

ANATOMY OF THE MATERIAL SELF

AN INVESTIGATION OF SELFHOOD AND THE MATERIAL LIFE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into the odyssey of selfhood and material life as it traverses from one cultural landscape to another. The primary objective is to investigate the relationship between identity and the evolution of selfhood, utilizing the concept of a system of symbols manifested and negotiated within my home through design and object ownership. The auto-ethnographic and self-reflexive approach dissects the anatomy of my material selfhood from my immigration in 1998 to the present day. Through an examination of my personal journey, this study utilizes personal, spatial and object anecdotes as key elements in the analytical process, aiming to encapsulate and scrutinize how one's home and possessions function as conveyors of meaning. In this process, the research unveils the significance of my domestic world and the objects within as symbols revealing connections or intentional detachments interconnected with aspirations, affirmations and the complex processes of assimilation. By dissecting the complexities inherent in multivalent concepts of culture, contemporary taste-worlds and racialized boundaries through a transdisciplinary approach, it explores the notion of belonging with belongings, analyzing the intricacies of identity and material culture to reveal the interconnections that aim to contribute to the contemporary experience of selfhood. The research offers a viable methodology and model to interrogate and analyze how individuals negotiate and develop identity and selfhood through the symbiotic system of symbols created in their material lifeworld.

KEYWORDS

Home, Interior, Material Culture, Identity, Possessions, Hegemony, Taste, Symbols, Belonging, Transdisciplinary, Auto-Ethnography.

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1

Daydreaming

...the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. Thought and experience are not the only things that sanction human values. The values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity in its depths. Daydreaming even has a privilege of auto-valorization. It derives direct pleasure from its own being. Therefore, the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are re-lived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time.

— Gaston Bachelard¹

Ever since I was young, like many of us in the span of our lives, the fantasies of houses and interiors — the construction of images of domestic contentment with possessions as vital players in a personal, intimate domestic dramaturgy — have been more than simply manifestations

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 28.

of materialist desire being played out. Over the years, I have engaged in the exploration, negotiation, acceptance and rejection of a spectrum of “traditional and contemporary cultural, social, aesthetic and technical knowledge to varying degrees.”² This process has been instrumental in crafting a “lifeworld”³ fueled by daydreams, desires and aspirations — even if, at times, I could not see my Korean-self belonging in parts of my envisioned and constructed lifeworld. Despite any comprehensive knowledge about social class, status, power structures, the operations of Western capitalism and so on, I understood very quickly where I fit in and where I did not. My drawings from my childhood did not include shapes of traditional Korean hanok nor elaborate turreted castles like those of Disney fantasies. Rather, they showed my awareness and subconscious desire for a proverbial American middle class single-family detached house with a gable roof, a window in the attic, larger windows on the main floor bounded by manicured lawns. There were trees, sunshine and the quintessential family of four symbolized with thick wax crayon scribbles.

Before relocating to Canada, there existed in Korea a certain level of exposure to North American culture which no doubt had influenced my daydreams and aspirations from childhood. In explaining this phenomenon, in *Economic Development in Historical Perspective 1945-1990*, historians Carter J. Eckert, Ki-Baik Lee and Young Lew investigated various factors contributing to Korea’s rapid economic growth and modernization post-World War II. This growth is linked to international phenomena, such as Korea’s geopolitical position with the United States, historical ties with major capitalist countries and the impact of Japanese colonialism which laid the groundwork for the country’s accelerated modern transformation. South Korea experienced substantial American influences, encompassing historical and political realms.⁴ There is no doubt that cultural influences — the influx of design sensibilities, retail brands, restaurant chains and various art forms, including music, books, film and television played a significant role in shaping not only myself but urban Koreans. As a personal anecdote to emphasize this point, I know that my mother carried in her wallet a photo of James Dean and Julie Harris (see

2 Alison J. Clarke, “The Aesthetics of Social Aspiration,” in *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*, ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 26.

3 David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (Great Britain: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979).

4 Carter J. Eckert, Ki-baik Lee, and Young Lew, “Economic Development in Historical Perspective 1945-1990,” in *Korea Old and New: A History* (Ilchokak Publishers, 1990), 389—418.

figure 1) in *East of Eden*⁵ through her young adulthood in 1970's Korea, which is an object that I now have framed in my home. Similarly, my father's fondness of American culture through his love for hollywood movies, jazz music and celebrating special occasions with a steak dinner at TGI Fridays, which the family eagerly attended during the chain's grand opening in Seoul. I was intrigued by my uncle who enjoyed American and British heavy metal music and his white electric guitar which I never actually witnessed him playing. In reflecting on these intimate truths from an early age, I now understand that my exposure to American culture was one I could not avoid. I question now if this early influence is why assimilation in Canada occurred without much hesitation or effort.

In John W. Berry's exploration of modern acculturation in *Acculturation: A Personal Journey across Cultures*, I encountered a concept that immediately resonated with my experiences — "remote acculturation". This concept describes the phenomenon of cultural influence through media and tourism absent any interpersonal contact.⁶ Living in Seoul during the 1990's, I observed and experienced a global hierarchy favoring the Western culture in various aspects ranging across ideas about what is called "race", taste preferences, aesthetics and style and what functioned as the managed sensibilities of character.⁷ In retrospect, the drawings of a home indicating a notion of middle-class American life is imbued with confusion and shame in not recognizing the beauty of my culture — which was almost always defined with terms such as exotic, foreign and oriental, ensuring the notion of otherness — until much later on.

Edward W. Said, in his pivotal study *Orientalism*, about Western attitudes towards the "East" defines the orient as "an integral part of European material civilization and culture . . . a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'".⁸ The West is centered as the superior hegemonic position and thus, I struggle with the realization that the beauty inherent in my native culture

5 *East of Eden* (Warner Bros, 1955).

6 John W. Berry, *Acculturation: A Personal Journey Across Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 12.

The term 'Remote Acculturation' is derived from the study: *Remote Acculturation: The "Americanization" of Jamaican Islanders* by Gail M. Ferguson and Marc H. Bornstein (2012).

7 See: Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in America", *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, editors, J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, (New York 1982), 143-176.

8 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Toronto, Canada: Vintage Books Edition, 1979), 2-7.

is always undervalued in comparison. As a child striving to belong and find acceptance in a North American suburban environment, my perceptions distilled into a fundamental belief: being Korean was deemed — in the eyes of the generally Caucasian society in which my family now existed — unattractive, incorrect and incompatible with the values of the time and place. While the concept of remote acculturation defined my exposure to Western culture and sensibilities, I did not understand that there could exist a gulf between the awareness of a culture not of my origin and one's acceptance by and participation in it. When I took my first steps on Canadian soil, the Korean-nurtured dreams of this suburban life seemed not only attainable and legitimate but necessary to belong.



FIGURE 1. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF A MOVIE STILL (EAST OF EDEN) IN FLOWER FRAME, 2024

2

An Investigation of Material Selfhood

Human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value - what might be called a 'presence'.

— Jean Baudrillard⁹

Simultaneously, this research is an interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary study of selfhood and material life. The researcher is both the subject and author of the work, a fact made possible by the methodologies of auto-ethnography and the critical premise of self-reflexivity.¹⁰ The subject of the work — the consideration of the role of possession in the making of identity and what is called selfhood — is indebted to art historian Mario Praz's remarkable autobiography *The House of Life*.¹¹ The author, the famed art historian and critic, narrates his life story by taking the reader on a detailed tour of his apartment in Rome in which the contents — his possessions — function as points of entry into anecdotes and

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (Verso, 1996), 16.

¹⁰ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 36, no. 4 (138) (2011): 273–90, <https://jstor.org/stable/23032294>.

¹¹ Mario Praz, *The House of Life* (New York: Akadine, 1896).

experiences. This thesis represents a critical assessment of character — the individual in society — by focusing on the interrelationships between material possessions and feelings. The possessions of the author are at once extensions of his identity, being and character and mechanisms into consideration of the same. The author/subject's objects are considered as tangible expressions — embodiments — of ideas, feelings and patterns of thought. In the context of the subject's domestic world, the objects considered, while always tools for living, are as much affirmational as aspirational. And these realities constitute the core of this work.

Sociologists with an interest in the social and symbolic meanings of art, objects and culture during the post-World War II decades, particularly in the modern era where audience considerations are crucial, have predominantly concentrated on the realms within the public domain.¹² Their studies are primarily conducted with an empirical approach and methodology focusing on collection of data through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. These theories traditionally emphasize three main types of external forces in terms of ownership and possession of art and objects as power, status and control. While the power of the objects in a person's life have long been recognized and studied, the approaches to the critical study of the meaning of things and possessions vary. By making myself the research subject, I am able to expand beyond the realm of empirical knowledge and data collection in my interrogation of the domestic space and the objects within. I agree with David Halle that meanings “emerge and crystallize” in the context of the domestic setting in which the person lives with the object.¹⁴ As a result, direct experience and personal engagement of living with the object is critical and the focus of this research.

To distinguish between the concepts of identity and selfhood, I turn to social psychologist Megan E. Birney's work, *Self and Identity*. Birney, drawing from the American Psychological Association, defines identity as “an individual's sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person

¹² David Halle, *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4.

¹³ Halle, *Inside Culture*, 6.

¹⁴ Halle, 11.

and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles.” Additionally, she underscores identity as an expression of one’s relationship with their surroundings, encompassing self-awareness, self-claims and external recognition. Therefore, identities are inherently social, intertwined with traits, roles, social relations and group memberships within our societal structure.¹⁵

In contrast, the term self or selfhood is complex and lacks a unified definition. Birney identifies three key features of selfhood: first, its complexity, as it encompasses various facets of our existence. Second, the ability to differentiate oneself from others, an essential aspect for human functioning, as articulated by Martin P. J. Edwardes. Lastly, the influence of one’s social environment, as emphasized by Terje Sparby and colleagues, indicating that our selves are shaped by our interactions with others.¹⁶ Expanding on the notion of selfhood, Giampiero Arciero and Guido Bondolfi term it “ipseity,” highlighting the pre-reflexive consciousness individuals have of themselves in their interactions and experiences. Selfhood emerges from one’s unique way of being, not easily categorized like objects.¹⁷ While identity and selfhood are related and sometimes interchangeable, as suggested by Bauman and colleagues idea that “the labor of self-composition never ceases,” they represent ongoing processes of discovery throughout our lives. Thus, identities offer a framework for understanding our selfhood within the context of our life experiences.¹⁸

In *The Principles of Psychology*, American philosopher and psychologist William James distinguishes three distinct aspects of the empirical selfhood which includes: the material self (the body and all materials belonging to the self), the social self (perception of others) and the spiritual self (sense of self closest to the perception of one’s values in terms of intellectual, moral, religious, aspiration and conscientiousness).¹⁹ Among James’s three facets of selfhood, I posit the material-self to hold the greatest potential for revealing a comprehensive spectrum of selfhood, encompassing social and spiritual dimensions. Yet, this revealing capacity not easily

¹⁵ Megan Birney. *Self and Identity*. 1st ed. 2023. Reprint, Taylor and Francis, 2023. <https://www.perlego.com/book/4140532/self-and-identity-the-basics-pdf>, 12-13.

¹⁶ Birney, *Self and Identity*, 13.

¹⁷ Giampiero Arciero, and Guido Bondolfi. *Selfhood, Identity and Personality Styles*. 1st ed. 2009. Reprint, Wiley, 2009. <https://www.perlego.com/book/2774956/selfhood-identity-and-personality-styles-pdf>, 13.

¹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, and Rein Raud. *Practices of Selfhood*. 1st ed. 2015. Reprint, Polity Press, 2015. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1535921/practices-of-selfhood-pdf>, 102-103.

¹⁹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Project Gutenberg, 1842-2018), <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/57628/pg57628-images.html>, 328-329.

extending in reverse. Theories that define self-reflexive and auto-ethnographic research hold the power to reveal important dimensions of selfhood and thus, I am interrogating my material selfhood. My self-examination — the descriptive and illustrative approach of describing my history, character and sense of self — is invariably tied to my ideas and experiences of home, homemaking, identity, culture(s), self-fashioning, social class, performativity, material desires and, perhaps most significantly, the pressures and processes of cultural assimilation which are distinct and unique to me. The interconnections revealed and recognized in this work aim to contribute to the contemporary experience of selfhood.

A critical observation of possessions and the objects we desire (meaning, objects of aspiration) and its impact on how individuals participate in the formation of their identity is crucial to assess and evaluate due to its significant impact on the practice of material self-fashioning and in turn, designing of our domestic interiors. It is not inconceivable to hypothesize that identity is shaped and created by objects directly around us and in our milieu. Thus, the primary questions that inform this research are as follows:

1. In what ways can we observe and study objects through an auto-ethnography and self-reflexive approach? How can we create a transdisciplinary model of object meaning and meaning making which interrogates diversity and multiplicity of meaning an individual creates?
2. In what ways have the pressures and mechanisms of cultural assimilation influenced my perspectives on and possessions of object ownership, aspiration and affirmations, and what valuable insights can be drawn from the findings in this context?

Like Praz's text, the auto-ethnographic and self-reflexive approach focuses on two distinct areas of research: my home (interior design) and my possessions (material culture). The disciplines

of design, design history and material culture are related and interdisciplinary. This thesis adopts a transdisciplinary framework that incorporates and references critical methodologies from various disciplines such as architecture, art, philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, anthropology and post-colonial studies. Thus, the utilization of a transdisciplinary approach is essential for analyzing the intricate nature of multivalent concepts encompassing culture, contemporary taste and ethnic boundaries.

The primary objective is to investigate the acceptance of transdisciplinary models concerning the meaning of objects by exploring the intricate relationship between identity and material culture with an overarching goal to uncover the interconnections that contribute to the contemporary understanding of selfhood. In conclusion, this thesis delves into the realm of taste sensibilities, by exploring and utilizing my identity and experiences as a case study that investigates immigrant integration, cultural reconfiguration and behaviors. In using the tangible realities of my home and my possessions to interrogate critically the operations of my mental world, my understanding of North American materialism and aspirational self-fashioning as they have been played out in the making of my lifeworld.

3

Dissecting the Anatomy of the Material Self

First, the design of this thesis began with consent from my spouse — with whom I have shared life for ten years — to write about our home, our possessions and in some instances, our lives as individuals and as a couple. Here, the fact of our entwined, merged and separate values, desires and dreams have been acknowledged and revealed in the investigation of our home and objects within. Second, central to this thesis research was the compiling of an annotated inventory (see appendix A and B, table 1 and table 2) of objects in the public areas of my home. In order to engage in a thoughtful and critical analysis of the items within the inventory, only objects that are visibly and intentionally positioned in the open areas of our home are included (the areas I consider to constitute the public domain of the home). This entails a process of critical evaluation in placing each object, extending beyond mere functionality. Whether driven by aesthetic considerations or prioritizing significance, the placement of each item undergoes careful scrutiny.

The public domains of my home are designated by a notion of performance which Erving Goffman describes as the “activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observer”.²⁰ In contrast to my previous chapter’s concept of selfhood influenced by James, I define the concept of identity through Goffman’s lens of performance, highlighting how individuals shape impressions. Identity, in this context, emerges from social, cultural and personal factors and interactions such as ethnicity, gender and profession. The spaces of focus in my home for this research are dependent on areas where performance is prominent. The key sections of this research will include the main floor of my home for investigation: the front room, the dining space and the kitchen. The lower level of my home, which includes the bedroom, a small study area and bathroom, although accessible and visible due to an open concept floor plan of my home, the lower level remains a private space and is not the focus of this research.

In this context, the public domain can be further delineated by occasions when guests, acting as observers and active participants, are present. During such times, these areas receive heightened attention and energy dedicated to meticulous curation. This involves considerations such as cleanliness, arrangement of items, organizational aspects, as well as investments in time and capital. The presence of guests not only signifies their experience but also serves as a tangible affirmation or critique of the efforts invested in creating and maintaining these spaces. Objects in private spaces such as bathrooms and storage spaces including closets, cabinets, drawers or hidden from sight as well as wearable objects (meaning, clothing, shoes, jewelry, etc.) were omitted from assessment. It is important to note that certain wearable objects do play a significant part in shaping our identity.²¹ However, the focus of the research is on objects which have gone through the process of actively being placed and displayed in space. The annotated inventory includes aggregated information such as: illustration of the object, the assigned category of classification, a description of the object and technical information including,

20 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 22.

21 See: Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of California Press, 1992).

And, Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

authorship, origins and manufacturer, the year of acquisition, monetary value and motivation. With this last category including what functions as a field note that is self-reflexive, written in a form of free-writing captures and reveals various themes regarding material aspiration, affirmation, function, collection and various thoughts, emotions or memories attached to or evoked by objects. The annotated inventory was critical in distinguishing and determining which object within the home was significant to interrogate within the public areas of the home and revealing various meanings as a preliminary step (see Appendix C, page 72).

The body of the written thesis is following the structure and strategy of Praz's text, *The House of Life*. Praz's melding of stories about his life and his collection of rare furniture and other objects is structured as a sequential journey through the apartment, starting, fittingly, at the entrance hall. The text begins with the chapter titled *Via Giulia*²² in which Praz begins his recollection of his life in the homes prior until his discovery of a home on Via Giulia, a street in Rome with his wife and logically, Praz moves inwards to the chapter titled, *The Entrance Hall*.²³ This procession from outside to inside or outward to inward is an approach I aim to follow not only in the context of spatial inquiries similar to Praz, but in the inquiries of objects and the material self. These chapters will center on one of the public domains within the home, elucidating the spatial and design characteristics through objects that serve as markers in space. The narrative perspective will transition from spatial descriptions to the objects themselves, weaving in and out of stories of life, selfhood, motivations, affirmations and aspirations.

In approaching this text for research, it was evident Praz explores themes relating to memory, nostalgia and the passage of time to reveal possessions as key indicators of taste, an extension of the self and a contributor of a sense of self. I question what would happen if I were to observe the objects in my home in the manner of Praz and what information would emerge from such an extensive review of my home and my possessions. It is important to note

22 Praz, *The House of Life*, 13-22.

23 Praz, 23-63.

that in this research, the structure of the home is as critical in its assessment with the objects. In her work *Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration*, Joan Kron outlines the concept, system of symbols:

The furnishings of a home, the soul of the house, and its landscapes are all part of a system — a system of symbols. . . And what is truly remarkable is that we are able to comprehend and manipulate all the elements in this rich symbol system as well as we all do — for surely the language of the home and its court is one of the most complex languages in the world. But because of that it is also one of the richest and most expressive means of communication.²⁴

Kron's exploration emphasizes our ability to understand and manipulate the elements of this complex language and its profound impact on individual identity and social affiliation. This is echoed by psychologist Irwin Altman's emphasis on the crucial role of privacy in the development of self-identity which occurs in the home. Privacy provides the residents — in their primary territory — an essence of individuality and freedom that we do not have in any other setting. Quoting Altman, Kron underscores the essential role of controlling and regulating privacy: "the ability to control and regulate privacy is essential for self-identity".²⁵ This notion of territoriality is used to "assert our individual identity as well as our allegiance to a neighbourhood, an ethnic group, a taste culture, or class".²⁶ An integrated perspective of the self, the home and objects is utmost important in the research. Praz's text serves as a guide in navigating the complex network of relationships and reveals the significance of objects in formation of identity through memory, material self-fashioning practices, and the influences of acquisition and arrangement in creating a meaningful home.

To establish the research foundation, an examination of various disciplines was necessary. Thus, a transdisciplinary approach is adopted, delving into diverse ideas and

24 Joan Kron, *Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration* (Park Avenue, New York, New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1983), 19.

25 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 27.

26 Kron, 29.

scholarship from various schools of thought. Patricia Leavy, a sociologist and arts-based researcher, highlights transdisciplinary methodology as an approach which “necessitates high levels of collaboration and integration between disciplines, resulting in the development of new concepts and tools”.²⁷ New concepts and tools must be explored through high integration of various disciplines in this research to interrogate and analyze multiple facets of the self. In the context of this research, Leavy references the definitions of transdisciplinarity provided by Hadorn and colleagues, aligning with the core premise of the study.²⁸ Transdisciplinary research can grasp the complexity of problems, take into account the diversity of life-worlds and scientific perceptions of problems, link abstract and case-specific knowledge and finally, develop knowledge and practices that promote what can be perceived as the common good.²⁹ The examination of the self, home and objects critically draws from the disciplines of design and material culture, both disciplines already interdisciplinary in nature. Simultaneously, the transdisciplinary approach incorporates insights from sociology and post-colonial studies, particularly in the context of immigration and the contemporary concepts of assimilation. It is vital to acknowledge the prospect of seeing myself as the subject as a chance to interrogate my questions deeper, like unraveling a thread to the spool, from the outer shell of my home to my inner consciousness in ways surveys and interviews cannot. Through the investigation of selfhood, it warrants acknowledgment that self-awareness will occur when the self takes itself as its own object as outlined by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton.³⁰

27 Patricia Leavy, “Transdisciplinary and Training the Next Generation of Researchers: Problem-Centered Approaches to Research and Problem-Based Learning,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 5, no. 2 (2012): 205–23, 210.

28 Gertrude Hirsch Hadorn et al., “The Emergence of Transdisciplinarity as a Form of Research,” in *Handbook of Transdisciplinary Research*, ed. Gertrude Hirsch Hadorn et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2008), 19–39, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6699-3_2.

29 Patricia Leavy, *Essentials of Transdisciplinary Research*, 1st ed. (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2016),

30 Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 3.

4

ICN → YYZ: The Process of Absorbing

In 1988, my parents decided to leave Seoul. My sister and I had to choose what we were going to bring to Canada and what we were going to leave behind. The ship's cargo space for a family of four was limited. My father was an academic who prioritized the shipment of his books that he rarely opened. My mother was a homemaker in Seoul, an avid reader and craftsperson with an impressive collection of books which she relinquished, and gifting many away before the move. Despite the fragility and daintiness of each object, her collections of miniature perfume bottles and small green frogs made of ceramic or glass made their journey across the ocean (with these cherished possessions coming to be displayed in various cabinets in our home). As children under the age of ten, my sister and I had very little agency in what we were able to bring to Canada as it was mostly decided for us. A sparse selection of my possessions made it to the new world, and the lingering recollections of the challenging decisions even as a child — whether to keep, leave behind, discard or give away possessions — continue to weigh on my mind.

Without the objects that rooted my existence and past in Korea, the first few years of adjusting to a new life in a new world was incredibly difficult especially with the new environment, unfamiliar objects, barrier of language and inability to connect with others. When we moved, the system of symbols³¹ which were created over the duration of our lives as a family became fractured and fragmented. The distance to the life I knew, which felt unbearable at times, a few small objects kept me connected to my past, people and the place I once called home. My sister and I would clutch onto family photographs and reread letters from family and friends before falling asleep. My aunt, as a gesture of goodbye, had placed a pearl necklace around my neck on the way into the gate at the airport — a necklace that I would place next to my pillow like a religious relic. I understood early on that things have significance despite monetary or societal value, authorship, form or function.

In contrast to the objects which connected me to my past, there are objects which shaped my future in the new world. As a Korean diasporic person settling in a predominately middle to upper-middle class Caucasian suburban city of Burlington, Ontario at the turn of the millennium, I attended schools with very little diversity and with peers and friends who grew up in a nuclear family structure in single family homes. Due to Canada's insufficient recognition of foreign credentials, my parents, like many immigrants, encountered difficulties in securing opportunities in their respective fields.³² This situation led to significant changes in our family structure, financial situation and housing circumstances. Upon my arrival at the age of ten, I did not speak English and it was not until around the age of thirteen that I was considered articulate. Consequently, fitting in and making friends proved to be a challenging and gradual process. Coming from a monocultural country to a multicultural country meant for me that the notion of belonging required navigation, assessment, rumination and processing. To belong meant that I had to recognize and acknowledge that I was, first and foremost, different. Second, I needed to comprehend and establish what it is I needed to belong. Lastly, a modification, adjustment or transformation needed to be executed through an act such as an acquisition or

31 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 19.

32 Nathan Janzen and Claire Fan, "Proof Point: Canada Is Failing To Put Immigrant Skills To Work," *Point Proof* (Royal Bank of Canada, February 22, 2023), <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/proof-point-canada-is-failing-to-put-immigrant-skills-to-work/>.

relinquishment.

This adjustment involves what is commonly referred to as assimilation — defined aptly by Catherine S. Ramirez in *Assimilation: An Alternative History*, as the act of “absorbing”.³³ Ramirez supports her research by citing the work of Robert Ezra Park who holds the view that assimilation unfolds “by a process of nutrition, somewhat similar to the physiological one . . . [and how it is possible to] “conceive alien peoples” [being] incorporated with, and made part of the community or state”.³⁴ The process of assimilation gradually extended to various aspects of my selfhood and daily life. These external factors played a role in shaping not only how I fashioned myself but also the way I crafted my space. Furthermore, these external influences affected the knowledge I embraced or aspired to acquire, encompassing a spectrum from broader educational pursuits to specific knowledge within various subcultures. This awareness and my agency to change became — and still is to varying degrees — a constant and conscious engagement in the process of discovering my identity which proves to be a lifelong journey in understanding the person I was in the past, who I am today and aspire to be in the future in the context of being incorporated with and made part of the community as defined by Ramirez and Park.³⁵

33 Catherine S. Ramirez, *Assimilation: An Alternative History* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020), 9.

34 Ramirez, *Assimilation*, 9.

Ramirez quotes Robert E. Park in “Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups with Particular Reference to the Negro” from *American Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 5 (1914), page 611.

35 The notion of ‘community’ has evolved and changed with my own growth as well as cultural and societal changes since my immigration in 1998 which I will discuss in later chapters.

In Matters of a Contemporary Taste: Possessions, Performance & Identity

EVERYDAY TASTES FROM HIGH-BROW TO LOW-BROW ARE CLASSIFIED ON CHART

	CLOTHES	FURNITURE	USEFUL OBJECTS	ENTERTAINMENT	SALADS	DRINKS	READING	SCULPTURE	RECORDS	GAMES	CAUSES
HIGH-BROW 	 TOWN Fuzzy Harris Tweed suit, no hat COUNTRY Fuzzy Harris Tweed suit, no hat	 Eames chair, Kurt Verner lamp	 Decanter and ash tray from chemical supply company	 Ballet	 Greens, olive oil, wine vinegar, ground salt, ground pepper, garlic, unseasoned salad bowl	 A glass of "adequate little" red wine	 "Little magazines," criticism of criticism, avant garde literature	 Colder	 Both and before, here and after	 Go	 Art
UPPER MIDDLE-BROW 	 TOWN Books suit, regimental tie, felt hat COUNTRY Quaker Tweed jacket, knitted tie	 Empire chair, connoisseur sculpture lamp	 Silver cigarette box with wedding velvet signatures	 Theater	 Same as high-brow but with tomatoes, avocado, Roquefort cheese added	 A very dry Martini with lemon peel	 Solid nonfiction, the better novels, quality magazines	 Malcol	 Symphonies, concertos, operas	 The Game	 Planned parenthood
LOWER MIDDLE-BROW 	 TOWN Spokely necktie, double-breasted suit COUNTRY Sport shirt, colored slacks	 Grand Rapids Dependable chair, bridge lamp	 His and Hers towels	 Musical extravaganza film	 Quartered iceberg lettuce and store dressing	 Bourbon and ginger ale	 Book club selections, mass circulation magazines	 Front yard sculpture	 Light opera, popular favorites	 Bridge	 P.T.A.
LOW-BROW  <i>Tom Funk</i>	 TOWN Leather jacket, women shoes COUNTRY Old Army clothes	 Mail order overstuffed chair, fringed lamp	 Bokam-stuffed pillow	 Western movies	 Coleslaw	 Beer	 Pulp, comic books	 Parlor sculpture	 Jukebox	 Crops	 The Lodge

FIGURE 2. TOM FUNK, "EVERYDAY TASTES FROM HIGH-BROW TO LOW-BROW ARE CLASSIFIED ON CHART," LIFE, APRIL 11, 1949, 100-101. PERMISSION FOR INCLUSION OF ILLUSTRATED CHART GRANTED BY THE ESTATE OF TOM FUNK.

My interest in questions of the ways that objects are used in the performance of identity and the development of selfhood began in a graduate seminar when I was introduced to a socio-diagram published in the 11 April, 1949 issue of *LIFE* magazine which presented a hierarchical chart of American taste preferences and material life. Devised by the American art historian Russell Lynes (who authored the accompanying text) and illustrated by Tom Funk³⁶ (see figure 2), the chart presents a combination of satiric and matter of fact illustrations that explained the differences between the characteristics of elite or “high-brow” taste and the categories that cascaded downwards to “low-brow” taste with each category including a corresponding caricature of people with differing cranial sizes. Lynes’s chart — as much a product of his own interests in taste and aspiration as a sociological exercise about the state of American material and temperamental taste sensibilities at the time — generated a national conversation about the implication of possessions or knowledge of objects as indicators, even predictors, of aesthetic judgment and character. The publication of the diagram argued for the idea of taste as a dimension of selfhood, a discernment and appreciation made clear that the relationship between identity and possessions is consequential.

This academic encounter with Lynes’s diagram represented, for me, something far beyond matters of taste and perhaps something more cynical and unnerving. It is a world that is internalized and embodied through social structures, where the diagram indicates a map of the social spaces with historically constituted and acquired categories which organize the idea of the social world in the minds of all the subjects belonging to that world and are shaped by it.³⁷ For me, this chart — informed and unsettlingly humorous — became an unofficial guidebook about the value of assimilating into the dominant cultural group and community. It is evident that items from Korean culture or non-Western culture in general are conspicuously and obviously absent, except for the Go board nestled among the games of high-brow taste — a pastime I have enjoyed since childhood. Discovery of the Go board within this context offers a fleeting yet strangely comforting and disconcerting affirmation — albeit only in its familiarity.

36 Tom Funk, “Everyday Tastes From High-Brow to Low-Brow Are Classified on Chart,” *LIFE*, April 11, 1949, 100-101. Permission for inclusion of the illustrated chart granted by the estate of Tom Funk. Tom Funk (1911-2003) was an illustrator for books and prominent magazine publications such as *New Yorker*, *Harper’s Magazine* and *LIFE Magazine*. See: David Cleall and Bob Davenport, “Tom Funk: 1911-2003 Illustrator,” *English Cubist*, n.d., <http://www.englishcubist.co.uk/vgd/tf/>. The socio-diagram by Tom Funk was illustrated in response to Russell Lynes article in the February 1949 issue of *Harper’s Magazine*. Lynes was an American art historian, photographer, author and managing editor of *Harper’s Magazine*. See: Russell Lynes, “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 1949, 19-28.

37 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 468-469.

From my perspective, despite the age of the diagram's inception in 1949 in the heyday of postwar modernist design and attending campaigns, what is presented as "high-brow" taste endures to this day (albeit often nostalgically) further confirming my sense of being out of place and my desire to move into an informed cultural and material world.

In my work — from the time I thought carefully about the operations and implications of taste — I have come to better understand the subjective aspect of human experience which shapes personal identity. The way individuals engage with the world and how objects — their possessions and how they acquire, use and exhibit — serve symbolic, affirmational and aspirational roles. Naturally, I have developed a keen interest in examining the intricate tapestry of contemporary taste realms, particularly in the millennial context. Pierre Bourdieu, quoting Kant, defines taste as "an acquired disposition to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate' . . . in other words, to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction which is not (or not necessarily) a distinct knowledge".³⁸ Taste is a silent yet powerful and significant communicator with its materialist, social and cultural meanings and as an idea, the ways in which it is connected to an assortment of ideas regarding the individual and collective existence. It is subjective yet widely understood within social spaces and as Bourdieu notes, represents the "practical mastery of distributions which makes it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall — and therefore to benefit — an individual occupying a given position in social space".³⁹ Thus, the examination of the contemporary taste realms involves delving into the tensions between binary concepts such as ownership and aspiration, affirmation and rejection, the interplay of public taste (mass-culture) and individual preferences, distinctions between what is deemed cultured or uncultured, affluent or not and the juxtaposition of Western (hegemonically Caucasian) perspectives with those of visible minorities. This exploration is pivotal for understanding how the objects we choose to surround ourselves with significantly contribute to shaping our lives, considering the experiential, ideological, affective and cultural diversity that defines my world.

³⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 466.

³⁹ Bourdieu, 466.



FIGURE 3. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF THE HOUSE EXTERIOR IN WINTER, 2024.

6

Home

Wherever we are, be it small as an apartment or expansive as a desert, strange as a distant country or taken-for-granted as a small adobe home, we are always housed in a geographical world whose specifics we can change but whose surrounds in some form we can in no way avoid.

— David Seamon⁴⁰

The apartment in which I live with my spouse is the thirteenth place that I have called home (see figure 3). Nestled somewhere in between Toronto's Annex and Yorkville neighbourhoods, my husband and I moved to our current place in February of 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic that prompted many landlords to sell their homes. A disheartening moment unfolded when we received a call from the previous landlord, informing us that the unit would be sold and we needed to move out. This news came just after Paul had spent several days diligently drilling into concrete walls to install our new Vitsœ shelving system, resulting in painful blisters covering

40 David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (Great Britain: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979), 15.

his hands. The contents of the IKEA shelving unit which housed books, objects and records, now lay scattered across the floor, awaiting our decision on where these valued possessions will be placed on the Vitsoe and whether the IKEA shelving would be repurposed or removed with this new possession.

When we came to meet the potential new landlord to view the home, we were immediately charmed by the warmth of the multiplex created within a traditional single family home compared to a condominium. The leafy neighbourhood is residential with its signature housing stock in the styles of which take inspiration from what has been described as American Richardsonian Romanesque style and Queen Anne Revival⁴¹ along with arts and craft-ish Edwardian houses (like ours) with simpler form and mid-rise buildings born of the adaptation of the International style to Toronto. The outside of the potential new home said very little about the interior other than that it is humble with its red brick façade adorned with a painted periwinkle porch that is worn out on the footpath. I had enjoyed my condominium living in the historic, inner city neighbourhood known as “Trinity Bellwoods” because I experienced it as urban and cosmopolitan and I was, as a result, neither particularly excited by the exterior of this new house nor by the surrounding fraternity houses with their large, often neon-lit Greek alphabets on their façades. And here I had to remind myself of Adolf Loos arguing that houses should not be assessed on the basis of their exteriors. “The house, he wrote, does not have to tell anything to the exterior; instead, all its richness must be manifest in the interior”.⁴² It is the inside — the interior — that matters.

The interior is flexible and less static than the structures of the home itself. As a critical discipline tasked with creating space and as the name given to the study and informed consideration of space, the practice of interior design is present in all forms of human inhabitation. It both constitutes and represents what Graeme Brooker and Lois Weinthal consider to be a “full range of social, economic, and political issues”.⁴³ This thinking holds that

41 Frank Cunningham, “Architectural History of the Annex,” The Annex Residents’ Association, 2023, https://www.theara.org/architectural_history.

42 Adolf Loos, “Heimat Kunst,” in *Adolf Loos: Trotzdem 1900-1930* (Vienna: George Prachner, 1982).

43 Graeme Brooker and Lois Weinthal, eds., *The Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2.

each interior embodies a network of symbols and representation which reveal, even more than the elements and structures of a house, greater insights of the occupant, the attending culture and the values that regulate society. With the complexity that defines an interior space, it is not a surprise that the term interior itself has had its complex share of meanings.

In the late fifteenth century the term divided the inside from the outside and as means to describe spiritual and inner nature of the soul.⁴⁴ In the early eighteenth century, interiority designated “inner character and a sense of individual subjectivity.”⁴⁵ Later in the mid-eighteenth century, the term interior designated “domestic affairs and territory.”⁴⁶ And by the nineteenth century, the interior included “the inside of a building or room, especially in reference to the artist effect.”⁴⁷ It is evident throughout the centuries past, the term interior grappled between the realm of public and private, outer and inner, tangible and intangible but importantly, also as an artistic and aesthetic experience which has been explored through various theories and disciplines from anthropology to phenomenology. The interior space is unequivocally tied to human existence and inhabitation.

The previous occupants of the apartment had outfitted their home with mid-century modern furniture — large teak credenzas adorned with diverse objects, artworks and an Eames-style lounge chair defining the space. Paul and I perceived the couple’s taste as commendable. Sociologist David Wright defines taste as primarily related to sensation — the senses being the primary tools through which individuals apprehend the material world.⁴⁸ Taste, also involving sensibility and skill, serves as a tool for perceiving the world and making judgments within social and symbolic contexts.⁴⁹ The previous occupant’s choice of interior finishes, dark gray walls and intense red accent walls, combined with artworks and recognizable mid-century modern furniture created an eclectic yet cohesive and inviting space. It is essential to note that the perception of ‘good taste’ is subjective, as taste “is implicated in both how we understand and appreciate our experiences of the world, and how we live together in it.”⁵⁰ One’s individual

44 Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 2.

45 Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 2.

46 Rice, 2.

47 Rice, 2.

48 David Wright, *Understanding Cultural Taste: Sensation, Skill and Sensibility* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.

49 Wright, *Understanding Cultural Taste*, 5.

50 Wright, 6.

understanding, appreciation and experience of the world is subjective and unique. The notion of taste is a significant subject in this work, serving as an “exemplary theoretical sociological problem,” it mediates between “the individual, their nervous system, social and cultural processes and the consequences of tasting for identities and for our relations with others.”⁵¹ The exploration of my selfhood in this context can provide valuable insights that inform the concept of taste.

Despite the initial shock of the red paint as accent walls, Paul and I were drawn to the potential we saw in their living room, the future potential of the soon to be vacated space being heightened by the character — curated character — of their home. On our drive back home, our thoughts and conversations drifted into daydreams, which we swiftly navigated the potential of the apartment. Through these daydreams, we articulated a vision for the space, determining precisely what adjustments were needed to transform it into our home. That very evening, we submitted our rental application, foreseeing the unfolding of our distinct touch and placement of each object.

The next day Paul and I were notified by the landlord that we would be getting the apartment. This news constituted for me a recollection of several personal narratives reminiscent of my family’s move to Canada and my assimilation experiences — a reckoning with what I knew would be the processes of relinquishment and acquisition in the aid and cause of creating our new home. In the realm of domestic interior design, Kron emphasizes that “humans operate in multiple territories and have a much wider range of devices for controlling space.”⁵² In our homes, where we exert exclusive control, various furnishings and objects enable us to create our distinct spaces.⁵³ The interventions made by inhabitants in the interior and the arrangement of objects convey the idea that the house becomes a representation of its occupants. The awareness of the power of what can be labeled as the material self-fashioning meaning that some of the things we owned — IKEA shelves, IKEA bed frames and the first

51 Wright, *Understanding Cultural Taste*, 43

52 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 29.

53 Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 27.

sofa Paul and I purchased together (a blend of modern and more traditional styling with tufted detailing and synthetic upholstery) were swiftly listed on various online marketplaces without a second thought. These dutiful possessions have accompanied us in our lives and some of the objects have been in my possession since I first ventured out on my own. In all cases, the objects function as both mnemonic aids and sentimentally triggering devices. The objects we kept, acquired for the new place or produced ourselves, represent what Kron characterizes as the “issues of taste, morality, values, national pride and appropriateness” that define self-fashioning and material performance.⁵⁴ This aligns with the concept that individuals typically strive to portray themselves in a perceived favorable light, inherently introducing an element of performance.⁵⁵ However, it is essential for the individual to genuinely believe in the “impression of reality” they seek to create.⁵⁶ In other words, for various external influences and internal considerations which will be interrogated in later chapters, the items we relinquished no longer resonated with our values and aspirations. These things said, the rationale of the narrative of our move and efforts at homemaking, in this case, is not directly about assimilation per se. Rather, it centered on aligning with our ideals, values, aspirations and affirmations as individuals and as a couple.

In contrast to my early experiences of assimilation, my current life stage involves a transformative journey shaped by diligence in education, capital accumulation and a career in interior design and art consulting, where my understanding of “taste” has expanded — here, I am not positing that I have good taste but I understand to a certain degree what constitutes ‘having good taste’ in contemporary society. The concept of assimilation, given my present circumstances, has evolved significantly, influencing and continuing to reshape my lifeworld and the progress and advancements in culture and society, particularly with heightened awareness and education in post-modern, post-colonial and anti-colonial studies, play a crucial role in this transformation. The impact of events like COVID-19 and the associated surge in anti-Asian sentiments has not only provided me with a substantial platform but also an opportunity

54 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 6.

55 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 7.

56 Goffman, 17.

to deepen my knowledge and seek a deeper understanding of the self. In consideration of the temporal evolution of the society I am actively engaging with and belonging to — from a suburban city to an urban metropolis marked by extensive diversity — it is imperative to examine how the process of assimilation, along with the understanding of evolving assimilation models, both at the individual level and in the contemporary context.

In *Black Spaces, Black Places: Strategic Assimilation and Identity Construction in Middle-Class Suburbia*, Karyn R. Lacy introduces the term ‘strategic assimilation’. In contrast to the classic assimilation model which I have aimed to highlight through my experiences in my formative years where an immigrant aspires to a single assimilation destination (the white, Anglo-Saxon mainstream), Lacy references the segmented assimilation model posited by Portes and Zhou⁵⁷ which explores three paths of adaptation possible by immigrants of colour.⁵⁸ This includes: the white middle class, the black underclass (as immigrants of colour grapple with racial discrimination upon immigration) and the third path in which one deliberately retains the culture and values of their immigrant community where the immigrant relies on their ethnic communities for “social capital, employment leads and relief from discrimination.”⁵⁹ Lacy extends this perspective through an examination of an assimilation model designed to comprehend the intricacies of the Black experience. This contemporary model suggests that assimilation, akin to the concept of identity, involves an ongoing negotiation that necessitates a conscious effort to maintain connections with one’s culture and ethnic communities.

It is within this dynamic process that individuals construct and preserve their racial identity.⁶⁰ In my view, it is not feasible for an ethnic identity to completely absorb or assimilate in a society where what is called “race” and racialization is prevalent. Consequently, depending on the social context, immigrants must navigate and pivot between their cultural world and the prevailing society — the “ethnic enclaves constitute an immediate social network, shelter immigrants from discrimination and provide resources expressly for the group’s members.”⁶¹

57 Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, “The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530, no. 1 (1993): 74–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002716293530001006>.

58 Karyn R. Lacy, “Black Spaces, Black Places: Strategic Assimilation and Identity Construction in Middle-Class Suburbia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 6 (November 2004): 908–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198704200268521>, 909.

59 Lacy, *Black Spaces, Black Places*, 909.

60 Lacy, 909-910.

61 Lacy, 925.

Lacy draws on Barth's critical perspective, highlighting that "ethnic identities are not fixed, in variant social categories, but that group members switch ethnic identities under conditions where their original identity is no longer useful."⁶² This assessment will become particularly relevant as this ongoing negotiation will unfold within my home as I attempt to mark our space with 'Korean things' and 'Western things' ensuring my presence in both cultures and that this can be, or is, communicated. Anna Pechurina further clarifies this thinking by arguing how the context of the home serves as a revealing lens for understanding identity and culture in particular to immigrants. "Home, which is defined by this body of work as a dynamic and multidimensional concept," as Pechurina explains, "is seen as an important focal point of migrant and diasporic belonging and identity." Pechurina further expands on the idea that by studying the creation of homes through everyday activities, accumulating or discarding objects and building connections with people and spaces provides insights into the creative construction and transformation of identities and cultures during movement and migration. Decorating and furnishing homes play a role in actively participating in the (re)shaping of one's place in the world, as well as in producing one's identity narrative.⁶³

62 Lacy, *Black Spaces, Black Places*, 912.

See: Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Boston, MA: Little Brown (1969).

63 Anna Pechurina, "Researching Identities Through Material Possessions: The Case of Diasporic Objects," *Current Sociology* 68, no. 5 (June 12, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120927746>, 2-3.

7

The Front Room

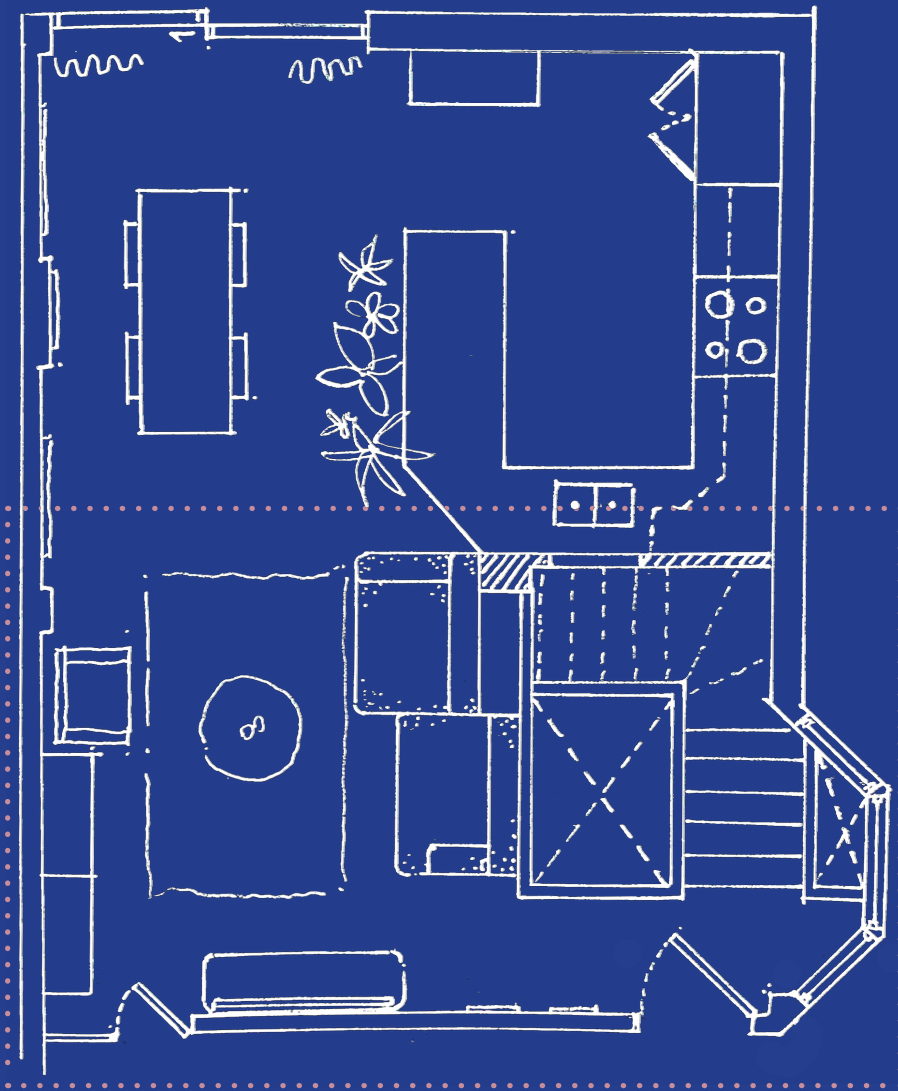


FIGURE 4. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF THE HOUSE FLOOR PLAN, 2024.

Our living room is directly adjacent to the entrance and the entrance opens up to a staircase which, for me, is the core of our home. Our door to the exterior is painted white with various postcards and Polaroids connecting to the exterior acting as a protective shield from the outside forces while providing the inhabitants with privacy but also a possibility of exit.⁶⁴ As noted, the previous tenants painted their walls with dark and light gray paint with bright red accent walls. The red wall adjacent to our front room conjured up too many opinions, as the first partition parallel to our entrance was bold and aggressive and certainly, first impressions are important.⁶⁵ When thinking about walking into an interior for the first time; the atmosphere, visuals, scents, or the views of the furniture prompt emotional responses almost immediately. Placement of windows and openings are crucial for allowing light into space, air into the home, and depending on the width of the windows and openings, it can affect furniture and object placements.

Benjamin Moore's 2121-70 Chantilly Lace paint stands as a widely embraced choice for white paint, often regarded as the epitome of palette perfection in my interior design career. Frequently recommended among designers, it has become the go-to paint for specifying white hues in interior spaces. Despite my inclination in wanting to explore the vibrant spectrum of colours or wallpapers (which I would not specify in a rental property), our walls underwent a transformation to white and neutral tones of paint. Opting for white was not merely an aesthetic choice but also presumption engrained with years of work and education that it symbolizes modern sensibilities, universality, freshness, openness, brightness and cleanliness, even if the reality may differ.

In his consideration of white paint, Christopher Wilk argues that its practical suitability for interiors and presumed neutrality is both an extension and the ideological tenets of modernism. As much related to ideas about hygiene as the museal logic and gallery practices that legitimates the aesthetics of the "white cube," the use and implication of white paint in the

64 Stanley Abercrombie, *A Philosophy of Interior Design* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), <https://archive.org/details/philosophyofinte0000aber/page/70/mode/2up>, 61.

65 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 11.

domestic sphere is valent. The emphasis on health and wellbeing in modernist architecture and interior design, emerged in the early twentieth century as a response to the interconnected challenges of illness and contagion associated with poor living and housing conditions. The idea of the new domestic interior, a product of modernist ideals, aimed to create well-lit, easily maintainable spaces conducive to personal and communal well-being.⁶⁶ While these aspirations are commendable and sensible post war, the prevailing preference for neutrality in aesthetic choices has saturated popular culture. Julienna Preston notes that the fashionable embrace of an “impersonal whiteness” in western interior environments challenges the notion of white as a neutral colour. Preston argues, the colour white, far from being neutral, embodies a socially constructed rationality that aligns with a dominant form of whiteness — a construct rooted in discriminatory economic and material practices designed to perpetuate a particular worldview.⁶⁷ Craig Wilkins, in the context of architecture and equity, identifies whiteness as a historically and socially produced concept that operates to grant or deny various opportunities, often concealed through terms like “neutrality or universality.”⁶⁸ Within this framework, I connect the notions of assimilation (absorption) into the dominant culture, particularly within Western perspectives on colour palettes, where white paint is symbolic of a modern aesthetic. This underscores that “interiors are political environments and their material construction and historical interrogation are anything but neutral.”⁶⁹ Preston references Lesley Naa Norle Lokko, raising a crucial question for examination in the context of interiors: “What are the implications — and alternatives — for both the maker and the product, if the vision [of neutrality] is no longer shared and the language is no longer tolerable?”⁷⁰ Considering assimilation and the concept of absorption into society, where individuals might strive to become neutral within the prevailing culture, I question what implications and alternatives arise for immigrants and the society at large if people were accepted as they are.

The newel and the handrail of the staircase is made of solid wood slightly warmer in tone from the light oak engineered hardwood flooring. Rather than an ornate baluster detail,

66 Christopher Wilk, *Modernism: Designing a New World 1914-1939* (London: V & A Publications, 2006), 250.

67 Brooker and Weinthal, *The Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design*, 126.

See: Diana Young, “The Material Value of Colour: The Estate Agent’s Tale,” *Home Cultures* 1, no. 1 (2004): p. 9.

68 Brooker and Weinthal, 126.

See: Craig L. Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture and Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): p. 10.

69 Brooker and Weinthal, 128.

70 Brooker and Weinthal, 128.

See: Naa Norle Lokko, *White Papers, Black Marks*, p. 27.

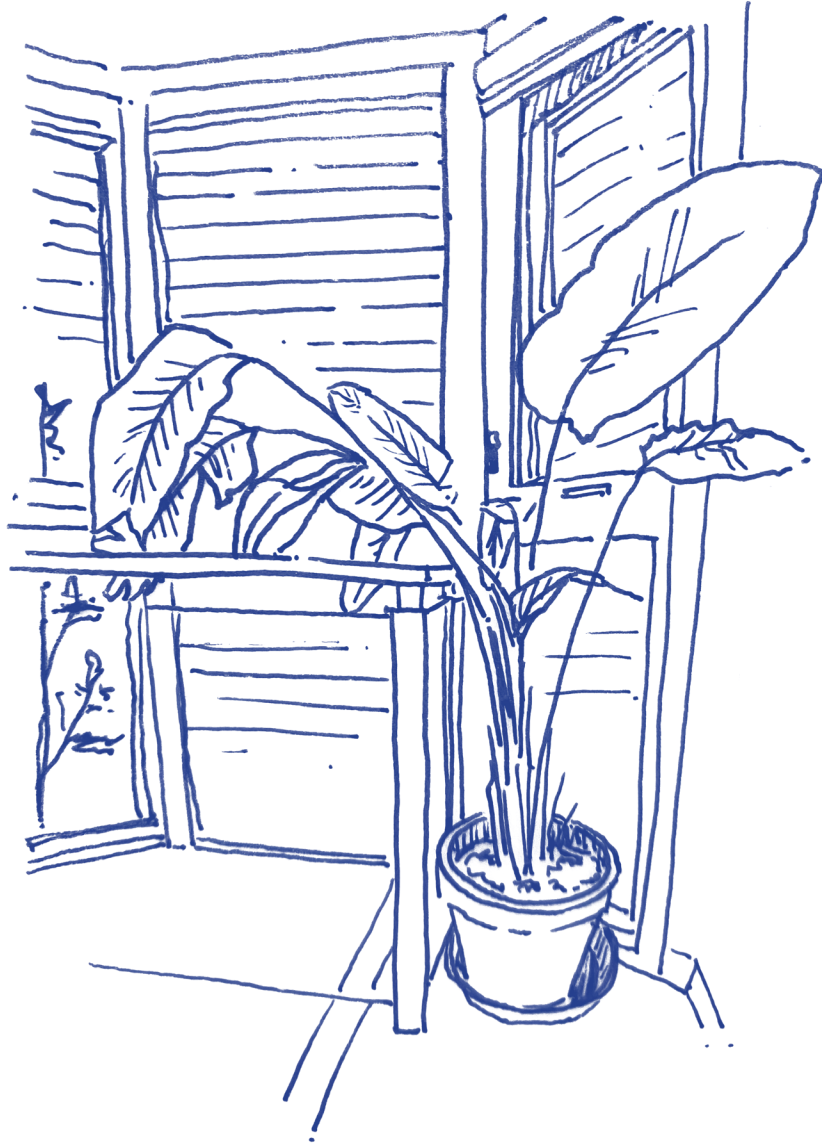


FIGURE 5. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF BIRD OF PARADISE PLANT IN POT, 2024.

the staircase is completed by clear glass panels. The stringers are painted white and the tread is solid wood finished with a dark walnut stain with an open riser to match the ebonized wood laminate on the interior doors. The composition of the various finishes together indicates a modern interior. Here, we've positioned a sizable bird of paradise plant in a painted terracotta pot. This botanical companion holds sentimental value as the inaugural plant Paul and I acquired for our first shared dwelling. Gifted by my mother, this bird of paradise has journeyed with us across five homes, receiving attentive care. Its significance extends to a cherished memory of our early twenties — three vanilla ice cream cones capping off the day. Much like Marcel Proust and his madeleines, this bird of paradise, with minimal conscious effort, unfurls memories spanning nearly a decade, evoking the genesis of my relationship with my spouse.⁷¹

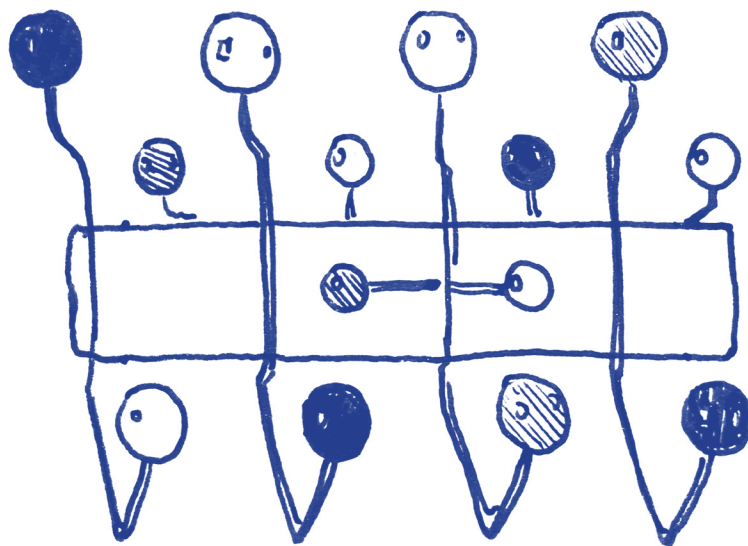


FIGURE 6. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF THE EAMES "HANG-IT-ALL", 2024.

⁷¹ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, vol. Swann's Way, 7 vols., Volume 1 (UK: Penguin Classic, 2017).

In Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton's study of household possessions through a survey of eighty families in Chicago area in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, plants were identified as "embodying personal values more than any other type of object" adjacent to values of experiences, style and the self.⁷² Other values the plants embodied were found in the study to be of nurturance, accomplishment, skills, ecological consciousness and for urbanites, a connection to the natural world.⁷³ Our connection to the natural world including our ideals regarding nurturance, accomplishment, skills and ecological consciousness has shifted with the rapid acceleration of technology and destruction of natural land, with many of those in urban cities relying on parks and trails to connect to nature.⁷⁴ The bird of paradise commands attention with its scale, earning us compliments for our plant care prowess. While the plant holds deep sentimental value, there is undeniably an element of performance related to care and nurturance involved in its maintenance.

Directly across the plants are minimalistic Muuto Dot coat hooks in a natural oak finish, a topic of frequent discussion involves contemplating their replacement with the iconic Eames Hang-It-All (a possibility which, in turn, raises questions about the implications of having a newly made version of the design — it was, along with other pieces of 'classic Eames design' reissued in the 1990s — or starting the work of finding an original from the era of its production). This functional object was designed in 1953 by Ray Eames. She made two versions, one featured natural wood balls on a welded metal frame painted black and the other differently coloured wood balls on white painted metal frame. Immediately considered as having captured the complexities of the atomic age — the marriage of whimsy and worry — the mass produced Hang-It-All combined functionality and artistry in an object for children that deflected adult concerns.⁷⁵ This aspiration for the original variant is rooted in its representation of object history, aesthetic and in evoking a sense of self-affirmation. I am keenly aware that its potential existence, especially adjacent to the main door, carries a performative aspect but most importantly, it is a signal. Goffman refers to "status symbols" as an object which provides

72 Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 78-79.

73 Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 79.

74 Bridget K. Behe, Patricia T. Huddleston, and Charles R. Hall, "Gardening Motivations of U.S. Plant Purchasers During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Horticulture Research Institute*, March 2022, <http://meridian.allenpress.com/jeh/article-pdf/40/1/10/3019513/i2573-5586-40-1-10.pdf>.

During the pandemic, plant purchases experienced a dramatic surge leading researchers to complete a survey by 1,211 residents in the U.S. to investigate the motivation behind purchases of plants across three generational cohorts.

75 John. Neuhart et al., *Eames Design: The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989).

“the cue that is used in order to discover the status of others, and, from this, the way in which others are to be treated.”⁷⁶ In this case, status may not refer to social class but one’s knowledge in designed objects, as Kron identifies, “our means of competition is the accumulation and display of symbols of status . . . every human being is a status seeker on one level or another — and a status reader.”⁷⁷ This prompts me to question, if this object of aspiration exists in my lifeworld, would I be seen as a forward thinking designer like Ray Eames? And who might prompt a discussion about the Eames upon discovery of the Hang-It-All? Lastly, what defines my identity when this object is absent, yet its significance is known through education and desired?

Above the existing hooks are two portraits of Paul and our dog Timber. Commissioned in eccentric illustration styles reminiscent of artists I was fascinated by during my teenage years navigating North American subcultures of the early 2000’s. Art critic, John Berger, stresses the importance of artworks with its symbolism and composition which includes various social, cultural and individual messages expressing the cultural context of the time, display of wealth (or lack thereof), or to support our own view of ourselves.⁷⁸ The portraits may reveal a sort of eclecticism and appreciation for a certain informality and clever satire found in the style of works by artist Robert Crumb and Daniel Clowes, both embodying an aesthetic style much departed from traditional, formal and classic portraiture completed with layers of oil paint and placed in a highly ornate decorative frame above a large mantel with a beautiful fire roaring underneath. The introduction of something traditional like this would feel significantly out of place and might even carry a sense of irony, unintentionally highlighting its misalignment with our social, cultural and status realm. Further supporting the view that I know where I belong and where I do not belong.

The placement of the television which is wall mounted is grounded by an entry bench handmade with black walnut directly beneath it (see figure 7). It is one of the first furniture

76 Erving Goffman, “Symbols of Class Status,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 4 (1951): 294—304, <https://doi.org/10.2307/588083>.

77 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 16.

78 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books Limited, 1972), 90-101.



FIGURE 7. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF HANDMADE BENCH WITH BOWL FOR KEYS AND CERAMIC VASE, 2024.

pieces that Paul made by hand and we designed together for our place while he was studying woodworking and before we decided to venture on a small woodworking practice. It is a linear bench with a rounded edge made from black walnut, it uses a mortise and tenon joinery and has an extended surface for a small ceramic display and a bowl for keys which we also made. The bench also holds a hand made ceramic bowl with a collection of matches from various establishments acting as souvenirs. There is a performative dimension to the bench especially given that its location was predetermined prior to its production. Its design, featuring an extended surface for displaying objects and a bowl for keys, signifies its purpose for an experience near the entrance. Upon entry, Paul and I communicate not only our design sensibility and taste but also our ability to create and fabricate — an expression with meaning. Here, the message of Walter Benjamin’s reflection in *Unpacking My Library*, where he acknowledges that writing one’s own book is an esteemed act, resonates.⁷⁹ While iconic furniture might be beyond our reach, our capability to discern our taste and craft our own objects adds to the role I assume and its legitimacy, ensuring the “impression of reality” I attempt to convey.⁸⁰ There is sentimentality to this piece because it is the first piece of furniture we designed and fabricated together, for this reason, it is deeply cherished.

Positioned above the bench is a television, complemented by a sectional sofa, a marble top coffee table and a handwoven Moroccan rag rug — known as a Boucherouite that define the space. In contemplating a time before the ubiquity of television, one might speculate that a fireplace would have been the focal point for communal gatherings. The television aligns with a minimalist sectional sofa in natural linen fabric — a versatile piece that can be easily disassembled, reupholstered and reconfigured. Beyond its functional and aesthetically pleasing qualities, the sofa holds additional significance as it is designed by the Canadian company Élément de Base, and represents the translations of our aesthetic sensibilities, economic capacities and social aspirations.⁸¹ The decision to part with our old, still perfectly functional sofa in favor of the new sectional sofa warrants further scrutiny.

79 Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 61.

80 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 17

81 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 6.



FIGURE 8. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF VITSOE 606 UNIVERSAL SHELVING WITH BOOKS, RECORDS AND OBJECTS, 2024.

The previous sofa, a fusion of modern and chesterfield styles with tufted detailing and synthetic upholstery, no longer resonated with our evolving sensibilities, taste and values. This shift in aesthetic preferences underscores the dynamic nature of identity, which is constantly “in a state of flux.”⁸² The unfavorable connotations associated with the previous sofa prompted a reconsideration of our consumption choices, aligning with Joan Kron’s observation that how we decorate our homes reflects not only personal preferences but also notions of social class, values, sex roles and life stage. Kron notes that “certain styles become the rallying flags of group membership.”⁸³ The tufted details and gray buttons felt overly ornate in contrast to the modernist-leaning aesthetic I now prefer. The amalgamation of modern design and traditional detailing seemed incongruent and ‘kitschy’, while the synthetic fabric appeared unnatural and morally lacking in “fitness of purpose, truth to the nature of materials and methods of production,” as articulated by William Morris, a leader of the English Arts and Crafts Movement.⁸⁴

In the process of letting go of the sofa, I find myself negotiating my own values and identity as a designer. It is important to note that there was a time when we were drawn to the sofa’s aesthetics, and later on, found ourselves describing it as kitschy. This implies that my values, and in turn my identity and selfhood, is shaped by various influences — in the case of the sofa, this includes, design principles, industrialization, modernism, the arts and crafts movement, considerations of material and craft and more. I draw values from my life experiences, particularly reflecting on the joy and impact of growing up in a Buddhist family that spent every Sunday surrounded by nature and natural materials in temples in the midst of a modern Korean metropolis. While there may be an element of using taste to affiliate with an aspired-to group or to distinguish oneself from others⁸⁵ — there is merit in acknowledging how, through the acquisitions and relinquishments of objects I am actively discovering who I am, as well as coming to a greater recognition of what resonates aesthetically or morally with me and what does not. The process of acquiring and letting go goes beyond mere gains and losses; it involves a nuanced negotiation grounded in the complex considerations of my life

82 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 60.

83 Kron, xviii.

84 Philip Meggs and Alston Purvis, *Meggs’ History of Graphic Design*, 6th ed. (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2016), 188.

85 Kron, 92.



FIGURE 9. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF BOOKS, DUCK SCULPTURE AND VASE ON VITSOE SHELVING, 2024.

experiences, cultural and social lifeworlds, education and desires in the form of aspirations.

Drawing from Goffman’s concept of the front region as a “place where the performance is given,” an object of aspiration which exists in Paul and I’s interior is a “focus of visual attention on the part of performer and audience.”⁸⁶ Dieter Rams, a prominent figure in product design since the mid-1950s, left a lasting impact on the furniture domain with his groundbreaking modular 606 Universal Shelving System for Vitsoe + Zapf, introduced in 1960. The Vitsoe system, characterized by simplicity and a keen sense of composition, proportion and materials, serves as a quintessential representation of his work. Despite numerous iterations designed since its 1960 launch, none surpass its functionality, with only a few managing to match its inherent “elegance.”⁸⁷ For people who are not aware of the cultural and historical significance of Rams’s design or who think little about shelving in general or the operation, materiality and appearance of this unit in particular, might simply note how well the shelving unit blends in with the “universal” white wall. The aesthetic unity of wall colour and shelving, where the

86 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 107.

87 Stuart Lawson, *Furniture Design: An Introduction to Development, Materials and Manufacturing* (London, England: Laurence King Publishing, 2016), 27.

shelves seem to effortlessly bear the weight of various objects, can be described as “an essay in elegant efficiency and adaptive, flexible design.” This integration is deemed to represent “a new age of ornament,”⁸⁸ highlighting the aesthetic and functional innovation embodied in the design which blurs the line between functional object and ornament.

Dieter Rams’s work as a designer frequently emerges in design school discussions, especially in survey courses on modern design where the objects he created for Braun have achieved iconic status. Revered as an industrial designer because of his sensibilities, work ethic and vision of material life, it makes sense that Jonathan Ive of Apple acknowledges the German designer’s enduring influence in the areas of design practice, aesthetics and culture. Rams’s *Ten Principles of Good Design* (a small red book that sits on our bookshelf) serves as a frequent point of reference in design education, encapsulating fundamental guidelines that continue to shape the discourse on quality and impactful design. This particular piece of furniture, representing Rams’s design ethos, holds exceptional significance in the realm of object ownership, attesting to its cultural and historical importance.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the 606 Universal Shelving does not enjoy universal acclaim since individual preferences and tastes vary. Personally, owning this shelving system aligns with what sociologist Colin Campbell describes as modern hedonism — an approach where behaviour is guided by the desire for the anticipated pleasure an experience promises.⁸⁹ The inherent design and aesthetics of the shelving system provide me with visual pleasure. However, the concept of modern hedonism resonates because, firstly, it involves pleasure derived through emotional, not just sensory, stimulation. Secondly, it is characterized as “self illusory,” where individuals use their imagination to construct mental images consumed for intrinsic pleasure — an act akin to daydreaming or fantasizing.⁹⁰ Consequently, the shelving system becomes an integral aspect of my aspirational daydreams centered around material and domestic life. The shelves, in my envisioned home, hold the potential to be fully realized,

88 Lawson, *Furniture Design*, 38.

89 Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, New extended edition., Cultural Sociology (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5. Modern Autonomous Imaginative Hedonism.

90 Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, 5.

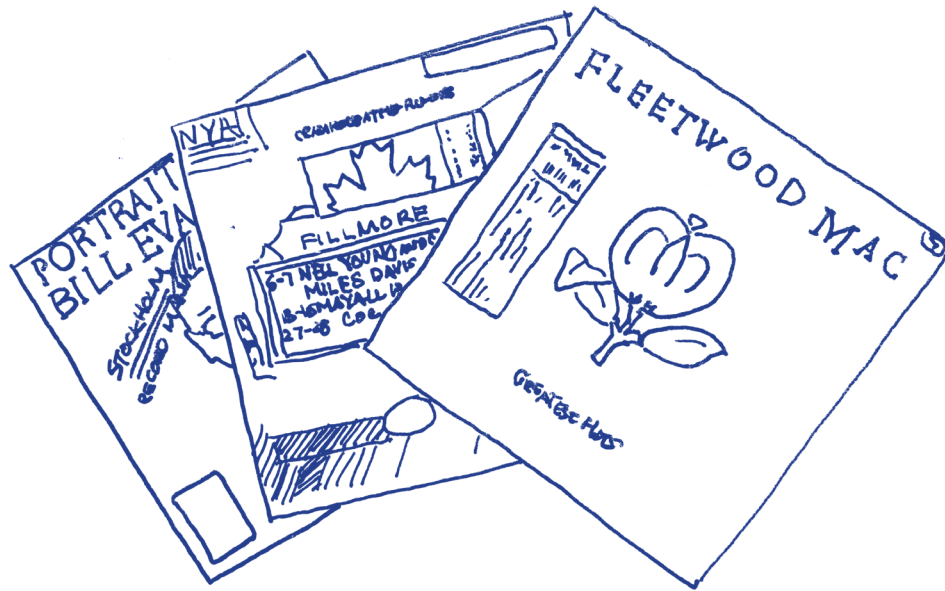


FIGURE 10. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF RECORDS WITH PURCHASE LOCATION NOTED WITH MARKER AND CONCERT TICKETS, 2024.

and owning this object could signify that my dream is just a little more attainable.

The placement of the Vitsø, directly in the first line of sight upon entering our home, was a calculated decision. In aligning with Kron’s perspective, the carefully considered, clearly conspicuous placement suggests that we “organize the space according to our imago mundi — our image of the world.”⁹¹ Examining the entirety of the shelving unit, it becomes evident that the furniture itself holds importance as the sine qua non (without which, not), without which the object would be naked and meaningless.⁹² The shelves, filled with a diverse array of objects spanning numerous categories, serve as a microcosm of my lifeworld, and I believe this holds particular the significance within the context of this research than any other object of interrogation. As Kron notes, one object alone is seldom sufficient to define one’s identity; it is the entire aesthetic complex and the total identity package that truly represents us to ourselves

⁹¹ Kron, *Home Psych*, 46.

⁹² Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 58.

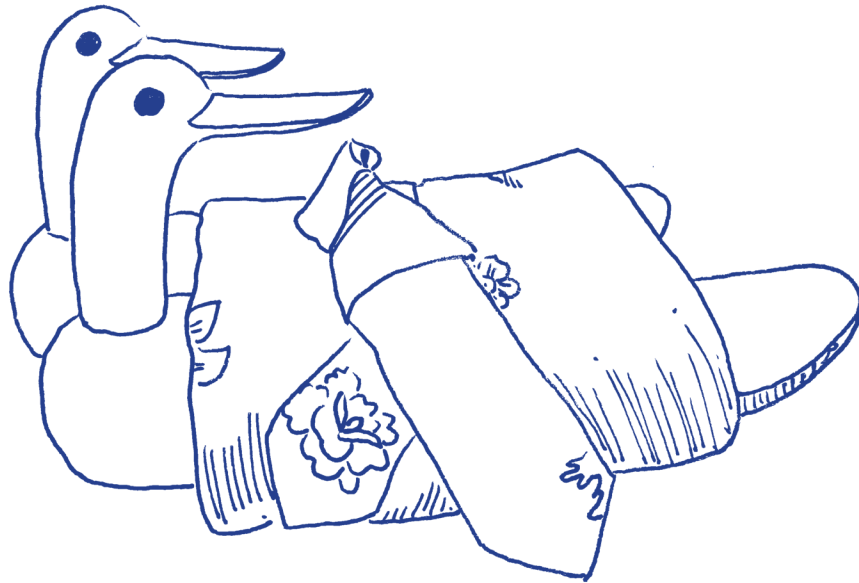


FIGURE 11. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF KOREAN DUCK SCULPTURE WRAPPED IN SILK, 2024.

and others — it is also critical to note that this representation continues to evolve with time. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the shelving in its totality.⁹³

For the most part, the Vitsoe shelving houses books, objects which given their subjects, can be seen to constitute a curated textual and visual microcosm of the intellectual and aesthetic culture of the room in which the unit resides. Like many of those who have been surveyed by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, books hold a special place for me as they embody the values, goals and achievements I aspire to cultivate. While it may not be an extensive collection, as the rows of books expand, encompassing my personal, leisurely and academic readings, the significance of my book collection continues to grow. Completed books, marked visually by plastic tabs and highlighted passages in many of my academic readings, evokes a sense of

⁹³ Kron, *Home Psych*, 63.

accomplishment and purpose. Books represent a source of joy and a tangible manifestation of aspirations. I envision the books I will acquire in the future, the stories and knowledge that will shape my actions, reactions, choices and ultimately, my future. In line with Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's findings, "books are often instrumental in developing the central theme in a person's life by providing a cultural model around which one can organize one's actions and goals."⁹⁴

A closer examination of the authors and titles on the shelves reveals the trajectory of my personal and professional interests. Autobiographical books by singer Patti Smith, Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf, bassist Peter Hook, psychologist and American spiritual leader Baba Ram Dass and entertainer Barbra Streisand may reflect my fascination with specific individuals from particular subcultures, times and places in their lives and mine. Each book holds a memory, like attending Patti Smith's concerts or pursuing yoga during the pandemic which led to the acquisition of certain titles. Books become markers of specific states of mind and periods in my life. Works like *Minor Feelings* by Kathy Park Hong, *Crying in H Mart* by Michelle Zauner and *Dictee* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha signify a time of what I would describe as self-growth and identity realization. Large format hardcover books on Alexander Calder and *Hummelo*, along with Taschen's heavily illustrated volume *1000 Chairs* along with issues of *Lapham's Quarterly* represent and communicate my interest in art, design and culture. The rows of academic books may also suggest the origins of my inspiration for this research. The dust jackets and spines subtly, yet directly not only make clear my interests by values and what I consider important. Moreover, I recall precisely when each book entered my possession, effectively turning each volume into timestamps of my life. To a certain extent, my books serve as souvenirs, as described by Susan Stewart. They move history into private time, acting like a calendar while constructing a continuous and personal narrative of the past.⁹⁵ They affirm my existence and contribute to my personal narrative. For these reasons, I understand why, more than any other types of objects, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton concluded that books

⁹⁴ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 70.

⁹⁵ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 139-140.

are special to people “because they serve to embody ideals.”⁹⁶

The second-largest portion of the shelving system is dedicated to my collection of vinyl records, which I began acquiring at the age of sixteen when I shed my CDs and dove into the subculture of analogue music, at which point my records became a collection. As with my books, my vinyl records also serve me as a timestamp and souvenir; some records include handwritten notes on the city of acquisition or a ticket stub. Large portions of the collection were relinquished and refined later in the spirit of curation and simplifying my life during the moves, but music was, for me, a space I could find opportunities to belong in my adolescence. My identity within the subculture of record collecting and the type of people who gravitated to this hobby by frequenting local record stores and conventions became the people I surrounded myself with. My parent’s love and appreciation for American music spanning all genres and the influence of U.S. popular culture, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, is ingrained in me. I knew the lyrics to *Imagine*⁹⁷ and *California Dreamin’*⁹⁸ as much as I knew Korean songs despite my language barrier. Effects of remote acculturation are present but my ability to join an alternative status group defined within a subculture in the way of music appreciation and knowledge was something in which I was confident and to which I belonged.⁹⁹

The shelving is adorned with various decorative objects, including an Akari Light Sculpture by Isamu Noguchi, a record player and speakers, candles, artworks and various decorative objects are scattered. An important object within the arrangement is a pair of wooden ducks, a traditional Korean symbol of peace, fidelity and plentiful offspring.¹⁰⁰ While the meaning of the ducks may not be known to many non-Koreans, they hold significance for me as markers of my deep longing and connection for the Korean objects I have lost. Anthropologist Sarah Trabert emphasizes the critical role objects play in identity expression and cultural survival for migrants. Displaying such items can help alleviate material and social deprivation, maintaining a connection to homeland practices.¹⁰¹ I display my pair of ducks in

96 Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 71.

97 John Lennon, *Imagine*, 1971.

98 The Mama’s and the Papa’s, *California Dreamin’*, 1965.

99 David W. Marx, *Status and Culture: How Our Desire for Social Rank Creates Taste, Identity, Art, Fashion, and Constant Change* (New York, NY: Viking, 2022), 122.

Marx defines subculture as loosely organized groups of young working-class outcasts who adopted unconventional styles and behaviours.

100 Wikipedia Contributors, “Marriage in Korea,” The Free Encyclopedia, Wikipedia, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Marriage_in_Korea&oldid=1203382582.

ways similar to my parents who had a pair on a shelf in my childhood home. In addition, I engage in a nuanced negotiation of symbolism, addressing elements like patriarchy, gender roles and traditional notions of marriage prevalent in South Korean culture, which I observed in my own family during childhood. This ongoing process of negotiating and negating ideals, values and morals significantly contributes to shaping my evolving identity. The enduring essence of the duck persists; each time I see it, I am instantly transported to my very first home, “my very first world and its original warmth of material paradise.”¹⁰²

Mindful of Kron’s observation that “our front rooms are one big cabinet of ‘cues being noticed and the meaning understood,” and that the Vitsœ shelving is, what Kron would call the “finest identity equipment,” the decisions that I have made with Paul make clear our desires around self-fashioning and the broadcasting thereof.¹⁰³ I emphasize that while there are performative elements to the object and its placement, a critical examination reveals a system of symbiotic symbols embodying my aspirations (the future), affirmations (current state) and the ongoing negotiation of my identity from childhood to the present (the past, meaning the present continues to pass). Even in its Eurocentric and modernist design sensibilities — far from my own culture — I endeavor to safeguard my Korean identity and selfhood, employing symbols and cues that perpetuate my Koreaness — a facet that I am determined never to relinquish; if anything, it serves as a foundation upon which to expand and evolve.

101 Sarah Trabert, “Understanding the Significance of Migrants’ Material Culture,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 20, no. 1 (2020): 95–115, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605319879253> journals.sagepub.com/home/jsa, 103.

102 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 29.

103 Kron, *Home-Psych*, 64.

8 The Dining Space & Kitchen

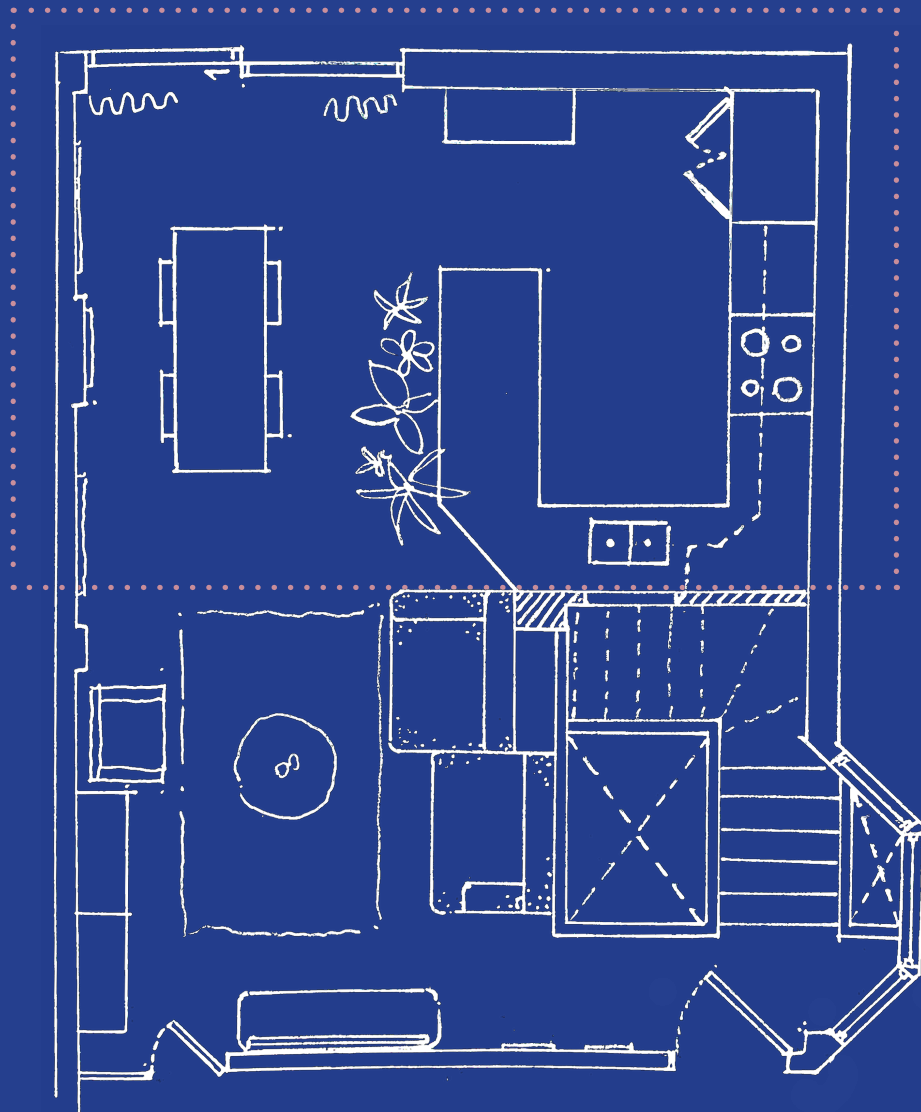


FIGURE 12. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF THE HOUSE FLOOR PLAN, 2024.

Between the front room and the kitchen, demarcated by an extended kitchen island, lies our dining space. Within this area, an intriguing remnant appears — an interior brick wall with remnants of a chimney. This suggests that in a previous life of this home, there was once a fireplace. This is evident in the covering of a flue pipe with a new layer of brick, noticeable due to the differentiation in brick types on the partition. In the concealed chimney, now buried in history, I envision this house before it was divided into four apartments. The permanent removal of the fireplace unveils shifts in society, economy, values and household dynamics. There might have been a time when a fireplace was a focal point for generational storytelling or contemplation, resonating with Rice’s observation that “the hearth and its mantelpiece might materially encode the mythical fireside.”¹⁰⁴

The disappearance of interior features like fireplaces, mantels and hearthside tools signifies a change and holds the potential to foreshadow the future. As dwellings become smaller, the traditional fire is replaced by deeper sofas and larger televisions. What transformations lie ahead in the realm of material culture and human experiences? Will elaborate sets of hearthside tools become mere decorative antiques, replaced by modern fireplaces with faux logs? Will television screens take over as our primary storytellers? There’s a certain irony in Paul’s December tradition of playing at high volume a 24-hour video of a beautiful fire with sounds of wood crackling. Despite concerns about authenticity and the absence of a physical, functional fireplace, the substitution for a digital hearth and fire — devoid of the scent and warmth of a real one — fails to replicate the basic, sensory and romantic pleasures ingrained in our evolutionary past.

While our dining space may be defined by the absence of a fireplace, the room’s spatial and material qualities are defined by a dining table made by Paul and I in 2020. When we decided to redesign our place during the pandemic, the dining table became the first piece of furniture crafted specifically for the condominium. Faced with the challenge of finding dining

104 Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 12.

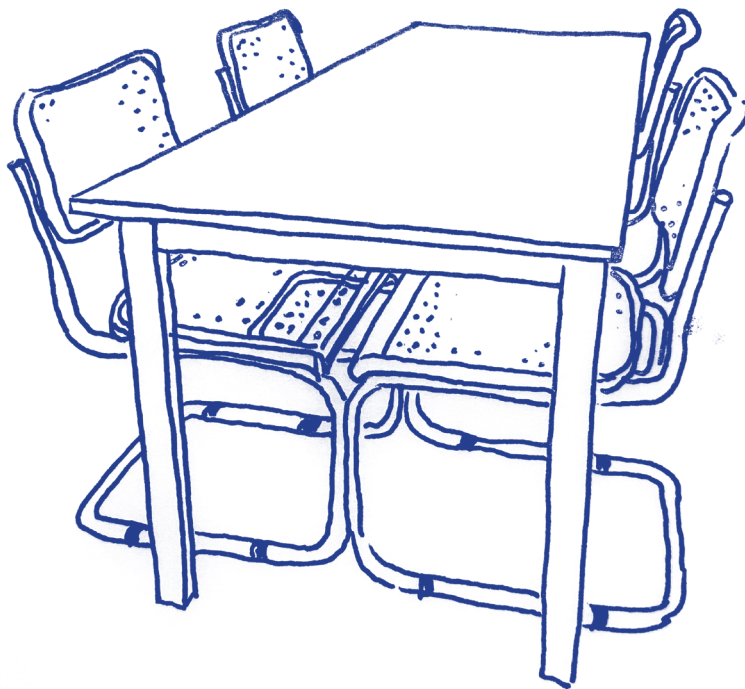


FIGURE 13. BY AUTHOR. ILLUSTRATION OF DINING TABLE AND FOUR CESCA CHAIRS, 2024.

tables with proportions conducive to comfortable dining, we were inspired by our visit to 101 Spring Street — Donald Judd’s apartment in New York City — and resolved to make most of our furniture. I am reminded, thinking about my childhood, of my family gathering around a low, dark lacquered dining table which emphasized not only the food placed on it, but how the table was the agent in bringing my family together. For me, the dining table is a significant object representing the values of family and community, symbolizing our daily ritual of eating and sustaining. The memories from my time in Korea deeply influence my understanding of food as an integral part of culture and identity. The table that Paul and I designed made of dark walnut, reminiscent of the dark lacquered table, required a noteworthy set of chairs.

Marcel Breuer, a Hungarian-German modernist architect and furniture designer, designed the *Cesca Chair* in 1928, incorporating a tubular steel frame and woven cane seat and back. Its Bauhaus origins and revolutionary use of materials made it a groundbreaking design. Acquisition of a set of Cesca chairs through a consignor based in Montreal (to ensure authenticity) felt like securing a piece of design history, aligning with our commitment to modernist values and aesthetics. The chairs themselves, with their sleek chrome frame and minimalist design,¹⁰⁵ contribute to the overall aesthetic of our dining space. Their simplicity complements the handmade black walnut table, creating a harmonious and cohesive environment. The act of acquiring these chairs reflects not only a desire for functional seating but also an appreciation for what is considered and perceived as good design. The language of modern chairs is familiar to me not only due to my formal education but also because chairs are essential everyday objects in the Western world, drawing significant attention in terms of furniture and design. While I can easily recall iconic chairs, as supported by the title *1000 Chairs* on our bookshelf, recalling notable tables or any other furnishings is a challenge. It is worth noting that my knowledge of Korean furniture is limited, having grown up in a household where small stools for tasks like making kimchi and a computer desk chair were the only chair-seating options available. Our dining and everyday sitting experiences involved radiant heated

105 Charlotte Fiell and Peter Fiell, *1000 Chairs*, (Taschen, 2017), 108-111.

flooring covered in yellow linoleum (typical material used in Korean residential flooring at the time but no longer) and were complemented with embroidered silk cushions. My preferred method of sitting, even today, is on the floor.

Several points arise from these observations. The modern interior, characterized by white walls, 606 Universal Shelving system and architectural details, necessitated modern furnishings. “The nature of the Modernist interior required ambitious levels of unity and consistency of design . . . and furnishings that enhanced and developed its architectural principles.”¹⁰⁶ Residing in a space dominated by hegemonically modern interiors, the system of symbols must be comprehensible to others. During a trip to Korea with Paul, it became apparent that he struggled with sitting, as many restaurants and homes still prefer floor seating with a low table. My decision to sit in chairs and incorporate chairs into our home furnishing, despite my preference for other seating options, can be seen as performative. It acknowledges that the society and culture I am part of considers sitting in chairs as the ‘proper’ and ‘civilized’ method of sitting.¹⁰⁷

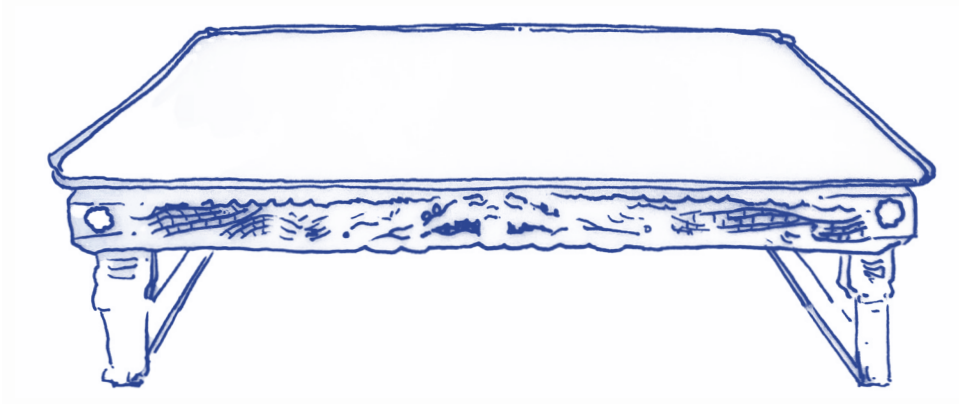


FIGURE 14. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF CHILDHOOD DINING TABLE, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Wilk, *Modernism*, 226-227.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Tenner, “How the Chair Conquered the World,” *The Wilson Quarterly* XXI, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 64–70.

Erving Goffman's concept of performance as "socialized," shaped to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented, offers insight. Performers intentionally present an idealized impression, using various strategies to shape and refine how others perceive them.¹⁰⁸ This implies that my performance is socialized and responsive to the region where modernism has had significant impact. The system of symbols I communicate must be understood by the region I am performing in. The lacquered dining table from my upbringing, adorned with ornate carvings and a seamless shine, might not communicate 'dining table' in my current context; my assumption is that it would be perceived as a coffee table.

The kitchen, divided by a U-shaped counter with white cabinets boasting linear stainless steel hardware and a dark gray Corian surface. Stainless steel equipment and storage solutions share the space, accompanied by a IKEA shelving system affixed to the wall. The shelves, a blend of order and chaos, cradle an assortment of liquor bottles, cookbooks, clean hand towels, table linen and various tucked-away objects. Amidst this array the IKEA shelving unit is

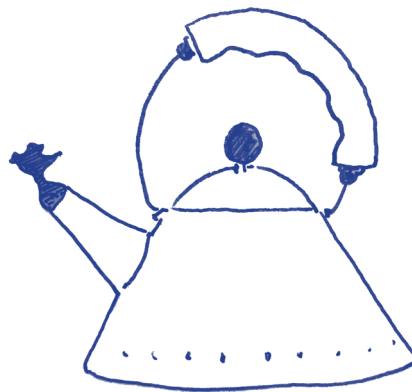


FIGURE 15. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF ALESSI 9093 KETTLE DESIGNED BY MICHAEL GRAVES, 2024.

108 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 35.

not the important feature, the Kitchen-Aid mixer, a Vitamix blender, cookbooks and a Japanese glassware are openly displayed rather than safely stored away in the kitchen cabinets despite its low frequency of use. To me, the kitchen serves as a repository of memories, where the act of cooking and cooking tools becomes a profound connection to my cultural roots. It stands not only as a domain of tangible recollections but also as a realm of aspirations. In the daydreams of my imaginary home, the kitchen and dining space would receive the most amount of square footage, it would be the center of the home where I would cook elaborate meals and host dinner parties.

In *Geography of Home*, Busch unfurls the kitchen as a laboratory, tracing its roots as a realm steeped in technology and science, fueled by various forms of heat — be it flame, coal, gas or electricity.¹⁰⁹ This multifaceted space has undergone myriad transformations, mirroring the shifts in society and food culture. In the contemporary context, the kitchen commands significant attention, often claiming a substantial portion of the design budget. Busch underscores the emotional resonance of the kitchen, a sentiment amplified when she recounts her real estate agent's suggestion to bake brownies during an open house.

Much of my immediate material aspirations are objects for use in the kitchen (this is likely because I have pleaded my case on the purchase of the Vitsœ shelving system which took many months of saving and convincing), a few objects of significance which come to mind are: a Mauviel copper jam pot, an Alessi 9093 Michael Graves Kettle with Bird Whistle, a set of Le Creuset pots and pans, a set of Jean Dubost Languiole Steak Knives with the company's tiny bees at the junction of the handle and the blade and assorted glassware. The demand for authentic design objects and name brands certainly contribute to an “obsession with certainty” or fascination with its moment of creation as described by Jean Baudrillard.¹¹⁰ There are countless reasons I can conjure in the desire and aspiration for these material objects, the beauty and functionality being the easy reasoning.

109 Akiko Busch, *Geography of Home: Writings on Where We Live* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 40-41.

110 Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 80-81.

For me, the kitchen is a sensory journey, particularly poignant when I am engaged in cooking dishes from my cultural heritage — a preference that shapes my everyday eating habits. Beyond their culinary functions, the tools in my kitchen symbolizes an escape — perhaps rejection and disapproval — of “Western” and fast food culture. Reflecting on my mother’s deep-seated values regarding food, cooking, health and nutrition — as well as culinary experts who attest to the excellence of a Mauviel copper jam pot and so on — these tools become conduits for carrying forward a cherished set of values I admire as I continue to nourish myself and Paul. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton identify objects as role models, objects affect what a person can do, either by expanding or restricting the scope of that person’s actions and thoughts. And because what a person does is largely what he or she is, objects have a determining effect on the development of the self.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 50-51.



FIGURE 16. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF THE HOME (PANORAMIC VIEW), 2024.

9

Conclusion

One day, Paul and I may own a home. It is something that we both desire. In certain moments, I daydream of living in a traditional hanok in Seoul, one that has been modernized and retrofitted with our own furniture — featuring low dining tables, silk cushions and intricate mother of pearl inlay reminiscent of my grandmother’s lacquered dresser adorned with traditional birds and scenery. In the context of our life in North America, my daydream shifts towards a picturesque and aesthetically eclectic vision. This might take the form of a Georgian revival (with association of formal living) or colonial revival houses akin to those found in New England or a flat roofed, heavily glazed modern bungalow like Philip Johnson’s glass house, which we visited on our honeymoon. It is important to acknowledge that these daydreams do not represent a prerequisite for happiness or fulfillment. The houses in these particular styles I have mentioned evoke within me an amalgamation of a certain ideal, a look and feel of the ‘American Dream’, which is best depicted for me in American movies and television shows of the 1990’s and early 2000’s — a type of aspiration that a naive adolescent might assume



FIGURE 17. BY AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATION OF THE GLASS HOUSE BY PHILIP JOHNSON, 2024.

to be a life of family, self-fulfilling jobs, a good education and leisure with a large yard and a golden retriever in North America. In a way, I believe that elements of my daydreams align with the daydreams my parents may have had when they made the decision to leave their home. An idyllic Western life, akin to a Norman Rockwell painting and neither found in South Korea nor my current Toronto lifeworld. It is an idea of a life I have observed in my past suburban lifeworld, through books, film and television. Later in life, as an adult privileged with diverse experiences, education and a degree of cultural and societal understanding, I encountered this envisioned lifeworld in my travels.

Reflecting on my childhood in Korea, where Western influences were prevalent and a preference for Western culture was evident, I recognized the persistence of a world and sensibilities inclined toward Western culture. In my travels, away from the comforts and security of home including the diversity of Toronto, the evidence of this preference became even more pronounced. Whether it is visiting Korea and finding Western influences have pervaded every part of society down to the bones of the facial structures of my young family members through plastic surgery or visiting immaculate homes resembling those in my daydreams, which I had the opportunity to visit through tours and country clubs where we saved for weeks to dine at during our honeymoon, underscoring the clear demarcation of ethnic, cultural and social

groups between property owners and the people who rent their space, owners and helpers and diners and servers. These experiences vividly illustrated the social, cultural and taste-related milieu and boundaries that I navigate in my life in real-time.

In reflection of my research questions, through the odyssey of my selfhood and material life depicted through auto-ethnography and self-reflexive approach in a transdisciplinary model of object meaning and meaning making, I have endeavored to traverse the various temporal, social and cultural strata that bind us in our contemporary society. In the earlier stages of my research, I assumed that understanding the notion of taste would guide my exploration. However, through the investigation of my material odyssey, I have come to realize, as expressed by Wright, that taste is not about revealing hidden social determinants or delving into cognitive processes beyond conscious understanding. Instead, it is a set of active responses to these determinants and the world that produces them.¹¹² This perspective suggests that taste is more than a passive reflection of predetermined factors; rather, it is best portrayed as a dynamic engagement with one's surroundings and influences.

The journey through objects and design elements of my home has brought to light the complexity of meanings and tensions inherent in binary concepts like ownership and aspiration, affirmation and rejection, complex interplay between public taste and individual preferences. Distinctions between what is deemed cultured or uncultured, affluent or not, along with the juxtaposition of Western (hegemonically Caucasian) perspectives against those of visible minorities, have been unveiled. This transdisciplinary exploration of home, material life, identity and selfhood has deepened my understanding of how I have looked to my home and objects not only as narrators of my life story but as active shapers of my identity. I approach this understanding with a profound consideration of the experiential, ideological, affective and cultural diversity that define my world and the world around me.

¹¹² Wright, *Understanding Cultural Taste*, 71.

In evaluating each object within my domestic sphere, it became evident that I am engaged in a perpetual process of negotiation. Navigating between the notion of belonging or fitting into the societal norms and simultaneously endeavoring to preserve the facets of my Korean identity or transporting — through objects — places of cherished memories reminiscent of my childhood home or destinations that embody my aspirations. As I make acquisitions, I navigate a nuanced justification, aligning them with the roles I play in the context of performing in everyday life and the pursuit of individuality while selectively rejecting others deemed ‘too common’ or ‘not for me’. The empirical scholars who have emphasized power, status and control as pivotal influences of object ownership undeniably cast their shadows on my material life. The ambitions and yearnings of individuals in a capitalist-driven society generate specific expectations that, in line with the system’s dynamics, are fulfilled through acquisitions.

Referenced by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, comments by Robert Ezra Park about performance and the roles one plays are apt in reflecting on my interrogation of my self-fashioning. “It is probably no mere historical accident,” writes Park, “that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask.” He continues:

It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously playing a role . . . It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.

In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves — the role we are striving to live up to — this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons.¹¹³

113 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 19-20.

My study of my objects has required me to engage with philosophical questions about the possibility of leading a life devoid of desires and aspirations and to question if it is conceivable for a person to know that they have sufficient things. The interrogation of my home and material life unveiled complex connections and intentional detachments layered with multiplicity of meanings we create, offering poignant insights into my immigrant life where discovery of commonalities could occur. Ultimately, my home and objects, irrespective of external influences, afford me a life as a human being — in the silent dialogue (perhaps not silent now) with the objects which surround me, I forge my identity, as we all do, finding personhood through the language of our domestic lifeworld and objects. The system of symbols created in my lifeworld exist as guides through the labyrinth of identity including the formation and the ongoing development of identity and selfhood. This embodies the profound notion of existence, living with each other and belonging because the home, as a geographical world defined by David Seamon, is “intimately joined with other dimensions of living.”¹¹⁴ Within these interactions between myself and my possessions, coupled with the resonance I find with anthropologist Janet Hoskins, there exists the potential to “encourage us to go beyond a view that personal experience and ‘the ethnography of the particular’ will only convince us of our own shared humanity.”¹¹⁵

114 Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld*, 16.

115 Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 183.

Appendices

Appendix A: Annotated Inventory

The Front Room

TABLE 1. BY AUTHOR, ANNOTATED INVENTORY OF OBJECTS IN THE FRONT ROOM, 2024.










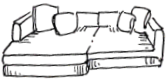
ILLUSTRATION	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHORSHIP	ACQUISITION DATE/YEAR	VALUE (+/-)	MOTIVATION
	APPLIANCE/ ELECTRONICS	TELEVISION	SAMSUNG	2022	\$699.99	AFTER A FEW YEARS OF OWNING A FEW TELEVISIONS THAT REQUIRED CONSTANT UPKEEP, MY FAMILY SUGGESTED THAT WE BUY SAMSUNG.
	FURNITURE	ENTRY BENCH HANDMADE BLACK WALNUT	PAUL AND JIYEON	2018	N/A	DESIGNED AND PRODUCED FOR PAUL'S WOODWORKING ASSIGNMENT, THE EXTENDED SURFACE IS MEANT TO PROVIDE A PLACE FOR CERAMIC WORK AND A BOWL FOR KEYS.
	RECEPTICAL	TRAY HANDMADE BLACK WALNUT	PAUL AND JIYEON	2021	N/A	PROTOTYPE FOR A HOTEL RENOVATION.
	RECEPTICAL	KEY BOWL HANDMADE CHERRY	JIYEON	2018	N/A	THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME I USED A LATHE TO CREATE A WOODEN BOWL, I OFTEN DREAM ABOUT A LIFE IN THE COUNTRY WITH A BIG SHED OR BARN WHERE PAUL AND I CAN BUILD A LIFE WOODWORKING AND MAKING CERAMIC OBJECTS WHICH SOMETIMES FEEL NAIVE.
	SCULPTURE	CERAMIC VASE HANDMADE	JIYEON	2022	N/A	HANDBUILT CERAMIC VASE THROUGH COILING TECHNIQUE. I WAS EXPLORING VARIOUS KOREAN CERAMIC SHAPES AND TECHNIQUES, MOVING AWAY FROM THE WHEEL.
	SCULPTURE	OVAL CERAMIC VASE	ANNIKA HOEFS	2021	N/A	A GIFT FROM ARTIST ANNIKA HOEFS.
	RECEPTICAL	SALT TIN	N/A	UNKNOWN	\$5	PURCHASED FROM AN ANTIQUE STORE DUE TO ITS VINTAGE AND NOSTALGIC ILLUSTRATION.
	LIGHTING	AKARI LIGHT SCULPTURE A1	ISAMU NOGUCHI	2022	\$175	PURCHASED FROM ISAMU NOGUCHI MUSEUM IN NEW YORK CITY AND DISPLAYED ON THE VITSOE.
	SCULPTURE	STONE CANDLE HOLDER	ELIZABETH LENNY	2021	N/A	A GIFT FROM THE ARTIST.
	FURNITURE	MODULAR SOFA	ELEMENT DE BASE	2021	\$2130	PAUL AND I SOLD OUR PREVIOUS SOFA WHEN WE MOVED FOR A MORE MODERN, MINIMAL AND FUNCTIONAL SOFA.


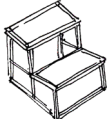

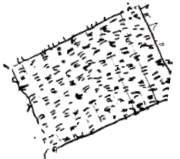
ILLUSTRATION	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHORSHIP	ACQUISITION DATE/YEAR	VALUE (+/-)	MOTIVATION
	FURNITURE	606 UNIVERSAL SHELVING SYSTEM	DIETER RAMS	2021 - ONGOING	\$2500	PAUL AND I SAVED FOR A LONG TIME TO ACQUIRE. CONSIDERED TO BE A MASTER PIECE IN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN WITH ITS MINIMAL DESIGN, FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY, WE JUSTIFIED THE PURCHASE AS AN INVESTMENT AS WE BEGAN RELINQUISHING VARIOUS IKEA SHELVING SYSTEMS. WE DREAMT OF PAIRING THE SHELVING WITH A FUTURE ACQUISITION OF A EAMES LOUNGE CHAIR OR MOGENSEN'S THE SPANISH CHAIR. THE PLACEMENT OF THE SHELVING SYSTEM IS IN A PROMINENT LOCATION AND IT IS OFTEN REARRANGED PROMPTING CONSTANT NEGOTIATIONS REGARDING HOW IT LOOKS AND WHAT IS PLACED ON THE SHELVING.
	FURNITURE	STOOL HANDMADE CHERRY WOOD	PAUL AND JIYEON	2021	N/A	BEAUTIFUL STOOLS ARE HARD TO FIND. I OFTEN REQUIRE A STEP STOOL TO ACCESS BOOKS ON THE VITSOE SYSTEM AND IN THE KITCHEN. WE DESIGNED A MINIMAL AND MODERN STOOL.
	FURNITURE	MARBLE COFFEE TABLE	ARTICLE	2018	\$399	A SIMPLE COFFEE TABLE WHICH WE PLAN TO REPLACE WITH A NEW COFFEE TABLE OF OUR OWN DESIGN.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED ARTWORK FAYE MOORHOUSE	FAYE MOORHOUSE	2021	N/A	GIFT FOR PAUL. THE ARTIST'S ILLUSTRATIVE STYLE IS INTERESTING IN ITS QUICK AND EFFORTLESS APPROACH.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED ARTWORK JESS STEIN	JESS STEIN	2022	N/A	GIFT FOR PAUL. THE ARTIST'S ILLUSTRATIVE STYLE RESEMBLES DANIEL CLOWES AND ROBERT CRUMB WHICH I ENJOY.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED ARTWORK MINZO KING	MINZO KING	2017	N/A	GIFT FROM MY COUSIN WHEN WE VISITED KOREA IN 2017, AN ARTIST WHO EXPLORES RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY, A TABOO SUBJECT IN KOREA.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED ARTWORK TOKO HOSOYA	TOKO HOSOYA	2019	\$200	PURCHASED DURING A GALLERY VISIT, SIGNED PRINT.
ART	VISUAL ART	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	2010	\$20	SMALL ILLUSTRATION PURCHASED FROM HAMILTON ART CRAWL.
	RUG	VINTAGE BOUCHEROUITE RUG 5' X 6'	MOROCCO ETSY	2023	\$200	A MENTOR OF PAUL AND I WHO WE CONSIDER TO HAVE IMMACULATE TASTE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OBJECTS LED US TO A LINK TO THE RUGS. I DID NOT HESITATE TO PLACE AN ORDER. THE RUG REPLACED A NATURAL JUTE RUG.



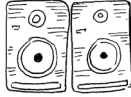



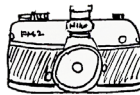

ILLUSTRATION	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHORSHIP	ACQUISITION DATE/YEAR	VALUE (+/-)	MOTIVATION
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED POSTCARD CHUCK CLOSE, PHILIP GLASS	CHUCK CLOSE	2013	N/A	POSTCARD FROM NYC DURING A VISIT TO MOMA IN 2013.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED ILLUSTRATION FROM FRIEND	FRIEND	2021	N/A	A PORTRAIT FROM FRIEND AS A GIFT.
ART	VISUAL ART	OIL PAINTING SCOTT EVERINGHAM	SCOTT EVERINGHAM	2023	\$375	THE ARTIST HAD A SMALL PAINTING SALE WHICH
	SCULPTURE	WOODEN DUCKS PAIR	UNKNOWN	2022	N/A	GIFT FROM KOREAN FRIENDS ON OUR WEDDING DAY - A SYMBOL OF LOVE AND FIDELITY. MY MOTHER AND DAD ALSO HAD A PAIR OF DUCKS.
	COLLECTION	RECORDS	VARIOUS	2005 - ONGOING	N/A	COLLECTION WHICH BEGAN DURING MY TEENAGE YEARS. LATELY I HAVE BEEN RELINQUISHING RECORDS THAT I NO LONGER LISTEN TO BECAUSE IT IS TOO MUCH TO CARRY AROUND. I PURCHASE A RECORD FROM EVERY NEW PLACE I VISIT AND ANY CONCERT TICKETS I MAY HAVE ARE TAPED TO THE ARTIST'S RECORD AS A TIME STAMP.
	APPLIANCE/ ELECTRONICS	SPEAKERS	KRK	N/A	N/A	PAUL'S SPEAKERS CONNECTED TO THE RECORD PLAYER.
	APPLIANCE/ ELECTRONICS	RECORD PLAYER	AUDIO TECHNICA	N/A	N/A	GIFT FROM PAUL AFTER MY VINTAGE WOOD RECORD PLAYER WAS NO LONGER FUNCTIONING.
	RECEPTAL	WOVEN BASKET	IKEA	2019	\$20	BASKETS TO HOLD THINGS THAT I DO NOT WANT DISPLAYED OR BE SEEN.
	BOOKS	VARIOUS	N/A	N/A	N/A	6 ROWS OF BOOKS BY VARIOUS AUTHORS IN VARIOUS GENRES AND TOPICS. A DETAILED REVIEW MAY REVEAL MUCH ABOUT MYSELF.
	COLLECTIONS	CAMERA	NIKON FM2	2016	\$300	I HAVE A COLLECTION OF VARIOUS FILM CAMERAS THAT ARE NOW STORED AWAY EXCEPT FOR THE NIKON FM2 WHICH IS USED ONCE IN A WHILE.
	FURNITURE	CHERRY LOUNGE CHAIR	PAUL	2024	N/A	A RECENT ADDITION TO THE HOME. PAUL IS EMBARKING ON CREATING A SET OF FURNITURES TO BE SHOWCASED BY END OF 2024.

ILLUSTRATION	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHORSHIP	ACQUISITION DATE/YEAR	VALUE (+/-)	MOTIVATION
	SCULPTURE	DECORATIVE CERAMIC VASE	ANNIKA HOEFS	2020	N/A	ORIGINALLY COMMISSIONED FOR A HOSPITALITY PROJECT, SURPLUS OF VASES ALLOWED ME TO OBTAIN ONE.
	PLANT	BIRD OF PARADISE IN PAINTED TERRACOTTA POT	IKEA	2016	\$40	MY MOTHER PURCHASED THE PLANT AS A HOUSE WARMING GIFT WHEN PAUL AND I MOVED. WE FINISHED THE TRIP WITH AN ICECREAM CONE.
	COLLECTIONS	PHOTOGRAPHS POLAROIDS POSTCARDS	N/A	N/A	N/A	THE MAIN ENTRANCE IS THE ONLY MAGNETIC SURFACE AND CURRENTLY HOLDS VARIOUS POSTCARDS, POLAROIDS, SMALL ARTWORKS FROM FRIENDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.
	FURNITURE	MUUTO DOT COAT HOOKS	LARS TORNØE	2019	N/A	THE HOOKS HAVE A MINIMAL AND CONTEMPORARY LOOK, THEY REPLACED COAT HOOKS WE DID NOT LIKE AND IS IN PLACE UNTIL WE PURCHASE AN EAMES HANG-IT-ALL.
	DECOR	CANDLES	VARIOUS	N/A	N/A	VARIOUS CANDLES ARE PLACED THROUGHOUT THE FRONT ROOM TO CREATE ATMOSPHERE THROUGH SCENT.
	APPLIANCE/ELECTRONICS	DIGITAL FRAME	AURA	2022	N/A	A GIFT FROM A FAMILY MEMBER DISPLAYING A CURATED SET OF MEMORIES IN A DIGITAL PHOTO FRAME.
	COLLECTIONS	HANDMADE CERAMIC BOWL WITH COLLECTION OF MATCHES	JIYEON	ONGOING	N/A	A HANDMADE BOWL HOLDS A COLLECTION OF MATCHES FROM TRAVELS.

Appendix B: Annotated Inventory

The Dining Space & Kitchen

TABLE 2. BY AUTHOR, ANNOTATED INVENTORY OF OBJECTS IN THE DINING SPACE & KITCHEN, 2024.






ILLUSTRATION	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHORSHIP	ACQUISITION DATE/YEAR	VALUE (+/-)	MOTIVATION
	FURNITURE	BLACK WALNUT DINING TABLE HANDMADE	PAUL AND JIYEON	2020	N/A	PAUL AND I DESIGNED A DINING TABLE FOR OUR PREVIOUS CONDO SPACE WHICH WAS LIMITED IN SPACE. IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FIND DINING TABLES WITH PROPORTIONS WHICH ALLOW COMFORTABLE DINING OPPORTUNITIES. WE WERE INSPIRED BY DONALD JUDD'S 101 SPRING STREET.
	FURNITURE	CESCA CHAIR	MARCEL BREUER	2020	\$1300	PURCHASED THROUGH A FURNITURE CONSIGNMENT COMPANY OUT OF MONTREAL AFTER THE DINING TABLE WAS FINISHED. AUTHENTICITY WAS IMPORTANT.
	FURNITURE	CONTEMPORARY FAN BACK SIDE CHAIR, ASH, WHITE WITH WEAR	WINDSOR WORKSHOP	2017	\$675	A CHAIR ACQUIRED THROUGH MY PREVIOUS ROLE AS AN INTERIOR DESIGNER FOR A BOOKSTORE. IT IS THE MOST TRADITIONAL IN TERMS OF STYLE BUT IT IS EXTREMELY COMFORTABLE DUE TO ITS WIDE ANGLED SADDLE SEAT. FOR ME, WINDSOR STYLE CHAIRS CONJURE UP IDEAS OF TRADITION, FAMILY, READING AND DINING.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED ARTWORK NATE HARRIS SIGNED PRINT 3/7	NATE HARRIS	2019	N/A	A GIFT FROM AN ARTIST FOR A COMMISSION OPPORTUNITY.
ART	VISUAL ART	PIERRE KOENIG CASE STUDIO HOUSE #22, 1959 24" X 36" EDITION 4/50 PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT FROM ORIGINAL LINE NEGATIVE, SIGNED BY ARTIST AU RECTO	PIERRE KOENIG	2021	N/A	A GIFT FROM MY FORMAL BOSS WHEN WE WERE MOVING OFFICE SPACE. I WAS VERY HAPPY TO BE GIFTED THIS PIECE BECAUSE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STAHL HOUSE AS AN EXEMPLARY MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE IN CALIFORNIA.
	PLANTS	DRACAENA TREE IN TERRACOTTA POT	N/A	2019	\$60	THE PLANT WAS ILL AND ON SALE. NOW IT IS THE TALLEST AND VIBRANT PLANT IN OUR HOME THAT RECEIVES MANY COMPLIMENTS.
	PLANTS	FIDDLE LEAF FIG IN TERRACOTTA POT	N/A	2019	\$40	DECORATIVE
	PLANTS	RUBBER PLANT IN TERRACOTTA POT	N/A	2019	\$40	DECORATIVE










ILLUSTRATION	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHORSHIP	ACQUISITION DATE/YEAR	VALUE (+/-)	MOTIVATION
	FURNITURE	IKEA HEMNES BOOKCASE	IKEA	2020	\$349	SHELVING/BOOKCASE BETWEEN THE KITCHEN AND DINING SPACE TO HOLD LARGE KITCHEN APPLIANCES THAT ARE DISPLAYED RATHER THAN PUT AWAY INTO THE CABINETS. IT ALSO HOLDS LIQUOR BOTTLES AND COOKBOOKS.
	APPLIANCE/ELECTRONICS	KITCHENAID MIXER	KITCHENAID	2019	\$300	I ENJOY COOKING AND BAKING, A GIFT FROM PAUL. THE MINT GREEN COLOUR MATCHED OUR PREVIOUS KITCHEN.
	APPLIANCE/ELECTRONICS	VITAMIX BLENDER	VITAMIX	2018	\$500	AFTER MOVING THROUGH A FEW BLENDERS, WE PURCHASED A CHEF RECOMMENDED BLENDER.
	APPLIANCE/ELECTRONICS	ALL-CLAD TEA KETTLE	ALL-CLAD	2018	N/A	GIFT FROM FRIEND, I WOULD LIKE TO REPLACE THIS WITH MICHAEL GRAVE'S ALESSI 9093 KETTLE WITH LIGHT BLUE HANDLE AND RED BIRD WHISTLE OR LE CREUSET'S WHISTLING KETTLE WHICH COULD MATCH MY FUTURE POTS AND PANS.
	BOOKS	COOKBOOKS	VARIOUS	N/A	N/A	COOKBOOKS ARE SEPARATEED FROM THE VITSOE FOR ACCESS BUT I CONSIDER COOKBOOKS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL IN TERMS OF FORMAT AND PUBLICATION.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED ARTWORK OF OUR DOG BY OUR PREVIOUS DOG WALKER	DOG WALKER	N/A	N/A	OUR VERY FIRST DOG WALKER ON HER LAST DAY LEFT US A HAND ILLUSTRATED CARD, IT REMAINS SENTIMENTAL.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH OF MYSELF ON BROOKLYN BRIDGE IN 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A	A PHOTOGRAPH FROM A TRIP WITH FRIENDS.
	VISUAL ART	FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH MY MOTHER'S BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF JAMES DEAN AND JULIE HARRIS FROM FILM, EAST OF EDEN	N/A	N/A	N/A	FOUND RUMMAGING THROUGH MY MOM'S BELONGINGS. SHE HAD KEPT THIS PHOTOGRAPH OF JAMES DEAN AND JULIE HARRIS SINCE SHE WAS A TEENAGER. SHE HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY WELL VERSED IN AMERICAN MUSIC AND MOVIES WHICH WE WERE EXPOSED TO GROWING UP.
ART	VISUAL ART	FRAMED FOUR LEAF CLOVER FROM MY SISTER	N/A	N/A	N/A	GIFT FROM MY SISTER.
	TABLEWARE	KOSTA BODA - MAMBO CHAMPAGNE GLASSES, SET OF 8	VICKE LINDSTRAND	2023	N/A	A WEDDING GIFT FROM PAUL AND I'S MENTOR. WE SPENT TIME LOOKING FOR ITS SPECIFICATION AS WE KNEW THAT IT WAS LIKELY A SIGNIFICANT DESIGN OBJECT. THE SMALL BUBBLES BLOWN INTO THE STEM OF THE GLASSWARE MEANT THAT A GREAT DEAL OF CARE WAS GIVEN TO ITS DESIGN AND FABRICATION. THIS GIFT ITSELF IS SENTIMENTAL BUT IT ALSO PROMPTS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EVERYDAY OBJECTS. I ASPIRE TO HAVE VARIOUS CONSIDERATE TABLEWARE.

ILLUSTRATION	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHORSHIP	ACQUISITION DATE/YEAR	VALUE (+/-)	MOTIVATION
	TABLEWARE	SILVERWARE SPOON AND CHOPSTICK SET, KOREA	N/A	1996	N/A	THE SILVERWARE (SUJEO) WAS GIVEN TO ME BY MY MOTHER AS AN ITEM OF INHERITANCE. THIS WAS THE FAMILY'S SILVERWARE. THERE IS A CERTIFICATE INDICATING 1996 AS THE YEAR OF ACQUISITION BUT WRITTEN IN CHINESE CHARACTERS AND THUS, UNABLE TO TRANSLATE.
	TABLEWARE	BRASSWARE SPOON AND CHOPSTICK SET	LA LUNE	2017	\$250	PURCHASED ON OUR VISIT TO KOREA, METICULOUS AND CONTEMPORARY DESIGN OF A TRADITIONAL OBJECT.
	TABLEWARE	CERAMIC HANDMADE TEAPOT AND TEA CUPS	JIYEON	2021	N/A	SMALL TEA CUPS AND TEA POT AFTER SEEING A TEA CEREMONY.
	INSTRUMENT	KOSHI CHIME	KOSHI	2021	N/A	CHIMES MADE FROM PYRENEAN MOUNTAINS IN FRANCE, WHEN THE WIND BLOWS INTO THE HOME THE CHIMES RING.
	INSTRUMENT	METAL CHIME FROM JAPAN	N/A	2023	\$30	SOUVENIR FROM JAPAN WHICH I TIED A SMALL STONE WITH A NATURAL OPENING COLLECTED IN JAPAN AT THE CENTRAL CORD OF THE CHIME.
	VISUAL ART	PAINTED SHELL	N/A	2022	N/A	A GIFT FROM TWENTY-EIGHT ATLANTIC AT THE WEQUASSETT RESORT AND GOLF CLUB THAT WE WENT TO DURING OUR HONEYMOON TO CAPE COD AND NEW ENGLAND.
	TABLEWARE	SHOTOKU GLASS USUHARI TUMBLER, SET OF 5 WITH WOODEN BOX	SHOTOKU GLASS	2017	N/A	A GIFT FROM A BOSS AFTER HIS TRIP TO JAPAN. OBJECT HAS NOT BEEN USED AS THE GLASS IS INCREDIBLY FINE AND THIN AS A LIGHT BULB RESULTING IN TOO MUCH PRECIOUSNESS.

Appendix C: Methodology

Notes on the Illustration

Throughout the development of this research, the apartment has undergone numerous changes, illustrating that the interior space and the material lifeworld are neither static nor finite. These changes are prompted by movements, acquisitions, disposals, evaluations, considerations, negotiations and other factors. As discussed in Chapter 6, the interior is a flexible space, less static than the structural elements of the home, allowing for major changes such as furniture rearrangement, addition or removal of items and subtle adjustments to the placement of objects used in daily life.

It is important to note that the descriptions and observations outlined in this research paper represent a narrative from a specific point in the past. In earlier iterations, the goal was to document objects in the annotated inventory through photographic documentation (see Appendix B, Tables 1 and 2). However, it became evident that photographs became outdated and obsolete over time. By adopting an illustrative approach to documentation of space and objects in my home, the documentation of my possessions felt more direct and honest, allowing reviewers to see beyond the physicality of the object itself. The static nature of the photographs may lead to various opinions and judgments without the context of being in the physical space as the focus remains on the multiplicity of meaning an object creates.

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