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Increments of Fourteen

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Inside My Space:

A Photo Documentation of my Personal Possessions

by

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As a child I loved holding things: coins, shells, shiny rocks. I was always on a quest to search, find, and collect these prized objects. As I grew older, I became more attuned with the meaning attached to objects and more aware of my own possessions. Coins were more than something to save and hold; they were significant because they could be earned and spent. And upon getting a job, spend I did, on shoes, glasses, handbags, dresses, jeans, journals, music, paint...I kept my ever-growing collection of personal goods under my bed, on the bookshelf, in the closet, in various stages between disarray and organization. There is nothing special or unique about my experience particularly among middle-to upper class youth in America. Upon arriving at college however, my classes, peers, and involvement with Intervarsity Christian Fellowship challenged me to rethink the value I place in material possessions. Studying abroad in Italy further developed within me a desire to do with less. I began my senior thesis with hopes to address materialistic tendencies in my life as well as explore the significance of containers/ rooms/ private spheres and their role in delineating personal possession over an object. I hoped that by relinquishing control over my space and possessions, through a performance piece, I would free myself from their hold in my own life. Ideas about materialism, Christianity, public and private space, and art historical moments provided the foundation for my thesis. Despite my initial resistance, the research and art-making process led me to new questions and realizations. Materialism affects what I buy but also how I choose to go about my art.

For my senior thesis, I orchestrated a performance that took place in my room without my presence. I invited fourteen participants to my room in different fifteen-minute intervals. Once the participant arrived, I handed him or her a set of instructions and then waited outside as they followed the directions inside my room. He or she searched my room, found one object, enclosed the object in one container, and signed and dated the outside before exiting. After all fourteen participants took part in the performance; I collected the containers and moved them to my studio where I took numerous photographs of each object and container pair. The final presentation consists of the participant instructions, my own instructions for the performance, a small red book where I wrote my thoughts and observations during the performance, the objects and containers signed and dated, a series of fourteen large photos one for each pair, and a series of eight small photos per pair.

The instructions allow me as the conductor to carry out my artistic vision and help viewers understand what took place in the performance. The participant instructions created a parallel between the inside, private sphere of my room and the containers, thus bringing up questions about access, privacy, and boundaries. Furthermore, the specific instructions attempt to eliminate outside variables so that the participants choice of object and container becomes the main emphasis. Although the instructions allow me to dictate the performance process, ultimately I cannot control the end result.

I realize that this project is connected to my context here at Scripps as well as American culture. The space I occupy and the things I own are dictated by my being a college student as well as an American. What I buy and how I organize my things is dictated by societal norms and expectations over personal choice. I lose, disregard, replace, forget my material possessions, but at the same time, I find, obsess over, become possessive of my things. Although I desire to be free of their hold, I am continually manipulated and constrained by them. Why do I value these things and what gives me the right to "have" them? A close examination and critique of materialism in our culture will help found and explain my attempt to react against it through my artwork.

Oakley, Mercedes, Nestle, Nike, Gucci, Coach, Starbucks, and Apple. We recognize most all of these names. Billboards, advertisements, Internet pop up's, pamphlets, and commercials bombard us with new and improved services and products everyday. In fact, our nation is built upon the buying and selling of products; as a result, millions of Americans have access to goods and services unavailable to most of the world. With new cars, and the latest edition of the i-phone however, come huge credit card debts, massive mortgages, and an overwhelming sense that despite everything we have it just isn't enough. Why in the land of plenty is depression at a record high? Why despite the American dream, are millions of Americans left disenchanted with their wealth?

Many people have defined materialism in different ways. For some psychologists and economists materialism is simply "…an interest in spending and buying" or "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" (Carroll, 109). Richins and Dawson presented possibly the most widespread definition of materialism in their study completed in 1992. They claimed, "Materialism is a central organizing value which leads to a number of value orientations (Graham, 244)." The three value orientations are the acquisition or pursuit of happiness, success defined by possessions, and possession

centrality. Richin's later work on materialism further "suggests that persons holding strong material value, place possessions and their acquisition at the center of their lives, that they value possessions as a means of achieving happiness, and that they use possessions as an indicator of their own and others' success" (Graham, 244). Richin's explanation of materialism includes many action verbs and nouns such as value, achieve, happiness, and success. These words echo promises of the "American dream," that each citizen can achieve a better, richer, and happier life through pursuit of democratic ideals governed by economic relations. Some studies point to a worldwide shift away from materialism towards "post-materialism" where individuals deemphasize material goods and instead prioritize other needs such as quality of life, belonging, and self-expression (Graham, 242). More individuals may be attempting to return to the simpler pleasures of life yet the fact remains that materialism is deeply woven in to the fabric of our society.

Money and possessions hold great power in society because individuals often believe they will bring freedom and happiness. A three-year research project on Religion and Economic Values at Princeton University found that 71 percent of the 2000 people interviewed agreed, "having money means having more freedom" (Wuthnow 209). Similarly, 76 percent agree, "having money gives me a good feeling about myself" (Wuthnow 209). How did money become so tied with personal identity? Money unconnected to an economic system is worthless in and of itself, but is made significant by the value we place in it. With money, individuals have access to the comforts and luxuries that society tells us are necessary for our personal happiness. The desire for material things becomes so engrained that some individuals look to money and possessions above all other sources for happiness, self-identity, and fulfillment (Carrol, 110). The sentiment prevails that money has the power to corrupt the wealthy and that our culture over emphasizes material goods (Wuthnow, 238). At the same time however, individuals are "themselves terribly interested in money, and few seem able to decide when enough is enough" (Wuthnow, 238). Although materialism is a complex, deeply engrained, and widespread value, individuals have a choice in whether or not to adopt a materialistic attitude.

Despite the claim that materialism leads to the realization of the American dream, statistics have shown that materialism has consequence. Parents blame the media for their children's materialistic attitudes, and young adults reflect that their hard working

parents are comfortable but saddened by emotional distance (Wuthnow, 238). Many see materialism's negative effects in others lives but find it more difficult to see it in their own. In their study on materialism, Richins and Dawson found statistic connections between wealth and discontentment. They explained the consumer characteristics evident in individuals they consider overly materialistic individuals or "high materialists." High materialists often "expect more from their acquisitions but they also experience higher levels of negative emotions after the purchase" (Graham, 246). With increased expectation and disappointment they found that high materialists are often more status conscious, compulsive in buying, non-generous, and possessive about the things they own (Graham, 251). Furthermore, they often judge themselves and others on the basis of material possessions (Graham, 250). When materials become so central, oftentimes other values and priorities are pushed aside.

This discussion about materialism shows how it is widespread and deeply connected to individuals value systems. I am frustrated by the rampant materialism I see in American culture, but acknowledge how I am connected with and apart of this culture. My frustrations became more evident while studying abroad in Rome, Italy last semester. I thought a lot about my material possessions as I choose what to pack for four months abroad. Despite my fears that I did not bring enough, I found that I actually brought more than I needed or used. Furthermore, living quarters in Rome were tight and families got by with far less material possessions than the average American household. I grew to love the Italian way of life and their emphasis on enjoyment and relationships over material goods. I also grew disenchanted with and desired to distance myself from American culture and it's emphasis on quantity over quality. By the end of the program, I couldn't have been happier without a cell phone, traveling all over Italy with only a backpack. There is a part of me that loves being free but in reality I am never entirely unattached. The fact that I am paying Scripps over twenty thousand to study abroad, the fact that my parents sent me over with money, all prove that freedom is bought at a price. My experience in Rome has shaped my ideas about materialism but my faith has also played a defining role.

"I am a millionaire. That is my religion." The writer George Bernard Shaw made this claim in 1907. While his frankness surprises us, his claim connecting wealth and religion is not so startling. As we have seen in the discussion about materialism, wealth like religion is connected to an individuals value system. While some see wealth as a

means to achieve the fulfillment and legacy promised by religion, other's religious values shape their view on materialism. In my experience, a Christian worldview has drastically fashioned the way I view wealth and has challenged me to rethink the value I place in possessions. An in depth discussion about how the Christian church deals with material possessions as well as an analysis of specific Biblical teachings about the issue will help frame my own viewpoints. I hope to show that for Christians there are no easy answers when seeking to live out Jesus' teachings about materialism in the present day. Similarly, my art piece does not present an easy solution but instead represents my own struggle to understand and grapple with materialism and possessiveness.

The Bible teaches that we live in a finite world. Human contact with the material world begins at birth and ends with death. Solomon, the wise Israelite king acknowledged, "Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand" (Ecclesiastes 5:15). Despite his greatness and material wealth, Solomon realized his humble beginnings and inevitable end. Similarly, just as humans cannot live forever, possession's value and usefulness fades over time. The apostle Paul taught in his letter to the early church, "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Timothy 6:7). Paul taught that things have no intrinsic lasting value and that the value or usefulness assigned to them pertains to the world. Furthermore, John a disciple of Jesus asserted, "For all that is in the world- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions-is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 John 2:16). For John, not only possessions but also the pride individuals attach to them is passing. The Christian faith and hope however takes individuals beyond the materiality of things to an infinite and deeper reality.

The Bible teaches that while the world will pass away, God remains sovereign and infinite. Therefore one should invest in and prioritize the eternal over the temporal. In his epistle, Mathew quotes Jesus who contrasts the finite world to infinite heaven:

> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mathew

16:19-21).

Craig S. Keener in his commentary on Mathew, suggests that Jesus stands apart from other scholars of the day because he asserts that material possessions are essentially worthless. He does not say, "feel free to store up a little" but simply begins with "do not." Jesus points out that earthly treasures (valued possessions/ money) can be taken, destroyed, and used up. Heavenly treasure on the other hand is secure. Furthermore, while earthly treasure is physical, heavenly treasure is intangible. Jesus understands how building treasure whether on earth or in heaven requires dedication and sacrifice and is therefore connected to identity and value. By contrasting physical and heavenly treasure, Jesus shows that eternal investment is much greater than any comfort or satisfaction gained by wealth. In addition, Mathew uses the word "store up" which infers an excess accumulation of possessions beyond the necessary. The issue is not that possessions are bad, but that a higher calling demands our resources. Similarly Luke, another disciple of Jesus wrote, "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). For Luke, person's identity should be founded in something besides the things he or she owns.

Most Christians agree that the earth is finite and that it is greater to invest in eternal treasure, but disagree about what it looks like to actually live these teachings. How should a Christian go about building up eternal treasure? Different viewpoints stem from varied interpretations on Jesus life. On one hand Jesus' teachings emphasized complete trust in God, and complete freedom form possessions. Jesus made it clear that "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Mathew 6:24). Jesus taught that the two were incompatible; he himself had few possessions and urged his disciples to leave their livelihood behind to follow him. At the same time, Jesus was not an ascetic and in fact, affirmed the goodness of physical enjoyment. Jesus benefited from the material wealth and hospitality of his followers and urged that possessions be used to help those in need (Mark 15:41-42). Jesus was fond of celebrations and attended grand banquets thrown for him (John 2:1-11, Luke 5:29). Jesus was not a heavy consumer of goods but enjoyed and used material things. Christians often emphasize varied aspects of Jesus teachings to support their own lifestyle rather than letting themselves be challenged and moved by Jesus' example.

Some Christian leaders in previous generations took the Bible's teachings on materialism to the extreme. Craig S. Keener in his commentary on the book of Mathew, discusses past nineteenth century revival preachers, particularly John Wesley and Charles Finney. Leaders in past revival movements often taught that Christians should not pray for revival unless they were willing to let go of their money and possessions. John Wesley lived as simply as possible, shared his possessions, and gave everything to the poor and urged church members to do the same. He taught that if one failed to give everything they could, one disobeyed the Bible and would end up in hell (Keener). Similarly, nineteenth-century evangelist Charles G. Finey, warned that God required followers to relinquish ownership of everything. Keener quotes Finey as he exhorts, "young converts should be taught that they have renounced the ownership of all their possessions, and of themselves, or if they have not done this they are not Christians" (Keener).

Wesley and Finey's teachings represent what Stiver calls "rigorous discipleship." Robert L. Stiver, in his insightful article "Deciding on a Christian lifestyle," states how advocates of rigorous discipleship are usually vocal and intense in their support for frugal living, freedom from possessions, and giving to the poor. Stiver believes that rigorous discipleship is an attractive, validly Christian viewpoint but is also problematic. Oftentimes, extreme self-denial and asceticism can become self rather than God focused. Furthermore, Stiver suggests that aesthetic models from prosperous nations are problematic because they do not speak to the experience of the worlds poor. Stiver suggests, "Ask the landless farmer in Guatemala what he thinks about asceticism" (1244-1288). A "greatly reduced lifestyle" may be possible for one who has much to begin with, but for those who have less then what they need, the aesthetic lifestyle speaks of injustice. A similar problem can be found outside the Christian viewpoint in Plato's assertion, "Simplicity doesn't mean to live in misery and poverty. You have what you need, and you don't want to have what you don't need" (427-347 BCE). This view of simplicity presupposes wealth and does not include those who don't have what they need. We see in the Bible that Jesus includes the wealthy and the poor in his call to remain unattached to material possessions. Ascetic frameworks however can often become too limited in their scope and are therefore problematic.

While some Christians have taken Jesus' teachings on materialism too far,

others simply refuse to pay attention or emphasize the passages they feel justify their lifestyle. Robert Wuthnow, in his article "Pious materialism: How Americans view faith and money," claims that faith is certainly a factor in how Americans use money, but it is currently less of a factor than religious leaders would like to believe. In one study sited, only twenty two percent of those surveyed agreed "God doesn't care how I use my money" (Wuthnow, 239). However, Wuthnow claims that the evidence suggests that faith makes little difference in how Christians actually handle their possessions and conduct their financial affairs (Wuthnow, 239). Wuthnow found that Christians believed that riches were not a problem if they were gained legally. He found that only sixteen percent of churchgoers thought it was wrong to want a lot of money. Yet it is difficult to ignore "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mathew 19:24).

The research completed for this paper represents my own struggle to understand and grapple with these issues in my life. On one hand, I am challenged by Jesus' call to leave all behind, follow him, and give to the poor. but then I am confronted with the fact that I am from an upper class family, am paying more than forty thousand a year for my education, and have more than I need. I feel like the little steps I take are worthless when faced with overwhelming world poverty. In my own life, I try to take the Bible's teaching to heart by practicing thankfulness and contentment and straying away from an unhealthy attachment to material things. The apostle Paul in Hebrews 13:5, challenges believers to "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have," because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Another theologian, Esther de Waal, put it simply, "Wealth consists not in having possessions but in having few wants." In Christianity there is an attempt to replace material value with spiritual value. Although I desire to live out these teachings, I am faced with the difficulties of disconnecting with the culture in which I am immersed.

Research about American consumer culture, my experience studying abroad, and my faith, guided my desire to address materialism through my artwork. Just as the Christian faith does not provide a simple answer to materialism but one that must be negotiated, I was not interested in attempting to "solve" materialism through my artwork. Rather, I wanted to bring attention to the ways in which materialism influences how we view our space and the things inside it. I hoped that by keeping the chosen objects

contained and put away after the performance, I would become less attached to them. Ultimately, I was curious to see how I would react to being denied access to these things and how the participants would react to the liberty and power being granted to them by the instructions. Many of these reactions were recorded in a red book that will be included with the objects as a part of the piece. Participants often noted feeling guilty, awkward, or uncomfortable going through my things. Similarly, I often felt anxious as I wondered what they were looking at, what they were finding. I felt vulnerable handing over the control of my space. It is interesting that even within the privacy of a room, more private spaces exist, delineated by doors, boxes, and curtains. These boundaries not only keep objects contained, but also act to limit what visitors' can and cannot see. I hoped that by allowing other people to search my room, by giving up control and privacy, I would become aware of my own and others limits and sensitivity. A preceding discussion about public and private spaces will address how possessions are seen through and shaped by the contexts in which they are found.

We constantly shift between private and public space. Doors connect the outside public realm to the inside private realm. Similarly, lids, fences, windows all connect but at the same time divide space. These objects help define a space, but the space simultaneously gives meaning to them. Beyond a physical conception of private and public, at times the two coexist through the value we place in material objects. Private meaning ascribed to a possession by its owner and public meaning ascribed to a possession by society, both give material objects their value (Richins, 504). Jane Rendell in her article entitled "Public Art: Between Public and Private," summarizes how the shifting boundaries between the 'public' and 'private' "allow us to consider the thresholds between inner and outer, subject and object, person and social" (24). Private and public appear as social and spatial metaphors in geography and sociology, but also appear in discussions about politics and ownership in economics (Rendell, 19). How and why are these boundaries made? Boundaries drawn around the public and private spheres indicate a value system, are culturally constructed, and change historically over time.

In geography and sociology, the public and private have physical, tangible connotations. Public and private can mean different things to different people: They can communicate "protected isolation or unwelcome containment, intrusion or invitation,

exclusion or segregation" (Rendell, 19). For example, a church building has the power to provide community, shelter, and comfort to many people. At the same time historically and presently, the church has furthered segregation and supported division in communities. Individuals build the church's physical structure with wood and nails but also build the church's social connotations and significance. Rendell confirms that space is not inert or simply a backdrop for human action to occur in, but rather "space is dynamic- it is both producing and produced by people" (Rendell,19). Furthermore, she claims, "between the 'internal' space of individual subjectivity and the 'external' space of the urban realm are a series of shifting thresholds" (Rendell, 22). The private and public lack a solid definition and exist only in our conceptions of them. Like a church building, a single structure can hold meanings about the private and the public simultaneously.

Public and private carry both positive and negative connotations. According to Rendell, public space encompasses the non- domestic realm and in the western democratic tradition stands for all that is good; for democracy, freedom, accessibility, participation, and elitism (Rendell, 20). Similarly, Rendell states, "from a liberal rights based perspective, privacy provides positive qualities; autonomy and intimacy, the right to be alone, the right to confidentiality and the safe guarding of individuality" (Rendell, 21). These positive qualities however are often used to critique the "other" public or private realm. Public spaces are seen as potentially threatening and in need of regulation while privatization increases the number of places where individuals are controlled and regulated (Rendell, 21). Shifting personal, social and historical standards define ideas about the public and private.

Furthermore, the relation between the private and public differs according to gender. Feminist critiques understand the public and private not as binary opposites but instead as gendered terms. According to Rendell, "For feminists the main problem with the terms is that they are inflexibly gendered – public-man and private-woman – and held in a fixed and hierarchical relationship where public interest overrules private interest" (21). Rendell suggests that a feminist position may trace women's positive interactions with the public city and promote freedom from private roles as mother and wife (Rendell, 22). These efforts can have positive effects but work within set patriarchal boundaries. To address the issue at it's core, individuals must seek to deconstruct the boundaries between the public and private by reassessing the value given to each sphere.

Just as gender plays a role, culture also determines ideas about the public and private. The article "Cultural values and important possessions: a cross-cultural analysis," compares values of consumers in the United States and in New Zealand and provides insight about how significant material objects carry different meanings across culture (Gillan, 923). The article outlines a study that collected data through mail surveys distributed to about two thousand people in the United States and in New Zealand. The study modeled itself around Swartz's 1992 proposition that interacting value systems constitute culture (Gillan, 924). Participants from both countries rated various consumer values and identified important possessions; four judges then analyzed the results. The researchers found that New Zealanders placed greater importance in sentimental possessions that have a "retrospective orientation" (Gillan, 929). American consumers on the other hand, were more drawn to recreational, practical, or aesthetic objects that satisfy more immediate desires (Gillan, 930). The study emphasizes how time is an important factor when considering cultural values. Jane Rendell also emphasized how the boundaries between the public and private shift over time and are "determined by personal/cultural/social/ historical conditions" (Rendell, 22). Furthermore, the article focuses on socially shared values: "When used to characterize and distinguish between cultures, values represent socially shared abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable" (Gillan, 924). For the article's authors, the sentimental/ interpersonal and recreational/ aesthetic – what others may view as opposite private and public values- are all merged into "socially shared abstract ideas."

Marsha Richins in her article "Valuing things: The Public and Private Meanings of Possessions" would most likely agree with Gillan that "individuals acquire values through socialization," but makes a differentiation between material object's public and private meaning (Gillan, 924). Whereas Gillan emphasizes the role possessions play in defining culture, Richins' work looks at the value of material objects by examining the private meaning attributed to a possession by its owner and the public meaning ascribed to it by members of society (Richins, 504). For example. a poor man brings his wedding ring to a pawnshop, as he desperately needs money. A pawnshop owner determines the wedding rings public value or economic worth in dollars yet the amount he or she offers the man will most likely not capture the rings actual value. The private value, the memories, experiences, feelings and personal history attached to the ring cannot be bought at any price. The ring's value contains elements of shared/public meaning such

as the realization of its economic worth, but also contains meanings that are inaccessible unless disclosed by the owner. Public and private meanings give possessions value and often coexist within a single object. According to Richins, "public meanings are the subjective meanings assigned to an object by outside observers (non-owners) of the object, that is, by members of society at large (506). Public meanings often shape desire through the media and advertising. Private meanings, on the other hand, determine consumer's feelings about objects they already own (Richins, 506). Furthermore, Richins sites empirical evidence that examines "the sources of meaning that give an object value… by focusing on the private meaning of possessions" and summarizes the evidence in four basic categories: Utilitarian value, enjoyment, representation of interpersonal ties, and identity/self expression (Richins, 507). An objects worth comes from both public and private meanings.

John Lastoicka and Karen Fernandez in their article "Three Paths to Disposition: The Movement of Meaningful Possessions to Strangers," conceptualize a meaningful possession as a vessel and recognize that it can carry multiple public and private meanings. From this perspective, their article goes on to unpack the consumer transfer of meaningful possessions to strangers at garage sales and online auctions (813). Young and Wallendorf (1989) see "disposition as a painful process in which consumers experience the death of a piece of their lives with each possession lost" and recommend that individuals attempt to become emotionally and physically unattached to the object in order to "facilitate satisfactory detachment from self and transfer to another" (Fernandez and Lastovicka, 814). For example, cloths that have been stored in the closet for a year are easier to give away because time and space weaken the owner's emotional attachment to them. They see garage sales as being a key transitional space along a meaningful possessions journey from the private "me" to the public "not me" (Fernandez and Lastovicka, 817). The garage sale acts as a "liminal boundary" an "ambiguous in-between space" that makes some owners hesitant, cautious, and afraid. If choosing to part with object can be anxiety ridden and painful as they describe, how much greater is the pain when an object is taken, stolen or lost? The owner did not choose to part with that particular object or go through any pre-disposition rituals to cope with the loss yet with the lost object comes a loss of control and access.

Public and private carry different meanings in different contexts. Despite attempts to define space and value, nothing is exclusively public and nothing is solely private.

There will always be elements of the public in the domestic realm, a television in the living room for example. Personal history with an object is mediated by society. The public and private overlap and expand upon each other in interesting ways. Thankfully, as Rendell discusses, "Art provides gifts of time and space, creating occasions where new mediums between public and private might yet start to be articulated" (26). I am interested in how individuals attempt to define and control the public and private and how these spheres influence individual experience. In my artwork, I hope to show that an object receives its value due to personal and social meanings. Furthermore, an object does not exist apart from a construct or container that colors and shapes our perception of it.

If one defines materialism as the importance individuals attach to worldly possessions, we are all guilty. Verbs actively create an object's public and private meanings: find, build, use, buy, sell, exchange, collect, display, and exhibit. The constraints/ actions that surround an object, whether visible or not, become internalized within the object and give it it's meaning. Material objects like individuals carry with them a past. Art movements and specific artists have dealt with materialism and the private and public meanings of objects in many different contexts and ways throughout history. Artists dealing with objects often push the boundary between art and life and lead their audiences to reexamine perspectives and relationships with the material world. An examination of past and present art will help create a framework for and help expand the ideas I am attempting to deal with in my work. Specifically the handling of materials and the object by artists in Pop Art, Neo Dada, Fluxus, "happenings," and conceptual art will provide a general historical framework upon which contemporary artists such as Sophie Callie, Kari Upson, Trevor Paglen, Fred Wilson, Walead Beshty, and Allen Topolski have built upon. Art has the power to shape perceptions and reveal assumptions about easily overlooked objects.

Many Artists' during the fifties and sixties saw themselves as image duplicators, commodity makers, and spectacle creators whose artwork spoke more to the culture of images rather than the artists own biography. Artists were concerned with the tangible, spontaneous, and materialistic as they attempted to "recast existentialist discovery of self as a discovery of the environment from which the self takes its form" (Fineberg, 178). New ideas about the artist's role and art's potential emerged in the 1950's and 1960's due to the emergence of counterculture that reacted against high modernism. Artists during this

time had seen how abstract expressionists work had been conscripted by the government to spread American ideology about artistic and social freedom. They therefore felt it necessary to align them-selves with an emerging counterculture that sought to engage with rather than remain insulated from interactions with society. Furthermore, the fifties and sixties saw new scientific innovation and advances in mass production that drastically altered the everyday American experience (Fineberg, 246). Neo Dada art denied traditional aesthetics and instead drew from this mass culture, modern materials, and popular imagery for concepts and inspiration; later Neo Dada influenced Pop art, Happenings, and the Fluxus movement. Art aligned itself with the counterculture represented by freedom, liberation, rebellion but also adopted and became fascinated with American consumer capitalism (Fineberg, 172). Although counterculture and consumerism seem to stand in opposition, they were both adopted by artists as a desire to brake the boundary between high art and everyday objects and experiences.

Pop art was all about objects. Pop art emerged in the fifties in Europe but realized it's full potential in New York in the sixties, where it got the world's attention (Fineberg, 237). Artists during this time "showed a preference for stereotypes, clichés and common places connected to the American way of life" (Elmalech, 181). In the States, Pop Art emerged from the postwar consumer society and reflected societies fascination with the processed and manufactured. Andy Warhol, Pop Arts' most well known artist commented,

> The Pop artists did images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in a split second- comics, picnic-tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles- all the great modern things that the Abstract Expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all (Berghaus, 158).

Generations of previous artists sought after the epic and experiential whereas Pop artists embraced the mass-produced object, celebrity, and ideal or otherwise "low art." Andy Warhol, in his 1961-62 series entitled *Campbell's Soup Cans,* (fig. 1) celebrated the sameness of mass commodity abhorred by abstract expressionists (Fineberg, 252). The artwork became less about biography or a unique artistic touch and more about the mechanical process used to create both object and image. Ambivalence was highlighted through repetition but also through the manufactured silkscreen process as well as the own artists attitude about the work.

Although some Pop artists pursued political commitments through their work, many, such as Andy Warhol and Jim Dine, continually asserted that their works were not intended as a social comment. Jim Dine in 1962, when asked about political dimensions of his work stated, "I'm certainly not changing the world. People confuse this social business with Pop art- that it's a comment. Well if it's art, who cares if it's a comment…any work of art if it's successful, is also going to be a comment on what it's about" (Berghaus, 158). Dine didn't want his artwork to comment about "social business, rather "what it's about." I argue however "what it's about," in Dine's case objects from everyday life, are completely tied to and shaped by politics and society. Eliane Elmalech in his article *American Pop Art and political engagement in the 1960's* saw this connection as a "double language" where artists became "both dissidents and propagandists" (181). Elmalech gave the example of Roy Lichtenstein whose paintings mirror war comic-book images monumentalizing the Korean and Vietnam War. Some believed, Lichtenstein's paintings reinforced and glorified the US military position while others thought they denounced militarism and American armaments policy (Elmalech, 185). Gunter Berghaus in his article *Happenings in Europe in the 60"s: Trends, Events, and Leading Figures* would state that both readings of Lichtenstein's work are too extreme: "Although it would be simplistic to say that the American artists glorified the new consumer culture, they can neither be regarded as politically engaged critics of the "American way of life" (Berghaus, 158). Most critics believe that Pop Artists simply represented the world around them without passing judgment; at the same time the objects they duplicated already carried meaning within them.

Pop art influenced my choice to work with objects and also my choice to create colorful, glossy photographs focused on the objects. The glossy photographs make the "inaccessible" objects accessible. They emphasize the participant's choice to place certain objects in particular containers. The photographs also bring attention to the new, oftentimes humorous, meanings and associations created through the pairing. After the performance, I realized that the important question was not why the object was taken but rather what was taken and how it was enclosed. The why was no more complicated then the fact that I instructed participants to take one object. Initially I had set out to uncover why and how individuals are attached to their material possessions but the performance incited new explorations. After this realization, much like Pop Artists- in their celebration of inanimate objects through a wide range of media, I became interested in replicating the

colorful plasticity of the objects through photography. However, while Pop Artist replicated objects in a way that withheld judgment and made them easy to recognize, I hoped to uncover humor and narrative and add to the objects mystery. My judgment as the photographer greatly influenced the end result. Through the process of photographing the objects, I became aware of how each new photograph added a value or judgment to the object; further upping it's commodity value. Emphasizing the use and value of my possessions is perhaps the first step towards deemphasizing them.

Some artists did not want to simply reproduce urban material reality but in their quest to make art as close to life as possible, wanted to actually use the material object in their work. Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Cornell, and Daniel Spoerri are known for their Combines and Assemblages where they incorporated fragments of ordinary reality into their pictures. "They formed their collages or assemblages from found and possessed fragments of reality and materials not commonly associated with high art" (Berghaus, 160). In 1965, Robert Rauschenberg explained, "I think a picture is more like the real world when it is made out of the real world" (Berghaus. 158). In his 1955 piece entitled *Bed* (fig. 2)*,* Rauschenberg shocked viewers by creating a painting around his actual unmade and dirty bed cloths and frame (Fineberg, 179). He effectively pushed the boundaries of art and brought the private material object into the public realm.

Another artist, Joseph Cornell renewed and transformed forgotten materials, experiences and ideas through his assemblages. Cornell began working in the thirties, before Rauschenberg, and while his lyrical and surprising combination of materials is often linked to the European surrealist movement, he worked effectively and was conversant with the New York art scene through from 1940 to 1960 (Hartigan, 1). In his pieces, Cornell collected and juxtaposed often-personal found objects in small, glass-front containers. "He forever altered the concept of the box- from a time- honored functional container into a new art form, the box construction" (Hartigan, 1). A symbolist, using things we can see- paper birds, balls, rings, clay pipes, clock springs- "Cornell made boxes about things we can't see: ideas, memories, fantasies, and dreams" (Drake and Summers). I was especially intrigued by how Cornell created interactions and stories through the choice and placement of objects in his boxes, for example, in his 1945 work *Hotel Eden* (fig. 3). My work differs from Cornell because my containers house objects placed in them by chance, and I am interested in capturing how the object

interacts with its container. However his work influenced my desire to create narratives between objects as seen in my photographs as well as include the actual containers.

Similarly, Fluxus artists Daniel Spoerri brought the private into public view but emphasized the element of chance. In his 1960, *The Breakfast of Kichka* 1 (fig. 4), real objects were thrust out into space, defying gravity and the flat view observers expected. Spoerri, a self announced "paster of found situations," made this piece from his girlfriends discarded leftover breakfast discovered by chance on the table. He assembled the coffee- pot, tumbler, china, eggshells, cigarette butts, spoons etc… by gluing the objects to the table just as he found them. Spoerri fastened the board to a wood chair and then mounted the whole (life size) piece on the wall, changing the plane from the horizontal to the vertical. The objects were preserved but their usefulness destroyed. John Cage who first embraced chaotic chance in his work influenced Spoerri like many Fluxus artists. Cage revolutionized modern music in his piece entitled "prepared piano" where his role as artists was radically deemphasized (Fineberg, 174). Spoerri broke down distinctions between art and life because he chose the situation rather than arranged the parts. He transformed the art canvas from a vertical window into a data collection point where creative decisions were left open to chance and nature.

Alan Kaprow, looked outside the physical realm to a permanent creative process in order to bring together art and life. Alan Kaprow discussed the ideas behind his art in *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings.* Kaprow was inspired by Pollock's action paintings where the art piece unfolded in time and space (Kaprow, 73). He expanded upon Pollock's encounter when he formed his ideas about "Happenings," (fig. 5) which began in 1957, and were defined by the artist as an assemblage of events constructed in their real environments. Happenings moved outside the flat painted surface and "instead drew its substance, appearances, and enthusiasms from the common world as we know it" (Kaprow, 704). Kaprow's "Happenings" brought attention to the ordinary objects no one pays attention to and kept the "line between art and life" as indistinct as possible (Kaprow, 706). Happenings were a natural outcome from the limitations and problems of representation experienced by Pop Artists who could only bridge the gap between art and life as far as their physical materials would allow. Furthermore, Happenings were revolutionary as the artist gave up control to the audience who played a large an active role in the performance pieces (Fineberg, 191). Another artist known for Happenings,

Brazon Brock, commented in 1977: "The emphasis in my work lies on social action, or the social process, not on the results…Happenings discovered the spectator as co producer, Without him the event could not take place" Brazon Brock 1977 (Berghaus, 164). Artists such as Brock and Kaprow first established and arranged conditions for the performance and then actively drew audiences into an interaction with their social environment leading them to question their experience (Berghaus, 162). "The outcome was never predetermined: it was left to the audience to draw their own conclusions from what they had experienced" (Berghaus, 163). Happenings effectively broke taboos and prepared participants dispositions to question, experience, and eliminate forms of autocracy.

Following in the performance tradition established by artists such as Kaprow, Conceptual artists, Gordon Matta- Clark and Yoko Ono performed risky cuts that effectively broke down barriers between the public and private and shocked the art world. Gordon Matta-Clark is perhaps most famous for his site-specific work completed in 1974 entitled *Splitting: Four Corners*, (fig. 7) where the artist literally cut in half a single-family house. The art world had never before seen anything like his radical space interventions. Matta-Clark cut the house in half with hand tools; literally attacking it's structural integrity and then tilted the foundation to widen the gap (Fineberg, 393). Lastly, Matta-Clark cut out the house's corners and invited viewers to experience the cut from the outside and inside of the house before its destruction. In *Splitting: Four Corners*, Gordon Matta- Clark undid a physical house but also deconstructed it's social/ political meaning. Mathew Smith in "The Cut in Collage Pollock, Fontana, Matta- Clark, Ono," comments how Matta- Clark grandly communicates what it would be like to be at once inside and outside (Smith, 60). The Painter Susan Rothenberg, upon experiencing Matta-Clark's split house exclaimed, "the insides were like a chasm opening up the earth at your feet" (Fineberg, 393). She goes on to note how the split made her realize how a house speaks of home, shelter, and safety (Fineberg, 393). Through the act of cutting the house in half, Matta-Clark undermined its sense of privacy and function as a safe place to retreat to and revealed a structures ability to segregate and imprison (Smith, 60). The split made the house vulnerable to the elements but also let the sun in creating a connection between light and dark, the limitless and contained. Furthermore, the cuts revealed unexpected layers of space but also time (Schwabsky, 35). Matta -Clark actively critiqued how the suburban "box" and ghetto housing for the urban poor imprisoned and isolated individuals from each other and the outside world. His cut

destroyed literal and figurative barriers between people and brought together the private and public.

The performance of Fluxus artist Yoko Ono, also involved cuts, but cuts that violated Ono's body directly. While Matta- Clark's performances were often private, Ono requires participant involvement to "complete" the work (Smith, 60). Ono began her renowned *Cut piece* (fig. 6) in 1964 in which she sits cross-legged on a stage and solicits audience members to approach her and slowly cut away her clothing. The cutting continues until the moment of unbosoming, at which point Ono covers herself (Smith, 60). Ono understood the public and private as gendered terms rather than binary opposites, thus foreshadowing later feminist critiques of patriarchy in the seventies (Rendell, 21). Smith notes how "the slashing of the canvas" that is the disrobing of the body, "reveals the all too human void" (61). Through Cut piece, Ono assumed a vulnerable position and opened herself to violation. Although she orchestrated the piece the final outcome was left up to the audience.

Kaprow, Matta- Clark, and Ono inspired my desire to test boundaries between the private and public realm by making myself vulnerable through a performance piece. Like Ono, I orchestrated a performance, brought in participants, and left the end result in their hands. Similar to Matta- Clark, the residential site became the context for the piece. In including participants and building my piece around their choice of objects and containers, I hoped to resist elevating my position as an artist above the perceived "audience." Conceptual art also shaped my ideas about what makes a work art and the role of the artist and audience.

The written text of two authors Lewitt, and Godfrey help explain and exemplify conceptual art. First of all, Tony Godfrey in his article "Conceptual Art," begins by claiming that it is not about forms, materials, or aesthetics but rather about ideas and the way it questions art. Godfrey outlines four main forms of Conceptual Art: readymade, intervention, documentation, and words (Godfrey, 7). Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (fig. 8) exemplifies documentation. His work includes a very ordinary wood chair, a plain untouched photograph of the chair, and words taken from a dictionary describing a chair. All three chairs are and give evidence to the idea of "chair." The important part of the work, as in many conceptual pieces is the concept, the artist's choice, and the viewer's engagement with the idea. Godfrey notes that the chairs are of no account in

themselves and for Kosuth "a chair is a chair is a chair" just as "art is art is art" (Godfrey, 9). Similarly, in my piece the instructions, the objects themselves, and the photographs replicate the idea of the other but reveal different aspects inherent in that idea.

Furthermore, the Conceptual artist and theorists Sol Lewitt wrote, "Sentences on Conceptual Art" to describe his ideas about Conceptual Art. He prefaced the sentences by saying that he wrote as he thought and his ideas "are subject to change as my experience changes" (Lewitt, 837). One sentence number twenty-five that states, "the artist may not necessarily understand his own art. His perception is never better nor worse than that of others" caught my attention and represents a central aspect of Conceptual Art (Godfrey, 838). This sentence radically dismantles the idea that artists have unique and incomprehensible perception about their own work. Instead, Lewitt makes no distinction between artist and viewer thus pushing the boundary of traditional artistic reception. Both understandings are seen as equal and valid. Although Cconceptual Art demands more of the viewer, it also gives them significance and changes their role. The performance and photographs in my work attempt to make the participants choice of object and container significant. On the other hand my photographs depart from conceptual art because they do not act as pure documentation of the object but seek to enhance it or reveal an interesting or humorous narrative between the object and container. I hope to spark viewer's curiosity through the photographs but they result from my own apprehension.

Contemporary artists such as Sophie Callie, Kari Upson, Trevor Paglen, Fred Wilson, Walead Beshty, and China Adams have built on the art historical ideas expressed in pop and conceptual art and have influenced my own work.

Two influential artists Karri Upson and Sophie Calle use mixed media in their works that seek to trace identity through possessions and push the boundaries between public and private space. Sophie Calle is a French artist who works with photographs and performances and often places "herself in situations almost as if she and the people she encounters were fictional " (Sophie, 1). Her pieces often involve natural curiosity as well as intensive investigation. They also have a strong conceptual basis as her work establishes rules for and reports on situations she sets in motion. In a 1986 work entitled *The Hotel* (fig. 9), Calle worked as a chambermaid in Italy and imagined who the hotel guests were based on the personal possessions they brought with them (Sophie, 1). The

work included photographs of the objects in the room as well as descriptions of the investigation. In a more recent piece entitled *La Visite Guidee* (fig. 10) (1994), Calle's personal possessions were placed in display cases throughout the museum amidst the museums treasured objects and a guided audio soundtrack offered Calle's reflections on these objects. In this work, Calle makes the personal public while also calling into question the elevated public status of museum objects. Calle's work shows how context shapes our perception of objects and how possessions can speak to their owner's identity. I enjoy how Calle incorporates audio, text, objects, photographs to tell a story and how she dares to flirt with opposites: "control and freedom, choice and compulsion, intimacy and distance" (Jeffries, 2). Her work helps me understand and make peace with the contradictions I see in my own work. It is possible for me to be removed from the objects in the containers while becoming intimately acquainted with them. I can dictate a situation while leaving it open to chance.

Karri Upson, a Los Angeles artist and recent MFA graduate as of 2007 has built on Sophie Calle's tradition of story telling through found objects, but in searching for answers, "straddles the line between moral and inappropriate behavior" (Subotnick, 2). Upson found personal items a man left behind in a mostly burned out and deserted house. She then took up the task of researching him and gave him a multidimensional life, which through increasingly bizarre works began to merge with her own. Upson explains her work: " The objective reality of the man I construct collapses into the subjective fiction I create, until they merge and I am more him than he is" (Subotnick, 1). From his possessions; Upson creates a persona and character for this person she never met (fig. 11). In my own work, the personal objects displayed act as evidence to my character. For example, when one participant enclosed a high heel in a vacuum Tupperware, I was embarrassed that the price tag, indicating I spent 100$ on the shoe, had not been removed. I cared less about parting with the shoe but more about what the price tag revealed to others about my character. Furthermore, I was interested in how Upson painted incredibly small compositions of found objects and documents, proceeded to photograph these, and then blew them up to reveal fingerprints, hair, lint and dust revealing traces of the artist herself (Subotnick, 2). Due to Upson's influence I did not shy away from reflections of the camera or my own hand in the photographs, images from outside the window, or dust on the containers surface. I also incorporated small scale, blown-up and cropped images along with the normal photographs of the

objects. My work differs from Upson because while she attempted to merge her own and the man's identity through her photographs, my ultimate goal was to merge object and container and to create a dialogue between two material entities.

Similar to Sophie Calle and Karri Upson's investigative efforts, Trevor Paglen traces the history of secret military projects through the twentieth and twenty first century uncovering what he calls "black spots on the map." In contemporary art, artists like Paglen often take on the role of psychologists, anthropologist, sociologists thus expanding the scope and reach of art. Unlike Calle and Upson's work however, Paglen moves beyond private possessions to make privately held secrets available to the public. His work, which includes research and photographs, documents places such as Area 51 or Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan where military personal and civilians "go about their business under a shroud not so much of invisibility as elision, obfuscation, redaction and just plain indifference" (fig. 12& 13) (Pritchard, 2). He is able to collect and document evidence of these hidden locations because they are connected with larger traceable networks and systems. Unlike traditional conceptual artists who resist putting forward judgments about their own work, Paglen acknowledges "underlying all of my projects is the desire to see something in a particular way and communicate that to other people" (Pritchard, 2). Paglen also makes it clear that dissimilar to the documentary approach of conceptual artists, his images are not produced in order to evidence something but that they are "art photos" (Pritchard, 1). Paglen embraces the artistic and aesthetic value of the photographs due to their ability to shape perceptions and reveal what cannot be seen with the unaided eye. In my own work I hope to approach the object and container pairs with a similar investigative dedication and not shy away from making known my own perceptions about these objects. Similar to Paglen, through my photographs I hope to capture a moment that cannot be repeated: the slant, color, lighting, reflection, and composition. The photograph becomes more than the evidence or documentation heralded by conceptual artist, but it can reveal the secret, humorous, embarrassing, or ironic as perceived by the artist.

Like Trevor Paglen, Fred Wilson deconstructs and re-represents historical documentation but with a different emphasis. Maria Gasper in her article "Fred Wilson Re-Presents History and Objects," highlights how Wilson critiques the way historical or art institutions display cultural objects (1). While Paglen's work is based on geography, Wilson's work is grounded in history. Both choose to work outside of the gallery/ studio.

Wilson stands a part form Paglen, Calle, and Upson because he is not interested in creating something new but rather working and rearranging collection objects from African Art, Native American Art, or Post Modern Art that already exist in the gallery (fig. 14). Wilson critically examines how museums interpret the cultural meaning of objects for the public and challenges the viewer to reconsider notions of representation, race, and colonialism (Gaspar, 1). In one moment he described to audiences how museums include all African objects in one plexi-glass vitirine and asked if the same would be done with Modernist paintings for example? "Would they be exhibited on top of one another?" (Gaspar,1). Wilsons desire to re-contextualize these objects relate with my own desire to bring the private into the public sphere. How are the way these objects are stored, kept, displayed speak to broader ideas in society?

I have been recently most challenged by China Adam's work; specifically her recent 1996 show called *The Official Stitch and Hide Procedure* (fig. 15, 16, 17) where she determined that 77.13% of her possessions were not useful and proceeded to get rid of them by making them into artworks. Janet Koplas, in her exhibition review of China Adam's work at Ace, describes how Adam's wrapped hundreds of her things in water repellant rubber coated cloth and stitched the cloth closed. The objects were concealed for the most part creating what Koplas calls a "cemetery of concealed objects" (1). Adam's took her desire to deal with materialism to the extreme and resisted giving away the objects secrets. Koplas describes the wrapped possessions:

> Sealed for protection and for psychological separation, they are reduced to being signs of possessions rather than whatever they once actually were. Adams arranges the packages formally, in neat, graduated stacks very much in keeping with the symmetry of mortuary architecture …For the moment she still possesses them; she has simply suppressed source, identity and function in favor of form and idea (Koplas, 1).

Unlike Adam's in my own work, I choose to contain the objects in clear boxes so that there identity would be known. I wanted to resist keeping the private, private, but wanted to make the inside available to be seen. I am challenged however by Adam's dedication to her conceptual idea, the risk she took in enclosing seventy percent of her things, and can see how the work directly deals with materialism. I hope to continue to challenge myself and remain open to new directions for my artwork. What if rather than

exposing these taken objects I attempt to de-emphasize them like Adams? What new veiled forms could emerge?

Initially, the performance stemmed from a desire to let go not only of my own possessions but my attachment to them. My Christian faith and research about materialism guided my desire to give up control and push my comfort. I invited others to my room, allowed participants to dictate the final outcome, and made my possessions available to be seen by the public. Although some tension and vulnerability is evident in my work, the completed performance pointed to something I did not expect. More interesting then the relinquishment of control and denial of access, was the objects and containers chosen by participants. Rather than being the heavy, serious, and difficult experience I expected, I was often curious about the participants choices and found myself amused and excited rather than distraught by their choices. Although doing without the objects did cause frustration at times, for example when I attempted to staple my essay to find that all of my staples had been taken, the anxiety was minimal. I realized that despite my preconceptions of how difficult this piece would be for me, fourteen objects is nothing compared to all that I have. At one point I wanted to count all of my things to show how small of a fraction the fourteen objects really were. At first my reaction troubled me because it strayed from my original intent however as I began photographing the objects I became immersed in the pairing of object and container and how the two merge to form interesting patterns, colors, shapes and ideas. What interested me about the objects was not that I could not access them, in fact I realized that many of these things I claim to need I rarely use, but rather why they were chosen and how they interacted with their containers to create new meanings. Through the photographs, I hope to reveal that the container shapes and colors our perception of the object inside. I do not want to ignore the subtle humor and creativity inherent in the participants carefully selected pairings but rather wish to examine and bring emphasis to it through the glossy photographs.

Their choice rather than my preconceptions began to take precedent. I found many of the pairings humorous or interesting for different reasons. My perfectionist friend signed her name in perfect cursive on a trashcan in a trash container; a male acquaintance chooses to bend the rules and placed one container inside another larger one; one participant put a photograph of my boyfriend and I in a measuring container placing my lips on the four liter marker; another friend placed my shades in a red tinted container reversing their role and from an object with which to see through to an object that must be seen. to

name a few… For other object and container pairs the abstract light and color in the photograph took over, morphing the nail clippers into a moth figure, creating a river landscape on the bottom of the glass jar, and suggesting railroad tracks over staples. In others I attempted to capture an interesting relationship between the object and container thus creating a new meaning or narrative: the keys in the piggy bank become the mouth of a vibrant pink face, a toothbrush and metal container clasp interact like two fictional characters in a cartoon, a q-tip emerges like a man climbing out of a cave. Why did participants choose to put certain objects in certain containers? What new interactions emerge due to the camera's mechanical eye? How does my own apprehension of humor guide the photographs?

Nicolas Bourriaud's 1998 work entitled *Relational Aesthetics,* helps found some of these questions. Bourriaud promotes art that emphasizes "process, performativity, openness, social context, transitivity and the production of dialogue over the closure of traditional modernist object-hood, visuality and hyper-individualsim" (Radical, 1). He champions art that models life and action within the existing real complete with its complexities and social obligations (Bourriaud, 3). According to Bourriaud, the nineties saw a shift in artistic production due to the emergence of a world wide urban culture, greater individual mobility, and the upsurge of social exchanges (Bourriaud, 4). Along with growing urbanization, Bourriaud challenged the artist to experiment and make work that "can be lived through" rather than "walked through" (Bourriaud, 4). He also positions relational aesthetics in a materialistic tradition but states that being materialistic does not imply narrow mindedness as defined through economic terms. Rather it is materialism that in order to create the world must first encounter it (Bourriaud, 8). In Bourriaud's work, I find the freedom to include and bring together a wide range of medium and practice. He makes valid questions about how objects, situations, individuals relate and how their coexistence creates new meanings.

Despite my own attempts to distance myself from materialism through the project, I found that I continue to embrace it. While attempting to relinquish control of my personal possessions, I ended up buying more: containers, ink, paper, mounting tape. I am frustrated by the fact that the acquisition of goods is inherent in my project. Furthermore, rather than deemphasizing my things, I brought attention to them through glossy plastic photographs. A materialistic value system is not only engrained in our society, but also in my own mindset and artistic practice. Despite my strong efforts, I cannot escape

materialism's tug- it's emphasis on discovery, appearance, and presentation. My project mirrors my desire to save money and the reality that I often spend more than I should. My project however is not a failure, because by rejecting pretense and embracing compromise, I can bring attention to the ways in which desire and actuality coexist and are negotiated in society. The project successfully revealed the contradictions inherent in addressing materialism. In addition, through the process, I realized that I am not as attached to my things as I believed before. Referring back to conceptual artist Sol LeWitt, he also wrote, "once the idea of the piece is established in the artists mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly" (LeWitt, 2). Initially, I was inspired by Conceptual artists de-emphasizing of the object, but realized that despite my efforts, the process can never be carried out entirely blindly. Inherent in any artistic process is individual choice and pressure from society. Ultimately, humans are not machines but are subject to constraint. I do not want to pretend to be blind, to make my art fit into a decided form, rather, I want to let it speak for itself. After all, according to Nicholas Bourriaud "artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions (constantly) develop and evolve" (1).

Epilogue:

I ended my fall semester thesis paper with an all too true quote by Nicholas Bourriaud: "artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions (constantly) develop and evolve." Without meaning too, I foreshadowed the major reworking of my project for the advanced spring senior thesis seminar.

I was relatively satisfied with my fall thesis project but felt that it left much room for improvement. In the fall, I completed a performance based piece in which I relinquished control of my space by inviting participants to choose and enclose in containers – for the remaining of the semester- objects from my room. I then photographed the fourteen objects and container and presented them with their corresponding photographs at the end of the semester. Research about materialism, public verses private space, and how artists have dealt with material possessions in the past, provided a basis for my work. In the end however, my project was connected to but did not completely address these issues in a very direct and meaningful way. Rather than being the simple, conceptual, and poignant piece that I had hoped for, my fall project was complicated, difficult to explain, and in some ways materialistic. My fall project began to be less about the themes I elaborated on in my paper, and more about participant's choices of objects, my own artistic judgment, and relational aesthetics. I believe artists should allow for shifts in emphasis, and that is why I choose to continue with and see the fall project through to completion. However, when given the chance to begin again in the fall, I wanted to learn from the critiques and my own observations and take the opportunity to do something new that was more in line with my research and artistic goals.

In the spring advanced thesis I hoped to continue with certain elements of the fall piece. My spring thesis entitled "Inside My Space" was a photographic documentation of every object inside my dorm room. I took, edited, and organized 1024 photograph's each representing individual objects centered on a white background. The final presentation was a six by eight feet grid mounted on the wall and surrounded by a painted light gray border. Both projects have similarities besides being predominantly photography based. They deal with ideas about materialism and privacy, allude to my context as a student at Scripps College but also as a United States citizen in 2010, and establish conceptual

guidelines while still allowing for artistic judgment. The spring project however deviates from the beginning attempt in significant ways.

I think that "Inside My Space" deals with the themes discussed in my paper more directly. The viewer and myself are forced to face everything I own; nothing is hidden and the objects are presented in a straightforward manner. Whereas in the fall, I presupposed that the project would be difficult, in the spring, I attempted to follow through with the conceptual idea without any pre-judgments. I simply let the project be and therefore was not confused or disappointed when it was more liberating than trying. I found that when one attaches too many emotions or attempts to overly predict responses, the artistic process becomes confined. In the spring, I also attempted to apply a non- materialistic attitude to the way I did and presented my project. I was frustrated by how the fall project over-glamorized my possessions and how I spent over two hundred dollars buying new containers for it. Therefore, in the spring, I made choices along the way that kept cost low so that my project would address materialism in content and process. Furthermore, in my final piece, I set conceptual guidelines for the project but also allowed for spontaneous creativity. I arranged the objects, altered the backgrounds, and at times shot multiple objects in the same frame. For me those creative choices keep the project artistically alluring while still maintaining conceptual significance.

Overall, I am happy with "Inside My Space". I am pleased with the photograph quality, the mounting and cutting job, and how the gray border worked to delineate the grid from the wall. I like how the colorful tinted backgrounds weave in and out, and how denser and lighter areas emerge. I enjoy how the piece reads differently at various distances- each reading contributes to the overall meaning of the piece. From far away, one can see that the piece is large, colorful, flat, and presented in a grid- this is a conceptual study. From a medium distance, the piece with all of its detail becomes overwhelming, but it also encourages the viewer to take a closer look- this is a lot of "stuff"! When viewing the piece up close, it becomes very intimate- there are some private, mundane, and telling things here. It is when the viewer takes a closer look that they begin to make judgments about me, or perhaps the society in which I live. They begin to make connections with the piece whether they enjoy or have a similar object or have given me one of the things presented. Most importantly however, a close viewing of the piece is a CHOICE by the viewer to enter in to look at what would otherwise be

unavailable or inappropriate. I wonder too if individuals would be more comfortable viewing this piece alone. The project required some vulnerability from me but also invited to put themselves out there as well.

If I did this project again I would change a few things. I enjoyed how large and small objects were about the same size in the grid, but to really emphasize their equality, I would try to get a more even white border around every object. I would also increase the size of each photograph and have the width longer than the height, to allow for easier close looking, especially in a crowded room.

This piece has been very significant to me. One song put's it well "we spend our whole life searching for all the things we think we want, never knowing what we have." This project helped me realize everything I own and everything I have that cannot be bought or sold. With this new awareness I want to be more careful about what I spend my money on and hope to give a good amount away. I also hope to continue making art that is challenging and speaks honestly about my life. I am thinking about doing something that addresses my naivety about finances and the reality that I will need to face the issue head on once I graduate. We will see where that leads…

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Object and Container Pairs:

Keys in Pink Piggy Bank

Flower and Vase In Blue Water Container

Picture Frame in Clear Measuring Device

Toothbrush in Metal Lunch Pail

Nail Clippers in Small Plastic Purse

Q-tips in Plastic Circular Pail

Sunglasses in Transparent Red Box

Trash Can with Trash in Opaque Trash Can

Material Blue Square in Green Storage Unit

High Heel in Clear Vacuum Tupperware

Watercolor Painting in Yellow Milk Crate

Hand Towel in Glass Circular Container

Staples in Solid Green Soap Box

Paper Schedule in Presentation Cube

Participant Instructions

Open door

Proceed inside the room alone and close door

Find containers in center of room

Choose a container

Open container

Search room thoroughly (nothing is off limits!)

Find any object that will fit in container

Place object in container

Close container

If necessary use tape/cardboard to fully contain object in container

Sign and date container with marker on tape

Leave container in center of room and open door

Close door

Lead Instructions

Prior to participant involvement:

Create both sets of instructions

Arrange for fourteen participants to come to my room in fifteen-minute increments

Collect fourteen various containers

Place containers in center of room

Also include tape, scissors, and black marker

During participant involvement:

Hand participant instructions

Give participant no further explanation

Wait outside room as participant performs tasks

Record thoughts, ideas in red book

Once participant exits room, thank them for their participation

After participant involvement:

Enter room alone and find container

Keep the object enclosed at all times until thesis completion

Move container to studio

Photograph each object in its container

Compile and assemble instructions, objects, and photographs for final display

Figure 1: Andy Warhol
Campbell's Soup Cans
1962
Each canvas: 20 x 16" (50.8 x 40.6 cm).

Figure 2: Robert Rauschenberg
Bed
1955
75 ¼ x 31 ½ x 8'' (191.1 x 80 x 20.3cm).

Figure 3: Cornell, Joseph
Untitled (The Hotel Eden)
1945
15 1/8 x 15 3/4 x 4 3/4 in.

Figure 4: Daniel Spoerri
Kichka's Breakfast I
1960
14 3/8 x 27 3/8 x 25 3/4" (36.6 x 69.5 x 65.4 cm).

Figure 5: Alan Kaprow
Words
1961
Performance

Figure 6: Yoko Ono
Cut Piece
1961
Performance

Figure 7: Gordon Matta-Clark
Splitting: Four Corners
1974

Figure 8: Joseph Kosuth
One and Three Chairs
1965
chair, 2' 8 3/8" x 1' 2 7/8" x 1' 8 7/8"; photo panel, 3' x 2' 1/8"; text panel, 2' 2' 1/8".

Figure 9: Sophie Calle
From the Hotel Series:
Hotel #24
1983
102 x 142 cm/ 40,16 x 55,9 in

Figure 10: Sophie Calle
La Visite Guidee
1994

Figure 11: Kaari Upson
Forget All Others
2006
42 x 66

Figure 12 & 13: Trevor Paglen
Unmarked 737s at Tonopah Test Range & Unmarked 737 at "Gold Coast" Terminal Las Vegas
2005

Figure 14: Fred Wilson
Untitled (Atlas)
1992

Let it be known:

On February 20th, 1995 via an extensive inventory of her possessions, China Adams came to the conclusion that 77.13% of her possessions had achieved what she has named "Official Burden Status". China Adams discovered that in fact only 22.87% of her possessions maintain integrity as useful possessions worthy of maintenance and upkeep, if necessary. On February 21st, 1995 China Adams began her process of concealment and disposal of her burdensome possessions, through her "Official Stitch and Hide Procedure". On November 29th, 1995 China Adams finished sewing.

Figure 15:
China Adams
The Official
Stitch and Hide
Procedure
1995
11" x 8 1/2"

Figure 15: China Adams
The Official Stitch and Hide Procedure: Box #7
1995
33" x 18" x 18"

Figure 16: China Adams
A Novel Attempt
2009
high and 16" diameter