MIRRORS & WINDOWS

Object attachment within the site of the domestic living room

[by Tony Whincup]

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Abstract

This study addresses the inter-relationship of objects, self and society. Discussion is based upon original ethnographic information from the photographic documentation of eight living rooms and recorded interviews with their occupants.

The main concerns centre on what objects were selected, why they were chosen and the consequences of these selections for the participants.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the participants who so generously gave up their time and privacy for my questions and prying photographic eye.

Secondly, I would like to express my thanks to my thesis supervisors, Henry Barnard and Keith Ridler. Their patience, constructive criticism and unswerving encouragement was vital to the completion of this thesis.

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Contents

List of Figures 177

Prologue

My first day at 'Grammar' school I remember very clearly. I was just a little over twelve years old. The school, situated on the edge of the 'green belt' and twelve miles west of London was, in the best British tradition, built of red brick on which ivy clung on every possible face.

Few of my friends from the junior school had made it through the 11+ selection examination. I faced, seemingly alone, a new school, a new class and new teachers, and I knew I was wearing 'baggy' short trousers. Uniform was an important aspect of the school and clearly reflected its maintenance of traditional educational values and procedures.

Not only were my trousers baggy, but they were made of a cheap, rough sort of material that rubbed the inside of my thighs - no one knew this except me, but everyone could see my trousers. I knew I would somehow be branded right from the very first day. I wanted to shout, "I, the real me, is not like these shorts - this is my mother you are seeing!" It would have made no difference, I was the shorts. No amount of 'verbal' telling appeared to change what people 'knew' of me. Perhaps words are too often involved in personal constructions which idealize or blatantly lie, and are quickly rejected for less transient and more concrete indications of a person. I never questioned how they knew, I didn't have to - it was my shorts. The cheap material and the poor cut said everything, or

at least that's how it appeared to me. I hated those trousers, they told lies about who I thought 'I' was.

On reflection, those awful first day trousers did, of course, tell about me. They did it though, without my permission, and they did not tell what I wanted them to say, but their telling was inescapable. Perhaps that is why I hated them so much.

I knew intuitively what others read and the classifications they drew were, in part, correct. You could not be a council estate child educated in a British grammar school in the 1960's without quickly realizing that every aspect of social categorization (class) depended not upon thoughts, academic ideas or sporting success, but rather on how they were done. Outward appearances were everything; clothes, accent, address, possessions, and style.

You were constructed according to the rules everyone so clearly knew and accepted. How we knew them I had no idea. I knew what was considered right and what was considered wrong and saw no reason to question.

What I wanted to do, by wearing smooth, close fitting grey flannel was to make a construction of myself that I thought appropriate, both in my eyes and in those of others. Perhaps I wanted to be something other than what I was. Whatever, I did not, with those trousers, feel in control of myself. My life since then, perhaps, can be seen as a struggle to wear the type of trousers I consider most appropriate.

To make a construction that I consider most appropriate, both for you and me, is no simple matter. My ideas of expression are limited by the paradigms available to me and your constructions of my expressions are quite likely not to be the same as mine. The hegemonic constraints to which I, more or less acquiesce, control my 'common sense'. Age, ethnicity, sex, religious orientation, geographical location, commitments to family, work and friends, together with aspirations for the future, all impinge on this internal 'me'.

Almost twenty five years ago when I was playing in a band, I wrote a blues song with the title 'Locked Inside Yourself'. One stanza in particular, still appears to have significance.

> *Wandering through the pathways of your mind*
> *Looking for a guide to help you through*
> *You'll never find your way in there.*
> *Seeing all the windows*
> *Searching for a doorway*
> *Round and round to nowhere, and*
> *Now you know you're locked inside yourself.*

The picture conjured by the verse is one of peering out from inside, but never finding a doorway through which to step outside, turn around and look back at oneself. There being no doors works both ways - you can neither get out, nor can anyone else come in. To avoid the exile of being locked inside yourself, it is necessary to make external constructions which you deem appropriate, to construct some albeit imperfect reflection of self, for you and others.

One last, but important, piece of information about my background is that I am a photographer. I feel fortunate to have spent many years documenting the skills and traditions of others, in particular, the I-Kiribati of Micronesia. My work in relation to recording their material culture, constantly pointed up the significance of objects in their realization and expression as to who they were as a people. Objects also separated me from them. Not only did I often not have the skills to realize the object's utilitarian function but, more importantly, I rarely 'felt' the object as they did. My value of the object was intellectual and not from social experience. Even as a photographer, with little understanding of the discipline of anthropology, I sensed the vital implications of the symbolic nature of objects in the construction and maintenance of a social order.

The elements of this prologue are offered in the hope that they may provide an understanding of both my interest and orientation to the questions they raise; questions that are fundamental to my humanity and sharpened by my time spent in other cultures, in relation to: Who am I? How do I show myself to myself? How do I

construct myself for others? What stops me making the constructions I want? How do I go about reading the constructions of others?

INTRODUCTION

This introduction will provide an overview of the ideas and working processes involved in the compilation and analysis of the ethnographic material for this thesis. The areas covered are:

Introduction: the concepts of the thesis.

Living Rooms: their reason for selection as a point of focus.

The Participants: selection and involvement.

**The Documentary
Process:**   discussion regarding the three processes involved; observational writings, tape-recorded interviews, and photography.

Reflexivity: the inevitable role of personal interpretation in ethnography.

Introduction:

At its ethnographic origins, this study is simply an inventory, an inventory of objects of eight living rooms, and yet as Collier and Collier point out, ' ..... a cultural inventory can go beyond material items to a detailing of human functions, the quality of life and the nature of psychological well-being' (1986:45). The primary focus of this study is a search for an underpinning logic, by which the participants' object attachments may be understood. The discussion centres upon the inter-relationships of the participants, their objects and social context.

The study proposes that the inter-relationships that exist between these elements are dialectical and, therefore, each is a construction influenced by the other. In the following chapters, the ways in which the participants constitute their object attachments by attribution of meanings and the way in which these objects orientate the experiences and expressions of the participants, are explored. It will also be argued that self-recognition and self-definition are the primary and unavoidable results arising from object attachment and that their construction and interpretation is socially embedded.

Broadly speaking, the central issues of each chapter place a different emphasis upon the three elements of object, self and society. The pathway of discussion, arising from the ethnographic material in Chapter One, begins with the apparently clear exercising of personal choice in mnemonic structuring, concluding with the controlling implications of social structures.

Chapter Two examines the participants' universal use of objects as mnemonics. Object attachments will be seen to be important for sustaining memories of significant life-events and thereby providing continuity for the individual during his/her life. Objects as mnemonics also have the potential to maintain an inter-generational continuum of memories and values. Entrusting objects as carriers of important life-events is the single most important reason for object attachment recognized by the participants.

Chapter Three focuses upon the implications of object attachments in revealing a sense of 'self' to the participants. In the attachment to objects, boundaries between 'self' and 'other' can be established. 'Self', as a new and different territory, is not only signalled to others through object attachment but these differences, in turn, become part of the further influences in the constructions and development of the participant. It is argued that within the consistencies of object selection a personal coherence is established; a logic of expression of each participant's experience.

The fourth chapter develops the concept of society as a symbolic system. In this argument, objects are considered as an important part of such a system, both structuring and being structured by, society. The process of implicating objects in self-representation is inescapably connected to social structure for construction and interpretation.

Finally in Chapter Five, the separately analysed concepts within each of the preceding chapters are united within discussions of 'structure and agency' and 'world views'.

The study will, then, explore what objects have been selected by the participants, why they were chosen, and finally, how these objects operate in the roles to which they have been assigned within a social context. For the sake of analysis, the ultimately inseparable interaction of object, participant and society, will be teased apart until they are united again in the 'Final Discussion' of Chapter Five.

Living Rooms

There are few places in our daily lives where we have control over the selection of the objects that surround us. The criteria for the selection of objects which construct our surroundings will be driven by varying degrees of practical necessity and social appropriateness. At the factory, the work of production will almost exclusively dictate a functional orientation to the choice of objects and in the logic of their relationships. In areas of socializing or public relations, such as the hotel lobby, office reception areas and

so on, the selection process of objects is likely to include a strong component of a particular social, aesthetic expectation. Whatever the balance between functionality and matters of taste, the choices of objects are likely to have been made by someone else.

The home, though, is seen as an area where a greater degree of control can be exercised than is to be found in other areas of the environment. In fact, for the participants, the definition of home is synonymous with personal control. Without control, they designated the building a 'house'. The living room, in particular, appears to provide the least limitations of all for the establishing of personally coherent object groupings.

It is, then, to the living rooms of the participants that this study focuses its attention. It is within this part of their homes that we will best see the consistencies of object choice, that produce and define visual boundaries to the expressions of their experiences. It is from here that this study can explore the private attributions of their object attachments, the memories they maintain, the hopes and aspirations they embody, and the self-definition and self-recognition with which they are inescapably implicated.

Participants

The selection of the participants was comparatively random. No specific criteria were established. Instead, contacts were made primarily from suggestions offered by friends who knew of the focus of my study. I did, though, want to include a range of different people and to this end, there will be found among the participants, considerable variation in age, social and economic status, ethnicity, religious orientation as well as geographic location.

I had met one couple while photographing their daughter's wedding, during a previous ethnographic enquiry into ritual. Two other participants I knew from occasional meetings in relation to art and photography. The rest were complete strangers.

My first approach in all cases, was by telephone. I explained the purpose of my study as arising from my interest in the importance

and values people place upon their possessions and what they do with them by way of display and arrangement.

The participants were also told that the study would be limited primarily to objects within their living room. I also asked permission to tape record all interviews and to document, photographically, their possessions, arrangements, the location of their house and to take a portrait of them.

It should also be noted that in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants pseudonyms have been used throughout this study.

Ethnographic Documentation

Information for this thesis was gathered by three separate processes:

a)   personal observations, recorded in writing.
b)   tape recorded interviews
c)   photographic documentation

Personal Observations:

My writings describe my observations and my feelings during the time I spent with the participants, supported by selected comments from the participants' interviews. Such writing helps to extend the contextualization of other ethnographic material and clearly recognizes the inevitably reflexive situation of the ethnographer. Shifts in emphasis of the participants' ideas, objects or environments, in each description, to an extent reflect the participant's own emphasis within the interview.

Interviews:

The tape recorded interviews were important for three reasons. They;

a) directed me toward those object attachments which were considered of particular importance by the participants.

b) provided me with a description of the personal constructions with which the participants imbued certain objects.

c) provided the opportunity for the participants to have a 'voice' within the study as to their view of themselves and their living room organization.

The questions (Appendix 1) were not used to provide a formal structure for the interview. Instead they existed as a 'check list' to ensure that similar issues were explored with each participant. In this way the interviews developed their own logic, particular to each participant. The unanticipated could then be incorporated.

Photography:

This study is concerned with the way in which objects establish visual boundaries of self-recognition and self-definition for the participants. To 'know' of these personally coherent object groupings, they must be seen. An important concept in this study is the recognition that, ' ..... material objects, too, are representations of cultural and personal experience and that "all textualization is not verbal" (Babcock, cited by Bruner 1985:27).

Photography was used for its potential to provide a detailed record of the participants' object attachments and as, '..... another way of telling' (Berger1982:92). As Lewis Hine observed, 'If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn't have to lug the camera around' (cited by Sontag, 1977:185).

The photographs have been assembled in two different ways. The first organization is to reveal each participant's individual objects and their relationship within a particular living room. Secondly, the photographs have been ordered to make comparisons of certain aspects within each living room.

Reflexivity

To conclude this introduction to a study primarily concerned with the constructive inter-relation of objects, people and social setting, it must be recognized that this thesis itself is a particular and personal construction.

As the author of an expression of my ethnographic experiences, I must recognize the inevitable symbolic nature of this writing and the cultural orientations that direct both my expression and your, the reader's, interpretations. As the participants will be seen to construct a particular coherence of object attachment by noting particular consistencies of memories of experience, so too, have I only attended to certain aspects of theory and ethnography. Only through selection and division can any sense be made - but it is a particular sense, a certain map of the territory. As Bruner so clearly puts it, 'Our anthropological productions are our stories about their stories; we are interpreting people as they are interpreting themselves' (1986:10).

What we interpret of the participants in the photographic record of their object attachments, is equally and inevitably a reflection of ourselves. The judgements we make from the clues during our visual detective story, equally mirror our aspirations and experiences as those of the rooms' occupants.

These photographic essays are the 'glass' of the window, in which we can see both ourselves and some of the interior. If we shade the light on the window as we peer in, we can, by shifting positions, view the inside with greater clarity, but our presence is always there. This is a window, not a door, and we can never truly enter the other person's house. Each room and its objects, is both a mirror and a window.

It is vital, in my view, that this relativity of interpretation be recognized in ethnographic writing. As our culture is both a product and a control of our perceptions, we as observers, must be aware of

our inescapable interpretive function. This study calls for a disciplined approach that does not filter out the experiential, intuitive and unavoidably interpretive aspects of ethnography; an approach, in fact, which seizes upon and validates, the very excitement and depth of the interaction of experiences.

This thesis, then, is a mix of theory and ethnographic material. The objective is to provide a reasoned account and yet still maintain the important experiential components of the ethnographer and the participants.

Chapter I

THE PARTICIPANTS

The Participants

ANNE	Photographer
SALLY & CLIFF	Housewife & Engineer
DERRICK & VANESSA	Businessman & Ex Nurse
ALAN	Artist
KATHLEEN & MICHAEL	Shop Owners
MARK	Farmer
STEVE	Farmer
BRENT	Rock Guitarist

ANNE PHOTOGRAPHER

Anne

As I searched for a place to park off Oriental Bay, I remember thinking that his would be an interesting interview. Anne had been a student of mine. She had attended the one year certificate course in photography and had then been awarded an Agfa bursary for a further year of study. Only through an element of luck and perseverance on her part was she accepted onto the certificate course. This has since been a point of double-edged humour between us. Unlike many students, though, Anne has established a viable commercial photographic business in Wellington.

Her flat is awkward to get to. You have to park some way away and enter by a long narrow lane. The view of Oriental Bay and the harbour is magnificent. The flat is on the first floor of a picturesque white weatherboard house. Anne sub-lets the downstairs flat.

Anne had invited me for Sunday 'brunch' with her boyfriend, so that we could talk about the aims of my thesis before we started the interview. Brunch was pleasant - pancakes and coffee in her sunny living room.

Anne is thirty-three years old and single. She has a partner, but he has his own house and does not live in the flat. Born in Richmond, Nelson, of Catholic parents and in Anne says words, ' ..... *a sixth generation New Zealander, which I see as important'*. Anne declares she is,

' .....*a real 60's kid. Brought up in a very small suburb. Everyone was building houses and having kids at the same*

sort of rate. Big families. Lots of Catholic families around us. I was one of ten children and umm I had an umm, I don't know, umm ....'.

Space, or the lack of it, is a significant memory of Anne's childhood.

'Grew up fighting for space and us kids for our own individual characters and who we were and what we were all about. Out of that we all have our sort of own isolating ways of giving ourselves space'.

Her father was an alcoholic and her mother did everything for the family, including taking on the father's role. Anne remembers that there was not a lot of discipline when she was a child and *'they were very much allowed to do what they liked'.* Consequently, from this freedom and possibly lack of guidance from the Catholic background, Anne had a child when she was very young. Her son, Waio, has been a major influence on her life, particularly in the first years after he was born. Although Anne insists she has never regretted having her child, she does comment that she felt frustrated seeing her friends going off to university. This had the effect of making her very ambitious and committed to pursuing a career as soon as she could. After a few false starts, she feels that,

'..... with photography I am on the right track. ..... We're all creative people in our family. We all do creative things in our own way, uhmm - tend to be very 'hand-type' people, doing things with our hands rather than our brains'.

In her parents' house there were no 'works of art' - at the most a calendar and a few photographs of her father's time in the Navy. Although her mother is creative, time was always a problem for her and anyway nothing precious would last long with so many young children around. *'Nothing was treated with respect - a house that was functional and that was it'.* It was from her grandparents and friends that she developed attitudes of caring for objects. Anne rarely came straight home from school, preferring to go to her friends' houses. In their families she found a different approach to the construction of space, and social and economic ideas, where, '

.... furniture got Pledged! ..... certainly aware that your house was very different'.

Her grandparents were also particularly formative in relation to objects and their organization. Her grandmother used to cut and polish stones and was always collecting new ones and displaying the finished pieces. In contrast to her own home my,

> *'Grandparents were very meticulous people, uhmm - depression people, everything was kept and saved and they had this orderliness and tidiness. It may have looked haphazard, but everything was kept for a reason'.*

Talking of her present flat, Anne comments,

> *' ..... it's an old style place and the proportions of the room and everything else regardless of the decorations, people still feel good about being here. When I first came to the place it certainly gave me really good vibes from the beginning. I generally select tenants on the fact that some will comment "what a happy home" - don't know what it is, the previous family or what'.*

The living room is seen as the most public place, but because most of the people who come to the flat are friends, only the bedroom has any more particular sense of privacy than the others. Every room, for Anne, has its own value,

> *' ..... if I had to choose, it would be my bedroom, 'cos it's a place of that ultimate sleep. To be able to come home sometimes and ignore all the other rooms but crawl into that bed, and that's it!'*

Apparently reacting to her overcrowded and communal childhood space, Anne comments,

> *'I'm terrible, once I'm in a space I really need to mould it and shape it as my own and that's even for the briefest amounts of time. Even camping I need to put things - I need to control that space'.*

She values her adult, independent status for the ability to exercise this control. This desire to control her space is even a source of conflict in the shared darkroom and studio at work. Anne explains this organization of space as the same as her approach to other things in her life and uses the example of housework or washing-up, where she will not go out until they are done. She feels compelled to reach a, '..... *nice sense of something complete - only then can you go on to do other things'*. With the completion, Anne feels a sense of security and is comfortable with moving into the next 'unknown'. having brought, ' ..... *things back to a neutral point, where you can start off again'*. For her the flat still requires attention ' ..... *it still feels restless at the moment this place, because its not how I would like it to be'*. The things that have to be changed are primarily functional and finance is the constraint. Non-functional things do not remain if the object is not aesthetically satisfying or valued in some special way.The cost of a possession does not, though, have any relation to how important it is to Anne. She says the TV is the most expensive. We decided that the things that a thief might make off with would probably be in inverse proportion to how much the possession was cherished!

' ..... *you want to make yourself look good. All have a sense of being assessed. Your visual cloak and your house give people signals as to who you are and what you're about. People want to put you in categories!'*

In line with this awareness, Anne is also very conscious of preparing her space for other people as well as herself. I commented on the woman's magazine 'Next' that was on the table, to which Anne replied.

' ..... *re-incarnation of the happy home. Women are shown to be curtain makers, cushion and painting decoraters - re-packaged Women's Weekly. ..... very vulnerable to that sort of thing'*. and '*I like to make visitors comfortable and let them sit in the best place for the view. ..... Through photography and developing a visual thing, I am always very conscious of the*

space and how the space could look and the potential of the space'.

In discussing the difference between a house and a home, Anne feels that she sees the flat ' *..... as a home. Home in the sense of emotional commitment - but not in the sense of an asset'.* She feels the important thing about a 'home' is ' *..... sense of being able to please myself. I can come in and do what I like - manipulate the space according to how I feel at the time'.*

She appears not so much to be seeking a sense of permanency and reflection in her life but, rather, a centre of organization. She believes the things she has put into it are less important than the location. ' *..... the fact that I can bask in the sunlight and look out over the harbour ..... it's a kind of mental enjoyment'.*

In conclusion Anne notes,

'...... still actually feel quite transient, even though I've been here for ten years! (laughing) Optimistic thought that maybe I won't be here too much longer and spend some more time travelling or ...... I don't know what it is ..... I don't want to feel like I'm buying and buying more things and encumbered by them. I don't really care if the things I've got go or not. They're not that precious really'.

But the organization of the space is!
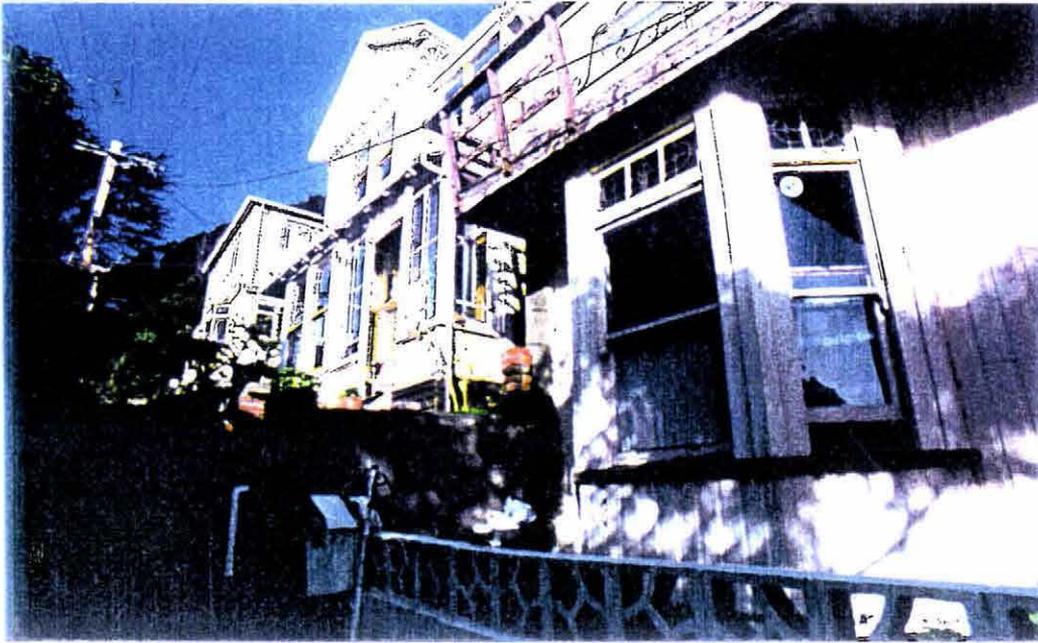
a

'Home is a sense of an emotional commitment - not an asset'.

b

' ..... I can control the things that are there to say, "this is a visual person with a sense of composition". ..... I could actually treat the whole room as a still life'.

a

' ..... I can bask in the sunlight and look out over the harbour ..... it's a kind of mental enjoyment'.

b

' ..... it still feels restless at the moment this place, because it's not how I would like it to be'.

a

'In my books there are all kinds if visual escapes and dreams in there'.

b

'The little tray behind is a gift from my younger sister, which is something I've always liked. Very 'moony' and full of love .....'.

a

'I keep these things strictly for their associations'.

b

*'I wouldn't buy anything like that ..... (*lots of laughter). *It's just a gift thing'.*
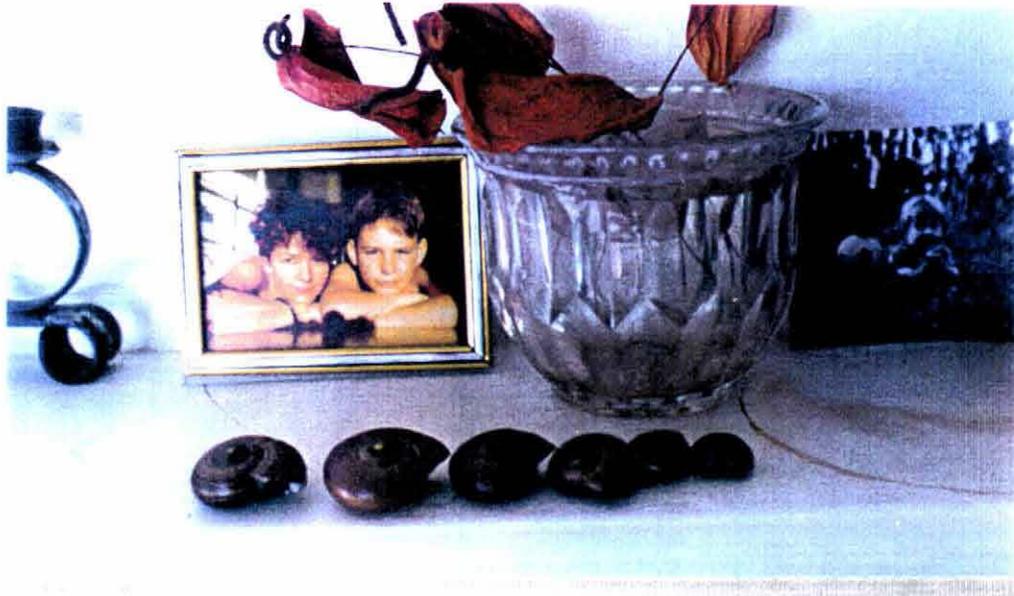
a
'Not much else on here except some photos of Waio (Anne's son), *when he was small. Shells. I collect stones and rocks from a place as a visual reminder'*.

b
'A couple of very unfunctional cameras, which reminds me of things long gone'.

a

'The cups I like because of the colour they give this corner of the room. They've got a sort of fifties look. .... I'm a real 60's kid!'
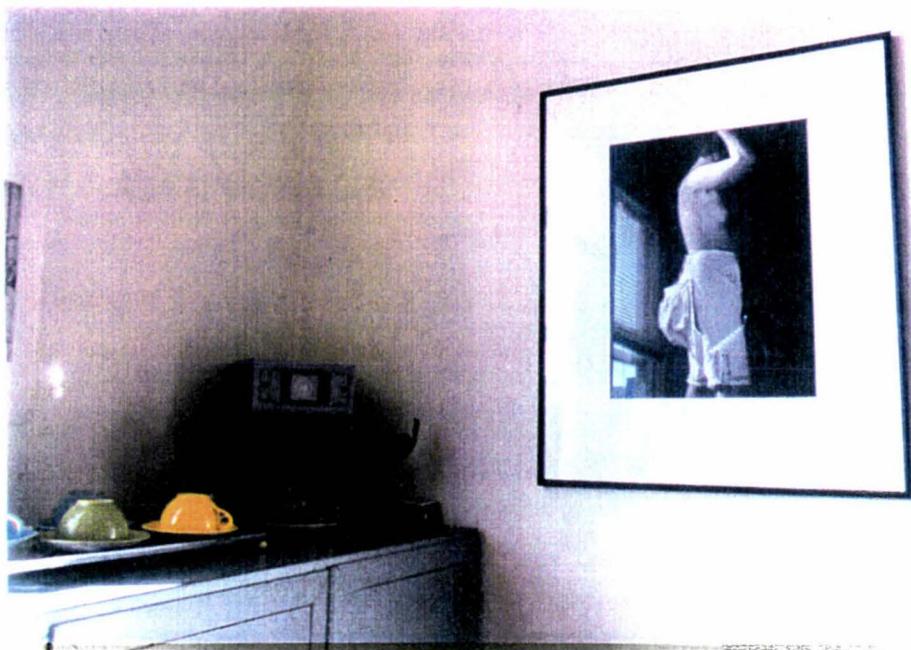
b

'I still look at them (Anne's photographs) and go, "God, how am I going to do just anything like that again?"

CLIFF ENGINEER
SALLY HOUSEWIFE

Sally and Cliff

A hill overlooking the Pauatahanui inlet. - the situation could have been beautiful. In fact it probably had been, before the housing development. A pair of large square columns made of water-smoothed stone stand at either side of the entrance road like some giant gate posts. The left hand column supports a bronze plaque that proudly announces 'Portage'. The site, now bare of any previous vegetation, comprises 'architecturally' designed houses, each apparently at pains to declare its individuality but with no concept of their visual impact upon one another.

Cliff was in the garden. New grass seed, staked out areas and new plants of all sorts were evidence of his activity.

Inside, the house was immaculate. A pale, unpatterned carpet ran the length of the hall and into the open plan dining and living rooms. The living area is set down a few steps and a balustrade edges the dining area. The view from the living room windows is striking and the room is sunny, with the lightness being reflected by the pale unpatterned furnishings and blinds. The ceiling is impressive. Rimu planking radiates, tent like, from a central support. The dining table, chairs and occasional tables are also rimu. The nakedness of the new estate is echoed in this room. The room has an 'unlived in' feel. Remarkably, the three piece suite is five years old and even with two children of two and four years, there is not a mark on the pale material. The surfaces show little trace of the occupants. It has that international hotel feel, where you wake up and try to remember which country you are in.

Cliff and I sit cross-legged on the floor and Sally in one of the chairs. I comment that I could tell that Cliff was a real 'floor' person. *'I'm not'*, interjects Sally. The two children vie for our attention. Nicholas, the younger, is finally given a video of Thomas the Tank Engine. Daniel, his brother, now turns his attention to disrupting Nicholas's viewing. They are not too intrusive and we begin the interview.

Sally was born in 1961 at Dunedin in the South Island and moved to Wellington when she was four years old. Some of her family is now in Auckland, but her mother still lives in Wellington. Sally started her schooling in Stokes Valley, then moved to Plimmerton for a few years before returning to Stokes Valley.

Cliff was born in Christchurch and except for three years in Fiji when he started school, lived there until he came to Wellington in 1975. Cliff is now forty years old. His mother was Irish and his father Scottish and they settled in Christchurch when they emigrated to New Zealand.

When I asked how long they had been married or living together, Sally quite strongly interjects, *'married'* . They have been married ten years.

Sally used to work as a secretary for Telecom, but stopped four years ago when Daniel was born. Cliff works as an engineer for Telecom and considers his salary high in comparison to the national average. His area has been undergoing a period of re-organization and he has yet to sign a new formal contract, but he feels comfortable that this will happen.

They had lived in two houses previously - the first a rented house at Makara. They then bought a ' ..... *place in the bush and built a Lockwood. Really enjoyed it, but we couldn't build on to it. We needed a bigger space and were forced to leave it'*. Cliff had planted a lovely garden, ' ..... *and we swore we'd never buy a new house again. Next would be a large house, fully fenced on a flat section for the children - and not on a hill'* (Sally).

The house in The Portage contrasts in every way to their previous home, the section is new, there is very little garden and what there is, is open to other gardens; the house itself is perched on poles cantilevered out over a steep hillside!

> *'We came to see the house as a Spec. House - framed up. It was sold as we walked through the door ..... (but he) ..... still miss the bush here. In my opinion, anyway, I have more feel for the outside of, the surroundings, than inside. I'm not quite as fussy or strict, where you, (talking to Sally) tend to be the opposite'* (Cliff).

Sally comments, *'I tend to like things new'*.

They do, though, both agree that the view is important to them. Even this, though, is not as satisfying as they had anticipated. They had not realized that some sections below them would be developed. A lot of discussion centered on the location of the house. Cliff criticizes the subdivision developers for not retaining some of the bush.

Sally and Cliff clearly tend to divide their energies differently. Cliff is an outside person, enjoying tramping, sailing and gardening, whereas Sally enjoys a strict control of the house interior. Her organization appears to apply to herself and the children as well as household objects. Both children are immaculately dressed and Sally carefully made up. The children attend my wife's kindergarten and she tells me that they are always dressed this way. Cliff, on the other hand, sprawled on the carpet in his gardening clothes makes a sharp contrast. Sally comments she *does* very little apart from the work in the house. When asked about her interests she comments, *'..... ummh, nothing really at the moment'.* Then, as if feeling that this was wrong in some way, she continues *' .... I read occasionally and knit sometimes'.*

Both want to regard the house as a home,

' ..... but we haven't been here long enough yet for it to feel like home. Cliff's theory, when we moved into this house, is that we do not get emotionally attached to it; because he was very attached to the other house. So he's decided that he's not going to get emotionally attached to this, because when it's time to move - but I don't think we will' (Sally).

I get the feeling that there is a resistance, particularly from Cliff, to establishing their identity in the house. Before the interview started, Cliff did mention that if he could have got out of the contract he would have. This lack of commitment permeates the room.

a

' ..... and we swore we'd never buy a new house again. Next would be a large house, fully fenced on a flat section for the children - and not on a hill!'(Sally).

b

' ..... still miss the bush here. In my opinion, anyway, I have more feel for the outside of the surroundings, than inside' (Cliff).

a
'I tend to like things new' (Sally).
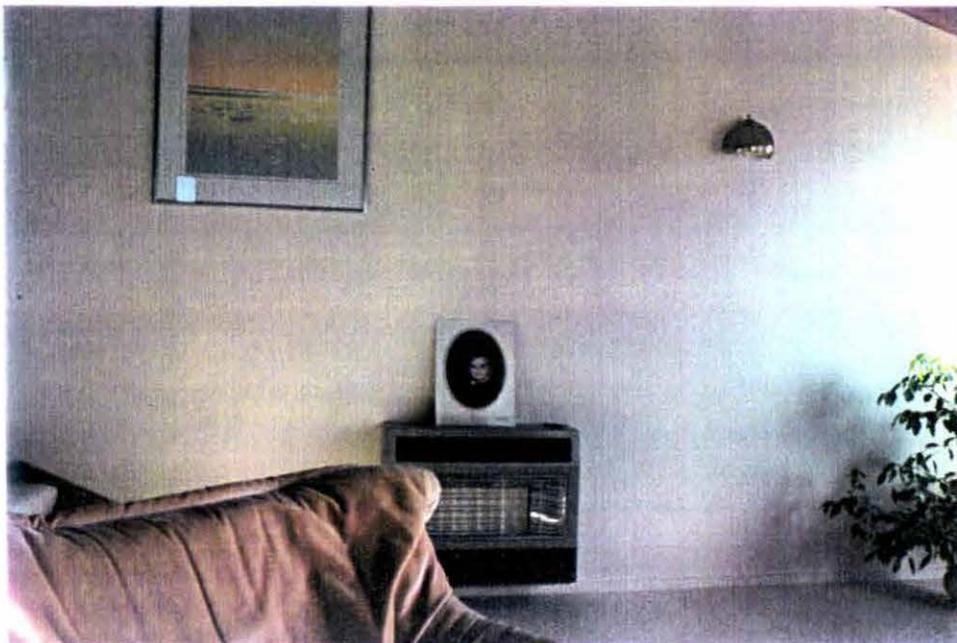
b
'The print is the only thing bought since moving in ..... simply for display' (Cliff).

a

'So he's (Cliff) decided that he's not going to get emotionally attached to this, because when it's time to move - but I don't think we will' (Sally).

b

'We don't collect things like other people might. Apart from the pot, which is purely ornamental, I would veer on the practical side' (Cliff).

a

'The chest was a wedding present from Cliff's brother, when he was living in Singapore' (Sally).

b

'I would prefer family photographs in a family room, rather than in the lounge' (Sally).

**VANESSA
DERRICK**

**EX-NURSE
BUSINESSMAN**

Vanessa and Derrick

Their house is approached by a private road along the edge of the Pauatahanui inlet. Dog-legging back from this road, a long drive takes you through a stand of dense trees and shrubs, emerging to confront their home, impressive in both size and originality of design.

When I arrived, Derrick and his wife, Vanessa, were out with the gardeners planting trees along the edge of a vast lawn. Introductions were made and fresh coffee was provided while I explained the objectives of my thesis.

I had asked for both Vanessa and Derrick to be there as it is important to find the balance of construction that has taken place. Vanessa, though, was given little chance to speak. Interestingly they both insisted, on a number of occasions, that decision making was very much a joint process. That maybe, but such a dialogue was not in evidence during the interview. Often, when Vanessa did say something, Derrick would over-ride before she could complete her statement. Generally talking for both of them, Derrick outlined his background, centering their progress upon the key points of development of both his businesses and their houses.

'Grew up as one of six kids, four brothers and one sister, and the ..... we were, right from day one, we were brought up in - we were the war-baby boom, part of that. We had to, if we wanted anything in our lives or in our home - we had to get out and work for it, that was it!

Encouraged ..... we were given a lot of freedoms as we were growing up. We were encouraged to have freedoms to do things, but we didn't really get a lot of help to do it, but just encouragement. Not someone holding our hand.

Father was a hard working guy. He used to sell insurance mainly. He was only there ..... he used to travel so he'd be away Monday to Thursday. He always encouraged us to do things. When we turned fifteen, we'd all saved up enough money to buy cars' (Derrick).

It was clear that Derrick had both wanted a lot in his life and also worked very hard to get it. I couldn't help thinking that each of the rooms I had glimpsed, lying beyond the impressive entrance hall, appeared to be approximately the floor areas of all the rooms in my house put together. Everything was spacious. The proportions remained, only the scale changed.

One of the few places Derrick professes not to have worked hard, was at school. Three brothers and his sister all ended up with degrees. Derrick and the remaining brother both went into business instead. *'So I suppose we did our learning in a different sphere or something. ..... Even when I was at college I had a business running'.* One business was a paper round. *'Not your normal sort of hour long job - we had guys working for us and we were paying wages to them and all that sort of thing and we were still at college then'.* This school-boy business was a distribution of forty to fifty thousand papers.

He did go to University for approximately one and a half years, but didn't enjoy it or do very well , so left. On leaving university, he went into a service station business.

During his time at university he had met Vanessa. Vanessa came from Australia in 1967 and went to Training College. She comments that this was a difficult time for her. At seventeen, she had to make a completely new group of friends. Derrick was part of this new group.

They knew one another for six years before getting married. They both took separate trips overseas, ' ..... *for a time of thinking before marriage'.* (Derrick)

'Never intended to get married until I was thirty. We got married at twenty six' (Derrick)

'That's a complement to me' (Vanessa).

Vanessa and I laugh, but Derrick is already forging on with his thoughts as though he never heard Vanessa's comment.

Derrick says that talking to his friends now they say he always worked hard, ' ..... *what they probably meant is that they were at the pub and I wasn't at the pub ..... '.* He has no regrets over the long hours, as he always has and still does enjoy working. Business grew. Derrick enjoyed the development and innovations he could make and bemoans today's more restrictive climate. *'Not so many laughs in it now'.*

A few years after their marriage in 1975, they bought a second business. They had bought a house as soon as they married. Derrick calls this a 'spec' house. *'Nice but an undeveloped section'.* They both worked hard on its development for two years. During this time he remembers being very busy but still finding time to go motor rallying. They were there five years in all.

The service station now also had a workshop and they found that friends were also their customers. Derrick also became involved in some serious trouble with the tanker drivers with, ' ..... *threats on the employees' lives, rape and bomb threats ..... '.* Both felt the need to move.

They moved to Whitby, buying a big house on an empty section and started the process of development all over again. Derrick and Vanessa remained in that house for twelve years.

During this time they had three children. They always managed to have holidays without the children. ' ..... *important for our relationship, to get away without the kids. We still do, even if only for a weekend'.*

As ninety percent of Derrick's assets were in the business and only ten percent in their house, they decided to build a new house. They felt that if they were going to get this one right it had to be built to their plans right from the start. A considerable amount of time was spent on the design. They believe the first design was for the architect, or a misconception of what he thought they were, but then as he got to understand them,

> ' ..... *he thought, I can do something completely different and it was ..... He saw in us that we are willing to step out of the ordinary, that we are willing, by nature, that we don't worry about what others would assess as a risk, or something .....'.*

Eventually the architect drew up a completely different proposal from his first. Derrick comments, *'The architect started to get something out of us that we would never have seen'.*

They have a sense of pride in their originality. Derrick contributes his business success to his developing for the future and not as they are now. Vanessa, *'Then a lot of other people follow, they copy ....'.* she is over-ridden by Derrick.

> *'We often do feel that people do copy us and you feel, you feel a bit antagonistic ..... I suspect in reality, actually, to a fair degree, we are leaders in things ..... we are willing to step into new areas'* (Derrick).

The original old house that was on this site has been moved to a corner of the section and re-furbished. It took two fastidious years to complete their present spacious house. Now their energies are concentrated on the grounds. A retired couple now 'live in', helping in the house and the garden.

Derrick would appear to be driven by an intent for practical efficiency in his life. He comments throughout the interview, continually swinging back to 'practicalities' as a dominant force. Their interior decorator got the *'push'* because she did not recognize how strong was this practical side.

' ..... look I could never come in in my dirty clothes and be comfortable in this proposal you've put forward here. ..... we've got our own opinions, sorry, goodbye!' (Derrick).

In response to considering what makes the difference betwen a house and a home, they both agreed that,

> *' ..... how we live in it makes it a home'* (Vanessa). *'Because we know what's happening. The things that happen around us is because we let them happen to a large degree'* (Derrick).

Improvements they might make would be to make it more *'practical'*. *'I want things to work in life'* (Derrick). Money helps us make things

> *' ..... as neat as we can. Sometimes when we are away and we stay in a motel or something, hey, I'm really happy, it's nice and clean and tidy and functional. I like this!'* (Derrick).

This attitude is clearly reflected in the house - clean, efficient, spacious and soul-less.

I mention that other people I'd interviewed have said they feel the objects they have put into a house are important in making it a home. Derrick responds,

> *'Now they may actually say that, but in reality that may not be the case. They may believe that's the case. When we sold our first house, we put a lot of effort in there, but I never had a moment's ..... I never ever even felt one pang for my effort in there'.*

Their houses, businesses and I suppose, bank balances, have got increasingly bigger. Derrick and Vanessa are friendly and hospitable. They were clearly involved with tree planting on a beautiful afternoon when I arrived but, ungrudgingly, gave up the next two hours to my interview and allowed me to later continue photographing. It appears that they have both enjoyed working hard together and share a common aim. Being constructively busy is clearly what Derrick enjoys. A 'self-made' man, Derrick uses and abuses English grammar, colloquial 'Kiwi' words and phrases and appears to have little time for anything other than the present.

'I've always thought in life and when, you know, marriage and that sort of thing - it's us against the world. There's a whole world there and we're doing what we want to do, there are risks everywhere .....' (Derrick).

a

'The architect started to get something out of us that we would never have seen'
(Derrick).

b

'Well our formal dining room/lounge, says to them, "We can do the same mate, if we want to!"(Derrick).

a
Formal living room.

b
'Not a lot of items I would really cherish. I would like a really good mountain bike at the moment' (Derrick).

a
Formal lounge - detail

b
Their interior decorator got the *'push'*, *' ..... look I could never come in in my dirty clothes and be comfortable in this proposal you've put forward here. ..... we've got our own opinions, sorry, goodbye!'* (Derrick).

a
Informal lounge. *'Sometimes, when we are away and we stay in a motel or something; hey I'm really happy, it's nice and clean and tidy and functional'* (Derrick).

b
Informal lounge - detail

a
Informal lounge - detail

b
Informal lounge - detail

ALAN   ARTIST

ALAN

Alan lives in a street made up of 'flat sunny sections'. The predictability of the neighbourhood heightens the jolt of contrast to come. This disjunction comes in two stages; first the outside and then on the inside. Unlike the rest of the houses, with their street frontage gardens, Alan's house is approached by a long, very narrow unsurfaced drive. Bushes and trees grow almost archlike overhead and uncut grass covers the drive except for the wheel rut trace of cars. At the end of this drive is a gate behind which lies a courtyard, apparently 'guarded' by skulls and bones. Lying immediately behind a massive whale vertebrae, a large horse skull, on a plinth of wood and stone, dominates a magical looking circle of red brick.

I was greeted by Tahi, Alan's eldest daughter. Leaving my shoes at the back door, I was shown into a working gallery-cum-artefact store room. Large and small three-dimensional works by Alan and other artists were stacked against the walls with smaller pieces on shelves or in glass cabinets. At the far end lies Alan's workshop; a tiny room crammed with bones, skeletons, skulls, skins and wings that press in on all sides, leaving clear only Alan's chair. On first viewing, the room seems random and chaotic, but gradually, like eyes getting used to the dark, arrangements, patterns, and groupings gradually emerge. There is an under-pinning logic at work.

Next comes the kitchen, which is open-plan to the main eating area. The real jolt, visually and emotionally, comes on entering the living room. Nothing has prepared you for this room. Minutes ago you parked on a street of neatly trimmed lawns and white weatherboard

houses, which, you believe, are full of the middle class aesthetic and functional paraphernalia of living. In Alan's house, it is not a simple transition from outside to inside, rather from one culture/time/paradigm, whatever, to another that is very different. It is its unexpectedness that makes the response so powerful. The room is large and opulent. The colours are rich and of the earth. Prints, ceramics, sculptures, books and skins are everywhere. A classifying hand is at work here too - a table of small bowls, another devoted to tea pots, prints hang with prints and paintings with paintings.

Tahi brings in coffees. Alan and I settle down into comfortable settees to start the interview.

I discover that the room in which we are sitting was an old village community hall, that was transported here and added to the existing house. It feels like a cross between a marae and a church. Alan, in fact, sleeps on the little mezzanine. As to whether it is the centre of the house, Alan feels that it depends on the activity, but that it tends to be the social centre. Tahi feels that it is a '..... *more formal area of the house. There is more ritual involved'.* Alan dislikes formal codes of hospitality, stating it's a '..... *part of our philosophy, it's a very open house'.* His parents would always offer food and drink or if it was later in the evening, a bed.

Open or not, Tahi returns to the feeling that it is a special room and she tells of how, as a small child she used to creep in late at night. The room has never been off-limits to the children, but they were not often there by themselves.

> ' ..... *start off right from the beginning with valuable and beautiful objects with your children, they learn to respect them and handle them in the appropriate manner ..... and then they grow up to appreciate them in the appropriate manner'.*

Alan is artist, carver, designer, ethnologist and very much adventurer and collector. His activities are numerous and wide ranging. He was born in Blenheim in 1945. As Alan says, he didn't grow up in a house like the one he has now structured, but

' ..... grew up with stainless steel and formica. All the old colonial furniture was thrown out. Didn't have any art in the house ..... just a few reproduction prints'. He goes on, *'The only quality things to talk of was books. My father bought them from auctions by the apple case. Two walls were lined with books and he may not have read any of them. But I grew up appreciating books. ..... I had no TV or radio or electricity ..... didn't get electricity unitl the 60's. Had no tractor. My father used horses right up to the 60's'.*

Most of his family continue to work the land today. He says, *'My family formed strong spiritual ties with the land in New Zealand .....'.* He traces his ancestral roots back to Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the Shetland Islands.

Alan attributes his keen sense of observation for nature, the seasons and hunting, to his childhood background. *'Father had a single bore shotgun. What that means is when you're hunting you learn to stalk - you only get one chance'.* Alan believes this ability for intense observation is transferrable to other areas and has contributed significantly to his ability and direction as an artist today.

Alan started with a dream to work in museums, *' ..... maybe the National Museum of New Zealand and to get involved in archaeology and identification of materials'.* This dream led, in 1956, to becoming a student archaeologist under Dr. Roger Duff of Canterbury Museum at the Wairau Bar Moa hunter site and later as museum assistant under Dr Terry Barrow at the National Museum. He has also created a museum within his own house and it is, in fact, registered as a private museum.

A period of overseas travel and work then followed. Alan spent four years travelling through the Pacific, Central America, U.K., Europe, North Africa, through Asia and back via Australia. During this time he worked for the Stockholm National Museum, and the British Museum. His travels took him twice across the Sahara desert on camel and truck. Returning to New Zealand in 1969, he taught design courses to Polytechnic students and worked for four years

for New Zealand Television Corporation as a designer in the area of studio settings. This was followed by a further three years of employment with New Zealand National Film Unit, as a designer in film settings, graphics and animation.

In 1977, Alan was off for another four years of travel, this time through North, Central and South America and Europe. During this time, Alan researched collections of local and Maori artefacts and gave numerous lectures and workshops on carving. While in South America, *'I travelled by canoe and motor trading craft 4,000kms of the Amazon river and its tributaries'*. Alan also, *'..... studied the firing techniques of the Northern Pueblos of New Mexico and the jungle Indian cultures, concentrating on the ancient and contemporary pottery of the Shipibo and Campa Indians'*.

As an artist and teacher, Alan has worked in many institutions and had his work exhibited world wide. Lecturing periods have been at Long Beach University, University of Santa Barbara, Mississippi High and The Free Academy of Art, Denhag, Holland. In New Zealand, Alan's teaching activities have been with Hutt Valley Activity Centre for pupils who do not fit into the mainstream school system, also teaching carving for the Maori Affairs Department and at Parumoana Community College and currently at Whitirea Polytechnic.

Alan has been the recipient of QE II sponsorship and the subject of many articles and books, together with television and radio productions such as, 'A Sense of Involvement', 'Koha', 'Kaleidoscope' and so on. His work is also represented internationally in museum collections such as, Auckland, Dowse, Coward in Hawaii, and Los Angeles Folk Art & Craft Museum. His exhibitions are too numerous to detail for this introduction to the participants, but suffice it to say that Alan has exhibited at major venues in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Peru.

As to his own work and to the artefacts he collects,

'I draw from the past, evolving further the influences I've been moulded by and drawn to ...... I clearly see myself as a link between past and future carvers'.
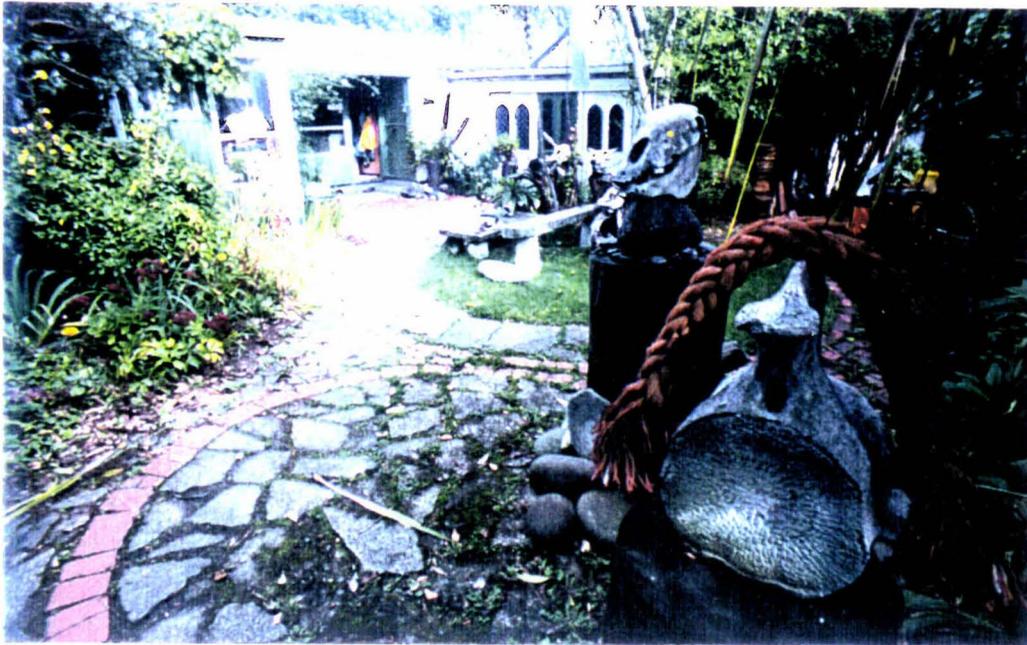
a

Lying immediately behind a massive whale vertebrae, a large horse skull on a plinth of wood and stone, dominates a magical looking circle of red brick at the entrance to Alan's house.
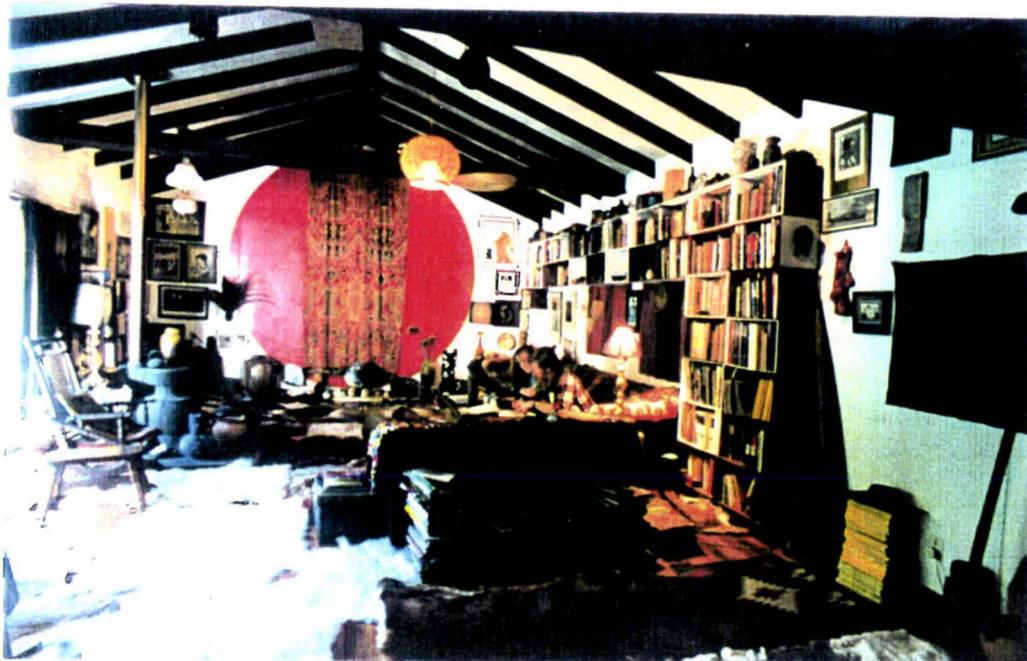
b

'I feel comfortable here. Often a lot of things talk for me. I suppose it's a way of establishing my identity with other people'.

a

' ..... it's chance organization. I'm not a decorator. I don't choose items specifically to fit with other things'.
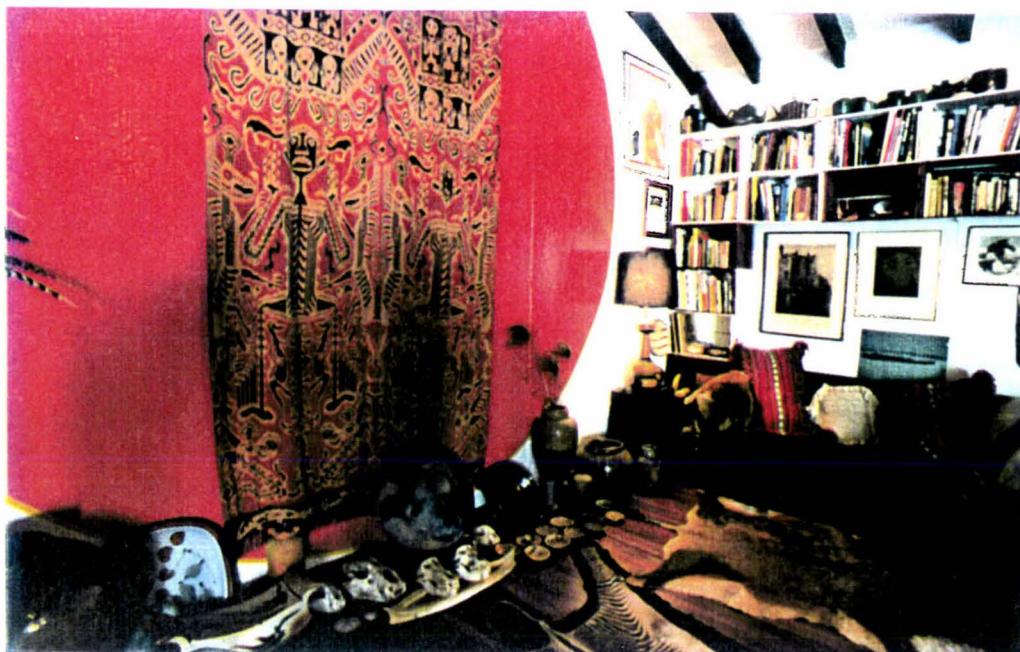
b

'For twenty years I've kept that circle on the wall bare and now I've got that weaving'.

a

'There are certain natural objects that have the same value as man-made objects'.

b

'More particularly a skeleton tells you a story. If you don't have the whole skeleton, the skull will tell you the most'.

a

'Various items collect you. ..... It would be the exception, though, to come home with nothing'.

b

'If you surround yourself wih beautiful things, it enriches your life, enriches your work'.

a
'I collect mainly for communication'.

b
'All objects have memories - all inter-woven with one's life'.

a

'Some things are incredibly erotic. Some of my work has those connections'.
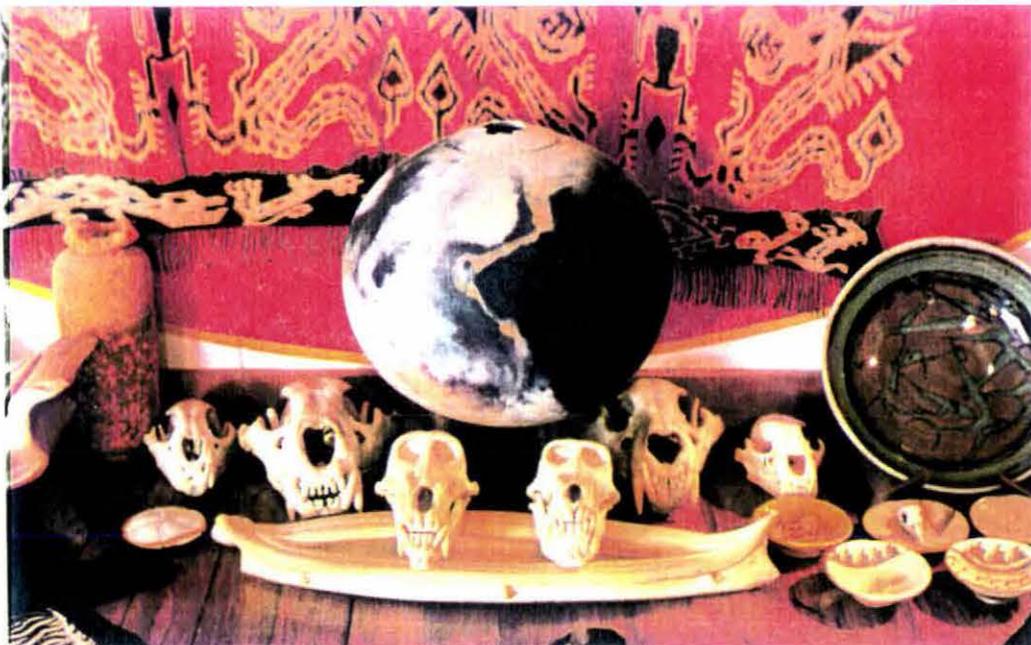
b

'I suppose there is one area I collect natural objects, is skulls. I don't quite know why. Skulls because I work in bone? ..... Whenever I come across a new skull, I clean it and label it'.

KATHLEEN
MICHAEL

SHOP OWNERS

Kathleen and Michael

' ..... over there (Cyprus) *it was after the war and things weren't too good economically ..... fewer jobs ..... strangely, things have reversed now. Got no unemployment there, plenty of money now .....'* (Michael).

'...... that's where we should be now' (Kathleen).

These are the opening words of the interview. The wistful feelings that are expressed are seen as a dominant force in the construction of their living room, particularly for Kathleen. For both Kathleen and Michael, approximately the first half of their lives was spent in Cyprus. Michael, now sixty-three years old, has been in New Zealand for thirty years. Four years after his arrival, he returned to Cyprus to marry Kathleen. Michael comments, *'I went back to Cyprus for this one here'* (both laugh).

Both were educated in Cyprus and completed High School. To go to university meant going overseas and very few people, at that time, could afford it. As Michael succinctly puts it, he got married, came back to New Zealand, made his business here and had four children, whom he is now starting to marry off. Kathleen comments that twenty six years ago, *'I thought I was coming to New Zealand for five years ..... it's going on and on'*.

Both still retain a clear accent and are likely to 'drop' into Greek to explore a difficult area or when searching for a particular word. Through their strong connection with the Greek Orthodox faith, they keep in close contact with the Greek Cypriot community in Wellington, which provides a continuity and strength for maintaining

both cultural orientations and their language. I believe that, particularly for Kathleen, her Cypriot background is very consciously maintained, both from a sense of pride and as a way of constructing an emotional mnemonic link.

'There is even stronger bond with back home than even if you remain there, I think ..... and you try to, and anyway you can't - to keep those ties close together. You don't want to forget and let go' (Kathleen).

'You never forget the place you were born and grew up as a kid' (Michael).

Kathleen and Michael now live in a quiet cul-de-sac. A wide grass verge, lined with trees, fronts the house. The houses in the street are what, in England, I would call 'middle-class'. These solid, well maintained buildings, are separated by mature sections. Kathleen reflects that it took a long time to call this place 'home'. It became a home because of, *' ..... what I put in it. It is the objects, our own personal things ..... those are the things that will change a room from impersonal to something special'*. Kathleen also felt that it takes children even longer than adults to see a new place as home.

'Children don't spend as much time thinking about objects as playing around ..... in the areas where they play their games - familiar areas, their friends ..... that's close to them and you take them away from their environment. It is different when you are a grown up ..... don't think you miss the outside so much .....' (Kathleen).

This is an interesting idea, that objects become important in different ways as you grow older.

Much of the house flows 'open-plan', one area into another. Only the bedrooms are viewed as significantly different in the sense of restricted access. The bedroom is also where Kathleen and Michael keep their religious icons.

Kathleen and Michael see their 'middle room' as the social area for the family and close friends, particularly in the winter, as it is where the television is and is also the warmest place. In summer, a lot of use is made of the sun-lounge, which is open-plan to the kitchen, perhaps reflecting the use made of large kitchens during their childhood in Cyprus, which traditionally became the focal point of social gatherings.

There is a significant difference in 'feel' between the 'middle room' and the lounge. I have the feeling that the lounge is rarely used. It has become a display area for memories of Cyprus. Ordered, clean, cold and un-used functionally, the room itself appears unchanging. For Kathleen it is her favourite room and as she says, *'I like to be in the lounge, to have the time to handle the objects at leisure and enjoy them'*.

It was in this room, the previous year, when photographing their daughter's wedding, that the idea of this thesis developed. As part of my documentation of wedding ritual, I was photographing the arrangement of the wedding gifts, when Kathleen came in and began to adjust some of the objects on the mantelpiece and to straighten the pieces of lace on the coffee table. It was impossible not to be aware of the reflection of the owners in the collection and arrangement of objects in the room. The opportunity to explore this idea further was irrestible.

It was good to be back. Kathleen and Michael were as charming and hospitable as they had been a year ago. I enjoy their formality and graciousness. The interview went on much longer than they had expected, but like many of the people I have interviewed, they said they enjoyed talking and thinking about the things with which they have surrounded themselves.

The light was fading and I only had a short time to take my photos. *'Well you do that and I'll put the kettle on'* Kathleen.

a

'I like to be in the lounge, to have time to handle the objects at leisure and enjoy them' (Kathleen).
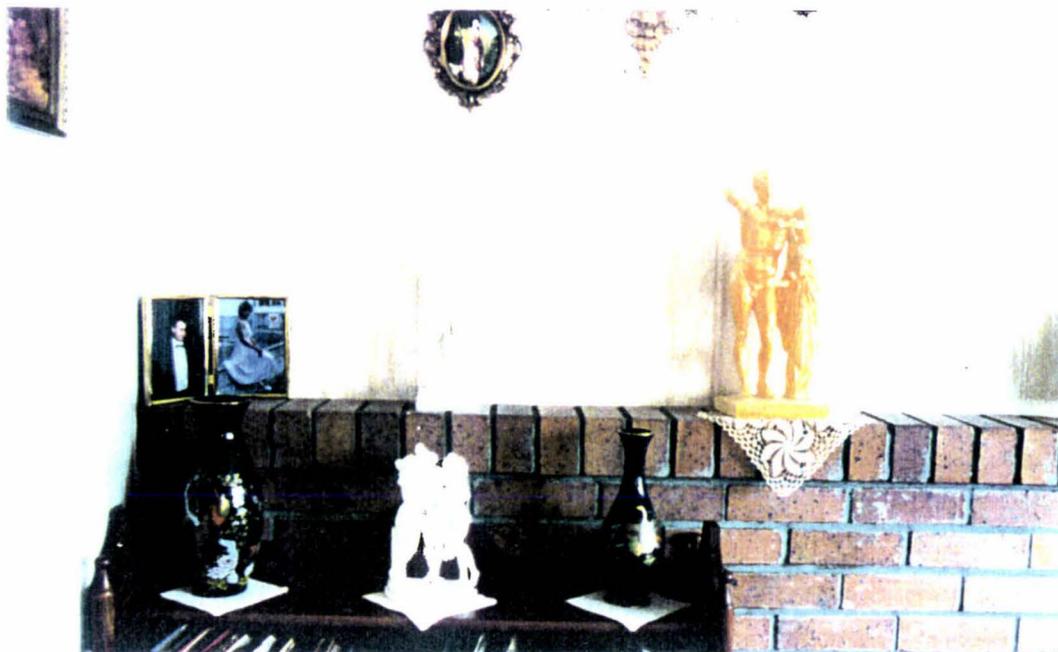
b

'These thing, they might mean nothing to you, but to me they are part of home. So they are valuable to me only' (Kathleen).

a

'I feel most comfortable when things are in a particular place' (Kathleen).

b

'Maybe you put it there for your own pleasure, eh? Because it reminds you of being there (Cyprus), of the good things ..... ' (Michael).

a

'You get to feel comfortable with your own touch, with personal things. It doesn't matter how expensive' (Michael).

b

'The kids photographs are the first thing. If I had to save something, that's what I would try to save' (Kathleen).
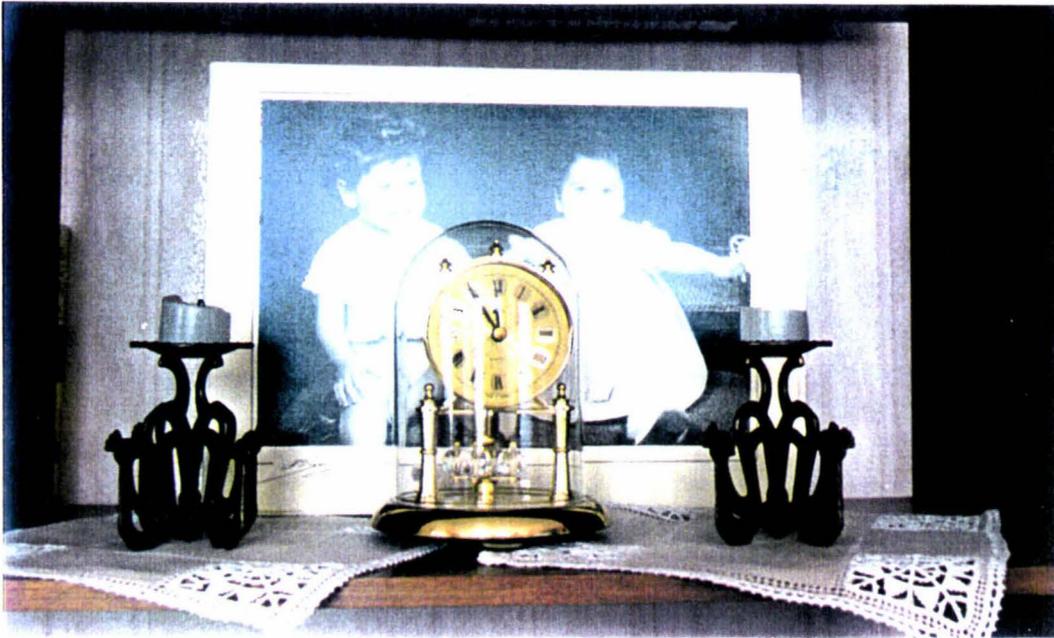
a

' ..... They did not feel right.So I gave myself time until I had crotcheted the lace. To somebody else it might look nothing, but to me, though, it reminds me of what mum used to do and of home' (Kathleen).

b

'I won't allow objects to become too important. It is Maria my child ..... it is the person that makes it important' (Kathleen).

MARK   FARMER

Mark

*'During the slump they lost everything, we lost everything -
when I think back on my life - my father lost everything, we
were put out into the cold world on our own. We've done quite
well my brother and I.'*

Sat in Mark's large living room, full of heavy but comfortable
furniture, the memorabilia of his past on every wall and flat surface,
it was easy to agree with him. At seventy nine years Mark is still
active, his ideas clear and his sense of humour intact. I'd met him
that morning at the back of the farm. He was dressed in heavy
oilskins and gumboots, after coming back from feeding his hens.
Strong Northerlies had brought driving rain. It was a foul day.

A cup of tea had been made for me. Mark had seated us in the little
alcove by the television. Before I could even start my prepared
introduction, Mark announced that he wasn't sure he could tell me
much, but that he would start at the beginning and see how he
went. As can be heard on the tape recorder, he was in full flight
even before I had time to position and turn the machine on. Nothing
was needed from me, except for the occasional nod of
understanding, for the next twenty minutes. What Mark had to say
was so much more revealing and I suspect more appropriate, than
the information I had collected in previous interviews, I determined
that in future I would allow people the freedom to follow their own
inclinations and that I would refer to my questions only to make sure
that specific aspects of information had not been missed.

Mark was born in 1914 in Masterton and went to Taru Country
School until he was fifteen. As he explains it,

'I thought of going to Massey, but in those days didn't have enough "oomph" for school'. and *' The big attraction in those days there was the deer and rabbit shooting. It was such a great life. Going back to school didn't appeal at all'.*

Life for Mark centered on the outdoors and had always been physically demanding.

'I went from a shepherd to a fencing contractor. I had a rabbiting gang of five working for me - and all those sort of things. I got sick of farm work. I was getting ten shillings a day and my food to split posts all over the countryside!'

From this work he was able to save up enough money to buy a new Vauxhall car in which he went up to Auckland for the horse racing. *'Bit of a loner - went up there on my own, an' all that'.* Here was the beginning of a passion that was to last throughout Mark's life.

The hard physical apsect of work did not change for Mark as his next job was working for a contractor shovelling rock by hand. He then became the driver for the firm, but *'drove too fast'.* After getting, *'......stopped by the cops on the Hutt Road three times in a month'.* he was criticized by his boss, to which his response was, *'Time I got out of this place, boss'.*

Mark then applied for a farm manager's job for 6,000 acres, a job for which he had little or no experience, but as Mark comments you, *' ..... need a lot of cheek in this world to get on'.* The cheek paid off and Mark moved from lorry driver to farm manager.

It seems in Mark, there has always been a streak of independence and both the drive and ability to take on organizational jobs. I get the feeling Mark prefers being his own boss, although this seems to arise from the satisfaction of control rather than any inherent attitude against being part of a system.

The War came next.

'I decided - I would like to go. I went away. Marvellous trip really I suppose, because I came back. We had our moments I must admit, but I saw the world, a lot of Germany. I was in Bomber Command see, which was marvellous. Once you get to that stage ..... ended up in Lancasters, four engines see, once we got into them, I said to the boy, "we've got a show of getting home in these". and they were marvellous, you could fly on two engines'.

On his return from the war, Mark put in for a block of land, *' ..... drew this out of the barrel, or somebody else did for me, and that was the start and had a very happy time here and enjoy it'.*

As I sat there listening to the encapsulation of a life-time's experiences, I am aware of a gentleness and consideration of the importance of time in Mark's outlook. I begin to understand how a life time on the land, with much of the work being done by simple tools has brought a quiet and gentle persistence and a awareness of the futility of railing at those things that only seasons and care can bring about.

I feel as though I am again a child sat with my grandfather. The combination of Mark's age, rural wisdom and apparent contentment effects an aura of peace and stability for him and the whole room. The feeling is also one of slowing down, as if preparing for the end of life - out of a necessity, gradually withdrawing from the arduous and vigorous physical work that farm life demands. This is not to say Mark and his wife 'B' are not happy. As Mark himself is aware, *' .....lots of people think, "poor old Mark, he's stuck out there", but that's not the case. We enjoy being here and that makes a marvellous difference in life'.*

The backdoor of the farm opens onto a short hallway which leads into the kitchen. This is a big farm kitchen with a large wood burning stove. There is table covered with an assortment of jars and old newspapers, at which 'B', Mark's wife, is having a late breakfast. The walls are adorned with pictures of the prize winning horses that Mark has owned.

The kitchen leads into the living room. This is a big multi-purpose area, - with are areas designated for eating, television viewing, and listening to music. A central pile of cushions is where Mark has a drink and a short sleep at mid-afternoon. There is also a table with an electronic typewriter, which serves as an office area. This room, Mark feels, is the most important and the centre of the house. It is the area of socializing, particularly with his family, that is very important to him. Everywhere is immaculately clean. I do not get the feeling that this is because of my visit. I believe there is a pride and care given to maintaining the room.

The furnishings are a mixture of styles. Two wooden cabinets must be verging on antique, while a large three piece suite which dominates the centre of the room is contemporary. The television is a modern one, while the stereo system alongside it must belong to the mid-sixties. The room reflects the elderly nature of its occupants as it traces their passage through time. It is lived in in a functional, non-pretentious way. What is there, is there because it is either loved and cared for, or is of direct practical value.

In response to my question as to whether he sees Tyneside, the name of the farm, more as a house or home, Mark's reply is immediate. Laughing he says, *'Oh, as a home of course!'* The house has become a home because of the enormous amount of work Mark feels that he has put into it. The ceilings have been changed, the house re-roofed, doors added to the kitchen, 'french windows' in the living room and drainage and concreting to the outside. It feels like a home because *' ..... we like it so much; if you like something it makes all the difference in the world'*.

To further questioning Mark agrees that the objects in the house do play a part in making it feel like home. As I later find, it is the rest of the family and his wife that choose most of the objects and position them. It is not surprising to find Mark responding mainly to the physical and financial work that he has contributed to personalizing the farm.

Mark doesn't know what will happen in the future but, *'Always said to them, don't sell Tyneside. Hate to think of anybody else being*

here, bar some of the family ..... what'll happen I don't know'. Clearly the whole house has become an important object itself, vital to his sense of stability and continuity and ultimately, peace of mind.

a

Returning from the war, ' ..... *drew this out of a barrel, or somebody else did for me, and that was the start and had a very happy time here and enjoy it'* (Mark).

b

Bee, Mark's wife, in their living room.

a

'Lots of happy memories attached to it all ' (Bee).

b

'That's our 50th. wedding anniversary. That's at the party' (Bee).

a

'One big one. (cherished possession) *That's my horse, above them. That's Highland King winning his first race in Hawkes Bay. He was a magnificent horse'* (Mark).

b

'I've got a lot of photos, but I want something that I can put, ... and I can say to my friends, "That's what I brought home from the war"* (Mark).

a
'The more precious things you protect - protect them from the hurly burly of family life'
(Bee).

b
'The cost doesn't come into it at all, it's the article you love' (Mark).

a

b

'Always said to them, don't sell Tyneside. Hate to think of anybody else being here, bar some of the family ..... what'll happen I don't know' (Mark).

STEVE   FARMER

Steve

Perhaps if I hadn't interviewed Mark in the morning, the meeting with Steve in the afternoon might not have come as such a contrast. In some naive way, I had thought that two Wairarapa farmers, their farms separated by only a few kilometers, might have very similar orientations in life styles. I couldn't have been more wrong.

With the memory of Mark, fresh in my mind, like a benchmark of orthodoxy - his immaculate traditional weather board farmhouse and surroundings, stable and loving marriage, and possessions tracing a lifetime, immovable upon their organized and spotless surfaces in my mind, I drove off to meet Steve.

Steve has recently separated from his wife, Susan. He is now renovating an old shearing shed, which is a little distance behind the house he previously shared with his wife and children. At intervals along the muddy drive to the shearing shed, are the carcasses of wrecked Bedford vans.

I was introduced to the carpenter, who appeared to be mentally disabled. I also got the feeling that he was extremely unsure what he was meant to be doing. The carpenter's hestitancy was not surprising, as Steve's concepts were anything but traditional or straightforward. The atmosphere was that of the film 'Vigil' by Vincent Ward. The unsurfaced muddy track, the feeling of disrepair and isolation, not just physically but mentally, distanced the place from the mainstream of development.

The interview took place in what Steve referred to as the kitchen, but as he explains, it is the centre of the house and will form part of a future open-plan living room. I was presented with coffee in an outsized ceramic mug of unusual design. Seated on a pair of old church pews round a table littered with papers and crockery, we began the interview. Steve was articulate and helpful. In fact, I'm sure he enjoyed the opportunity to talk through the traumatic events of his last few years.

Steve was born in Wellington in 1947 and lived there until he was eighteen. His mother is a fourth generation New Zealander, while his father was brought over from England by his parents, when he was only a baby. After school at Wellington College, Steve spent some time at Massey University, preceding a period of moving around a number of re-hab. farms as a cadet.

Steve and his wife bought the present 300 acre farm twenty years ago.The previous owner helped finance Steve's purchase with a loan of $100,000. A further $70,000 came from his parents, while Susan and Steve contributed $5,000 of their own money. Interest at this stage was only 6%.

> *'Interest climbed as high as 33% at one stage, because we were on lawyer's money. As what we paid for the farm was recognized as being unfinancial ..... had to find various methods of alternative income to survive'.*

The farm clearly started out on an unstable financial basis and has been at the mercy of market fluctuations ever since. I have this image of Steve lurching from one crisis to another, desperately trying to come up with some life-saving idea. Finances - the cost of 'living', the cost of 'things', formed one of the central themes throughout the interview. Steve constantly refers to the financial problems of the large scale management of the farm and his successes of second-hand purchases of three hundred dollar cupboards and five dollar chairs.

Steve was a stud master working with Romney sheep. A rare black sheep was given to him for his wife to spin from. He bred up to a 1,000 coloured sheep and developed what is called a 'handcraft flock' and dealt with home spinners and weavers. Initially the money was good. This was the start of the need to enlarge and develop the shearing shed. The handcraft market though,

> ' ..... dipped out. I'd be away from home for ten days in a month at trade fairs. The kids used to support and help run the farm while they were at home, but when they left and the wool industry dipping, we had to change our way of life'.

To keep up with the finances Steve sold the first part of the farm, ' ..... 29 acres at two thousand dollars an acre; we only lost thirty acres out of the three hundred'.

Steve cites the financial problems and Sue's growing awareness of the concepts of feminism as having caused an irrepairable rift in their marriage. Every time there was a surge in the market it would interfere with,

> ' .... Sue's studies or other ambitions ..... so it sort of wound down. I discovered recently we weren't doing anything together, so, urr, after a couple more trips - my son calls me a fascist hippie - I've moved in here. Living in separate accommodation. I've moved in in an uncompleted state ..... and knowing me and my perseverance it will never ever get finished now, because I'm quite happy to camp up in the woolshed on my side of the farm'.

Due to pressure from the bank, Steve has sold another twenty two acres along the drive and a further sixty acres on top of a hill and aimed to end up debt free - had Sue and he stayed together,

> ' ..... but I will now have to take out another mortgage to buy the other half out. I don't mind debt. That's never been a problem to me. It was the debt levels that caused the stress levels'.

The intention behind the development of the wool shed is multipurpose, if a little unorganized. Steve intends to continue to shear sheep and to that end is keeping the centre an operational shearing space, ensuring that the outlet corridor is wide enough to take the bails. Although, as Steve is well aware, the development as living acommodation is illegal, he believes the inspectors on the council will turn a blind -eye to his activities although,

' ..... one of my objectives is to have the tourist who is capable of, how shall I put it? the back-packer type tourist ..... come and milk the cows, feed the chucks, do some work on the land and get an experience of New Zealand'.To this end Steve has squeezed in space for odd bunks and small beds. He even has an idea of using the Bedford vans, radiating in a circle around a central bathroom area, as sleeping accommodation.

Steve has some strong opinions regarding the design and refurbishing of the wool shed. Recycling is an important concept, not only because of cost, but also to allow objects to continue a useful existence. The cupboards he knocked down from $400 to $300, he managed to organize a stove and micro-wave for $800, and he paid only $5.00 for the old door which came from Cameron's Service Station fifteen years ago. 'It still has all the old phone numbers on it, which I've varnished over to preserve'. Other doors dumped from offices, a cane chair bought in a clearing sale, ' .... said yes to $5.00, but I only had three two dollar pieces, so it cost me $6.00', wood for the walls, the list goes on endlessly, each purchase and bargain apparently bringing pleasure.

Steve is also clear with regard to decoration.

'I have a loathing for painting because I think it hides the inside of the timber and the other reason is my hand, and it's not through drinking too much alcohol, is unable to stand still to paint white lines on cupboards and things'.

Similarly, an old bench top that had come from a former farm, had got badly stained.

' ..... felt it nicer just to polyurethene and leave the stains on rather than, well it's quicker!'. ..... Sue always wanted to paint the bloody things. To me the grain, the years of growth, each timber talks - it has its own feeling. ..... here I'm just doing things that I'm comfortable with. You don't have to build shelves with new 'bison' board. ..... I left the wires exposed ..... because I think they are part of the reality of the place. It's much cheaper and no less efficient'.

Steve remembers that he was never comfortable in his previous house because it was dominated by Sue's direction. His mother was also a very dominant person, *'It was easier to go along with ideas than fight'.*

A house or a home? Steve responds,

'I see it as an expression of who and what I am. Not drawing attention to me, but drawing attention to how I feel, in the sense to test others to see where they're at'.

Re-inforcing this attitude later in the interview, Steve states,

' ..... see it as a place where others can feel comfortable, where they can do their own thing. But when they come I like to observe their reactions. ..... the place gives them a message I can't express in words'.

The interview was broken into two parts. The light had started to fade and we had stopped the interview while I photographed the living room/kitchen. It was now dark. We had been talking for a long time. It was a dificult interview - not because Steve did not respond fluently and easily, he had. The problem was in taking seriously the developments he proposed. On the one hand, Steve appears logical and aware and yet his actual ideas for the future seem almost like daydreams - another lurch into another crisis, still looking for a direction?

a

'Looking to put stained glass in the doors and windows. ..... but also to let someone else express themselves on my behalf through their hobby'.
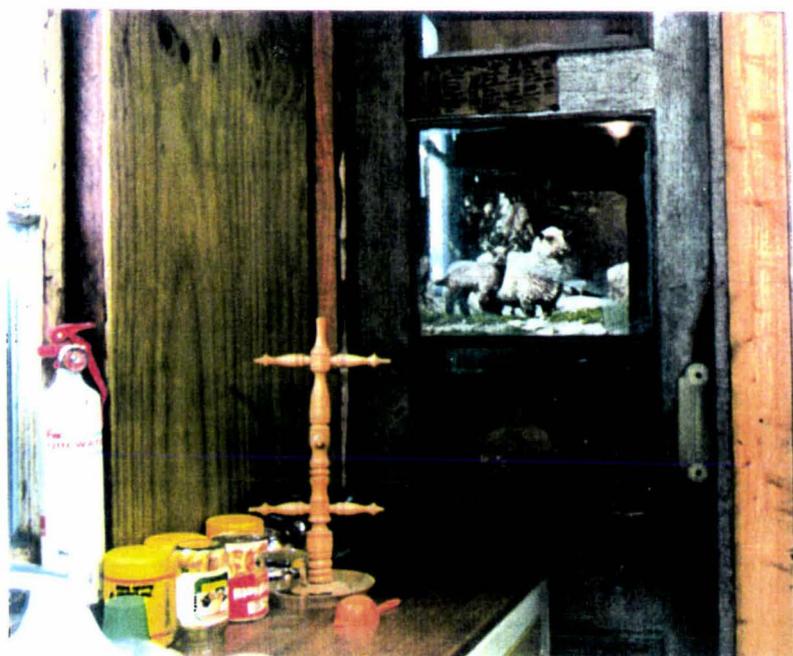
b

'I like to put things in that make people talk'.

a

'I don't like little black boxes all locked up. I probably will never curtain this place'.
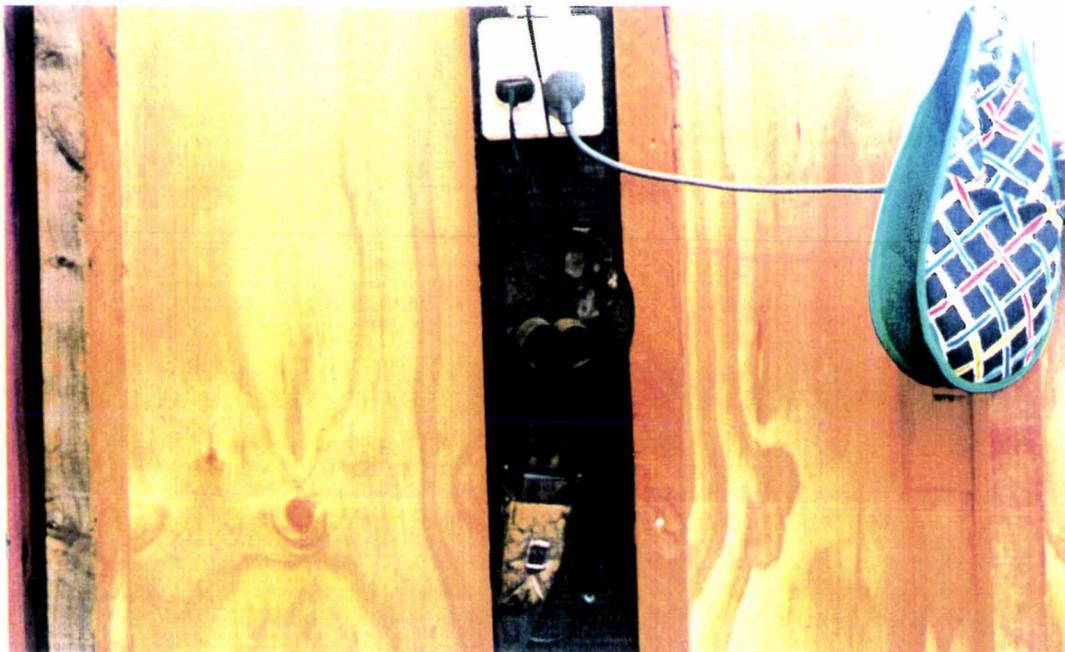
b

'Set of sheap shears from a clearing sale - paid $3.00'.

a
'The pews are purely cynical ..... saying stuff the church and that sort of thing'.
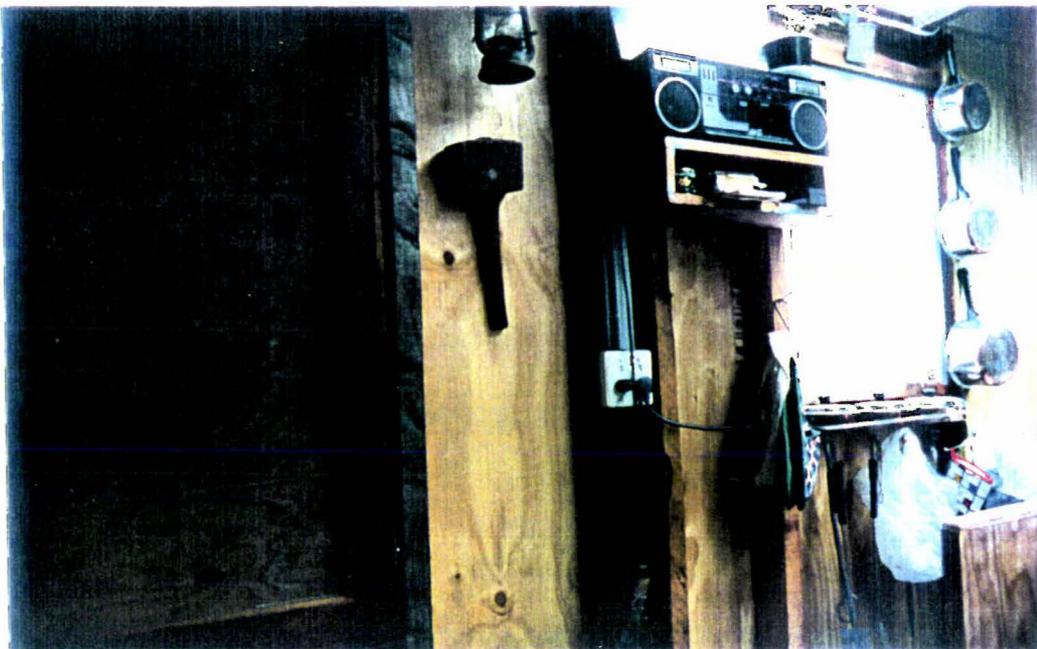
b
'I loath painting because I think it hides the the inside of the timber'.

a
Old boxes from his Grandfather's workshop support Steve's microwave.

b
'I can remember going to my Grandmother's. For years that clock used to be on her mantelpiece .....'.

BRENT   ROCK GUITARIST

Brent

Brent lies sprawled in bed, a double mattress on the floor in the corner of a room. This single, high-ceilinged room, is definitely 'home' for Brent.

> *'I love it. It's really good. Quite separate. I can lock myself off and come in here and 'jam' out and make a noise. Don't mind people coming, but there are times when I want time to myself. ..... cleared everything out to make it my own. Stuck some photos on the walls. It's a bit of an inspiration as well - to look up to.'* It is home because of, ' *..... all my pictures, you know photographs of family an' that. I've got a painting of my daughter's and things I achieved at outward bound'.*

Brent's space is part of a derelict looking building in Courtenay Place. One of the double doors at the street entrance has been shattered. The hall-way is littered with the debris of old machine parts, building materials and general rubbish waiting to be taken away sometime. A dingy flight of stairs takes you to the first floor. There are nine rooms similar to Brent's, which share a common kitchen and toilet. As far as I can gather, most of the other occupants are on the dole and do a variety of 'cash in hand' jobs like gardening, playing in bands or prostitution.

Apart from essential repairs, little or no work is done on the place as money is a constant problem. The rent, though, is cheap, as part of the agreement with the landlord is that he does no maintenance. The other reason, I suspect, for this part of the agreement is that it is illegal for the building to be tenanted. As Brent says, ' *..... the*

Council turns a blind eye to us living here. If we weren't here the
'street kids' would be straight in'.

Is there anything you don't like about your room? *'Yeah, one thing
with the room is it gets real dusty. Comes in from the roof. Really old
building'.* Apparently, each day there is a light covering of dust over
everything. Brent's room faces out over Courtenay Place. He's
finally got used to the traffic noise, but recently there has been a lot
of road development and the 'jack hammers' have been starting at
8.30 am and driving him mad. Another thing is that a number of
windows are cracked or badly fitting and in a 'Southerly', the rain
drives in, wetting the bed.

Brent is twenty-four years old and has been living in this room for
seven months. He has a young daughter who lives with an ex-
partner in Nelson. *' ..... an' I go and visit her every so often'.*

Brent is clearly of Maori parents and I asked him if he was
conscious of any influence from his cultural heritage. *'No, cos' when
I was adopted I was adopted into a Pakeha family and umhh, their
ways'.* Brent readily admits that although he looks Maori, he knows
nothing of the culture or language. He tells me a story of a time
when he was playing in a night club,

> *' ..... this Maori, he was in this other band he was, came up to
> me an' says, "Kia Ora bro., hongi".*

> *"Hi ya mate, Brent".*

> *That's what I thought his name was. I didn't know what the hell
> 'hongi' was. An' then he goes, "No hongi" and I goes "what?"
> an' he just jumps his nose in my face'.*

Brent feels strongly about behaving as he wants to, without the
dictates of others' cultural expectations. He notes that if he refuses
to say' Kia ora'

> *' ..... they (other Maoris) can get offended by that, you know,
> because they've said it like when Pakehas are around and, as*

if to make me one of them. I may be the same colour as them, but I'm really my own person'.

The police also regularly raid the flats looking for drugs.Brent and the others are 'night-people'. Their times of being awake and active seem slightly askew and out of synchronization with the majority of the working population. It seems that mid-day or later is the time to get up and 3.00 to 4.00 am is the time for going to bed, which is why Brent was still decidedly in bed when I arrived to interview him at 10.30 am. I sat cross-legged on the floor beside the mattress and with Brent propped up on a pillow, we started the interview.

'I was born in Motueka and adopted out at six weeks'. Brent seems to feel strongly for his adopted family, particularly Kerry, the parents' natural son. He was brought up in the suburbs, which he liked because of the closeness to his friends and school. *'As kids we didn't have far to go to school; meant our parents could work. We could look after ourselves'.*

While attending college in Nelson he *' ..... got into a band at the early age of fourteen'.* His ability and satisfaction he gets playing as a rock guitarist has clearly orientated the directions of his life.

While doing a linesman's certificate in Nelson with the Tasman Energy Board, he began to play with a band called 'Living Scandal'.

'Did really well down there and ended up touring with the 'Angels' in Nelson, Invercargill and Dunedin, and , uhmm, and then we thought we'd move to Wellington and work our way up the North Island'.

Things didn't work out though and all the band, except Brent, returned to Nelson. Brent stayed on because *' ..... I like the city'.* He got a job as a bus driver and also formed a band called the 'Gathering'. Brent quit his bus driving job eight months ago in order to concentrate on his music. *'I don't like working' I've done it for a long time and don't like it'.*

The band is now busy playing every weekend. ' ..... *an' the money's alright. It pays for the rent and food, but 'Gathering' is breaking up'.* Brent might take a place in another band that plays originals, as he is

' ..... *sick of playing 'covers'. Aim to get an album done. We should do really well as we've got some good material. I'd like to leave New Zealand and go to Australia or the States. The sort of music we play is quite 'heavy' and so, umhh, really like to go to LA for the life style. The life style of a muso'* (laughs).

Brent's life centres on his music and his construction of an identity as a musician. ' ..... *people come in here and look around an' say "he's a muso"'*.

a

' ..... the Council turns a blind eye to us living here. If we weren't here the 'street kids' would be straight in'.

b

The posters act as role models of what Brent aspires to in music.

a

'Took me ages to do this room., eh? It took me three or four days, putting things up on the wall and then I'd find something else, "Oh, where am I going to put that?". Oh. that looks good over there beside that; so I'd do that'.

b

'CD's I chucked on the wall. You can just lift them off, they're just sitting on pins. I like to show off to my friends'.

a

'I've got lots of little things that are gifts. I don't like the troll itself, but because it's a present from her (his wife) *and it's playing a guitar* (I keep it)'.

b

'Cane chair loooks good next to the blind. It'd look silly if I didn't have that painting there and just be the cane blind and so I chucked the painting just to cover the blind. Used to have a guitar either side, an' that used to look good. It's just trial and error'.

a

'These posters show I'm into music - which is where it's at. I'm also into Harley Davidsons'.

b

' ..... people come in here and look around and say, "He's a muso".

Chapter 2

MEMORIES & OBJECT ATTACHMENT

Objects charged as mnemonics for important life experiences

Introduction

Remembering

Mnemonics

Objects as Mnemonics

Conclusion

Introduction

Peoples' possessions inevitably have much to do with their past, things they cherish, and future hopes and aspirations. An important aspect of possessions emerging from my interviews with the participants, was their association with memories. This was mentioned many times and appeared to be of primary concern to the participants in their object valuation and placement. Although some objects in the living rooms had little to do with memories, for instance the television and stereo, many objects were there simply because they had strong associations with important times in the past.

We start this study thinking about memories and the importance, which it is impossible to over emphasize, of these memories. Memories are no more than a trace of our experiences, a little understood pulse across the synapses of the brain, upon which rests the whole constructed edifice of human social life. It is in this special function of being able to remember, to note consistencies and to recall them, that lies the core of our survival, our humanity and our individual identity. It is not surprising that the nature of memory is of vital concern to individual and group alike.

The importance of memory, lying at the very heart of the human social system, and its importance to the object attachment of the participants in particular, is a consistent underpinning theme of this study. As Butler emphasizes,

> Without memory, life would consist of momentary experiences that have little relation to each other. Without memory we could not communicate with one another - we would be incapable of remembering the thoughts we wished to express..... (1989:2).

The relationship of the participants' object attachments and the maintenance and retrieval of important life events is the focus of this chapter. A brief discussion of the nature of memory will set a

foundation upon which the participants' descriptions of memory and object associations, can be analysed.The object as a mnemonic and its importance to the participants, will be explored within the categories of souvenirs and momentos, gifts and photographs.

Remembering

Memory is a slippery and fragile thing, constantly open to deduction and addition. Such changes are not simply a case of 'more or less' of the original, rather, transformation is an important aspect. The focus and details of the original memory can shift and adapt, forming a new construction or emphasis of detail or emotion. Loftus draws attention to that 'Whenever a memory for an event is called to consciousness, the potential appears to be there for substitution or alteration to occur' (1980:49). The fear of loosing access to memories and our attempts to give them a stability is eloquently expressed by Nooteboom,

> What made exercising his memory so difficult was not only the fact that his apparatus was so limited ...... but also that, as he grew older, the available supports and footholds needed for a trip to the underworld of the past were beginning to disappear. That aunt Therese had exchanged her tangible flesh for the blurred shadow which from time to time roamed through a dimly lit corridor of his brain was bad enough .... (1984:21/22).

Inni, Nooteboom's hero, continues to ruminate on the loss of tangible objects that he can associate with past times, and that the objects that are lost are replaced by others which carry a further set of memories, which in turn continue to cloud the memories maintained by the originals.

Recognizing that, ' .....memory is the core of human culture and personal identity' (Butler 1989:2), strategies that provide associations to the storehouse of life's events, in particular those key periods and decisions which most clearly define one's difference and individuality, are clearly a prime concern for any society or individual. Inevitably, mankind has searched for features which key,

synecdochially, the memory system to restore the whole of those otherwise tenuous and transitory important individual life events and socially agreed values. Many of the participants' objects will be seen to work in this way by replacing vast tracts of associative memory with one key element; a clock for Steve, a vase for Kathleen and two statues for Mark are constructed to stand for a large, but particular, field of previous experience.

Butler cites Simonides of Ceos (556 - 468 BC) as the first to develop an artificial memory system, where loci are constructed, upon which images for the particular memory are placed: 'So the creation of those images would evidently relate to what we do with natural memory, when we take a slice of raw perception and transform or abstract it, inventing something absolutely new before filing it away' (1989:19/20). The importance embedded in this concept is that the personal mnemonic need not necessarily have been previously associated with the memory it is charged to maintain.

We often rely on cues when we try to remember something; a cue that might set us amidst a cluster of memories associated with the particular experience we wish to reference. Freud found that by simply encouraging people to reflect upon a particular point in their past, they could retrieve long forgotten, but important, memories. By 'free-association', people can work through tracts of their own particular memory and orientations. Such 'cues' help us check different parts of our long term memory to see if they contain the idea and its associations we are looking for. Almost anything can serve as a 'cue'. From the stream of passive sensory perceptions, attention will be given to a particular tune, smell, pattern of shapes or a grouping of colours and so on, and without organization or bidding, may flood the mind with dramatic memories of a particular event. Once the core or strong association of a particular aspect of the past is re-established, the memory, by association, can explore outward. Such triggers to the retrieval of significant memories through associative attachments are called mnemonics.

Mnemonics

I will further define a mnemonic, for the purposes of this discussion, as being a conscious construct. A random sensory stimulus may cue a specific memory recall and, although arguably mnemonic, as it works by association, it is in the first instance, only a chance occurrence. If attended to and ordained to stand in the future as an association to an event, the stimulus then becomes, in my terms, a mnemonic. The 'cue' has now become a conscious, rather than a random and chance stimulus to memory. The central feature of this definition is an expected degree of personally considered construction and inherently, the opportunity for repeatability. This places the mnemonic as a special class amongst symbols, in which the defining concept rests upon the emphasis of personal choice of symbol connotation and value, as opposed to a previously established socially agreed signifier and signified. My fear otherwise, is that the term 'mnemonic', without this concept of a personal construction and interpretation, becomes so broad that it is subsumed in the general concept of symbolism and memory and as a definition is, therefore, redundant.

Personal mnemonic constructions are singular associations, in as much as no attempt is made toward a standardization for others. Personal mnemonics are directly related to dynamic, first-hand experiences, rather than to learned, vicarious experiences. The personal mnemonic will have full significance only for the duration of those that constructed it. For others to understand the imbued meaning, the mnemonic would need to be translated through, or into, other symbolic communication forms or procedures. In contrast, group mnemonics intended as general and external cues, must reach towards a public consensus as to their nature and the loading of associations.

For the constructor, the personal mnemonic is, then, associated to particular events or experiences. The personal nature of these constructions makes the specific memory associations private and inaccessible to the outsider, in all but a most general orientation. Any sustainable source can serve as a mnemonic and, clearly, objects

have the potential to powerfully realize this function. It is the specific and personal act of constituting objects as mnemonics that I will address in the following section.

Objects as Mnemonics

Objects as mnemonics are a complex business inter-twined, as they are, with edited past experiences, current constructions and orientations towards future aspirations. The ethnographic documentation of this study points up that although any object can be constituted as a mnemonic, certain, but inevitably inter-related, categories can be identified. There are some objects that appear to be designated an association with past experiences through the most tenuous of connections or even none at all, other than the mnemonic construction itself. Anne for instance refers to a teddy bear on her mantelpiece (Photo P.24 b) commenting,

'I had an old boyfriend and we used to have this thing about bears ..... together. We used to talk as mother bear and father bear; and he was like a panda bear, soft, lovely person.I like this thing here. (refering to the glass object to the right of the toy bear) *I don't know what it's for, it feels kind of Catholic in its way. Reminds me of something that is put on top of the thing for communion. It could almost be a cross'.*

Whereas, by contrast to these very specific relationships Alan states quite categorically, *'All objects have memories - all interwoven with one's life'.* He believes 'things' have all got a history, both contemporary and ancient and, *' ..... as each item tells a story; if you can own that story you are that much richer'.* The many objects in Alan's living room (Photos 54 b) serve both specific and general memories. Specifically, the objects maintain the memories of Alan's actual process of collection, of the transactions of exchange, giving and purchasing. More globally, but significant, is Alan's view that objects reach back and outward in time and space through a history of inter-connections of experiences. This view of objects sheds some understanding upon the type of objects collected and valued by

Alan. Their importance arises from their richness in historical attendance or in promotion of new experiences - ancient pots, prints and skulls are equally valued.

The participants' object mnemonics can be identified within more specific categories of souvenirs and momentos (those objects that were in some way present at the time of the participant's original experience), photographs and gifts. Photographs are the only specific objects that all the participants possessed and for many, they were their most important mnemonic object. It is though, the content of the photograph, which is as non-specific as any other mnemonic, that is the important aspect to the participants. Gifts as a category are equally non-specific. The point to be emphasized here is that any object can be constituted as a mnemonic by the participants, but these random objects can be seen to fall within the major classifications outlined.

There is an admixture of more or less all categories, souvenirs, gifts and photographs, in the participants' living room object attachments. The logical conclusion would appear to be that there is no more or less appropriate object (in the case of the photograph, 'content') in relation to mnemonic construction and that the importance lies in the value of the association, rather than in any intrinsic worth of the object. Both Alan and Michael comment on the relationship between monetary value and objects. Michael argues that objects holding strong personal memories transcend monetary value, and that the consideration of monetary value denies the object its full realization as a personal mnemonic. Michael, talking of a rich acquaintance's focus upon the financial value of objects, comments that

'..... you wouldn't appreciate it any more, or perhaps not appreciate it at all. People with a lot of money only think of money ..... looks at an object and said, "I wouldn't consider it a good investment". I never thought of it that way'.

Steve too, comments that the cost of any object is not important to him as '..... I value objects by their associations'.

Alan discussing the difference between being a collector and a dealer, makes a very similar point. Alan says he is not interested in objects in financial terms, but for the dealer, ' ..... *every object has $ signs. He can end up rich in a monetary sense, but poor in another sense'.* Alan argues that the dealer can lose the sense of owning something beautiful, in an emphasizing of financial considerations.

Souvenirs and Momentos as Mnemonic Objects

Objects that were implicated, even tenuously, at the time of the participant's initial experience, can achieve immense importance. 'In these cases the sacrilizing mechanism is contagin from the proximity of the object to a special time, place, event, or person in our lives' (Belk 1992:40). Mark's statues, Alan's skulls and other objects from his travels, and Anne's collection of shells and stones fall into the category of souvenirs and momentos.

One of the pleasures of Kathleen's life is to have quiet time in her living room amongst her possessions that enable her to reach back to memories of home. Virtually all these objects she brought with her from Cyprus or has acquired as gifts from there over her years in New Zealand. Kathleen is very conscious of her use of objects to protect her past. She says quite clearly that, ' ..... *there is even a stronger bond with back home than even if you remain there ..... You don't want to forget and let go'.* Fighting not to let go, Kathleen not only displays objects from, or related to Cyprus, but organizes their settings on lace doylees spread on tables and shelves in the traditional manner. Kathleen, as a little girl, remembers her mother and the neighbours arranging objects in the house. When she first put objects in her cabinet in New Zealand, it ' *.....did not feel right. So I gave myself time until I crocheted the lace. To somebody else, it might look nothing, but to me, though, it reminds me of what mum used to do and of home'.* (Photo P67 a)

For Kathleen, mnemonic objects sustain her important memories through the passing of time and distance from her homeland. Memories with no ongoing cues for association are hard to maintain. It is as though dissatisfied with her present environment, Kathleen

displaces her hopes and ideals to another time and place, through objects that once existed there. She therefore treasures her souvenirs and momentos as mnemonic objects that have the capacity to trigger reflections of these times. Virtually all Kathleen's object attachments are decorative, or used in a decorative manner, rather than for a functional purpose. Plates, glasses, vases and so on, are ensconced in glass cabinets or displayed on tables and shelves.

By contrast, although falling into this chapter's classification of mnemonics, nearly all of Steve's valued living room possessions were functional and yet, it is their mnemonic, rather than the utilitarian potential, that is most valued. Steve explains that

> ' .....things are favourite in a sense of associations being tied up with the objects. For instance, the clock. I can remember going to my Grandmother's. For years that clock used to be on her mantlepiece and my mother would say it always chimed when she came home late as a teenager and still it chimes and is still going. I can remember that clock for forty five years - the association with my Grandmother'. (Photo P88 b)

Even the apparently most trivial object acts as an important personal mnemonic. 'The box holding up the radio ..... That was John Middleditch, who was a painter and an artist who sent something to my sister in the mid 50's and has my sister's name and address on the bottom, care of Mum and Dad. Quite a bit of borer in it'. (Photo P87 b)

He continues with an inventory of objects and their memories,

> 'I inherited the fridge from my previous house. Actually sitting on solid Kauri. The Kauri came from the Wellington City Engineer's building, under their map desks. ..... Most of the boxes under the microwave came from my Grandad's house. The boxes are an association with my Grandfather. From a place where he did all his carpentry. (Photo P88 a) ..... The lantern is Grandad's. Sat in Mum and Dad's house for thirty years. ...... The old door you

see here with the picture of sheep, a picture I did, came out of a service station in Masterton fifteen years ago when they had a clearing sale. I paid $5.00 for it and it's the office door and they still have the original phone numbers of Masterton, four digit numbers and I've polyurethened over the whole lot'.
(Photo P85 b)

All the objects with which Steve constructs his space, resonate of his previous experiences. His memories are personal, and without interpretation, are accessible only to him. No amount of looking would ever reveal the reason or specific values placed upon his object attachments.

Similarly inscrutable is Mark and his wife Bee's prized possession, a pair of statues which Mark brought back from war time Germany. The statues are nick-named the 'greyhounds' because when Mark smuggled them out of Germany in a large wooden box, he told every one they were greyhounds in the hope that they would leave them alone on the ship coming back. These statues, which he enjoys as art objects, were also purchased specifically as souvenirs and momentos of his memories of the war.

'I have a lot of photographs, but they're not much good, they are away in an album. I wanted something that I could look at and say, "That's what I came home with" ..... I'd hate anything to happen to them, they've been sitting there for forty seven years .....' (Mark). (Photo P76 b)

Mark's next most important possession is a photograph. As he describes it, '*One big one* (favourite possession) - *that's my horse above them* (the statues). *That's Highland King winning his first race in Hawkes Bay. A magnificent horse'*. Mark has many other pictures of race horses he has owned, but has a special affection for Highland King. The photograph carries many more associations than the particular scene depicted. (Photo P76 a) The commissioning of the printing and framing was done at the race immediately after Highland King had won his race. In this case, the photograph as an object is also tied to the experience. The associations are so strong, Mark

does not refer to the photograph, but rather, *'My horse .....'*, when indicating the photograph.

The two participant couples who placed little emphasis upon objects as mnemonics were Cliff and Sally and Vanessa and Derrick. Neither was particularly concerned with maintaining current memories or accessing those of the past. From my observations, both couples were orientated toward outward communication of their current social status and looking toward the future. Derrick and Vanessa, in particular, exemplify an intensive drive and dynamic to the future; the past has little significance. They have a forward-looking and planning orientation to their lives.

> *'In business, if you develop for now, the world as today, you miss out on tomorrow. You have to develop for five years time. Think of the future and plan for then!'* (Derrick).

Derrick and Vanessa's living rooms reflected this lack of personal mnemonic construction through objects (Photo P43 b & P46 a) Both couples' rooms were comparitively stark with few examples of any souvenirs or momentos from previous experiences, functional objects such as furniture and entertainment systems dominated. Such objects, I will argue later, have more to do with self-conscious strategies of social positioning than maintaining access to memories. An emphasis upon functional, status objects well fits the attitudes expressed in their interviews

Both couples found it extremely difficult to identify objects that were so important to them that they would try and rescue them in the case of a fire. Clearly, a significant aspect of object importance is removed if the object is not valued as a personal mnemonic. Even the objects they did finally identify, were not addressed with any passion or significance. Derrick clearly sums up his relationship with objects in stating, *'There's not a lot that I really, of items that I would cherish. I'd like a really good mountain bike at the moment. I quite like my car'.*

Inherent in the very nature of collecting momentos at the time of experiences, is an anticipation that these objects will help sustain their memories. There is an implication that in wishing to sustain a memory of an experience, the experience is, in some way, valued. All the participants maintained some momentos as mnemonic objects, but the variation between the couples Derrick and Vanessa and Sally and Cliff, in comparison to Mark and Bee and Kathleen and Michael is clear. For reasons that will be developed in future discussions, the valuing of mnemonic object attachments is directly related to the significance and importance deemed to the reflection upon <u>past</u> experiences.

Gifts as Mnemonic Objects

Another vital and deeply meaningful group of mnemonic object attachments is that of the gift. They register constructed associations of the receiver, but also by the very nature of being a gift, maintain an expression of a relationship between people. They help us remember loved ones and serve as a symbol for others to see, of that person's affection for us. As Kathleen comments,

> ' ..... it's the love that's given behind it (a gift). *The person gives them, gives them because they want to give them and that's what makes them valuable to me. It is the thought behind it. It's the love.'*

Brent has a plastic troll, (Photo P96 a) which he admits he doesn't really like, but keeps because it is a gift from a girl-friend. Brent comments, *'I don't like the troll itself, but* (I keep it) *because it's a present from her and it's playing a guitar'*. In the dilemma between 'taste' and the power of a gift's associations, the gift wins. Close to the troll is a painting given to him by his young daughter in Nelson. In the cupboard beside Brent's desk is an empty magnum of champagne, from his 21st. birthday. The whole area around his desk implicates the constructions and relationships with other people.

Anne keeps a poster, (Photo P21 b) that although satisfying aesthetically, is more important because

> ' ..... it's significant that I bought it in Sydney once for a boyfriend at the time ..... it satisfies all the graphic qualities of photography. It's very symbolic. So I can live with it for a long time ..... he gave it back to me afterwards. Which was a nice gesture at the time, so ..... it's kind of a, eh umh ..... partly a gift returning. '

The gift of a plate (Photo P23 b) from her younger sister is also of considerable importance.

> 'The little tray behind is a gift from my younger sister , which is something I've always liked. Very 'moony' and full of love ..... umh ...... In our family we're not gift givers; we don't buy each other birthday presents, we don't send cards at Christmas. That was one of the rare occasions ..... she sent that to me. ..... I wouldn't normally think of going and buying such a thing, but it's got such a sense of love about it .....' (Anne).

Similarly, though more extensively, Mark and Bee's living room, apart from war time souvenirs and the photograph of his winning race horse, is almost completely structured with gifts from family and friends, many from the occassion of their golden wedding anniversary.

Gifts are, then, assigned a double intensity of significance. The importance of the gift as a personal mnemonic builds upon many factors such as the importance of the relationship, the distance through time and space of the relationships involved, as well as aspects of individual vulnerability. Such objects cannot be treated as functional commodities exchangeable for money. To destroy a gift is to destroy evidence of a relationship. As Kathleen says, 'I couldn't bear to throw away any of the children's gifts'. Belk (1992) notes that gifts are purposefully removed from their monetary associations. Indications of cost are removed and mystery is imbued in their wrapping and a ritual process is engaged in the giving. As

monetary value of the 'thing' itself. ' ..... *I can't think of any gift I really want'* (Derrick).

A gift is a complex object, drawing upon many aspects of an individual's sociological and psychological make-up. The importance in this study is to note that the gift as a mnemonic object reminds the participants of their relationships with others and how those others see them. 'Gifts are one of the ways in which the pictures that others have of us in their minds are transmitted' (Schwartz 1967:1).

Any gifted object, it would appear, can become invaluable to the participant. The financial consideration of the gift is, for most of the participants, a secondary concern, rather, it is the importance of the associations of both experience and relationship that makes the gift of value.

The most popular class of mnemonics identified by the participants is the photograph. Photographs appear to be one of the few mnemonic objects common to all the participants. The following discussion explores the logic behind their popularity and the complexity underlying their apparent directness of communication.

Photographs as a Mnemonic Objects

In nearly every participant's living room, photographs were prominently displayed. When Kathleen and Michael were asked to name their most important objects they responded, *'The kids' photographs are the first thing. If I had to save something, that's what I would try and save'* (Kathleen).

' ..... *other things you can replace them, but if you lost your kids' photographs, well that's it .....'* (Michael).

Mark and Bee have large areas of their walls devoted to maintaining a presence of their family. (Photos P75 a & b) Even those participants who had little use for other objects as mnemonics, mentioned their photographs as important and had framed images of family, friends and activities on display. Although not a part of their living room, Vanessa draws my attention to

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' .... the photo wall upstairs. Every time I walk past it, I get quite nostalgic and it takes me back to my memories and it really is my 'memory lane' along there. I do treasure them'.

I would argue that all photographs work predominantly at the level of personal mnemonics. With their mass of accurately recorded surface detail, photographs serve as powerful triggers to memory. The associations of image are so strong, the object is no longer seen for what it is, that of photographic paper carrying an arrangement of black silver halides. In discussing photographic imagery with my students, I use a scalpel and make incisions into a piece of blank photographic paper. I am watched with anticipation of what might come out of this action. I then pick up a second piece of photographic paper on which is a portrait. I continue to make incisions, this time to the eyes and mouth of the portrait. The student reaction is always one of horror and revulsion. It is a good starting point for debate. (I don't actually find it easy to do myself!) The fact is, to be understood, photographs demand a construction of past events, ideas and emotions. It is into these personally constructed associations that my scalpel cuts.

The apparent communication potential of a photograph is deceptive. The accuracy of the recording of recognizable surface facts intimates a potential for understanding. The problem is, though, that facts are only that and a meaning must be given by the viewer. Simply stated, the problem of photography is that it presents facts without meanings. The facts are all but unquestionable. The single photographic image is an isolated moment in time, with no past and

no future. The statement of the moment is unambiguous, but, 'Facts, information, do not in themselves, constitute meaning' (Berger 1982:89).

The realistic representations of the photographic image denote objects that can be described in an unambiguous way. These objects may individually or by juxtaposition, connotate emotional or descriptive meaning for the viewer. The connotations of an image, though, arise at the intersection of what construction the viewer brings and the construction of the photographer. Berger argues, photographs do not have a language of their own, rather they quote from reality. 'A photograph quotes from appearances but, in quoting, simplifies them. This simplification can increase their legibility. Everything depends upon the quality of the quotation chosen' (Berger 1982:119) (My underlining). If photographic images are treated as signs, it must be recognized that signs are understood from socially accepted conventions. To be considered a language, a sign must be articulated within a system of signs. Similarly, photographic meaning is to do with contextualization of the image. As signs are arbitrary and relational, photographic images, do not simply 'tell' in a clear, unequivocal way.

This argument re-affirms that, 'All photographs, even simple ones, demand interpretation to be fully understood and appreciated' (Barrett 1990:33). Photographs, although appearing seductively like memories, are significantly different. From the image alone, we know nothing except what we can bring to bear upon it. Only through our association and our constructions, can these richly factual statements have a meaning. In other words photographs are no less symbolic or inscrutable than any of the other personal mnemonic attachments of the participants.

> Andy Grundberg, reviewing an exhibition of National Geographic photographs makes this point about the kind of photographs: "As a result of their naturalism and apparent effortlessness, they have the capacity to lull us into believing that they are evidence of an impartial, uninflected sort. Nothing could be further from the truth" (Barrett 1990:33).

It must be realized that the reproducability of the photograph is only of the vehicle for the image. What is unique and non-interchangeable is the image content. The photograph, identified by the participants as their most important object mnemonic, is deceptive. The photograph although, appearing to communicate through an accessible language, is unique in its precise moment of content recording and as inscrutable and personal in its constructions towards particular associations as a pebble collected from the beach. The photograph, in demanding personal constructions from past experiences, functions in the class of personal mnemonics.

Conclusion

The emphasis of this chapter, as stated at the outset, is upon the personal mnemonic object in relation to understanding the participants' object attachments. Many cherished possessions which seem to have little aesthetic, monetary or functional value are displayed in the participants' living rooms, simply because they have been constituted as a mnemonic. It is important to recognize the distinction, within the general class of symbols, between those objects that become constituted as personal mnemonics and those designated as public symbols in recognizing and understanding the participants' specific relation to their personal mnemonic objects and the generality of symbols intended for public associations.

Recognition of a known shape and therefore also access to the learnt constructions associated with it, can endure considerable change and still provide recognizable visual clues. This is a particularly important aspect of the mind's adaptability and provides a vital process for symbolic inter communication. Imagine if only exact matches of symbols could be used to communicate. All words would have to be the same type face, point size, weight. Clearly, communication with these restrictions would be almost impossible. As it is, we have no problem in recognizing a specific animal from the following symbols; CAT, **Cat**, *cat*, Cat, and CAt.

Similarly, a cross may stand for many, to communicate Christianity. As a symbol, it may be found as a bejewelled ornate working in precious metals, two simple sticks lashed together or two crudely painted brush strokes on a wall. The size, colour and proportions may all change, but the object will still be accepted as revisiting associated memories of the emotional overlays of Christian religion. The strength of a public symbol lies in its non-specifity, rather than its belonging to a generally recognizable class or group.

By comparison, a personal mnemonic is designed to encapsulate a particular set of memories, and depends for its function upon its uniqueness. The memories enshrined in a personal mnemonic are non-transferrable. Michael, refering to objects that hold memories of Cyprus, comments, '..... *certain things in anyone's life, there are certain things you cannot replace'*.

Recognizing these two divisions within signs and symbols, helps us in our understanding of the participants' attitudes towards their heirarchies of object possession. The personal mnemonic, and object mnemonics in particular, operate through an attention that will allow for no substitutions. It is the specifity of a wedding ring - a worn edge, a scratch, an inscription, its weight - which would render change immediately recognizable. Any substitution is not the object of past attentions and cannot, then, truly trigger the associated memories attached to the original. Witness the devastation through the loss of such a mnemonic or the complex and confusing emotions that arise if a substitution in the form of a forgery or a case of mistaken identity, is discovered.

Objects that serve as public symbols are generally replaceable and as such, do not warrant the same priority as a personal mnemonic, which is irreplaceable. This does not mean, though, that a public symbol cannot also be constituted as a personal mnemonic, by an individual. This is clearly the case of a wedding ring, which will inevitably serve both functions. Mnemonic objects, as with other symbols, are multi-vocal. Their particular mnemonic association, as attributed by one person does not, though, limit the particularity of their construction for others. An infinite variety of definitions would be

expected between at one extreme, the specific, internal and self constructed personal mnemonic to the other extreme, of general, external and learnt public symbol.

In the struggle to maintain memories by charging objects with recall and therefore, essentially their safekeeping, the relationship between the owner and object changes. The personal mnemonic object becomes as priceless and unique as the memory to which it holds the key. There arises a levelling through 'pricelessness', whatever the original monetary value of the object. Driftwood, shells, a cheap teddy bear and so forth, assume parity with gold wedding rings and antique clocks. In fact, monetarily valueless mnemonics displace goods such as expensive stereos and TV's in the heirarchy of personal possessions. No other wedding ring will do, but any television set will provide for the desired functional response. Similarly, a gift cannot be replaced by another similar object, as it would no longer be the carrier of the sentiments expressed by the original object. The mnemonic value does not lie in an object's utilitarian functionality but rather, in the attribution of meaning by the participant. Witness the removal of plates and cups to wall mountings or glass display cabinets, which not only protects the physical aspect of the objects, but also deny their original functionality. Their meaning now depends upon the constructs which are brought to them.

By rendering functional objects non-functional and disdaining to attribute any monetary value to them, the participant has established the object as an unchanging vehicle for memory. The object has become irreplaceable and, unless the memory is to be rejected or accessed in another way, is as much a part of the participant as the thoughts it perpetuates. A very special relationship is formed. The object, in reflecting important selected experiences, reminds the participants of who they are, and their differences and associations with others. Object mnemonics, by perpetuating particularly chosen experiences and values of the past in the present, also provide a sense of continuity.

This chapter has one clear and simple point to make - that an important aspect of object attachment, for most of the participants, is their deployment as personal mnemonics in maintaining important life events, for recall and reflection. The mnemonics are set out to establish and maintain an experience, described by Turner as,' ..... formative and transformative, that is, distinguishable, isolable sequences of external events and internal responses to them' (1985:35).

Objects maintained as personal mnemonics are the keepers of highly selected and important life-time events. Although they remain inscrutable to the outsider, they are vital for the participant in the process of self-recognition. As a group, mnemonic objects are generally the best of a person's reflections about themselves. The personal mnemonic, then, orientates some of the participants to their most cherished possessions. It is in these object attachments that they can sustain the most personal and 'advantageous' sense of self.

What better place than the living room to display and protect such mnemonics? The participants saw their living rooms as places they controlled and as spaces in which to spend times of leisure. Mnemonics sited in these rooms are, then, both safe and appropriately available to serve their function in providing access to important experiences. The direct relationship between object and memories of experience, helps in understanding many aspects of the participants' attachment to their possessions and the construction of their living room spaces through them.

Memories, I began by arguing, are the underpinning source of humanity and the maintenance and transmission of culture. Memories, arising as they inevitably must do, from experience, are both limited by society and yet, concurrently are the basis for the construction of society. The maintenance of memories of selected important life experiences, through the construction of objects as mnemonics, provides the foundation for the investigation into the concept of self-recognition in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

SELF & OBJECT ATTACHMENT

Objects implicated in the process of self-recognition.

Introduction

Content & Boundaries

Photographic Comparisons

Conclusion

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the important relationship between the construction of personal mnemonics and object attachments. The value of the participants' object attachments, it was argued, lay in the memories of the experiences they perpetuated. It was also emphasized that the meanings of personal mnemonic objects remained inscrutable and relied upon the participants' verbal disclosure for our understanding. As mnemonics they had been consciously constructed, their individual meanings attributed and only fully understood by the participants.

This chapter, like the last, is concerned with memories of experience, but rather than focusing upon the storage and retrieval of those memories, the emphasis is now upon the role played by groups of object attachments in revealing individual consistencies of memories of experience. It will be argued that the development of an awareness of self is arrived at, retrospectively, out of witnessing these consistent patterns, revealed and maintained in the concrete expressions of our experiences. Dilthey made a similar point when he wrote, 'Thus we learn to comprehend the mind-constructed world as a system of interactions or as an inter-relationship contained in its enduring creations' (1976:196).

Content & Boundaries

In becoming attached to objects the participants, consciously or unconsciously, inevitably and unavoidably, map out their orientation towards their existence.

> In someway, and somehow, the unit in question sees itself, and is seen by others, as being different to other units. This would seem to involve an 'inside' and a boundary to the outside ..... (Rapoport 1981:10).

Two steps are involved in establishing this difference. The first is an attachment to objects, which forms an 'inside', the distinctive coherence of which implies a contrasting set to others. The Shorter

Oxford English dictionary defines coherence as, 'Logical connexion. Harmonious connection of several parts of a discourse, system, etc ..... so that the whole thing hangs together' (1972:338). Collins Cobuild English Language dictionary further defines 'coherence' as, 'The quality that something has when it makes sense or is pleasing because all the parts or steps fit together well and logically' (1987:264).

The important point of these definitions, in relation to the argument I wish to develop, is the emphasis upon a particular sense of unity. Objects in isolation are diseparate, but the participants appear to consistently work toward establishing personally coherent and satisfying combinations of objects, that consciously or unconsciously, have some sense of unification for themselves. Each object grouping is in someway personal and unique and yet each is also a product of particular social influences of time and place upon the participant.

As we will see, the balance between clear and strong social determinism and individual eclecticism varies between the participants and yet a combination of the two is inescapable. The object attachments of the participants are immutable marks of identification, in much the same way as whorls of their finger prints bear a general similarity of design, but in detail are quite unique. An examination of the participants' object attachments appears to indicate that these personally coherent groupings of objects do not arise from any one factor, but rather the sum of all factors that contribute to the entity of the individual. From the ethnographic information, three major factors were apparent. Firstly, objective factors such as the objects people owned, the money they possessed, where they lived and so on, clearly varied with each participant. Secondly, the participants appeared to indicate varying degrees of self-determination, ranging from Kathleen's apparent unwitting acceptance of her life-style and object associations, to Derrick or Brent's, self-conscious, aspirational strategies. Finally, all participants inevitably operate within the logic of their socializing conditions. I propose that criteria for individual coherence arises within vectors of objective conditions, social orientation and

individual determination. The concrete expression of this coherence is, ultimately, at the root of a sense of self.

From the interview comments, it appears unlikely that the participants consciously set about forming groups of objects in order to recognize themselves. More likely,

> Each normal individual ..... makes a self. Out of its brain it spins a web of words and deeds, and, like the other creatures it doesn't know what it is doing; it just does it. This web of discourses ...... is as much a biological product as any other to be found in the animal kingdom (Dennett 1991:416).

Whatever the motivations underpinning the participants' development of coherent groupings of object attachments, the outcome provides a concrete statement. These 'statements' make visable the differences, from the similarities with others, to themselves. 'As Aristotle said, it is because bodies have colour that we observe that some are a different colour from others; different things differentiate themselves through what they have in common' (Bourdieu 1979:258).

Commonalities of the factors such as race, age, sex, social background, religion, education and so on, that impinge upon the vectors that describe coherence, could be argued to establish object groupings in which personal boundaries are blurred, revealing unity with others. On the other hand, contrasts of such factors are likely to develop differing contents, by way of object attachments as expressions of these differences, producing clear boundaries which emphasise difference and therefore separation. Whatever extreme, or level of admixture between separation and individualism and commonalities and social unity, the participant is faced with a recognition of self in the mirrors of others. That is the recognition of '..... differential positions, ie., by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference' (Bourdieu 1979:172).

This chapter set out to emphasise the important role of objects in making differences visible, in order that they may then be comprehended. Without this comprehension, individuality, that important quality of 'self', could also not be comprehended.

As was commented on in the previous chapter, in relation to the construction of objects as mnemonics, it is likely that there is a strong editing process operating in the selection and maintenance of both objects and snapshots of objects. Belk (1992) suggests we organize to represent only the best experiences. As Kosinski points out,

> What we remember lacks the hard edge of fact. To help us along we create little fictions, highly subtle and individual scenarios which clarify and shape our experiences (cited by Jong 1974:100)

Such an editing process leads to a particularly favoured construct of our lives, rather than simply a preserving and showing random experiences. 'Every telling is an arbitary imposition of meaning on the flow of memory, in that we highlight some causes and discount others; that is every telling is interpretive' (Bruner 1986:7). This editing process underpins and points up individual representations through object attachment. In this way, groups of objects begin to reveal underlying consistencies in the orientation to experiences, reflecting not only objective conditions but also what is thought of as 'best' or most favoured by the participant. The personally coherent object groupings of the participants, then, become symbolic representations of all that contributes to the make-up of that individual. The more or less clear distinctions between one symbolic representation and the other delineate boundaries of criteria for coherence at their interface.

The importance of boundaries, or some form of division, cannot be over emphasised. Constructive awareness divides the world up.' ..... the birth of reason was also the birth of boundaries, the boundary between 'me' and the 'rest of the world', ... (Dennett 1991:414). In a sophisticated way, memory provides the recognition of consistencies within division, by which both subject and object are

constructed in a close dialectic relationship. A seamless continuity of an undivided, unnamed universe would be the void of the Biblical sense. The recognition of consistencies to perceive existence is fundamental to this study. The clarity, vigilance and process by which consistencies of personally coherent groupings are arrived at and maintained will be seen to vary with the participants and their socializing orientation.

The emphasis of this chapter is that the participants, through their object attachments, establish a particular coherence, which, in most cases, signals clearly identifiable boundaries between themselves and others. Even a most casual glance through the photographic essays, shows the participants unique construction of space in the selection and contextualization of their objects. The photographs demonstrate, more or less, clear distinctions between each participant. It is through these distinctions that, I believe, the participants come to 'name' themselves and be 'named' by others. As Hamilton-Paterson in discussing the importance of naming, to the concept of the existence of diminutive atolls in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, argues the vital importance of

..... how much the physical world belongs to its taxonomy, description and name to the Western nations. It is also a reminder that in a sense things do not exist until they are named. Before that everything partakes of a state of undifferentiated chaos which is never a neutral matter to human beings but carrys a degree of menace. ..... It could be argued that the Old Testament story of Genesis was less a matter of creation than of naming, ... (1992:33).

The following pages provide a visual comparison of certain aspects of the participants' object groupings. There are four sections; their living rooms, walls, shelves and the participants themselves.

Photographic Comparisons

Living rooms

Walls

Shelves

Participants

Living Rooms

Kathleen
& Michael

a

Brent

b
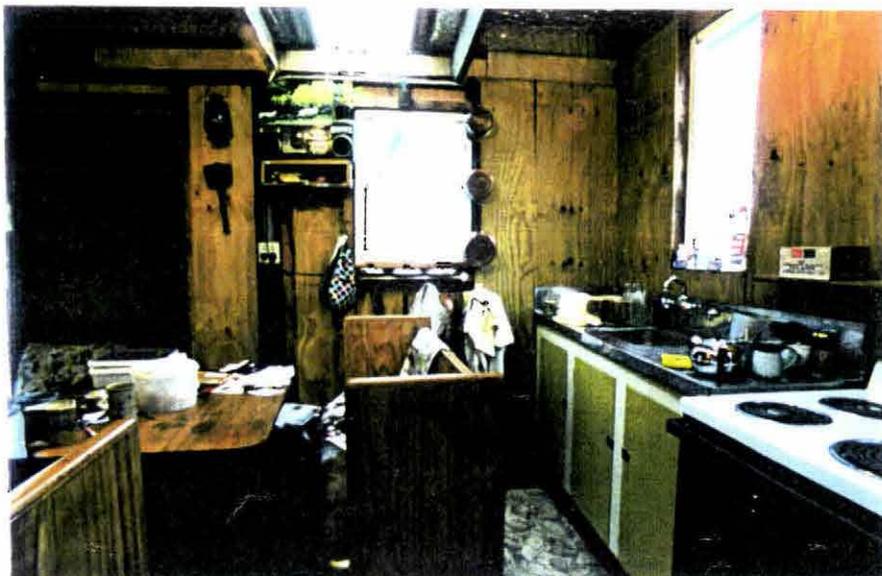
Steve

c

Living Rooms

Mark

a

Anne

b

Sally
& Cliff
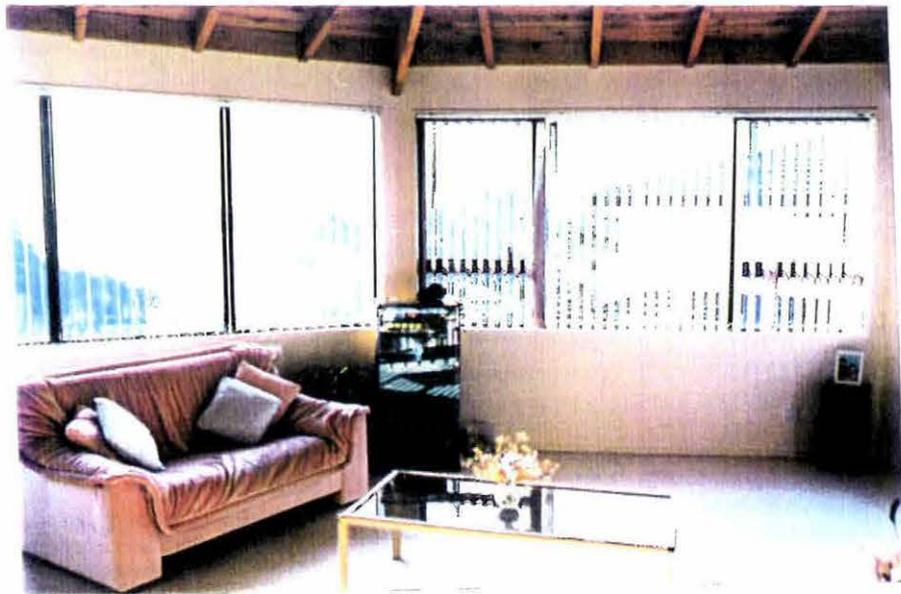
c

Living Rooms

Alan

a
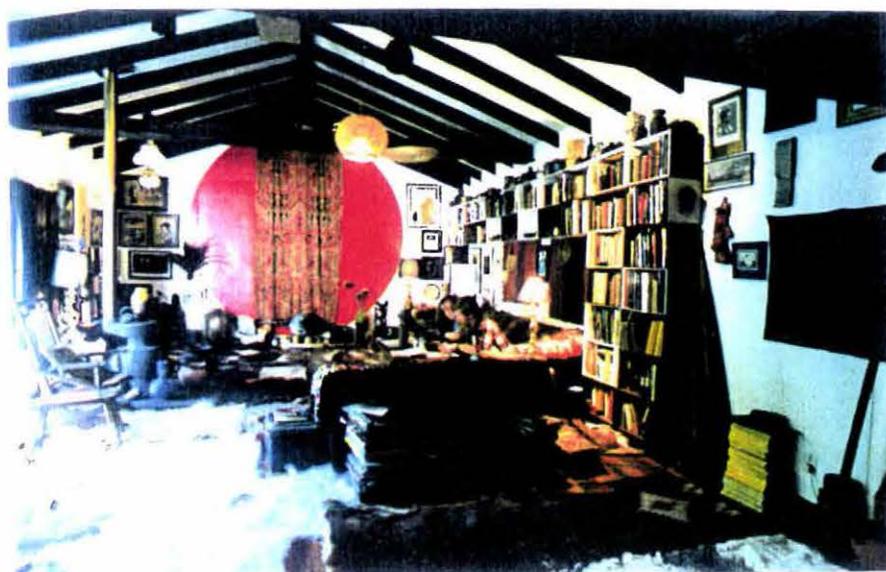
Derrick
& Vanessa

(formal)
b

Derrick
& Vanessa

(informal)
c

Walls

Kathleen
& Michael

a

Brent

b

Steve

c

Walls

Mark

a

Anne

b

Sally
& Cliff

c

Walls

Alan

a

Derrick
& Vanessa

(formal)
b

Derrick
& Vanessa

(informal)
c

Shelves

Kathleen
& Michael

a

Brent

b

Steve

c

Shelves

Mark

a

Anne

b


Sally
& Cliff
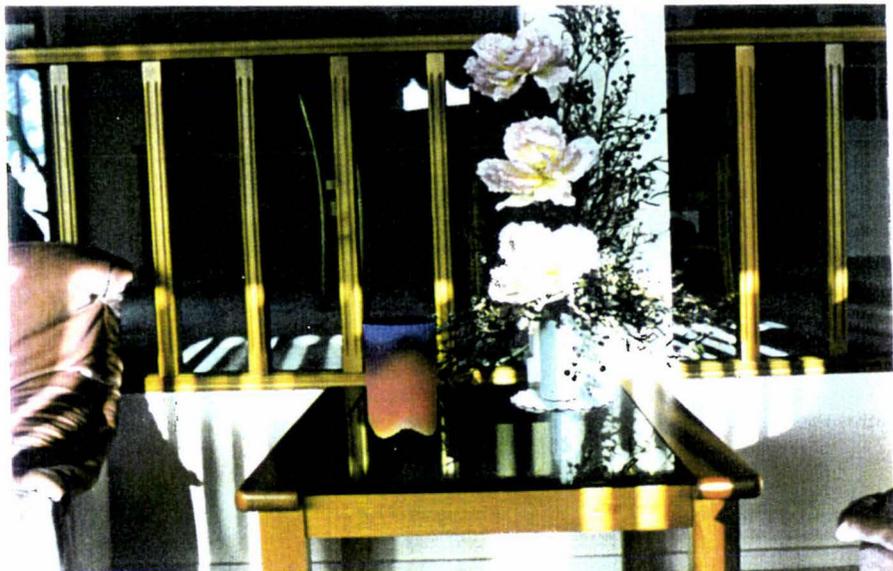
c

Shelves

Alan

a
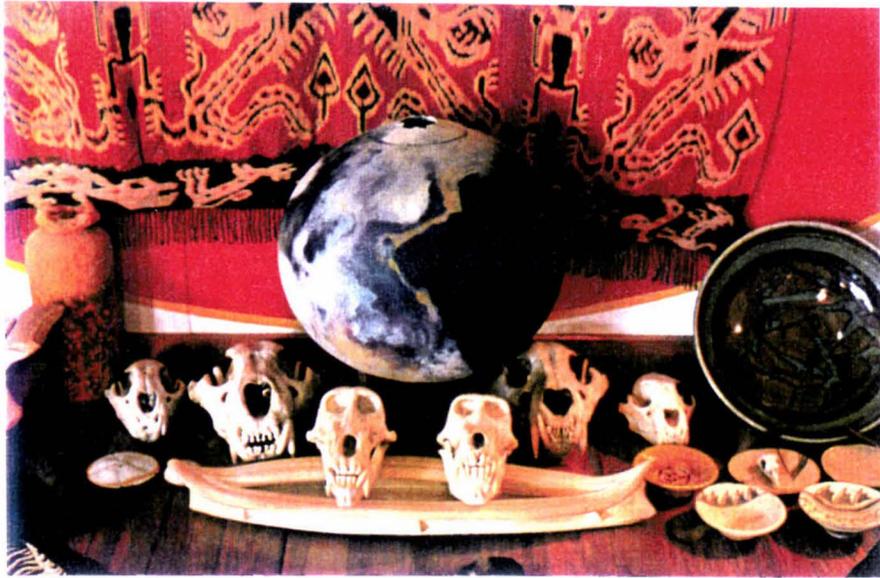
Derrick
& Vanessa

(formal)
b

Derrick
& Vanessa

(informal)
c

Participants

Kathleen
& Michael

a

Brent
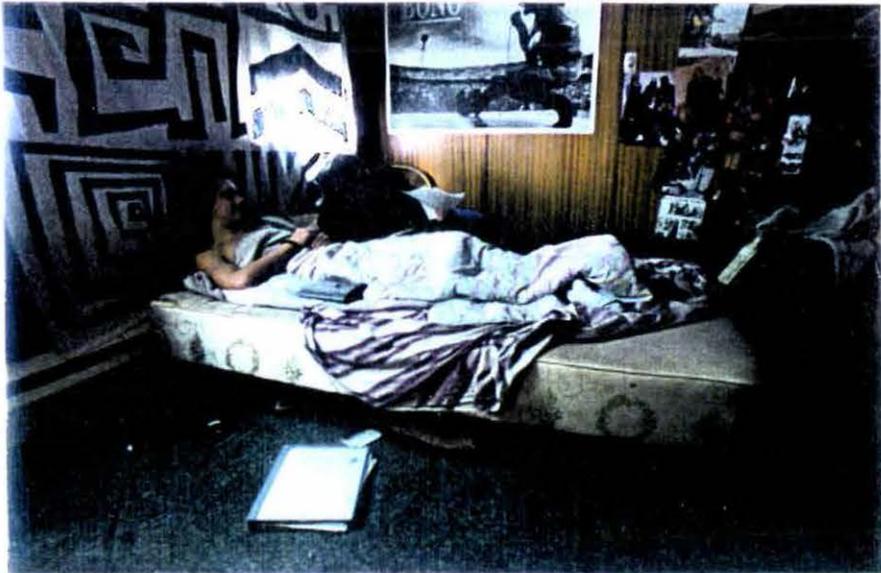
b

Steve

c

Participants

Mark

a

Anne

b

**Sally
& Cliff**

c

Participants

Alan

a

Derrick
& Vanessa

b

Conclusion

Through all the clearly varying object groupings visible in the photographic comparisons, one clear commonality dominated each participant's conscious organization; the desire to establish a 'home'. Within the parameters of this discussion of the participants' living rooms and their object attachments, each participant appears to reach beyond mere physical separation to a more personal definition of space. It would appear that walls alone are not boundary enough. Many of the participants spoke with pride at their work in constructing a home. Rapoport emphasises this attitude stating ' ..... an essential aspect of positive feelings about oneself is the feedback from the environment which responds to an active effort from the individual' (1981:22).

The term 'house', was somehow seen to connotate with a failure to establish a home. Objects that were deemed personally important were singled out as the most significant element in the transformation of a house into a home. The non-objective attributes that defined a home for all the participants was the potential for control. Anne comments that an important aspect about a 'home' is ' ..... (the) *sense of being able to please myself. I can come in and do what I like - manipulate the space according to how I feel at the time'.* This view is echoed almost identically by Rapoport as he observes ' ..... much of the expression of identity is achieved through manipulating semi-fixed elements' (1981:21). Anne is also conscious that others 'read' her expressions and of how she wishes them to communicate a sense of a strongly visual person and that of being a photographer in particular.

A brief extract from the transcription of my interview with Kathleen and Michael continues to emphasise this vital aspect of the definition of a home for the participants.

'I've been to some homes, Open Homes and I've walked into quite a few and you think they are straight from a magazine. To me that is not my cup of tea. They might be perfect, with the colour scheme and the radio arranged ..... but the soul is not there' (Kathleen).

You've got to put your own touch. You might get the best designers and decorators and so on to do your own home and put it there and put it here. But, err ..... person should do it their way and then they will get a lot of pleasure by creating something .....' (Michael).

'It is the objects, our own personal things ..... those are the things that will change a room from impersonal to something special' (Kathleen).

Without your own personal possessions or your own ideas Michael comments, *'It's not a home, it's a house'.*

'It's like living in a hotel, you make do, but ..... '(Kathleen).

'You get to feel comfortable with your own touch, with personal things. It doesn't matter how expensive' (Michael).

The single, high-ceilinged room, is definitely 'home' for Brent.(Photo P 125 b)

'I love it. It's really good. Quite separate. I can lock myself off and come in here and 'jam' out and make a noise. Don't mind people coming, but there are times when I want time to myself. ..... cleared everything out to make it my own. Stuck some photos on the walls. It's a bit of an inspiration as well - to look up to.' It is home because of, *' ..... all my pictures, you know photographs of family an' that. I've got a painting of my daughter's and things I achieved at outward bound'.*

Each participant, in some way, echoed these expressions of the importance of control that a home provided. The 'home', as was anticipated at the outset of the study, in the opinion of these participants, clearly provides a socially and personally acceptable setting within which to establish an individual coherent space, where a, ' ..... home is then not only a material shelter but also a shelter for those things that make life meaningful' (Csikszentmihalyi 1981:139).

The material collection that establishes a home can be argued to give 'shape' to the 'self' of the participant. As Csikszentmihalyi puts it, 'There are no people in the abstract, people are what they attend to, what they cherish and use' (1981:16). Collier & Collier continue asserting, 'The value of an inventory is based upon the assumption that the "look" of a home reflects who people are and the way they cope with the problems of life' (1986:45).

Dennett (1991) cites an interesting simile, likening a radar 'blip' to the recognition of 'self' and tells of the New York Harbour Board's experiment with a shared radar system for small boat owners. If lost in the fog, one could see on any television screen all the boats in the harbour represented by a 'blip'. The problem obviously remained as to which one was you. To find who you were, you had to do something. Performing a tight circle immediately traced the movement on the screen. Unless a number of other boats did the same procedure in unison, you were now identifiable.

> Thus do we build up stories about ourselves, organized around a sort of basic 'blip' of self-representation. The blip isn't a self, of course; it's a representation of a self. ..... What makes one blip the me blip and another blip just a he or she or it blip is not what it looks like, but what it is used for (Dennett 1991:429).

This anecdote points up that to be 'seen' by ourselves and others it is to our concrete objectifications of our experiences we must look.

> One of the most persistent but elusive ways that people make sense to themselves is to show themselves to themselves, through multiple forms: by telling stories, by dramatic claims in rituals and other collective enactments ..... Self recognition is accomplished by these showings ..... (Myerhoff 1986:261/2).

Dennett's argument further re-inforces Myerhoff, emphasising the self-definitional aspects of our constructions, asserting, 'Our fundamental tactic for self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories, and more

particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others - and ourselves - about who we are. .....' (Dennett 1991:418).

Although there exists a commonality of purpose in the deployment of objects to establish a home, there is little or no commonality amongst the participants as to specifically what these objects should be and how they should be arranged. One argument forwarded by Bourdieu in relation to the diversity pointed up by the object attachments of the participants, centres on 'taste'.

> Taste is the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct signs, of continuous distributions and discontinuous oppositions; it raises the differences inscribed in the physical order of bodies to symbolic order of significant distinctions. ..... Taste is thus the source of the systematic expressions of a particular class of conditions of existence, ie., as a distinctive life style, ... (Bourdieu 1972:174/175).

In Bourdieu's description of 'taste', there are clear affiliations with my determination of 'individual coherence'. Both concepts are born within the vectors of structure, agency and objective conditions, which encapsulate, 'conditions of existence' (Bourdieu 1979:175). and both are ' .... a system of classificatory schemes which may only very partially become conscious ..... ' (Bourdieu 1979:174) Importantly, such a concept of analysis is dependent upon the synthesis of all aspects of determination of each participant.

> ..... analysis initially conceals the structure of the life-style characteristic of an agent or class of agents, that is, the unity hidden under the diversity and multiplicity of the set of practices in the fields governed by different logics and therefore inducing different forms of realization, ... So it is necessary to reconstruct what has been taken apart, first by way of verification but also in order to rediscover the kernel of truth in the approach characteristic of common sense knowledge, namely, the intuition of the systematic nature of life-styles and of the whole set they constitute (Bourdieu 1979:101).

Bayley echoes these sentiments of Bourdieu's stating, 'Taste might evade absolute definition but we are known by our momentary expressions of choice ..... ' (1991: xviii).

No valuable consideration of each room can be made based upon a single factor. Brent and Steve share a common economic factor of having little money, but their object attachments are vitally different, as different from each other as they are both different from Derrick and Vanessa who are 'well off' economically. Although Steve and Brent have no expensive objects on display, as do Vanessa and Derrick, the variety of object attachments does not appear dependent upon economic factors. The 'class' of objects may be determined by the availability of money, but this neither limits the variation of objects within a given price level or the importance and, therefore, value of those objects to the participants.

Bourdieu, though, argues that any particular condition that controls or limits an individual's options becomes ' ..... a virtue of necessity which continuously transforms necessity into a virtue by inducing 'choices' which correspond to the condition of which it is a product. ...... an agent has what he likes because he likes what he has ..... ' (1979:175). Consciously or not, then, the participants' intended aspirations are limited within the parameters of 'commonsense' of their particular situation. To be sure, every participant made some mention of being dissatisfied with their spatial organization or objects they possessed; Brent wanted to buy more plants, Derrick wanted a BMW rather than his new Japanese car, Steve had many more decorating plans which were stymied by lack of finances, as did Sally and Cliff. The reality of the situation, like my 'grey flannel trousers', is that their expressions of 'taste' precisely described the total interaction of their situation, rather than any one factor, such as their economic status.

Even taking a limited number of factors into account is doomed to ambiguity and inconclusive answers. For example, Steve and Alan are both male, of similar ages, New Zealanders by birth and in broad terms, of similar economic status and educational backgrounds, yet a comparison of their living room walls

demonstrates vastly different responses to their construction. Steve selects a wooden mallet and a cheap radio mounted on an old wooden box, while Alan's wall is adorned with impeccably mounted original art works alongside a vast collection of books.

Each isolated factor of sex, age, religion, location and so forth leads to no substantial clue in understanding the rich diversity of the selection within Steve and Alan's living rooms, or of the other participants for that matter. The dynamic interaction of the parts that comprise them as people is not the equivalent to the separate analysis of each social or personal factor. As Bourdieu comments,

> To account for the infinite diversity of practices in a way that is both unitary and specific, one has to break with linear thinking, which only recognizes the simple ordinal structures of direct determination, and endeavours to reconstruct the networks of interrelated relationships which are present in each of the factors. The structural causality of a network of factors is quite irreducible to the cummulated effects of the set of linear relations, ... (1979:107).

To this I would add the concept of the 'butterfly effect', only recently being explored in Chaos Theory, which points up the significance of even the slightest variation, within a set of inter-related factors, disrupting all but the most crude and limited predictions.

To reiterate; particular coherences or demonstrations of taste, recorded in the photographic documentation (pages 125 - 136) arise from the interaction of all the forces acting upon each participant. Their object attachments in relation to single factors cannot, in any substantial way, point up in analysis to any specific causation of the individual's sense of 'self'. In relation to the exploration of this chapter's concern with self-recognition, it must be concluded that a 'self' awareness is only developed on a personal and wholistic level, through comparison with the wholistic representations of others. The type of self that one interprets oneself to be, may be seen to more or less align with others. The boundaries established by the personally coherent object

groupings of each participant will at once point out both commonality with and divergence from others.

That some commonalities of valued representations can be identified between Kathleen and Mark, in their emphasis upon family mnemonics and gifts from their families, (Photos P131 a & P129 a) appears to indicate some 'transparency' or 'overlap, within their understanding of 'self'. By contrast, Sally and Cliff apparently share little or nothing of value in the establishment of coherent object groupings with Alan and the visually established boundaries are clearly and separately defined. Look for instance at the uncluttered walls, devoid of all but one print, of Sally and Cliff (Photo P 129 c) and the profusion of prints, tapestries and books in Alan's room (Photo P 130 a). The individual expressions and reflections of experience in the participants' object attachments more or less associates or disassociates them with one another.

I would propose that these reflections argue the logic of my earlier concept of self and its expression of coherent object groupings, originating within the three vectors of; objective conditions, social constraints and individual agency. The variety of each living room, I have already stressed, originates from the interaction of all of these forces, but I would further suggest that this variety of expression also arises from a variation of emphasis within each vector. The simplistic tendency to then isolate a changing vector as the 'cause' of differing expression must clearly be avoided. The outcome of single vector differences is realized, rather, through its 'multiplication' with the other vector factors. In other words, it cannot be simply 'subtracted' for analysis as its function was not, in the first place, 'additive'.

As the vectors, symbolically, shorten or lengthen, changing the configuration of their triangulation from one participant to the other, this equates to similarities of divergence of participant boundaries and, inherently, their perception of 'self' in relation to the sum of the expressions originating from the variety of other vector triangulations.

The important aspect to emphasise in this chapter is not so much a searching for an analysis of why these differences exist but, rather, the way in which they do. The importance of these objectified differences lies in the participants' inevitable confrontation with different matters of taste or differing coherent object groups of others. In this way the participants may sense something of their own particular 'selfness,' by the contrast of boundaries arising from different content. Logically, then, the greater the clarity of the boundaries the greater clarity and realization of a personal 'self'. Conversely, if the changes observed in others are subtle, the self that is sensed is rather one of unification and identification with commonalities of these expressions of experience.

The purpose of this chapter has been to draw attention to the diversity of object attachments and their organization, in the living rooms of the participants. Involvement with objects, on one level, is unavoidable. In this inevitable engagement of objects, the participants reveal, through their selections of personally coherent groupings, the sum of all the influences upon them. Their spatial constructions become symbolic representations from which a sense of 'self' can be recognized. As Dilthey argues, 'Experience and understanding of the objectifications of life disclose their mind constructed world' (1976 :195).

This awareness of all that is particular and personal to the individual does not happen simply by observing their conscious or unconscious object preferences but, rather, in comparison with the different coherent object groupings of others. As Dilthey argues, understanding does not come from the straightforward route of gazing inwards upon ourselves, but through the longer, more circuitous route of witnessing both our personal expressions and those of others. The importance of expressions are twofold as they provide both a concrete manner in which our own edited experiences are represented to ourselves and to others and, secondly, we can see the differences of others by viewing their expressions, thereby further clarifying the position of our 'self' by contrast and comparison.

Each participant, in surrounding him/herself with personally appropriate or coherent object groupings, provides a construction by which a sense of self can be identified, which in turn provides some sense of security, social and psychological well being. 'If you put on Sabbath clothes and Sabbath caps it is quite right that you had a feeling of Sabbath holiness' (Quoted by Myerhoff 1986:265).

In a physiological and a psychological sense, the participants may not know what they are doing, but in a social sense many are clearly aware of the potential of their object selection and organization to establish specific boundaries and, in doing so, a particular representation of self, ' ..... for their content may state not only what people think they are, but what they should have been or might yet be' (Myherhoff 1986:262).

The premise of this chapter has been that the participants, through the interaction of the three vectors of socializing agents, objective conditions and individual agency, select and order objects in their living rooms in a personally coherent way. The photographic comparisons dramatically juxtapose the diversity of these personally coherent object groupings. It has been argued that such differences of content set up boundaries at their inter-faces and, in so doing, reveal through their contrasts a sense of 'self' to the participants.

A further consideration that should be noted is that the participants' relationship with objects is not just one way. Living rooms, as an environment in which object attachments can be established and maintained, provide the opportunity to reflect upon the expressions of past experiences or to be orientated toward future experiences. Although the meanings of objects are constituted by our actions to them, objects also constitute the types of actions and experiences we become involved in.

> The relationship is clearly dialogical and dialectical, for experiences structure expressions, in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own

experience and self understanding. But expression also structures experience, (my underlining) ..... (Bruner 1986:6).

It is out of this close resonance of subject and object relationship that consistencies of expressions of experience are established and in their dialectic interaction produce a spiralling development, which for Dilthey, is the principle of hermeneutic analysis. This dynamic inter-relationship orientates a particular selection and organization of object attachments. Once started, it is logical that this interaction of person and their object attachments will forever continue to influence the individual's experiences and expressions. As a comparison, consider an experimental situation in which a television camera is set up to record the monitor of its own productions. Once a signal is established, minor variations within the electronic system set in motion a constantly interactive and changing 'dialogue' between the recorder and monitor. Each item is a product of the other, the interchange can only stop by the removal of one or the other, then neither can function, so totally interdependent are they. This theme of subject and object inter-relationship will be developed further in the next chapter.

The object coherence of each room also appears to arise from a combination of what 'feels right' personally and choices made by anticipating what might 'feel right' to others. In the following chapter, it will be argued that it is but a small step from 'self recognition', through object attachment, to 'self-definition' by the conscious use of the powerful symbolism provided by objects. Derrick and Vanessa have the space and money to provide two living rooms. One room demonstrates a coherence which is personally appropriate and the other, that they call their formal living room, anticipates their interpretation of the requirements of the 'type of people we entertain' (Derrick). Brent is also conscious of establishing a particular coherence of objects and images of objects, to encourage a reading and a validation of himself as a 'muso'. As Goffman (1959) points out, the way we see ourselves is as much influenced by the interpretations of others of our expressions as by our own. In the following chapter it will be argued, that object attachments are significant not simply in the self-

recognition of the participants but also in their self-definition, both by their own self-conscious strategies and by the attribution of others to the 'face' they present through their objects.

The following chapter, then, continues to develop the implications and ways in which objects are not simply reflected upon by their owners, but also interpretted by others. If the participants recognize something of themselves through their object attachments, so too, do others construct their own interpretations or readings from these 'texts'.

Chapter 4

SOCIETY & OBJECT ATTACHMENT

Objects implicated in the process of self-definition

Introduction

Objects as a Symbolic System

Society as a Symbolic System

Self Definition

Continuity & Change

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of whether there is some cultural logic underpinning the participants' object attachments. The examination of the ethnographic material shifts in relation from an emphasis upon the individual, to the implications of the social construction and interpretation of object attachment.

With no understanding of the implications of social context to guide interpretation, the participants' object attachments would remain inscrutable, possibly to both the participant and the 'outsider'. The process can be likened to Dennett's radar screen analogy of the previous chapter. The radar screen can be interpreted as a particular context within which 'blip' representations of a boat are seen and interpreted in a particular way. 'Expressions' must be appropriate within a particular context for any intended communication to occur, for as we saw in the last chapter, it is from a basis of commonality that differences can be understood for what they are.

In order to go beyond the simple description of surface facts of utilitarian function and reach toward an understanding of the wider significance of object attachments, the implications of social context must be considered. Little reference has been made by the participants of the original utilitarian value of their objects. It would seem that of much greater importance for them is the involvement of objects in self-recognition and self-definition. The participants' energy and concern seems to be more associated with how their objects affect the way they see themselves and are seen by others.

From the very outset of this study, objects have been seen to represent something other than themselves and become, ' ..... a means by which the reality of another thing may be recognized' (Meier quoted by Noth 1990:3). In both the previous chapters, it was argued that the significance of the participants' object attachments existed not so much in utilitarian functionality, but for what they represented in relation to personally significant life experiences. In fact, the whole principle underlying the importance, to the participants, of objects as mnemonics, hinges upon the constructive nature of the meaning of an object. It was noted that a value of an

object is, in many cases, directly related to the value of the experience with which it has become associated. The constructive and representational activities of the participants in relation to their objects was further developed in an examination of their personally realized coherent groups of object attachments. These specific object attachments, it was argued, formed boundaries that prompt questions as to, ' ..... the nature of this boundary, how it is made known, ... how people are reminded of it and so on' (Rapoport 1981:11).

The question then arises; if an important aspect of object attachment is concerned with its symbolic potential, is it simply a 'one off' attribution, as in the case of personal mnemonics, or part of a more systematic approach, generated within a particular context?

Objects as a Symbolic System

> It is through things that man visualized, admittedly mainly for his own purposes, ideas and thoughts that shape his culture, his particular communication system. They are the picture book of his culture, of a culture. All we have to do is learn how to read it (Gerbrands 1990:51).

I almost added an exclamation mark after quoting Gerbrands, 'All we have to do is learn how to read it'. That reading, or interpretation, is clearly a crucial and complex issue. To be actively involved in communication, objects must have some agreed signification and operate systematically within a particular context as 'Expression is not the same thing as communication. You can express your feelings to a stone, yet it is unmoved' (Lewis 1980:1).

In much the same way as geographical space, on a journey from forest, across savannah and into the desert, is marked by the changes in flora and fauna, so too is our position in social space marked by changes of objects. Similarly to our geographical comparison, specific spaces will not always be clearly marked at their boundaries, but become clearer the deeper we get into the territory. If the recognition of an immediate transition is required, boundaries

have, in some way, to be very clearly marked. Witness Derrick and Alan, who are very conscious and proud of the personality of their spatial constructions. Derrick has a long drive curving round and hiding the building until the last minute of approach, which heightens the impressiveness of the house and realizes a rapid and clear boundary change. Alan's house is similarly screened until you get very close and we are faced with the unfamiliar - skulls and bones arranged in a provocative still life. In both cases there can be no mistake, we are in different territory.

I continue to emphasise that recognizing difference does nothing more than signify change. What the new social or geographical space 'means', remains inscrutable, ambiguous and open to fictional constructions of the kind of emotional qualities I experienced approaching Alan's house. For difference to be meaningful, in a symbolic way, the conceptual attributions associated with these changes must be learnt.

By way of an example; an I-Kiribati navigator of Micronesia, traces his position upon the apparently implacable vastness of the Pacific Ocean by observing often minute changes. Clues such as a piece of driftwood, birds at sunset, a cloud with a turquoise underside lit by the reflection of a far off lagoon, or the subtle feel of a cross swell reflected back from an atoll, will all provide him with not only 'objects' of difference, but those that will be seen as signs to position the next low lying atoll.

The navigator has learnt not only to see keenly, but to interpret what he sees appropriately for his context. The environment in which he operates changes only slowly and the 'maps' he uses of the territory have been handed down over the centuries and gradually refined. From generations past, our navigator has come to see his ocean through a particular set of interpretive patterns that have great value for him. As Dilthey observed, 'The world-views which further the understanding of life and lead to useful goals survive and replace lesser ones. A selection takes place between them. In the sequence of generations the world-views which are viable are constantly perfected' (In Rickman 1976:139). His society have identified and

taught him to see consistencies that combine to afford him an interpretation of a particularly valued coherence. It is not hard to imagine that his ocean is very different from ours. Our experiences may be the same as his, the rise and fall of the canoe, the breeze on the cheek and so on, but we may be at a loss to interpret them to find the next atoll - we may not even know that we are experiencing something of value for the context. The vision the navigator has is through a particular set of 'spectacles', which he neither knows he is wearing and could, therefore, not think to remove for another.

These objects, in the context of the ocean, act as signs and are seen for their particular significations. In fact, their reality may exist only in their associated sign meaning. The navigator is possibly not aware that this interpretation is a construction and, that in fact, other equally valid constructions of the same object may be made in other contexts. The reality of an object can be perceived as both the territory of initial experiences and as symbolic maps of those experiences. In this way, ' ..... the object is constituted by one's activities with reference to it' (Meltzer 1978:22).

The object as a symbol, serves not simply as a personal mnemonic in a relationship from its particularity in the present to generalities of the past, but also as an agent of cultural construction. 'Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges' (Douglas and Isherwood 1978:12). The sociological construction is not, though, static. It was born of experience and is re-attended as a further experience in its own right. The symbol exemplifies both the past and the present. It is not a passive receptacle for attention. By its very existence, it exerts a control in relation to further thoughts, memories and experiences. In so doing, objects become a vital element in cultural construction and transmission.

Objects within a social context have specific meanings for those with eyes to see them and a background to understand their relevant implications. Silverman and Torode (1980) argue that Saussure made clear the arbitary and constructive nature of all signs. Any system of signs is inevitably socially organized, arising as it must from the experiences of the individuals. Although socially constructed

and, to a degree transient, objects constituted as a symbolic system, comprise a vital part of a cultural system. People cannot be a part of this structure without knowing how to read these objects. Conversely, the inability to recognize the value of these constructions places people in other social spaces. The logical development of this argument leads to the conclusion, which is the premise of most modern concepts of anthropology, that 'society' is a symbolic system.

Society as a Symbolic System

Harker and McConnochie argue that, 'When we speak of a culture, then, we want to use the term to refer to the symbolic system which incorporates the rules that governs how an individual interprets his or her environment' (1985:22). The differences in shared symbolic meanings, or 'significant discontinuities' (Levi-Strauss 1968:295), boundary differing cultures or units within a culture. The adoption and the agreement upon a particular set of symbolic constructions leads to a unique view of reality and expression of values. In contrast, confusion through misinterpretation, can be seen to arise when significantly different intentions are constructed upon similar objects or actions.

> When culture is seen as a set of symbolic devices for controlling our behaviour, in whatever sphere, then it provides a link between what we are intrinsically capable of becoming ..... and what we individually do become in our own particular environments (Harker & McConnochie 1985:30).

It is, then, the inter-relationship of the phenomena that comprise this system that is vital to construction and interpretation. ' ..... just as one word from a poem used in another context has no poetry, so one physical object has no meaning by itself, and the question of why it is valid has no meaning either' (Douglas and Isherwood 1978:72). In discussing culture in this way, we are left with a concept of a system from which is proposed the possibility of some kind of long term stability and, therefore continuity, arising from an agreed vision of the social world.

In much the same way as ocean experiences have gradually given rise to a system of interpretive patterns that enable the I-Kiribati to navigate from one diminutive coral atoll to another so, too, have we in contemporary New Zealand society, formulated symbolic systems of interpretation to 'navigate' our social context The more defined and unified the symbolic system, logically, the more stable and cohesive will be the society, the group, or even the individual's sense of self. A clearly defined symbolic system is likely to make the society or the boundary of the territory, clearly visible to approaching 'strangers', or 'strangers' clearly visible to those within.

This chapter has so far emphasized that, although, experience is individual, any reflection upon it is culturally orientated. Anything other than initial experiences must rely upon symbolic systems for their encapsulation, reflection and communication. It is the practice of the symbolic systems, used in the expression of experiences, that demonstrates the unique relation of social context and the mediating properties of the individual. All that comprises the individual and is subsumed in words such as 'character', 'type', 'personality' and so on, plays a vital, inseparable and interactive part with each person's symbolic cultural patterns. Every reflection and expression of experience is then an interaction of the particular symbolic system of the social group and the individual.

The establishing of particular symbolic systems should not be simply thought of in the larger or more obvious settings of countries or historical periods, but also of the more discrete spaces within each social structure. The social system may be large, far reaching and clearly and firmly established, it may equally well be small, transient and unclear. Whatever the social context the participants' object attachments are an expression of their experiences in direct relation to it.

What we see in the photographic essays, then, is an expression of each participant's experience of life through a particular symbolic cultural patterning. The personally structured coherence, which the control of the living room space provides the opportunity for, reflects

two aspects of the participants' expressions. The first, the socializing agents of their individual histories. 'Between the child and the world the whole group intervenes ..... with the whole universe of ritual practices and also of discourses, sayings, proverbs, ... (Bourdieu 1977:167). Secondly, the objective conditions of the participants' environment, which include the physical nature of their environment and the products available to them.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, each object attachment tells simultaneously of participant, social patterns of behaviour and the 'objects' available for expression. The participants reveal their resources and their sense of appropriateness in relation to a specific context.

Object attachments can be interpreted, rightly or wrongly, to classify. These classifications, which equally as much reflect upon the classifier as the classified, cover the whole range of individual and social attributes, which include education, economic status, taste, religious orientation and so on. Readings are made, in particular relation to the objects' context and influenced by the clarity of definition of the culture's symbolic system. A symbolic definition may permeate all aspects of New Zealand society or may be relevant only to a small sub-group.

As one can never reflect upon experience without deploying a symbolic system, the way objective conditions are viewed must always, in fact, be a particular cultural reading. The intellectual autonomy recognized by the participants can be only relative and limited to their own particular symbolic approach. The problematic nature of an understanding of contextual placing of self is because

> Within a mode of social life a claim can be logical or illogical, but the mode of life as a whole is itself non-logical ..... There is no independent reality against which the logic of a mode of social life is to be tested because the very activity of testing is itself part of a mode of social life (Burtonwood 1986:8).

The 'autonomy' of a participant can then be seen to operate only 'within' a symbolic structure, as it is debatable whether it is ever possible to truly step 'outside' it.

Self-Definition

Much of what we see in the participants' object attachments comes from their selection in relation to their sense of appropriateness for a particular social context. As we have discussed, boundaries established by objects are at once both inclusive and exclusive. Objects are a powerful method of aligning with, or distancing oneself from, social groups. Consciously or unconsciously, object attachment provides alignment and status within particular groups. The polarities involved between social groups means alignment in one can mean a rejection from another.

As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a number of the participants were conscious of what they saw as an inevitable communication and interpretation arising from their object attachments. They recognized that these object attachments revealed much about their social backgrounds and future aspirations. As Goffman puts it,

> Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what will be expected of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him (Goffman 1959:13).

Anne spoke of her *'visual cloak'*, Derrick is very conscious of structuring a formal living room to demonstrate certain social skills, while Steve, ordered his objects not so much for himself, but more to observe the reactions of others'. Brent, too, very clearly wanted to be read as a 'muso', while Alan felt that his objects were able to say a lot about him to a newcomer.

On the other hand, the remaining three couples, Mark and Bee, Sally and Cliff and Kathleen and Michael tend to consider their object attachments and living rooms to be purely 'personal' and psychological, rather than a social matter. Each of these couples insisted that they made no conscious attempt to use their objects and displays to position themselves socially. Sally and Cliff, and in particular Sally, wanted new, clean and ordered objects set out 'correctly'. (Photo P 34 b) For Sally, the living room is the site, among many in her house, of a particular practice. She spoke of Cliff' study, which in her opinion was obviously untidy, the family room for the children and the privacy of her bedroom for personal artifacts, certificates and letters. Cliff rarely used the living room and it appeared to be retained primarily as an area for socializing with visitors. The organization and structuring with utilitarian objects apparently reflected and reinforced their concepts of self as efficient and organized.

When I asked Kathleen if she ever used her objects to 'say' anything about herself to others, she replied, *'I don't want to say anything to anybody ..... not really, do I? I haven't thought of it that way'*. For Mark the emphasis of his living room was as a setting for the family to come together and within which memories of them were maintained in their absence. For Kathleen and Michael and Mark and Bee, their rooms clearly serve mnemonic functions, maintaining contact with important life events and, in particular, their families.

Although each of these couples rejects pro-active strategies to position themselves within social fields, their object attachments are clearly appropriate to their particular social considerations. In line with a less self-conscious approach to object attachment, these participants would appear to be rather more influenced by underlying structures, which penetrate through time, to provide frameworks of accepted ways of 'doing things'. Kathleen responded quite forcefully to my question as to whether things were consciously displayed because other people will see them,

'Objects are on display, it's there because I want it to be there - for my pleasure and that's it! I won't take it away because some one is coming'.

More in line with my example of the isolated navigator, they are so immersed in the use of their symbolic systems they have little or no self-conscious perception of the arbitrary and therefore constructive nature of their particular 'reality'. Things, then, just 'are' and are not open even to limited self-conscious control.

A comparison of the object attachment of Brent and Kathleen point up these differences of awareness of orientation. Kathleen's object attachments centre on mnemonic constructions of her home in Cyprus. (Photo P 64 a) The arrangement and selection of her objects follow traditional Cypriot structures of placement and her sense of appropriateness. It is hardly a choice, as Kathleen herself states, she is not 'comfortable' with any other expression. In complete contrast, Brent's background, objective constraints and social context, orientate him to a totally different object selection. His objects boundary the territory of certain aspects of the popular music. His objects speak of cult symbols, of big breasted women, motorbikes and rock concerts. Each participant's living room constructions would, either in part or totality, be quite inappropriate and of little value to the other.

Not only do the objects of these two participants 'tell' of widely differing backgrounds, they are also the result of conscious and unconscious approaches to object attachment. For Kathleen her socializing agents are strong, stable and orientated to a particular inter-generational focus, which inculcates an apparently inseparable object selection to the acceptance and maintenance of a particular sense of appropriateness.

Brent, in contrast, self-consciously selects his objects with the sole purpose in mind that they will symbolically construct a representation of a person associated with the 'pop' industry. His objects show a specific selection of symbols to be interpreted by others within a particular social context from agreed and valued boundaries. ' .....

people come in here and look around and say "He's a muso" (Brent) (Photo P 97 b). The selection, I believe, is particular to this point in time for Brent and is a quite deliberate and conscious decision, although, as it has been argued, there are limitations upon the agency Brent can exercise. The significant difference between his and Kathleen's object attachment (Photos P 64 b & P 65 b) lies with the context in which they wish to achieve status.

One broad division of the participants' object attachments can be made into conscious and unconscious use of objects in realizing particular social aspirations or presentations of 'face'.

> The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self - delineated in terms of approval of social attributes ..... (Goffman 1967:5).

The concepts embedded in the presentation of a particular *'face'* (Goffman 1967), is at the core of the self-defining and self-perpetuating process. The development of 'face', according to Goffman is a complicated social interaction. Whatever conscious and internal constructs an individual may aspire to, their 'self' or 'face' is verified in inter-action with others. As Goffman puts it,

> A person tends to experience an immediate emotional response to the face which a contact with others allows him ..... One's own face and the face of others it constructs are of the same order; it is the rules of the group and the definition of the situation which determine how much feeling one is to have and how this feeling is to be distributed among the faces involved (1967:6).

Kathleen and Michael, Mark and Bee, in denying any conscious strategies to position themselves socially through their objects, appear to conform un-selfconsciously to historical patterns that dictate an appropriate selection, use and display of objects. These patterns are related to clear social structures which have been

sustained through strong, culturally socializing agents in their youth. There are advantages to this 'unconscious' perpetuation of social structures, as Bourdieu rather cynically points out ,

> The most profitable strategies are usually those produced, on the hither side of all calculation and the illusion of the most "authentic" sincerity, by a habitus objectively fitted to the objective structures. These strategies without strategic calculation procure an important secondary advantage for those who can scarcely be called their authors. ..... the social approval accruing from apparent disinterestedness (Bourdieu 1977:214).

The question of personal selection of objects to construct a living room to reflect a particular social reading is clearly a complex one. Derrick refers to his quite conscious attempts to define a particular position within his areas of socializing. The display of economic status alone Derrick feels does not provide appropriate symbolic associations as, ' ..... a lot of people we know, we think are bloody stuck up wankers, sort of thing, you know, they're into, you know, it's got to look right' (Derrick). In order to achieve this perceived correctness for status in that group, Derrick and Vanessa hired architects and interior designers.

Derrick and Vanessa specifically set out to exchange their economic capital for, apparently, more valued symbolic capital of 'good taste', within a particular social context. They recognize they have little or no voice in areas which value design and taste and request, from others, a symbolic description of themselves, which will attribute to them the appropriate forms of cultural approval. In hiring a designer they envisaged the transfer of economic capital to cultural capital and hence, status amongst the people they entertain through the demonstration of good taste, in design and appropriate object selection.

The description of such a strategy also helps in understanding the conflict between describer and described.

*The first interior decorator got the push. ..... we've got our own
opinions, sorry - goodbye!' ..... Look I could never come in in my
dirty clothes and be comfortable in this proposal you've put
forward here'* (Derrick).

It would appear that Derrick, used to decision making in his business
enterprises, finds it difficult to hand over control of his environment
and description of 'self', to a designer. His actions can further be
interpreted to point up his emphasis upon functional efficiency, in
conflict to the designers emphasis upon a socially appropriate
symbolic statement.

The formal living room (Photos P 43 b & P 44 a), though, becomes
the site of another's practice. It has become an artefact, which can
only ultimately succeed in aligning appropriate symbols of taste with
its owner if it appears to be consistent with an overall pattern of taste.
Otherwise it becomes another display of economic capital, clearly
being the purchase of another's creative skills and not simply a
reflection of personal taste.

Bourdieu does acknowledge that, 'Particularly skillfull strategies can
make the most of limited capital available (in this case aesthetic
sensibilities), through bluff ..... ' (Bourdieu 1977:214). In other words,
it is possible to symbolically express what you do not 'naturally' feel.
This is not easy, as there appears to be a consistency of trajectory in
the expression of capital and the 'false notes' of 'bluff' can be
detected quite quickly. The purchase of the symbols of an
appropriate taste might be easy for those with sufficient money but,
the attribution of these symbols to a reading as personal aesthetic
sensibilities is much more difficult and complex. The transfer of
capital, it would seem, is not an easy thing.

In New Zealand's contemporary, consumer orientated society,
objects are continuously promoted, through the advertising media, as
symbols of status within society as a whole and specific groups in
particular. With the advent of the assertion of individualism, albeit
limited, in the face of social dominance, the resulting fragmentation is
seen in the valuing of alternative contexts. Each context is realized

by variation in their symbolic systems, which order and communicate their view of the world. The status that particular objects provide, by way of how they are valued, vary with the social group. The self-definitional focus of this chapter implies a more or less conscious editing process by the participants, in order to represent and maintain their most valued representation of 'self'. Clearly, without some form of status within a particular field, to all intents and purposes, the participants have no way of asserting any acceptable construction of self within the particular social context and must rely upon the description of others with which to 'see' themselves.

I suspect that within the contemporary social structure of New Zealand, with its diverse and conflicting fields, the valuing of ethnicity and creative skills as a form of status is particularly important. Where there is little, or no hope, of acquiring any substantial economic capital, cultural capital can be seen as providing the empowering agent necessary to bestow a position of authority or status within a social field and hence the means to construct an appropriate social world. 'The struggles between symbolic systems to impose a view of the social world defines the social space within which people construct their lives and carry on what Bourdieu sees as the symbolic conflicts of every day life in the use of symbolic violence of the dominant over the dominated' (Mahar, Harker & Wilkes 1990:5).

For Brent, I would suspect that both consciously and unconsciously, he recognizes his only possibility of empowerment exists through the development of subjective strategies of self presentation in relation to his skills within the field of music. Similarly his objective representations, as with each of the participant living rooms as a site of practice, talk of a particular personal coherence. Brent is then determined by his positional strategies, through his object display and his trump card in the form of musical competence. His interview reveals he very much wants to assert his independence from what he sees as the prescribed norm of New Zealand society. He does not wish to work again, *'I've tried that an' I've had enough of it'* (Brent). Through the hours he keeps and drugs he uses, these he offers as statements of his agency in his struggle to acquire a 'voice' in a

society dominated by the valourization of object acquisition and in which he recognizes his inability to compete.

Brent is, however, confounded in his struggle for independence. In the 'pop' industry he is confronted by a huge socio/economic field within which symbolic capital is defined, at any particular moment, with tremendous clarity and utilizing the whole weight of contemporary advertising techniques. What appears to Brent as independence of operation, if he contrasts his room and his life style to his step-parents for instance, is in reality a practice, powerfully influenced by the economics of the 'pop' industry, which implicitly makes its money by orientating millions of people in the same way. The industry sets up a musical field in which very specific capital is recognized and like it or not, Brent's strategies will almost inevitably be driven by them. As his room shows, Brent's object attachments of things pop - CDs, guitars, DeBono and Harley Davidson posters and the incorporation of design elements of contemporary magazine and television orientation are not singular, but those of the mass production of an industry. These are the objectifications he sees as necessary to be considered a 'muso'. (Photo P 95 a)

In the same vein, the personally coherent object groupings of the other participants can be in terpretted and analysed in relation to their potential for specific and personally valued social positioning. Alan's practice of collecting, would appear to be at once the result of his training as an archaeologist, and of strategies, conscious or unconscious, that enrich his status within a particular aspect of society. Alan's collections can be interpreted as strategies which exemplify a further dimension of symbolic capital within fields that value creativity, in the eclectic and sensitive nature of the individual object selection and demonstration of economic capital in their rarity. (Photos P 58 a & b) The result is the power to be seen and to give voice within chosen fields or social spaces, such as the arts, education and Maoridom.

Anne and Steve are also both aware of conscious positioning through their objects. Anne speaks of wanting to be seen as a visual person. For her, an appropriate contemporariness, of visual expression, can

be seen to provide status in line with her aspirations as a photographer. Anne, talking of her living room comments,

> *'Through photography and developing a visual thing, I am always very conscious of the space and how the space could look and the potential of the space'.* She continues, ' *...... you want to make yourself look alright. All have a sense of being assessed . Your visual cloak and your house give people signals as to who you are and what you are about . People want to put you in categories'.*

Interestingly, for Anne, the arrangement and the compositional aspects of her object attachments appear more important than many of the objects themselves.

Steve also expresses a similar consciousness in the way his object attachments implicate him in a social reading. He says,

> *'I see the place as an expression of who and what I am. Not drawing attention to me, but drawing attention to how I feel, in the sense to test others where they're at ...... I'm giving others a message I can't express in words'.*

Reinforcing this attitude, later in the interview, refering to his living room Steve states,

> ' *..... see it as a place where others can feel comfortable, where they can do their own thing. But when they come I like to observe their reactions. ..... the place gives them a message I can't express in words'.*

How the participants see themselves and are seen by others has much to with their affiliations of values, social order and alignments to stability or change. An important aspect of the shaping and inherently self-defining role of object attachments lie in the participants' constructions of them in relation to either perpetuation of continuity or promotion of change.

The Role of Objects in Change and Continuity

In our contemporary society, where objective conditions are in a continual and rapid state of change, objects can be seen to be powerfully implicated in either the maintenance of continuity or the promotion of change. 'In the first sense they (objects) reflect what is; in the second, they foreshadow what could be; and thus they become a vital force in determining cultural evolution' (Csikszentmihalyi 1981:27).

This section explores the concept that two vitally different object interactions and shaping processes exist in the definition of 'self'. Firstly, objects have the potential to act as agents of continuity and reflection or, secondly, of action and change. These polarities of engagement, it will be argued, are significantly related to the owner's age. Objects implicated in 'doing' are in general favoured by the young, whereas objects associated with reflection are increasingly chosen with age. 'The first refers to the development of self-control through unique acts; the second, to an achievement of self-hood based on conscious reflection' (Csikszentmihalyi 1981:96).

The meanings by which objects are constituted, then, changes with age, with greater emphasis being placed upon their mnemonic functions and family associations in older age. Csikszentmihalyi (1981) suggests that the shift of object attachment and their meanings from youth to old age is one of perception of social integration,

The objects and photographs of objects of Mark and Brent clearly reflect different historical points. Brent also indicates that his most important object attachments are those, such as his guitar, that provide activity and the promotion and recognition of an individual self and that his posters, of De Bono and Harley Davidson motorbikes, anticipate and orientate his actions for future goals. Mark, on the other hand, most values those objects which reflect important life events of his past, such as his statues, reminding him of his war time experiences, or the photograph of his favourite horse. Mark's other objects are mainly gifts, whose importance lies in their

symbolic connotations of his family's love and presence.The comparison of these two participants emphasises the potential of objects to promote change, through activity and personal development, or to promote reflection which maintains the past in the present and in so doing, sustains continuity.

Mark is also of a generation where continuity, stability and family commitments were valued and seen as appropriate social patterns. The socially shaping forces from his previous generation were strongly orientated to inculcate the perpetuation of these values. Mark's plea to his children not to sell the farm, 'Tyneside', can be seen, in the light of continuity, to be a way in which Mark can hand on a statement of values that he sees as important. The farm as a social statement, is as much an inheritance of a cultural coherence as the financial asset to be realized from its sale. Mark, though, values the cultural orientation of what the farm stands for more than its economic value. As Mark says, *'I can't bear the thought of any one else but family living here'.* In a social sense, Mark wishes to see the values embedded symbolically in the farm perpetuated inter-generationally.

His living room can also be regarded as the site of struggle against the rapidly changing society outside its walls. The room becomes a point of stability and coherence amongst the potential chaos and fragmentation of post-modern society. Accordingly, Mark's cherished possessions relate to activities and important life events of his past. (Photos P 76 a & b) His object attachments describe personally valued inter-relationships and in so doing construct a text that is a way of, '.....maintaining a sense of continuity, fostering identity and protecting self against deterious change' (Rubinstein and Parmalee 1992:140).

Each participant demonstrates degrees of implicating objects in the perpetuation of past experiences and in the anticipation or construction of new experiences. The personal mnemonic is a vital agent in the perpetuation of a particular continuity. The continuities that Kathleen and Michael struggle to preserve are in relation to their ethnicity and religion. Kathleen's pride and love of her social heritage

from Cyprus is an important structuring force, both in what can be considered appropriate and how it can be expressed. The object attachments within the living room continue, through the circularity of experience and expression, to perpetuate particular values and practices.(Photo P 65 a) Importantly, she feels her object attachments and their arrangement influence her children. Even surrounded by many alternatives, Kathleen says, ' ..... *she* (Maria, her daughter) *has got lots of things all over the place like her Mum. So obviously it carries through.* (said with definite pride) *..... even the boys. They don't like bare places, even though they think we over do it a bit '.* (Photo P 66 a)

Both Anne and Alan offer information about the social orientation of their parents' object attachments and proxemics which in part have driven them to break with any continuity, but on the other hand, have in fact continued a particular aspect of their parents' values. Anne notes that, like her mother, she must organize her space, even for the shortest period of time, while Alan clearly continues his father's passion for collection. '

My father bought from auctions by the apple cases. Two walls were lined with books and he may not have read any of them, but I grew up appreciating books' (Alan). (Photo P 54 b)

Although these aspects of their childhood environments may be continued, both Anne and Alan completely reject other aspects of their environment. Alan's living room is anything but the home of his child hood. I

' ..... *grew up with stainless steel and formica. All the colonial furniture was thrown out. Didn't have any art in the house, just a few reproduction prints'.*

Anne's collection of objects and concern for the organization of her living room is also diametrically opposed to her childhood and, as she comments, the

' .... house I grew up in had no works of art. My mother was creative, but time was a problem and there was nothing precious because of the number of kids. Nothing was treated with respect - a house that functioned and that was it!'

Alan quite consciously makes direct reference to the effecting and valourizing of his particular views of the importance of objects to his children. Alan argues that if you

'Start off right from the beginning with valuable and beautiful objects with your children, they learn to respect them and handle them in the appropriate manner ..... and then they grow up to appreciate them in the appropriate manner'.

This is a continuation of Alan's philosophy of the essential inter-connectedness of things, that *' ..... various items will collect you. See yourself as one of the transitions in the object's history, alter the perspective from egocentric, to that of the object in which you are part of its history'* (Alan).

Alan does, though, constantly involve objects as essentially new aesthetic experiences. He brings together the continuation of valued past experiences in dynamic new constructions of his found or constructed objects. These artefacts orient and provide for new experiences, at the same time gaining weight and value through the richness of their historical heritage. The apparent dialectic of continuity and change are united in the vehicle of Alan's creativity.

For Alan, there is a seamless inter-connection of objects and memories. He believes it is an impossibility to have something that doesn't have a connection and an association. His whole world is a web of the inter-connectedness of objects. This concept is best illustrated in an actual example of Alan's work. (Photo P 59 a) The shape is a breast bone of a rare whale. It reminded him of a sculpture of the 6,000 year old 'Venus forms'. He cast the bone and added breasts. *' ..... and there it is, a continuation from, or through, nature of those ancient, ancient connections to the contemporary world'* (Alan). Alan has overcome the boundaries and discontinuities

of form, concept and time, by re-combining them in a single, coherent sculpture.

After his recent separation from his wife and children, Steve is working towards establishing a long term personal space which, through its own particular coherence, will reflect his individuality and provide stability both financially and emotionally. It is, though, very much his possessions which define his space and reach back into his past, providing a coherent continuity between generations and individuals denied him by his immediate, fraught and fragmented history. He clearly values the past and consciously perpetuates these aspects of his object attachments. It is the disjunction of objects of established symbolic patterns, juxtaposed in Steve's own idiosyncratic practice, that produces the impression of the bizarre. The disjunctions of old church pews contrasted with contemporary plastic tables and unusual ceramic mugs and old, unfinished kauri planks and boxes supporting a modern micro wave with bare electrical cabling, as in a surreal painting, fracture a reading of expected coherence and reflect Steve's simultaneous construction of objects of continuity and change.

In many cases, objects can be seen to be constituted toward both change and continuity, though in most, the orientation will be more clearly toward one or the other. For Brent and Anne, their living rooms provide a base from which to reach out to newer, less stable experiences. Mark's living room encapsulates a lifetime of experience and promotes an enduring sense of self into which he and Bee can withdraw in the face of rapid social and personal change.

The living room, as a controlled space, defined by personally important objects, has the potential to become a centre of individual stability and well-being arising from a personally structured coherence. Conversely, objects also have the potential to produce instability. The relocation of an object, to an alternative context in which it no longer fits accepted or traditional patterns of a society or the individual, becomes a disjunction in which instability resonates from itself and implicates other objects within its proximity. The generation of such instability may be conscious or unconscious, but it

is a powerful way of opening up new experiences as can be seen in the object attachments and arrangements of Steve.

It would appear that objects in youth are deployed more for their ability to generate new experiences and with age, there is a gradual shift to deploy objects in the construction of stability. The young learn from their new experiences of their unstable state, while the elderly's focus upon objects as mnemonics, provide a stability and the opportunity to reflect upon past experiences. Also with age, there is the potential of the shift in one's centre from isolated self to ' ..... a network of enduring relationships' (Csikszentmihalyi 1981:101), in which objects have the potential to signify alignment with others and other groups as well as, mnemonically, maintaining very personal reflections. In this way object attachments continue to play their essential role in self-definition and self-recognition. With age, the emphasis is to preserve in expressions of previous experiences, <u>what I have been</u> and in youth the orientation is to, <u>what I might yet be</u>.

A dynamic social force exists, in the broadest term, across the ages of people, with objects as the pivotal agent. The participants display the range of object attributions from reflection and continuity to activity and change. The emphasis of individualism, though, continually confounds the stability of a shared social understanding. Words, objects and actions; little is sacred from the struggle of intellectual individualism to assert itself in the face of established social structures. Areas which value stability and longevity as vital, such as religions, the law and certain cultural heirachies, must maintain a continual vigilance to protect their interpretation and in a sense, their particular values. Objects are clearly involved in both actions of perpetutation and fragmentation, stability and change.

Conclusion

Within all the diversity of object attachments exhibited in the participants' living rooms is the premise, central to this thesis, that they are, in some way, valued. From this simple notion, that the participants' object attachments are important to them arise the

questions with which each chapter has been concerned, of why? where? when? and how? For the participants to value their objects, it is logical that they must have some significance for them. The significance of objects as mnemonics has been explored and, whether valued by others or not, were clearly of considerable personal value to the individual participants. Discussion has also centred upon the implicating of objects in personally coherent groupings which revealed a sense of division and in turn a sense of 'self-recognition' to the participants.

Some of the implications of the complex social issues of object attachment and the interaction of social and personal significance for the participants, have now been examined in this chapter. The preliminary discussion of this chapter argued that both utilitarian and personal object significance was socially embedded and inescapably socially defined. Even an object of the most functional usage revealed, in its very construction, the outcome of experience, and the expressions of which were ultimately social in origin. Similarly the most personal construction of object significance, arises from socially embedded experience. As objects are constructed by socially attributed meanings, they transcend their often original utilitarian purpose, to become symbolic. As with any symbolic system where meaning is necessarily a construct, readings will vary in value in relation to context.

In an isolated or strictly maintained social group, there is likely to be a common understanding and valuing in relation to the construction and interpretation of the symbolic object. In contemporary New Zealand society, objects and their associated symbolic meanings, are more or less valued by numerous social factions. In fact, these social groups are constructed by what they value and see as significant, with objects being vitally implicated in the symbolic signalling of their social orientations and parameters of their existence.

The multiplicity of object significance is, on the one hand, a dilemma of contemporary social existence and, on the other, the very nature of it. Contemporary social life is a multiplicity of values and their associations with objects. The problematic nature of understanding

'selfness' will be explored in the following chapter, but suffice it to comment here, that the problem is compounded in contemporary society as the implication of any action, thought or object is essentially ambiguous in relation to how it is interpreted and valued. Objects take on, in a social sense, a vital role for the participants in the signifying, both to themselves and to others, what they value and therefore inescapably, the social group or context with which they, consciously or unconsciously, identify.

The process of alignment can be both a conscious strategy or an unselfconscious intuition of what is 'right'. Kathleen has been cited as denying any self-conscious strategies to position herself socially through her object attachments, yet the objects she values symbolically reflect her Cypriot and religious heritage. Her objects are grouped around a coherence based upon criteria which are valued within the context of the Cypriot community of Wellington. By contrast, Derrick self-consciously deploys objects in a strategy for definition and develops a coherent object grouping of a contemporary and 'international' style, which he believes is valued by a social context within which he wishes to find status and recognition.

A number of other examples, including these, have been analysed earlier in this chapter and point up this aspect of the definition of self, being dependent upon the social context within which the object attachments are viewed. Definition is a process of separation and, logically, cannot be done in isolation. The objects valued by the participants position them through both acceptance and separation with one or more social groups.

Conscious strategies of self-definition necessarily demand an understanding of the values of the social context within which the conscious positioning is to occur. Each individual, through the social readings of their object attachments, reaches toward acceptance and status within their own particularly valued social context. Neither these social contexts nor the participants' aspirations necessarily remain static. For example; Derrick, with his increasing economic capital, values certain objects for their ability to define his status within a field of his choosing. Similarly, Steve's recent change in

marital status finds him realizing previously withheld value criteria for object attachment, which is inevitably likely to shift his social recognition for himself and in the eyes of others. Ageing has also been argued to re-orientate the valuing of objects.

This chapter has focused upon the complex and interactive nature of the participants, their objects and their social context. It is essential that that which has been separated for analysis is reunited in this conclusion, and to emphasise that the participants' practices are the sum of all the forces upon them. That objects exist as a symbolic construction has been argued; that society itself is a symbolic structure has also been argued; that the recognition and definition of self is achieved through symbolic definition has been argued. We are inevitably drawn to the conclusion that 'selfness' is a part of the whole symbolic social framework in which our existences are enacted.

Within objective constraints, the participants' living rooms provide a site and an opportunity to construct a symbolic statement which they feel is appropriate. The coherence of their object attachments represents the dynamic inter-action of their social and objective conditions and could be regarded to be made, with more or less intentionality, to align with specific groups and attain a level of status within them.

Even as the participants align themselves with certain readings through the symbolism of objects, so too, are the objects exerting their influence upon the them. In both a functional and utilitarian sense, object attachments will alter individual or group behaviour and expression of future experiences. In a more complex and subtle sense, the individual's behaviour will be changed by both their perceptions of culturally appropriate activities in relation to their object attachments and in the way they see themselves, in the reflection of others' attitudes toward them.

It is important to realize that every aspect of our inevitable involvement in symbolic systems shapes the shaper. 'Each new object changes the way people organize and experience their lives'

(Csikszentmihalyi 1981:46). Csikszentmihalyi also points out the way in which a number of apparently insignificant technical advances can, with hindsight, be seen to have vast social impact.

For example, my commitment to using a camera positions me symbolically, for both myself and others. It equally well positions me physically. Using a camera orientates my actions, the types of thoughts I think and, ultimately, the experiences I have. In reflection upon these experiences, I will engage the symbolic systems that I know and feel appropriate. My reflection and ensuing objectifications, which in turn, I know, will be used to classify who I am, have, in part been arrived at because I use a camera. To a large extent, my status, experiences and expressions are orientated by this single object and therefore, my recognition and definition of self.

Although this example might be thought to overstate the case, it points up that the relationship and value of some objects are more or less involved with the determination of its user's social existence. Objects are vitally involved in both the experiences that are open to us and the way in which those experiences are expressed. A change in objective conditions and/or the socially attributed symbolism of these objects would immediately change the very nature of an individual or group. I can only conclude that the interdependence of subject and object is total and I return to the concept that I am constructed through my object attachments as they are constructed through me. The constructor constructs but so, equally, do the constructions construct the constructor.

Each of the participants similarly not only selects, but is shaped by their objects. Brent clearly indicates his posters become role models that will direct his behaviour. Alan suggests that he does not so much collect objects, rather they collect him. When we reflect upon the functional nature of the living room constructions of Derrick and Vanessa and Sally and Cliff, the 'chicken and egg' nature of object attachment becomes clear. Both couples indicate, in their interviews, that the primary reason for selecting objects is in relation to their efficient functionality. The nature of these selections will dictate the type and extent of their experiences in this environment.

Chapter 5

FINAL DISCUSSION

Introduction

Structure & Agency

World Views

Mirrors & Windows

Introduction

For the sake of analysis the main elements of this study, objects and their relation to self-definition and self-recognition, have largely been discussed separately. This summary now begins to explore the implications of these areas as an interactive whole and to examine the important consequences of these relationships.

The unifying root of all the preceding discussions lies at the starting point of this study - the objects of the participants' living rooms. There have been three major concerns in the analysis of the participants' object attachments. Firstly the 'what' of object attachment, in which the concern was the specific objects that were gathered for attendance in the participants' living rooms. The photographic essays in Chapte One, revealed a broad range of objects. The participants point up diversity in practically every aspect of object attachment. There are dualities with reference to; new/old, functional/decorative, local/foreign, cheap/expensive, elegant and crude construction, fashionable/dated, and an equally diverse range of placement and arrangement was also exhibited.

Secondly, questions of 'why' the participants were attracted to their particular objects were raised. Again a diversity of responses was recorded, showing strategies for social integration or separation, active engagement or contemplative attention. Objects were seen to be implicated as mnemonics, as 'objectifications' of experiences and in the representation of 'self' which positions the participant within a social context, through external 'readings'.

Finally the question of 'how' objects operate in the roles to which they have been assigned by the participants was discussed. Logically, objects must constitute some pattern of communication, yet there is no dictionary of objects. In fact, we have seen that one object can be constituted to have many meanings. A dictionary of words that continually shifted within contexts of time and space would be frustrating, to say the least and, possibly, ultimately rejected as misleading. Yet we cannot live without objects, in both a utilitarian sense and as a function of a symbolic social structure. At

this point of the discussion, we begin to centre on the heart of the dilemma in which we, as humans, believe in some degree of personal autonomy and yet the very nature of thinking and reflecting upon experiences must deploy a symbolic system that in turn, arises from an agreed social vision which, inevitably, directs the very nature of our thoughts and experiences.

To appreciate object attachments as a central and unifying issue we must consider Dilthey's argument that experience is at the source of human existence. Dilthey proposes that in order to build upon 'mere experience' and to develop 'an experience', some system for thinking about and for sustaining and memorising the initial experience is needed. A symbolic system by which we can develop maps of experiences; plans upon which we can reflect and chart the direction for new experiences or maintain memories of the old, are essential to the realization of our human social structure. Reflections of experiences, cannot logically <u>be</u> experiences, but are rather symbols and 'maps' of them.

It was argued earlier in this study that objects, even the most utilitarian, function as part of a symbolic socializing system. Any object plays a symbolic role, pivotal in the inter-relationship of experience and social structure. To the understanding of this chapter and the general argument of the thesis as a whole, the role of object attachments should be considered as an expression of the participant's experience within a particular social context. The rest of this discussion will build upon the concept that object attachments are a central and mediating process between experience and social structure.

This relationship is expressed diagrammatically below:

Experience ⟷ **Objects** ⟷ **Social Structure**
(Expressions)
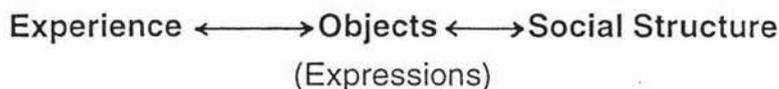
(Figure 1.)

Objects can then be seen to be a symbolic medium, through which the intangibles of society and experience are mediated and made manifest and by which both can then be subjected to change and development. Objects are a central mediating agency in any dialogue between experience and social structure but are, in turn, structured by experience and social order, as is shown in the schematic. When the selection of objects is considered in this way, the participants are consciously or unconsciously revealing the inter-play of experiences and their social structure which orientates the very nature of what can be considered of value to themselves and to others.

Through all the complexity of interaction, construction and interpretation of these relationships, objects are arguably implicated in only two irreducible symbolic functions, that of self-recognition and that of self-definition. The participants' involvement with objects may be a part of self-conscious strategies or as un-selfconscious accretions, but like my 'grey flannel shorts' described in the Prologue, they inevitably make concrete and visible the synthesis of the participant's experiences and social background. The view of self gained in these expressions is at once both personal and social.

The discussion in the previous chapter concerning social positioning and the perpetuation of values, and the earlier discussions of mnemonics and the recognition of a personal coherence through object attachments all, logically, relate to a recognition of a sense of self. Our objects permit us and others, to see who we are, or who we would like to be, or who we were - or perhaps, something of all three. As the participants select, with more or less consciousness their object attachments, so too, do these objects structure the future experiences and interpretations of themselves. This discussion brings us to a point where the participant can be seen to be both the producer and product of their object attachments.

This final chapter reunites these ultimately inseparable elements under two broad headings. In the first section, Structure and Agency, the contradictory duality of attempting to separate that which is not separate, is explored. The second section, World Views, considers

the implications of overarching social orientations towards these concepts of unity and division.

On the completion of this chapter, in the spirit of hermeneutic principles and in order to break the linear quality inherent in the written text, a return to earlier chapters would be of value. In this way your experience of my experience will be a little closer.

Structure and Agency

The participants' use of object attachments as mnemonics and within the proces of self-recognition and self-representation, rely upon the development of particular boundaries which encapsulate an appropriate individual or social coherence. Discussion of these areas has concentrated primarily upon the way in which the individual constructs, or becomes aware of, a reality for themselves. Other factors running through any consideration of object attachment are those that, apparently, exist 'out there' and exert a control on just what it is that the individual can and cannot do. These social contexts, in which each participant lives is, in turn, boundaried by objective conditions, such as the range of objects accessible to him/her and socially developed 'givens' about the nature of reality and how the world is known.

Such a description would appear to set up a 'structure vs. agency' debate of clearly opposing camps. If such a division exists at all, it is not one of opposing and confrontational forces but, rather, a circular or, more accurately, a spiralling dynamic, in which each lends vigour to the other. There can be no person without structure and no structure without people. A circularity exists, ' ..... always tending to reproduce the objective structures of which they are a product, they are determined by past conditions which have produced the principle of their production .... ' (Bourdieu 1977:72).

The work of Bourdieu proposes a dialectical analysis of structure and agency of practical life. The emphasis is upon viewing the inter-relationships of personal control and orientation and the social

context, within which that practice occurs, as an essential, single, indivisible action.

By way of a personal example, to clarify these thoughts, let me take two objects directly in front of me as I write this chapter. The first is a word processor; a purely utilitarian object, but one that has impacted upon the way in which I think. The functions the processor supplies have dramatically affected the way in which my initial experiences are later expressed. In affecting my objectifications of experience, the word processor alters the very nature of future experiences.

The second object, pinned to the wall above the word processor is a large black and white photograph. It is a picture of my wife when she was pregnant with our second child and shows, in the background, our first son playing with a stick. The photograph was taken in winter, in a forest in Wales. Memories of that time come flooding back as I write this and glance up at the image. The photograph itself is in a poor state, there is some 'browning' due to poor fixation, the corners of the board are damaged and cockroaches have eaten away parts of the mount, while it hung for eight years, in my study in Kiribati. The photograph was on the first roll of film I exposed when I attended my photographic training at Cardiff College of Art, many years ago. I can even remember the excitement of developing and printing it!.

My relationship with this photograph is complex - the image itself is rich in associations and inspires reflections beyond its particularity of surface facts. I think of my long relationship with my wife, Joan, and of the process of birth in general. I also look at the child playing, who is now a man of twenty three years old and I spiral out into thoughts of continuity and change. The picture as an object was my construction and one of my first photographs. Its ageing traces both its and my time, in the Pacific.

In the photograph and the word processor we see some of the polarities of object attachments - the functional and non-functional, the personal and impersonal, the irreplaceable and the replaceable, and so on. Both objects, though, by contributing to my way of objectifying my experiences, make me who I am. As I argued in

Chapter 3, it is in the interaction with concrete expressions of experience, that self recognition and self-definition are achieved. Consciously or unconsciously, each participant gathered objects around him or her, in personally coherent relationships. It has been noted how the sum of these object attachments describes boundaries that provide a sense of identity. In addition, the interaction is dialectic, in that our expressions direct further experience.

It is not fanciful to consider that as my objects have a reality through me, I am then, the voice of my objects. As I constitute my objects, so too, do they constitute me. If these objects are considered to arise in part from the historical relationship of all other people and things, then I am as much a product of the world's history as it is of me. Which returns me to my argument, that although there exist internal and external forces, expressed in structure and agency, they are not so much separate entities but rather, parts of a dynamic and interactive whole.

Alan similarly commented in his interview, that he believes there is an uninterrupted continuation through objects, from ancient times to the modern world, and that he is a part of this inter-connectedness, through his relationship with objects. Each participant that remarks upon the transmission of values, memories and social beliefs in his/her object possessions, is recognizing his/her own particular inter-connectedness in the world. Ideas of the potential for objects to perpetuate the status quo and provide continuity, were explored in Chapter 4. Objects of certain functional nature, such as a ball, will provide the opportunity for similar experiences between peoples, cultures and time. Similarly, objects with a strongly symbolic reading, removed from utilitarian functionality, have the potential, inter-generationally, to perpetuate socially valued ways of expressing experiences.

Expressions of experience equally well <u>direct</u> who we are as <u>represent</u> who we are. There is a circularity in the way in which we think the thoughts we think and the nature of those thoughts. 'Therefore it seems more correct to think of self-awareness as a

process of self-control rather than a static moment of apperception' (Csikszentmihalyi 1981:3).

The participants' object attachments are functional and personal, but above all else they are social in the construction of meaning and value. It is clear from the participants' interviews, that objects are rarely seen simply as utilitarian. However they are acquired - they may have been purchased or constructed, found, inherited, or received as gifts - each object has been subjected to a process of selection from the multitude of existing artefacts or natural objects, before being deemed appropriate to remain in the living room. This selection process engages attention and draws upon the inter-active dynamic of structure and agency. The cherished possessions, cited by the participants, are constituted by associations beyond the objects' utilitarian functionality or decorative intentions.

Gifts carry the love from one person to another; inheritances of old objects may perpetuate inter-generational continuity of values and memories; purchases may be made in order to buy into a particular skill or social context and many objects will be constituted as mnemonics - they all stand for something other than themselves. Objects are constituted symbolically and their value lies as much, if not more, in the participants' attribution of them, than monetary or functional considerations. Although it has been cited before, Anne sums up this position commenting, that what a thief might take would be in inverse proportion to the value she places upon her objects, with the stereo and television going first and perhaps her 'teddy' being left to last. Participants cited objects whose meaning would be spoiled if they were considered in monetary terms; some would not exchange certain objects at any price. The symbolic relationship can become so strong it can be considered to be part of the participant's extended self, in as much as the feelings of attachment do not equate with a rational valuing of the object's intrinsic worth.

As powerful and personally meaningful as the participants' object attachments may be, those meanings are inescapably a product of a particular social framework. The participants, their objects and the social context form an indivisible interaction. As the participants and

their objects rely on one another for their existence, so too does the social framework in which they are both embedded and at the same time constitute. The symbolic systems that are generated within the vectors of objects, people and social context, form both the 'maps' with which to negotiate a particular reality and provide the foundation of hegemonic stability, by which they are maintained.

It has now been argued that the relationship of the participants with all their objects and, in particular, those they value is not so much dialogical but forms a unity which is not easily accommodated within contemporary Western thought. In Chapter Four it was also argued that all expressions of experience are socially constructed. There is a danger here of being drawn to a simple reproductive model, arguing the inevitability of expressions of experience reaffirming the social symbolic system, of which they are concurrently both a <u>construct</u> and a <u>constructor</u>.

From the documentation, of both photographs and participants' tape recorded interviews, there appears to be little evidence of a stable pattern of reproduction. A number of the participants note that the nature of expression of their experiences change. Two elements of change are identified; firstly a change of objective conditions, such as Kathleen emigrating to New Zealand or Derrick and Vanessa's increase in economic capital and, secondly, the way in which the participants, affected by these changes, view future experiences and their expressions. Steve has clearly and consciously identified exploring new aspects of 'self' and expressions of experience in his recently changed objective conditions. Sally and Cliff, similarly recognize that their new house, far removed from the 'bush' setting of their previous one, is a mediating force in new experiences and orientation to expressions. In much the same way as history is not fixed but is, rather, a retrospective construction of the present, so to do the participants' expressions of their original experiences change with their changing objective circumstances. The participants come to view their past differently with present changes. Logically, the more stable the social group the more consistent the memories of past experiences and the more drastic the process of change the more open to variation is the recall of previous experience.

The social, the participant and their expressions must be viewed as a dynamic and interactive whole. This interaction is more likely, within the post-modern social conditions of the participants, to produce continued and sometimes rapid change, through the reformulation and revaluing of experiences and their expressions, than perpetuate a maintenance of the *status quo* through reproduction. As Harker comments,

> We are left with practice as a dialectical production, continually in the process of reformulation. The reformulation may be almost imperceptible in a slowly changing, traditional type culture, or of major proportions in a revolutionary situation (1990:101).

In considering the relationship of object, people and society the particular orientation to the concept of structure and agency, such as post-modern as opposed to modern, appears to effect the nature of all other expression. In much the same way as the individual can be argued to be in a constant state of change, it is then logical that any society constituted by these changing elements, must also inevitably be in a constant state of change and will vary considerably, over time, in its attitudes to the relationship of intellectual independence and the rigour with which the context of symbolic sign systems are inculcated. The social view of the world, then, varies dynamically within the vectors of object, people and society, which in turn varies through time and changing objective conditions.

The following discussion identifies factors that, arguably, structure significantly different world views. Not all the characteristics attributed to these differing world views can be identified in the participants' relationships to their object attachments, but discussion does provide a vehicle in which the previously fragmented aspect of social orientation can be viewed together.

World Views

Dilthey argues that,

> World views develop under different conditions. Climate, race
> and nationality, determined by history, and the development of
> states, the temporal delimitation into epochs and Ages in which
> nations co-operate, combine to produce the special conditions
> which influence the rise of different world views. The life which
> originates under such conditions is very varied and so are the
> men who apprehend it (in Rickman 1976:139).

Mark and Kathleen, as older participants, appear to have a clearer
and less self-conscious approach to their object attachment
coherence than other participants. Their commitment to what is
appropriate appears defined by forces external to themselves. Other
participants, though, mention self-conscious deployment of their
object attachments to position themselves socially. The division
between the two approaches appears to be one of the understanding
of the value of alternative symbolic systems. The concept of more or
less conscious deployment of objects in relation to self-conscious
strategies, inevitably involves the notion of a positional self. This idea
is best exemplified in the clear division pointed up in traditional and
modern social structures.

Horton in his paper, 'African Traditional Thought and Western
Science' (1967), points out that modernism and traditionalism share
strong initial commonalities, citing mental stress, theory and common
sense orientations and medical concepts. It is, though, their
expressions of these common experiences which is very different.
The single most important difference between these groups
originates from the awareness, or lack of awareness, of alternative
contexts. Clearly a lack of alternative contexts will tend to perpetuate
the status quo and maintain cultural traditions. As Evans-Pritchard,
referring to the Zande view of the world puts it,

The web is not an external structure in which he is enclosed. It is the texture of his thought and he cannot think that his thought is wrong (cited by Horton 1967:230).

Traditionalistic, should be recognized as a clear boundaring, within which alternative objectifications are seen as having no intrinsic value. Alternative contexts, for interpretation, are simply not 'seen' for what they are. McConnochie, Harker & Wilkes point out that,

..... in archaic societies there is no differentiation of practices. That is, the object structures are very stable and the mental structures are reproduced almost completely so that although arbitrary, their arbitrariness is not recognized and they are misconstrued as evidently self correct (1991:16).

By contrast, then, the period entitled 'modernism' is aware of alternative social orders, but can not see or recognize any significant value in them.

What distinguishes the Victorian culture from the culture of today is that the Victorians were the last people to believe that patterns of intellect are subordinate to patterns of society. What held the Victorian pattern together was a social code, not an intellectual one. They called it morals, but really it was just a social code (Pirsig 1991:311).

While society subordinated the individual presentation of self in favour of a particular social structure, it could be seen to be more in line with traditionalism and various degrees of modernism. The move to an acceptance or encouragement of individual intellectual dominance approximates to the 'post modern ' era. Here societies' options expand, social mores and values are more diversified and unavoidably, expression and its interpretation becomes more complex and less clear. The objectifications of society are then fragmented amongst small groups or even made up of personal, individual constructions. Even in the apparently most stable of social orders, change would appear to be inevitable. It is the tempo of change, revolutionary rather than evolutionary, that is witnessed in

contemporary Western society with the valuing of individualism and self-conscious positional strategies. It is as though the self-correct arbitrariness of the *closed* social order, as represented by 'traditionalism' is overthrown by an equally arbitrary self-correctness of a contemporary concept of agency dominating any acknowledged structure. The participants, as suggested, do not exhibit the polarities of such an argument but they can be described as occupying positions some distance apart along a continuum from essential-self to positional-self and perhaps, even of multiple-self.

As the ability for symbolic systems to function depends to a large extent upon agreement as to their value and interpretation, the orientation of a society towards its social structures will be very much a determining factor in the effectiveness for objects to function as a part of these systems. It is not experience that is at the heart of social differences, but rather the construction of the symbolic systems used in the expressions of these experiences.

As the polarities from traditional and modern describe a variance from essential-self to positional-self and, arguably, multiple-self, so too do these polarities describe a variance and increase in tempo from socially reproductive to a non-reproductive social order. Concepts on unitary and non-unitary social construction also essentially parallel these ideas. The cultural stability arising from agreed symbolic systems, is under threat in post-modern societies. In other social systems, objects play a vital role in their coherence and continuity. Generally nominated by a dominant social group, the symbolic value of objects has set positional readings and directions of aspirations. The post-modern framework in accepting and promoting intellectual individualism, has seen objects implicated as agents of discontinuity and, combined with rapid changes in mass production and attitudes towards object elitism, contribute toward the fragmentation and lack of coherence in contemporary Western society.

Fragmentation is unavoidable as groups and then individuals, independently plot their own courses of action. Historically, those who achieved an alternative vision and viewed things differently from

their society were few and could easily be absorbed or eliminated. Artists, politicians, scientists and 'visionaries' who experienced and objectified in radically different ways were often, not unexpectedly, shunned. In the contemporary post-modern society of New Zealand, the hegemonic process which maintains stable patterns of activity, expressions and interpretation, is constantly being assailed by alternative symbolic systems. The change is rapid. A solid traditional core which could absorb and close quickly behind the occasional assault, becomes weakened and, with each alternative, becomes a less identifiable process of common stable patterns.

Not only is the society likely to fragment, but also to polarize. As those elements of society who value 'traditional' patterns strive to perpetuate them, they are forced to produce increasingly clear and immutable boundaries to the content they wish to preserve. On the other extreme, there are those who reach to ever more transparent boundaries. The trust in a well established social order, a trust that made self-conscious positional strategies remote or unthinkable is challenged by ever increasing diversity or alternative readings and values of previously accepted constructions. Conscious and unconscious struggles and unavoidable tensions are the result.

> The innate desires and selfishness of the individual that are normally held in check by the mores of society are now (the move from the 1920's to the 1970's) being let loose and are interfering with the normal functioning of society. By the 1970's, individualism has become a matter of turning inward for meaning and self-definition. Individuals are not rebelling against society; society has lost its constraining power (Tomson 1989:853).

It must not be forgotten that objects do not simply position 'self' in a social setting, but also maintain and demonstrate personally valued experiences. It is the way of expressing these experiences that is being protected, as well as demonstrated, in the participants' object attachments. One object of Kathleen's from Cyprus, a 'teddy' of Anne's or a poster of Brent's, may be sufficient to spiral out to memories of previous experiences or the anticipation of those to

come, but one object alone would appear not to be enough to construct a clear boundary to reflect and mark out a sense of self for the participants and others. In the post-modern society of the participants, there appears to be an ambiguity arising from a lack of consensus of construction and interpretation of expression. To maintain strongly held beliefs and personally appropriate ways of expression, the participant is forced to clarify and vigilantly maintain boundaries, through a cohesiveness of groups of object attachments.

Horton has argued, that in the face of fragmentation and rapid change objects can play a significant role as stable 'texts', yet many of the traditional symbolic associations that provide the 'maps' to guide one through a particular social context are sacrificed to the nature of post-modernism. Charged with protecting memories that provide a sense of self through their consistency, and a sense of stability through their continuity, in the rapidly changing social order of twentieth century New Zealand, it is hardly surprising that every participant declared some object attachments constructed as mnemonics.

> Any sign system we use, however, must rely on memory. Culture itself is memory, indicating the power of the system to preserve and accumulate information. Culture is memory - created, preserved, accumulated and transmitted by human society (Petrov 1989:77/78).

Nor is it surprising that the participants cherished these mnemonic objects, whatever they may be, more than the replaceable objects of mass production, many of which are at the very heart of discontinuity they are trying to guard against. As Dilthey so eloquently puts it, 'The mind, oppressed by the restless change of impressions and destinies and by the power of the external world, is compelled to seek inner strength to resist it all so it is led by change and instability, by its continuously changing moods and its views of life, towards permanent evaluations of life and firm goals' (in Rickman 1976:139).

A sense of 'self', its protection and positioning, has perhaps never in history been such an individual and personal responsibility. 'In

contemporary, particularly contemporary Western culture, individual identity is paramount so that the physiological concept of self-identity and self-esteem are seen as linked and as a focal in social, personality, developmental and clinical psychology' (Rapoport 1981:11).

In our current consumer orientated society, object attachments are implicated everywhere in the self-conscious projection and reflection of 'self' and in the interpretation of others. Objects are pivotal in the very nature of human existence. It is not to their functional qualities I refer, but rather that in material objects, consistencies of experience are realized and memorized. Without consistency, there could be no symbolic systems. Essentially there could be no cognitive or social order, only chaos.

Mirrors and Windows

The participants' living rooms provide a unique environment within which to establish their object attachments. Few other social spaces afford the control that 'home' permits. The living room, although functional in the sense of possibly providing a source of entertainment and at its most basic, shelter, is one of the rooms least dictated by specific functional requirements. Participants have the freedom to define the activity, decoration, objects and their arrangement in its organization. The cumulative effect represents the expression of the dynamic interaction of structure and agency.

Whatever the considered level of 'agency' and within the parameters of choices seen to be available, objects gathered together reflect a particular appropriateness and individual coherence. As each individual establishes this coherence, the objects become at once both boundaries of unification and separation. The particular sense of 'self' of the participant is mapped out in a very public and comparatively stable way. These objectifications will inevitably be interpreted by others. It takes only a little self-awareness to recognize the potential to construct descriptions of 'self' considered appropriate for others and for particular social conditions.

The objects of the participants' living rooms are vitally implicated in the dynamic process of social and individual existence and yet the more we strive for self-conscious promotion of individualism the more we have to rely upon ever further removed representations of the original experience of what it is to be human, as

..... we see each other darkly, through the distortions of culture, and our efforts to touch one another are forever failures. Only in good science fiction and poor social science do humans meet mind to mind. In the real world we are isolated from our own kind, eternally so (Richardson 1974:7).

Richardson reminds me of the sentiments in my 'blues' lyrics, quoted in the Prologue and of the frustration expressed in its title, 'Locked Inside Yourself'. To make contact with ourselves and others; to know that as humans we do, in fact exist, it is to our objectifications of experiences we must turn. To our object attachments we owe our consciousness of existence as a 'self'. It is as symbolic constructions that objects permit reflection and the very special social constructions of humanity.

Objects taken in isolation, remain inscrutable and, at best, provide information of functional practices at a particular point in time and place. Collectively, though, objects represent a 'text' of social and individual coherence. As I have argued in Chapters 3 and 4, this coherence is boundaried by the vectors of individual, object and social system. The specifity of the objects themselves are not important, rather it is the way they are deployed that provide a window to the intangible thoughts, beliefs and values of a society.

The indivisible quality of objects and social structure has been emphasized many times in this study. As with an equation, missing factors can be deduced from what is known. So too, objects as visible and concrete expressions of intangible social qualities, provide a vital and informative starting point in the understanding of others and their social structures.

As was suggested in Chapter 4, the boundaries produced by object attachments, map out consistencies for those within, but also provide an indication of new territories for those without. It is in the very nature of objects representing and sustaining a particular consistency of expression, that they provide the potential for initially recognition, and secondly, understanding of others.

Peer through the reflections that are you, mirrored in the windows of these living rooms, into the mind of each participant and, perhaps with all the more clarity because their physical presence is absent, recognize the commonality of human experience realized in a myriad of differing expressions.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

INTERVIEWS

At the outset describe for interviewees:

.1 the purpose of the study

.2 that all information is confidential and will be used only in my MA thesis.

The following lists are central ideas to the interview questions. The questions are not necessarily phrased using these specific words.

Although the groupings of questions are maintained, the order of questions will be influenced by the 'flow' of the interview.
Other ideas are also open to investigation as they arise.

QUESTIONS

General category:

The 'owners' of the living room.

* Where were you born?
* Where did you go to school?
* Where did you come from before living in New Zealand?
* How long have you been in New Zealand?
* Have you been living together for long?
* How many of your family are living in the house?
* Do you mind telling me your ages?
* Are you working and what do you do ?
* Do you mind giving me an idea of your income level, do you see it as low,middle or high?
* How secure would you rate your job?
* How long have you been living in this house?

* Do you own or rent it?
* Was your previous house similar?

House and Room

* Why did you choose this area?
* What drew you to the house in the first place?
* Do you have any particularly strong feelings about it?
* Do you think of 'here' as a home or a house?
* What are the essential differences between the two for you?
* Do you feel any one room is more important to you?
* What room do feel is the centre/heart of your home?
* Have you made any changes since moving in?
* Where have most of those changes been and why?

The Living Room

* Do you have any particular favourite things here?
* Why are they so important?
* Can you tell me about their background?
* Is there anyhing here you dont like?
* Why does it stay?
* Are there things you would like to change ..... what and why?
* Who, in the family, chooses what stays and goes?
* Who decides on the decorating and arranging?
* How important is the placement of things to you?
* Do you collect things deliberately or is it an arbitary/random process?
* What are your main reasons for what is selected?
* Are any of the pssessions here because you are conscious that they something about yourself that you want others to know?
* And why is that important?
* How much of the rest of the family is represented, or has an input, to this room?
* Do you see the living room mainly for you, or as a shared place, a place to be with other people?
* Who uses the living room the most?
* Does anything draw particular attention from visitors?
* Is it important to you what other people think of your room?

* Are some of these possessions gifts? Do you know where and who they came from
* Are some things homemade? Who made them?
* Which things are your most important practical possessions?
* What are your most valued artistic or personal objects?
* Does the price of any possessions influence how strongly you feel about them? Either way could you give me some examples?
* Do you have any particular reasons for grouping some things together?
* Is this room anyhing like your parents, or the rest of the family?
* Are you ever conscious of picking up ideas from other people or homes you admire? Either from visits or pictures in magazines?
* Have you had any professional design help in establishing your living room? Would you if you could?
* Are you conscious of any cultural pattern influencing either your choice of possessions or arrangements?
* If so, where from?
* Do you have possessions that are important to you that you would not want to put in your living room? Why?
* Do you ever change things around, take things away and introduce new objects?
* What has been here the longest, what the shortest?
* Whats your oldest possession in the room, is one of the most important?
* If you had to grab one thing and run in the case of a fire, what would it be?
*

Appendix 2

Dear

I am writing to thank you for having allowed me to photograph in your house and also for giving up your time for the interview. Without your assistance my MA thesis would not be possible.

The study is going well and generating more and more questions for me as it progresses. In order to explore answers to some of these questions it looks as though another visit would be useful. It is unlikely that I will need to take additional photographs, so if you were prepared to talk to me again it could be at any time that was convenient for you.

I will give you a ring in the next month or so to see if you are agreeable to answering more questions.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Whincup

Senior Lecturer
Head of Photography
Wellington Polytechnic