands of item descriptions constructed by sellers themselves. Sellers may be collectors or antiques experts, but often they are amateurs selling off unwanted items. As such, eBay becomes an unprecedented public space for the performance of amateur collecting and consumption knowledges. These non-expert knowledges, displayed on eBay, have become a major source of discussion on an online old radio discussion forum. This paper argues that amateur knowledges are strongly contested, often in separate online spaces, and as part of identity performance. While a 'cult of the amateur' may be occurring online, it is not happening without a fight over knowledge and its performance. eBay is shown as a relational space to the forum, allowing radio experts to perform their own group identity and related practices - distinguished from those seen on eBay.

Biography: Ellis is a leading scholar in the cultural analysis of online exchange. Her work explores the articulation of identity, material culture and the Internet. This has led to her being awarded a major Economic and Social Research Council grant to lead the U.K.'s first in-depth academic study of eBay. This project investigates how the site has changed collecting behaviour, its sense of community and the relationship between participation on the site and the expression of social identities. Her ethnographic work with users focused on the development of a sense of community and helps to understand how virtual media alter the social relations of exchange and ideas of community sustainability.

AFTERNOON: PANEL 2 - FASHIONING IDENTITY: MARKETS AND THE DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE

Chair: Girish Daswani, (Dept. of Anthropology, University of Toronto)

Discussant: Kate Geddie (Dept. of Geography, University of Toronto)

2:00-2:30

The Market versus the Commercial Boulevard: Notes from Oxford Street, Accra
Ato Quayson, Dept. of English, University of Toronto

2:30-3:00

Looking Good and Being Good: Ethnicity, Gender and Fashioning the Diaspora Economy.

Parminder Bhachu, Dept. of Sociology, Clark University

This paper examines strategies of entrepreneurial Asian women who have created innovative micro-markets of design and fashion from the margins. As niche marketers, their markets are cultural conversations that represent complex means of cultural dialogue and racial politics. This paper highlights the stories behind these influential images and sounds, the dynamic hybridizing agents, the remixing and vibrant combinational cultural forms that constitute both national and transnational domains of fashion and popular culture. Such globally potent cultural products have emerged through the politicized and racialized interventions of second generation British Asians. This exploration opens up windows into a much more complex understanding of globalization which overlooks the influence of women as border-crossing designers and creators of new worldly markets.

Biography: Bhachu's work exposes the complexities of globalization by examining how diasporic Asian women gain advantage within the micro-markets of the fashion industry, creating not only hybrid products but contemporary symbolic landscapes. She also examines how the hybridizing trends of diasporic communities travel through complex cultural and commercial conduits, and are reflected in ethnically driven, locally produced and globally connected sartorial economies. This work helps to understand how the creation of spaces through which the boundaries of 'displaced' communities are 'emplaced' within new social, cultural and political contexts.

3:00-3:30

Tibetan Sweater Markets in India: Shaping Tibetan Identities and Communities in the Diaspora

Timm Lau, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Since the 1960s, itinerant trade with sweaters has become the main source of income for Tibetans in the diaspora in India. Tibetans build markets in towns throughout India every winter to re-sell garments bought from Indian merchants. While this economic niche is enabled by the structure of Indian economies and market socialites, interaction between Tibetans and Indians during the trading season entails ambiguous relationships that are significant for the maintenance of Tibetan diasporic identities. Tibetan itinerant traders move between the meritocratic organization of their transient market communities, and socio-political organization along lines of inherited status in refugee settlements. My paper demonstrates that Tibetan understandings of refugeeness in India are shaped by the recurrent movements of traders between these settings.

Biography: Lau's work provides an in-depth analysis of the role of the market in shaping the identity of Tibetan exiles in India. His ethnographic work shows that Tibetans build trust relations with Indians through their itinerant trade, but present negative trade experiences with Indians as 'proof' in the construction of Indian moral inferiority. It also reveals how diasporic Tibetans worry about cultural erosion and the fear of turning into the Indian 'other', and how market experiences are used as a mode of differentiation based on antagonistic moral representations to uphold Tibetan identity boundaries.

EVENING: KEYNOTE ADDRESS - TRANSNATIONALISM AND NEW MODELS OF MARKETING

Tony Pigott, President and CEO, JWT Canada;

Global Director, Social Marketing JWT;

Co-Founder and Principal of CREOS-Bridging Worlds Through Art

Biography: Tony Pigott graduated from the University of Western Ontario with an honours degree in History. After graduation, he spent a number of years outside of Canada combining travel with teaching and publishing work in Japan, Australia and Papua New Guinea. Mr. Pigott then joined JWT – an advertising and marketing communications company operating in over 90 countries. For over twenty years, Mr. Pigott has developed strategy and communications programmes for various leading businesses and not for profits including Unilever, Kraft, Pfizer, Shell, The Discovery Channel, The United Way, HSBC and Nestle.

Mr. Pigott also launched JWT's Social Marketing practise now called EthosJWT. It is the centre of excellence for social strategy and communications for the agency globally and has undertaken audits of consumer trends and corporate best practise around the world. Ethos has worked with, among others, The Hospital for Sick Children, Magna and Harvard University, HSBC, Shell, Merck Frost, CARE, The MS Society and Concerned Childrens Advertisers. In 2002, working with UNESCO, Mr. Pigott spearheaded a U.N. Type 2 Partnership - aimed at developing a global communications programme on sustainability - that was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Since then he has participated with UNEP in a working group on sustainable consumption and spoken at a number of UNESCO and UNEP conferences on consumer trends related to sustainability and social change.

In 2004, Mr. Pigott and Co Founder Cameron Brohman, launched CREOS a new for profit enterprise with a development agenda. Its mission is to generate revenue, awareness and intercultural understanding through the marketing and distribution of art and creative products from marginalized or at risk cultures to affluent markets around the world. CREOS has been developing the foundation for a global business that will include exhibitions, art retailing and television programming. They are currently piloting the business model focussed on artists in Haiti.

CREOS has a working agreement with CARE and is currently in discussions with the Inter American Development Bank. CREOS is also a member of UNESCO's Global

Alliance for Cultural Diversity and has presented on the business concept to UNESCO conferences in Paris and China. More recently, Tony has been selected by the Director General of UNESCO to join an independent advisory committee who will provide guidance on the development of UNESCO's World Report on Cultural Diversity.

Friday Mar. 7th

MORNING: PANEL 3 - MARKETS AND THE CULTURAL ECONOMIES OF TRANSNATIONALISM

Chair: Jens Hanssen (Near and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Toronto)

Discussant: Emily Eaton (Dept. of Geography, University of Toronto)

9:00-9:30

The Tourism City Is the Bazaar: Ideological and Spatial Negotiation in Antigua, Guatemala

Walter Little, Dept. of Anthropology, State University of New York, Albany

From the Spanish Colonial period to the present the small Guatemalan city of Antigua has been the site of contestations over marketplace spaces and marketing practices. Since the early 1990s, these debates have become more pronounced with the intensification of foreign tourism to this city. In this paper, I discuss how the influx of handicraft vendors from other Guatemalan towns and foreign tourists, along with the recreation of Antigua in cyberspace, have literally converted Antigua into a bazaar. This transition, however, is continually challenged: in the places that are occupied by vendors, that are expected by tourists, and defended by local residents and businesspersons from tourists or vendors. It is through the occupation of Antigua and these contestations that it is possible to see how such "bazaars" become socially, economically, and politically entrenched and naturalized in specific places.

Biography: Little's research focuses on the socio-economic and political lives of Kaqchikel and K'iche' Maya handicraft vendors. Using a theoretical approach that combines political economy and interpretive perspectives, he has analyzed their participation in tourism settings, handicraft marketplaces, and their homes; revealed how they use identity instrumentally for political and economic gain; and why community continues to be a powerful way for Mayas to organize their economic, political, and social life, given their participation in global economic and cultural markets.

9:30-10:00

Senegalese Marketplaces in New York: Linking Commodities, Sites and Communities

Marieme Lo, Global Gender Studies, State University of New York, Buffalo

Migration and the formation of diasporic communities give rise to transnational socio-economic practices linking peripheral local economies to metropolitan markets, building on claims of national/ethnic identity, nostalgia, and exotics. This paper analyzes how

trans-local connections enable the emergence of specific productions and trade practices that figuratively and spatially bind distant sites and facilitate the construction and maintenance of diasporic identities. It also expands on how some Senegalese immigrants seize such opportunities, materialized through fairs and bazaars, to construct distinctive, footloose, creative and informal economic exchanges, thus decisively entering economic sites outside of formalized and state—centric regulations and platforms. It finally shows the continuity between endogenous local market practices in peripheral sites and their negotiation and transfer in metropolitan centers in North America.

Biography: Lo studies the effects of diasporic social networks on women's livelihood diversification, poverty, and social change. She examines female entrepreneurship, the links between global economic shift, and the dislocation and reordering of local economies in Africa. She is among the few scholars examining the ways in which an economy of sentiment facilitates the creation of production and trade practices that emotionally and physically bind local market places in Africa with the identity needs of diasporic African communities in North America.

10:00-10:30

China's Globalization to Africa: consequences for the West's Ideological and Economic Hegemony

Eric Ansah, Dept. of Political Science, University of Amsterdam

This paper offers a theoretical perspective to explain and better understand how the contemporary wave of China's globalisation to sub-Saharan Africa has changed Europe and the West's role in Africa in both ideological and economic-material domains. I argue that China's globalization to Africa and the surge in Asia's overseas capitalism stimulated Africa's political, commercial and industrial community to 'look East' and increasingly, has informed the making of alternative strategies and resistances to the dominant neoliberal paradigm and political liberalism. This emerging tendency of the commercial and industry classes in sub-Saharan Africa to increase their ties to Chinese and Southeast Asian overseas investors in the export-oriented trade and joint ventures, led to a significant turn away from the west and has led to a further decline in the role which Europe and the West had played in Africa since the previous waves of globalisation from the 19th and 20th centuries. The paper maps out the 'ways and means', ideas, ideologies, institutions and practices, through which China and southeast Asia's overseas capitalism seek to overtake Europe and the West in sub-Saharan Africa's markets.

Biography: Ansah's current research interests concern the contents and discontents of Asia-Africa development comparisons; the rise of East and Southeast Asia, particularly China and the implications of the contemporary wave of China's globalization for global political economy.

AFTERNOON: PANEL 4 - EXCHANGE AND SPACES OF CREATIVITY

Chair: Dr. Rima Berns McGown, Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies,
University of Toronto

Discussant: Maureen Murney (Dept. of Anthropology, University of Toronto)

2:00-2:30

Aftermarket: Art, Objects, and Commerce

John Freyer, School of Art & Art History, University of Iowa

In this presentation, I discuss three different, but inter-related projects: my ebay-based performance piece AllMyLifeForSale.Com, a new interactive installation entitled Walm-Art.Com, and Surplus, an installation comprised of one-ton bales of surplus clothing. Each invites reflection on our personal and cultural relationships to the objects in different ways. Surplus is concerned with mass production and disproportionate consumption, and exposes the essentially unilateral commercial and economic relationship between the First and Third Worlds. "All my life for Sale" considers the relationships between who we are and what we own. The project also explores the modern marketplace, and asks how has the Internet has changed our ways of buying and selling, especially for second hand objects? It also prompts us to contemplate our own definitions of art and the act of artistic creation. In combination, these projects explore art identity, consumption, culture and expression.

Biography: Freyer is a media artist and author. His first-person online performance projects 'Temporama' and 'All My Life for Sale.com' have received international attention. They examine the complexities of consumption, including: the multiple lives of objects as they pass through second-hand markets; the effect of disembodied exchange; and the continuing desire to maintain a sociality of exchange. His work addresses these issues through the vehicle of performance art rather than conventional academic analysis and, in the process, reveals perspectives that have great utility for understanding the character of virtual markets.

2:30-3:00

Digital Markets and Digital Capitalism: The Impact of eBay on the Art and Antiques Sector

Lisa Bloom, University of California, San Diego

This paper analyzes shifting notions of "community" in the fine art and antiques sector of the economy, dominated by 19th century patriarchal business practices and high-end auction houses. Depersonalization of fine art objects through eBay has had a democratic impact by breaking down gender and class barriers and has enabled a move away from personal relations based on older patriarchally-inflected social hierarchies. This paper examines eBay in the context of other art auction houses such as Sothebys.com and internet research sites such as Artnet.com. I bring to this topic both my academic training in visual cultural studies and gender studies as well as and my seller's knowledge of eBay and the fine art and antiques market. This paper draws on ethnographic research from a small community of women selling fine art and antiques on eBay in the US to examine more closely embodied experiences during the auction process.

Biography: Lisa Bloom is both an academic as well as a "power seller" of fine art and antiques on eBay. As such, she is one of the few scholars to have brought to the topic of emerging market cultures both an academic perspective as well as a detailed insider's knowledge of eBay and the fine art and antiques market. Her position as an eBay seller has positioned her as one of the few scholars conducting ethnographic research in virtual markets as she studies a small community of women selling fine art and antiques on eBay in the US, examining embodied experiences during the auction process. This perspective contributes to an understanding of the altered sociality of exchange facilitated by new market technologies.

3:00-3:30

Advertising Oaxacan Wood Carvings: Romantic Misrepresentations in the Virtual Marketplace

Michael Chibnik, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Iowa

In recent years, artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico have prospered through the sale of wood carvings to tourists, store owners, and wholesalers from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Japan. These pieces, invented in the past fifty years, are made mostly by monolingual Spanish speakers who do not describe themselves as "Indians." Nonetheless, merchants selling ethnic arts on the internet promote the artisans as simple farmers and the carvings as ancient, and symbols of Zapotec identity. Many marketers honestly believe that the carvers are self-identified Zapotecs who have been making pieces for many years. More knowledgeable dealers mislead their customers by noting that the Indians of Oaxaca have been making crafts for centuries. Potential buyers are allowed to infer that the carvings are part of indigenous tradition. Because these romantic misrepresentations help sales, the wood-carving trade depends in part on intercultural miscommunication.

Biography: Chibnik focuses on the dynamics of household economics in Latin America. His recent work examines the interconnections between craft production in Oaxaca and consumption in the United States and Europe, mediated through the internet. Chibnik's research reveals how localized craft markets allow an engagement with a paradoxical form of 'modernity' that enables producers to stay at home only to find that the free trade practices in which they have become engaged threaten the (invented) 'traditional' way of life that is a source of primary value creation for the market they have created. This work explores how the spatial extension of markets, facilitated through media like the internet, alters social relations in sites of production.

Saturday Mar. 8

MORNING: PANEL 5 - TRANSNATIONALISM, DESIRE AND ILLICIT FLOWS

Chair: Naisargi Dave (Anthropology, University of Toronto)

Discussant: Kate Parizeau (Geography, University of Toronto)

9:00-9:30

Images and Evidence: Human Trafficking and the Production of Illicit Markets in Southeast Asia and Beyond

Johan Lindquist, Dept. of Social Anthropology, University of Stockholm

In recent years, human trafficking, particularly of women and children into prostitution, has emerged as a global problem. This paper considers the role that documentary film, and especially the testimonial of the trafficked victim, has taken in the production of human trafficking as an illicit market that demands intervention. Based on fieldwork among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and filmmakers in Indonesia, I consider how a wide range of films made by groups with radically different political persuasion utilize the genre of melodrama in the production of narratives of victimization. These films come to function as evidence that human trafficking is a problem, thus leading to the expansion of a transnational humanitarian market centered on donors and NGOs.

Biography: Lindquist's work focuses on the ways in which national borders have compelled the illicit flows of desire for work, intoxication and sex. Specifically he has studied the multiple pressures surrounding the transnational circulation of labor, prostitution and drugs in South east Asia, and how these are structured by the 'opening' and 'closing' of borders. This work offers an example of the regional and global implications of desire. His recent work on the production of a transnational humanitarian market around human trafficking is reminiscent of abolition movements, and focuses on the complex moralities and institutional interests that mobilize, and are served by, the formation of transnational markets.

9:30-10:00

Factory Direct: Hot Deals of Fresh Human Organs in Bangladesh

Monir Moniruzzamann, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto

The current medical success of organ transplant creates a thriving trade in human body parts. The average price quoted on the open market for a kidney is CAN \$1500 in Bangladesh, which serves as a bazaar for national and international wealthy bodies. Both patients and sellers regularly post newspaper advertisements providing a description of their blood group, tissue typing, name, picture, contact number, and compensation offer for trading their organs. By covering five daily Bengali newspapers from 2000 to 2004 and conducting interviews with organ recipients and sellers, this paper explores newspaper advertisements for the sale of fresh human organs in Bangladesh.

Biography: Monir Moniruzzaman's research focuses on the trafficking of human organs in Bangladesh, particularly raises the question as to whether it is ethical to purchase an organs to strive toward longevity, and whether the sale of one's organ is an appropriate means of fighting poverty. His current research interests include commodification of body, medical ethics, new biomedical technology, and health in post-tsunami Thailand. He is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology, a research associate at the Comparative

Program on Health and Society, and a CIHR strategic training doctoral fellow of Healthcare, Technology, and Place at the University of Toronto.

10:00-10:30

The Return of the Traders

Regina Bittner, Bauhaus Kolleg, Bauhaus Dessau Foundation

Kiosks and temporary markets have become characteristic features of city centres, border areas and transport intersections since the fall of the Iron Curtain. At the beginning of the 1990s, kiosks were regarded as a typical phenomenon of "capitalism without capital". The paper will discuss the spread of transnational social space associated with migration, refugees and tourism, where people, images, goods and cultural symbols meet across borders. The countries of the former Soviet Union are a case study for the return of the market as it spreads out in areas in which states have lost their influence or into which multinational capital has not yet penetrated. In the paper, I analyze the contours of this new capitalism; identify institutions of daily and social life that have established themselves in societies in which state regulations have been weakened and discuss what more flexibility and mobility mean for people in eastern Europe.

Biography: Regina Bittner's work includes research on the history of workers' culture, cultural theories of urban pleasure, the city, and the "society of experience." Recently she has focused on the development of transnational public spaces in urban metropolitan areas and examined marketplaces as one such space in which different cultures and urban practices encounter each other. Her work examines how informal markets, translocal communities, new diasporas and transitory life-styles represent the transnational space of those urban hubs whose cultural, economic and social activities are no longer limited to the local.

**AFTERNOON: PANEL 6 - MARKETS, PLACES AND WORLDLY THINGS:
COMMODITIES IN MOTION**

Chair: Tania Li (Dept. of Anthropology, University of Toronto)

Discussant: Saul Cohen (Dept. of Anthropology, University of Toronto)

2:00-2:30

A Transnational Marketplace in Istanbul

Deniz Yukseker, Dept. of Sociology, Koç University, Istanbul

This paper analyzes the development of a transnational trade network (shuttle trade) during the 1990s between Turkey and the former Soviet Union (FSU). Based on ethnographic research in Istanbul, I describe the activities and the social relations embodied in the manufacturing and wholesaling of apparel in Istanbul. Predominantly female informal traders from the FSU frequently "shuttle" between Istanbul and their towns in search of cheap goods for resale back home. In shuttle trade, market activities are neither regulated by the state nor are they embedded in ethnic or community ties. Rather, in the absence of legal and social regulation, buyers and sellers create personal

relations, and they nurture a hybrid idiom of "trust" in order to facilitate business. Nevertheless, these social ties are not stable; they are susceptible to falter under the influence of changing national and global economic conditions such as currency crises and increasing global competition.

Biography: Yukseker's research analyzes transnational trade networks between post-Soviet countries and Turkey, in which Western fashions are circulated and transformed through the activities of informal entrepreneurs. Based on ethnographic evidence collected in Istanbul and Moscow her work exposes the processes through which small-scale entrepreneurs become active makers of global processes and meanings and how the marketplaces in both cities are enjoying a revival as local and transnational social practices, created in part through traders activities, converge in old urban spaces to generate new senses of community. This contributes to an understanding of the role of informal transnational processes in the reshaping of market spaces.

2:30-3:00

Inside and Outside Modernity: The Ukrainian Mail-Order Bride

Natalia Markewycz, Division of Humanities, York University

The concept of the Mail-Order Bride reforms the traditional relationship process into a commercial status of online catalogues objectifying women into products that can be added to a customer's "shopping cart." This paper aims to elucidate some of the murkier aspects of this match-making service, such as the opportunistic appeal for the "old-fashioned" nature of women, the repulsion towards feminism from both ends of the service, and the power structure in these relationships on a larger political scale. The exploration of this material reveals the intertwining of two extremities: the modern and the traditional. This binary structure overlaps in countless ways and raises a number of questions about transnational relationships, the traditional institution of marriage and the very modern concept of internet match-making where traditional correspondence as a method of courting falls into the realms of the ever so modern cyberlove.

3:00-3:30

Urban Terroir: Barcelona's Market Network

Robert Davidson, Dept. of Spanish & Portuguese, University of Toronto

In this presentation I consider the unique system of local markets in the Catalan capital by reading this urban network as the liminal point where rural *terroir*—which is expressed in both tangible products and local, intergenerational knowledge—has its metropolitan expression. I examine how recent efforts to revitalise these spaces have sought to reactivate the social and civic nature of the market and in this way, I continue to develop my understanding of *terroir* as a politically-keyed idea implicated in what I see as a new form of civic-minded Catalanism.

Biography: In the past few years Davidson's research has revolved around the twin concepts of the avant-garde and cosmopolitanism. Author of *Jazz Age Barcelona*, in which he considers how journalists contributed to a reactivation of Catalanism through a direct engagement with the aesthetics of their local built environment, his most recent research projects have considered respectively both the space of the modern hotel and how the notion of *terroir* may be used to better understand the changing nature of Catalan nationalism.

Sunday Mar. 9

MORNING: PANEL 7 - CULTURAL POLITICS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF E-COMMERCE

Chair:

Discussant: Jim Delaney (Geography, University of Toronto)

9:00-9:30

Everyday eBay: Exchange Value and The Superfluity of Memory

Ken Hillis, Dept. of Communication, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

eBay arises at a time of material excess. Everything is disposable, yet the return of an impulse to collect suggests that, at a time when commodities themselves take on diasporic qualities, nothing should be thrown away. In the eBay marketplace, then, superfluity and a commodity's exchange value collapse at the intersection of memory and its exteriorization as a networked database. eBay's buyers and sellers negotiate value through elaborate textual histories that narrativize an object's past and are accompanied by ambiguous images of the object for sale. These narratives and images encourage prospective purchasers to value the consumption of an imagined experience "exchanged" prior to any actual sale of an object. They also encourage successful bidders to pay a premium for objects purchased. eBay's indexicality, and the images used by sellers, suggest that authenticity itself is now transferable, an exchange value available to the highest bidder.

Biography: Hillis's work examines the politics of communication technologies focusing on electronically mediated communication, the histories of visual, optical, and electronic communication technologies, and the technologies of politics and the public sphere. His exploration of these technologies reveals how the ongoing rearticulation of space in virtual terms influences new formulations of minority body politics, particularly through the complex processes of commodification and e-commerce manifest in virtual markets such as eBay.

9:30-10:00

Trust Matters: Building Trust in Online Markets

Keyvan Kashkooli, Dept. of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley

The emergence of globalized markets, often online between exchange partners with minimal information about one another, fosters and relies on institutions and governance structures. Individual economic actors are confronted with high levels of uncertainty. Based on this premise, I use the case of eBay as a natural experiment to understand two issues: (1) how market makers/designers attempt to solve issues of risk and uncertainty in an anonymous market with fleeting interactions; (2) whether or not these solutions "make" the market. eBay, the company, in conjunction with its users developed institutional innovations in online banking, the public manifestation of network-based reputation effects, and fraud protection in response to uncertainty in the eBay.com marketplace. I use quantitative longitudinal data from the eBay marketplace from 2000 through 2007 to analyze the role of these innovations in market growth.

Biography: Keyvan Kashkooli is at the forefront of a group of junior scholars documenting the sociological ramifications of the emergence of virtual marketplaces. In particular he addresses questions of how institutions emerge in response to depersonalized modes of informal exchange. His work speaks directly to the ways in which local variations in economic and legal organization structure marketplaces, and what these variations mean for the possibility of a global virtual bazaar.