The meaning of things

Domestic symbols and the self

MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI
University of Chicago

AND

EUGENE ROCHBERG-HALTON
University of Notre Dame

To Isabella and Chessie

Contents

Preface

In Western cultures the broad stages of history are marked by the kind of objects people could make. The Paleolithic period derives its name from the crude stone tools that were in use during its long millennia; Neolithic refers to the period in which stone was shaped to conform more and more precisely to the designs of its users. The Bronze and Iron ages define times and cultures in which things were first molded out of metal. Much later, the Industrial Revolution and the Atomic Age mark transitions in the processes of exploiting physical things for productive purposes.

From this perspective the evolution of humankind thus tends to be measured not by gains in intellect, morality, and wisdom; the benchmarks of progress have to do with our ability to fashion things of ever greater complexity in increasing numbers. Whether or not one likes this tacit definition of what history is about, the fact remains that the transactions between people and the things they create constitute a central aspect of the human condition. Past memories, present experiences, and future dreams of each person are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century we have the dubious privilege of seeing both the beginnings of the human romance with things, in the distant past, and also its possible end, in the all too imminent future. For the first time in history there is increasing awareness that the resources of energy that have fueled material expansion are finite and that their desperate pursuit threatens the continuation of life on the planet. The modern culture of materialism, or the belief that the ultimate goals of personal life can be fulfilled by things and sensations, is losing credibility in the face of facts. It is not merely ideology but accumulating empirical evidence that forces us to reevaluate our relationship to objects. Whether humankind will heed the evi-

dence and respond to it adaptively by redirecting its goals is perhaps the most important question for our survival.

The study that follows is an attempt to understand how and why people in contemporary urbanized America relate to things in their immediate environment. We wanted to examine the role of objects in people's definition of who they are, of who they have been, and who they wish to become. For despite the importance of objects, little is known about the reasons for attachment to them, about the ways in which they become incorporated in the goals and in the actual experiences of persons.

Our data were obtained from interviews with over 300 people who were members of 82 families living in a major metropolitan area. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes, where we could see and discuss the things that were part of their everyday lives. By talking to children, their parents, and their grandparents, we hoped to discover generational differences in the interaction with objects, as well as patterns that differentiate some families from others.

When this study began in 1974 we had no great theoretical design or preconceived pattern to guide us. The method adopted was basically ethnographic: to describe as precisely and completely as possible the phenomena to be studied, using the language and the conceptual categories of the respondents themselves. It was to be a descriptive study, in which people were requested to tell what objects were "special" to them and why. Classifications of objects and meanings were to be derived from their responses.

Essentially, this is the plan that was followed. But as soon as the data started accumulating in certain patterns, a process of theoretical interpretation emerged simultaneously. We then began to "explain" what we were seeing in terms of those conceptual categories that were available to us and which seemed to be the most relevant. As the interaction between empirical and conceptual patterns appeared to validate the importance of a theoretical perspective, that perspective itself suggested new ways to look at the data – new analyses to perform. In turn, these further empirical explorations led to other theoretical insights, which, again, directed our attention back to the respondents' comments. This process was completed after five years, not because its possibilities were exhausted but in order to harvest the ideas.

Perhaps the most central of these ideas is that of *cultivation*. This concept was developed by Rochberg-Halton (1979a,b) as an application of philosophical pragmatism to a theory of culture and was meant to emphasize how meaning involves an active process of interpretation oriented toward goals. In the context of this study the concept accounts for the vast differences in the range of meanings that people derived from the objects with which they interacted. The same culturally legitimized object might provide only fleeting comfort to one person, whereas to another it signified complex emotional and cognitive ties to other people and ideas. Thus we concluded that the potential significance of things is realized in a process of actively cultivating a world of meanings, which both reflect and help create the ultimate goals of one's existence. The implications of this and similar concepts that were also suggested by the study give a somewhat different perspective than most investigations in the social sciences usually do on what people are.

Although the antecedents of such a project are not relevant to its conclusions – just as the historical sources of a poem or mathematical proof are largely irrelevant to the value of the finished product – it might be appropriate to trace the various influences that started us on this investigation. The earliest discernible roots of our concern with the meaning of things go back to a set of ideas that had a brief flowering in France about 30 years ago. In Paris, in 1965, George Perec published his novel, *Les Choses,* and thus inaugurated an ephemeral genre that was called *chosisme.* The goal of this all but stillborn literary movement was to portray human life mainly in terms of the characters' acquisition, use, and disposal of objects, and not in terms of an inner stream of consciousness or of a sequence of actions and events. Thus the reader learned, exclusively from the things he owned and from what he did with them, what a hero valued, whom he loved, and what his thoughts and actions were. As a literary school, *chosisme* was doomed by the narrowness of its chosen limitations. But it did raise an important issue, which seemed ripe for more systematic investigation.

Even earlier, a few philosophers had begun to explore the impact of possessions on selfhood. Georges Gusdorf (1948), for example, expanded the simple equation that "to be is to have"; or that one knows who one is by the objects one owns and by how one

uses them. Some of the same themes were sounded by Gabriel Marcel, especially in his work *Etre et Avoir,* and even by the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (1956). But these ideas had little effect on any of the sciences of society or behavior in either Europe or the United States. Depth psychology, for instance, was very interested in "object relations," but that term referred almost entirely to interaction with other people rather than with inanimate objects. Our project came to reflect the opposite process: to investigate the personification of things rather than the reification of persons.

The stimulation provided by these French writers had no direct effect for over two decades. In the meantime one of us had been studying artistic creativity. After having spent years describing how painters and sculptors fashion their artifacts, another question presented itself: How do audiences relate to works of art? In other words, having temporarily exhausted the issue of how art is produced, he wondered how it was "consumed."

The other author began with an interest in culture heroes as role models and cultural indicators and in the transformative power of symbols. This research on objects directed him to an extended study of philosophical pragmatism and Peirce's semiotic. Unlike structuralist or cognitive theories, the pragmatic approach included the physical object itself as an essential element of the interpretive sign process, which constitutes meaning, and made possible a broader approach to the meaning of things. G. H. Mead's discussion of the role-modeling process suggested that things, too, literally act as role models. If psychoanalysts could discuss relations with people as "object relations," it certainly seemed possible to view things as role models or socializing signs.

Although our initial interest in examining how art is consumed was to study exchange centers, such as art galleries, book and record stores, theaters, and the like, we quickly decided simply to ask people what things meant to them. But a methodological question arose: What objects would we ask them about? We realized that we must broaden the scope of the investigation to include the whole symbolic environment of the household (as well as the neighborhood and city), without deciding a priori what objects are valued, which is how we structured the interview format.

Some of our colleagues at the University of Chicago began to share a common interest in the problems of adaptation to urban

life. This group, led and stimulated by Bernice Neugarten, consisted of Bertram Cohler and Gunhild Hagestad, who were interested in patterns of family influence and decision making; Stephen Golant, whose concern was the use of community resources by the aged; and Morton Lieberman, whose interests focused on the psychological concomitants of major life transitions. Our project, conceived of as dealing with the issue of how people adapt to the urban environment through signs and symbols, became integrated with others in a Program Project Grant funded by the National Institute on Aging. Thanks to this grant we were able to carry out the study.

Once research started, our varied intellectual backgrounds began to direct our interpretation of the results. Foremost among the influences that shaped our course has been our participation, as instructors, in the Social Sciences "Common Core" at the College of the University of Chicago. This yearlong sequence of courses is an old tradition at the University, and it has had a permanent effect on those who teach it as well as on the students. We have both taught the *Self, Culture and Society* sequence several times. Many of the perspectives that have directed this volume have been derived from the "classic" works we have discussed with our students: those of Arendt, Durkheim, Freud, Geertz, G. H. Mead, Turner, Weber, to name only a few. There is no question that the intellectual experience of teaching these courses has broadened the book that evolved.

The study of "Yankee City" by one of our "ancestors" on the Committee on Human Development, W. L. Warner, still stands as a major contribution to the long tradition of the "Chicago" school of urban sociology. Although our method is quite different, we would also like to consider this study as part of that tradition.

Other people whose support and encouragement have been very helpful over the years are Victor Turner of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Virginia, Gerald Suttles of the Department of Sociology, and Paul Wheatley of the Department of Geography and the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Judy Torney of the University of Illinois at Chicago helped to carry out the pilot study. Useful comments on the manuscript were received from several colleagues: Bertram Cohler, Jerry Gerasimo, Bernice Neugarten, and Richard Shweder. The writing of this book was facilitated in part by a post-

doctoral training fellowship in research and therapy with adolescents, directed by Dr. Daniel Offer at Michael Reese Hospital, granted to Eugene Rochberg-Halton. None of these persons, however, are responsible for any faults that may be found in the book.

We are grateful to the students at the university who helped collect and analyze the data, but who are too many to mention by name. We owe particular thanks to Stephen Kahn, who was responsible for much of the computer programming. Carl Ferrono, Cynthia Clark, Stephen Kobb, Jane McCormack, Thomas Figurski, Patricia Weenolsen, and Paul Lewis were some of the most assiduous interviewers. Finally, Linda Myers typed the various drafts of the manuscript with patience and efficiency.

The study reported in this volume was supported, in large part, by a grant from the National Institute on Aging, PHS-5P01-AG00123.

We wish at this point to express our profound gratitude to the 315 women, men, and children who not only agreed to receive us in their homes but who also enlarged on what meanings the objects therein held for them. Listening to them has been enlightening and enjoyable and made writing this book possible. We hope we did not misinterpret their responses too much. Our intention was simple: to get closer to the truth about human experience. We are, however, all too aware of how difficult that goal is to attain in practice.

Names, professions, and other concrete details obtained from interviews have been changed to disguise the identity of the respondents.

MC
ER-H

CHAPTER 1

People and things

Humans display the intriguing characteristic of making and using objects. The things with which people interact are not simply tools for survival, or for making survival easier and more comfortable. Things embody goals, make skills manifest, and shape the identities of their users. Man is not only *homo sapiens* or *homo ludens*, he is also *homo faber*, the maker and user of objects, his self to a large extent a reflection of things with which he interacts. Thus objects also make and use their makers and users.

To understand what people are and what they might become, one must understand what goes on between people and things. What things are cherished, and why, should become part of our knowledge of human beings. Yet it is surprising how little we know about what things mean to people. By and large social scientists have neglected a full investigation of the relationship between people and objects.

There are, of course, many invaluable insights on this subject in the previous work of other authors, but they seem to be fragmentary and of marginal significance to the authors' argument. Social scientists tend to look for the understanding of human life in the internal psychic processes of the individual or in the patterns of relationship between people; rarely do they consider the role of material objects. These past contributions will be reviewed wherever appropriate. On the whole, however, we shall proceed by developing our own perspective on the exceedingly complex subject of person–object transactions.

The person as a pattern of psychic activity

Before starting the main task of this volume – an empirical analysis of the interaction between persons and objects – we should define two of the terms of this relationship. At first such a definition might seem superfluous, for the terms appear to be clear enough: People and things are concrete entities that need no preliminary explication.

But what do we mean by "person"? Depending on one's unstated assumptions, entirely different entities might be referred to by this term. Therefore, to avoid confusion, we shall spell out the particular perspective from which we approach personhood. The perspective to be described is not intended to be a "nothing but" definition of what a person is. People are too complex to fit any one perspective; they are the result of so many forces and reflect so many principles of organization that it would be impossible to do them all justice in a single point of view.

There are, for instance, biochemical, genetic, neurophysiological, endocrinological levels of analysis that can illuminate what a person is. One can look at a person as the result of a history of reward contingencies, social learning, or cultural conditioning; or one can develop a description based on the vicissitudes of repressed libidinal drives. These and many other accounts bring us closer to understanding what a person is. But we shall not draw directly on any of these accounts. It is not that we dispute their usefulness; in fact, wherever applicable we shall borrow whatever concepts seem appropriate. But we intend to develop a different perspective on personhood, which we regard as more conducive than previous ones to the understanding of how people relate to things.

From our perspective, the most basic fact about persons is that they are not only aware of their own existence but can assume control of that existence, directing it toward certain purposes (cf., Smith, 1978). This, then, will be our starting point for a model of the self. How self-awareness came about is not relevant here. Thus we shall take self-awareness and self-control as givens.

But what is the "self" that self-awareness is aware of and which self-control controls? Let us begin answering this question by turning to the influential insight of Descartes, who grounded knowledge within the unity of the *cogito*, the subjective self-aware-

ness. Descartes pursued the method of doubt to show how knowledge of the objective world is based on inference, and is in no way certain, because inferences could be mistaken or based on external deception and internal delusion. He attempted systematically to peel away vagueness in order to arrive at the most basic "cardinal conception," or clear and distinct idea. He claimed to find this true basis for knowledge in the utterance, "I think, therefore I am." In Descartes's view the self is the *subject* of thought or self-awareness, and its existence ("therefore I am") can be inferred from this starting point.

Descartes's thoughts have had a profound effect on modern epistemology and psychology, and even on the commonsense assumptions of the average Western person. We have taken for granted that mind and body are separate entities; that thoughts are of the mind, emotions of the body; and also that we can know the self directly, and that it consists of a subjective and private self-consciousness.

But Descartes's assumptions, and consequently much of the social science tradition based on them, are by no means so clear and distinct as they seem. Even the "I think" is a process occurring in time and space, involving a transaction between subject and object, between self and other. Self-awareness occurs when the self becomes the *object* of reflection – that is, the self takes itself as its own object. In other words, even self-awareness – self-knowledge – is inferential and not direct. When we say, "Who am I?" we attend to certain bits of information or signs that represent the "I," and these signs become an object of interpretation. One could never attend to all the feelings, memories, and thoughts that constitute what one is; instead, we use representations that stand for the vast range of experiences that make up and shape the self and enable one to infer what the object of self-awareness is. Because self-awareness is a process occurring in time, the self can never be known directly. Instead, self-knowledge is inferential and mediate – mediated by the signs that comprise language and thought. Self-awareness, resulting from an act of inference, is always open to correction, change, and development. Therefore it seems more correct to think of self-awareness as a process of self-control rather than as a static moment of original apperception.

Another effect of the Cartesian influence was to seek the meaning of the self, or indeed of any inquiry, in an absolute origin or

beginning, a "cardinal conception." Our approach will involve going in the other direction, toward the ends or goals of experience and the means used in getting there. We shall view the self in a context of *cultivation* (Rochberg-Halton, 1979a,b), a process of interpretation and self-control motivated by goals rather than by origins. This point may seem minor, but it actually has important consequences for any inquiry about the self. A Cartesian approach consists of peeling off the allegedly false persona or mask of the self to attain the "real me" (or cogito) inside. This goal of reaching for a private and original self is limited in that it ignores the process of cultivation. If cultivation is a self-corrective process, in which some goals are refined or given expression, and others are rejected, then the self should be the culmination of cultivation itself. However, the goal of a private self posits authentic being as something logically prior to experience and cultivation, a kind of elementary form, making it seem as if it were possible to think and feel, act, and be a self prior to socialization through culture and language. But what would the medium of thought or emotion be – What would give it direction? How could one form intentions and act intelligently or attend to the process of acting without cultivation?

Cultivation is a psychic activity that is only possible because humans are able to focus their attention selectively in the pursuit of goals. Because attention is the medium through which intentional acts can be accomplished, it is convenient to think of it as "psychic energy." As used throughout this book, psychic energy is not the same concept made familiar by Freud's later writings. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it refers to an unconscious reservoir of libidinal strivings, a life force that manifests itself in desires that provide motivation and direction to conscious life. Our use of the concept is quite different, more in line with Freud's own early formulations, in which he identified psychic energy with "mobile attention" (Freud, 1965, p. 134). Attention and psychic energy are used interchangeably here, on the grounds that intentional psychological acts cannot be carried out without the allocation of attention.

Psychic activity consists of intentions that direct the attention through which information is selected and processed in consciousness. When attending to something, we do so in order to

realize some intention. Because psychic activity determines the dynamics of self-consciousness, it also determines what a person is by constituting his or her self. In the words of William James:

But the moment one thinks of the matter, one sees how false a notion of experience that is which would make it tantamount to the mere presence to the senses of an outward order. Millions of items in the outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no *interest* for me. *My experience is what I agree to attend to.* Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind – without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos. (James, 1890, p. 402)

It would be a mistake to think of psychic activity as a sort of *élan vital*, a raw force that gives meaning and purpose but is itself outside of meaning and purpose. In Freud's variant of Cartesianism, for example, psychic activity is ultimately grounded in the underlying mechanistic forces of the unconscious. Cultivation only serves to repress and sublimate the original impulses that are beyond the process of representation. In contrast, we assume that the meaning of psychic activity is to be found in the intentions that one forms as a result of cultivation. Human beings never experience "raw" instincts: Even hunger and sexual drives always appear in consciousness transformed and interpreted through the network of signs one has learned from one's culture. To assume that only the biological source of the experience is "real" while its symbolic interpretation in consciousness is just an epiphenomenon is certainly possible, as long as the fact that it is an assumption is admitted and one realizes that it ignores precisely what makes human experience human.

The actualization of intentions is dependent on the available psychic energy, or attention. Any intentional act requires attention – reaching for a cup of coffee, reading a paper, or conducting a conversation. Only by concentrating attention can we "make things happen." Therefore it is convenient to think of attention as psychic energy, because through its allocation ordered patterns of information and action are created.

Making the metaphor of energy even more compelling is the fact that attention is a finite resource. At any given moment we are incapable of focusing on more than a few bits of information at a time. It requires effort to concentrate, that is, to keep the same information in focus for any length of time (Binet, 1890; Bakan, 1966; Kahneman, 1973). Consequently, there are a limited num-

ber of things we can *do*, a limited number of ways we can *be*. Of course, it is true that people differ considerably in how they learn to structure their attention, in how much they can concentrate on certain patterns of information, and thus in how much they can accomplish. However, even the most heroic efforts of consciousness draw on the same limited supply of attention. The "divine" Michelangelo through his long life was constantly bedeviled by competing demands that forced him to shift his concentration from one task to another, and therefore the projects he was able to complete are far fewer than those he planned to accomplish.

How this limited psychic energy is invested – and consequently what sort of self will emerge – is determined by an enormous array of factors. Chance, which lies outside individual control, obviously plays a primary role. Where one is born, with what genes, and in what surroundings limit drastically the options for what can or must be attended to. But again, we are left with the fact that people pay attention to what they *want to*. Part of the information in consciousness consists of intentions, structured in a hierarchy of goals. These intentions, then, direct attention and as a result, we can interpret information. Without intentions we could have no meaningful information and there would be no consistent change in human affairs except for those produced by genetic evolution. Thus for each person the pattern of information that constitutes the self is shaped by conscious goals – no matter what other factor "below" conscious intentionality determines it.

Among the patterns of ordered information that depend on attention for their existence are what we usually call social systems. A *social system* is a predictable pattern of interaction among persons made possible by shared structures of attention. The simplest example is a dyad. Two persons constitute a dyadic system when their actions with respect to one another are not random but, rather, follow a recognizable pattern. Two people are part of a system if they come together more frequently than when left to chance, if their thoughts focus on the same information more often than one would expect by chance, if their reactions take into account each other's actions, and so forth. In other words, a dyadic system is based on congruence in two persons' consciousnesses. The more similar the attentional structures of the two are, the stronger the dyad is. However, to achieve such a congruence one must draw on the

However, to achieve such a congruence one must draw on the

same amount of limited attention that is needed to allow one to experience the self and the environment. Thus social systems lead the same precarious existence as other forms of order do; entropy threatens their structure, which can be maintained only by further investments of psychic energy. In practice, in terms of a dyad, a person can only be involved in a few such relationships at any given time. One cannot physically meet, let alone psychologically be on the same wavelength with, more than a few other individuals. Sympathy, concern, care, and love, which describe the states of consciousness that make two people want to continue a relationship, are great drains on their attention. Mozart's Don Giovanni, whose conquests in Spain alone numbered 1,003, definitely violates the laws that limit how many dyadic systems one can be a part of.

Social systems involving more than two people also rely on the same pool of limited attention for their survival. A business company, an army, or a nation exist only as long as people pay attention to the goals of such systems. Thus social systems owe their organization of goals to attention, and in turn these goals structure their members' attention, giving shape to the selves of those who are part of the system. The relationship between social systems and personal consciousness, each structuring and being structured by the other, is so delicate as to appear circular.

The process that explains how social systems survive by structuring the attention of individuals – and incidentally, avoids circularity in the argument – is socialization. Whenever a person begins to interact with another individual or a group, at first the respective goals will tend to be out of phase. If the newcomer is to become a part of the already existing system, a reordering of intentions is required. One simple example of socialization concerns the mutual adaptations involved in developing a congruent pattern of wakefulness and sleep when a baby is born to a couple (Csikszentmihalyi and Graef, 1975). Infants have no preference as to when to do the things of which they are capable; their attention is not structured but is utterly unsocialized. To the parents, their demands for attention are entirely random and conflict with the rhythm of sleep, work, and leisure that their parents have already established and that give structure to their lives. Hence a reordering of goals is necessary for the system to continue func-

and the infant, who is most dependent on the system for survival, will have to reorganize its attention to reduce conflict. Socialization proceeds in a similar manner in all such contexts: The interaction between people requires an ordering of consciousness that simultaneously preserves the system and changes it; shaping the person while preserving his or her goals.

When socialization is viewed from the perspective of personhood as developed here, some additional aspects of the process become salient – for instance, a person should not only accept uncritically the conventional goals of society but he or she should be able to change them if evidence shows their limitations. This critical element, usually omitted from the accounts of socialization, is the cutting edge of cultivation.

Thus by the cultivation of goals through limited attention, individuals become persons. Psychic energy has another characteristic to be considered in this context. When someone invests psychic energy in an object – a thing, another person, or an idea – that object becomes "charged" with the energy of the agent. For example, if a person works at a task, a certain amount of his or her attention is invested in that task, thus that invested energy is "lost" because the agent was unable to use that attention for other purposes. Part of the person's life has been transferred to the focal object – part of his or her ability to experience the world, to process information, to pursue goals has been channeled into the task to the exclusion of other possibilities. However, this lost invested energy can turn into a gain if as a result of the investment the agent achieves a goal he or she has set for his or herself. Accomplishing a goal provides positive feedback to the self and strengthens it in allowing the self to grow.

The fact that attention can be condensed to tasks or objects also opens up the possibility of expropriating psychic energy. If, for instance, a farmer devotes years of his life to cultivating a field but then the field is taken away, the farmer loses the object in which his life energy has been condensed. Another example is the alienation of labor. As Marx observed, wage laborers invest a certain amount of their life in labor. While working in the factory, their choices of action and experience are drastically reduced; they forfeit the opportunity to live any other way. Because workers concentrate their attention on the job at hand, a product takes shape; however, workers do not "own" the product, having little choice

in deciding what it will be, how it will be done, and to whom it will be sold and for how much. Moreover, the return workers get is always less than the value of the activity they have invested in the task, the difference being surplus value – the profit that the employer makes by appropriating part of the workers' life energy.

Thus far we can conclude the following. Personhood depends on the ability to allocate one's psychic energy freely. An individual cannot become a person if he or she is unable to cultivate his or her goals, and therefore the shape that the self will take.

There are potentially many obstacles to the development of self-control. Some may be organic in nature, caused by genetic failure or physiological imbalances. Others result from early experiences or from opportunity structures built into the social context. Psychiatrists have remarked on the fact that most psychopathologies, especially the more severe ones, are characterized by "disorders of attention." People classified as schizophrenic, for instance, feel unable to control the sounds, sights, and feelings they attend to and are impaired in their effort to concentrate even on the most simple intentional actions. Some patients worry as to whether they will be able to place one foot ahead of the other when they walk or to lift a glass to their lips when they are thirsty. The simplest tasks of information processing, of attention allocation, become problematic when one is unable to dispose of his or her psychic energy freely (McGhie and Chapman, 1961; Freedman, 1974; Shield et al., 1974).

Less extreme but more widespread interference with control over attention occurs whenever people feel forced to attend to tasks against their present intentions in order to secure some future goal. Students who sit in a classroom when they wish to be out playing football lose control over the psychic energy invested in their immediate intentions because they fear the even greater loss that would result from failing the course or dropping out of school. Workers who hate their jobs but perform them because of the paychecks they receive at the end of the week similarly forfeit control over their psychic energy, at least temporarily. Throughout the course of a lifetime, however, these instances of alienation can add up to loss of control over a substantial portion of one's life energy.

The optimal state of experience for the individual is one in which intentions are not in conflict with each other. In this state of

inner harmony people can freely choose to invest their psychic energy in goals that are congruent with the rest of their intentions. Subjectively, this is felt to be a state of heightened energy, a state of increased control. The experience is considered challenging and enjoyable. In previous research this state of vital activity and inner order has been described in detail as the "flow" experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1976, 1978a,b).

The opposite of psychic order is inner conflict – the desire to do incompatible things or to do something other than what one is doing. Phenomenologically, one recognizes psychic disorder because one's attention is split: Psychic energy is focused on conflicting intentions. This reduces the effectiveness of psychic activity, for the two goals interfere with each other. Because inner conflict both introduces noise in the information-processing system of consciousness and reduces its capacity to do work, one may think of it as psychic entropy. The terms we use to describe such experiences are anxiety, frustration, alienation, or boredom, all referring to temporary impairments of psychic activity.

From the individual's point of view, the ability to invest psychic energy freely is the prerequisite toward achieving self-control. The exercise of self-control is experienced as an enjoyable state of inner order. But this criterion alone is insufficient for developing a critical perspective on personhood. It is, unfortunately, possible for persons to invest energy in projects that conflict with, or are destructive of, the goals of others. Saint Augustine, for instance, describes with puzzlement the deep enjoyment he derived in his youth from stealing pears from a neighbor's orchard (Augustine, (450) 1969, p. 41). Juvenile delinquents in our time also claim that nothing compares with crime as a source of a personally satisfying experience (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1978). The industrialist may be in full control of his psychic energy, deriving enjoyment and fulfillment from his manipulation of other people's energies, but his actions might have the result of increasing conflict in his community. Depending on which goals a person develops, an action will involve effects that are socially desirable, neutral, or disruptive. Therefore one must go beyond the goals of the individual to find a criterion for evaluating personhood.

However, moving from a personal to a social perspective does not change the nature of the criterion. The same considerations that define a positive state of the individual apply to the social

system, except that we move from the level of personal consciousness to that of community. The relevant consideration shifts from order and disorder within persons to order and disorder between persons. Entropy in a social system exists when the intentions of persons. Entropy in a social system exists when the intentions of people conflict with one another; when the same information is interpreted as positive feedback by some and as negative by others; and when the psychic energy investment of some people makes it more difficult for others to attain an ordered state. When a group is in an entropic state the intentions of its members cancel out each other instead of contributing toward each person's goals.

It follows that to achieve a vital community the psychic energy of individuals must be congruently structured. This congruence can result from either historical or environmental pressures, as in Durkheim's examples of "mechanical solidarity," or it can be achieved by intentionally cultivating common values, ideals, or interests. In either case, harmony exists among the goals held by individuals in the community. This implies, in turn, a restructuring of attention, a partial reallocation of psychic energy that will be invested willingly in goals that might not benefit each individual directly. A truly vital community, however, does not become more homogeneous. People are so different from each other genetically and experientially that, in order to reflect such differences accurately, individuals must structure their attention differently, thus building selves that diverge from each other in a variety of ways. However, it is possible for each individual to cultivate goals without producing conflict in the community. This would result in an integrated group of people pursuing a common goal while contributing their own unique perspectives to that goal. The condition of community, as Hannah Arendt (1958) has said, is one of *plurality*, not homogeneity.

Even the achievement of a harmonious community cannot serve as an ultimate criterion. True, such a human group would have a tremendous power, a great amount of psychic energy to focus on common goals. But these goals might, in turn, conflict with the goals of other human groups or with those of nonhuman systems.

The ecological awareness of recent years has made us realize that the survival of humans depends on preserving patterns of order in chemical, physical, and biological systems that have

"goals" of their own. By attempting to reorder our environment in terms of human goals, we have introduced such a heavy dose of entropy in the planetary ecology that we are making it unfit even for human habitation. Crass consideration for our own survival suggests more subtle values: understanding and respect for different communities and cultures, different forms of life, different patterns of energy.

Clearly neither the individual nor the family nor the country, and not even the human race, can alone provide grounds for ultimate values. As humans' ability to affect their environment increases, so must their consciousness grow to include patterns of energy based on principles different from their own. Of course, this "ecological consciousness," forced on us by the awareness of how technology can destroy Earth, is not an achievement of our times; it was discovered long ago by religions and philosophies in different parts of the world.

One of the universals that unites most of the diverse religions of traditional peoples is the idea of "cosmos," the living idea of a universe composed of personified laws and forces – a universe that speaks to humans. The practical effect of modern consciousness has been to depersonalize the cosmos and reconceive it as a Newtonian machine, a Cartesian "apparatus." But this creation of the modern person's "single vision," as Blake would have it, is a kind of robot or Golem that many have claimed to be out of control. It is as if Descartes himself were being manipulated by his own machine and forced to say, "It thinks me, therefore I am not." For the ancient Greeks a "pragmatic" solution still meant one that conformed to moral goals bearing on an ultimate conception of what was the right way to live. In the modern world dominated by technical values, "pragmatic" has come to mean a solution that is expedient in the short run without regard to ultimate goals (Bernstein, 1971, 1976; Habermas, 1973). Georg Simmel, as far back as 1908, saw deeply into the problems that arise when the objective world – believed to be ruled totally by mechanistic forces – is separated from the individual so that life becomes increasingly a technique rather than a process of cultivation:

Thus far at least, historical development has moved toward a steadily increasing separation between objective cultural production and the cultural level of the individual. The dissonance of modern life – in particular that manifested in the improvement of technique in every area and the simultaneous deep dissatisfaction with technical progress – is caused in large part by the fact that things are

becoming more and more cultivated, while men are less able to gain from the perfection of objects a perfection of the subjective life. (Simmel, 1971, p. 234)

Simmel suggests that for all our technical mastery over things, in the end it is the things that have come to dominate us. The cultivation of the person, or what he calls "subjective culture," has been subsumed under the domination of the thing and what philosopher William Barrett (1978) has called "the illusion of technique."

In sum, we shall say that the fullest development of personhood involves a free ordering of psychic energy at the level of the individual, the wider human community and social institutions, and the total environment. At each level, attention is invested in intentions that should lead toward consistency with each other. Thus the consciousness of the person in itself unifies the pattern of forces within those dimensions of the universe that are accessible to humans. The person who is able to cultivate his or her own desires, the goals of the community, and the laws of nature, and is able to reconcile these patterns, succeeds in establishing a temporary structure of order out of potential randomness. This is the creation of cosmos out of chaos and the ultimate touchstone of what is ordinarily called mental health, or self-actualization.

We have called this process *cultivation*. Cultivation refers to the process of investing psychic energy so that one becomes conscious of the goals operating within oneself, among and between other persons, and in the environment. It refers also to the process of channeling one's attention in order to realize such goals. This, then, is the ideal against which our model of the person can be assessed.

The nature of things

Having defined the perspective from which persons will be viewed, we shall next develop a workable definition of the other term in the relationship, namely, the object or the thing. This should be an easier project because things seem much less complex and thus present fewer problems than humans. Yet clearly here, too, we must exclude a great deal of information that cannot be dealt with adequately in the present context. In talking about objects, we shall not be concerned with their chemical composition, their mass, or their weight.

We shall view a thing as any bit of information that has a recognizable identity in consciousness, a pattern that has enough coherence, or internal order, to evoke a consistent image or label. Such a unit of information might be called a *sign*, to borrow a term from semiotic. In this perspective a symbol is only one kind of *sign* – a sign defined as the representation of some object (a quality, physical thing, or idea) to some other interpreting sign (for a discussion of the meaning of cherished household objects from a semiotic perspective see Rochberg-Halton, 1979b, Chapter 1). Viewed as signs, objects have the peculiar character of *objectivity*, that is, they tend to evoke similar responses from the same person over time and from different people. Relative to other signs such as emotions, or ideas, objects seem to possess a unique concreteness and permanence. Obviously, this characteristic of objects is grounded in their physical structure so that an artifact from an ancient people can still convey an image of the ideas of that culture even though there may be no record of how those people spoke or what they believed.

To restrict our perspective even further, we shall be concerned here mainly with objects that were shaped by human intentionality. Man-made things are twice as much dependent on intention for their existence: Like any other object, they can be interpreted through the psychic activity of the interpreter; unlike natural objects, they were originally given shape by the investment of psychic energy of their maker. The physical constitution of the sun or the rain is independent of human intentionality. They are objects in the sense that we attend to them as patterned, meaningful information. But a sculpture or an old shoe owe their very physical existence to the attention and intention of their maker.

Because of this double relation to consciousness, man-made objects have an extremely important role to play in human affairs. It is quite obvious that interaction with objects alters the pattern of life; for instance, that refrigerators have revolutionized shopping and eating habits, that automobiles created suburbs and increased geographical mobility, or that television is changing how family members relate to one another. It is also relatively easy to admit that the things people use, own, and surround themselves with might quite accurately reflect aspects of the owner's personality. Not surprisingly, the clothes one wears, the car one drives, and

the furnishing of one's home, all are expressions of one's self, even when they act as disguises rather than as reflections. But it is more difficult to admit that the things one uses are in fact part of one's self; not in any mystical or metaphorical sense but in cold, concrete actuality. My old living-room chair with its worn velvet fabric, musty smell, creaking springs, and warm support has often shaped signs in my awareness. These signs are part of what organizes my consciousness, and because my self is inseparable from the sign process that constitutes consciousness, that chair is as much a part of my self as anything can possibly be.

It is difficult to imagine a king without a throne, a judge without a bench, or a distinguished professor without a chair. In these examples the chair is an essential element of the role of a king, judge, or professor. In the rites of investiture the authority of these positions are given to all three through the symbols of chair and robes. In other words, the ideal of authority is invested in king, judge, and professor; that is, they are literally clothed with the vestments of the positions and can thus command the attention of their subjects through these objects. The original meaning of invest was "to clothe," in the sense of endowing with the qualities intended, but now, in modern utilitarian capitalism, the term means to put in money or time with the intent of getting a return for that investment. Thus the older meaning was perhaps closer to the sense of ultimately giving rather than to an expected getting, and it is this older sense that we mean when we use the term.

This crucial role of things has seldom been investigated even by philosophers; social scientists have by and large ignored it altogether. One thinker whose work contributes to this understanding is Hannah Arendt (1958). As a social philosopher who firmly believed that only through free political action can one fully become a person, she was not primarily interested in people's relation to objects. Yet the fourth chapter of her *Human Condition* is certainly one of the most trenchant analyses of the role of things in history.

Essentially, she distinguishes our environment into the "planet," which is shaped by natural forces, and the "world," which is built up by human effort. It is by the work of *homo faber*, intentionally creating objects through signs and through the effort of his hands, that the world exists. This distinction is the nature–culture dialectic made familiar by anthropologists. But

Arendt's analysis of what it meant for the development of human-kind to be able to create one's world is in many ways unique. She says on the issue:

The things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that . . . men, their ever-changing nature notwithstand-ing, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table. In other words, against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world rather than the sublime indiffer-ence of an untouched nature . . . Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity. (Arendt, 1958, p.137)

This conclusion echoes Heidegger's more obscure dictum: "Men alone, as mortals, by dwelling attain to the world as world. Only what conjoins itself out of world becomes a thing" (Heideg-ger, 1971, p.182).

These arguments imply that men and women make order in their selves (i.e., "retrieve their identity") by first creating and then interacting with the material world. The nature of that trans-action will determine, to a great extent, the kind of person that emerges. Thus the things that surround us are inseparable from who we are. The material objects we use are not just tools we can pick up and discard at our convenience; they constitute the framework of experience that gives order to our otherwise shape-less selves. Therefore the things we make and use have a tremen-dous impact on the future of humankind.

A good example of the confusion surrounding this simple point emerges in the context of the current debate surrounding the control of firearms. A slogan of the gun lobby is: "Guns don't kill people, people do." The neutrality of the object is assumed; peo-ple's intentions will be carried out independently of the things they use. Needless to say, our position implies the opposite con-clusion. There are no "people" in the abstract, people are what they attend to, what they cherish and use. A person who has a gun in his or her house is by that fact different from the one who does not.

Because objects are so intimately related to the self, the same criteria of development can be applied to them as was earlier ap-plied to personhood. Things contribute to the cultivation of the self when they help create order in consciousness at the levels of the person, community, and patterns of natural order. An object that, when attended to, inhibits the pursuit of goals at any of these levels is a hindrance to the development of the self. Thus the ma-

terial environment that surrounds us is rarely neutral; it either helps the forces of chaos that make life random and disorganized or it helps to give purpose and direction to one's life.

The objects of the household

Of all the things that people use and surround themselves with, our study will concentrate primarily on those objects they keep in their homes. This limitation will exclude many things that are im-portant in defining the self, such as tools of the trade, cars, and those things that people encounter and use in the public spaces of life. But one can argue that the home contains the most special objects: those that were selected by the person to attend to regu-larly or to have close at hand, that create permanence in the inti-mate life of a person, and therefore that are most involved in making up his or her identity. The objects of the household rep-resent, at least potentially, the endogenous being of the owner. Although one has little control over the things encountered out-side the home, household objects are chosen and could be freely discarded if they produced too much conflict within the self. Thus household objects constitute an ecology of signs that reflects as well as *shapes* the pattern of the owner's self. It might be noted in this context that the term "ecology" literally means the study of households.

Despite the importance of this ecology of signs, few social scien-tists have given it the attention it deserves. Those who have, were interested in them only as signs of the owner's relationship to others, as symbols of status within a social hierarchy. W. Lloyd Warner, for instance, in his classic study of Newburyport, Massa-chusetts, in discussing the eating utensils used by the upper-upper class inhabitants of "Yankee City", says:

They give objective expression to the inner feeling of the persons involved about themselves, help to reinforce the person's opinion about himself, and increase his sense of security. (Warner, 1953, p.120)

In general, sociologists imply that status symbols serve to main-tain social order by supporting hierarchial differentiation among people. However, when such differentiation is not ratified by en-dogenous community acceptance but is based on a rigid distinc-tion enforced by the social structure, status symbols might be seen

as contributing to entropy at the second level of analysis — community order — which we have discussed. Even art objects can perform this divisive function:

The presence and control of objects of art provide a permanent mirror of superiority into which the upper classes can look and always see what they believe to be their own excellence, thus reinforcing one of their principal claims to superiority, their belief in their own good taste. (Warner, 1963, p.235)

Art, expropriated by one group to bolster its control over the psychic activity of others, becomes a tool of oppression. Other sociologists have observed how people belonging to the same social class share the same pattern of objects in their living rooms (Laumann and House, 1970). Attitudes, behavior, and household objects form an ordered sign system that structures, and is structured by, the selves of those who derive their identities from the same social class. Similar studies, with similar results, had been conducted earlier by Chapin (1935), Davis (1955), and Junker (1954). These sociological studies all focus on those dimensions of the household ecology that are determined by social class status — past, present, or anticipated in the future. One's position in the social order is an integral part of who one is, thus the signs of status are important ingredients of the self. But they certainly do not exhaust all the meanings of objects for people.

Psychologists have been even less interested in studying household objects. With the exception of Furby's work, which emphasizes the ownership of objects as an expression of a person's ability to control the environment (Furby, 1978), and Mehrabian's study of the physiological arousal resulting from household objects and their use (Mehrabian, 1976), references to the phenomenon are incidental and fragmentary. Control and arousal are again important dimensions of the self. The first refers to the positive feedback a person receives from the environment; the second, to the activation level of attention and therefore to the extent of readiness to invest psychic energy. It is important to know how objects affect these dimensions, but to get a full understanding of person — object relations one cannot be limited to seeing people as mere neural robots. Other aspects of the transaction must be integrated into the picture.

In the following chapters we shall consider some of these other aspects. First, we shall explore further the theoretical links between people and things, drawing on a variety of social science

perspectives. Part II will present the empirical findings of our investigation; describing the household objects considered to be special by a sample of typical American families and the reasons they give for interacting with these objects. The relationship between these empirical patterns and the goals people in our culture cultivate to give meaning to their lives will be explored in Part III. Finally, in the concluding chapter, the viability of the goals themselves will be reviewed in terms of the survival of humanity.

CHAPTER 2

What things are for

To say that meaning is a process of communication involving signs raises the question: What is meant by "signs"? Apparently, material artifacts are the most concrete things that surround us in our homes: We can point to them, look at them, touch them, sit on some of them, sometimes we even bump into them and thus are forceably reminded of their materiality. One might wonder if signs or symbols refer only to things such as crucifixes, trophies, diplomas, or wedding rings, whose main function – if they, indeed, have any – is to *represent* something like religion, achievements, or relationships. A wedding ring on someone's hand, for example, is a sign of attachment, just as a trophy tells of its winner's prowess and the family's pride in displaying it. But what about other types of objects that seem to have a more clear-cut function, such as television sets or furniture? Do these things also qualify as "signs"? From our perspective they can provide just as many meanings as a crucifix or trophy. Television sets certainly have a utilitarian significance, although a person could live without them. However, the utility of a television set derives from its status as a means for entertainment and information and from the fact that in our culture about one-quarter of a person's waking day is spent watching television. Thus television sets both represent one of the most important beliefs in American culture as to how people should spend their time (and money) and are signs of the way Americans invest a significant portion of their daily attention.

Even the use of things for utilitarian purposes operates within the symbolic province of culture. The most "utilitarian" objects in the home, such as running water, toilets, electric appliances, and

the like, were all introduced into general use no more than 150 years ago by advances in Western technology – all considered luxuries when introduced (Boorstin, 1973, pp. 346f). Thus it is extremely difficult to disentangle the use-related function from the symbolic meanings in even the most practical objects. Even purely functional things serve to socialize a person to a certain habit or way of life and are representative signs of that way of life.

When a thing "means something" to someone, it is interpreted in the context of past experiences, either consciously, or unconsciously in the form of habit. The emotion that things evoke is also an interpretation or inference, a sign or symbol of one's attitude. The development of symbols – or signs whose relation to an object is based on convention rather than on a qualitative or physical resemblance – in a cultural tradition meant that people could compare their actions with those of their ancestors to anticipate new experiences. Symbols became able to convey feelings and attitudes that had an objective existence outside immediate situations, and this development of self-consciousness is generally considered the greatest accomplishment of humankind. By freeing sensations from their immediate environment, one can deal with them in the abstract and thus, to some extent, can achieve greater self-control and greater control over the environment. Through symbols, experiences such as fear, love, or awe could now be communicated in words, pictures, or ritual acts.

As humanity began to develop this procedure of making certain things represent others, the symbols themselves were creating human beings who, in turn, could reflect on their surroundings and accordingly could change their own conduct to a degree not even remotely approximated in other species. The spatiotemporal environment itself became culturalized and revealed to people their own past – the accumulated experience and wisdom of their ancestors – as well as their present goals, thus enlarging their possibilities. This had the two-sided effect of increasing the range of both solutions and problems. When goals become shortsighted, people can actually create more problems than they can solve. The fact that objects can affect people in this way is a mixed blessing. Relations with material things have powerful consequences for human experience, and even for the survival of the species. Many of these consequences are of dubious value and some might be seen as

dangerous. However, before discussing the effects of material symbolization, we should look more closely at how this complex process works in the praxis of everyday life.

Symbols that mediate conflicts within the self

Depth psychology in this century has described in detail one of the important dimensions of symbolization. In Freud's understanding of the inner dynamics of the psyche, symbols play a central role. It had long been a truism that negative experiences are the result of a conflict between inner desire and outer actuality. Freud added a crucial insight to this simple view of the causes of unhappiness: The really traumatic conflict is not that between the self and its environment, but the one that arises *within* the self. This conflict is the outcome of incompatible desires ingrained in the makeup of the human body and the *internalized* restraints that are part and parcel of social living. Because these controls are accepted by the person, the conflict becomes an inner one, between the formless libidinal drives and the stern censor of the superego.

The tension between desire and restraints cannot be admitted into the beleaguered consciousness, lest the realization of one's basic impulses destroys the precarious balance of the psyche that is forced to adapt to a social environment. It is at this point that symbols become important in the Freudian schema. The repressed contents of the unconscious, unable to manifest themselves in their real shapes, surface into consciousness under various disguises. Sexual or aggressive desires, which in their original form would threaten sanity, emerge into awareness camouflaged as apparently neutral acts or objects. The most potent psychic energy is the most destructive, which must be tamed to become effective. The very fact that irrepressible drives are allowed to express themselves consciously, even though disguised beyond recognition, is supposed to relieve the inner tension between id and superego, thereby helping the integration of personality. This transformation of the inadmissible into the harmless is the essential symbolic process in Freudian thinking.

How certain objects get to be carriers of repressed desire is essentially a simple one. An object whose shape, function, or name

is similar to a bodily part or process that is the seat of a given desire will be unobtrusively substituted for the real thing in a person's preconscious. "Symbolic relation seems to be a relic or mark of former identity" (Freud, 1900, p. 387). After this sleight of hand is accomplished, one's dreams and fantasies can freely deal with the symbol without incurring the wrath of the internalized censor. This process of transformation has been made into a commonplace by Freud's early writings. For example, "All elongated objects, such as sticks, tree-trunks, and umbrellas (the opening of these last being comparable to an erection) may stand for the male organ" (Freud, 1900, p. 389).

Thus objects, through their ability to embody problematic needs, feelings, or ideas, have a rather important place in the Freudian view of human experience. Yet their role is certainly not essential. If there were no things to serve as symbols, the mind could presumably latch onto abstract shapes or invent some other way to disguise the repressed forces in its subconscious. There is nothing in the object itself that helps to restore order in the psyche, it is not *an* object in its concreteness that produces a symbolic transformation but *the* object as an abstraction. The real meaning of a possession, like that of a dream, does not lie in its *manifest* content but, rather, in its underlying *latent* content. For Freud things did not contribute one way or another to the wholeness of the person; only the *concept* of certain objects, when seized by the mind, would act as mediator between the warring factions of the psyche. Therefore in the Freudian scheme, things per se do not serve any transcending purpose; they do not help a person to change or to grow. What they do is to lend their semblance to the preconscious, which projects meanings into them to neutralize part of the repressed energy of the psyche.

Although Freud's insights have been developed and revised during the past half century, psychoanalysts have continued to view transactions with objects in essentially the same light. Winnicott, for instance, who was interested in children's attachment to blankets, stuffed toys, and the like, called these "transitional objects" and declared: "The transitional object stands for the breast, or the object of first relationship" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 236). Although such explanations are accurate as far as they go, they become reductionistic if they are not pursued further. An object that represents a past relationship does, in addition, have a

present meaning and a projected future meaning as well. It makes a difference whether the breast is represented by a thumb, a blanket, or a rabbit. To the extent that analysts were interested in the genesis of object relations rather than in their consequences, they have ignored a crucial dimension of psychic activity.

Carl Jung, the other great depth psychologist of this century, assigned a somewhat more active role to the symbols that appear in art, religion, dreams, or fantasies. Jung distinguished between a sign, which is a relatively known thing, and a symbol, whose meaning is relatively unknown (cf., Turner, 1967, p. 26).

The symbol is not a sign that veils something everybody knows. Such is not its significance: on the contrary, it represents an attempt to elucidate, by means of analogy, something that still belongs entirely to the domain of the unknown or something that is yet to be. Imagination reveals to us, in the form of a more or less striking analogy, what is in the process of becoming. If we reduce this by analysis to something else universally known, we destroy the authentic value of the symbol; but to attribute hermeneutic significance to it conforms to its value and its meaning. (Jung, 1953, p. 299)

A symbol is charged with psychic energy and transformative power precisely because much of its meaning is unknown or unconscious. Jung believed that unconscious drives included not only needs for physiological satisfaction but also powerful desires for personal development and spiritual union with the social and physical environment. These strivings are expressed by the archetypal symbols of the collective unconscious, like the rising sun or the swelling sea.

An object like the *ting,* the four-legged bowl used as a cult utensil in connection with the *I Ching* divination rituals, becomes a projection for the universal aspiration toward achieving wholeness in existence (Jung, 1958, p. 234). The four legs of the bowl, like the four arms of the cross, or the axes of the *mandala,* stand for the *coincidentia oppositorum,* the resolution of the dualism of experience, the synthesis of dialectical forces. In Jung's view, even the figure of Christ is a symbol of the self (Jung, 1958, p. 36): part God, part man; part male, part female – a template representing the ultimate goal of the process of individuation. Despite the profound insights in Jung's analysis, there is a certain sense of claustrophobia derived from looking at symbolic processes from his – or for that matter, from Freud's – perspective. One gets the sense that the entire panoply of natural and cultural phenomena are nothing but projections of the inner travails of the psyche. They

The main difference between Jung's view of symbols and that of Freud is that the psychic transformations produced by symbols are relatively more open-ended in the former. The psychic development that Jung saw as a human possibility, and that was given life by symbols whose structural form anticipates and spurs along the unfolding of the psyche, must be rediscovered by each person in a different way, depending on his or her location in cultural space and time. Although the steps of individual differentiation and spiritual union are essentially the same throughout history – hence the universal power of basic symbols – they have to be rediscovered independently by each person in his or her own existential configuration. Implicit in Jungian thought is the possibility of transcendence, of discovering new psychic skills and achieving higher forms of relatedness with the cosmos. Although Jung's pessimism about our particular historical period was hardly less unrelieved than Freud's, in principle his interpretation of human psychology admits more optimism. This optimism is based on the transformative potential of symbols, which are seen from his perspective as templates for development rather than as simply adjustment.

However, Jung shared with Freud an essentially abstract, conceptual view of the role of things in the symbolic transformations of the psyche. Like Freud, Jung was not interested in the actual experience that people may have had in their lives with concrete objects. He also focused only on the visual or functional properties of objects, on the Platonic idea of things, rather than on their impact in the transaction people have with them in an existential context.

Psychologists in general have followed the lead of Freud and Jung by ignoring the place of things in the daily commerce of existence. To examine more closely this aspect of how objects affect people, we turn now in a different direction.

Signs that express qualities of the self

In attempting to describe what being a part of an alien culture is, anthropologists have often found themselves in a position to use objects as metaphors for the peculiar essence they wanted to portray. Thus Ruth Benedict (1946) chose *The Chrysanthemum and the*

two things, deeply enmeshed in Japanese culture, were potent symbols for the polar oppositions between which life in that nation is played out. Victor Turner (1967) named his book on the ritual life of the Ndembu of south central Africa, *The Forest of Symbols,* to convey a wide range of meanings including the fact that certain trees, such as the *mudyi,* act as dominant symbols in this culture. Even the indigenous term for symbol derives from the word that means "to blaze a trail" through the forest (Turner, 1967, p. 48).

In fact, anthropologists have accumulated incredibly detailed descriptions of the symbolic use of objects in a variety of cultures. Rather than summarize this wealth of information here, we shall select a few instances to illustrate the ways in which objects can serve to express valued personal traits.

In almost every culture, objects are chosen to represent the power of the bearer. More than any other trait, the potential energy of the person, his or her power to affect others, is the one that is symbolically expressed. For men this power tends to be synonymous with virile virtues such as strength, bravery, prowess, endurance; for women, power is expressed in the equally stereotyped forms of seductiveness, fertility, and nurturance. Perhaps the course of biological and social evolution originally favored the development of these traits and their segregation by gender. In many traditional societies, however, these sex stereotypes are maintained even though they no longer reflect adaptation to the physical environment. Here is an example of how a particular object, in this case the spear, acts as a central symbol of the self in a preliterate society:

A man's fighting spear (*mut*) is constantly in his hand, forming almost part of him . . . and he is never tired of sharpening or polishing it, for a Nuer is very proud of his spear . . . In a sense it is animate, for it is an extension and external symbol . . . which stands for the strength, vitality and virtue of the person. It is a projection of the self. (Evans-Pritchard, 1956, p. 233)

This description implies that for the Nuer the spear is more than a conceptual sign standing for some set of inner needs or desires. The spear is not an abstraction, but a heavy, sharp object one can balance, twirl, or throw; a thing with which one can dig, jab, or slash; a long smooth wooden shaft with a wicked point. In other words, it is a real object that a man carries and feels the weight of – an object, above all, he can display to others. In its

objective character, the spear exaggerates and demonstrates to everyone those personal traits that the owner – and the rest of the culture – aspire to: strength, speed, potency, permanence; the ability to command respect, to control one's surroundings.

Presumably, this symbolic meaning of the spear, or of any other expressive object, is not simply to reflect an already existing actuality. It also helps bring that actuality about. The Nuer lugging his spear across the sunbaked plateaus of the Sudan might not be particularly endowed with strength. His weapon, however, conveys to the man the power that he lacks. By hoisting the spear, he *feels* the kinetic energy in its shaft. But it is possible to claim an even greater creative role to such objects. One might see, not only in the lives of individuals but also in the history of cultures, that symbolic objects foreshadow ways of being, or feeling, which had not previously been available to any person. As Geertz (1966) has argued in a different context, symbols can be both "models of" and "models for" reality. In the first sense, they reflect what *is;* in the second, they foreshadow what *could be;* and thus they become a vital force in determining cultural evolution.

Preliterate societies are, of course, not the only ones in which objects reflect, or create, a sense of power in those who use them. In our own culture the enormous symbolic significance of vehicles is so obvious that it is too easily taken for granted. From a child's first tricycle to a ten-speed bike, later to a motorcycle or a car, the physical energy of the owner is enhanced by more and more powerful machinery. He or she, like the car, can be auto-mobile, literally self-moving. The constant loving care so many people devote to their cars parallels the Nuer's fascination with his spear. One can see in this almost narcissistic concern a libidinal, phallic fixation; but it seems to be more – an expression of Eros in the broadest sense, a need to demonstrate that one is alive, that one matters, that one makes a difference in the world.

Because of their physical structure, objects lend themselves to the expression of raw physical power. From the spear to the airplane, they can act as levers that increase a person's strength or speed – his or her kinetic energy. But there are also more subtle aspects of the self that can be expressed through the medium of objects. Magic powers, based on a human's presumed close relationship with supernatural forces, are stored in "power objects," which the American Indians carried in their medicine bags. The

clergy of the Catholic church, for instance, still have access to such sacramental objects. Some things stand for wisdom, justice, frugality, or other virtues respected in the community. In all cases where actual physical objects become associated with a particular quality of the self, it is difficult to know how far the thing simply reflects an already existing trait and to what extent it anticipates, or even generates, a previous nonexistent quality. A woman suddenly feeling beautiful or sophisticated because she is wearing a new dress or necklace or a young man feeling free because he is driving his own car are common experiences. Without doubt, things actively change the content of what we think is our self and thus perform a creative as well as a reflexive function.

All people can, and presumably most people do, use symbolic objects to express dimly perceived possibilities of their selves to serve as models for possible goals. This process can be seen most clearly, as one would expect, among visual artists. Many painters and sculptors are constantly involved in seeking objective counterparts for ideas or feelings they experience. Creative artists are those who can find a convincing visual solution for a problem that was never previously formulated. In the solution, and even in the formulation of creative problems, objects stimulate and help develop the artist's thought (Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, 1976, pp. 244ff).

How this works in actuality is well illustrated by the account of a young artist who explains why he is painting:

I like to look at these things, that's why I paint. It's like enjoying dreams, which I do. I like to think, daydream about things I see. The theme of my paintings covers the past, the present, and the future; it has conscious and subconscious elements. *I paint only objects with personal significance, those that have meaning for me. With them I create a little world of my own.*
In my paintings, I usually include New York, cats, my uncle; a car, a railroad, or some other sort of transportation, for instance roller skates; address, numbers; a dragon coming out of the kitchen. Once I put a boot in a ship to symbolize a trip to Italy; mother, girlfriend, myself; organic shapes – trees, plants . . . these things have many different meanings to me and I enjoy them all. I would like to fly out of the window like the plane I paint, or be with the person I like and whom I paint. (Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, 1976, p. 147; italics added)

Not every artist describes his relationship with the visual symbols he manipulates in his paintings with such exuberant abandon. But every artist uses objects "to create a little world of my own," a world in which he or she can play out vicariously dynamic

situations from which he or she can learn, and can show others, how the world operates.

Objects as signs of status

The most extensive studies of objects as expressions of the self have been done in connection with the status-giving role of things. This is a special case of the use of objects as expressions of the self. Objects signifying status appear in almost all cultures, although what objects will be chosen as status symbols, how they will be used to signify status, and even what the meaning and context of status itself will be, are as diverse and variegated as the peoples who make up humankind. Thus although status symbols are an extremely important aspect of the whole person–object interaction process, it is, nevertheless, unfortunate that this one dimension has so overshadowed the rest that it is almost impossible to think of people's possessions except as symbols of their social standing. Just as depth psychologists immediately interpret a person's relationship to an object in terms of sexual symbolism, sociologists tend to look at the same relationship in terms of status symbolism. The value of these perspectives should not disguise the fact that human interaction with things is much more complex and flexible.

Status is also a form of power, but of a different kind from the raw kinetic energy contained in spears or cars. It consists of the respect, consideration, and envy of others. A person with status sets the standards and norms by which others will act, and in this way embodies the goals of a culture. Similarly, a thing with status also acts as a template embodying these goals because it will cause people who believe in its status to act accordingly toward it and its owner who possesses the status. A flashy or expensive car, for example, conveys to those who believe in its status that its owner is a person possessing distinctive or superior qualities, someone "above" the crowd. Thus one might say that status is control over psychic energy because those who have it can count on the attention and to a certain extent the compliance of those who have less. People "look up to" those who have higher status; an expression that well describes the focusing of attention – and hence of psychic energy – along status lines. The origins of status hierarchies are already present in primate dominance systems where, as

Chance (1967) has noted, the pattern of glances exchanged by the animals seems to reflect accurately their rank: Submissive animals "look to" the more dominant ones, but the reverse is rarely true (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978b).

At first status was probably based simply on the power of kinetic energy and indistinguishable from it. The hunter who could throw the spear farthest was the one everyone looked up to. But as human beings discovered more varied and subtle forms of self-control, the reasons for obtaining status also multiplied. Finally, we reached the point where status – or the ability to control meaning in one's community – has become, to a certain extent, independent of other sources of control and has taken on a life of its own. Wealth, political power, talent or physical prowess are still the stuff from which status is made, but one can maintain or even gain status by manipulating its symbols for one's own purposes. This is where the importance of things as status symbols lies.

There are many ways in which a given object may become a symbol of status. To qualify as a status symbol, the object might, for instance, be *rare*. Rarity implies that a thing is difficult to obtain, and therefore it takes a large investment of psychic activity to make or to find. Such an object will in turn be "looked up to" – provided the audience is aware of its rarity – and its owner will indirectly gain control over others' psychic energy. An object that is *expensive* functions essentially the same way. In fact, rarity and expense are by and large synonymous, because both terms refer to the amount of attention required to make a thing. The *age* of an object also enhances its status. The products of humans' labor do not survive very long; the order imposed by concentrated psychic activity through the craftsman's skills turns with time into disordered fragments. The second law of thermodynamics acts on things, as on everything else. Entropy gnaws at the shapes we create. There is not enough surplus psychic energy to store and maintain the things we make. By and large, only the most outstanding objects survive. But even a trivial object, if preserved accidentally, becomes rare with age. Thus an antique will have status by the criterion of rarity and eventually that of expense. Finally, an object can gain status simply by *attracting the attention of people who have status*. People of high status control others' attention, thus their own goals can exert more influence than that of average people. An object that is "in" among the elites will embody their

status and thus attract the attention of those with less power. True, an object that is singled out by an elite usually already has one or more of the characteristics previously mentioned – rarity, cost, and age – but sometimes even simple objects, such as common houseplants, can be invested with attributes of status like "fashion" or "style." Similarly, even "antistatus" symbols can signify something about the owner's relation to status conventions. When something is invested with attention by those whose attention is powerful, the thing will attract attention in its own right. Having famous persons sponsor products in commercial advertising is an obvious application of this general principle.

Status symbols, therefore, express a very general aspect of their owners – their power to control others. They are in some ways a summary of all the salient characteristics of the self, a global measure of the owner's standing in the community. It should be remembered, however, that status itself is a symbol, standing for generalized power but not necessarily translatable into it. People who look up to those who have high status might at any time refuse to be controlled and on occasion might actively revolt against the hierarchy, destroying its symbols.

In this context it is pertinent to mention the most abstract form of status symbols, namely, money. Although this topic deserves a separate treatment, the symbolic dimensions of money belong with the discussion of status symbols. Ordinarily, we conceive of money as "real" rather than as symbolic, yet it is perhaps one of the most purely symbolic objects devised. For example, a gallon of gasoline today will probably get you as far as it did ten years ago. But a dollar's worth of gasoline will not get you anywhere near as far as it did ten years ago – even if the same dollar bill were used. That is, the physical properties of gasoline are what contribute to its value, whereas the physical properties of a dollar bill are relatively unimportant. What gives money its value and status is the fact that people agree on its worth. Checks and credit cards are mere scraps of paper and plastic, yet a single one could potentially be worth a billion dollars, a billion invisible, but very real, dollars. Thus the phrase "money is no object" rings true in a different sense: It is the object that is no object, because it can transform itself into anything "it" wishes. Money is the most social of all things because its inherent quality is that of a conventional symbol, an agreement among people for exchange. Indeed, as Sim-

mel (1978) suggests, money has in many ways usurped the role of God as the representation of ultimate purpose and measure of value in the modern world.

With the rise of technology and the establishment of a free market system, money has become the agreed-upon counter of exchange into which nearly all manifestations of psychic activity could be transformed. Whereas in the past one could achieve status through strength, wisdom, honor, or holiness, and each of these required different forms of psychic energy investment irreducible to the other, in modern times wealth has become the measure of a person's standing on a uniform scale (Simmel, 1978; Polanyi, 1957). As Marx has noted, a man who has money need not be handsome, brave, loving, or wise: He can buy all these qualities and benefit from their effects (Marx, 1972, p. 83).

The symbolic power of money derives in large part from the fact that over the millennia it has become accepted as a symbol of human effort. Thus in practice money is *objectified psychic energy*. A laborer will work all week, focusing his attention on a task from which he does not benefit directly. In exchange for his labor he will get money with which he can purchase the products of other people's labor. The employer who paid his wages will exchange the product of the laborer's effort for more money, and so on. In other words, those who own money are in control of other people's objectified psychic energy; therefore wealth confers status.

Whereas other sources of status – respect, talent, tradition – rely on a direct hold over people's attention, wealth does so indirectly. Money must be exchanged to assert its power. Thus there are situations in which the status-giving power of money is not entirely effective. In certain social contexts its power is resisted by those who claim different sources of status – and with some success. For instance, in the small and traditional New England towns W. Lloyd Warner (1963) studied, the highest status belonged not to the wealthiest but to those who descended from families with long-established tradition in the community. In fact, the newcomers tried to purchase tradition with money. But present prestige is usually based on former wealth, and thus the lack of status of "new money" might be a case of culture lag. The competition of different values against money is a rearguard action doomed to failure as long as money remains the most effective symbol of human energy.

Objects as symbols of social integration

Thus far we have dealt only with the ways objects can be used to express, or to create, personal qualities. By either embodying hidden psychic processes or exhibiting the power or prestige of their owner, things can serve as means of individual *differentiation*; that is, the development of a person's traits that make him or her stand out from others. However, the cultivation of individuality serves a larger goal of integration because the intention to differentiate oneself from others still needs other people to give it meaning. If pursued as an ultimate goal, differentiation would eventually result in chaos, not uniqueness, and so even differentiation has a purpose within and for the integrated life of the community. How signs contribute to integration is another area where anthropologists have provided a wealth of examples that illustrate the process.

A classic study of the emergence of integrative symbols is Durkheim's interpretation of the ethnographic accounts of preliterate religions, especially those of the tribes of Central Australia, which because of their primitiveness, Durkheim claimed, present a clearer picture of the origins of religion. There are obvious problems with this premise, the first is that even the most "primitive peoples" possess extremely complex as well as very different forms of religious life. In seeing all religion, science, and art as reducible to Cartesian "elementary forms," Durkheim loses sight of the fact that these traditions are all historical achievements, discovered through experience and cultivation, and are not only mere appearances of an "underlying" a priori order; and thus he gets into similar problems as Freud and Jung did. Yet even with these difficulties, Durkheim presents some rich ideas to account for religious life. Durkheim's conception was that religion originates in order to account for a concrete, yet mysterious experience: the experience of sociability. He denied the then favorite explanation, according to which religion arises to explain inexplicable natural phenomena. It was the feeling of belonging to a group of people that produced the notion of a sacred supernatural force existing on a different plane from the forces of nature. The miracle of sociability, according to Durkheim, is first experienced in the continuity of generations: Although individuals die, the lineage continues. A divine force was postulated to account

for the permanence of life through its various transformations. Needless to say, this explanation fits most other religions, including the Judeo-Christian, whose basic text consists to a large extent of an enumeration of genealogies and of various explanations as to how and why the Supreme Being allowed the chosen people to survive, suffer, or prosper.

Another utterly mysterious aspect of sociability is what Durkheim called "collective effervescence." This is the experience people get when participating in common activities, especially of a ritualistic or exhilarating kind: the experience of belonging to a whole greater than the sum of its parts, of being carried away by a group "spirit." In our times this feeling may be relatively rare, confined perhaps to revolutions, football games, rock concerts, and religious revival meetings. But for traditional people dancing around their campfires, collective effervescence was a proof that a great spirit was abroad, a powerful force that manifested itself only through the group, and thus was somehow implicated in the existence and the survival of the clan.

Religion, Durkheim argued, started as a system of practices – or rites – whose purpose was to relate individuals to the great pervading force of whose existence they learned through the experience of sociability. This force was conceived as existing everywhere but as being especially powerful in certain places, animals, plants, or objects that were particularly associated with the clan or its divisions. These repositories of spiritual force were what some cultures called *totems* (Durkheim, 1965, pp. 121ff).

Some of the most sacred objects of the Australian Aborigines illustrate how the experience of belonging to a group might have given rise to the idea of an all-powerful spiritual force. "The *churinga*," Durkheim (1965, p. 141) writes, "is counted among the eminently sacred things; there are none which surpass it in religious dignity." This churinga is a bullroarer, a wooden instrument used to make a booming sound during tribal ceremonies. For the Arunta of Central Australia its sound is a manifestation of the sacred force that binds each individual to the group. It is certainly not accidental (although Durkheim did not argue this point) that the spiritual force was most concentrated in an object that was used in connection with the very rituals that produced the experience of sacredness originally. Thus the churinga ac-

tively produced group cohesion by making the sounds necessary for a collective experience. Such instances are rather common in ethnographies; among the pygmies of the Ituri forest, the spirit of the tribe is manifested in the *molimo* trumpets. Whenever things go badly in the forest, when someone gets sick or dies, or game is scarce, the trumpets are taken out of their hiding places and are blown all night, sometimes for weeks. It is not the trumpets that are sacred; it is their sound – the concrete manifestation of the spirit of the tribe – which is supposed to heal misfortune (Turnbull, 1961, p. 80).

Among the other sacred objects of the Arunta that symbolize the essential force of the clan is the *nurturya*, a bundle of sticks or spears that is assembled at the center of the village for ritual occasions (Durkheim, 1965, p. 145). This symbol has been used often even in modern times: Mussolini's emblem for fascism was the *fascio*, a bundle of sticks bound to an ax, which represented the idea that whereas each stick could be easily broken separately, the bundle is impossible to break – *l'unione fa la forza*, union makes strength. The same symbol is conspicuously displayed behind the speaker's rostrum in the U.S. House of Representatives, among other places.

In different historical periods a culture may resort to different signs to express the basic goal that unites it and gives it purpose and direction. In an account of his travels in France, Henry Adams (1905) reflects that the Gothic cathedrals dedicated to the Virgin Mary were the medieval equivalents of the large electric turbines of his times. Both edifices acted as giant storehouses of power, which reflected the goals of the age; the one spiritual, the other material. Adam's insight is not just an intriguing metaphor. The cathedral and the generator are, indeed, centers of accumulated energy: the psychic energy of those who built them and those who "used" them. Chartres was built with the direct input of labor from the community and has attracted the attention of people for centuries. The electric dynamos of the nineteenth century, like the atomic generators of the twentieth, are built through the psychic energy of people redirected through the mediation of taxes or financial investments; we use the power of the generator also indirectly through the energy that heats our homes and runs our appliances. The investment of attention in these two symbols

is equally real. Which formulation of the force that makes a society survive and flourish will be more successful remains to be seen.

All symbols of social integration, however, can also act as signs of the opposite process, namely, social differentiation and opposition. The cross is a concrete expression of the unity of all Christians, but it also underlines the separation between the latter and the followers of Islam or any other religion. The American flag commands the allegiance of U.S. citizens, but it excludes other nationals from the community. The maple leaf is a rallying emblem for Toronto hockey fans in competition with the followers of other teams. The classic study of the differentiating yet integrating effect of symbols is Victor Turner's account of Ndembu ritual. Among the Ndembu the "dominant symbol" for the female puberty initiation rite is the *mudyi,* or milk tree. Because of its white secretion, this tree has become associated with milk and the nurturing, life-giving role of women. By extension it also signifies the maternal lineage through which the Ndembu reckon their descent, and hence the unity and continuity of their society (Turner, 1967, pp. 21ff). A *mudyi* sapling, representing the "greenness" or immaturity of the novice herself, is placed in the center of the initiation site. By focusing their attention on the milk tree in their ceremonials, the Ndembu experience, in a compressed form, the qualities that are most important to them as individuals and to their society as a whole. The explicit purpose of the girl's puberty rite is to celebrate the principles of matrilineage and continuity, yet there are many instances during the ritual that highlight various levels of conflict: the jeers of the women toward the men in the early phase of the ritual, the initiate's own mother versus the adult women representing the matrilineage into which the girl will be initiated, and the girl as a unique individual and literally a "center of public attention" set apart as the hub of the dancing circle of women. But here the conflict and differentiating aspects ultimately contribute a creative tension that provides the psychic energy for a unifying resolution:

The "energy" required to reanimate the values and norms enshrined in dominant symbols and expressed in various kinds of verbal behavior is "borrowed," to speak metaphorically in lieu at the moment of a more rigorous language, from the miming of well-known and normally mentionable conflicts. The raw energies

of conflict are domesticated into the service of social order. (Turner, 1967, pp. 38–9)

Thus the Ndembu girl's puberty rite is a process of cultivation in which a tree and all it symbolizes serves to initiate a person into maturity.

One of the best ways to create bonds between people in most cultures is through gifts. Mauss's classic work on the subject explores how interpersonal relations can be strengthened through the exchange of objects:

But for the moment it is clear that in Maori custom this bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself . . . It follows clearly from what we have seen that in this system of ideas one gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence . . . The thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place. (Mauss, 1967 (1925), p. 10)

On a larger scale ritualized barter can also have the effect of reducing potential conflict between neighboring social groups. The best known example of such a process is the trade of armshells for spondylous necklaces in the Papuan *kula* ring, which are exchanged across hundreds of miles of open sea by islanders and which are eventually returned as presents to their original owners after all that trafficking is over. Thus no economic benefit results from the transaction, but the practice "is a strong protection of trade in an area rent by fear of the black art, suspicion, and hostility" (Fortune, 1932, p. 210).

Embedded in the context of exchange, objects become containers for the being of the donor, who freely gives up part of him or herself to another. If the gift is reciprocated, a definite tie is established between the partners in the exchange. Again, this is not a metaphorical tie, for what has been exchanged is real energy: A small part of my being has been given to another for a small part of his or hers. Presumably gifts are necessary when the relationship between people is problematic, and a person needs concrete, permanent signs of its existence. However, if they are detached from the actual sources of their meaning, gift objects can easily be manipulated to express a false relationship; a fact

well known to Vergil, who coined the adage: *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* (Beware of Greeks bearing gifts).

The three levels of representation

As we have seen, through time and space humans have used objects to express, or to explore, some of the purposes that animate their own individual lives, as well as those that bound them to or divided them from each other. These two dynamic centers, the personal and the social, are related to each other at many points; moreover, both are also related to a third center of purposes, which we shall call the *cosmic* level.

In traditional societies this cosmic level includes the great natural phenomena that control the rhythm of life: the sun, the moon, the stars; water and fire; wind and earth. Every society has to make a believable connection between its own purpose and those that make the world go round. This necessity is well expressed by Eric Fromm: "The basic passions of man are not rooted in his instinctive needs, but in the specific conditions of human existence, in *the need to find a new relatedness to man and nature* after having lost the primary relatedness of the pre-human stage" (Fromm, 1955, vii; italics added).

We can now see more clearly the scope and the meaning of representations. The objects that people use, despite their incredible diversity and sometimes contradictory usage, appear to be signs on a blueprint that represent the relation of man to himself, to his fellows, and to the universe. The relationship is usually represented in personified and dynamic terms: It is both the vitalizing and destructive energies of these three levels of organization that are personified most often in various cultures.

In addition, we have seen that these three levels can be described by two modalities: *differentiation* and *integration*. Symbols of the self, for instance, might stress the unique qualities of the owner, his or her skills and superiority over others. In this case the objects serve a process of differentiation, separating the owner from the social context, emphasizing his or her individuality. Or they might represent dimensions of similarity between the owner and others: shared descent, religion, ethnic origin, or life-

style. In this instance, the object symbolically expresses the integration of the owner with his or her social context.

This dialectic pervades the human predicament. On the one hand, persons must discover the limits of their being, by expressing the purposes and potentials inherent in the individual organism they inhabit. This involves the ability to control the environment, others, and oneself by cultivating purposive habits of life through which one in-habits the world (Dewey, 1934, p. 104). Only through self-control, through shaping events to one's intentions, can one learn who one is and what one is capable of. On the other hand, people know, consciously or unconsciously, how fragile and insignificant they ultimately are. Thus one also must find ways to establish links between one's self and the far more vast purposes in the environment: other persons, groups, or the great patterns of cosmos.

The psychiatrist H. F. Searles states this dialectic as follows:

The human being is engaged, throughout his life span, in an unceasing struggle to differentiate himself increasingly fully, not only from his human, but also from his nonhuman environment, while developing, in proportion as he succeeds in these differentiations, an increasingly meaningful relatedness with the latter environment as well as with his fellow human beings. (Searles, 1960, p. 30)

This is one of the oldest problems in philosophy – the relation between particulars and generals. In most of modern philosophy the tendency has been to see the relation as a dichotomy rather than as a dialectic (see Rochberg-Halton, 1979c). The dialectic underlies most psychologies, including the Freudian and the gestaltist (Werner, 1957). It can also be perceived in Baldwin's and Piaget's tension between assimilation and accommodation (Baldwin, 1906; Piaget, 1967). In an evolutionary perspective it has been seen as the dynamic that propels the evolution of organisms from atomic structures to molecules, to living organisms and, finally, to human societies (Mayr, 1963; de Chardin, 1965; Csikszentmihalyi, 1970).

How does this perhaps overly general distinction between differentiation and integration help us to understand what signs do? First, it suggests that the balance required for a vital, growing culture should include both processes. It alerts us to the dangers incurred by a person, or a culture, that fails to develop its individual potentialities; or conversely, that attempts to develop its individual control at the expense of relatedness with other purposes.

Later, we shall describe how an overemphasis on differentiating or integrating goals may be normal in an age developmental context. However, if, on the average, most people's objects reflect only dimensions of the personal self, if they are used exclusively to express each one's individuality, we might suspect the existence of a basic pathology – a tendency to fragmentation, a competitive attitude toward the *Umwelt* that forbodes a fall. The same argument applies to a community or whole culture. Conversely, for people whose relationship to objects reflects only ties to other individuals or systems, the opposite pathology is suggested – a lack of individual development, the failure to unfold one's potentials.

This two-sided dialectic is also reflected in the history and etymology of the word *symbol*. In ancient Greek, *sym-ballein* meant to "throw together," or to "join." The phrase came to designate a coin that two friends break in half, each with the hope of reuniting. When the two friends would meet again, the joining of the two half coins signified the relationship between the two persons, so the separation of the coin served the larger purpose of unity. Thus *symbol* originally meant that which brings people together. It is significant that the opposite of *sym-ballein* is *dia-ballein*, to "throw apart," or "separate," which is the root of our word for "diabolic," the essence of evil. Evil is what separates the self of a person into conflicting forces, what divides one person from others, what sets up people against the cosmos. It is *chaos*, the force of entropy that destroys the order on which life depends.

When one traces the course of the self in ethnographic and historical reports, it appears that most traditional peoples have emphasized the integrated or social self at the expense of personal uniqueness (Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1969), whereas modern Western culture has tended to stress the differentiated, uniquely individual self (Durkheim, 1897; Simmel, 1971; Arendt, 1959). Thus runaway fragmentation is more of an actual possibility in our own culture. The writings of many of the great social scientists near the turn of the century deal with the problem of chaos and entropy, which in their view dominates modern life. The theme linking the diverse theories of Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, Freud, and Jung is a common concern with the crisis of modern society that was brought about through the increase of industrial specialization, rationalism, and the developments of modern science. This

common concern with the possibilities of an imminent breakdown of social life led each of these men, through very different approaches, to study both the ways meaning is created and how it serves to bind society together.

Durkheim's concern with the fragmenting effects of modernity is reflected in his study of suicide, where he states that the problems underlying increasing European suicide rates resulted, "not from a regular evolution but from a morbid disturbance which, while able to uproot the institutions of the past, has put nothing in their place" (Durkheim, 1966, p. 369). This "morbid disturbance" was not due to an increase in physical suffering or economic poverty but to an increasing poverty of morality – in other words, a loss of the meaning of existence and standards by which to judge actions (Bellah, 1973; pp. xxix, pp. xxx).

Georg Simmel expressed similar concerns in his landmark article, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (Simmel, 1971), in which he relates the growth of modern urban forms with the development of individuality. In Simmel's view the overwhelming sensory overload and anonymity encountered in the modern metropolis causes the individual to develop "the blasé attitude" – an overemphasis of rationality – as a means of adaptation to city life. The blasé attitude, and the increased need for specialization as a result of the division of labor, causes an impoverishment of "subjective culture" – the cultivation of the relative uniqueness of the individual developed in interaction with the objective forms of culture. Thus the modern metropolis presents the two-sided fact that through the breakdown of traditional norms and affective life, an increased emphasis on individuality is made possible. On the other hand, "subjective culture" – which should follow its intrinsic laws leading to a wholeness of personality – is actually subjected to enormous pressures from the complex and differentiated urban environment, which tends to result in a pseudoindividuality of overexaggerated behaviors, mannerisms, styles, and so forth. While opening the possibilities for the cultivation of personality, modern urban culture actually encourages a false isolating individuality at the expense of subjective culture, resulting in differentiated, but not centered, selves.

Max Weber (1958) also saw the differentiating effects of rationalism and bureaucratization as presenting serious threats to free-

dom, creativity, and the very survival of Western civilization. In his well-known conclusion to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* he remarks:

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved. (Weber, 1958, p. 182)

Freud and Jung too, from their different psychological perspectives, saw the increasing threat to instinctual life that civilization brought.

The problem of modern society confronting Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, Freud, and Jung was the fragmenting and entropic effect of exaggerated differentiation, the opposite of the *sym-bolic*. What they all sensed was the process of what might be called the *dia-bolic*, the raising of the mode of differentiation to an ultimate goal. Durkheim, who said that God is a symbol of society, and who saw a morbid disturbance of society, would probably agree with the metaphor of the dia-bolic. His rejection of God and religion as obsolete, and his belief that art is superfluous, however, left him with only a secular, institutional approach to reinvesting meaning in modern society. For Carl Jung the metaphor of the diabolic in modern life was more than a metaphor, it was literal mythological truth. The archetypes of the collective unconscious are forms that shape the content of history, and the archetype dominating modern society and consciousness is the trickster, the Faustian devil figure, the bringer of chaos.

The modern age has proclaimed in many ways that God, the ultimate purpose, is dead. It has attempted to replace the religious representation of ultimate purpose with other ultimate purposes, like rationalistic science, but these do not seem to provide the integration or depth of expression or enduring vitality that many of the great world religions have.

We might, then, see what is usually called "religion" as the effort to represent, and to participate in, the relationship among the three centers of purpose that constitute the human experience. Every religion can be seen as an attempt to identify the ultimate goals within the person, the community, and the cosmos, and to

establish some connection, through ritual or other sign processes, among these three levels. From this perspective, religions cease to be anachronisms to be discarded along the way. In their historical forms, religions certainly contained considerable superstition and misunderstanding, a large ratio of noise to information. Once institutionalized, religions acquire an identity of their own to be defended against competing systems of thought; thus they often lose their ability to pursue integration and, in fact, become a hindrance in that pursuit. However, the essential purpose that religions have served has been indispensable and will be so in the future, regardless of what forms the religious impulse takes. It is impossible to imagine human life without a map or blueprint as to how the cosmos is organized, what makes it related, and how humans fit in it. Whether this map will be produced by science or politics or a revamped version of an old religion, the attempt to realize the integration will be essentially "religious," even if couched in scientific terminology, because it will have to represent through signs a set of relationships that probably will never be completely exhausted.

Objects, then, serve to express dynamic processes within people, among people, and between people and the total environment. These processes might lead to either a more and more specific differentiation or increasing integration. Transactions with things can be either representative – a "model of" some aspect of the environment – or actively stimulating and creative – "a model for" the environment. This last distinction needs some further elaboration.

One of the most important, but unfortunately most neglected, aspects of the meaning of things is precisely the ability of an object to convey meaning through its own inherent qualities. Yet most accounts of how things signify tend to ignore the active contribution of the thing itself to the meaning process. We have seen that in the work of Freud, Durkheim, and to a lesser extent, Jung, the concrete sign or thing plays an extremely passive role, and meaning tends to be projected from the knowing subject. At most, drawing on some resemblance to inner psychic processes, things act as catalysts to express or clarify a thought or feeling already present in the person's experience. Similarly, despite the numerous pages he devoted to describing how children play with or understand things, Piaget's theory is not truly *interactionist*, be-

cause the schemas are a priori forms of thought and the environ-
ment only serves to facilitate these structures (Bailin, 1971, p. 90).
Interaction is necessary to bring the developmental stages into op-
eration, but the interaction is purely "logical" for Piaget and any
object X may be substituted for object Y without making a signifi-
cant difference on the subject. The objects of interaction have no
intrinsic character of their own, which may have an effect on the
categories of thought. These various structuralist approaches
echo the Cartesian tradition by seeing that meaning occurs be-
cause of structures of the mind, not experience; because of *langue*
(the general language system), not *parole* (the actual speech act or
interaction); because of form, not content. In these views the self
is ultimately set apart from its environment; and the world of liv-
ing people, cherished possessions, and monuments of human civi-
lization become mere façades masking underlying ideas (Roch-
berg-Halton, 1980b).

In other accounts, such as those given by Evans-Pritchard
(1974), Geertz (1973), and Turner (1967), the object appears to
make a more active contribution to the process of cultivation.
Here the object, by its concrete properties, can stimulate new in-
sights, new understandings. It seems important, then, to allow for
the inherent character of the thing to have some influence in the
interpretive process of meaning, and in *Art as Experience* (1934),
John Dewey introduced a distinction between *perception* and *recog-
nition* as a way of dealing with the role of an object's own qualities
(Rochberg-Halton, 1979a). Recognition is when we experience a
thing and interpret it only as something we already know. The act
of recognition may be conscious or unconscious, may or may not
cause pleasure, or may or may not restore balance to a disturbed
psyche. In any case it does not produce a new organization of
feeling, attention, or intentions. Many people relate to objects
through recognition simply because of habituation, or because
they are unable to give their full attention to all the information
received from the environment (e.g., Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-
Ponty, 1962; Milgram, 1970). Perception, on the other hand, oc-
curs when we experience a thing and realize its own inherent
character. It might be a very ordinary object, such as the peasant
clogs or the battered straw-bottomed chair painted by Van Gogh,
and so eloquently analyzed by Heidegger, or a patch of sun-

light on the morning floor. The point is that the object imposes
certain qualities on the viewer that create new insights, which
is what makes any experience aesthetic in Dewey's perspective.

Again, this distinction runs deep in human psychology, under-
lying, for instance, the different cognitive approaches that Getzels
calls "presented problem solving," and "discovered problem solv-
ing." The first refers to a stance in which a person already knows
what the problem is and what needs to be done; the second refers
to a stance in which one first questions the nature of the problem
and only then begins to worry about solving it. Needless to say, it
is the second approach that leads to creative accomplishment
(Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, 1976).

The socializing effect of things

Thousands of examples attest to the indirect impact of objects on
the changing human existence. It has been claimed that the earli-
est Paleolithic artifacts helped to "select" *homo sapiens* by favoring
the survival and reproduction of those who had the right genetic
makeup or social organization to benefit from the use of tools. Let
us assume that a flint scraper or axe was somehow introduced to
an early human horde, whether accidentally or intentionally.
Further, assuming that the individuals in the group varied in
terms of, say, fine muscle coordination or intelligence, it stands to
reason that the tool would be used first and most effectively by
those persons who were best coordinated and most intelligent. Be-
cause tools make life easier for their users, the more coordinated
and/or intelligent persons will have a relatively greater chance to
survive and ensure the survival of their offspring. With time, the
genetic makeup of the species will slowly be changed in the direc-
tion of increasingly greater proportion of genes favoring the se-
lected traits. Thus it can be said that man-made objects are also
responsible for human intelligence (Washburn, 1959; Geertz,
1973).

It is interesting to note here that psychoanalytically oriented
psychologists interested in "object relations" (who by "ob-
jects" do not mean things, but representations of other people),
have recently come to a somewhat similar conclusion. They claim,

in effect, that it is not the instincts that determine the way we deal with "objects"; it is our relationship with the objects that brings about instinctual needs. In other words, children do not get attached to their parents because they have a need for attachment; it is the interaction with the parents that creates such a need (see, e.g., Fairbairn, 1954; Kohut, 1971).

Each new object changes the way people organize and experience their lives. For example, Lynn White makes a compelling argument to the effect that the invention of the stirrup by the eighth century made it possible for mounted knights to wear heavy armor – a fact that made those few who could afford to be so armed essentially impregnable. The armored knights became a different caste with a power several magnitudes greater than that of the peasant; at first this fact was simply a measure of a differential in brute force, but later it became the basis for the social and economic organization of feudal Europe. In White's words:

Few inventions have been so simple as the stirrup, but few have had so catalytic an influence on history. The requirements of the new mode of warfare which it made possible found expression in a new form of western European society dominated by an aristocracy of warriors endowed with land so that they might fight in a new and highly specialized way. Inevitably this nobility developed cultural forms and patterns of thought and emotion in harmony with its style of mounted shock combat and its social posture. (White, 1966, p. 38)

Other historians have claimed equally revolutionary effects due to the introduction of the heavy plow, the watermill (Bloch, 1967, pp. 136ff), the yoke harness (Lefebvre des Noettes, 1931), the rudder (Lefebvre des Noettes, 1932), the spinning wheel, and the power loom (Thompson, 1963), to name but a few. Innovations developed to cope with a specific problem have a way of changing the way people do things and of altering how they relate to each other; eventually they affect the way people experience their lives. Recently, the rate at which new things have arisen to shape and reshape our lives has, if anything, increased. Historians and sociologists have speculated widely on the effects of the radio, the car, various electric home appliances, contraceptive pills, microcircuits, and nuclear bombs, among others. Yet we know very little about how such things have affected our "patterns of thought and emotion," to use White's phrase.

A partial exception to this general neglect appears to be the interest that social scientists devote to the effects of television.

Certainly, studies on this subject must by now be in the thousands (a number are reported in Comstock et al., 1978). But if one looks at what these studies are focused on, one soon discovers that, with a few exceptions, researchers are not interested in how *the television* affects people but only in the effects of *programs*. Because programs are made by people, and consist of conscious acts of communication, it is assumed that the program is what affects the viewer. The thing itself, the set that transmits the communication, is supposed to be neutral. Despite MacLuhan's (1964) insight about the medium being the message, few investigators have looked directly at the effects of watching television per se, regardless of content. Those who have, find that people feel more relaxed viewing TV than doing anything else but, at the same time, they experience it as the most passive and mindless activity in their lives (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1977). Given the fact that, on the average, we spend four hours a day interacting with this thing, one wonders what the ultimate effect on our "patterns of thought and emotion" will be.

In every known society, certain objects are necessary to provide subsistence, those Marx called the "means of production." For a hunter this might be a spear, for a Mexican peasant woman the stone on which she grinds the corn. According to Marx, the free, use of such things is an essential condition of a truly human life for two reasons: (1) because without it one cannot control one's material survival and (2) because it is through productive labor that people create their own being. "Men . . . begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence . . . This mode of production [is] . . . a definite form of expressing their life . . . As individuals express their life, so they are" (Marx, 1972, p. 114).

If the means of production are owned by someone else, the worker is related to the product of his or her labor as to an *alien* object (Marx, 1972, p. 58). But because the product of labor is the objectified self – the outcome of psychic activity invested over time – the worker relates to his or her own self as an alien object. There is no need to detail here the various dimensions of alienation that Marx derives from wage labor: estrangement from nature, estrangement from one's life activity, estrangement from control over one's consciousness, and finally estrangement from one's fellow men (Marx, 1972, p. 62).

It is doubtful that anyone has yet improved on Marx's analysis of a person's relation to the means of production, and on its social and psychological consequences. Still, Marx in his later life, and certainly his followers, have given a rather narrow interpretation to productivity. It does not seem necessary to assume that only productive *labor* allows people to unfold their potentialities, to create their selves. In his famous passage from the *German Ideology*, the young Marx spelled out a prescription for nonalienated life: "to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic" (Marx, 1972, p. 124). Clearly, material productivity was not the goal; rather, it was the chance to freely actualize as many of one's skills as possible. But this utopian attitude toward human activity did not survive long; in the West it became absorbed into the Calvinist "Protestant ethic," which rigidly separated work from leisure; in Communist countries, faced by the harsh demands of industrial development and political survival, only the materially productive value of work was retained.

The exalted position of work, as the only means to define one's being, perhaps has been carried too far. People can also create strong and complex selves by investing their psychic energy in activities that are usually called "leisure" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Over seven centuries ago, Dante Alighieri expressed this idea clearly:

> For in every action, whether caused by necessity or free will, the main intention of the agent is to express his own image; thus it is that every doer, whenever he does, enjoys (*delectatur*) the doing; because everything that is desires to be, and in action the doer unfolds his being, enjoyment naturally follows, for a thing desired always brings delight ... Therefore nothing acts without making its self manifest. (Alighieri, 1921 (1317), Book I, Chap. 13, our translation)

In other words, action need not be productive in the material sense to disclose the self of the agent. What counts is that it allows the person to "express his own image," and in the process, to cultivate that image through immersion in the activity at hand. To the extent that work does this better than any other activity, it retains a privileged status – if not, it becomes a hindrance to personal development, and other forms of action can substitute for it. It is not the purely mechanical motions or material products of work or leisure that matter but, rather, the intentions or goals that can

These reflections are relevant to our topic in that the crucial issue for personal development might not be who owns the means of production but who owns the *means of action*. The former are a special subset of the latter, as was pointed out by Aristotle in the *Politics* (Aristotle 1973, pp. 601ff). By "means of action" we mean any object or sign that allows a person to "make his self manifest," as Dante would have it. We have seen, for instance, in Evans-Pritchard's (1974) account of the Nuer, what an important place the spear had in that culture as a means for expressing and enhancing valued traits of the owner. Yet the Nuer are not hunters, merely pastoralists. Moreover, only the fighting spear (*mut*) is special to the Nuer, not any of the other kinds (*bidh, giit*) he owns (Evans-Pritchard, 1974, p. 237). Perhaps the *mut* in the hunting past of the Nuer was the principal means of production, and its present symbolic value is only a reflection of its former use value. Or it could be said that in recent prehistory, warfare was the main productive activity in the culture, hence the centrality of the fighting spear. In either case we might simply have an instance of culture lag, in which the metaphoric superstructure of the object rests on a previous context of historical experience.

Although this kind of reductionistic argument might be correct historically, it does not explain reality existentially in the here and now. For at least several generations the Nuer have used spears to make their existence more meaningful, even though these objects were only marginally related to their productive activities. In our own consumer society hundreds of objects can be found in each household that are not necessarily productive in a purely material sense. The empirical part of this volume will explore what these are, and thus we reserve this discussion for later.

Our emphasis on means of action as against means of production is not intended to erase the peculiar importance of the latter. It is a misguided idealism indeed to ignore the fact that the necessities of physical survival must be met first. Even the least "materialist" views of the human condition agree on this (Maslow, 1963; Arendt, 1958), and thus we shall simply assume it. It follows that issues related to the ownership of such means have powerful economic, social, and, finally, psychological consequences. But given the overwhelming wealth of American society, the question of the necessities for physical survival is by and large irrelevant. The only claim we are making in this argument is that the actions and

central from a social-psychological perspective; that nonproductive actions and objects might serve just as important ends in the development of the self.

Things as role models

The triangular relationship whose apices are the self, the object, and the "other," has another set of profound implications. When we confront a thing, we usually do so in a context of cultural meanings that help us interpret the object. As existential philosophers are fond of saying, the network of cultural meanings is "always already there," mediating the transactions. At the same time, we believe that new signs are constantly being created by people throughout their lives, some embodying enduring meanings in new forms, others expressing new meanings in forms that can either be traditional or unprecedented.

From a sociological perspective this situation has been described in terms of a socially constructed "symbolic universe" that persons confront as an "objectified reality" (Schutz, 1960; Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In pragmatist philosophy it is reflected in the triadic nature of meaning: When we interpret a thing it acts as a sign (first element), standing for something (second element), through creating an interpreting thought or emotion (third element). The new sign, created through the interpretation may be equivalent to the first sign or may be more developed (Peirce, 1931 – 5, Vol. 2, para. 228). One grandmother we interviewed, for example, named her husband's and her own grandmother's wedding rings as special and had given them to her grandson and his fiancé for their wedding. These rings are signs (first element), standing for five generations of family continuity (second element) to this woman. The third element of these signs are her memories of the people and events and the thoughts or emotions evoked through reflection. In a given act of reflection the memories, thoughts, or emotions may not be new at all, but over the course of her life these rings have continued to "grow" and develop and to take on new meanings, and are still doing so, even while retaining the same physical form.

Therefore it becomes possible to see how interaction with objects results in socialization. To use a thing in a culturally appro-

priate way means to experience the culture directly – becoming part of the medium of signs that constitutes that culture. The little boy who plays with guns or toy soldiers is learning to act according to the rules that are part of the repertoire of roles of that society, as is his sister who plays with a doll house. In either case already existing goals reified in toy objects attract the child's attention and restructure it in conformity with the toy's intended use and ultimately with the societal norms. If socialization is successful, the child will grow by internalizing societal expectations, which reciprocally make a differentiated self possible. George Herbert Mead (1934) implied this in his discussion of socialization when he said that *inanimate objects* could serve as elements of the "generalized other," as role models (Rochberg-Halton and Csikszentmihalyi, 1978; Rochberg-Halton, 1980a):

It is possible for *inanimate objects*, no less than for other human organisms, to form parts of the generalized and organized – the completely socialized – other for any given human individual, in so far as he responds to such objects socially or in a social fashion (by means of the mechanism of thought, the internalized conversation of gestures). *Any thing – any object or set of objects, whether animate or inanimate, human or animal, or merely physical* – toward which he acts, or to which he responds, socially, is an element in what for him is the generalized other; by taking the attitudes of which toward himself he becomes conscious of himself as an object or individual and *thus develops a self* or personality. (Mead, 1934, pp. 154fn, italics added)

In Mead's view, through assuming the role of the group or community, an individual's conduct becomes influenced and guided by social rules and norms. Unfortunately, Mead's original meaning of the term "role model" has become narrowed, so that now social scientists tend to emphasize the behavioral patterns of an actual person as constituting a "role model," leaving out or omitting the fact that Mead includes "any object" or "set of objects" as having this power as well. The importance of a role model lies in its representativeness as a sign.

Mead's account again highlights the dialectic, which we have already encountered in the analysis of symbolization: the tension between differentiation and integration. Mead, like Marx, emphasizes the fact that when the agent interacts with the peculiar physical characteristics of an object, his or her unique personal traits will emerge. Both also agree on the socializing function of a thing; its ability to reveal social goals and expectations through its use. How such socialization through objects works is usually too

obvious to attract notice. Yet it is an active part of the experiential context of people and therefore important to understand.

The socializing effect of objects is relatively clear. Substituting pictures of Stalin and Lenin for crucifixes in Russian classrooms was an orderly part of indoctrination into a new set of ultimate goals (Bronfenbrenner, 1973; O'Dell, 1978). But what social messages are being transmitted by objects in use? What is the implication of the fact that only 7 percent of the West German population in 1965 preferred traditional overstuffed furniture, whereas 35 percent preferred modern Scandinavian design; 15 percent chose imitation antique coffeepots; and 43 percent, pots of an identical shape but of a more contemporary style (Noelle and Neumann, 1967, pp. 132, 141–2)? Or what is the implication of the fact that the new city houses of Hyderabad in India often contain refrigerators in the dining room for guests to admire (Duncan and Duncan, 1976, p. 208)? Certainly, interaction with such objects helps either to pass along an already articulated set of social values and attitudes or to structure a new set of orientations, in which case the objects help to accomplish a "status passage" (Strauss, 1969, p. 37).

Until the 1960s many Americans prided themselves on their home appliances, and using them provided an empathic participation with the dominant ideology based on technological control. This relationship has by no means disappeared; every year some new technological marvel, such as a food processor or a word processor, will stimulate the enthusiasms of the great consuming public. But since the late 1960s plants have also become an important focal center in urban homes. Now transactions with plants are accompained by very different meanings from those with electrical appliances. There is a quality of generativity and nurturance in the former, a real sense of both a contribution to life as well as the symbolization of cultivation itself. Like the Ndembu girls initiated under the *mudyi* tree, many respondents emphasized how their own goals were being cultivated by houseplants. There is no question that the increased attention to plants represents the cultivation of ecological values that have become part of the culture in recent years. The question still remains: Is this microcosmic transaction with the natural environment a cause or a consequence of cultural values? In all probability, the answer is "both."

The role of objects in the development of the self – a summary

The Paleolithic hunter who spent days chipping stone tools regained the psychic energy invested fashioning them, and more, through the saving in time and the added efficiency in procuring calories that the use of the tools provided. This saving is well expressed by the Greek poet, writing in the time of Augustus, who celebrates the advantages of the watermill: "Spare your hands, which have been long familiar with the millstone, you maidens who used to crush the grain. Henceforth you shall sleep long, oblivious of the crowing cocks who greet the dawn." (quoted in Bloch, 1967, p. 145).

However, because a certain response is adaptive at a given time and at a specific level, it does not follow that the same response will always contribute to survival no matter how often and how intensely it is produced. Humanity's development of technique – the ability to manipulate and make use of external objects – is one of the distinguishing features of human evolution but, unfortunately, it also seems to be an ability that has gotten out of hand. If things attract our attention excessively, there is not enough psychic energy left to cultivate the interaction with the rest of the world. The danger of focusing attention exclusively on a goal of physical consumption – or materialism – is that one does not attend enough to the cultivation of the self, to the relationship with others, or to the broader purposes that affect life. As the economist Linder (1970) has pointed out, the acquisition and maintenance of objects can easily fill up a person's life, until there is no time to do anything else, not even to use the things that are exhausting all of one's psychic energy. When such a pass is reached, the adaptive value of objects is reversed; instead of liberating psychic activity, the things bind it to useless tasks. The former tool turns its master into its slave.

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, which is why understanding the type of relationship that exists between people and things is so crucial.

In the preceding pages we have tried to explore some of the complex dimensions of this relationship. Considering the extent to which the fate of the human species has become intertwined with the things it has created, it is now essential to understand clearly how this relationship works and what its possible consequences might be.

CHAPTER 3

The most cherished objects in the home

Empirical events gain meaning only when they are interpreted through a conceptual framework. This is why in the preceding chapters we have outlined a theoretical perspective from which to view transactions between people and things. It is also true, however, that theories are directed and corrected – in fact, *cultivated* – by systematic exposure to facts. Therefore in the next four chapters we shall alternate development of the theory with presentation of the findings of an empirical study, highlighting first one, then the other aspect of the investigation. What follows, therefore, is neither a purely theoretical analysis nor the outline of a factual report; instead, it is a combination of both – an exploratory effort – in which insights are gleaned from data and new empirical analyses are presented to bolster emerging hypotheses. Hence, the conclusions will often remain heuristic rather than definitive. On the other hand, the flexibility of such a method will provide us with a greater variety of leads than could a more conventional one.

To find out what the empirical relationships between people and things in contemporary urban America are, in 1977 we interviewed members of 82 families living in the Chicago Metropolitan Area. Twenty of these families lived in Rogers Park, a relatively stable community at the northern limits of the city of Chicago; the remaining were selected from the adjacent suburb of Evanston, an old and diversified city in its own right, even though it is geographically indistinguishable from Chicago. Half the families belonged to the upper-middle class, half were lower-middle class as measured by Hollingshead's occupational ratings and by level of education. In each family we talked to at least one of the children,

both parents, and at least one grandparent, who often lived at a different address from the younger generations. There were 79 respondents in the youngest generation, 150 in the middle one, and 86 in the oldest generation, for a total of 315 respondents. Forty-four percent of the respondents were males. The Evanston sample was selected by street canvassing of census tracts chosen to give a stratified socioeconomic representation ranging from the poorest to the wealthiest neighborhoods in the community. The Rogers Park sample was drawn by random telephone sampling. Of the total group, 67 percent were Caucasian, 30 percent Afro-American, and 3 percent Oriental. Fifty percent of the lower SES (socioeconomic status) respondents were Caucasian, 50 percent Afro-American; the respective proportions for the upper SES groups were 87 and 13 percent. The first criterion in selecting the sample was to find families with three generations that could be interviewed, so that families with one generation living farther than one hour driving distance, or with children under 10 years of age, were excluded. (For a more detailed description of the sample and the sampling method see Appendix A.)

Each respondent was interviewed in his or her home. The interview began with a number of questions directed at the respondent's relationship to the neighborhood, community, and the city; these issues, however, will not be dealt with here. (For a sample of the full interview schedule see Appendix B.) We then asked for a description of the home itself – its atmosphere, its mood, its outstanding physical characteristics. Next, we inquired about the objects it contained: "What are the things in your home which are special to you?"

After the respondent identified the special objects, the interviewer probed to ascertain why the object was special, what it would mean to the respondent to be without it, where it was kept, how and when it was acquired, and so forth. All responses were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The word "special" was used by the interviewer throughout the interview to mean significant, meaningful, highly valued, useful, and so on. It is less precise than these other words and thus imposes on the respondent the task of defining what constitutes the meaning of an object.

A total of 1,694 things were mentioned by the people with whom we talked; on the average, this comes to slightly more than

five objects for each respondent. By examining the kinds of objects mentioned as being special, we were hoping to make a first step toward understanding how people relate to the world of artifacts around them. But clearly, it was impossible to tackle all 1,694 objects one by one. Thus we attempted to develop an empirical typology or "grammar" by sorting these things into as many distinct categories as would preserve the commonsense, or "emic," characteristic of the objects. It was found that 41 categories accounted for all the objects mentioned and that each thing could be classified in one of them with at least a 95 percent accuracy. Some of these categories were much more inclusive than others: *Furniture,* for example, included chairs, tables, chests, sofas, and dining-room sets; *TV,* on the other hand, included only television sets. (See Appendix C for a description of object categories.)

A similar process of classification was used to organize the reasons given why the objects were special. A total of 37 *meaning categories* were constructed, such as "Memento," "Souvenir," "Gift," or "Enjoyment," depending on whether the respondent stressed general memories or the memory of a place, the fact that the object was a gift or provided enjoyment as the reasons for cherishing the object. Because possessions actually exist in a context for the person and have multiple meanings, any one object may appear in more than one of these categories. The categories do not exhaust the range of meanings or capture the personal significance of objects for individual respondents, but they serve to uncover generally shared patterns of meaning. By using these criteria, we coded 7,875 different reasons that the objects were special; in other words, on the average, each object was coded as having four separate meanings. Interrater reliability in coding these meanings was less than for object categories but was still respectable: The agreement between two coders was approximately 85 percent for all generations. In most of the following analyses, instead of the 37 meaning categories, we shall use 11 *meaning classes* that resulted from combining similar categories. For instance, the categories "memento," "recollection," "heirloom," and "souvenir" were all combined in the class "Memories." (See Appendix C for a list of the meaning categories and classes.)

With these preliminaries out of the way, we can now turn to our first question: What sorts of objects are significant in the lives of contemporary Americans? Table 3.1 lists the ten categories of ob-

Table 3.1. *Percentage of total sample mentioning at least one special object in each category (N = 315)*

Objects	Percentage
1. Furniture	36
2. Visual art	26
3. Photographs	23
4. Books	22
5. Stereo	22
6. Musical instruments	22
7. TV	21
8. Sculpture	19
9. Plants	15
10. Plates	15

jects that were mentioned the most by people. Taken together, they add up to about half of all the objects; the remaining 31 categories account for the other half.

These categories, then, are symptomatic of what kinds of things people cherish in their homes. By looking more closely at these ten kinds of objects, we should be able to understand better the ties that bind people to the material world around them and the consequences of this relationship. Logically, we begin with the largest and most frequently mentioned category.

Furniture

Not surprisingly, chairs, sofas and tables are most often mentioned as being special objects in the home (beds were classified in a separate category). After all, furniture is important in the home, it is the sine qua non without which the house would be naked and one would be ashamed to have visitors. One could say that furniture is special because it makes life at home comfortable, but then one immediately thinks of a Japanese or Hindu home, which is practically devoid of furniture but equally comfortable to its inhabitants. Clearly, the notion that chairs and tables are more comfortable in an absolute sense is not true; they are so only within a pattern of cultural habits and expectations.

Furniture presupposes a settled life-style and surplus exchange power, which can be invested in these symbols of stability. Perhaps it is only after the great silent bourgeois revolution of the late Middle Ages that furniture became a central domestic symbol, a test for the family's settledness and affluence. From the early dynasties of Egypt through the Renaissance, few homes contained any furniture.

Throughout those forty centuries, the poor and the vast slave population had few possessions; but although the rich were incomparably better off, no Pharaoh's palace or luxurious Roman town or country house approached the standards of comfort and convenience, or commanded the variety of furnishing enjoyed by the tenants of a modern house in a municipal housing estate. (Gloag, 1966, p. 63)

Rich farmhouses in rural France prior to the Renaissance were almost devoid of furniture; people sat, and even slept, on sacks of grain or mounds of straw. Plates, silverware, clothing and any other kind of movable property was also exceedingly rare (Le Roy Ladurie, 1979). In the Middle Ages,

even wealthy citizens owned little besides a trestle table, with boards that could stand in a corner or against the wall except at meal times, a few benches and three-legged stools, for chairs were a rarity, and in the richest house there was seldom more than one, which was used exclusively by the master of the household. (Gloag, 1966, p. 75)

Initially, the possession of furniture was a clear sign of authority: In Ottoman Moslem culture until quite recently a couch (or *divan*) was still a symbol of the ruler and his court; it was on such a couch that the pasha or Raja conferred with his counselors, hence the name of *Divan* given to the supreme council and its "prime minister." In most cultures a throne has been the symbol of highest authority, and we still defer to the chairperson at a meeting.

Thus it seems that in the evolution of cultural life forms the personal ownership of furniture is a relatively recent step, one that confers authority and power to its owner. As with any other man-made object, furniture is the product of psychic activity. It takes the concentrated attention of many people to acquire the raw material and the intention to fashion it in a shape that conforms to the human body and its actions. Therefore to own furniture, again like owning other objects, means to possess other people's psychic activity. The preeminent place of furniture over other objects might be due to the fact that it can be displayed

more easily, that it is supposed to be useful, and that it constitutes relatively heavy investments of money, and hence of psychic energy.

Let us now turn to the respondents' comments on why they cherish the pieces of furniture they mentioned. In reading their answers, one obviously cannot immediately arrive at a facile generalization. The reasons people give are many and diverse and cannot be reduced to a simple set. But there are trends that can help us to sort out the multiplicity of meanings that such things evoke among people.

Some of these trends are characteristic of younger people as opposed to older ones, others are more prevalent among males than among females; however, they also cut across these larger categories to produce clusters of meaning that are characteristic of people in general. Here is what a teenage boy says about why he selected the kitchen table and chairs as being special to him:

'Cause I can sit on 'em, eat on 'em, play on 'em, do lots of things with the chairs and table. (What would it mean to you not to have these things?) It would mean that I wouldn't have as much comfort because those chairs are very comfortable. And with another table, I couldn't play as good 'cause I love the feel of that table.

This short answer illustrates several trends in the answers of the younger generation. The meaning of kitchen furniture for this youngster revolves about the active experiences he can have by interacting with the thing; the accent is on the utilitarian, enjoyable characteristics of the objects, and the outcome refers exclusively to the respondent's own personal self. The table does not provide a link with others or with some ideal to be achieved; it only serves the momentary purposes of the user.

Among women of the middle generation, the reasons for cherishing furniture are very different. The following is an example of why one middle-aged woman finds two upholstered chairs in the living room special:

They are the first two chairs me and my husband ever bought, and we sit in them and I just associate them with my home and having babies and sitting in the chairs with babies.

Another respondent comments on why a wicker arm chair in the living room is special to her:

It is very old. It was given to me as a present by one of the oldest black families in Evanston. They thought I would take care of it. My brother brought it home. It

Both these quotes illustrate quite a different set of meanings from the ones typically mentioned by younger respondents. Gone is the emphasis on comfort and enjoyment; one finds, instead, important memories, relationships, and past experiences. The egocentric attitude is replaced by a concern for other people: one's family or wider ethnic connections. There is an implicit sense of responsibility for maintaining a network of social ties. In general, these themes are quite typical of the women in the sample.

The same themes also appear in the answers of their husbands. In addition, the men often look at their furniture as the embodiment of a personal accomplishment, or an ideal they strive to achieve. Here is what one man says about a desk in the study:

I made it. It's very simple, actually, it's just a door. Actually, of the things that I've made, the reason I'm fond of them is that I've made every effort to achieve simplicity. I have a passion for building things as compulsively as possible and as economical of design as possible. My wife and I are junkers and garbage freaks, we like to make use of things other people don't use or throw away, that are free.

In contrast to the other answers reviewed thus far, this one introduces a direct note of accomplishment, of the object embodying an abstract ideal (simplicity, economy) as opposed to personal enjoyment or social relationships. Of course, as said earlier, these "themes" are not exclusive to teenagers or to grown men and women. Every category of respondents might mention any of the reasons for cherishing an object. Yet some types of reasons are more typical of some classes of respondents than of others, and this is why we use quotations from children stressing enjoyment and egocentricity, from adult women stressing social networks, and from men stressing accomplishment and abstract ideals. Later we shall examine in more detail the relationship among objects, reasons, and types of respondents. At this point let us turn to the significance of furniture in the lives of older respondents.

Generally, when grandparents mention furniture they say it is special to them for reasons similar to those that adult women, the mothers in our sample, also stress: The objects are signs of past events, of ties to family and to other people. In addition, there is also a strong concern about the object becoming a link with the younger generations; a sign representing the owner to be passed on into the future:

(This chest) was bought by my mother and father when they were married, about 70 years ago. And they didn't buy it new, so it's practically an antique. My-

mother painted it different colors, used it in the bedroom. When I got it my husband sanded it down to the natural wood. It's beautiful. I wouldn't part with it for anything. And I imagine the kids are going to want it, my daughter-in-law loves antiques.

It is interesting in this case that the respondent thought it noteworthy to mention the transformations brought to the chest: Her mother painted it, her husband sanded it. These actions change the appearance of the thing while preserving its identity; they appropriate the object at different stages of its relationships by stamping the identity of the owner on its appearance. Painting and sanding are almost rituals of passage in a relationship with the object spanning two generations. In addition to the concern for continuity of relationships in the past and in the future, the oldest generation, like the youngest, often stresses the theme of comfort and personal usefulness that a favorite piece of furniture provides.

There was a total of 638 meanings given for why furniture was considered special. Of these, the largest classes referred to Memories (15 percent), Stylistic reasons (12 percent), and Experiences (11 percent). Only 5 percent of the meanings were Utilitarian, that is, focused on the usefulness of the object. The importance of the relationship between the self and the object was stressed in 17 percent of the cases; 15 percent of the time, people stressed the relationship between the object and the respondent's immediate family. Other kin and nonfamily ties were mentioned, each only about 3 percent of the time.

In the range of its significance, Furniture is quite typical of the other object categories. They tend to be considered special for a limited range of reasons: because they embody memories and experiences; because they are signs of the self and of one's family. These themes will be developed later on; we shall now look more closely at the kind of objects that, next to furniture, were cherished by the greatest number of people.

Visual art

The large proportion of people mentioning visual art (26 percent), and the great number of such objects (136, or 8 percent of

the total) is due in part to our broad definition of what is qualified for inclusion in this category. An object did not have to be the original work of an artist, or a bona fide recognized work of art. Any two-dimensional representation other than a photograph was included, ranging from an original Picasso to the cheapest reproduction of the *Last Supper* – provided, of course, that the respondent mentioned the picture as being special. In addition, paintings made by children or other family members were also included in this category. Adopting such a democratic attitude toward what constitutes art was necessary, otherwise, there would be a variety of impossible decisions about where to draw the line on legitimate art.

Previously, we had seen that furniture is a recent candidate for the central position it now holds as a significant household object. The same is even truer for objects in the Visual Art category. The practice of using two-dimensional representations to decorate Western homes, thereby expressing meanings relevant to its inhabitants, is also an outcome of the middle-class mercantile revolution of the Renaissance (Hauser, 1951). Earlier, with some exceptions, only the rulers or the clergy owned pictures. Great areas of the world, particularly those under Islamic influence, have never adopted this practice and, indeed, sometimes have had religious sanctions against it.

This does not mean, of course, that in earlier times and in different cultures homes were bereft of visual beauty; in fact, quite the contrary. In practically every primitive society the decoration of the home reflects the highest skills and aesthetic sensitivity possessed by the culture. The carvings on the beams of a Polynesian hut, the paintings of a Plains Indian tepee, the rugs strewn on the floor of an Arab tent are the most exquisite fruits of those people's ability to express visual beauty. But these artifacts are an organic part of the dwelling; they are not separable from it. Even the great Roman frescoes and mosaics are still a structural part of the home. When visual decoration is present, it is always a part of an object with some religious or practical use: a weapon, a blanket, a dish, or a vase. The concept of a visual representation that is an end in itself, to be attended to for its aesthetic qualities alone, regardless of its use, is quite recent in history.

With the popularity of oil paintings, Europeans developed a portable, detachable object abstracted from any potential use. Art

emerged as an autonomous entity, freed of its context of useful-ness. Even Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci spent a great deal of their time painting shop signs, carving bridal dowry chests, and sculpting saltshakers. Only well after the Renaissance could an artist survive economically from painting alone because only then were paintings accepted as objects worth paying attention to in their own right (Hauser, 1951). Whether this differentiation of art from everyday use constitutes an emancipation of the human psyche from constricting religious norms or even survival necessi-ties – or an alienation from reality, as some claim – is a question that need not concern us here. We shall turn, instead, to a cursory inspection of the reasons respondents gave for cherishing the vis-ual art objects in their homes.

As expected, Visual Art objects are not very meaningful to the youngest generation. Less than 10 percent of the children men-tioned one or more pictures as special, as opposed to 37 and 22 percent of their parents and grandparents, respectively. This dif-ference is, of course, extremely significant statistically, and it might reflect the youngsters' inability, or disinterest, in finding meanings in forms of two-dimensional representation. Perhaps for children even a realistic picture is too abstract and static to attract much attention. The reason for the strong drop in prefer-ence for pictures among the older generation is not so easy to explain.

One of the surprisingly few social class differences relating to the significance of objects concerns this category. Although 37 percent of the upper-middle class respondents singled out at least one picture as being special, only 14 percent of the lower-middle class did so (chi square, $p < .0001$). The Visual Art objects were not only valued more frequently by upper-middle class respon-dents but, as measured by the living-room inventory conducted in each household at the conclusion of the interview, these persons also own significantly more Visual Art objects than those of the lower-middle class. Furthermore, the type of art object itself tends to be strongly influenced by social class, so that lower-middle class respondents tend to have a higher percentage of mass-produced art, whereas original art objects tend to be owned more frequently by the upper-middle class, regardless of whether or not these are mentioned as special. Although the upper-middle class can afford to own more pictures in general and certainly more original pic-

tures, the reason for these differences is not primarily economic: Much of the visual art was far from expensive, and lower-class respondents often mentioned more costly objects such as cameras or stereo sets. Perhaps lower-class culture is still relatively indif-ferent to the artificial meaning of pictorial representation. Pic-tures acquired their legitimacy in the church and the palace where they served to represent the beliefs of religion and the ancestry of the aristocracy; they filtered down to the homes of the bourgeoi-sie as symbols of affluence and sensitivity. But they seem to have acquired only a precarious foothold in lower-middle class homes, where, when art is mentioned, there seems to be a greater reliance on icons of social and religious value, for example, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, *The Last Supper.*

One would expect that the reasons given for the special attrac-tion of Visual Art objects would pertain to their beauty, original-ity, aesthetic value, or the artist's skills; in short, with the intrinsic qualities of the picture. Yet this was rarely the case. Only 16 per-cent of the time were any aesthetic characteristics of the picture mentioned, and an additional 10 percent of the reasons dealt with what we coded as Style, or any decorative, fashion, or design as-pect of an object. Again, a large percent of the answers considered past Memories (16 percent), Associations (5 percent), characteris-tics of the Self (10 percent), the Immediate Family (16 percent), and Nonkin relationship (12.5 percent) – in fact, pictures were the objects most often mentioned in the last class, suggesting that they are a main symbol of friendship.

Thus the bulk of significations carried by visual "works of art" is not connected to aesthetic values and experiences but refers to the immediate life history of their owners: reminding them of rela-tives and friends or of past events. People pay particular attention to pictures in their home because in doing so they relive memora-ble occasions and pleasing relationships. Of course, the interest-ing question is why pictures rather than appliances, let us say, or other things, serve this purpose so frequently. Perhaps something peculiar to a work of visual art enhances these experiences. The qualities invested by painters in their work, the order they bring to their paintings, presumably act as catalysts for attracting and directing the viewer's attention toward pleasant memories. Or, possibly, appropriate moods and sentiments are released because of the cultural conventions attributed to art.

Occasionally, some respondents mentioned aesthetic qualities of their pictures, although they are probably not the kind of reasons that a critic or connoisseur would find compelling:

It's a picture of a ship, under water. There's a certain light effect, and color effect. There are rays of light coming down on the sunken ship. It's the first time we ever bought any art and I really enjoyed that, looking at it.

Even this answer, which is relatively high in its concern for the intrinsic qualities of the object, seems to reveal a strong component of pleasure derived from the act of buying itself: The respondent does not seem sure whether he enjoys looking at the painting because of its artistic "effects" or because it indicates his first step toward becoming a collector. The following reasons for cherishing paintings are much more common.

Because my granddaughters made them. They are their handwork. Their Dad framed it for them . . . They know I appreciate it.

I fell in love with it (a yellow picture of a city skyline) when I first saw it and the colors are just right to fit in with the rest of the room. (Without it) I'd feel sad like the room was not coordinated.

My parents gave it (painting above the sofa) to us. They saw the empty space above the sofa and one day they brought us this picture to fill it. It's not my style, but they gave it to us so I keep it.

None of these reasons, which are quite typical, deal with the kind of experiences that art is supposed to provide. Yet, for better or for worse, paintings and prints – even if only pale reflections of the originals – seem to lend themselves readily to the construction of meaning in people's lives by becoming signs of cherished experiences and relationships.

Photographs

If furniture and paintings are historically quite recent vehicles for carrying meaning in the household, photos are by comparison practically newborn. After all, paintings were used in ritual contexts as far back as thirty-thousand years ago, whereas photographs are only little more than a century old. In some respects one could make a case for treating photos as an evolved form of picture making, thus combining them with the Visual Art category. Yet the process of taking pictures is different enough from that of making pictures to preserve the distinction. First, the work

is not primarily shaped by the concentrated attention of the artist; it results from the actions of a machine that was itself shaped by human intentions so that it could perform its task. With modern cameras it is hard *not* to take a decent picture. This does not necessarily imply that the photographic artist requires fewer skills or less concentration to produce a masterpiece; but the mediation of the machine alters the process of production and presumably that of appreciation as well.

The preference for photos even more than for visual art shows a dramatic age difference: 10 percent of the children mention at least one photo as being special, as compared to 22 percent of the parents and 37 percent of the grandparents ($p < .0002$). For the youngest generation Photographs are the sixteenth category in order of frequency, for grandparents they are the first. Are these differences due to progression through the life cycle per se or to secular changes unrelated to aging? It could be, for instance, that when the present grandparents were young, photos were much rarer and thus more cherished. If this were true, contemporary youngsters who take photography for granted will not feel that photos are special even when they have grown old. However, in looking at the meaning photos convey, one is led to conclude that their significance derives from the particular values that are paramount among the older respondents and which seem to be a result of their position along the life cycle.

Twenty-seven percent of all the reasons given for cherishing photos refer to Memories and 26 percent to the respondents' Immediate Family. No other object had such a high proportion of reasons in these two categories. Obviously, photographs are the prime vehicle for preserving the memory of one's close relations. For this reason they are often described as being "irreplaceable" by older respondents. When the picture represents a deceased relative, it often bears a freight of vivid emotions for people in the middle generation as well.

An adult woman, describing why a picture of her brother located in the front hall was special to her states:

It's the only formal picture that we have of him, and because it's one typical way that you really remember him, like that's him. And too because he's gone, passed away.

When asked what it would mean not to have the thing, she broke down and started to cry. When she calmed down, she said:

"I am sorry, I couldn't answer that." A grandfather, describing the meaning of a snapshot of himself and his two brothers relates:

It goes back some 50 years, and it's almost like at that time, well it flashes back things that make you remember, you know – it's sentimentality . . . (at this point he started to cry and could barely talk . . . Asked if there were other things with special meaning he said): No nothing. I'm just not materialistic, nothing except that picture. (Later in the interview he described what it would mean not to have the photo.) Well, I guess I just wouldn't think of the things that looking at that picture recalls – it's just like a constant reminder, and if it weren't there I wouldn't recall them. I mean that picture came up by accident, and it laid around and it didn't do anything and then my wife put it on the television set and it makes you wonder, that's all. I wouldn't feel bad . . . I enjoy the memories it brings, but if it suddenly got destroyed I wouldn't cry about it, I mean it's gone, it's served its purpose . . . like any other icon you use it long enough so that whether it's there or not there it would still be in your memory.

Although he emphasized that he is "not materialistic" and "wouldn't cry" if he lost the photo or any of his objects, the actual presence of the picture and the experience it recalls, upon reflection, were enough to bring this man to tears.

A grandmother, talking about family photos in her living room emphasizes the links to the distant roots of her family:

They are very special. I think as you get older, they become more important to you. These are pictures of my mother's side. They came through the Cumberland Gap, they were Irish and Welsh. One of the boys married a girl from another covered wagon, and those were my great-great-great grandparents. I think it was during Daniel Boone's time. These are very, very old pictures.

Others see photographs contributing to a sense of personal continuity:

You would miss all the unguarded moments in the children's growing up – playing in the yard, seeing the yard change and the surroundings change. Without them I think I would lose a lot of my past. It's related to my – our – past.

One woman expresses clearly the importance of photographs – in this case, home movies – for the future identity of her descendants:

I have a lot of movies of the family from many years back. To me they are bigger treasures than any plate or picture of anything, because these can never be replaced. We have movies of when the children were small, and of grandparents, and including my own husband, and from way back when. Now if they were to get lost, they could not be possibly replaced. A piece of crescent china can be replaced. But movies of family that are not living anymore, you cannot replace these and these are what are important, more than any other item . . . A movie of a person that's not here today, in 50 years, for their descendants, you can show how

that movie and say: "This was your grandfather and grandmother, your aunt or your uncle" – it means something. They can see what the people actually look like.

More than any other object in the home, photos serve the purpose of preserving the memory of personal ties. In their ability to arouse emotion there is no other type of object that can surpass them; they are perhaps equaled only by the stereos mentioned by the youngest generation. Because photos bear the actual image of a departed kin, they can acquire an almost mystical identification with the deceased person. In most cultures around the world the memory of ancestors is preserved in one form or other. In some, such as ancient Rome or Japan, a house was not a home without a shrine where each departed person was represented by a symbol of his or her former existence. In our time photos seem to fulfill this function by imparting a tenuous immortality to beloved persons and by providing an identity, a context of belongingness, to one's descendants.

Books

About one-fifth of the sample mentioned one or more books as being special: 15 percent of the children, 24 percent of the parents, and 26 percent of the grandparents. Twenty-seven percent of all the meanings referring to Embodiment of Ideals involved books, over twice the number of any other object in this category. Thus books remind people of values, goals, and achievements they seek to cultivate. Many give a variant of this reason for cherishing books: " 'Cause you can learn a lot and grow from them."

Often books are signs of a person's past success in school, or in some intellectual project, as was the case with this respondent explaining the significance of some language books:

I spent a summer . . . studying Sioux with my wife and some friends. It is an accomplishment, something that's not commonplace. How many people speak Japanese, French, Spanish, German, and Sioux?

Compared to photos and TV sets, ownership of books seems like a venerable institution. Yet it was not until the Reformation and the adoption of the printing press that books became accessible to any but the very wealthy or the very learned. And for some time the Bible was the only book that most families either wanted

or could afford. Even now, the "good book" is the one singled out by many respondents as special:

(The family Bible) was sent to us from England. It's very important, because I'm so fortunate to have such a wonderful background. My grandparents were born in England and my father was one of fourteen children. And they all educated themselves. And my Dad memorized the Bible by heart and he passed an examination to preach and he could preach in any church. The Bible has such a significance because of my heritage, my background, which I'm very proud of.

Such statements are not concerned with the ideals of Christianity that saints and theologians have found in the Bible. Instead, they show a complex mixture of a need to belong, a need for self-respect bordering on pride, all wrapped in a religious tradition. In this respect, the Bible serves as a talisman of continuity:

(What would it mean to you not to have this Bible?) I would feel as though I had lost a friend, because when I open it and read the names of all the children, and they were so young and they all lived to be so old, none of them died at a young age. And when I see their pictures, I see I have good roots.

Of all the Religious reasons for cherishing objects, the great majority (36 percent) referred to books. For many professional men, whose identity as productive adults is intimately related to written knowledge, books signify a central dimension of the self. Although professional books are usually kept in the office rather than in the home, lawyers, doctors, teachers and other people whose livelihood depends on book knowledge keep some of these volumes in their homes. Many voice this fear of what it would mean to be deprived of such props of a professional identity: "That would be terrible. I would be very upset. It has something to do with my sense of being O.K. I am wrapped up a lot in those things."

The development and popularity of audio and visual media of communication in this century, such as telephones, radios, television, and so forth, seem to have made the craft of reading (and writing) less central than it was in the nineteenth century. But the significance of books in people's lives might be far richer than this cursory survey reveals. 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 (Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie, 1979). Specific books, ranging from *Principia Mathematica* to the Horatio Alger stories, from the Platonic *Dialogs* to *Fahrenheit 451*, have been mentioned as giving

direction and purpose to one's life. In this general overview the theme that emerges is that books, more than any other kind of objects, are special to people because they serve to embody ideals and to express religious and professional values.

Stereos

One-fifth of the respondents also mentioned stereo sets or tape players as one of their special possessions. This category of objects shows one of the most skewed distributions by age, a trend that is almost the reverse mirror image of that found for photographs. Here 46 percent of the youngest generation mentions a stereo set versus 18 percent of their parents and only 6 percent of grandparents (chi square, $p < .0001$). It is, of the 41 object categories, the most frequently mentioned by children. This trend might reflect in part a cohort difference in exposure. Stereos became widely available only after persons of the grandparents' generation grew to maturity, and thus they might not have had time to become attached to these instruments. But the same argument could be made about television sets, yet older people find them more special than their children do. Therefore the younger person's attraction to stereos cannot be explained only in terms of familiarity with technology; it is probably bound up with the extraordinary importance music has in the lives of teenagers. Everyone knows the central place popular music has assumed in the youth culture over the last two decades, yet no thorough explanation of this phenomenon exists. What the children in our sample say begins to suggest the kind of relationships youths have with the stereo and the music emanating from it.

Basically, most of the reasons are summarized in the following quotes:

Because when I'm not real happy and gay, I turn it on and it makes me happy again . . . (What would it mean not to have it?) It would mean that all my good days would turn into bad days . . . 'cause it helps me recover good, recover from the bad days.

The same theme pervades the answer of an adult male, a policeman:

Well I like music and I spend a lot of time listening to it . . . so I would be kind of lost without it... It's just a way of soothing me, if I've had a rough night, made a

lot of arrests, have to write up a review, prepare to go to court, it's just soothing, it would irritate me a bit if I didn't have it.

Thus the music made so accessible by records and tapes seems to act as a modulator of emotions, a way of compensating for negative feelings. The importance of this function is particularly important in adolescence when daily swings of mood are significantly greater than in the middle years and much greater than in later life (Larson et al., 1980). But a stereo is not just like an "upper" or "downer" drug to be taken passively when the need arises, it also allows an active involvement of the person with the machine. Talking about his tape deck, a teenager explains:

I like to use that and this, and mess around and make weird sounds and everything, and play them back . . . Not having it wouldn't really hurt me a whole lot, but it'd take out a big hunk of the day.

On the whole, stereos are most often justified as special in terms of both the experience they provide (28 percent) and references to the self. In this, they resemble television sets most closely and are most dissimilar from photos and visual art. When a person mentioned Release as the reason for cherishing an object – the escape it provided, the venting of frustration – chances are that the object referred to was a stereo; 17 percent of the Release reasons concerned this category, followed by Musical Instruments (15 percent).

Musical instruments

The ability to master sound has always been one of the supreme achievements of any culture. In Chapter 2 we mentioned how the bullroarer represented the spirit of the tribe for the Australian Aborigine and gave a concrete expression to the sacred forces abroad in the universe, or how the tribal trumpets were used by pygmies to awaken their gods and restore peace in the forest. Drums, pipes, and strings were always associated with solemn rituals and momentous occasions.

In our sample, musical instruments were mentioned by one-fifth of the people, as often as books and stereos. As with stereos, their frequency was highest among the youngest generation (32 percent), half of that among the adults (17 percent), and one-

third among the elderly (10 percent), again suggesting the declining importance of music with age. The most frequent reasons for cherishing musical instruments were references to the Self (24 percent) and Experiences (22 percent). At the same time, Immediate Family (17 percent), Memories (10 percent), and Personal Values (9 percent) were also relatively frequent.

For many people a piano or guitar is the only means through which they can cultivate any kind of creative expression. Therefore musical instruments are much more actively related to the person's achievements and values than stereos could ever be. For many adults, a musical instrument appears to be a central symbol of a life-style once cherished or anticipated in the future.

A very successful lawyer, for instance, who lived in an imposing home with his handsome family, described most of his possessions with a detached indifference. Toward the end of the interview he was asked – as the others were – what his most private object was. At this question he paused, looking thoughtful, and then invited the interviewer into the basement family room where from an old chest he carefully unpacked a trombone. It turned out he had played it in college, and for the middle-aged lawyer it epitomized a life of freedom and spontaneity on which he looked back with nostalgia. Even now, when depressed or overwhelmed with responsibilities, he would retire to the basement and blow on the old trombone.

A similar reason is given by another man favoring a baritone ukulele:

Well, I enjoy music, I started playing it back in college. Playing it brings back fun recollections of college, I enjoy it, the whole family enjoys music, my wife and I have had a lot of fun with it. It's got those kinds of meanings and reflections.

Here we see a whole complex set of meanings condensed in this one object: It allows the man to use his skills in musical expressions, to have fun in the present while reliving past enjoyment, and at the same time, sharing the fun with those he loves. The ukulele in this case is a catalyst for a many-sided experience; it is not only an instrument for making sounds but is also a tool for a variety of pleasurable emotions. In playing it this man recaptures the past and binds his consciousness to that of others around him.

In still another case the man we interviewed had just given up a well-paid managerial job and was embarking on an uncertain life,

possibly centering around a career as a folk singer. This shift was concretely illustrated by the contents of the home: He had just sold his old furniture, had gotten rid of all the objects associated with his former self – only four old guitars were left hanging on the wall, eloquent signs of a radical change in life-style.

However, in general, musical instruments tend to evoke one's children or spouse as well as the self and its values. Parents often talk with pride of their son's or daughter's prowess when they mention a piano or violin. In a few cases music is an activity that the whole family pursues together, apparently achieving some of that collective sentiment of which Durkheim spoke, in the shared enjoyment resulting from the integrated use of skills.

Television sets

Of all the household objects, none has been as controversial as the television set. TV has been charged with destroying the American family, hypnotizing children into passive habits, and encouraging aggression. At the same time, this medium has been hailed as the means of restoring human interconnectedness because it provides an instant sharing of information and emotions across continents and cultures.

This ambiguous appraisal is reflected by the kind of experience people report while watching television. In some of our previous studies it was found that adolescents and adults watch television more than they do any other single activity. When they are watching, they report feeling more relaxed than other times of the day; but they rate their moods as being significantly more passive, weak, drowsy, and irritable (Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey, 1981).

In the present study 21 percent of the respondents mentioned a TV set as being special to them, males significantly more often than females (29 vs. 14 percent; $p < .002$). The youngest generation cherishes these objects most (37 percent), then the oldest (23 percent), whereas the middle generation mentions them least frequently (11 percent).

Often reasons given for appreciating TV sets are tinged by guilt, as if the respondent were talking about an addiction on which he or she has become dependent. The following quotations from teenagers are quite typical:

If you are real tired, it's sorta like reading books. You can sorta let that do the work for you. I really spend a whole lot of time in front of it. So I'd be doing a lot of nothing and being really bored without the TV.

(Without a stereo) I couldn't listen to music a lot. And I like to listen to music. I'd have to watch TV. And it's usually really boring, the TV programs.

This one from an elderly grandmother;

I just love it. I would miss it terribly because I'm alone. I have to rest my back on the bed so it's easier to look at television than it is to read.

It is difficult to decide to what extent this defensiveness concerning television is genuine and to what extent it is a reflection of what the respondents construe that social expectations should be. Given the great furor about TV, people do not readily admit enjoying it without reserve. Yet in the majority of cases one senses that people, in fact, use the medium simply as a pacifier, as a passive source of experience when all else fails, or when one is too tired to seek genuine experiences. Television viewing is essentially a vicarious social activity, because the viewer is almost constantly confronted with representations of other people engaged in various types of interaction. Occasionally, however, one meets a full-fledged enthusiast, like this woman whose house contains no fewer than six television sets and ten telephones:

I love TV. I really do believe that it will save the whole world. You know – instant communication will alleviate a lot of problems . . . It would be hard to live without our TVs – we are accustomed to getting our information that way. Nothing touches it! It's total involvement. After the essentials, it's the most important thing to have. I used to be a social worker and I would always recommend TV to poor people. It's our window to the world. If they don't have an education, they sure would get it from TV. It's McLuhanesque – the content is not important . . . it's the existence of TV. I feel real strongly about that.

The protelevision ideology is quite clear in this quotation, which proves again that one can find excellent reasons pro and con, to legitimize or to criticize almost any given position. Or to put it more constructively, one might say that a complex object like a television set can be interacted with at many levels. At the simplest level one can use it as a background pacifier, a source of painless stimulation to distract a mind bored by inactivity but unready to face a more taxing challenge. Or it can be used with control, selectivity, and discernment; if approached this way, one can cultivate the activity and "believe that it will save the whole world." This variability in involvement is not only true of TV, of course, for it

can apply to any other object. The reason "primitive" people believe in the power of magic objects, which to us seem trivial knick-knacks, is that they concentrate considerable attention in the power objects and thus, in fact, embody them with psychic energy. Similarly, sacramental objects acquire power in the Catholic church, or the products of science in a culture that holds science itself as sacred.

In general, television sets stand out among household objects by having both the highest frequency of references to the Self and to Experiences (34 and 32 percent, respectively) and the fewest proportion of meanings associated with Memories (0 percent). Clearly, for this sample at least, TVs are tools for experiencing the present. They are not good vehicles for binding people to their own past or future, or for bringing them closer to others. This, of course, is in great part due to the rapid obsolescence of a TV set. As with stereos and other electronic products, the rapid improvements of TVs and quick turnover make it difficult to conceive that they could ever be associated with past events and memories. Respondents rarely cherish the memories of viewed television shows, rather, it is the habit of viewing itself that is valued. Thus television socializes primarily by providing habitual, low-intensity experiences that are valued as ongoing enjoyment and release rather than as memorable occasions.

Sculpture

This category parallels the two-dimensional category of Visual Arts; that is, it includes all three-dimensional artifacts, excluding furniture and weavings, that respondents mention as special, ranging from original pieces by recognized artists to inexpensive mass-produced replicas. As with Visual Art objects, sculpture is a favorite of the middle generation; children rarely mention it, but it is the third favorite object of their parents. There is also a significant sex difference, in that women mention sculpture more than twice as often as men (26 vs. 11 percent, chi square, $p < .001$).

In several other respects sculpture and visual arts produce the same meanings: They reflect Memories, Associations, Intrinsic Qualities, and involve feelings about the Self and the Immediate Family in approximately the same proportions as paintings do.

They are more apt to carry formal ties, such as ethnic and religious associations, and relatively fewer meanings relating to friends.

Again, as in the case with paintings, the most surprising thing is how seldom aesthetic qualities of sculptures are ever mentioned. There is no reference to plastic art as the arena in which Praxiteles, Michelangelo, and Rodin wrought their great masterpieces, a hallowed craft to be approached with reverence and a refined sensitivity. Most people, perhaps fortunately or not, have a much more straightforward approach to the pieces of sculpture that they keep in their homes.

Our favorite example pertains to a woman who showed the interviewer a clumsy epoxy figurine representing the Venus of Milo as one of her most special objects. In describing it she said "It's unusual 'cause it doesn't have arms. I got it (as a prize) at a demonstration through a point system. I would feel bad because I really worked at getting it." What made this reproduction important has nothing to do with cultural canons of taste nor with the intrinsic quality of the object. She liked it because it reminded her of the hard work she put into a sales demonstration and the recognition that she received for it, and because of the zany idea of making a statue without arms.

As with most other objects, sculptures frequently stand for family relationships:

I am going to keep this thing (a bust in a teenage girl's mother's room) forever. I wasn't even in school and me and my mother went to the store and I told her this looked like her, so she bought it. I'm going to keep this for life. It reminds me of my mother.

They show people through my daughter's eyes who made them and they are very beautiful . . . I would pick up, pick them all up if the house burned down, I would feel very sad if any of them were destroyed.

Perhaps one can identify more easily with sculpture than with painting; the greater realism of three dimensions adds a lifelike and tangible quality to sculpture that painting lacks. Sometimes this process of identification is quite complex. An old black man, who had worked as a domestic helper for wealthy families during most of his life, gave the impression throughout the interview that nothing in his home mattered much to him. What counted, he repeatedly said, was that the objects be useful, comfortable, and cheap. Toward the end of the interview, however, a look of recog-

nition passed over his face; he walked to the mantle shelf and pointed at two black porcelain figurines representing crouching panthers. These, he said, were special to him in a way that the other things were not. He told a long story about how he had always admired panthers and that his nephew, who was aware of this predilection, during a trip to the South found these two statues in a pawnshop window in Nashville and called him up, asking if he should buy them? The old man said yes and the nephew bought the panthers, which have been crouching above the fireplace ever since.

The admiration for the panthers, he explained, stems from the fact that these animals are cool, wise to the ways of the jungle, full of a hidden strength and vitality. "They are so smooth, so powerful, yet they don't scarcely show it." He himself wished to have the same qualities and in part thought he did. At this point the interviewer, struck by the obvious connection, asked the man if the two felines also related in his mind to the Black Panther ethnopolitical movement. The question seemed to produce genuine surprise in the respondent. No, he said, the thought had never occurred to him. If this is true, we have here a case of a man spontaneously inventing a personal symbol that other men of his race had already chosen, presumably for similar reasons: The animals suggest ideal qualities that are particularly important to this group – restrained power, elegance, inscrutability, and, of course, blackness.

Plants

It is probable that if we had conducted our interviews ten years earlier, indoor plants would not have figured prominently among the most special household objects. As it turned out, 15 percent of our respondents mentioned plants. Most were women: Of the 47 people who did, only 7 were men.

The use of plants for decorative purposes in the home seems to have a short history, at least in the West. Again, the practice must have originated with royalty and the aristocracy; it was in the palaces of the sixteenth-century French monarchs that *orangeries* and other growing plants were established. The next spurt seems to have occurred when the Victorian British middle class began to

adopt in its living rooms the various exotic plants imported from the far colonies. Of course, there has always been a demotic use of flowers by the peasants of Europe; these, however, were usually arranged on balconies and windowsills, and thus were a part of the home only liminally.

Whatever use plants have had in the past, the practice seems to have lacked an ideology. Although the number of plants kept in the average urban household has increased during the seventies, the significance of their cultivation for a large segment of the population has changed even more. Plants now carry a number of meanings that were previously inarticulated or at least not expressed with their current urgency.

This can be seen in the fact that Plants were mentioned as embodying Personal Values more than any other type of object, including Books. The other large classes of meaning associated with Plants were Experiences (21 percent), Style (14 percent), and the Self (23 percent).

The values that plants represent involve nurturance, the caring for living things that respond to one's attention. Growing plants provides evidence of one's skills, thus they are like trophies that record one's accomplishments. But perhaps the most important meaning that plants evoke deals with the "ecological consciousness" that has emerged only in the past decade as a full-fledged cultural value. For urban dwellers, indoor plants represent a tie with a natural world threatened by the encroachments of technology, a way of bringing nature into the city, of having living things that require almost daily attention growing in their own apartment or home. Those who care for them are able to feel that they are contributing, however slightly, to the preservation of the environment. Here is an ideologically complete reason given by a female respondent:

Cause living plants are so rare in the city and I like taking care of them and they purify the air: it's a real subtle give and take with the plants. I like their shapes and shadows and things like that. Without them my house wouldn't feel so alive to me and I also feel that my plants are real centered kinds of beings. Like if I ever get really angry or something I can go and start working with plants, repotting them, taking care of them. And it makes me feel better, so I would really feel a loss, they are so sensitive and so subtle.

Few people can formulate their relationship with plants (or with

any other object) so clearly. Most people take the interaction for granted, assuming that it must be valued because it is the "in" thing. The respondent just quoted is one of those rare cultural innovators who attempt to give legitimacy to a behavior pattern by explicating its meaning, which she does by drawing cause-and-effect connections between the object in question and other, presumably valued, conditions. Plants "purify the air," "their shapes and shadows" are beautiful, they make the house "feel alive," they are therapeutic, and so forth. For an object to acquire meanings there must be a number of individuals who can perform this task of legitimation. Then the rest take the already legitimized symbol and use it without much further thought:

I have around a hundred plants . . . I bought a lot of them and a lot of them were given to me by friends like through the last ten years or so. (Well, why exactly are they special?) Well, I just like to take care of plants and I think they are pretty and I just like 'em.

Because they are growing and not dying and they are alive . . . and I am actually doing it. (What would it mean to be without them?) Less messing around in the dirt, but I think the house would be sort of empty . . . They kind of add to the house and the atmosphere, so I would miss them.

I love them . . . I like looking at them. It's healthy for you. Some I've managed to get to bloom, but others I just can't.

They are very decorative and I found out I have a green thumb. Some of them need to be repotted. My daughter gave them to me . . . They make the apartment look very nice.

These four respondents agree that plants are "pretty" and "nice," but they accept these labels without question. One says that they are "healthy for you"; however, the meaning is not developed, but seems to be taken for granted. Of course, an effective symbol need not be logically or empirically understood: It is often a more powerful influence when unself-consciously accepted. People can save a great deal of psychic energy by simply accepting the fact that plants are pretty and healthy, without having to bother about what these values explicitly mean – that is, what causal links are inputed by these designations. Once the symbolic value of the object is accepted (in this case, when plants are accepted as being nice), it can be put to a variety of uses: to fill up and beautify the house, to show one's horticultural skills, to remind oneself of the friends and daughters who gave plants (those nice, healthy things) as presents.

This analysis has stressed the social legitimation of objects as

symbols. It might seem that we are suggesting that any object, no matter what it is and how it looks, could be made to seem beautiful and wholesome by a cultural assignment of meanings. To a certain extent, in exceptional cases this appears to be the case: Contemporary art critics are able, for instance, to justify self-mutilation, the wreckage of automobiles, and termite colonies as having artistic value – and a small segment of the population actually accepts these meanings as legitimate. But in the case of plants a more universal process is involved. Plants actually do possess some of those causal attributes that cultural legitimation articulates about them. They are generally found to be attractive because that is their purpose, otherwise they would not have survived. During the long ages in which evolution proceeded without the benefit of human meddling, a plant that was unable to attract the attention of insects had fewer chances to pollinate than a more attractive plant and thus was less able to reproduce. Therefore "attractiveness" had a positive survival value for plants. This trend was reinforced when humans became capable of deciding which plants were to survive and which were superfluous. Those that were able to attract attention – because of the color of their flowers, their unusual shape, the texture of their leaves – tended to be cultivated for decorative purposes. Similarly, it is in fact true that plants grow, they respond to the grower (i.e., they either die or stay alive); they are more or less "natural"; and they "purify the air" (even though the role of houseplants in this process is rather questionable).

So the meanings that the culture assigns to plants are not made out of whole cloth; there is a factual basis to the causal connections attributed to them. But most of the common houseplants now in use are not indigenous to the Chicago area nor even to the United States. Thus their very presence is not itself natural but depends on the cultural trend of "house" plants. Therefore to make them a viable cultural sign, some people must articulate the natural connections, emphasize their positive aspects, play down or explain away the unpleasant features – in short, legitimize the value of the object. This process of refinement, then, results in a condensed symbol that has a recognized set of values in the grammar of meanings: The object (in this case, plants) evokes a specific range of emotions and thoughts and transmits its values to other objects, behaviors, or persons with which it is associated. Thus a house

that contains plants becomes "pretty" and "full of life"; a person who tends flowers gets in touch with "nature," grows as a person, and helps to make the world healthier; a person who gives plants as a gift is sensitive, communicates an appreciation for beauty and the life process, and so on.

Plates

The tenth category of objects, mentioned by 15 percent of the respondents, included a variety of eating and drinking utensils: dishes, china, cups, mugs, and pewter trays. Although these are all objects ostensibly made for use, again relatively few people found them special for utilitarian reasons. An observer from another planet, unacquainted with human ways, might be surprised to learn that such humble vessels could carry so much meaning. To those acquainted with popular psychology, the explanation might seem embarassingly obvious: after all, oral needs are quite basic; and besides, containers of this sort could have deep sexual connotations.

But whatever unconscious reasons might have prompted the selection of plateware as a significant symbol, the meaning these objects carried for our respondents were fairly straightforward. They were the objects most often mentioned in connection with the category "Ethnic Background," and, after Furniture, they constituted the next most often mentioned "Heirloom." In line with this emphasis on memories and associations, plateware was found to be significantly more special to women than to men and to the older than to the younger respondents.

The reasons given are those that are by now familiar: ties to a person or a place; shared origins or a common issue:

(The cups and saucers) belonged to my mother, wedding gifts which she brought with her from England in 1905. And whenever anybody had a baby or a birthday, they always gave a cup and saucer. And then when they knew that my mother had saved hers, they came to me. So that's why they're important . . . I have them on display.

This cup . . . my grandmother brought it back from Newfoundland when she went back home there on a trip 65–70 years ago. That's how long I've had it, and it's not even cracked. It's so old. She brought that back for me and a cream pitcher for my sister. And my sister's kids broke hers. So I'm kind of proud that I've still got it.

A father said:

Well, the most important things would be the pewter mugs which have been in my family since the 1700s. They are things that I inherited from my mother, who just passed away. (Without them) I think part of my family tradition would be missing. I intend to carry that forward. Even the few family heirlooms we've had, I've treasured. We want to keep the tradition in the family. At Christmas, when the children got old enough, I passed out some of the things that I had treasured.

These quotes raise an important issue, one that might help explain the psychological value of china and other easily broken objects, such as glass, which was also fairly frequently mentioned by women (12 percent of the time). Given a number of fragile objects, the majority of them are soon bound to be broken. To preserve a breakable object from its destiny one must pay at least some attention to it, care for it, buffet it from the long arm of chance. Thus a china cup preserved over a generation is a victory of human purpose over chaos, an accomplishment to be quietly cherished, something to be "kind of proud" of.

Not surprisingly, it is the people in the generation of the grandparents who are most sensitive to the expressive potential of fragile plateware. It could be that having witnessed the dissolution of many relationships, the decay of many forms of structured order, they appreciate the meaning of an unbroken dish.

This does not imply that the only reason plates were chosen to preserve memories is their weakness – which, paradoxically, highlights strength. After all, symbols not only carry multiple meanings for people (Turner, 1967), they are also multidetermined. Possibly, for instance, women pay particular attention to eating utensils because dishes and cups are part of a housewife's "tools," like the hunting spear is to the Nuer. All these reasons might be involved in the choice of these objects as carriers of meaning. But once the choice was made, the values communicated refer to one's roots, to one's kind, and to overcoming the forces of physical and social disorder and dissolution.

These brief sketches of the ten most popular objects begin to give an idea of what people cherish in their homes, and why. It would be too tedious, and not very enlightening, to discuss the remaining 31 categories of objects, each of which was mentioned by less than 10 percent of the people, and in some cases only a few

times. In later chapters we shall return to some of these minor categories, to illustrate a point. Now let us pause and consider what we have learned by this cursory analysis of cherished household possessions.

The first impression one receives in reviewing the evidence is the personal nature of the themes evoked by the objects that people surround themselves with in their homes. Table 3.2 lists the frequency with which all the meaning categories were mentioned. The two most frequent categories of meaning were the ones coded Self (mentioned by 87 percent of the respondents) and Enjoyment (mentioned by 79 percent). These two categories generally overlapped because objects providing enjoyment almost always were coded also as having reference to the personal self. When a reason was phrased: "I like to work with these tools," "TV is entertaining," "I dig my bed," or "Guns. Shooting is my hobby," it was coded in both the Self and the Enjoyment categories.

Thus the main single reason for having objects is one that might be seen as egocentric and hedonistic. It might be useful to distinguish at this point hedonistic pleasure from enjoyment. The former refers to a value derived from satisfaction that is an end in itself; it is the consummation of a feeling and not the meaning or purpose of that feeling that makes the difference. Whatever will make one "feel good" is pleasurable regardless of what effects this has on one's other goals or on the goals of others. Enjoyment, by contrast, results from the purpose aimed at by the activity and intrinsically involves the integration of the pleasurable feeling with one's context of goals. Enjoyment, then, is a purposeful feeling inseparable from the interaction and not merely a subjective, individual sensation. It implies self-control, the development of skills in the pursuit of voluntary as opposed to spontaneous goals.

In a game of tennis, for example, pleasure might constitute the euphoria resulting from the physical activity of the body or in winning against a competitor. Typically, these sensations are ends that do not lead to further goals. Enjoyment in the game might be derived from reflecting on one's most skillful moves, the perfection of the game, the interaction among the players – in other words, from a relationship between the person and a pattern of goals that has an inherent potential for further growth.

When a person mentions his or her tools as a source of enjoyment, the meaning referred to is egocentric, but not necessarily

Table 3.2. *Proportion of respondents mentioning various classes and categories of meaning for cherishing special objects (N = 315)*

A. Person-related reasons	Percentage of people mentioning		B. Non-person-related reasons	Percentage of people mentioning	
1. Self	87		1. Memories	74	
			Memento		52
2. Immediate Family	82		Recollection		46
Spouse		34	Heirloom		20
We		33	Souvenir		22
Children		35			
Mother		27	2. Associations	52	
Father		20	Ethnic		9
Siblings		11	Religious		7
Grandparents		12	Collections		15
Grandchildren		7	Gifts		40
Whole Family		22			
			3. Experiences	86	
3. Kin	23		Enjoyment		79
Relatives		9	Ongoing Occasion		48
Ancestors		7	Release		23
In-laws		11			
			4. Intrinsic Qualities	62	
4. Nonfamily	40		Craft		34
Friends		24	Uniqueness		17
Associates		9	Physical		
Heroes		20	Description		46
			5. Style	60	
			6. Utilitarian	49	
			7. Personal Values	53	
			Embodiment of Ideal		24
			Accomplishment		31
			Personification		15

hedonistic, for interaction with tools is valued not only because of the positive physical sensations it provides but also because it promotes the cultivation of new experiences and goals. One cannot enjoy the use of tools unless one learns to build objects that ap-

proximate more and more closely some ideal of efficency, beauty, or permanence. It could be said that enjoyment is the subjective feeling of cultivation.

Elsewhere this state of enjoyable interaction has been called the *flow* state and its parameters described (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1978). Apparently one of the main reasons people cherish objects in their homes is that they facilitate flow experiences. However, because we know that the objects most often mentioned as sources of enjoyment were TV sets and stereos, we can infer that most of the flow referred to was low in complexity, more akin to pleasure than to enjoyment.

The second major theme is that of kinship; of the ties that bind people to each other – that provide continuity in one's life and across generations. On the whole, 82 percent of the people cherished at least one object because it reminded them of a close relative. But numbers do not begin to express the importance of kinship ties. It is the cumulative effect of hearing people talk about their parents, spouses, and children, the depth of their emotions in doing so, that is so impressive. The quotes reported earlier in this chapter should give the reader some flavor of the importance of these attachments; in later chapters we shall elaborate further on this theme.

The third theme concerns the lack of certain relationships rather than their presence. In addition to meanings dealing with the self, and with one's kin and friends, there could have been a third level of interactions represented in the home, a level referring to a wider area of meanings. One might have expected artifacts that reminded the owner of his or her ethnic background, political allegiance, cultural preferences and values. After all, homes in the past were supposed to be centered around household gods, crucifixes, icons, historical pictures, flags – symbols of attachment to widely shared cultural ideals. Such objects, however, were conspicuous by their absence. Only 7 percent mentioned religious meanings, and 9 percent, ethnic ones. Political allegiance was not represented visibly in the home, except for the pictures of a few "heroes" like John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King. The meaning category "Embodiment of an Ideal," mentioned by 24 percent of the people, was the most frequent in this area. But the ideals mentioned were often very fragmentary and idiosyncratic; the closest to a widely shared cultural ideal was perhaps the ecological-consciousness by plants.

The reasons people give for cherishing their household possessions reveal a picture of the meaning of life for urban Americans that is in some respects familiar but in others, strikingly unexpected in its detail. We get a sense of a life in which immediate experience, a search for enjoyment, is important. At the same time, one feels an an almost equally strong desire to remember the good times of the past and especially to preserve the relationships experienced with people very close to oneself. This search for meaning seems to proceed in almost complete vacuum of formal goals and values. This does not mean that goals and values are absent. They are often implicit in the other reasons about which respondents talk. But none of the great spiritual and ideological systems that are supposed to have moved people in the past have left objective traces in the homes of these Americans nor has a new configuration as yet taken their place.

Another generalization that the findings suggest is the enormous flexibility with which people can attach meanings to objects, and therefore derive meanings from them. Almost anything can be made to represent a set of meanings. It is not as if the physical characteristics of an object dictated the kind of significations it can convey, although these characteristics often lend themselves to certain meanings in preference to others; nor do the symbolic conventions of the culture absolutely decree what meaning can or cannot be obtained from interaction with a particular object. At least potentially, each person can discover and cultivate a network of meanings out of the experiences of his or her own life.

This is illustrated in Table 3.3, where one sees that every object category can serve to convey a meaning in each meaning class. One person even cherished a TV set as a carrier of memories; and another, plants, a painting, and a sculpture for utilitarian reasons – these were the most unlikely associations between objects and meanings. All other object-meaning combinations were mentioned at least twice or more often. The process of creating signification is not entirely determined by prior cultural convention.

At the same time, Table 3.3 also indicates that although each person is free to attach any meaning to any object, in fact, some things stand for Memories much more often than others, whereas other objects recall Experiences or Personal Values more frequently. In this specialization of meaning both the object's physical characteristics and the values attributed to it in the culture at large seem to play a determining role. We have seen, fo instance

Table 3.3. *Distribution and percentages of meaning classes making up the object categories*

	Furniture N	Furniture %	Visual art N	Visual art %	Sculpture N	Sculpture %	Musical instruments N	Musical instruments %
Memories	98	15.4	84	15.6	73	18.0	25	10.4
Associations	35	5.5	28	5.2	47	11.6	8	3.3
Experiences	69	10.8	47	8.8	36	8.9	52	21.7
Intrinsic Qualities	56	8.8	86	16.0	46	11.3	8	3.3
Style	80	12.5	56	10.4	47	11.6	15	6.3
Personal Values	27	4.2	24	4.5	22	5.4	21	8.8
Utilitarian	34	5.3	1	.2	1	.3	5	2.1
Self	106	16.6	54	10.1	47	11.6	57	23.8
Immediate Family	98	15.4	84	15.6	58	14.3	41	17.1
Kin	18	2.8	6	1.1	10	2.5	2	.8
Nonfamily	17	2.7	67	12.5	19	4.7	6	2.5
Total	638	100.0	537	100.0	406	100.0	240	100.0

	Photos N	Photos %	Televisions N	Televisions %	Stereos N	Stereos %	Books N	Books %	Plants N	Plants %
Memories	79	26.7	1	.6	16	7.6	29	11.3	7	4.1
Associations	5	1.7	5	2.8	7	3.3	22	8.6	7	4.1
Experiences	27	9.1	56	31.5	59	28.1	50	19.5	36	21.3
Intrinsic Qualities	49	16.6	4	2.3	4	1.9	10	3.9	13	7.7
Style	8	2.7	2	1.1	7	3.3	3	1.2	24	14.2
Personal Values	7	2.4	7	3.9	4	1.9	37	14.5	25	14.8
Utilitarian	2	.7	20	11.2	17	8.1	14	5.5	1	.6
Self	22	7.4	60	33.7	68	32.4	58	22.7	39	23.1
Immediate Family	77	26.0	17	9.6	21	10.0	19	7.4	14	8.3
Kin	13	4.4	2	1.1	2	1.0	3	1.2	1	.6
Nonfamily	7	2.4	4	2.3	5	2.4	11	4.3	2	1.2
Total	296	100.0	178	100.0	210	100.0	256	100.0	169	100.0

that TV and stereo sets most often signify the Self; photos, the Immediate Family; and paintings, Nonfamily. Photos specialize in preserving Memories, sculptures embody Associations, and so on down the line.

This preliminary overview, by necessity cumbersome in its details, has also raised another set of issues. Thus far we have attempted to give a general summary of the object relationships for

the sample as a whole. However, in describing specific objects and meanings, we have seen that these relationships are unequally distributed. Some are characteristic of youth, others of old people; some are more prevalent among men, some among women. This suggests that the cultivation of the self might involve transactions with different types of objects, depending on one's sex role and position along the life cycle. It is to these issues that we shall now turn.

CHAPTER 4

Object relations and the development of the self

By reaching for a mobile hanging above the crib and setting it in motion with a touch, a baby learns a tremendously important fact: "I can make that thing dance if I want to." An infant starts life with precious little information about the self. At first he or she is aware only of strong feelings of hunger, pain, or delight, which come and go unbidden, and of soothing sensations whenever fed or fondled. Slowly sensory experiences coalesce into predictable patterns, and the outlines of the environment begin to emerge. The infant, although still largely a passive bundle of sensations moved by genetic instructions and random actions, begins to recognize parts of the body and where the boundaries lie that separate that self from others.

Taking possession of this body and transforming dim awareness into a conscious self, the infant learns to connect the action he or she receives with those needs that were satisfied. This is the first evidence that the baby gets of his or her existence as an autonomous agent, capable of independent action. Setting a mobile in motion and seeing it dance at the touch of the fingers might well be the infant's earliest experience of selfhood.

The self grows largely as a function of environmental responses to intentions; it develops out of feedback to acts of control (Seligman, 1975, p. 141). The infant becomes aware of wanting food, company, freedom to crawl; the psychic energy of the infant becomes channeled in order to realize these intentions. By reflecting on – that is, by turning attention to – these intentions, the child discovers the self – the source of those wants from which the intentions emerged. When the baby gets food to avoid hunger, or company when lonely, the child's self grows stronger, by learning that his or her intentions are effective. When desires are frus-

trated, however, the power of the self to affect the environment is weakened in the child's consciousness.

Psychologists have long recognized the primary role that people, and parental figures in particular, have in shaping the developing self. Every theorist, from Freud to Mead, from Erikson to Piaget, emphasizes the importance of the infant's early relations with his or her caretakers as the most significant source of information from which the self emerges. It is, of course, true that the mother is the most powerful, and usually the most responsive, source of information for the newborn. Parents, siblings, and, later, peers can provide exquisitely detailed or alternatively all-inclusive feedback, if for no other reason than that the self can best be confirmed or negated by language – communication with others. To say "I love you" to someone implies a validation of his or her self that no amount of dancing mobiles can give.

Yet the impact of inanimate objects in this self-awareness process is much more important than one would infer from its neglect. Things also tell us who we are, not in words, but by embodying our intentions. In our everyday traffic of existence, we can also learn about ourselves from objects, almost as much as from people.

A good example of such an object is the ball, one of the earliest objects with which children in many cultures are confronted. Basically, a ball has a vocabulary limited to only four expressions: It can rest, fly, roll, or bounce. With these, however, incredibly eloquent messages can be composed. A baby in a playpen can formulate hundreds of intentions with a ball – squeezing, throwing, hitting, catching, and so forth. When the ball performs as the child intended, the child's self is confirmed and strengthened. Later, through a variety of games using this multipurpose object – the ball – youngsters are provided with the opportunity to confirm their selves further by learning to control its movements. In our society even grown men, such as Pelè, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Jack Nicolaus, Minnesota Fats, or Pete Rose, have structured the self around their ability to control the trajectories of balls.

Things differ in the kind of messages they can send about the self. A doll, for instance, lends itself to nurturant behavior: It "expects" to be hugged, dressed, or lulled to sleep and is shaped to produce these behaviors, to which children readily respond. When cradling a doll, the child's action can reflect back the mes-

sage: "I am someone who takes care of dolls." A toy gun has a different range of expressions; by using it as a firearm, a child learns: "I am someone who can shoot people." Of course, children at play generally know that they are pretending, yet the kind of messages they receive about themselves during play may become real components of their adult selves.

Toys are important shapers of the self in childhood and often continue in later life as symbols of different "leisure" pursuits. Golf clubs and jogging shoes and sailboats and snowmobiles are tools of self-definition for many adults. But everyday utilitarian objects also serve the same purpose of providing information about the self, and yet their effect can be so pervasive as to be difficult to discern at first glance.

The most basic information about ourselves as human beings – the fact that we *are* human – has been traditionally conveyed to us by the use of artifacts. Civilized people express their identity as humans by wearing clothes, cooking their food and eating with utensils, living in houses, and sleeping in beds. Those people who consider themselves "civilized" differ from those who are "primitive," mainly in terms of the variety and complexity of the things with which they interact. Not so long ago, "civilized" people also credited themselves with more intelligence, higher morality, and greater sensitivity. But such claims have turned out to be very difficult to prove. Thus often the only remaining distinction between civilized people and primitive people is the know-how of the former to boost their ego by interacting with the things that make up their world. Of course, the converse is also true – the contempt of the hunter or farmer for the burgher because the latter would not know how to use the tools of survival if removed from his urban environment.

The tools of one's trade, perhaps more than any other set of objects, help to define who we are as individuals. Karl Marx was right: Humans create their existence primarily through productive efforts. That is, for most adults the intention of producing the necessities for physical survival in accordance with a specific form of life is the most basic, requiring the greatest investment of psychic energy. Productive action reveals a great deal about the worker's ingenuity, skills, endurance, as well as his or her limitations. Thus whatever information we get about our selves from productive acts becomes a central component of the self as a

whole. Smith, Carter, Miller, Weaver, Taylor – in most languages, as in English, the identity of a person was often derived from his occupation (the male pronoun here is more of a historical one rather than a sign of contemporary sexism). A "Smith" was someone who owned an anvil and knew how to forge iron with pincers and hammers, whereas a "Miller" owned large stones connected to wind or water and could grind grain. A man defined and cultivated his individuality by using the things that enabled him to exist.

The condition of women in history can also be traced to differences in their interaction with objects. Whereas men were forced by the division of labor to learn a variety of special skills related to different categories of things, women developed their selves through interaction with objects that changed little with time: Kitchen utensils, gardening tools, looms, brooms, and those things involved in raising children were the universal instruments through which female productivity was expressed. Of course, social skills arising from human interaction largely compensated for the lack of instrumental self-definition, but the resultant selves could not fail to be different in important respects. The current "emancipation" of women is also greatly the result of the sudden emergence of a whole range of previously nonexisting objects – contraceptives and household appliances have considerably decreased the amount of psychic energy necessary to accomplish traditionally feminine household tasks and crafts. That is, women need not – and, in fact, no longer can – define their self exclusively with information resulting from interaction with traditional feminine objects. Thus women are free – and in essence forced – to seek new things that will help them to define who they are.

In some respects, however, our emphasis on tools of production, although accurate in reflecting the long sweep of past centuries, seems somewhat obsolete as a reflection of current reality. After all, the majority of workers, those in white collar, business, and service occupations, nowadays do not use specific tools on their jobs. For more and more people, information-processing skills have taken the place of the primary productive skills dependent on material objects. The tools of the eye have displaced the tools of the hand. Things, however, have not ceased to send messages about who we are. By and large, we now define ourselves through objects of consumption rather than production. When

Veblen (1953) wrote his *Theory of the Leisure Class* at the turn of the century, only the rich could lead a life of leisure. But now American society as a whole resembles a leisure culture. Cars, homes, and other leisure-type equipment are some of the things that define what we can do and who we are. Moreover, the belongings that surround us in the home constitute a symbolic ecology structuring our attention and reflecting our intentions and thus serve to cultivate the individuality of the owner.

Despite the fact that so many objects are mass produced today, it is still possible to achieve some unique expression by careful selection and combination of items. A stereo system, for instance, with half a dozen major components (i.e., receiver, amplifier, speakers, turntable, tape deck, cartridge, etc.), manufactured by dozens of companies in dozens of styles, could be assembled in billions of different ways, giving ample opportunity for each person on Earth to express his or her individuality, even modestly, by choosing a system that no one else has. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that stereos are the most frequently mentioned special household objects by younger people in our sample.

Age-related differences in the significance of objects

Age differences begin to indicate the role of objects at various points in the life cycle. Table 4.1 lists those things that at least 10 percent of respondents reported as special in each of the three generations. The three lists are quite different in a number of respects. Some differences were presented in the previous chapter: for instance, the asymmetrical preference for stereos and photos among the youngest and oldest respondents, the curvilinear relationship of preference for TV sets with age, or the importance of visual art and sculpture for the middle generation.

In general, each column of the table reflects the outline of a kind of self that develops at each of the three broad divisions of the life cycle used in this study: adolescence, parenthood, and late adulthood. The young receive meaningful information from interacting with objects that are appropriate to their stage of life, as defined in this culture; these are different objects, and therefore different selves, from those that their parents and grandparents develop.

Table 4.1. *Special objects mentioned at least once by respondents of three different generations*

Children (N = 79)	Percentage mentioned	Parents (N = 150)	Percentage mentioned	Grandparents (N = 86)	Percentage mentioned
1. Stereos	45.6	1. Furniture	38.1	1. Photos	37.2
2. TV	36.7	2. Visual art	36.7	2. Furniture	33.7
3. Furniture	32.9	3. Sculpture	26.7	3. Books	25.6
4. Musical inst.	31.6	4. Books	24.0	4. TV	23.3
5. Beds	29.1	5. Musical inst.	22.7	5. Visual art	22.1
6. Pets	24.1	6. Photos	22.0	6. Plates	22.1
7. Miscellaneous	20.3	7. Plants	19.3	7. Sculpture	17.4
8. Sports equipment	17.7	8. Stereos	18.0	8. Appliances	15.1
9. Collectibles	17.7	9. Appliances	17.3	9. Miscellaneous	15.1
10. Books	15.2	10. Miscellaneous	16.7	10. Plants	12.8
11. Vehicles	12.7	11. Plates	14.7	11. Collectibles	11.6
12. Radios	11.4	12. Collectibles	12.0	12. Silverware	10.5
13. Refrigerators	11.4	13. TV	11.3	13. Musical inst.	10.5
14. Stuffed animals	11.4	14. Glass	11.3	14. Weavings	10.5
15. Clothes	10.1	15. Jewelry	11.3	15. Whole room	10.5
16. Photos	10.1				

Perhaps the simplest way of illustrating these age trends is by considering the objects in two categories: *action* objects and *contemplation* objects. These classes loosely reflect the two classical approaches to human existence outlined by Hannah Arendt: the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* (Arendt, 1958). The first refers to the development of self-control through unique acts; the second, to an achievement of selfhood based on conscious reflection. At different times in the history of Western civilization, Arendt claims, one or the other of these two avenues was held to be preeminent, but either the one or the other was always held to offer the most effective means for cultivating selfhood.

The objects children cherish share a proclivity for action. Many of them are meant to invite kinetic involvement – such as musical instruments, pets, sports equipment, vehicles. Even stereos, refrigerators, and stuffed animals are instruments for *doing*. They require some physical manipulation to release their meaning. Grandparents, on the other hand, single out things that do not require physical interaction: photographs, books, painting, sculpture, plateware, silverware, and so on. This turn with age from action to reflection matches what we know from common sense and is also similar to what other scholars have described theoretically and empirically (i.e., Cumming and Henry, 1961; Neugarten, 1968, pp. 140–1). The middle generation represents both trends but is much closer to that of grandparents: Parents cherish musical instruments, plants, stereos – all objects of action; they also find meaning in objects of contemplation like art, books, photos, and plates. Of the children's special objects, 59 percent can be classed in the action category, compared to 29 percent of the parents' and 27 percent of the grandparents' (chi square, $p <$ .001). Only 16 percent of the children's objects are suited for contemplation, as opposed to 45 percent of their parents' and 47 percent of the grandparents' ($p < .0001$). This pattern suggests two things in addition to the obvious differences: Contemplation is relatively less valued in youth than action is in late adulthood; and parents are practically indistinguishable from grandparents in terms of the action/contemplation distinction.

But the physical characteristics of cherished objects may only give a very superficial indication of the different kind of interaction people at various stages of life have with things. Here is, for

example, what a boy says about a new set of silverware he thinks is special:

They have jagged bottoms and I like them because I can make designs on the food with them. It makes it fun to eat with them 'cause you can make all kinds of neat patterns and things . . . (Without it) it would mean that I wouldn't have fun eating anymore. The food would be good, but it wouldn't be as much fun not seeing the jags going up and down and all around.

We have coded silverware an "object of contemplation," because in most cases these objects are kept in sideboards or special chests and are used – if ever – only on special occasions; their meaning usually derives from memories of past events or of relatives. But the quotation shows a youth can appropriate such an object and use it in quite a different context of meaning: It becomes a tool for self-control through kinetic action, of enjoyment derived from carrying out intentions in a direct, physical way. Thus objects that seem to be made for contemplation are often used in action by youth; and vice versa, the older generation often cherished kinetic objects, such as musical instruments or sports equipment, for the memories they evoke rather than the physical interaction they are potentially able to provide.

Normally, however, the intrinsic quality of an object lends itself to either action or contemplation. Nowhere is this specialization of meaning more evident than in the case of stereos and photos, the most often cherished objects of the youngest and oldest generation, respectively. Most children who mention a stereo value it as a means to hear their records and create moods and not for its own qualities. Photos, on the other hand, are often described as "irreplaceable" by older respondents. The qualities of the photos themselves induce moods of remembrance of particular occasions for older people. The inherent qualities of photographs and stereos also reflect the different temporal orientations of youth and the aged. A photo is completed as an object; it can take on new meanings only in contemplation, as the owner compares those present in the photo with a current situation. But a stereo can take on new meanings with each record played, because its function is to serve as a medium for music. Old meanings and identities can thus easily be discarded and new ones take their place, as a youth pleases or as the fashions dictate. Stereos and photos are thus objects well suited to induce sentimental moods, and perhaps they are so highly regarded by children and grandparents, respectively, be-

cause they can induce those moods that are appropriate to meet the inner needs of children for lively activity and of grandparents for contemplation.

Sometimes the process of social maturation is reflected by subtle differences in how persons relate to the same object. One of the few sibling pairs we interviewed consisted of a 12-year-old girl and her 15-year-old brother. Both children independently mentioned the refrigerator as being special, but for quite different reasons. The young girl said that when she felt unhappy all she had to do was go to the kitchen, open the refrigerator, and she would already feel better at the thought of fixing herself a snack. The boy, on the other hand, said that the refrigerator gave him a good feeling because when his friends came over to visit he could open it and treat them to food and drink. In the first case the meaning of the object was clearly egocentric – a tool for restoring the homeostasis of the child's moods. In the second case the meaning expands beyond the horizon of the personal self and its needs to include social bonds. The same siblings also mentioned a wrought silver sculpture made by their grandfather. The younger explained her predilection by saying that it made her feel proud to be able to show the sculpture to her friends, who usually admired it. The older said that upon seeing the sculpture he was often amazed that one of his relatives, who lived a long time ago, had been able to make something so beautiful. It is remarkable how much the range of significations of an object can expand in three years' time. The young girl uses the object to "show off," as a tool for capturing her friends' attention. The older brother is intrigued by the continuity of meaning over time; his perspective is already decentered, finding meanings relevant to the self beyond its material confines.

The differences in meaning in this example seem to support Piaget's (1967) claim that the child moves from "concrete" operations to the "formal" stage of cognitive development around this period (see Piaget, 1967; Canaan, 1976), with a corresponding "decentration" of perspective. Although Piaget may be accurately describing processes of change during this period, we do not share his rather rigid separation of the "formal," or form – the "second intentional" level – from content. Indeed, one of the main purposes of our study is to explore how the most complex patterns of emotion and thought can become embodied in and sym-

Table 4.2. *Generational effects of the distribution of meanings associated with special objects*

	Children (N = 79)	Parents (N = 150)	Grandparents (N = 86)	Probability value of chi-square
Memories	48.1	82.0	83.7	.0001
Associations	48.1	52.7	54.7	NS
Experiences	91.1	86.0	81.4	NS
Intrinsic Qualities	53.2	70.7	55.8	.01
Personal Values	55.7	56.0	46.5	NS
Self	97.5	87.3	76.7	.0004
Immediate Family	70.9	85.3	86.0	.013
Kin	12.7	27.3	24.4	.039
Nonfamily	43.0	37.3	40.7	NS
Past	64.6	85.3	86.0	.0003
Present–Future	100.0	97.3	96.5	NS

Numbers represent the percentage of respondents mentioning at least one meaning in the different classes of meaning.

bolized by concrete things, that is, how things themselves are part of the interpretive sign process that constitutes meaning. Accordingly, the purpose of cultivation is not to achieve increasing levels of abstraction but, rather, the goal is what Peirce (1931–5) referred to as "concrete reasonableness" – the embodiment, actualization, and growth of the patterns of emotion and thoughts that comprise the self.

If one turns from the types of objects cherished by the different generations to the kinds of meanings that the objects evoke, the disparity between the age groups is again highlighted. Table 4.2 shows the relevant figures. The largest differences, as one would expect, are in terms of the great increase in Memories from childhood to adulthood and the steady decrease of Self-related meanings.

In addition, references to Immediate Family and Kin also increase with adulthood. Associations, Personal Values, and Nonfamily personal ties do not change from one age group to the other; nor does the class of meanings we have coded as Experiences. But the subcategory of Ongoing Occasions is mentioned much more often by children ($p < .004$), and so is Enjoyment ($p <$

.02). The same holds for objects providing a sense of Release, which is described at least once by 38 percent of the children, compared with 23 percent of parents and only 9 percent of grandparents ($p < .001$). These patterns again suggest that the meaning of a cherished object tends to shift by adulthood from what one can do with it currently to what one has done with it in the past and that instead of providing information primarily about the personal self, it now speaks more about other people.

It is interesting to note that although references to the present or the future do not decline substantially with age, meanings referring to the past increase significantly from adolescence to adulthood. Besides having a past, maturity means cultivating that past, integrating former experiences – previous ways of being – into the ongoing psychic activity. For an adult, objects serve the purpose of maintaining the continuity of the self as it expands through time.

The outline that emerges from these findings is not surprising on the whole, but it allows us to see with greater clarity and detail how the self develops and is maintained across the life span. The importance of objects of action in the early years is a reminder of the powerful need children have to internalize actions and to define the limits of their selves through direct kinetic control. The internalization of the other and the experiences of our own inadequacy are extremely important for the cultivation of the self and are often painful. But intentional action producing enjoyment is also central to the evolution of the self. Enjoyment is a key factor because it serves as proof that the action is a genuine expression of the self. Therefore play, toys, and tools used in games have a central importance in the development of children.

This need for immediate, physical feedback that produces enjoyment is the main factor behind the object preferences of youth, who need it to build concrete evidence for the existence of an autonomous self. As one grows older the evidence becomes irrefutable and the doubts about one's existence, about the shape of one's self, tend to become less urgent. At this point, however, a new set of problems seems to arise whenever one attends to one's self. The issue is no longer: Who am I? What can I do? Rather: Where do I fit in? How am I related? This transition from concerns about current enjoyable experiences to enduring family ties

is what the generational differences in Table 4.2 seem to reflect.

Perhaps most adults sooner or later realize that there are ways of cultivating the self other than by acting in terms of one's own intentions. It is possible to identify with a set of intentions broader than one's own, and any cultivation of these broader goals will also include the self. In other words, when parents identify with their children, they will be affected by whatever happens to the children as if it were happening directly to them. Thus, when a person identifies with his or her family, ancestors, race or culture, then all the known actions and experiences of these groups can provide feedback to the self, and the individual's self grows by making these experiences personal. Sooner or later the fragility and the limitations of a self built on individualistic intentions become painfully obvious. When this occurs, people tend to broaden the definition of the self by sharing – sometimes in actuality, sometimes vicariously – the intentions of other people, institutions, or broader purposes like those contained in a religion.

This conclusion is certainly not new. Many theorists of the life cycle have said roughly the same. The three adult "stages" envisioned by Erikson – "intimacy vs. isolation," "generativity vs. stagnation," and "ego identity vs. despair" – refer to this process of shifting the center of the self from one's own actions to one's position in a network of enduring relationships (Erikson, 1950). Contrary to most speculations on this subject, however, the evidence gleaned from examining people's relationships with objects quite strongly confirms the fact that such a shift is not only intuitively true but is also empirically demonstrable.

A very immediate implication of such a developmental change concerns the physical environment of older people. For example, the possibility that older persons may see their furniture as extensions of themselves or as a personal record of their memories and experiences is often ignored. Advice issued from government agencies stresses the importance of simple, hygienic, uncluttered rooms with the bare minimum of objects and furniture; and the managements of many residences for the aged appear to have implemented this suggestion. For example, gerontologists give the following advice for older people about to be relocated:

FURNISHINGS AND THE USE OF SPACE – Setup and placing of furniture appeared unfavorable in the majority of apartments. Many flats were crowded

with old and bulky furniture . . . Counseling on setup and furnishing is desirable before the aged move into their new apartments. (Rosenmayr and Köckeis, 1966, p.42)

From this viewpoint furniture is seen only in terms of its physical function, not as a culturally defined "frame" (Goffman, 1974) for structuring the experiential living space, thereby missing its importance as a means of establishing a sense of personal continuity and meaning in an otherwise impersonal environment. Yet if, as we have argued, the self of mature adults tends to be structured around networks of past and present relationships, which are often embodied in concrete objects, then depriving an older person of such objects might involve the destruction of his or her self. A recent study with institutionalized older persons seems to bear out our argument (Sherman and Newman, 1977–8).

The importance of objects for the normal development of young children has been recognized in the past two decades. From this an active effort to enrich the infant's environment has followed; cribs now fairly bristle with kinetic toys. A similar awareness might be in order to preserve the richness of stimulation for the elderly; at the very least, objects that signify the expanded boundary of their selves should be preserved.

This does not mean, of course, that all older persons should be encouraged to live surrounded by bric-a-brac and ancient furniture. In this respect the needs of the elderly are as diverse as those of younger people. Some older respondents stated quite convincingly that none of the objects they owned meant an awful lot to them or that only some photos were irreplaceable. But for others certain things – a bed, a refrigerator, a set of china – were vivid ties with a way of being that could not be changed without serious consequences. It is not just the objects themselves but also the meanings that sustain one's life that are at issue. If these are made concrete in objects, as they often are, then one should have sensitivity and respect for the material signs that carry such an essential burden.

Two women, living on different floors of the same high-rise dwelling, illustrate drastically different patterns of transaction with objects. Both were widows living alone, past their eightieth birthday. Their health and income were about the same. The two apartments were identical, and the complement of objects and furniture in their homes was also quite similar. When asked which

objects were special, the first woman could not think of any answers. The things she owned were useful and nice, she said, but there was nothing more to tell about them. Finally, she remembered something that was special: a custom-made shower attachment in the bathroom, a gift from her daughter. The reason it was special was that the spray gave her a massage that relaxed her. When asked the same question the second woman had difficulty in knowing where to begin: She had dozens of objects that she was eager to discuss. Her daughter's handiwork was preserved in a wallhanging and plants; her grandchildren's photos and drawings were throughout the place, and the cupboards contained china and silver whose dates and provenance were carefully remembered. The bathroom cabinet still held her husband's shaving kit, 25 years after his death – a relic she attended to each day. In fact, the bathroom alone contained three special objects: besides the shaving kit there was an old rug cherished as an heirloom and a plant that had grown from one of her daughter's cuttings.

Our argument would be so much more convincing if we could say that these different patterns of interactions are related to other measurable differences in the way these two women have adapted to their lives; if, for instance, we could say that the first was barely able to cope with old age, was alienated and unhappy, whereas the second led a serene and happy existence. But both women seemed to be fairly contented, equally active and involved, and well adapted to their environment. It is doubtful that any psychological test would have shown great signs of stress or maladjustment in the former and not in the latter.

Thus the significance of the different patterns of object relations shown by these two women can be evaluated in one of two ways: either one dismisses the importance of the difference because it seems to have no overt behavioral correlates (i.e., the two women are in other respects similar) or one takes the difference seriously, as a datum that is significant in itself even without any observable side effects. Suppose we take the second course; then what do we learn if we ask: What *is* the significance of the difference between the two women?

The first one lives in a world to which she is well adjusted; she can draw sustenance and comfort from it. The objects she owns keep her warm, well fed, and relaxed. The intentions in which she invests psychic energy tend to be fulfilled, as far as such things can

be, and so her sense of self is sturdy and resilient. Compared to the second woman, however, a whole dimension of experience seems to be so atrophied that it is missing – that of the experience of being part of goals larger than herself. There is nothing mystical, or metaphorical, about such an experience. The personal self emerges out of feedback to intentional actions; similarly, the self that includes a larger whole emerges out of feedback to actions motivated by the goals of a collectivity. For instance, if I invest psychic energy in the intention to make my company prosper (as opposed to simply making more money for myself), then any vicissitude of the company, even if it does not affect my salary, will have a direct effect on my self. We can discuss this investment of psychic energy as a transaction between my personal self and the larger "self" of the corporation. For if a self is an *ordered pattern* of psychic activity and not just the physical material of the body per se, then surely a corporation, like any other social system that has a continuous existence irrespective of that of its particular members, has a kind of "self" or "personality." The second woman in this case differs from the first in that her home environment reflects an expanded boundary of the self, one that includes a number of past and present relationships. The meanings of the objects she is surrounded by are signs of her ties to this larger system of which she is a part. She is actively attached to this family system through the psychic energy allocated to the objects; whenever she attends to them, her relationships are activated in consciousness. The belongings she cherishes reflect the goal of her family, both living and dead, which motivates her daily existence.

This exegesis suggests that the two women lead significantly different lives, despite the lack of other obvious behavioral or psychological differences. Perhaps some day it will be possible to obtain independent evidence that will confirm this argument. At this point all one can say is that the inner life of two such people must be drastically different. The first seems to make her way through life alone, ordering experience in terms of her own personal goals, translating information in terms of these "self-ish" needs. The second has related her self to other persons by bonds of interaction; the intentions that direct her needs are shared with others and the information she attends to is decoded in terms of goals that transcend her own private ones. Which kind of inner life is "better"? Which is more "adjusted"? Perhaps these ques-

tions are premature, or ultimately inappropriate. The point is to realize that one can give meaning to life in quite different ways; the choice one makes might be no more – or less – than its own reward.

Gender-related differences in the significance of objects

In our description of how the self develops through interaction with objects, we have maintained that a person *chooses* which objects to cultivate and therefore the kind of self that will emerge out of the interaction. This should now be qualified. It is only to the extent that a person *possesses* his or her own self and is not possessed by the external forms of mind, such as a consumer culture or alienated labor, that free choice is possible. Therefore the reflecting self should experience itself as acting relatively autonomously. On the other hand, it is also true that the world of objects and meanings a person confronts is "always already" (to use the idiom dear to existential philosophers) constituted in his or her environment. What objects are available, how one should react to them and why, are issues already decided in advance by the social milieu into which one is born. Thus most people much of the time act out relationships already "scripted" by the culture, thus developing selves that fit the cultural mold. By adopting the intentions pervading his or her culture, a person does not feel determined or coerced; usually he or she goes about building the self unquestioningly, doing "what comes naturally." Thus, by a process whose beautiful inevitability recalls that of a cell duplicating and differentiating itself into a complex organism, the self through its own seemingly autonomous choices replicates the order of its culture and so becomes a part of that order and a means for its further replication.

Cultural scripts, however, never ascribe the same roles to each member of society. Every category of people is limited in what it can do, and therefore can be; but some are more limited than others. One of the most universal differences between roles is the one ascribed to gender. Sex role differences are often explained in terms of two contrary viewpoints: the *functional* and the *conflict* perspective. The first assumes that structural differences in a social system are adaptive for the whole as well as for its parts, thus

the different expectations shaping men and women in a given society is the result of a mutually beneficial division of tasks and responsibilities. The second starts from the premise that inequalities always benefit some person or class of persons at the expense of others; therefore gender differences are the result of males having imposed their own interests on females and trying to preserve their advantage.

As is usual with the extreme positions of a dialectic, both have merit, but their synthesis involves a painstakingly complex weighing of factors. The relevance of the argument in this context is that, as one might expect, men and women in our sample display different patterns of relationships with objects (see Table 4.3).

Males mention significantly more TV, stereo sets, sports equipment, vehicles, and trophies. Females more often mention photographs, sculpture, plants, plates, glass, and textiles – all with a frequency that is significant at least at the .005 level of probability. This means that males cherish objects of action more frequently (44 percent vs. 30 percent for females; $p < .001$), whereas women prefer objects of contemplation (45 percent vs. 29 percent for men; $p < .0001$). The female pattern is closer to that of the grandparents, whereas the male, resembles that of the children. A similar trend obtains for the meanings that the objects evoke. Women give reasons referring to Memories, Associations, and Immediate Family significantly more often than men do.

These differences reflect, at the level of symbolic household objects, the distinction sociologists have made between *instrumental* male roles and *expressive* female roles. What they further indicate is that these distinctions not only involve the behavior society expects from sex roles but also permeate the most intimate symbolic environment people create to give meaning to their lives. Men not only act in accordance to masculine stereotypes; they also respond to things around them in terms of appropriate masculine scripts when they supposedly choose freely for themselves. In other words, the selves of men and women represent different sets of intentions or habits of consciousness: They pay attention to different things in the same environment and even value the same things for quite different reasons.

The distinction between objects of action and of contemplation,

Table 4.3. *Most frequently named objects mentioned by each sex*

Males (N = 141)	Percentage	Females (N = 174)	Percentage
1. Furniture	32.6a	1. Furniture	38.5
2. TV	29.1	2. Photographs	30.5
3. Stereos	28.4	3. Visual art	27.0
4. Visual art	24.1	4. Sculpture	25.9
5. Musical instruments	20.6	5. Books	24.1
6. Books	19.9	6. Plants	23.0
7. Sports equipment	17.7	7. Musical instruments	22.4
8. Collectibles	14.9	8. Plates	20.1
9. Photographs	14.2	9. Appliances	16.7
10. Beds	12.1	10. Stereos	16.1
11. Pets	11.3	11. Beds	14.9
12. Sculpture	10.6	12. TV	14.4
13. Vehicles	9.9	13. Glass	12.8
14. Appliances	9.9	14. Textiles	12.6
15. Trophies	8.5	15. Collectibles	12.1

aPercentage of respondents mentioning at least one object in each category.

which shows such a difference between the sexes, barely begins to tell the story. The meanings given by men are usually very different from those given by women, even when they refer to the same object. For instance, plants were coded as "objects of action," because in fact their meaning arises out of the physical care devoted to them. They are the most numerous objects of action mentioned by women. Yet the "action" plants represent is hardly the same action that males usually talk about. We have seen in the last chapter how plants refer mainly to the slow, growth-producing nurturance and life-giving concern that has been the classic symbol of womanhood.

For men, action usually means exertion toward a goal of physical and mental supremacy. The active pursuits of women are often motivated by intentions that are broader than the self defined by its physical limits, whereas those of men tend toward the expression of individual intentionality. For men, objects often point outside the home, but the connection is rarely that of a part to a whole, as with women and the elderly. Instead, the object connects different aspects of the person's self: the family man with

the professional man and the man of leisure. Here is a father describing why the fireplace in his home is special:

For a lot of psychological reasons that I've never much thought of but it's just I enjoy a fire just like I enjoy being next to a lake or a river or an ocean. To the extent that a fire is warming and comforting and we do a lot of camping outside, mountain climbing, hiking, and a fire is a comforting phenomenon in those circumstances so inside the house it's also this way. It's comforting and attractive and a physically beautiful thing as well.

This quotation illustrates an interesting symbolic inversion. Although the fireplace is traditionally a symbol of the home, this man uses it for exactly the opposite reason: to represent the great outdoors inside. The home and the arena of wilderness action are related by the comforting warmth of the fire, a sign common to both. The same man comments on the significance of climbing equipment in his three sons' bedroom:

I love climbing and therefore I am an appreciator of the equipment . . . To be completely without it would be like cutting off an arm. I am just attuned to climbing in the outdoors and to the shape that you have to be in to do it and the whole thing and it's very important.

For this man the equipment represents, among other things, "the shape that you have to be in" – in other words, one of the physical shapes of the self he had developed through the action system of climbing.

Here is another, a policeman, for whom the most special objects were a brace of handguns kept in the bedroom. In this case we have one of those by now rare instances when a man owns the tools of his trade:

Well, they are my working tools, they save my life, you know, at least give me the feeling that they will. I like to take real good care of them, keep them up, keep them oiled, and so on. They are my living to an extent . . . (Without them) that would mean that I wouldn't be able to work . . . They would be a matter of survival and guns to a policeman are like a horse to a jockey, you got to get used to them, work them a lot, know what they are capable of, know their strength and weaknesses, how it does what it does, every gun is different. A gun is not just something that makes a loud noise. The policeman who knows his job, he knows his gun too, so with a new gun it takes a lot of breaking in. So I would sure hate to have to break in a bunch of new guns . . . It would be a lot of trouble if I didn't have my guns, the ones I know.

This is an almost lyrical illustration of how closely the identity of a person can become enmeshed with his instruments of production. Here the symbolic elements are almost absent at the overt

level, but the whole sequence is a symphony of symbolic references to the man's survival, his skills, his responsibilities – in fact, to his *self* as a worker. (Parenthetically, there were not many other visible dimensions to the self of this man, judging by the rest of the interview. The only other objects he mentioned were a stereo because it allowed him to get relaxed after a rough day's work and a topaz ring that his family bought him, because "it's got a lot of sentimental value in addition to being a piece of topaz.")

Other tools, even when not actually tools of the trade, are often central to a man's identity as *homo faber*. Here is a tool-and-die maker whose main hobby is to build and fly model airplanes. He feels most at home in the basement where his tools are and where he says he has the "most control over the environment." These tools allow him to express what is most uniquely individual about his self. The lathe, for example, enables him to build and modify planes that he flies in competitions:

I got it to learn about my business. But then I found out I enjoyed it, because you can fashion things within a thousandth of an inch. It's a very fine instrument . . . It also ties in nicely with the model airplane hobby – there are certain things I can make or fashion. It's doing something with my hands which I enjoy . . . (Without it) . . . It's certainly not one of those things that's necessary for survival. But I'm sure it's important to me. I had a dream that the house was on fire. And I don't know if my wife and kids got out, but I was down in the basement, frantically trying to dismember the lathe, and get it out, piece by piece. It's a very special tool . . . I feel very fortunate to have it.

For this man the lathe is not "necessary for survival," as the guns were for the policeman. Yet in another sense it is a necessary tool to fashion a particular identity. The information the lathe provides, with its infinitesimal tolerance for error, is crucial for building the owner's self – so crucial, in fact, that in his dream this symbol and instrument of the self takes precedence over wife and children.

Another man mentions a power saw, which he jokingly claimed to have bought for his wife for Mother's Day:

I never had power tools except for a drill, and as I said, I like building things . . . We really bought the saw to build the solar panels on the roof, so it's really a promise to ourselves that, when we get some money, we'll build it.

The same man also discussed a calculator:

I was doing a lot of statistical work for my degree at Northwestern. I like math,

especially statistics. Also, I spend hours designing my solar collector . . . I like to play around.

Play, pleasure, and enjoyment derived from the challenges of professional roles are represented by many of the adult men's cherished objects, giving their responses a more diversified, more spacious, more adventurous tone than those received from women. The latter's concerns, as we have seen, are more narrowly focused on the crucial human ties that give life its continuity: on parents and children, on those family occasions that restructure the network of relationships, like marriages, births, graduations, portentous events in the history of the tribe.

However, here we need to keep two levels of analysis separate. On the one hand, males *as a group* show a much more diversified sphere of action than females as a whole do. On the other hand, each *individual* male, although perhaps showing a specialized involvement with a particular set of objects, does not necessarily have a more diversified field of interaction than his sister or wife. In fact, at the individual level the relationship might well be reversed. When considering the complexity of most women's social networks, as well as the other interactions in which she is involved, the average individual woman might have a more varied self than her companion has.

As already noted, the complexity of self-definitions that the male role allows in American culture is often at the expense of a fragile individualism. The effigy of isolation is stamped on the other side of the coin of uniqueness. For this reason these men often seem inordinately dependent on outside recognition of their accomplishments: Having invested most of their energy in achieving autonomous goals, they need other people's recognition to ensure them of the validity of those goals – for instance, the relative importance of trophies for males. A man whose special possessions include six photos of himself receiving a cup and other symbols of accomplishment from officers of the company he has been working for says, "These are my titles, my honors. They are for other people – so you'll know I was somebody. For *you*, not me. They show I'm important."

Sometimes the self represented by signs for men resembles the prankster of primitive mythology, the unsocialized child of libido straining to get out of playing the role provided by the culture. Perhaps because of greater demands for constricting specializa-

tion, or because of weaker ties to the societal network, men much more often assert this side of their selves.

Here is the same man we just quoted, explaining why a marlin mounted over the fireplace was special:

My wife caught it in the Barbados; it was a crazy trip we had, filled with love and fun. If one of the children broke it, it's death. It would be gone. We want it to last, because of its bittersweet memories. I managed to get fractured on that trip. I like to gamble, fish, play golf. I was deeply into alcoholism at that time. Had a brawl in a bar in the Barbados and fractured my shoulder. Took no pills for the pain because they would have interfered with the drinking.

Bittersweet indeed – the quote starts on an idyllic tone of fond conjugal memories, but it soon disintegrates into pure Hemingway *macho*. In the protocols of many men this tone crops up quite unexpectedly. The patterns of meaning men carve out of the home environment is unlike that of women because they often value different experiences and learn to choose different types of belongings to objectify these experiences. Tangible evidence of prowess, such as sports equipment or trophies – or perhaps even vehicles – are cultivated by men as a cherished feature of the "paraphernalia of life" (Veblen, 1953, p.30). But the paraphernalia that women value is more likely to give testimony to domesticity itself. The feelings and thoughts one has in taking care of plants, for example, are bound to be different from those involved in the use of sports equipment. Likewise, the craft involved in making textiles and weavings (some of which were made by the respondent herself), is distinct from the crafts of athletics usually employed in the achievements of trophies.

The gender-related differences we have reviewed here can be explained in other ways than by recourse to different cultural scripts for men and women. Sociobiologists would point out that the propensity to wander afar, to take chances, to be restless, to be concerned with competition and production characterizes males in most cultures and in most animal species. By contrast, female animals tend to stay put, to be concerned with reproduction and relationships. This specialization of behavior across sexually dimorphous species strongly suggests an adaptive strategy to natural and social selection pressures operating in the environment.

It is true that, by and large, the selves of men and women are built along the lines of ancient themes, which may have at one time reflected a differentiation of roles that was convenient for

adaptation. In a hunting economy, where procreation and child care tended to confine women to the hearth while propelling men in search of game, it made sense for men and women to cultivate different goals emphasizing the actions and experiences that made up their being. Now that the existence of men and women is no longer limited by the same conditions, it is remarkable how influential sex-stereotyped goals still remain. Even more striking are the dazzling variations that people play on these ancient themes and the genuinely new directions that their goals may take. As Clifford Geertz has justly noted, what is universal in humans does not give us a cue to humanity. It is the cultural peculiarities and individual idiosyncrasies that define what men and women are (Geertz, 1973). The gross gender-related differences we share with primates and other living organisms are part of who we are, like the chemicals we share with the inorganic world are part of our bodies. This inheritance still influences our actions and even our consciousness. But what is most interesting about people are the unexpected forms in which the raw material of this inheritance is shaped.

The two dialectics

The relationship between people and objects reveals two major dimensions of organization: one that runs from action to contemplation; the other, from self to others. The first pole of these pairs typifies young people's relations with objects, the second pole is characteristic of older respondents. Meaning for the young seems to arise from active involvement with objects that define the boundaries of the self; for adults, it tends to follow from a more passive involvement with things that expand the boundaries of the self to include relationships with other people. Similarly, males emphasize action and self in contrast to women who value contemplation and relationships with others.

In addition, Memories seem to perform a self-maintenance function for older respondents. When a woman attends to a chair in which she has nursed her children long ago, or when a man looks at a trombone he played in college, the past experiences that used to define the selves of these people are again activated and recreated in the present. Thus memories serve to integrate the various patterns around which the self is organized at different

points in time. One would expect that, other things being equal, the longer a person lives, the more important this becomes to ensure the integrity of the self.

But our data reveal that these two main dimensions of meaning, one based on the self–other polarity, the other on action–contemplation, are not simply characteristics of different stages of the life cycle. What we find is that *within* each generation some people cultivate objects in terms of memories, others in terms of experiences; some emphasize references to self, others to the family. Although it is true that differentiation (or concern with personal self) as well as an action orientation are much stronger among youth, and integration as well as a contemplative attitude are characteristic of older respondents, it is also true that the two dimensions vary among younger as well as among older people.

To illustrate this trend, one might refer to the pattern of correlations between the proportion of Memory and Experience reasons given by individual respondents for why they considered objects special, within the three generational groups. These correlation coefficients were −.58, −.66, and −.66 for the three generations ($p < .001$ in each case). Again, this suggests that differentiation and integration are more or less exclusive strategies of individual adaptation: One either stresses meanings relevant to the self, or to one's kin, but usually not both.

The cross-correlation of the two dimensions also results in predictable patterns: Stress on the Self goes with absence of Memories (−.57, −.55, −.58), whereas stress on the Family tends to exclude references to Experiences (−.33, −.34, −.47). Apparently, the axes of differentiation versus integration and activity versus contemplation act as organizing principles for the meaning structures people build for themselves. Although differentiation and activity are typical of youth, there are young people who find meaning in integration and contemplation; the reverse being true for adults.

The ideal balance in the development of the self would involve an equal progress in the processes of differentiation and integration. But the data suggest that instead of being in a dialectic relationship, the two processes might be in practice dichotomous: People either cultivate their selves by developing signs of individuality or by stressing signs of relatedness.

This dichotomy in the meanings conveyed by objects is clearly

illustrated in Table 4.4, which reports the frequency with which different objects carried significations relevant to the Self and Others and to Memories and Experiences.

Table 4.4 shows how specialized the major object categories are in providing information about meanings that bear on the differentiation – integration dimensions. Television and stereo sets, plants, books, beds, and musical instruments are primarily signs of differentiation; that is, they refer to the individual self. On the other hand, photos, visual art, sculpture, and furniture are primarily signs of integration because they provide meanings that stress the relationships with other people. The table also shows that the same objects that serve to carry meanings about the Self also refer to Experiences, whereas the objects that specialize in integration refer to Memories.

Shared meanings within the family

To what extent are the meanings derived from transactions with objects shared by members of families? Answering this question is difficult because of various factors. First, families vary a great deal in terms of how similarly they relate to their domestic environment. In some families, despite generational differences, every member mentions the same categories of objects and the same classes of meanings. Other families seem to live in homes that contain very different symbolic dimensions; in these, each member relates to an exclusive set of objects for reasons that are not shared with the other members. This diversity suggests that families could be studied in terms of their internal symbolic differentiation and integration, a task with exciting possibilities but beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

The second factor is the sheer number of relationships involved. For each object or meaning category there are 15 relationships one could look at: that between male children and their fathers, their mothers, their grandfathers, and so on. Instead of burdening the reader with a multitude of correlation matrices, we shall show only the pattern relating to the action–contemplation dimension.

Table 4.5 answers two questions: Do people in the same nuclear family find the same objects special when they are classified ac-

Table 4.4. *Percentage of various objects having meanings referring to Self, Others, Experiences, and Memories*

No.[a] Self	%	Other People	%	Experiences	%	Memories	%
1. Television	34	Photos	33	Television	32	Photos	27
2. Stereos	32	Visual art	29	Stereos	28	Sculpture	18
3. Beds	25	Furniture	22	Beds	22	Visual art	16
4. Musical instr.	24	Sculpture	22	Musical instr.	22	Furniture	16
5. Books	23	Musical instr.	20	Plants	21	Collectibles	14
6. Plants	23	Beds	18	Books	19	Books	11
7. Collectibles	18	Collectibles	16	Collectibles	14	Musical instr.	10
8. Furniture	17	Stereos	13	Furniture	11	Beds	8
9. Sculpture	12	Television	13	Photos	9	Stereos	8
10. Visual art	10	Books	13	Sculpture	9	Plants	4
11. Photos	7	Plants	11	Visual art	9	Television	0

[a] In numerical order of significance.

Table 4.5. *Relationship between family members' percentage of responses falling in special object and meaning classes, using the action-contemplation distinction*

	Pairs correlated				
	Fathers & mothers (N = 72)	Boys & fathers (N = 43)	Girls & fathers (N = 24)	Boys & mothers (N = 51)	Girls & mothers (N = 33)
Types of objects mentioned as special					
Action	.31[b]	.18	.26	.11	.47[b]
Contemplation	.23[a]	−.02	.27	.10	.27[a]
Type of meanings					
Experience	.03	.20	.14	.04	.26
Memories	.12	.39[b]	.53[b]	.25	.43[b]

[a] $p < .05$
[b] $p < .01$

cording to the action–contemplation distinction? And, if one member of the family emphasizes either Experiences or Memories, is it likely that the other members will also do so?

What the results suggest is as follows. Parents tend to share an

interest in the same types of objects but not necessarily for the same reasons. If a husband mentions more action objects, chances are his wife will also do so. But if the husband stresses the meaning of experiences, this will not give us a cue as to what meaning the wife will stress. It is as if marriage socializes the spouses to share an interest in the same objects; but at the deeper level, there is no agreement about what the objects mean.

The table also quite strongly suggests that mothers pass on their meaning system to their daughters but not to their sons. Perhaps this pattern reflects the greater stability of the self women typically develop in our culture. We had seen before that as a group women tended to have a narrower focus of interest centered around traditional nurturant and interpersonal roles. Males, although individually often narrower in the scope of their interest than females, as a group showed a greater variety of specialized interests. These differences were interpreted as gender-specific paths in the development of the self. Here we see that women pattern their interaction with objects, and the meanings derived from them, on their mothers – a process that is congruent with the more conservative role that females have traditionally assumed in our culture.

Fathers and sons do not share interest in similar kinds of objects like mothers and daughters do, but fathers appear to socialize their children rather effectively in terms of integrative meanings. If a father prizes memories, both his sons and daughters are likely to do so. Table 4.5 also confirms the differentiating nature of experiences and the integrating aspect of memories. Although the Experiences class shows no significant relationship between any of the pairs within the nuclear family, the Memories class shows some substantial correlations. In other words, when meaning results from what one does, it tends to be personal; when it results from something that happened in the past, it tends to be shared.

Of course, the preceding patterns are just the ones that show through the sample as a whole. As mentioned earlier, families differ greatly in terms of what objects or meanings are shared. In some families there is a strong similarity between fathers and sons, in others, between sons and mothers; sometimes the whole family shares the same objects and meanings, sometimes no one in the family does. What does cut through these differences is the particularly strong relationship between the meaning system of

mothers and daughters, the agreement between spouses on special objects but not on meanings, and the fathers' impact on their children as far as the salience of memories are concerned.

These explorations of how people interact with objects help to illuminate the process by which we become human. In the first years of life the most relevant information attesting the existence of the self consists in kinetic feedback. A child proves his or her existence as an autonomous entity by forming intentions about actions that have a clear effect on the environment: by moving things, throwing things, and breaking things; by running, jumping, and catching. These gross actions provide the clearest evidence that there is an agent capable of having an effect. The more improbable the action, the more it goes against the laws of random chance, the more it defies entropy, the clearer the message that there is a self here that does make a difference. When a girl hopping on one foot throws a ball against the wall, claps her hands twice, and then catches the ball on the rebound, she demonstrates through this strange ritual how much she is in control of randomness. Defying gravity and other inertial laws, she can make things move in highly improbable trajectories, thereby forcing one to conclude that there is a goal-directed force in action. That force is the self.

Hence we have in early life the importance of things that are capable of expressing action. Toys, sports equipment, and vehicles are obvious tools of self-development for children. But even furniture is used by children in an active, kinetic mode: A good chair is one that can be moved, turned over, climbed on; a good bed is one that can be bounced or jumped on. Even silverware, as we have seen earlier, lends itself to active expression and hence validation of the self.

By late adolescence, kinetic information generally becomes redundant – that is, the growing person already knows that he or she can control the body and its environment in predictable ways. Of course, athletics, dance or acting provide further opportunities to expand the boundaries of the self through action. But for the majority of young people a new set of challenges becomes preeminent: the control of impulses and emotions. Just as in earlier years mastery over motion proved the existence of a relatively autonomous self, for the teenager mastery over the inner states of

the information-processing system itself is the paramount task of cultivation. A self that is carried away by feelings of loneliness, anxiety, or stress is not autonomous, it cannot control its own activity because it is determined by outside influences. One must become "captain of one's soul" – this is often accomplished by becoming "cool," which is the easiest way of showing one's self-control or independence of outside forces.

Adolescents find interaction with stereos, television, and musical instruments important. These tools allow teenagers to modulate their emotions – to become happy when they feel sad, to relax when they are worried. Music and television provide already structured emotional states, from comedy to romance, from violence to soothing sameness. Just as the early kinetic objects help children to define their selves through physical action, these later objects help adolescents to solidify their selves through control of their psychic processes. The amount of emotional or intellectual growth derived from interaction with these objects will depend to a great degree on what purposes can be imparted by the object and cultivated by the adolescent.

Later in life, cultivation of the self follows more and more specialized blueprints. This is especially true for men in this sample, whose identity depends to a great extent on the mastery of narrow occupational skills defined by cultural custom and social needs. An adult man grows to be a person by using the tools of his trade, giving him more individuality. More and more, however, discretionary activities in the leisure sphere also help to define the sort of person a man is. Things that one uses in work or leisure continue to provide messages about the identity of the actor.

Adult women seem to derive their sense of self less from specialized roles and more from a generalized, traditional set of actions. Caring for people and preserving and nurturing relationships are still the tasks that are most valued by the women we studied. Therefore they prefer to interact with objects that act as tools for carrying out such activities. The things they cherish are signs of ties that bind the family together – shared experiences. The self of women is built less around skills that attest to mastery over physical patterns of energy and more around skills that order the psychic activity of others. The question here, of course, is: Do these stereotypes allow the person to realize his or her potentials. What is interesting is that many mothers in this sample also

them were more often those signifying the traditional role of mother. This suggests that there may be multiple ways to define the self. Or it may suggest that, despite the influences of women's liberation, which has made changes in the public sphere, there is still a rigid separation of roles within the home.

What is more important, however, is that by adulthood an entirely different pattern of self-definition becomes possible. As we have seen, the self begins to emerge from cultivation of kinetic interactions. Through mastery over its environment, the developing self differentiates itself as a unique, seemingly autonomous agent. But by adulthood a new process for establishing the self is increasingly used. This consists of *integration,* which is the result of investing psychic energy in goals that are the result of other people's intentions. One still preserves one's own intentionality, but now it is increasingly directed toward others. Differentiation is the result of control, whereas integration is based on participation. Both are ways of expanding the effectiveness of the self, but the first does it by imposing on information an order established internally, whereas the second uses psychic energy to relate the self to patterns of order external to itself.

Why this transition? It is almost certain that differentiation is a necessary first step in the evolution of the self. But it also seems true that sooner or later most people feel that the individualized entity they have become is not a viable state in the long run. When all of one's energy is invested in personal goals, then by definition one is in potential conflict with the goals of everyone else. Perhaps more to the point, given the fact that our physical system will eventually disintegrate, if all our psychic energy is tied to individual goals, the order achieved by these goals will also dissolve. The differentiated self is vulnerable and impermanent – a transient pattern of order in the flux of chaos.

Therefore cultivating broader goals, more permanent forms of order, is more attractive. By paying attention to the intentions of others, to the goals of larger systems, one "buys into" a self that transcends the fragile differentiated individual. Thus as one grows older, the signs of integration tend to become more highly valued and consequently attract more attention: Objects that stand for memories, relationships, family, and values become more prominent. In later life, possessions that represent belonging occupy center stage.

Although these phases in the interaction people have with ob- ·   ·

jects more or less accurately reflect life cycle changes, the data also suggest considerable individual variation. We have seen that even in childhood some persons experiment with selves based on integration and that there are some older people who seem to have no psychic energy invested in systems that transcend personal goals. In fact, differentiation and integration appear to be, to a certain extent, mutually exclusive strategies for organizing the self. The family milieu helps to establish which of these principles will be used; as we have seen, a concern for contemplation as an alternative to action is shared by parents and their children.

Our data also suggest that the transpersonal goals into which people invest attention tend to be rather "primitive" in the sense that they include close kin, ancestors, and descendants in preference to some larger, more universal body. The strongest ties that the self establishes are still to relatives, not to abstract principles, institutions, or groups. This is true especially of women and older people of both sexes; even middle-aged men show little evidence of integration with systems beyond the ascriptive kin network.

It is possible that this has always been so and that we have overestimated the importance that religious, political, or cultural goals have played in the lives of people in the past. Or perhaps we are witnessing a return to a concern with goals shared with people close to oneself, a turning away from participation with larger systems. Perhaps in our society we have become disillusioned with the possibility of merging personal goals with those of a broader community; perhaps we have learned that religion and politics are fragile and impermanent and no new order has emerged to take their place; thus we have turned back to goals closer to home.

CHAPTER 5

The home as symbolic environment

Few English words are filled with the emotional meaning of the word "home." It brings to mind one's childhood, the roots of one's being, the security of a private enclave where one can be free and in control of one's life. The idea of home seems to express such basic and universal human needs that it comes as a surprise to realize that many other European languages have no words with the same connotations. In Italian, for instance, *casa* is the nearest equivalent, yet it is much closer in meaning to "house" than to "home." The same is even truer of the French *maison*, and by the time one gets to the Hungarian *ház*, the references are almost exclusively to the physical structure rather than to the emotional space. Of course, lexicality is not a sure indication of the psychological significance of a concept. Yet the availability of a word with shared meaning makes it easier to experience that meaning in everyday life. In all langauges there are circumlocutions that convey the psychological meaning of "home," but these are often somehow awkward and not commonly used. The Italian *"focolare,"* literally "hearth," or "fireplace," is the closest poetic metonym, but it is practically never used in speech. The Hungarian *otthon,* meaning loosely "place of origin," is more commonly used in the same sense as the French *chez nous,* but neither one has the concreteness and the wide-ranging content of "home."

It would be tempting to attribute the preeminence of this concept to the Old Norse and Teutonic origins of the word, which originally connoted both a safe place and the whole world. Perhaps people of northern cultures, hemmed in by long winters, developed a stronger attachment to their shelters. But, of course, such an explanation is not tenable: The Eskimos, the Indians of the North American forests, the nomads of the steppes of Central

Asia had no permanent homes. On the other hand, among the Romans, *domus* had many of the connotations of "home," and in southern France, in the Middle Ages, one finds the concept as strong as it can ever be:

This basic cell was none other than the peasant family, embodied in the permanence of a house . . . In local language this entity was called an *ostal* . . . in Latin . . . *hospicium*, or, more often, a *domus*. It should be noted that the words, *ostal, domus* and *hospicium* all and inextricably mean both family and house. The term *familia* . . . never crosses the lips of the inhabitants . . . for whom the family of flesh and blood and the house of wood, stone or daub were one and the same thing. (LeRoy Ladurie, 1979, p. 24)

One might conclude, therefore, that this apparently universal human concept is in fact one of those cultural variables that is more or less freely invented at certain places at certain times and abandoned elsewhere. This conclusion seems to contradict the implications of modern ethology. Recent writers have popularized the notion that territoriality is one of the most basic needs among animals including man (Ardrey, 1966). But animals display just as much variability in their concern for territory as humans do. Although solitary wasps have private nests and permanent sleeping places (Portmann, 1961; Richards, 1961), and savannah baboons tend to sleep on the same branches of the same tree night after night (Altmann, 1980), there are also many species that do not show preferences for a personal niche in which to withdraw. Whether or not an animal becomes attached to a particular location depends on its overall strategy of adaptation to its environment. Animals whose food supply is widely scattered and unpredictable, for instance, cannot be tied down to a particular place and show no special interest in territorial defense (Harvey and Greene, in press). Among humans, adaptive strategies are particularly flexible, because they are shaped not primarily by genetic and environmental determining conditions but by symbolic forces whose purposes almost always extend beyond mere adaptation. The extent to which the physical environment is elaborated with communicative signs that reveal the specific characteristics of the inhabitants is, with language, one of the distinguishing features of human life. Although we live in physical environments, we create cultural environments within them. We continually personalize and humanize the given environment as a way of both adapting to it and creating order and significance. Thus the importance that

the home has depends not only on survival needs (to bring up infants, to eat and sleep in comfort), on the particular economy (hunting or pastoral, farming or industrial), or on the climate; it also depends on values, tradition, and literary and religious associations that cannot be predicted from determining conditions.

Conceivably, humans could adapt to a way of life in which the sheltering function of a home was provided by a different structural arrangement, less wasteful of material resources than are current individual family dwellings. Although such an adaptation is possible, in the present cultural milieu it is not very realistic. As we shall see, a home is much more than a shelter; it is a world in which a person can create a material environment that embodies what he or she considers significant. In this sense the home becomes the most powerful sign of the self of the inhabitant who dwells within.

As a 63-year-old respondent told us, "I'd say my home is my castle. Even more than that, I'd say that home is church to me . . . to find peace and quiet and beauty with no static."

For most people, the home is a church in that it is the place where ultimate goals can be cultivated, sheltered from the intrusions of public life. It is true that almost always such ultimate goals are secular and tend to be rather pathetic in their aims: to relax, to be comfortable, to be close with other people. But whether or not one likes it, for most, these *are* ultimate goals, whose attainment is made possible in the home.

Before examining in detail what our respondents said about their homes, one more contextual issue must be mentioned. When discussing "homes" in this study, we are referring to physical structures that are quite unique in the world, although not in the United States. The majority of the people we talked to lived in quarters that by world standards were incredibly spacious, well built, and full of material comforts. Yet several persons complained about lack of space, or the dilapidated conditions of their homes, even when there were more than two rooms for each person in the family. By contrast, in a country like El Salvador, where the mean household density is three persons per room, and 60 percent of all families live in one room units, people rarely complained about feeling crowded (Martin-Barro, 1979). Thus the standards for what constitutes an adequate home in the physical sense are extremely variable; in our culture it is possible for peo-

ple to feel dissatisfied with a home that in most other parts of the world would be considered palatial. When talking about their homes, then, our respondents, even those who are classified as lower-middle class, reflect a set of expectations that are quite unique in time and place. What they describe is not home in any abstract sense but the kind of home that shelters and supports the self of average Americans in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Physical dimensions of the home

In this sample 69 percent of the respondents live in single family houses, the rest live in apartments or condominiums. Thus much of the discussion of interiors in this chapter will be concerned with houses, although the argument will usually apply to multiple-family dwellings as well. The first item on the home interview was the following question: "Could you describe your home to me as if I were someone who had never seen it?" This question usually produced a long and detailed description. If the respondent chose to describe the feelings, moods, and atmosphere of the home, then the interviewer probed further for a physical description; if an exclusively physical account was given, then an emotional description was sought. An illustrative answer is the following one given by a 75-year-old grandfather:

You want a description of the home or of the house? (Interviewer: "Both") I think there is a vast difference. A home is a place where people live and a house is something you live in. This is a three-bedroom ranch style home [sic], sitting on about a one-half acre of ground. There is a living room, a kitchen, a family room, a 2-car garage, three bedrooms, two baths and a half basement. It sits on a pie-shaped lot with better than 5 tons of craborchard limestone walls and a fountain when weather is feasible and an underground lighting system. That describes the house. The home is where our children were raised . . . I have had the undivided attention of a very devoted wife. She has made the home and I have tried to help.

This quotation illustrates the kind of detail respondents gave to the physical and the emotional description of the home. Like most men, this respondent dwells more extensively on the physical aspects: the size of the lot, the weight of the building material, the improvements he built, such as the fountain and the lighting system. In terms of psychological dimensions he has little to say: It is

the place where he raised his children. And then he adds the insight: To make a home, one requires undivided attention. Of course, attention is required to make anything, but this respondent meant that homes are made with a special kind. That is, as one needs the specialized attention of builders, carpenters, and plumbers to make a house, one needs the specialized attention of "homemakers" or "devoted wives" to make a home. But enough for now about the emotional descriptions of the home, which will be discussed more extensively later.

The preceding answer is in many ways a good prototype of the physical description most people gave of their homes. Let us review its three main components:

1　"It is a . . . ranch style home." Variations on this element are: It is a Victorian frame house, a Cape Cod, a Queen Anne, a Mediterranean stucco, an eight-flat Georgian brownstone, and so forth. In other words, one element of the physical description identifies the architectural style of the dwelling.

2　"There is a living room, a kitchen . . ." The second element of the description is usually a list of the number and function of the subdivisions of space within the building. Although these vary, the list of rooms tends to be rather similar across families.

3　"It sits on a pie-shaped lot . . ." The third element often consists of those peculiarities that make the dwelling unique to the respondent.

At first glance these three structural characteristics seem so obvious as to be trivial. In what other way could a dwelling be described? If one is to give someone else an idea of what it looks like, one must mention style, size, and functional differentiation, plus unusual characteristics. Yet even these obvious factors provide some insight into the peculiar nature of the contemporary American home. First, let us consider style. What does it mean for people in the same neighborhood to characterize their homes as Tudor, Queen Anne, Victorian, Mediterranean, a high-rise, or split-level ranch? This means, of course, a hodgepodge of styles quite unique in the history of human habitation. If the same variety had existed, for example, in Cape Cod architecture, there would now be no distinctive "Cape Cod" home. This mixture suggests a reliance on previous forms of aesthetic order, the lack of a unified set of cultural goals that imposes itself on the shape of the houses. On the other hand, this variety can be seen as a sign of individuality: The neighborhood can choose to adopt the most successful forms from previous times and other places.

The second element of these physical descriptions also reflects

the same dialectic between lack of pattern, on the one hand, and individuality, on the other. Some houses have one bedroom, some as many as seven; some have sewing rooms or music rooms; others, greenhouses and workshops and libraries and dens. There are toy rooms, game rooms, offices, pantries, porches, foyers, attics, and laundry rooms. It is unlikely that there has ever been a culture in which so many styles of life were represented by the different functional arrangements of the home.

This emphasis on differentiation is carried even further in the third element of the description. Here the respondents focus directly on what makes their homes distinctive, on what reflects their presumably individual tastes or unique accomplishments.

It used to be a stable, a sense of time past about it . . . It's got a big beautiful double pine door to go in that carriages actually used to drive into and it has a large living room with the old stall windows still in it and a fireplace . . . with a fire you can start just by flicking a switch.

Compared to other cultural periods, the house as described by our respondents emerges as an incredibly diverse entity. This variation suggests a lack of that unified style that distinguished the great civilizations of the past, but it also indicates a richness of individual solutions that is certainly equally unprecedented.

Respondents often described their homes as being "large," "small," or "just right." As one would expect, middle-class respondents said more often that it was large; lower-class ones more frequently felt it was small (chi square, $p < .01$). Interestingly, however, the youngest generation used size most often as a descriptor and middle-class boys tended to say their houses were large, whereas lower-class girls said it was small. Space seems to be a more crucial factor in the perception of the home for the active young.

Windows and the amount of light in the rooms were mentioned often, especially by women. The age of the home was named by one respondent in four: the point usually being that the house was old and full of character, although sometimes age had a negative implication related to disrepair. Newness of the house appeared seldom as an important trait, generally mentioned by males. Another relatively frequent dimension concerned the orderliness of the home. Respondents described their houses as "messy" as often as they described it as "neat" or "well kept." The

only noticeable trend here was that girls, when compared to all other age and sex groups, tended to say that their home was more messy than neat ($p < .04$), perhaps reflecting the socialization of a future homemaker.

The single characteristic of the home most often mentioned was "comfortable," "cozy," or "relaxing." Of the respondents, 41 percent noted this quality. Already we are treading here in the ambiguous territory between physical and psychological dimensions. To say that one's home is comfortable might mean that either its layout induces a sense of physical ease and relaxation or its ambience produces a pleasant emotional state. In all probability both meanings were intended. The two extreme groups on this variable were lower-class mothers – 70 percent mentioned the comfortableness of their homes – and middle-class boys – only 13 percent did. In general, comfort was more salient for the lower than for the higher socioeconomic status respondents ($p = .025$), perhaps because comfort for the latter is something that can be taken for granted.

To summarize, the kind of physical descriptions people gave of their homes contained the following dimensions: the style, size, function, and unique features of the dwelling; its age, how orderly it was, how much light there was, and above all, whether or not it was comfortable. Of course, many other details were also mentioned, but these were the ones singled out most consistently. From them a picture of what the home means to these people begins to emerge: a shelter that allows a person to live a distinctly individual life in comfort. But to see the picture more clearly, we must turn to the kinds of emotions people associated with their homes.

The home as a shell of the self

Not every respondent obliged us with a description of the mood of the home. In fact, overall, only 45 percent of the responses could be coded for emotional content, while despite probings, 55 percent of the interviews yielded no discernible feeling tone associated with the home.

Of those responses that had a recognizable emotional tone, 36

percent were clearly positive and 9 percent were either negative or strongly ambivalent. An example of the latter is the following description by a middle-generation woman:

I liked the place when I had moved in. But later I began to notice things I didn't like . . . the house itself tends to be running down, though my husband says it's because it knows I don't care about it anymore . . . I never stay in a place more than three to five years. I want to move or tear apart the place and redecorate. And since I never quite get it the way I want it, the house has a rather transient look. And, since I believe a house reflects where you are in your life, and since the house is in transition now, I'd like to move and find out where I am going to be next, inside and out.

The symbolic relationship between home and self could hardly be expressed in clearer words: "I believe a house reflects where you are in your life . . . I'd like to move and find out where I am going to be next, inside and out." Obviously, this woman's ambivalence is not lost on the rest of the family. Here is what her 12-year-old son says to the question about the home; "It's okay. That's all. We're pretty happy, I guess. My mom's always saying she wants to move out. She's always changing things around."

The mother's lack of clarity about the direction of her own self gets communicated to her son through the house that she threatens to leave and is always transforming. For better or worse, the atmosphere of the home becomes a powerful medium for sharing emotional states within the family and for shaping the selves of those who are exposed to it. Sometimes the negative aura filters into the house from the neighborhood. Here is another mother from our sample speaking:

It's somehow not as cozy as the house we lived in before . . . somehow it's cold, there were fires and people died in homes near us, so I just don't feel at home here, comfortable.

And her 14-year-old daughter says:

When I am home alone it makes me feel scared. When I am home with everybody else, I just want to be upstairs. I just don't want to be around other people all the time.

But positive feelings outnumbered negative ones in a ratio of four to one. Table 5.1 shows the percentage of various kinds of emotional descriptions of the home, by the various generational and gender groupings. The "positive" descriptions usually consisted of adjectives such as "happy," "close," "warm," "cheerful,"

Table 5.1. *Percentage of respondents giving various kinds of affective responses in the description of the home*

	N	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Boys	(36)	39	42	19
Girls	(28)	46	43	11
	64			
Fathers	(51)	22	70	8
Mothers	(62)	45	47	8
	113			
Grandfathers	(22)	23	77	0
Grandmothers	(38)	37	58	5
	60			
Total	237[a]	36	55	9

[a]For this analysis, only the families living in Evanston were considered.

"free," and "open." Neutrals were those in which no feeling tone of any kind could be discerned.

Table 5.1 reflects an interesting pattern. Males tend to give fewer positive affective responses and more neutral ones (chi square, $p < .01$). But this gender-related difference only develops in adulthood: Among children it is not yet present. Boys and girls are not significantly different in this respect, whereas their parents are ($p < .01$). Consequently, fathers are significantly different from sons ($p < .01$), whereas mothers and daughters give essentially identical responses.

What this trend suggests is that children of both sexes start out with a warm emotional attachment to the home. This attachment continues to be strong for women, whereas men essentially cool out in their relationship with the home. Or it is possible that these changes reflect the fact that adult males learn to react to any type of relationship less in terms of feelings; thus their emotional neutrality concerning the home is an indication of a more general dulling of affect rather than neutrality specifically about the home.

When children talk about their home, the positive aspects they stress are a sense of physical and emotional security, coupled with a sense of freedom that permits them to expand and yet to be private. A 15-year-old lower-class girl puts it like this:

This house seems gentle to me, like loving . . . to put it plainly, there's really no home like your own. I am used to it and I know every little stitch around here. Sometimes it's large, sometimes sadness is all around, then happiness is all around. Wonderful, this house is wonderful.

An 8-year-old boy comments:

It's big, roomy, comfortable, greenish brown on the outside. It has four floors, eleven rooms, lots of toys, it's beautiful and it has high ceilings. There's one cat, lots of posters, pictures, plants, and closets . . . It's happy and free.

And when the emotional tone is negative, one gets a sense of helpless anxiety, of loneliness and emotional isolation, as in the description of this 11-year-old boy:

I feel sorta helpless. When I look down from the third floor, I can't really describe it. It's just a sort of funny feeling. Sorta like looking down from way up in an airplane or something.

More than for any other subgroup of this sample, the dependence of children on the emotional atmosphere of the home comes through clearly. What is significant is that boys express negative feelings almost twice as often as any other group. Perhaps it is this early disenchantment that turns into lack of affect by the time boys grow into men; possibly young males expect too much from the emotional atmosphere of the family – being more dependent on affective sustenance and therefore more easily hurt. As a consequence, they might turn to emotional neutrality as a protective device. Reading the interviews of the girls, one gets the impression that although they are just as sensitive to the emotional tone of the home, and that although in some respects they are even more critical of its failures, they are more tolerant and resilient – being less ready to write off the home as a loss because it falls short of perfection.

As expected, the fathers' way of describing the home reveals a very different set of concerns from those expressed by other groups. In line with the instrumental roles adult males play in our society, fathers extensively talk about the work they put into the home. New kitchens, new roofs, and new plumbing take precedence in their descriptions. The house, for men, becomes a concrete embodiment of all the psychic energy they have invested in it, both directly in the form of labor and indirectly in the form of money. Thus the house represents the accomplishments of the owner's self.

We had a kitchen put in and we enjoy that . . . We did the bathrooms over somewhat. We've done an awful lot of things in the house – you can't see them, but we have put a lot of money into this house. We are due for some painting and then I'm going to have someone fix the leak in the plaster here. It was just painted two years ago. It needs to be scraped and resealed, but you don't find painters who are willing to do that these days.

Only a *pater familias* could speak of his home in these words. Although his answer contains no direct affective references, it exudes a very clear pride, a sense of achievement and control that stands for affect among these instrumentally oriented males. The father's investment of psychic energy in the home sometimes results in adventurous experiences:

Since I've done work on it I've discovered lots of interesting things about it. I do most of the work myself. I found a bunch of old newspapers under the boards when I put in a new heating system, and the like.

But adventurous or not, work invested in the physical structure itself seems to be the most salient tie between the self of the adult male owner and his home. This does not mean, of course, that men do not depend on its emotional tone. It's just that, relatively speaking, they are less able to verbalize this dimension of their selves, because cultivation of functional goals has been accomplished at the expense of developing skills for the pursuit of emotional goals (cf., Adams et al. 1979; Block, 1973). In the following quotation a father manages to convey deep feelings about the emancipation of his wife and children with a minimum of emotional references:

It's a nice cozy little bungalow . . . The yard is small, but well stocked with flowers and trees . . . The inside is plain and unshowy, but well furnished. The kids aren't home very much, they have their friends . . . My wife's not home because she works. I'm home in the summer, in and out. So the home feels like it's coming apart a bit: I guess my kids are at that age. During the school year it's more together, but during the summer we all go our separate ways. My daughter has two jobs, my wife, besides working, is active in several organizations. When the summer comes, I start to feel lost . . . I have all this time on my hands.

It is as if men related to their homes on two levels. The first is the overt level of functional activity that conforms to the social stereotype of the male self: This is expressed directly and forcefully in the interviews. Then there is another level that surfaces here and there, revealed by an almost embarrassed reference to

love, happiness, and warmth. Only too often, these aspects of the self emerge only after they are beginning to be missed.

The way women of the middle generation relate to their homes is also quite predictable from what in the previous chapters we have learned about their relationships to objects. They see the house primarily as a place where people interact with each other; when the home is seen in positive terms, it is because the interaction is harmonious. Typical examples are:

It's cheerful – everyone always tells me that. It's comfortable . . . and certainly filled to the brim. It's very active – and it's very different too. I've been in lots of homes, and sometimes it's like a culture shock to come back into this one. It may be too busy for some people.

It's a very big, friendly place full of kids all the time. Plenty of space to move around. Plenty of space to have their friends without me feeling cut off from doing what I want to do . . . A backyard – all the kinds of things that kids would want to have.

My home is a special place, it's large in a way and yet its sorta small in a way . . . large as in being just about enough room for my family size and sometimes it seems too small because we always have a lot of kids and there's always a lot going on and sometimes it's just too small and I think my home is basically comfortable . . . as you can see we live all over the house really informal, if you know what I mean . . . Yes, and close . . . well, I know it's a mess but it's not that bad.

Women rarely complain about the house being in a mess or lacking in amenities or style, as long as the family interaction is friendly, warm, active, and comfortable. Another way in which concern with emotional harmony manifested itself was in their reliance on color terms. Over and over women mentioned a "yellow kitchen" or a "blue pastel bedroom," obviously intending to convey a certain mood with that description. Men almost never did so. In scoring the Rorschach inkblot test the mention of color is taken as an emotional indicator, and these responses suggest that the use of color to describe the objective household is also a good indicator of emotional significance. Of course, the Rorschach test is "projective" in that it tries to elicit the inner psychological profile of the respondent. Our "measure," by contrast, elicits the psychological profile of the person through his or her valuation of the actual domestic environment.

Again, although this concern with a friendly social context in which their children could grow to be individuals was the major theme emerging from the mothers' interviews, it was certainly not the only one. Like their husbands, the women took pride in the

work they put in the home and learned about their selves from the feedback the home provided. Of course, the work they were concerned about was less often structural – such as taking out a wall or putting in new plumbing – and tended to be a question of decoration that affects mood rather than material comfort: a new wallpaper, different furniture, a rearrangement that, in the words of our respondents, alters the "personality" of the home.

Although these women were more involved in the emotional state of the home than their husbands and sons, one gets the impression that they were less *dependent* on it than their spouses or children were. Perhaps being the ones who through their psychic activity created a home inside the house, women felt more in control over it and knew that maintaining whatever affective relationships had been established was within their power. And yet they were not entirely autonomous from their spouses in maintaining the emotional tone of the household. In those families where the husband expressed positive affect towards the home, 73 percent of the wives also did; in those where the husband was neutral, only 46 percent of the wives were positive; and of the ten families without husbands, in only one did the wife have a positive view of the home. Clearly, maintaining a harmonious emotional center is a much easier task when both partners are involved; still, in the culture we are considering, the women assume most of this burden.

The most complex set of relationships to the home is found in the generation of the grandparents. Some of the older respondents had to move to a retirement home bereft of memories and individuality. A number of others had to move in with their children or relatives, again becoming dependent on the moods of other people. Still others had to resettle in smaller quarters after their children had all moved out. Often the descriptions have a tone of grim resignation or of small expectations barely met:

It's a place to live, and that's all . . . it makes me feel I have some place to live. Won't be pushed around or pushed out. It makes me feel good. I feel safe.

Not surprisingly, those who were able to remain in their old places stress the importance of the continuity of memories and experiences the home represents:

It's home to us because we raised our children here . . .

I lived in it for 34 years; it's like an old bathrobe: when you put it on, it feels so good.

It's just a nice place to go to. It's got so many memories. With never – I'm very lucky – never a bad time.

Those who live by themselves prize the privacy and independence afforded by their own place. In the words of a 68-year-old woman:

Well, I feel happy in my home. Most of the time I'd rather be in my home than anyplace else. When I am in my home I can do anything I want to do, read my Bible as long as I want to, pray on my knees if I want to, if I want to shout I can shout and not disturb nobody. I just love to be in my home.

As this excerpt and an earlier quotation suggest, the home frequently becomes a place where religious goals are pursued in later life. This is true almost exclusively of women, as if their earlier investment of psychic energy in the goals of others later in life gets rechanneled in patterns dictated by an even broader value system:

I have a peaceful home and a religious home. I don't believe in those things that I don't think is religious and I usually have a radio in the kitchen and I keep the Moody Bible Institute on and I sends them donations.

My object is to keep my family, as my mother used to pray, and every holiday, when we were together we'd all get in a circle, chairs all around, all kneel down and each of us would hold the other's hand, and my mother would always say a prayer and we hoped that we would always stay together like links of chain, and be concerned about each other and love each other.

It would be very easy to dismiss such musings as referring to a kind of religion that is the opiate of the masses. In fact, it seems quite clear that for the first two women, previously quoted, religion is a solace in solitude, and for the third it is an almost magical incantation to preserve family unity, thereby avoiding loneliness. Yet it would be an arrogant prejudice indeed to discount the value of prayer and ritual in the lives of these people. After all, our sophisticated culture has not yet discovered a more effective way to express the relatedness of people or the hope for transcending the limitations of individuals bound by mortality to an ephemeral span of existence. Religion, however crude, can still act as a potent symbol for the transcendence of the individual's own self.

The "inner sanctum"

After the respondents described their homes, they were asked the following question: "Where in your home do you feel most at home?" The answers afford a more intimate glimpse of the psychological significance of the domestic environment. Here again, the responses reveal different conceptions of the self rooted in particular activities and interactions with the spatial possibilities of the house.

Table 5.2 shows that although the living room was most often mentioned as the center of the house, this was due mainly to the adults' responses. Children tended to feel most at home in their own bedrooms. Their reasons are a poignant illustration of the great need for autonomy and privacy that children, especially during adolescence, feel. Here is the answer of a 15-year-old girl:

In my room. It has all the needs I want in there, except for food and I go to the kitchen for that. All the needs, if I'm scared or something, I go to my room and sit on my bed.

An 8-year-old boy responded:

My room because that's where I mostly am and where I sleep. It's where my toys are and where I play.

The by now familiar differentiation of meanings by gender again appears among adults. The kitchen and cooking activities are traditionally associated with women in American culture, and the mothers in the sample felt at home most often in the kitchen partly because that is where they spend the most time and also because it serves as their base of domestic operations:

I would say the kitchen. That's generally where I might talk on the phone. I'm usually cooking there and I enjoy cooking so it's a pleasurable room for me. I might sit there at the table and do any work that requires writing. So I'm most comfortable in the kitchen.

The kitchen. Because it's cozy. It's full of things I use all the time. It's a place where I do a lot of my thinking, a place where I vent a lot of my frustrations, the place where I create some good food – I bake bread and slap the board.

Again, the sexual stereotype asserts itself in the males' choice of the basement den and recreation area as their favorite place, which they mention much more often than their wives. In the following response one finds clear examples of the masculine in-

Table 5.2. *Part of the house in which respondents feel "most at home"*

	Generational differences (% mentioning)				Sex differences		
	Children (N = 79)	Parents (N = 149)	Grandparents (N = 82)	Chi-square	Males (N = 138)	Females (N = 172)	Chi-square
Living room	18	31	26	NS	29	25	NS
Own bedroom	53	13	12	.001	25	22	NS
Kitchen	7	23	16	.025	6	25	.001
Study	5	9	15	NS	17	3	.001
Dining room	3	3	5	NS	2	4	NS
Basement	5	2	1	NS	5	1	.025
Whole house	5	15	18	.05	12	15	NS
Other	4	5	7				
Total	100	100	100				

strumental orientation and also of the usually less obvious, almost childlike, emotional dependence:

In my little study which I arranged downstairs . . . I built all the furniture, the desk, chair, bookcase, everything down there, so they surround me. It's a sort of womblike area, situation. It's quiet and it's cool . . . I have a warm feeling about the things that I've built.

For the grandparents the most homelike part of the house is often reduced to a particular chair or television set. Seventeen percent of the older respondents specified a chair in a room versus 6 percent of the grandchildren and 3 percent of the middle generation ($p < .0008$). They mentioned TV sets 32 percent of the time versus 10 and 13 percent of the younger age groups ($p < .0001$).

The location of special objects also illustrates how rooms serve as larger communicative contexts and how these contexts change for different family members. Children's special objects are most often found in their bedrooms ($p < .0001$), their fathers keep significantly more objects in the basement and study ($p < .001$), whereas the mothers' are in the living and dining rooms ($p < .001$).

Almost half the special objects children of ages 8 to 14 mention are located in their own bedrooms. However, the importance of the bedroom continuously declines into adulthood, to an average of about 11 percent, and then becomes more important in old age, where about 24 percent of the special possessions of respondents over 70 years old are again located in the bedroom. For children it is a private area that gives a greater feeling of control over the activities and objects than other rooms and thus is a place where autonomy itself can be cultivated through "dialogues" with the self, mediated by cherished possessions (Rochberg-Halton, 1980a). Because children place a higher value on action objects that hold more egocentric meanings, it is more important that they be physically surrounded in the same room where they sleep and spend time in play and recreation with those things most closely associated with their developing identity.

The autonomy provided by the bedroom appears to be a less prominent aspect of the pattern of meanings that adults cultivate. Instead, the social atmosphere of the living room becomes the most appropriate context for structuring and expressing what they consider most significant. The bedroom again increases in

importance for the very old, presumably again because of the autonomy it provides, either as a private sphere where older people living in their children's home can keep personal belongings or also possibly because the person spends more time resting in the room.

The decreasing importance and then reemergence in old age of the bedroom seems almost to trace the course of the self over the life cycle. In childhood and adolescence privacy is valued because it enables the child to cultivate a sense of autonomy through interactions with an environment charged with personalized meanings. Presumably, the sense of personal autonomy is internalized with adulthood and thus the self can be symbolized more broadly throughout the home and through more socially oriented patterns of meaning. With old age, however, the self itself becomes increasingly internalized as the social activities of the old person diminish, and thus the bedroom again becomes important as a private sphere in which the autonomy of the old can be cultivated in the immediate environment of objects of contemplation.

Like some strange race of cultural gastropods, people build homes out of their own essence, shells to shelter their personality. But, then, these symbolic projections react on their creators, in turn shaping the selves they are. The envelope thus constructed is not just a metaphor. The home is an empirical and normative entity, constituted through time by the objective patterns of psychic activity that people invest in different areas of the house, in different objects, and in different activities. Thus the home is a goal or intention that becomes realized through the attention the inhabitants give to it. In other words, the home is a craft cultivated by all its members. When certain artifacts, rooms, and activities are preferentially selected by various family members to embody different patterns of meaning, then different family members can be seen as inhabiting different symbolic environments even though in the same household. So every physical house might contain different "homes," and the character of these homes might change over time as the goals and patterns of attention that make up the selves of its members change. But the home, as already stated, is also an objective entity with its own "personality," which exerts a reciprocal influence on the individual family members. It represents the *gestalt* of the family and forms an essential part of the *social self* of the individual, as we shall argue in Chapter 7.

Of course, the pattern of meaning that makes a home is not invented solely by its inhabitants. The pattern is itself shaped by cultural blueprints or "programs," to use the term Geertz (1973) adopted from the field of computers, which is why one finds such predictable differences in the kinds of homes children, adults, males, and females create. But it is still the individual person who is responsible for the implementation of the cultural template. Although environing conditions, such as the state of the economy, the availability of housing, and the like are certainly determining factors, no one else has full control over the person's psychic energy: How it will be used should depend in the last analysis on his or her decision.

The storehouse of signs

One of the most important psychological purposes of the home is that those objects that have shaped one's personality and which are needed to express concretely those aspects of the self that one values are kept within it. Thus the home is not only a material shelter but also a shelter for those things that make life meaningful. Although we have already discussed these meanings, it might be useful to review them by examining the answers to the last home interview question, namely, "What do all your special objects, taken together as a whole, mean to you?" Again, in order to highlight generational differences, we shall consider the children's answers first.

Perhaps no respondent gave a more eloquent answer than this 8-year-old boy, the youngest member of the sample:

They make me feel like I'm part of the world. (Interviewer: How do they do that?) Because when I look at them, I keep my eyes on them and I think what they mean. Like I have a bank from the First National, and when I look at it I think what it means. It means money for our cities and our country, it means tax for the government. My stuffed bunny reminds me of wildlife, all the rabbits, and dogs and cats. That toy animal over there (points to a plastic lion) reminds me of circuses and the way they train animals so that they don't get hurt. That's what I mean, all my special things make me feel like I'm part of the world.

What is so beautiful about this answer is that it shows graphically the process whereby household objects become signs of a wider network of meanings that embrace the whole "world." It is

a simple process, simply described by this boy: "I look at them, I keep my eyes on them and I think what they mean." Attention is focused on a set of objects, which release their meanings by activating latent memories and by bringing into consciousness information about the world. Through the signs that bring together the self and the world, the boy can truly feel that he is part of the world.

Another rather astonishing feature of this answer is the variety of content that constitutes this boy's world. It is not just the world centered around the individual self that one would expect from a young child. In fact, it seems to include mostly that third level of organization that is so rare even among adults: a self-world system in which psychic energy is invested in goals transcending personal needs – in this case, cities, the government, wildlife, and animals for whose welfare humans are responsible.

Most young people run true to form in their answers to what all their special objects mean:

All the things I've done that have been fun.

Enjoyment, happiness, relaxation . . .

They are kinda my life, they're things I enjoy . . . they are the fun parts of my life.

They are part of me, I'm part of them. I acquired them. I've done what I will with them. They don't have significance for anyone else except for me and I would feel very lost without them.

All these quotations come from adolescents. The emphasis is on "fun" – both pleasure and enjoyment – and the perspective is frankly ego centered. But as stated earlier, enjoyment is not simply pleasure seeking, it is a sign of freedom and autonomy. Thus enjoyable activities provide information about the existence of the self as an independent agent, and the objects that are signs of this independence become central supports for the cultivation of the personal self.

This need to be surrounded by objects that proclaim the autonomy of the self is still strong in the fathers' interviews. The adult males seldom if ever mention objects that relate to their professional or productive roles but, rather, focus on signs reflecting their hobbies. Voluntary activities are still the main expressions of independence. Here a man whose special objects included carpentry tools and photographic equipment comments:

Well, it's either an echo or a reinforcement of the things that I like to do, as opposed to objects that I or someone else might value just because of the finan-

cial worth. They tend to give me the freedom to pursue a variety of interests. The tools are primarily to build something in this house. In other words, creative effort. And the same with the photo equipment. I suppose I just try to bring it all together.

The point is, of course, that these objects are not "either an echo or a reinforcement . . ."; they are both. They become special because they echo the person's intentions, the goals that give direction to the self; at the same time, the objects reinforce that goal by providing the specific feedback that they are designed to give. This theme recurs quite frequently:

I guess that's fairly obvious: I take pride in craftsmanship, in design, efficiency. I like machinery, gadgets. I take pride in doing things, and pleasure in novelty.

Things that afford me pleasure and enrich me in some way. I mean me inside. They just seem to make life life.

Adult males also bring up another theme fairly often that seems to give special objects a much less authentic purpose. Here the information about the self is not released through direct interaction between person and object but, instead, is mediated by the opinion of others. One learns about the self from conventional values attached to the objects rather than from their use:

They mean a lot to me. They mean that I've accomplished something. They mean that I've gotten myself up to the point when I can look back over the years and see what I've worked for, and see what I have for the work that I put out to get.

No more than an ego trip. Nothing that I would go down fighting for . . . It makes me feel good while I'm enjoying those things to know that I have them and equally as important, that other people know I have them.

The next two responses were given by men answering the question, "What are your most private or personal objects?" One of the reasons we asked this question was to see what the equivalents of "medicine bundles" or sacred "power" objects might be in our own urban society. These two men did name "power" objects, their cars, as their most private or personal possessions. What gives them personal power is paradoxically the fact of being on public display when they use these things:

My Cadillac has become to me a thing I deserve. I wonder if others say things, I've had comments: "You're rich," from customers. They may even resent it – I don't care. It shows you make so much more money. It represents my right to own something associated with successful people. In toto we live simply. It's my more blatant . . . comfort. I've always bought ahead of my ability to pay, lived

simplify, my greatest earning years have reached their peak. Now I must think of my children's education, give them an opportunity.

My car, probably because of the images it creates, to be very frank. Being different than most people. Most people don't have a Jaguar. It's more different than having a Mercedes at this time. . . . It's an ego trip which I admit. I don't think it's so wrong. I hope a lot of people let me do my thing.

These answers are clear examples of how "status symbols" work. They reveal intentions that consist of the goal of standing out from or above others through identification with symbols – such as expensive furniture, gadgets, cars. The status derived from these things depends ultimately on standing *apart*, through a competitive comparison with others' symbols of status. The owner can assimilate the "spirit" of the status totem and become, in the case of a car, a Jaguar or Mustang or any of the other symbols of prowess, dominance, or power in the American automobile "totemic" system. These objects, then, act as storage batteries of psychic energy, trophies of their owner's importance. By attending to them, or having others attend, the owner feels recharged. He gets information about his own accomplishments through these symbols and is reminded that his psychic energy has not been wasted: "I can look back over the years and see what I've worked for."

The main theme among the wives of these men is by now familiar, summarized by the answer of one woman: "They are special because of the people who are special." In effect, the attention of the women is almost entirely given to family interactions, and hence the objects that are meaningful to them are those that contain this interpersonal aspect of their self:

Memories, I would say. Apart from that, they have no cash value. It's just memories. Something like that (a sculpture) is not fantastic, but my son made it. Or like this picture my daughter made. You know, things like that. The memories connected with them.

They mean family togetherness . . . something that's just a part of our family. We do a lot together. We talk a lot and travel a lot together, and we have a nice kind of family relationship.

Even when the meaning of the household objects does not relate to the family, it rarely refers to the kind of pride derived from instrumental activity that males express:

We've put in a long time with each other, and I feel very friendly towards certain objects – but in a metaphysical sense. As I've said about plants, there's an exchange that takes place between us. I'm not quite ready to say the same thing about a wooden spoon, but again, we've put in such a long time together.

A 26-year-old woman talking about her special objects, which include ceramics, Indian bells, and batik wall hangings says:

Sensual because they are nice to feel and they are really like beautiful to look at. Orgiastic or what is the word? Orgasmic, yeah, orgasmic. Sensual and orgasmic. They're a real rush.

There is in these answers a kind of empathy, a responsiveness toward the inanimate environment based on exchange and sensuous participation rather than on shaping and unilateral control, as is more typical of men.

A 62-year-old grandmother summarized the meaning of her special objects with a few well-chosen words: "Well, they represent my hard-earned final composite identity."

This identity is, as one would expect, continuous with the adult identities of their children. For men objects represent personal and status achievement, with the additional theme of security and a sense of completion of the self – something along the lines of Erikson's notion of ego integrity. For women the theme of family memories is still dominant, but now it becomes somewhat abstracted and generalized to a feeling many respondents directly express as "love":

Love, love. I can say that love covers it all because the people who have given them to me love me or they wouldn't give me such things.

It means a whole family, that we all enjoy receiving these things . . . And if somebody makes it (referring to a quilt) and puts so much time in it, to me it's love that's been put into the object . . . that's more special to me than anything . . . if you know how many hours are put into it.

This suggests that love can be seen as attention invested over time in a task for someone else's sake. And in the lives of these people love is the most important thing because that is what they devoted their lives to. Therefore the signs of love become the most meaningful objects in the home.

When experts reflect on what the future home will be like, they tend to see a "living environment" in which electronic gadgets replace the slaves of antiquity in catering to every whim of the owner. Such prophecies are very much like this vision by Arthur Pulos, a professor of design at Syracuse University:

Today's living room will be transformed into a media and entertainment center. Digital electronics will provide instant sight and sound images . . . An electronic stage will present three-dimensional programs through the medium of laser-generated holography. The passive viewer and listener of today will become the active participant of tommorow as he or she gains acces to private and public

data banks and interacts with educational and recreational programs at will. (In Booth, 1979)

Homes of this kind were envisioned a long time ago by science fiction writers. In his 1950 short story, entitled "There Will Come Soft Rains," Ray Bradbury describes a day in the life of exactly such a home, set in the far distant year of 1985. At seven o'clock in the morning the alarm goes off and a soft recorded voice reminds the inhabitants of appointments, birthdays, and bills to pay. Meantime in the kitchen, pancakes are baked and bacon browned automatically, while tiny electronic mice issue from the wainscoting to clean the rooms . . . and so on, hour after hour, including a musical rendition of the poem the lady of the house likes best: "There will come soft rains . . ." Unfortunately, the only trace of the home's owners is their shadowy outline against the outside wall, left there by a radioactive explosion.

The writer's vision complements that of the engineer, qualifying the naïve optimism of purely technological aspirations. What good is saving time, if we do not know what to do with it? What if all we can do with conserved energy is blow up the planet?

What matters about the home of the future is not so much the number of rooms it will have or the amount of electronic marvels it will contain. The important issue concerns the psychic activity of those who live within it. Will the activity be turned against itself and against others or will it be invested in goals that can be cultivated to give a vital sense of shared purpose and standards for living? We worry too much about trivial technological improvements while leaving the truly essential questions out of reckoning.

The importance of the home derives from the fact that it provides a space for action and interaction in which one can develop, maintain, and change one's identity. In its privacy, one can cultivate one's goals without fear of ostracism or ridicule. The home is a shelter for those persons and objects that define the self; thus it becomes, for most people, an indispensable symbolic environment.

In describing how people relate to their homes, we have outlined patterns that seem in many ways very traditional. Sexual stereotypes are very obvious, age-related attitudes are predictable, and many of the values and aspirations expressed by our respondents seem trite in terms of a modern, sophisticated world view. This outcome, however, is not of our doing. We did not hope or

expect to find such strongly traditional values reflected in the answers. If these are stressed in our account, it is because the respondents stressed them. The interpretive framework we have used emerged from the data rather than vice versa.

Despite a superficial veneer of modernity, the main concerns of these people are largely the same ones that have moved men and women at least since the beginnings of recorded history. It seems unlikely that the solution to their aspirations will come from technological and material advances. Despite a standard of living that is many times higher than any of the past or than that now enjoyed by most people in the world, persons in this culture are still confronted by the same fears and frustrations that have threatened the value of life since humans acquired self-consciousness. Meaning, not material possessions, is the ultimate goal in their lives, and the fruits of technology that fill the contemporary American home cannot alone provide this. People still need to know that their actions matter, that their existence forms a pattern with that of others, that they are remembered and loved, and that their individual self is part of some greater design beyond the fleeting span of mortal years.

Some are able to give such meaning to their experience in the home and outside of it. Others live in the shadow of meaninglessness, unsure whether the sum of their years will add up to a coherent pattern. Some seek to validate their acts by imposing order through control – skills, money, taste, or singleness of purpose. Others find solace in an order external to them, whose goals they adopt and support with their life energy. The battle for the value of life is fought in the arena of meaning. Advances on the material front are skirmishes that tend to distract us from the one issue that counts. How to create and cultivate meaning that is in harmony with the ultimate goals of humanity, the living, the dead, the unborn, is the challenge for those who have the welfare of humanity at heart.

CHAPTER 6

Characteristics of happy homes

What difference does it make, if some people talk about their homes in warm emotional terms, whereas others use only neutral descriptions? Perhaps none. Maybe the affective tone of the responses to the home interview is just a superficial stylistic difference without any real psychological consequence. The people who fail to mention that their homes are "warm," "happy," or "free" might just be more reticent, more reserved, but otherwise the same as those who do use such adjectives to describe their homes. However, it is also possible that the description of the home in warm emotional terms represents something more essential. Perhaps for those who express such emotion the home provides an important set of meanings not available to others, and this difference has repercussions in other areas of their lives.

When looking at the interviews, we noticed that in some of the families all four members gave positive emotional descriptions of the home. In others, all four gave neutral or negative descriptions. If expression of affect about the home is a meaningful variable, one would expect these two kinds of families to be different in other respects as well. Families that agree on the positive emotional tone of the home should be more integrated. The pattern of feedback provided by a positive emotional atmosphere in the home might help one to cultivate a different self from one nurtured in an emotionally neutral home. Perhaps in families of the first type, members feel emotionally more secure and thus are free to invest their psychic energy in wider goals. At least this is what one would expect from Arendt's (1958) analysis of the relationship between "private" and "public" spheres of action; only those who can count on a nurturant, protective home environment are free to venture into the public arena:

Without mastering the necessities of life in the household, neither life nor the "good life" is possible, but politics is never for the sake of life. As far as the members of the *polis* are concerned, household life exists for the sake of the "good life" in the *polis*. (Arendt, 1958, p. 37)

To explore the truth of this hypothesis, we wanted to compare two sets of families at the extremes of the distribution in terms of affect expressed about the home. We selected the five most "warm" families and the five most "cool" ones from the lower socioeconomic class and then did the same selection from among the upper-middle-class families. There were 39 persons in each of these two extreme groups. Table 6.1 shows how the two groups differed from each other in terms of their descriptions of the home.

The "coolest" of the warm families had at least two members giving a positive description of the home, whereas the "warmest" of the cool families had only one person mentioning positive affect in connection with the home. Thus the two groups of families do not at all overlap on this dimension.

As one would expect, cool families have more marital problems. Three of the middle-generation couples in this group are divorced. In the warm families one couple is considering separation, but they are still living together. The question we are interested in, however, is a more subtle one. How do the dynamics of these two types of families differ in terms of the goals, personalities, and actions of their members?

Divergent goals

The last question on the "Events" interview read as follows: "If you had the time and money to do *anything* you wanted, what would you do?" We looked at the answers to this question to get a sense of the goals of the respondents. Admittedly, this question is unrealistic. Constraints of time and money always limit what one can do, and therefore we usually plan our goals with these restrictions in mind. Yet the clearly whimsical nature of this question might also reveal deep-seated wishes, by suggesting what people would do in an ideal life freed from constraints, and thus be more useful than a more "realistic" question in disclosing the nature of ultimate goals. In a sense, one might expect the answers to ap-

Table 6.1. *Number of family members expressing three kinds of affect about the home*

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total family members
"Warm" families (10)	28 (72%)	11 (28%)	0 (0%)	39
"Cool" families (10)	4 (10%)	24 (62%)	11 (28%)	39

Chi square = 28.5, p < .0001

proximate what anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) calls the "liminoid" in modern society – the state of marginality occurring when normal structural constraints are removed. During this "betwixt and between" period usual responsibilities and duties are either abolished or reversed. The lowly may be raised to the highest status, for example, so that poverty becomes for a time the goal of right living.

What aspirations are revealed when people are asked to imagine themselves in the "liminoid" situation where restrictions of time and money do not apply? The most unanimously shared goal in both groups is travel. About 70 percent of the sample (56 respondents) said that if time and money were no object they would take a trip – the favorite destinations being Hawaii, California, Colorado, "around the world," and Europe. The agreement on this issue is so complete that even some of those who would not choose travel prefaced their answer with the disclaimer: "Probably most people say 'travel,' yes? I am a very poor traveler . . . Traveling is not my forte, it upsets my physics."

It might be worth pausing to consider the meaning of this almost unanimous goal. Somehow it does not come as a surprise that people wish, above all, to be somewhere else, doing something different. The notion that life is better over the horizon is so ingrained in our culture as to have become a commonplace; indeed, this is precisely the goal that defined the identity of the early Pilgrims ("I am a pilgrim and a stranger.").

In a recent book Victor and Edith Turner (1978) have discussed pilgrimage as a universal expression of the phase of liminality, involving a community of wanderers all equal in status

as they journey to their sacred goal. For some, pilgrimage is an escape from the constraints of village or city life. But it is also a productive escape – productive in the literal sense of "to lead forward" toward one's goals. In such a case pilgrimage acts as a template for the journey of life, by replacing the constraints of life with a dramatic situation that engenders flow and in which every event is charged with a sacred meaning. This need to seek far away symbols of the ultimate goal is still pervasive in secularized societies. In the iconoclastic Soviet Union, for example, millions each year journey to a pyramidlike structure in Red Square to view the remains of Lenin. "Lenin" has become a material icon representing the ultimate goal of the Communist state to a people who have always been devoted to icons. The equivalent in the West might be the booming tourist industry (see Schudson, 1979). Americans are encouraged to fly to "fantasy island," whether it be the Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, or even the land-locked island of Las Vegas. Disneyland and Disney World are centers that attract pilgrims from around the world at a rate greater than Jerusalem ever did. It might be argued that the Disney parks are models of the contemporary "Heavenly City," without slums, death, or disease, where all care is laid aside, and everyone has a good time. Las Vegas surely rates as the Mecca of the West, where the ultimate goal – money – is sought in ritualistic activities within a fantastic environment of Roman palaces, circuses, and pleasure domes. It is a city, as architect Robert Venturi has stated, meant to be seen in a moving car at night, where the "pilgrim" is bombarded with signs of Pleasure. Tourism, of course, need not be a passive escape. It can also provide opportunities to learn about the wider world through enjoyable experiences and to grow from these experiences.

In any case, for whatever reasons, most people see travel as their foremost goal if they had all the choices in the world. On this issue, warm and cool families were in absolute agreement. Differences started to emerge only after we began to look beyond this unanimous goal.

Each person's answer to this question could be placed in one of two categories. If the only goal mentioned was travel, or some form of consumption or pleasure, we coded the answer *escape*. If the goals included any mention of improving the lot of the respondent or of someone else, the answer was called *productive*.

The following are representative examples of each type; the first given by the cool father and the second, by the warm father, both of whom are discussed at length in the case studies of Chapter 8.

I would take a year and just go around Europe and just do. Don't ask me where I would go because it would change from month to month ... Ski, hunt, fish, look-tour. I would just go out and live. I could see living on a three-masted boat and going from place to place. If I had to park it for three months and fly someplace else, I would ... I would probably sail around the Virgin Islands and the South Seas. It sounds like bullshit, you know; everyone says that ... I would spend some time in the Germanic area of Europe. (Why?) Because the goddam women are gorgeous. The whole scene out there is so healthy ... so outdoors oriented and so clean, vibrant. People are just with it. You get down into some countries like Spain, Italy, or Mexico and other areas where they just seem to be living on the periphery of life. They just aren't with it ... But the Teutonic race is right with what's going on today. The Austrians, the Swiss ...

Despite its length, the answer by one of the cool fathers contains no reference to any goal that could be seen as productive, nothing that involves a change in skills or states of being beyond a hedonistic escape from the present. Compare the previous quotation with the following answer, also from a man of the middle generation:

I would travel, I would like to take the entire family West. Let the children see the country, also New York, New England, the West Coast, by train or by car. You really see things at your own pace and leisure. Then I would like to go with my wife to more exotic places, Japan, parts of Europe that we have never seen. Also, I would like to have a rehearsal band for serious playing. I would do more reading ... novels, history, political history.

Here even travel is a productive goal, which would enable the children to learn about the country and the man to share exotic experiences with his wife. In addition, this man would improve his skills as a musician and read more. This kind of answer was coded as having a "productive" goal.

The total sample was almost evenly divided into halves in terms of escapist and productive goals; 36 people only mentioned the former, 39 also mentioned the latter. (In three interviews this question was not answered.) But the two groups of families differed significantly: 35 percent of the members of the warm families held escape goals only, whereas in the cool families the proportion was 60 percent (chi square 3.84, $p = .05$). This difference suggests that when the members of a family share positive emotions about their home, they develop aspirations that lead beyond immediate gratification to some productive outcome.

On closer inspection of the data, a surprising pattern emerged.

Table 6.2. *Type of goals mentioned*

		Escape	Productive
Warm families	Children	4	6
	Mothers	6	3
	Fathers	0	10
	Grandparents	3	5
	Total	13	24
Cool families	Children	8	2
	Mothers	3	7
	Fathers	7	1
	Grandparents	5	5
	Total	23	15

The difference between warm and cool families was primarily due to the goals held by fathers and then to those held by children. Grandparents did not differ, whereas mothers answered almost significantly in a direction that was opposite from that of fathers and children. Table 6.2 shows the relevant breakdowns of data.

All the fathers from warm homes mentioned productive goals, whereas only one from cool families did so (Fisher exact: $p = .001$). On the other hand, only three mothers from warm families aspired to productive goals, whereas seven mothers in the "cool" group did so ($p = .11$). The numbers we are dealing with here are too low to make much of these findings, but it almost seems that when the husband takes a serious, responsible view of life, the wife can afford to be frivolous. Because her life is more invested in the home, and therefore she may have fewer opportunities to be involved in outside activities than her husband, she has more reasons to want a respite from the obligations of the home. When the husband's goals are purely hedonistic, the wife must concern herself with productive goals. If this is true, then what a "warm" home means takes on a somewhat ambiguous connotation. It suggests that it might require a certain sterotyping of sexual roles within the home to make an emotionally integrated family. A combination of productively oriented husbands and wives unconcerned with productive goals seems to produce families that have a positive affective tone.

Most of the wives from "warm" families gave answers like the following:

I'd sleep late. I'd travel all over, round the world, not all at once – right now, I'd go some place warm.

As contrasted with women from cool families:

What I'd like you can't buy. I want peace of mind. Read the question again, would you please? . . . I think I would do for the children, provide them with a good education. My son Dick is getting a good education because he has a scholarship. But Mike is just a year behind him in age and he hasn't had any college. I would like to provide an education for all of them.

Providing for their children's education was one of the most common "productive" themes among these women; others were improving the house and working. It is as if the "normal" situation for a family in our culture is to have a husband who is a good provider and a wife who gives her attention to the home and dreams about escape. When the husband evades his responsibility, then the wife takes over the productive goals. The first situation seems to be more adaptive in that it is a sign of an emotionally integrated family. Yet there seems to be something not quite right even about this productive father/escapist mother combination. It appears to work because it produces a warm family, but one wonders whether the woman in such a situation is sacrificing too much for the harmony of the home. Is such a separation of roles necessary for a home to be warm?

The difference between the goals of children living in warm and cool homes is in the same direction as that of their fathers, although the magnitude does not quite reach statistical significance (Fisher exact, $p = .08$). Here is what an 11-year-old boy from the former group says about what he would do if he had all the time and money:

If he agreed, I'd try to improve Gene's eyesight (he is referring here to a friend with an eye problem). I'd go to California, look around Burbank to see how TV shows are filmed. Then I would try to improve the country's economic state – I'd get the country off its rear end and moving again. I'd help the police modify their courtroom procedures.

By contrast, children from cool homes tended to give answers similar to the following one by a 12-year-old:

I'd buy a house and I'd put a swimming pool in it. And I'd buy a remote control airplane. And we'd move into that house and I'd buy a remote control TV and everything.

These two boys, of the same age, are developing quite different dreams about the ideal life. It seems clear that the emotional tone of the home is related to the goals that its inhabitants develop. The wish to escape the actual conditions of one's life is greater among fathers and children in families that lack a warm emotional tone. In such families mothers cannot indulge in escapist fantasies, even their uninhibited wishes reflect productive goals. When the family shares positive feelings about the home, fathers and children express goals that go beyond immediate gratification. In such a context, however, mothers dream of more escapist goals, away from the constraints and confinements of the home. Is it because women whose families are in harmony actualize their productive goals through the family and now feel they deserve to indulge their whims? Or is it that an emotionally integrated family requires so much psychic energy on the woman's part that she cannot entertain, even in fantasy, other productive goals? These and other possibilities may account for this intriguing pattern. But before making too much of this single and slender finding, let us move on to other differences between the two kinds of families.

Participation in the public sphere

Most philosophers and psychologists agree that for a person to develop his or her potentialities fully, it is necessary to take on challenges outside the home. The family, no matter how warm and fulfilling, cannot provide the varied contexts for action that are necessary for the growth of a self. From a societal viewpoint it is equally obvious that a healthy community requires participation in its affairs; excessive investment of attention in the family might in fact drain psychic energy from the pursuit of broader goals and thus decrease the vitality of the community.

Therefore it becomes important to raise the question: What is the relationship between emotional harmony in the home and participation in the wider institutions of the community? At a theoretical level there are two equally plausible answers to this question. One, an extension of Slater's (1961) notion of "libidinal withdrawal," suggests that warm family members might find all the gratification they need at home and thus lack incentives to get involved in the community. The opposite prediction would follow

from Hannah Arendt's reflections on the dynamics of the human condition. Following her arguments one might claim that a person who feels physically and emotionally safe in the private sphere of the household will have a strong base from which to act productively in the public sphere of the community. Which of these two theoretical predictions are supported more strongly by the data?

One question in the interview asked: "Do you participate in any clubs, organizations, or associations?" In addition, respondents were asked to describe the nature and frequency of their activities in such organizations. This question gives only a pale indication of what Arendt meant by action in the public sphere, because in her view even the public sphere is dominated by the template of the household in the modern world, but it should still provide some idea of what the relationship between family integration and community participation might be.

When one looks at the answers to the question, the second hypothesis appears more likely to be true. The members of warm families belong, on the average, to 1.9 organizations, whereas those of cool families belong to 1.3 organizations (substitute "t" test = .15, $p < .05$). These analyses include only members of the two younger generations, because the grandparents' responses were often unclear on this score – it was difficult to tell from their answers in which organizations they were involved at the present and to which they had belonged in the past.

Again, the overall results only begin to tell the story. When one looks at the fathers' answers, the difference is once more the most glaring, with significantly more warm fathers reporting community involvement than cool ones did ($p < .025$), followed by that between children. Mothers from warm families are still involved in more organizations than those of cool families (1.9 vs. 1.5, on the average), although the difference here is the smallest.

Perhaps more important than the number of organizations one belongs to is their type. Children from cool homes were almost exclusively members of sport teams only. Those from warm homes belonged to a much greater variety of hobby clubs, student associations, and religious groups (Fisher exact, $p = .05$). Mothers of cool families were mostly members of charitable and church organizations, whereas their counterparts in warm families be-

longed to the PTA and to community action and political groups. Seven fathers in the warm group were members of professional or political organizations, as contrasted with only three in the cool group.

On the whole, it seems that the difference between the two types of families consists in the fact that members of emotionally integrated homes participate in organizations that are actively involved in maintaining or changing the goals of the community – that is, with politics in the broadest sense. The PTA, school clubs, professional, community, and political organizations all share this character of allowing individuals to struggle toward actualization of goals in and through the community. By contrast, one could say that church groups, charities, sports clubs, self-improvement groups, hobby organizations, although all providing opportunities for growth and productive achievement, are less suited to accomplish "political" ends in this wider sense. When the organizations are broken down by this criterion, the pattern reported in Table 6.3 emerges.

The difference is very large, but it must be taken with more than a grain of salt because the breakdown of organizations is *post hoc* and thus only suggestive. This suggests that people who share a warm emotional tone toward the home with their immediate family tend to participate in a greater number of institutional activities and especially are more likely to be involved in organizations that tend toward the realization of practical goals in an institutional context – which is the basic function of the political process. Again, the clearest difference in patterns of participation – as is also true of goals – is between the fathers in the two kinds of families.

Choice of role models

Another possible comparison between the two types of families concerns the kind of individuals they single out for admiration. It is commonly assumed in theories of socialization that people become acculturated to their society in part by selecting to pay attention to certain "significant others" whose behavior and values they internalize. These significant others become role models and transmit the goals of a culture from generation to generation. If

ible 6.3. *Persons who participate in school, professional,*
nmunity, and political organizations

	Yes	No
Warm families	18	11
Cool families	6	23
Total	24	34

i square: 10.23, *p* < .005

Table 6.4. *Percentage of respondents listing at least once one of the*
three principal role model types

Role model types	Warm households (N = 39)	Cool households (N = 38)	Significance of difference (chi square)
Family Member	59	68	NS
Friend, Teacher, Associate	41	61	NS
Public Figure	64	37	<.05

of a culture can be "objectified" in its artifacts, they can
ersonified in those individuals whom we admire. It is
, therefore, to ask what kind of models our respondents
rchic energy in because this will presumably indicate
. of persons they want to become.

of questions in the interview had the respondent list the
ns he or she most admired and the reasons for this ad-
This part of the interview was analyzed independently
yons, a graduate student at the University of Chicago.
ped 47 categories of role models; these, however, could
:d into three main classes: models who are *Family Mem-*
who are *Friends, Teachers, and Associates,* and those who
Figures, ranging from the field of sports and entertain-
iat of religion and politics.

ght expect members of warm households to select their
ils more often from the family itself. Or, following the
eported in the previous section, one might predict that
d be more prone to focus their attention on public fig-
ise, secure in the warmth of their own families, they can
ights on more distant, more outstanding exemplars of
e. Table 6.4 suggests the latter alternative is closer to the
ereas 64 percent of warm family members mention at
admired public figure, only 37 percent of cool family

former, only once by the latter. The only public figures chosen
more often by cool family members were sports personalities (7
vs. 2) and religious figures (6 vs. 1).

Again, the pattern that emerged in the analysis of social partici-
pation in the previous section is confirmed. Warm families chan-
nel the psychic energy of their members toward the broader in-
tentions of the community – the wide world of political action;
cool families do so much less, and the public arena they direct
attention to tends to be more toward sports and religion. Perhaps
this difference implies that sports and religion are better suited to
provide the emotional gratification lacking in cool families.

When one turns to the reasons that role models were admired,
another counterintuitive but meaningful finding emerges. Of the
22 types of reasons mentioned, we shall consider only the 9 most
frequently used (Table 6.5). The category most often mentioned
by members of warm families was Expertise, the ability to do one's
job well whether inside the home or outside. This is a public vir-
tue, consonant with the outward orientation of the emotionally
integrated households. By contrast, the largest differences in fa-
vor of the cool families involved affect, or the emotional warmth
of the role model and family values. It is as if members of cool
families, deprived of affect within their homes, look for this qual-
ity in the persons they admire. Those who belong to warm fami-

Table 6.3. *Persons who participate in school, professional, community, and political organizations*

	Yes	No
Warm families	18	11
Cool families	6	23
Total	24	34

Chi square: 10.23, $p < .005$

the goals of a culture can be "objectified" in its artifacts, they can also be personified in those individuals whom we admire. It is important, therefore, to ask what kind of models our respondents invest psychic energy in because this will presumably indicate what kind of persons they want to become.

One set of questions in the interview had the respondent list the five persons he or she most admired and the reasons for this admiration. This part of the interview was analyzed independently by Bert Lyons, a graduate student at the University of Chicago. He developed 47 categories of role models; these, however, could be grouped into three main classes: models who are *Family Members,* those who are *Friends, Teachers, and Associates,* and those who are *Public Figures,* ranging from the field of sports and entertainment to that of religion and politics.

One might expect members of warm households to select their role models more often from the family itself. Or, following the findings reported in the previous section, one might predict that they would be more prone to focus their attention on public figures because, secure in the warmth of their own families, they can set their sights on more distant, more outstanding exemplars of the culture. Table 6.4 suggests the latter alternative is closer to the truth. Whereas 64 percent of warm family members mention at least one admired public figure, only 37 percent of cool family members do so. The total number of public figures mentioned by the two types of households is even more divergent. Foreign heads of state were mentioned seven times by warm family members but never in the other group. U.S. presidents were mentioned 13 times in the first group, but only 5 times in the second. Artistic and literary role models were selected nine times by the

Table 6.4. *Percentage of respondents listing at least once one of the three principal role model types*

Role model types	Warm households ($N = 39$)	Cool households ($N = 38$)	Significance of difference (chi square)
Family Member	59	68	NS
Friend, Teacher, Associate	41	61	NS
Public Figure	64	37	<.05

former, only once by the latter. The only public figures chosen more often by cool family members were sports personalities (7 vs. 2) and religious figures (6 vs. 1).

Again, the pattern that emerged in the analysis of social participation in the previous section is confirmed. Warm families channel the psychic energy of their members toward the broader intentions of the community – the wide world of political action; cool families do so much less, and the public arena they direct attention to tends to be more toward sports and religion. Perhaps this difference implies that sports and religion are better suited to provide the emotional gratification lacking in cool families.

When one turns to the reasons that role models were admired, another counterintuitive but meaningful finding emerges. Of the 22 types of reasons mentioned, we shall consider only the 9 most frequently used (Table 6.5). The category most often mentioned by members of warm families was Expertise, the ability to do one's job well whether inside the home or outside. This is a public virtue, consonant with the outward orientation of the emotionally integrated households. By contrast, the largest differences in favor of the cool families involved affect, or the emotional warmth of the role model and family values. It is as if members of cool families, deprived of affect within their homes, look for this quality in the persons they admire. Those who belong to warm families are able to take affect for granted because they already experience it in their homes; thus they respond more to public qualities such as expertise, ideals, character, and creativity. Creativity as a trait to be admired in role models is the one that differentiates warm and cool families most sharply (chi square 11.7, $p < .005$). The ability to be original and innovative seems to appeal to those

Table 6.5. *Percentage of respondents listing at least once one of the nine main reasons for admiring role models*

Reasons for admiring role models	Warm families (N = 39)	Cool families (N = 38)	Significance of difference (chi square)
1. Expertise	54	29	<.05
2. Generosity, Kindness, Understanding	41	45	N.S.
3. Intelligence	38	39	N.S.
4. Ideals	36	24	N.S.
5. Affect	31	53	N.S.
6. Creativity	31	5	<.005
7. Character	26	13	N.S.
8. Family Values	23	32	N.S.
9. Strength	18	34	N.S.

who live in the relative security of an emotionally integrated home but leaves members of cool families cold.

The paradox of families that focus positive emotions on the home is now more clearly delineated. They are close, the relationship among their members is warm, yet they are the ones that foster productive goals, active involvement in social action, and public models and values. It truly seems that investment of psychic energy in the household frees attention for broader goals and task instead of just absorbing attention and tying it down to the maintenance of the family. The "return" on the "investment" seems worth the effort, for those who freely give their attention to their family to create a warm home ultimately have a richer, more diverse public life as well.

Personality patterns

If the meanings elaborated in the homes help shape the selves of family members, then one would expect people from warm and cool families to differ in terms of the organization of their selves. That there is such a difference was already suggested by the three previous sections. The goals one develops, the types of interactions in which one invests energy, and the models one admires are important dimensions along which the self is organized; and on

all these dimensions the warm and cool families differed. But there is a more direct way to explore the shape of the self. So-called "personality inventories" are designed to reflect these different patterns of psychic energy allocation.

Thus one might ask: Does belonging to a warm family have any appreciable personality correlates? We raise this question with some trepidation because the measurement of personality dimensions can be very frustrating and inconclusive. Even laying aside the current controversy about whether personality traits do in fact exist or are purely figments of cognitive patterns of consistency (Shweder, 1977), the problem is choosing among the literally hundreds of theories and testing one that will give meaningful results.

In this study we used 8 of the 22 scales of the PRF-E, Jackson Personality Research Form (Jackson, 1967), which seemed relevant to the issues we were investigating. This instrument commends itself by its high reliability and above average validity and also because it is simple to administer, fill out, and interpret.

Specifically, we expected that members of warm families would score higher than those of cool families on the dimensions of Affiliation and Nurturance. People scoring high on Affiliation are supposed to be warm and gregarious, to enjoy being with friends and people in general and to make efforts to maintain relationships. People high in Nurturance are supposed to assist others whenever possible, to be interested in caring for children, to perform readily favors for others. The average scores of individuals in the two families are reported in Table 6.6. As can be seen, the groups do differ in the expected direction on these variables. In addition, significant differences appeared on two other personality dimensions.

The cool group scored significantly higher on Defendance. According to the makers of the test, this means a tendency to be suspicious, to take offense easily, to be self-protective, rationalizing, and secretive. The warm group was close to being significantly higher on the dimension of Order, which reflects organization, discipline, consistency, and deliberation in the conduct of one's life.

Finally, members of warm families also scored significantly higher on desirability. This means they have a stronger tendency to describe themselves in terms judged as desirable; to present, consciously or not, a favorable picture of the self in responses to

Table 6.6. *Mean scores of members of warm and cool families on eight subscales of the Jackson Personality Research Form (Form E)*

Personality dimensions	Warm families N = 39	Cool families N = 38	Value of "t" test
Affiliation	9.72	8.16	1.93[a]
Defendance	5.49	6.73	−1.78[a]
Impulsivity	5.18	5.29	− .14
Nurturance	11.59	10.18	1.99[a]
Order	9.05	7.34	1.64
Sentience	8.00	7.68	.44
Social Recognition	8.13	7.42	1.24
Desirability	11.77	10.37	2.05[a]

[a] $p < .05$

personality statements. This finding can be explained in two ways: The higher score on Desirability might mean that people in warm families have a tendency to present deceptively inflated images of themselves. Or it could be that their positive self-assessment is in fact realistic and appropriate. The makers and previous users of the PRF are themselves not sure about the meaning of the Desirability dimension. Some of the evidence reported in the test manual, however, seems to favor the more positive interpretation. Psychiatric patients, for instance, have low scores on this variable. When the PRF is correlated with the Bentler Psychological Inventory, Desirability correlates highest with the Self Acceptance scale of the BPI (= .62), next, with the scales of Diligence, Stability, Orderliness, and Perceptiveness (Jackson, 1967, p. 59). In other words, Desirability seems to be a desirable trait, even if it might include a tendency to put one's best foot forward.

On the whole, then, members of warm families display personality traits of warmth, caring, orderliness, positive self-concept, and lack of suspiciousness. The fact that on four of the eight dimensions investigated significant differences emerged between the two groups suggests that in fact warm and cool families are separated by more than their emotional attitude toward the home – as if the affective tone of these two kinds of families develops different personalities in their members. Which comes first? Do people with a warm personality create warm homes or does a

warm family interaction in the home shape warm personalities? This important question cannot be answered with the data at hand. It is possible, however, to analyze the results in greater detail and thus investigate the relationship further.

When the mean personality scores of the parents are analyzed separately, it appears that warm fathers have a significantly higher sense of Order than cool fathers and that warm mothers are extremely low on Defendance, significantly lower than cool mothers. Thus the personality dynamics of emotionally integrated families seems to be based on fathers who are organized, disciplined, orderly, and consistent and on mothers who are accepting, open, and forgiving. One still does not know whether it is the father's purposiveness that produces, as a reaction, the mother's openness, or vice versa. It is also possible that these traits shape each other through mutual family interaction. In any case this combination of traits between the spouses seems to underpin a warm home life.

But the question still remains, which comes first, the positive emotional attitude toward the home or the appropriate personality constellation? A tentative answer to this question might be attained by examining differences among the children in the two kinds of families. If children from warm families have more of the appropriate traits than children of cool families, it is safe to assume that this difference is caused by the family milieu, rather than vice versa. Inasmuch as children cannot choose the family in which they are born and have less chance to influence its tone than their parents have, it is reasonable to assume that if there are differences in the children's personalities, they are the result of the affective tone of their families.

Table 6.7 shows the average scores on the eight relevant personality dimensions given by the 20 children. Although the number of respondents is very small, three of the eight comparisons are statistically significant. Thus the emotional tone of the home seems to differentiate children more than their parents, suggesting the conclusion that a warm feeling toward the home is not simply the by-product of congenial personality types but in fact is an important formative influence on personality. The largest difference is on the dimension of Nurturance. Children of warm homes are more sympathetic, helpful, caring, and supporting. The next difference is Affiliation: the relevant traits here are

Table 6.7. *Mean scores of children on eight selected subscales of the Jackson Personality Research Form (Form E)*

Personality dimensions	Warm families (N = 10)	Cool families (N = 10)	Value of substitute "t" test
Affiliation	10.10	6.80	.37[a]
Defendance	7.10	10.60	−.37[a]
Impulsivity	7.90	6.30	.14
Nurturance	13.40	9.68	.50[b]
Order	8.60	6.80	.13
Sentience	9.50	8.20	.13
Social Recognition	9.40	8.60	.11
Desirability	8.80	7.20	.20

[a] $p < .01$
[b] $p < .005$

loyal, warm, friendly, sociable, cooperative. Warm homes also breed children who are less denying, defensive, and unsure of their worth.

Another way of representing these findings is to ask, Which is the strongest personality trait for each of these 20 children? Among those from warm homes 8 out of 10 attained the highest score on the traits of Affiliation and Nurturance, as opposed to only 1 out of the 10 children from cool families (Fisher exact, $p = .0007$). Table 6.8 presents these results. There is no question that emotionally integrated families produce children that are warm, cooperative, helpful, and supporting. The modal trait for children of unintegrated families is suspicious defensiveness.

It is intriguing to note that these intra- and interfamily personality patterns are complementary rather than identical. Not all members of warm families share the same traits. Fathers are high on Order, mothers low on Defendance, and children are high on Nurturance, Affiliation, and, like their mothers, low on Defendance. Thus it does not seem that children simply acquire parental traits through modeling or imitation. Rather, a certain set of parental personality dimensions calls forth a complementary set of traits in the children. The father's sense of order and discipline does not impel the children to be equally ordered and disciplined but might give them enough of a feeling of security to be warm

and nurturant. However, it is not likely that parental characteris-

Table 6.8. *Predominant personality trait (highest mean) of children from warm and cool families; number of children scoring highest on each of the eight Jackson Personality Research Form (Form E) subscales*

Personality dimensions	Children of warm families	Children of cool families
Affiliation	1	0
Defendance	0	4
Impulsivity	0	0
Nurturance	7	1
Order	2	2
Sentience	0	1
Social Recognition	0	2
Desirability	0	0
Total	10	10

tics affect the appropriate traits in the children in any simple linear fashion. Presumably, there is no direct one-to-one relationship between Trait A in the mother and Trait B in the son or daughter. Instead, one would think that whatever effects shape the child's personality are mediated by the total network of family relationships, especially by the meanings attributed to actions, objects, and the home as a whole.

Relationships with objects

What do objects mean in the lives of these people? The answer of one of the fathers from a warm home expresses quite clearly the sentiments of this group. Asked what it would mean *not* to have the special objects he had mentioned, he answered:

I honestly think almost nothing. One way that you could say that is that we have so many things that we like that a few more or less wouldn't be particularly noticed. Another way of saying it is that we enter into an emotional relationship with the things that we have and that it would probably work with whatever we happened to have around. Beyond that, there's something very close between the freedom to love and the freedom to go without.

When asked if this interchangeable quality applied to all the

objects he had singled out as special, he went on:

To every individual thing, yes. I think that the place that the loss would be felt most severely would be in family objects and for that reason they are irreplaceable. Another *rosewood secretary* (one of his special objects) would not be the one that came down through the family. We have a four-poster bed that we like very much and another would be very beautiful, but it wouldn't be the one that my wife's grandfather was born in. I think that the intrinsic value, the cash value that it has is almost indifferent, because most of it we've never had a commercial relation to.

For this man things matter only as carriers of meaning. Their value does not derive from intrinsic worth but from their power to act as signs of relationships, of the extended boundaries of the self. Thus objects for him have the paradoxical quality of meaning "almost nothing" and yet being "irreplaceable."

It is possible that such a paradoxical relationship to objects is the key to a healthy interaction with the inanimate environment. Poised between "the freedom to love and the freedom to go without" one can learn from and create meanings with things, yet not become addicted to their possession.

Some of our respondents were upset by our questions about special objects and told us that they were not materialists, and things meant nothing to them. It is people, not objects that count. "You should ask me how I feel about people, not things," they would say. Human relationships are so much more important than material possessions, they claimed, and in fact they would not mention any object as special, or perhaps only one or two photos of persons to whom they felt close. This rejection of the symbolic mediation of things in favor of direct human ties seemed plausible at first, until we began to notice that people who denied meanings to objects also lacked any close network of human relationships. Those who were most vocal about prizing friendship over material concerns seemed to be the most lonely and isolated. This does not mean, of course, that things are indispensable to objectify relationships with loved ones. It does seem, however, that those who have ties to people tend to represent them in concrete objects. Thus to deny meanings to objects is not necessarily a sign of being in close touch with people; quite the contrary. On the other hand, a great involvement with possessions might be equally a sign of alienation. When things become indispensable, when the self is destroyed by the loss of possessions, one has come to rely excessively on the symbolic power of objects. The optimal attitude seems to be one in which a person can use things to ex-

press, objectify, and strengthen meanings and relationships without becoming entirely dependent on the objects themselves.

When one compares warm and cool families in terms of the objects they cherish and the significations they attach to them, one major difference stands out. The parents in the former group keep mentioning objects that are signs of the spouses' mutual relationship to each other, whereas parents in the latter group do so more rarely. Fifteen out of the 20 persons in the middle generation of warm families mention at least one object that relates to their spouse. It is often a wedding gift, one received for an anniversary, or a souvenir of a trip taken together. Only 5 of the 18 middle-generation adults in the cool group mention objects referring to the spouse (Fisher exact, $p = .004$). The difference is particularly strong among men: seven of the warm husbands mention symbols of their wives, only one of the cool husbands does so ($p = .02$).

Similar, but less pronounced differences appear in connection to other family members. In each case the material environment in the warm homes appears to be higher in meanings signifying close human ties. For instance, 60 percent of the warm adults mention at least one object referring to their own parents or grandparents, as against 40 percent in the second group ($p = .08$). In the first group 75 percent of the adults mention their children in connection with objects; in the second, 50 percent ($p = .08$). It is also interesting that 30 percent of the warm parents have objects that are signs of their own childhood, as opposed to 6 percent of the cool parents ($p = .06$).

All this adds up to the fact that the emotional integration of the home is concretely embodied in household objects. Otherwise, the kinds of objects mentioned by the two groups were essentially the same. Except for a tendency for more works of art to be mentioned as special by adults in warm families ($p = .05$), none of the other object or meaning categories differed. For instance, both groups of adults referred objects equally often to their own selves. Activities and accomplishments of the self were the meanings most often associated with things by all respondents. What did separate the two groups was simply the interpersonal meaning associated with the objects. The human relationships that made one group of families emotionally integrated were represented in the symbolic ecology of the household.

It should be noted that, search as we might, no differences were found among the children of the two kinds of families in terms of the objects they cherished or of the significations attached to them. Both groups of children tended to have things that referred to their own selves, and enjoyment or use were the main reasons for finding them special. Apparently, the impact of symbolic specialization does not manifest itself until early adulthood. Children from warm and cool families already differ in terms of goals, social participation, and personality; but they have not yet objectified these differences in their symbolic environment. As far as the oldest generation is concerned, no systematic differences were found either. Grandparents of warm families tended to mention meanings associated with their own parents, siblings, and ancestors more often but the trend was not significant. They also mentioned "embodiment of an ideal" as a reason for cherishing objects – usually books – twice as often as cool grandparents. But on the whole both sets of grandparents were surrounded by objects referring to the family, and thus the differences failed to attain statistical significance. It is the symbolic patterns of the parental generation that most clearly reflect the emotional tone of the household.

Families whose members describe their home in positive emotional terms do indeed differ from families in which such descriptions are lacking. These differences are complex and sometimes unexpected, but on the whole they present a picture that seems sensible as well as thought provoking (Table 6.9).

The advantages of a warm, emotionally integrated family are clear. On the one hand, relationships between parents and children in warm families are closer because they are concretely represented in special household objects. These families have an internal focus; the psychic energy of their members is directed to each other, and each presumably receives feedback from the others' attention. Perhaps this is what explains the seemingly paradoxical fact that these internally focused families have more energy to invest in outside goals and activities: In warm households the attention one receives from the family gives assurance of one's own worth, thus one is relatively freer to invest psychic energy in goals that go beyond self-ish intentions. Thus children in warm families develop traits of Affiliation and Nurturance, they seem to have more productive goals, they take part in organizations with

Table 6.9. *Summary of main differences between members of warm and cool homes*

		Warm families	Cool families
Personality traits	Fathers		Less sense of order, self-discipline
	Mothers	More open, accepting, less critical	
	Children	More helpful, caring, more open, accepting, less critical	Less loyal, warm, friendly
Goals	Fathers	Productive	Escape
	Mothers	Escape (?)	Productive (?)
	Children	Productive	Escape
Social participation	Fathers	Higher membership in goal-directed organizations (school, professional community, political)	Relatively higher membership in church, charity, sport, and self-improvement organizations
	Mothers		
	Children		
Person role models	Fathers	More public figures admired, more emphasis on expertise and creativity	More family members admired, more emphasis on affect
	Mothers		
	Children		
	Grandparents		
Relation to objects	Fathers	Meaning of objects relates more to other family members	Meaning of objects relates more to self
	Mothers		
	Children	No difference	

more active goals, and they respond more to public role models.

In cool families there appears to be less attention directed to each other's goals. Lacking this confirmation of their existence and worth, they have to seek it elsewhere. Thus their goals and their activities in the public sphere have to be relatively more selfish, in that the outcome of their actions must help to validate a self deprived of positive feedback. Children in such families grow up less concerned with the needs of others because their own needs for recognition have not been satisfied; they turn more suspicious

and self-defensive for the same reasons. Their goals tend to be hedonistic rather than productive and they do not get involved as much in social organizations – except athletic ones – and, paradoxically, they admire warm family members rather than public figures, presumably because such role models exemplify the source of love they have missed in their own life.

It would be quite easy, therefore, to enshrine the warm household as the most desirable model for what a family should be like. Yet there is one nagging ambiguity in this picture that mars its idyllic character – the position of the mother in the warm family constellation.

All evidence suggests an asymmetrical relation of the husband and the wife in warm households. The typical configuration involves the stereotyped roles of the productive father and devoted mother. In both warm and cool families about the same percentage of mothers worked, and so the question of "liberated" working women versus housewives was not the issue here. The warm husband and father can focus his attention on his wife and children and on the objects that embody family relationships. At the same time, he tends to have an orderly, self-disciplined personality, is involved in public organizations, and invests his psychic energy in productive goals. The complementary role for the warm wife and mother is to give herself to create a family system that is ordered and energized by her devotion. This scenario is, of course, identical with the traditional family model described by Parsons and Bales (1955). Herein lies the ambiguity. For, by contemporary standards, the complete absorption of the wife's psychic energy into the family is morally untenable, because it means that she will be able to define herself only in relation to what she does for other people. It is unfair that she should receive feedback to her own self mainly from the restricted circle of the family, whereas her husband and children, fortified by her attention, can turn to the wider arena of public life to reap rewards and confirmations of their skills.

The traditional Western family model reflects a relatively successful adaptation to the requirements of human development. To develop a strong self in the modern world, people need the nurturant culture of the family – a meaning system that expresses acceptance and love. To cultivate such a goal is a full-time job, involving as much concentrated attention as the pursuit of any

professional task. The creation and maintenance of a system of meanings, even one limited to a few people, requires giving psychic energy, which then will not be available for other purposes. What is unfair about this particular solution to the necessity of adaptation is that in traditional families the woman has no choice in how to allocate her attention. Both she and the rest of the family expect her to maintain the system, and consequently she has little energy left to do anything else.

Is there a more equitable solution? We have seen that fathers of warm families are more involved with the household than their counterparts in cool families. Yet their involvement does not seem to "liberate" their wives – if anything, it appears to tie the women even closer to the task of household maintenance. The man's input of psychic energy into the family simply increases the intensity of the family relationships rather than serving as a substitute for the woman's involvement. But perhaps this is because the man's involvement is rigidly determined by norms that dictate "appropriate" behavior. No doubt there are ways to create "warm" families without expecting a lifetime commitment from one of its members. The women's liberation movement has given women political freedom to participate on an equal basis in public life, but the responsibilities of the home are something less affected by legal systems and more so by the cooperation of husband and wife. It is precisely this problem that remains to be worked out in families now attempting to change the *status quo*. Femininity has already been redefined during the past decade to include more productive goals, and it seems quite likely that a wider definition of masculinity, which includes nurturant goals (e.g., Chodorow, 1974), could produce warm families at least as effectively as those discussed here. We should add that our sample for the most part leaves out families with children under 10 years of age, and one might expect that it would be this age group who would be most affected by the women's movement because these households were set up after traditional roles were brought into question. It is also important to realize that alternative sharing of family responsibilities might take years of cultivation before it can reveal its viability.

There might be other objections to holding up warm families as positive examples. The past century has seen a veritable deluge of critical attacks against the so-called "bourgeois family," which was

assumed to be patriarchal and authoritarian, closely bound by ties of guilt and repressed desire. It was for this kind of family that Marx, Engels, and Lenin saved some of their sharpest barbs. It was the same kind of family that Freud exposed as a hotbed of neurosis. Consequently, in Soviet Russia, Israel, and China attempts were made to substitute collective upbringing for the family, claiming that the former was a more healthy environment for human development (Coser, 1951). It is too early to dismiss this alternative to the family, although clearly it has been less than a roaring success so far. Of course, the problems encountered by collective education might not be its fault but, rather, the social systems in which it has been tried out. In nations with fewer economic and political problems it might still work out better.

In any case it should be clear that the warm families of this chapter bear little resemblance to the ideal-typical "bourgeois family" against which so many European intellectuals have rebelled in the recent past. The families we have been describing are in many ways a new cultural development, a phenomenon perhaps unprecedented in the history of evolution.

For one thing, the classical bourgeois family is held together by the heavy weight of social traditions. Economic advantages, status considerations, social controls, and expectations maintain it; they provide the constricting goals that channel the psychic energy of its members. Thus it might be a closely knit unit, but it is not necessarily a warm one because the meanings that maintain it are rigid creations of social forces. By contrast, the warm families in our midst are practically *invented* by their members. Outside constraints are relatively light; the meanings that keep these families together are woven and mended by the constant attention of those who comprise them.

Paradoxically, these warm families seem to accomplish exactly what Marxist and Freudian theoreticians hoped the abolition of the bourgeois family would accomplish: a greater involvement and integration in the community. Members of warm families are less dependent on the private needs that the home has satisfied; they are less dependent on the nurturance of their own selves, and this psychic emancipation allows them to expend their energies on more complex goals, as well as on more demanding communal action. On this score the traditional family arrangement seems to draw on a deeper source of wisdom than many modern

theories, which have run afoul of human nature in trying to instill communal goals in children by short-circuiting the family, and have only succeeded in creating self-centered, alienated adults who could not conceive of meanings beyond their own private interests.

In one respect the critics of traditional families are absolutely correct. An emotionally integrated family is a costly proposition in terms of psychic energy. With the best intentions in the world, one might not be able to devote the attention that it requires. The many demands on one's energy that survival in a complex society implies might leave one enervated. Or, more precisely, one might choose to invest one's psychic energies in goals that are more suited to personal development than to cultivating those related to the home. But the home is a living sign of the emotional warmth of its members and depends on them for its continued existence. This chapter suggests that by devoting one's energies to the creation of an emotionally integrated home, one can obtain tangible and substantial results.

CHAPTER 7

The transactions between persons and things

Thus far we have discussed the various kinds and meanings of special objects, but we have not looked at the process by which meaning is attributed to things in any detail. Yet cherished possessions attain their significance through *psychic activities* or transactions. Objects are not static entities whose meaning is projected on to them from cognitive functions of the brain or from abstract conceptual systems of culture. They themselves are signs, objectified forms of psychic energy. Whether through action or contemplation, objects in the domestic environment are meaningful only as part of a communicative sign process and are active ingredients of that process.

How a person interacts with objects makes considerable difference. In Chapter 1 we defined the person and the thing as two elements, and in this chapter we will explore the third term, the transaction or relationship between the person and thing. The mode of this transaction determines the goals around which one can shape a life course. The most inclusive term to describe the modes of meaning that mediate people with objects is perhaps cultivation (see Rochberg-Halton, 1979a,b.; 1980a).

Cultivation involves both senses of the verb "to tend": to take care of or watch over ("she tends her plants regularly"), in other words, "to attend to"; and also to proceed or be directed on some course or inclination ("he tends to find the right way"), that is, "to intend" some aim. Indeed, cultivation – the improvement, development, refinement, or resultant expression of some object or habit of life due to care, training, or inquiry – comes closest to the original meaning of the term *culture*, although most contemporary theories of culture exclude this aspect in favor of a rather static "symbol system" approach, for example, in the structuralism

of Lévi-Strauss, the cognitive anthropology of David Schneider, or the "semiotic" of Umberto Eco. According to these contemporary theories, the essence of culture is that it is a "logical" system of conceptual beliefs rather than a life to be lived in the flesh and blood. They stress a radical dichotomy between nature, which is without meaning or purpose, a purely discrete mechanical system, and culture, from which all meaning is cognitively derived. Our view, by contrast, is to see nature and culture on a continuum, so that culture, or cultivation, is the completion of nature. When a person cultivates a habit of tending plants, for example, both the nature of that plant and the nature of that person can be enhanced by the transaction. The meaning of the object, then, becomes realized in the activity of interaction and in the direction or purpose that this activity indicates: physical and psychological growth.

A much less obvious example might be the activity of reminiscence when looking at or thinking about old family photos. First of all, this is an activity in which signs of loved ones or past experiences are communicated, certain moods associated with those people are induced, and a stream of thought about "how it was" is brought about from a person's current perspective on how things are now. The reminiscence evoked by the photo has its own peculiar flavor or pervasive quality. But this activity has another dimension. It also indicates intention – a direction, purpose, or habit that is an essential feature of the meaning of the activity. Many animals can remember but presumably only humans reminisce, that is, actively intend a memory to come into consciousness and, in a sense, complete the natural process of memory. Indeed, remembrance and tangibility, according to Hannah Arendt (1958), are what make a human world possible:

The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and will remember, and second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfillment and which makes it, indeed, as the Greeks held, the mother of all arts, the living activities of action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they had never been. (Arendt, 1958, p. 95)

When a person intends something to come about, or attends to something, that activity tends in some direction – toward its out-

come or purpose. The attention that a person invests in the activity is the means by which that outcome can be realized.

To summarize, then, the meaning of cherished possessions is realized in the transaction between person and object; transactions are psychic activities (or communicative sign processes) and not simply physical behaviors per se, although they involve physical behaviors; and there are different modes of transactions.

The fact that some types of objects are usually meant to be valued for reasons other than their intrinsic qualities, such as trophies or dollar bills, whereas others are meant to be valued precisely for those qualities, illustrates that different modes of psychic activity seem to be involved in the way meaning is construed.

We would like to distinguish three modes of transactions that seem essential to understanding how artifacts can come to acquire significance. These modes should provide both different perspectives in which to view the person–object transaction and some criteria for understanding the process of cultivation. The modes of transactions that we consider essential to cultivation are: the aesthetic quality unique to the specific transaction; the channeling of psychic energy within the transaction; and the outcome or goal of the transaction. "Transaction" is used here in the technical sense proposed by Dewey, where an element of any act of intelligence only gains its meaning in the context of the transaction itself (see Dewey and Bentley, 1949); that is, the elements are not actually independent. Between the person and the thing, the first two elements of transaction, are the mediating modes we are considering, as illustrated in the following diagram.

Elements of Transactions

person ⟷ thing

mode: 1 aesthetic quality
2 attention
3 goal

In seeing these three modes as comprising transactions, we were influenced by Peirce's three "modes of being," which in his sign theory are roughly the iconic, indexical, and symbolic modes of signs (Rochberg-Halton, 1980c). But the tripart division of mind also has a very long tradition in psychology, as Ernest Hilgard (1980) has recently argued in an article called, "The Trilogy of Mind: Cognition, Affection, and Conation." Hilgard sug-

gests that psychology has been dominated by the cognitive element to the relative neglect of the other two dimensions in the last 25 years. However, in our view all three modes are essential to experience and the cultivation of the self and serve to mediate the person with the thing.

Thus our examination of the modes of transaction will involve three questions: (1) What is the aesthetic quality of the transaction or what characterizes aesthetic experience? (2) How is psychic energy channeled? (3) What is the outcome of the transaction? We shall attempt to answer (1) by examining the role of aesthetic experience in the valuing of art objects, using Dewey's distinction from his book *Art as Experience* between what he calls *perception* and *recognition*. Our answer to (2) will involve a discussion of how attention serves to channel psychic energy. In responding to (3), we shall discuss the goals of the cultivation process – how outcomes of psychic activity can be seen in the context of a hierarchy of goals.

A given experience will rarely come under the heading of only one of these areas, rather, all three will usually apply to any person–object transaction. The same experience will have different features come into prominence depending on what perspective one chooses to emphasize.

Aesthetic experience

The first dimension along which one might assess the nature of a person–object transaction is its aesthetic quality. In everyday language, "aesthetic" has a refined, almost effete connotation that makes it seem irrelevant to everyday experience. But in its broadest sense, every act of awareness, whether of internal states or of the external environment, has an aesthetic component. What we are about to argue is that this aesthetic dimension is not a rarefied frill but a vitally important aspect of how we relate to the world.

The approach to aesthetic experience taken here was developed by Rochberg-Halton (1979a,b) and is based primarily on John Dewey's distinction between what he calls *perception* and *recognition* (see Dewey, 1934). For Dewey, recognition describes a falling back on some previously formed interpretive schema or

stereotype when confronted with an object, whereas perception involves an active receptivity to the object so that its qualities may modify previously formed habits or schemes. Although the explicit purpose of art is to evoke aesthetic experience, Dewey does not limit aesthetic experience to art alone but considers it a potential element of *all experience.* Perception is essential to aesthetic experience and leads to psychological growth and learning. Recognition, or the interpretation of an object or experience solely on the basis of already existing habits, only serves to condition a person further to a life of convention. If culture were simply a symbol system of convention, as some cognitive anthropologists argue, then aesthetic experience would only consist of recognition in Dewey's sense, because the object of that experience "contains" meaning only as an arbitrary sign endowed with meaning by cultural convention and not because of unique qualities of its own.

Culture seen as a process of cultivation makes it possible to view meaning as a transaction rather than as a subjective projection by a culture or individual on to a chaos with no meaningful properties of its own. Dewey's view seems to account for something left out of most contemporary accounts of meaning, namely, the way something genuinely new can arise in experience – something not reducible to convention. Although even perception largely involves conventional habits of interpretation, the fact that a person uses conventional habits of thought from his or her culture is not the important issue. What is important is that the object of interaction has some influence on the experiencer's interpretation because of its own intrinsic qualities – for this is the essential way that learning occurs in Dewey's aesthetic perspective. The nth listening to a favorite piece of music, the re-viewing of a painting or a sunset – or *any* activity – can and should involve novel elements that make the experience unique and complete. Aesthetic qualities occur in the immediate present, but they also act as mediating signs in consciousness (Rochberg-Halton, in press). They are neither exclusively mental nor physical, subjective nor objective, but belong to specific situations or contexts and form consummations of transactions between the organism and environment:

A situation may be cheerful, distressing, exciting, fearful, indeterminate, etc. In each instance there is a unique, pervasive quality that conditions, and is conditioned, by all the constituents of the situation ... Pervasive quality *is* esthetic quality. Dewey's point is that esthetic quality is present in *any* experience that is

they serve to unite "experience" in symbolic form.

distinctively *an* experience – one that is marked off from the rest of our experience by its wholeness, integrity, and unity. (Bernstein, 1966, pp. 94–96)

Aesthetic experiences, which are often considered subjective and hence inessential by social scientists, thus actually may be one of the essential ways we learn to become *objective,* in the sense of coming to recognize the pervasive qualities of the environment in their own terms. On this basis it would seem that the almost ignored area of aesthetic experience should receive more attention in social research than it has previously.

But the aesthetic experience has usually been either reduced to a mere sensation of physiological perception or to a cultural convention. In the former case it is seen as a hedonistic individual sensation of pleasure, whereas in the latter all meaning is purely conventional (or symbolic in Peirce's sense of a sign that will be interpreted on the basis of conventional understanding rather than because of its own qualities or physicality). Including qualitative immediacy as an element of the person–object transaction seems to offer a way to go beyond the usual argument that reduces art solely to social convention (e.g., Durkheim, 1965, pp. 426, 427; Sahlins, 1977, pp. 11, 12; Goodman, 1968, pp. 5, 38) or the utilitarian argument that art only gives a "pleasure sensation" (e.g., Mehrabian, 1976) but is not an essential aspect of social life. Although most meaning seems to occur within the received bubble of conventional norms, we want to explore how aesthetic experience provides possibilities for the emergence of new experience. To clarify this, let us first discuss how respondents actually did value their art.

The most surprising feature of people's comments on the significance of paintings and sculpture was that intrinsic qualities of such objects were rarely mentioned. Instead, art was valued primarily because it recalled memories of events, family, and friendship. Of all the meanings mentioned in connection with visual art, only 16 percent could be coded as referring to intrinsic qualities; the same proportion for sculpture was 11 percent.

This pattern suggests that art tends to be valued more for the symbolic context surrounding it than for the expressive possibilities of the object itself. But a home is not a museum, so why should the intrinsic qualities of artistic objects be valued? If artistic objects reflect personal identity, ties to loved ones, or one's relation to a status hierarchy, their function is still important because

However, from the aesthetic perspective, art objects have a purpose of their own – the unique ability of producing new visual experiences, feelings, and ideas. If a picture drawn by a child is cherished for this reason and not for what it looks like, the object is valued as a symbol of love or personal relationship, but not as art. Likewise, it is possible to value an original Picasso, as at least one of the respondents did, not as art but as a token of social standing. In so doing, personal needs may be realized, but the "purpose" of the object itself is denied. An aesthetic experience involves something more than the projection of meaning from the person to the environment or vice versa. It involves a realization of meaning through interaction with the inherent qualities of the object.

As mentioned earlier, recognition is a falling back upon a previously formed schema or stereotype when confronted with some object:

Bare recognition is satisfied when a proper tag or label is attached, "proper" signifying one that serves a purpose outside the act of recognition – as a salesman identifies wares by a sample. It involves no stir of the organism, no inner commotion. (Dewey, 1958, p. 53)

Thus recognition involves the use of art for purely external reasons, such as valuing a painting only because it was a wedding gift, or because it fits an interior decorating scheme, rather than a valuing of art because it emphasizes the specific expressive qualities of those objects.

It could be argued that the proper function of the home is to be a safe haven of recognition, whereas the "stir of the organism," the "inner commotion" that Dewey attributes to the aesthetic act of perception, is more properly relegated to the public arena. Perhaps there is a complementary relationship between the home and the outside world: People who can bask in the understanding milieu of recognition at home might then practice aesthetic perception all the more acutely when they are out of it. But perception and recognition are not opposites. More correctly, recognition is "arrested perception" because it does not go far enough to meet the inherent qualities of the object on their own terms. Perception includes the familiar and cannot occur without it because that would be utter chaos. Much of what makes a home such a warm and familiar place is that it embodies all our prejudices and habitual idiosyncrasies and allows us to "vegetate" when we must.

But without the "stir of the organism" provided by aesthetic expe-

riences, a home would very easily lose its warmth and become petrified. It seems more likely that habits of transaction formed in the home will be generalized to other contexts as well, and how one learns to relate to things at home will have a decisive effect on the psychological growth of the person.

To give an idea of what it means to value art exclusively in terms of recognition, and to show the relationship of this habit to a person's overall life course, we might consider the case of a woman who named five art objects out of a total of seven things that were special to her in the home:

Wall plaques: They give the kitchen a "kitcheny" look. Without them the kitchen would seem plain.

Last Supper portrait: It makes the kitchen more religious. It's just like when the family is all together at dinner . . . It looks nice and it "belongs there."

Metal ship: It reminds me of something from the seventeenth century. It's special because I bought it for my boy. I would miss it.

Venus de Milo reproduction: It's unusual 'cause it doesn't have arms. I got it at a demonstration through a point system. I would feel bad because I really worked at getting it.

Plaques: A peasant boy and a peasant girl set of plaques. I really like it. I paid a lot for them. I would be very upset if anything were to happen to it.

All the objects in these descriptions are valued because of social meanings they embody, such as ties to kin, or effort or money spent. Objective qualities only serve the purpose of recognition, embodying religious beliefs and cultural beliefs about interior decoration. The objects have no "purpose" of their own that might call out a novel idea or emotion. Even the *Venus de Milo* is unusual " 'cause it doesn't have arms," not because of the beauty of the figure. Its symbolic value lies in the efforts invested in acquiring it through some point system – serving as a trophy.

When we look at this woman's daily activities and responses to some of the other questions, it becomes apparent that she is habituated to an extremely passive life-style. Electronic media dominate her day. She reports, for example, spending about 8 hours each day watching television, listening to the morning radio for about 4 hours, and spending an hour or two every day on the telephone. One would hope that some of these activities overlapped in time, otherwise, 13 hours each day are spent attending to appliances.

One example of this passivity is her response to the question

about what kinds of things she does at home during the day that are special. She said: "I watch TV and listen to tapes. I think about things I wish I could do but don't." Another example is her response to a question that asked which objects and places in her home she would go to if she felt the following emotions: happy, sad, in touch with other people, lonely, powerless, and free. Five of the six answers involved a situation where she would be lying down – "happy" in the living room on the sofa; "sad" in the bedroom on the bed; "in touch with other people" was the bedroom again, but on the phone; "lonely" in the basement on the sofa; "free" in the living room on the rug. Only "powerless" evoked a nonhorizontal situation and high stimulus environment – the front porch.

As indicators of a general life-style, the habituation to the media and to lethargic activities reveal that it would be extremely difficult for this woman to have an aesthetic experience in Dewey's sense – that is, to be really affected and not merely manipulated by the objects of her experience. As long as things mean only what they are "supposed" to mean, a person cannot grow beyond the boundaries set by culture and socialization.

Perception, on the other hand, involves an active, critical receptivity to the object so that its qualities may modify previously formed habits or interpretive associations. In perception the objective qualities of objects are intrinsic to our experience; in recognition they are extrinsic. An experience of perception means that the scheme through which we interpret an object is changed or enlarged, which is how learning occurs, by enlarging or changing the habitual framework of interpretation. Dewey's comments on the act of expression also convey what he means by perception:

The junction of the new and old is not a mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the "stored," material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation . . . Things in the environment that would otherwise be mere smooth channels or else blind obstructions become means, media. At the same time, things retained from past experience that would grow stale from routine or inert from lack of use, become coefficients in new adventures and put on a raiment of fresh meaning. (Dewey, 1958, p. 60–61)

This orientation to experience is similar to the one that Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) have found to be the hallmark of creativity. Their study showed that creative artists were no more

technically proficient or intelligent than those who were uncreative; what distinguished the two groups was that the former tended to approach a task as a "discovered problem," whereas the latter faced it as a "presented problem." Creative artists did not look at an object or composition in terms of given aesthetic categories (e.g., pleasing color, strong texture, exciting vanishing point) but discovered unique peculiarities and relationships in the objects they were about to paint.

It stands to reason that perception should be a prerequisite to creativity. But this form of transaction with the environment is not limited to creative artists or scientists. Every time we interact with an object the possibility of new learning is potentially there. It is important to mention that aesthetic experiences may range from the most extraordinary and ecstatic to the most simple and humble. The first bird chirping at dawn might induce a sense of delight in a way quite different from Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," but each would have a place along a continuum. Similarly, the sense of complete exhaustion at the end of a good day's work might be different from that of finishing the work of a lifetime. However, each might be an experience of the aesthetic, ranging from the humble to the profound – the feeling that one has given one's all toward realizing the work.

Perception is not limited to artistic objects but is a mode of psychic activity applicable to any object. It involves a consummation, a quality of finality that unifies and distinguishes the experience. Whereas the third mode of psychic activity – the outcomes of transactions – emphasizes the directionality in which a person's goals may be furthered through interactions with the object, and the second mode – flow – emphasizes the means through which psychic energy may be channeled to realize those goals, the aesthetic mode involves the consummation or completion of an experience through the realization of the inherent or intrinsic qualities of that experience.

An illustration of this type of psychic activity is the following description of a wooden chest:

American Indian chest: One of the things that we bought most recently is a chest downstairs that's done by North American Indians. And we fell in love with that when we were in Canada this summer, and we brought it home, and I just love having it in the living room. (Why?) Well, because we have made somewhat of an effort this year to study Indian art. We went to many shows, and we did some reading, and when we went to Canada we saw this piece in a gallery and we had

seen many things like it at the shows, and it is a thing we could afford, and so we bought it. And since then we have seen this Indian show at the Art Institute. They had a day where they had the Indian chief of the tribe come in and it was the same tribe that made this chest. And so we spoke to the people. The symbols and the things that they showed us and some of the other things that they had to sell, are so very similar, because this particular tribe are part of the Whale Peoples, and only this tribe can use certain symbols and they used it for centuries in their art. So that's kind of a nice thing and we value it.

(And what would it mean to you *not* to have this chest?) I would feel that the surrounding part, the living part, would be pretty empty. I would hate to have to start collecting knicknacks and mementos. (So you're speaking of all of your art as a group?) I would group all of the atmosphere, the feel that you get. I don't have one major piece of art downstairs; they're a bunch of minor pieces. The total atmosphere that you get of the living room, or of any room in the house, is one of some visual excitement, because so much is going on. There is not one large statement. It's a lot of little shouts. So, if the walls were blank, I could not live in a plain, unadorned room. It gets to be that I become so familiar with what's on the walls, that I know it's there and I don't even have to see it. I *know* it's there. If you were to take it down and remove it, I would know it's gone immediately. If anything's out of place, I would know that it's out of place.

There are many conventional elements in this description: The respondent and his wife were aware of the style of the chest and had seen others like it; it is a souvenir of their trip to Canada, and much of the art is often experienced on an almost unconscious, habitual level. But an important element of the meaning of this chest is that it has its own story and a living quality in the sense that it creates new experiences for the owners. The chest and the other art objects impart an atmosphere of "visual excitement," "a lot of little shouts," that are an essential feature of the lives of these people.

Again, we should mention that art objects are by no means the only source for aesthetic experience. Houseplants, for example, seemed to provide more aesthetic experiences than art objects for a number of respondents. Books can also provide experiences of perception, as illustrated in the following response:

Books, because they open up a new world. They're informative and you can learn a lot. They're enjoyable because they tell you about other countries and you can escape from where you are to a different surrounding.

The purpose of artistic objects is to express feelings and ideas and to stimulate new perceptions through their own qualities. There is no real reason, other than convention, that a home should simply contain works of art, but there is every reason that aesthetic experience should form an intrinsic aspect of domestic

living, and art is both a template and medium for the realization of these experiences.

The flow of psychic energy

The next dimension of the transaction between persons and objects concerns how psychic energy is channeled. We have just seen how the intrinsic qualities of the object can have a decisive role in the transaction when a person allows those qualities to be realized as part of the meaning of the transaction. Aesthetic experience, or what Dewey calls perception, is what enables the individual to learn new things, to accommodate his interpretive schemes to the qualitative properties of the environment.

But for any transaction to occur it is also necessary that a certain amount of psychic energy be allocated to the object. Attention is needed to realize a psychic transaction. When we turn to consider how psychic energy is channeled, it becomes clear that attention plays the key role in serving to limit and direct psychic energy.

When a person interacts with an object, he or she selects it from the surrounding environment (including the mental environment) through concentrating attention on it. Of course, there are many reverse instances when the object "selects" the individual and compels the person to pay attention. For instance, when a pet (in our extended use of "object") barks or meows loudly in order to be fed, or when an alarm clock harshly reminds us of the agreement we made with it last night to awaken at this ungodly hour. But mostly, it is the person who chooses to invest attention in a particular object, and most of our interactions with possessions consist of habitual patterns of attention.

Household artifacts not only have meaning as individual objects but also form part of a gestalt for the people who live with them – a gestalt that both communicates a sense of "home" and indicates the type of activities that are appropriate for different parts of the home. In the same way, the organization of the household can be seen as a pattern of attention and intention made concrete in the artifacts and the ambience they create; a pattern that in turn channels the psychic energy of the inhabitants. The household objectively represents what the self is in terms of what things psychic energy has been invested in – what we consider significant to

possess. If examined closely it can reveal the patterns of attention that help to structure our everyday consciousness. The organization of furniture and appliances shows where family members habitually spend time, what they tend to pay attention to, and what they wish visitors to see or not to see. The location of display items in the living room, and of more personal objects in the privacy of the bedroom, is only one illustration of the organized pattern of attention that can channel psychic energy in the household.

But the organization of household artifacts also represents a structured and structuring process of attention at a more unconscious level. Indeed, most of the vitality of a culture seems to reside in its ability to provide a vast reservoir of ideas and feelings that exist as unquestioned assumptions and which allow an individual to learn complex information with relatively little self-consciousness or direct attention. The relative ease with which a child learns language shows how culture can operate to reduce the amount of information one has to pay conscious attention to, so that one's attention can become more concentrated on a few key elements, meanwhile the remaining information is internalized almost without effort. Likewise, the total context of artifacts in a household acts as a constant sign of familiarity, telling us who we and our kindred are, what we have done or plan to do, and in this way reduces the amount of information we have to pay attention to in order to act with ease. It is worth mentioning that the words familiar and family are both derived from the Latin word *familia*, which included the kin as well as household possessions and slaves. One of the important functions of household possessions, then, is to provide a *familiar* environment, which can reflect the order, control, and significance of its inhabitants, and thus enable them to channel their psychic energy more effectively within it.

Every conscious experience lies on a continuum ranging from boring sameness at one end to enjoyable diversity at the center and, finally, to anxiety-producing chaos at the further end. It is in the enjoyable middle regions of experience that one's attention is fully effective. This optimal state of involvement with experience, or *flow*, is in contrast with the extremes of boredom and anxiety, which can be seen as states of alienated attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1978b).

Alienated attention represents a waste of psychic energy because it is expended without contributing to the process of cultiva-

tion. Marx discussed this process in the context of production as alienated labor, when the full fruits of the worker's product (e.g., ownership of the object, the full money value of the object, pride in workmanship, etc.) were denied him. But the same holds true for people in a consumer society: When the culture directs consumers to pay attention to attention-getting devices rather than to the specific functions or qualities of the goods themselves, this can also be called alienated attention – or what Marx called "false consciousness." It is alienated because in the end it is not really the object that is consumed but merely the attention of the consumer.

Flow, by contrast, is a kind of integrated attention that serves to direct a person's psychic energy toward realizing his or her goals, regardless, at this point in our discussion, of what those goals might be. Integrated attention contributes to the cultivation process by stimulating growth through the intrinsically rewarding nature of the transaction with the object. The following quotations from younger respondents illustrate how flow can arise from transactions with valued objects:

My radio. I've grown accustomed to doing my homework while listening to it. I also go to sleep to it and it's my alarm too, so I depend on it alot. (Without it) I'd feel uncomfortable. It would take more concentration and I would also have to depend on someone to get me up.

Drums. They're an activity. I started saving money to get some drums. I can really get into them after playing for awhile. I just turn on the radio, close my eyes – it gets that I'm *in* the music, *in* the record.

(What do all your objects taken as a whole mean to you?) A feeling of memories I suppose. Sometimes when you're really, really sentimental, you take out albums of stuff and look through them and you can keep in mind some of the things from your past. It helps you keep in mind some of the things you want to remember, that you feel you should remember.

These descriptions contain some of the key elements of the flow experience: a merging of action and awareness ("it gets so that I'm *in* the music, *in* the record"); a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field (without the radio "it would take more concentration," the photo album "helps you keep in mind some of the things you want to remember"); a loss of ego or sense of self (the drums again); control over one's actions and over the environment (all three descriptions, although the photo albums seem to emphasize control over one's mental environment); coherent noncontradictory demands for action and clear, unambiguous feedback to a person's actions (the radio and drums provide clear

feedback for attention to focus on symbols of reminiscence); and finally, intrinsic rewards.

The concept of flow illustrates how psychic energy is directed through activities capable of being valued as intrinsically enjoyable – activities in which the psychic energy given to the object is returned to the person as meaningful, enjoyable information, thus creating a kind of free and open "current" of psychic energy. In other words, flow, as a kind of integrated attention is another way of describing the process of cultivation at work.

Household objects appear to facilitate flow experiences in two distinctly different ways. On the one hand, by providing a familiar symbolic context they reaffirm the identity of the owner. They can create a milieu free of boredom and anxiety, a setting conducive to involvement and learning. Although it might seem that in this sense objects only provide experiences of recognition, this very familiarity serves to reduce the number of things a person has to attend to, thus freeing the self to concentrate on a specific transaction. Without this sense of familiarity there could be no perception or flow, only chaos. On the other hand, objects in the household might provide opportunities for flow directly, by engaging the attention of people in acts of perception that lead to flow activities – as illustrated in the three previous quotations.

So far we have discussed how attention serves to channel psychic energy in transactions with objects. But we have not yet raised the question of what purpose this transaction serves. The fact that some of the greatest criminals in history commanded great powers of attention, or that juvenile delinquents find illegal acts "flow experiences" (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1978), suggests that there must be more to the attention process than mere technique. The technique of allocating attention is surely important because it is the very means for realizing intentions. However, this raises the issue of the purpose of attention, or the ends it helps to cultivate and realize. To answer this we must turn to the third dimension of psychic activity: What are the *outcomes* of the transaction?

The goals of transactions with objects

Cultivation of the interaction with objects implies, first of all, per-

ception of the unique intrinsic qualities of the object and, second,

a channeling of psychic energy in order to realize the transaction most effectively, which we have described as the process of flow. The third aspect of psychic activity refers to the outcomes of the transaction. Here we shall consider the role of intention in the meaning of cherished possessions. To do this we must address the purpose of cultivation itself, to examine what ends or goals meanings reflect.

The importance of the cultural environment from this perspective is that it facilitates adaptation or socialization, that is, indicates goals, acts as a rule for conduct, has a purposive influence. It is plain that many personal habits are formed within the environment of the home. The cultural microcosm of the home, like culture in general, is not only a reflection of what people are but also molds what they may yet become. The pragmatic meaning of cherished possessions is that they serve to socialize and influence conduct toward certain ends or goals. The term "pragmatic," as originally developed by Aristotle, and as reformulated by the pragmatists, meant the cultivation of a way of life through activities aimed toward the attainment of the good or virtuous life and thus was intrinsically moral. It implied that the path to learning to live well, as opposed to mere living, is dependent on a process of cultivating the activities that make up one's life – that living well is a kind of practice.

The process of cultivation is motivated by belief in goals held to be ultimate by individuals. This does not mean that these beliefs are necessarily ultimate but only that they provide a provisional sense of purpose around which to shape one's life course. Any ultimate beliefs, like one's conception of God, love, moral standards, political ideology, or truth, are still open to cultivation and so are only provisionally ultimate for any given individual.

Ultimate goals provide a standard toward which actions are or should be aimed. Thus when one values a cherished photo, or souvenir, or plant, these transactions are intentional activities that reflect what one considers significant and which involve real outcomes. The sense of being in touch with a loved one or a place one has visited, or of being in touch with nature itself, expresses what we consider significant and reveals the purpose that motivates us to invest attention in certain objects and meanings rather than in others. As the cluster of objects one values solidifies, so do the meanings one derives from experiences with them. Different selves

emerge around goals embedded in cherished belongings through habitual interactions. The possessions one selects to endow with special meaning out of the total environment of artifacts are both models of the self as well as templates for further development. They serve to give a tangible expression and thus a continued existence through signs to one's relationships, experiences, and values.

Valued possessions involve outcomes in the sense that these transactions reveal intentions or goal-directed purposes; that is, they tell us what "it all adds up to," and how these goals are being realized. The outcome of valuing old family photos, for example, might be that it reveals, simply and concretely, the goal of family preservation and continuity.

Perhaps the best way to discuss the outcomes of transactions with objects is by returning to the earlier distinction among personal, social, and cosmic levels. Although each of these levels may contribute to cultivation, in the sense in which we are using this term, it is only by establishing some sense of harmony among them, some balance, that authentic being or what the Greeks aimed for as "the good life" may be achieved over the course of a lifetime.

The personal, the social, and the cosmic self

It is usually taken for granted that underneath the *persona* or mask that we present to the world, there is a "real me," apart from others and private. This commonsense assumption is held especially by Americans who believe in "rugged individualism." Yet if we examine this assumption closely, it seems to lose much of its common sense. In fact, it is literally a view opposed to common sense. Common sense after all is a belief that our experience tells us would be shared in common, by the community. The personal self develops through internalizing the social environment. When the infant begins to learn how to pay attention to his or her parents and internalizes their intentions, and later those of playmates and friends, he or she is learning to develop *common* sense, and in this way cultivates the self.

Thus the idea that the "real me" is in some sense independent of other people reflects the overemphasis on individualism in

modern life, an overemphasis that would ultimately result quite literally in idiocy. The ancient Greeks actually saw the emphasis on one's own *(idion)* to be a *deprivation*, a cutting off of the self from the community, which is absolutely essential to its health and vigor (Arendt, 1958; Rochberg-Halton, 1979c).

The personal self is fully infused with the social. So when a transaction is valued because it has outcomes for the individual, it must be realized that the individual is still a social being. The positive side of the modern emphasis on individualism has been to render a much richer view of what privacy, intimacy, originality, uniqueness, and autonomy can provide. Its merit has been to relax the culturally accepted norms for conduct, thus allowing the possibility of the freer development of the self. But the purpose of this process still remains the fuller unfolding of our humanity within and for the social life of the community. Originality is often thought to mean not being influenced in any way – not imitating others. But if originality becomes an ultimate goal, and one consistently pursues it, one loses the most valuable means of growing as a person – the possibility of imitation, the process that is so essential to the development of the self in the first place.

When transactions with objects further this development of the personal self, presumably the purpose is to aid in creating a world of one's own, a world in which one makes a difference, "my world." This is illustrated in the following responses to what all one's objects mean:

They're just reflections and images of places that I like and feel happy with and people that I know pretty well and activities I enjoy.

If I didn't have them, I probably wouldn't be the same person. They sort of mold my personality.

Well, they're a part of my personality. Everybody's made up of different things. They're part of me in the respect that they make up my personality.

The objects provide an environment charged with personal meanings. They also indicate the goal of a personal self that can assimilate the diverse information of an impersonal world and imbue it with order and significance.

When an object is imbued with qualities of the self, it expresses the being of that person, whether in written words or a chair that was crafted or a photograph. It becomes an objectified form of consciousness no less than words spoken into someone's ear, all forming part of the social self. Through these objects a part of the

self comes to be embodied in the consciousness of others and will continue to exist long after the consciousness that molded them has ceased to exist. Perhaps the clearest example is when a number of people gather to mourn for someone at a wake or funeral. These people – family, kin, and friends of the departed person – are the living representation of the deceased. Although the personal self has ceased to exist, the social self has a continued existence in those who will remember and through those artifacts that in whatever way give testimony to that person. Similarly, the idea of family – those people, living or dead, that one loves and cares for and would devote one's life to – is an idea or ultimate goal whose full realization involves the development of the social self. This description given by a mother of what all her objects mean to her illustrates how certain outcomes of transactions serve to express and further the social self:

It's the story of our lives and our children's lives. They represent the experiences that we've been through together. They represent a period – a turmoil that they went through and came out of. All the years that you spent going through those turmoils to get them to this stage. They grow up and they leave you when they're civilized! After all your hard labor, you don't get to enjoy the fruits of it!

Her statement that, "After all your hard labor, you don't get to enjoy the fruits of it!" almost echoes our description of alienated attention in the last section. We must be careful to interpret her statements within their particular context, however; and when we do this we see that she is expressing some anxiety about the imminent departure of her now grown up children from the nest and the disruption of her immediate family to whom she has given so many years of her life. When this woman reflects on what objects mean to her, her attention turns to the process of cultivation itself – to the experience of raising her children. But it is the social self we hear speaking ("our lives and our children's lives," "They represent the experiences that we've been through together"). She most cherishes those things whose meaning reflects the development of the family as a whole.

The social self is not limited to the family but is that part of one's psychic activity in communion with the goals of friends, coworkers, the craft of work itself, and the various other institutions that make up one's world. The roles of the social self – parent, worker, citizen, consumer – are strands interwoven in the social fabric, and these roles lose their meaning without their *relata*.

There is yet another level that should be distinguished – that of the cosmic self. If the personal self serves to answer the question, "Who am I?" and the social self answers, "Who are you and we?" the third level of the self, the cosmic one, seems to answer the question, "What and why is it?" The "cosmic" self is not a mystical entity that transcends human understanding, existing in a realm beyond signs, conceptions, or physicality. Rather, it is that portion of the self whose ultimate goal is the larger harmony of things. One might say it is the portion of the self involved in the creation, discovery, or embodiment of the laws of the universe, the cosmos. If this sounds a bit grandiose for the everyday experience of the common person, it should be realized that one does not have to be a physicist to reflect on the laws of the universe, for these are at work everywhere, even in the communication of joy between mother and infant. Creation and death, love and hate, good and evil, truth and ignorance – these are some of the great moving principles of nature, as they are realized in human experience. Just as electromagnetic laws govern energy, so these laws direct psychic energy, though in ways we are only beginning to understand.

One would think from the popular usage of the term that the cosmic self sits serene in bliss and perfect knowledge, bathed in freedom from all desire, aloof from ignorance and error. But this might be a good definition of the idiotic, not the cosmic self. The cosmic self also has its serene moments, when the quality of the larger harmony is enjoyed in an aesthetic experience or through a flow activity; but these seem to occur as consummations of critical perception from which growth occurs. The cosmic self is the manifestation of man's restlessness at his own limitations and his quest after the true order of things; in this sense, it has been essential to the development of humanity. With its relentless and passionate question, "What and why is it?" the cosmic self is the essence of both religion and science. We are so used to thinking of religion and science as providing final answers that we forget that, in essence, both are manifestations of man's need to question the universe and to discover its meaning.

In our study we expected to see indications of the cosmic self in the valuations of objects for religious purposes, but very few things were mentioned that had religious meaning. Perhaps Embodiments of Ideals could be taken as indicators of the cosmic self,

but again, the goals reflected in these meanings referred much more often to the personal or social self and not to the integration of one's purpose with some greater pattern of purpose. It might be inferred that the question of the cosmic self, "What and why is it?" does not find much tangible expression in the lives of many contemporary Americans. Of those responses that gave even a glimmer of the cosmic self, perhaps the simplest was that of the youngest member of the entire sample. Although already quoted, it bears repeating. When asked what all of his objects meant to him, he replied:

They make me feel like I'm part of the world. Because when I look at them, I keep my eyes on them and I think what they mean. Like I have a bank from the First National, and when I look at it I think what it means. It means money for our cities and for our country, it means tax for the government. My stuffed bunny reminds me of wild life, all the rabbits and dogs and cats. That toy animal over there (points to plastic lion) reminds me of circuses and the way they train animals so they don't get hurt. That's what I mean, all my special things make me feel like I'm part of the world.

Even the toys serve as signs of the larger totality and thus endow the room with the quality of a *microcosmos*. By interacting with them, some of his psychic energy is channeled beyond personal goals toward larger purposes and thereby to the realization of the interconnectedness of the individual with the totality. Some responses from older persons suggested a de-emphasis of the personal self, of the transience of personal life. As expressed by one 84-year-old great-grandmother, for example:

No, I'm not *attached* to anything. You get so that you feel you are with one foot in the grave and you just dis-attach yourself. You couldn't know that yet because you are young still.

There definitely seems to be a shift with age toward objects and meanings that convey the continuity of one's experiences. In the community we studied, children first relate to objects by seizing the material world and bringing it to themselves. They seem more concerned with the use and control of psychic energy itself than with outcomes and hence emphasize the experience of the object as an ongoing occasion or as a means for enjoyment in activities oriented toward the development of the personal self. With age, the individuals increasingly realize that psychic activities have *outcomes* and cultivation shifts from an emphasis on process regardless of outcome to goal-directed processes. Memory and reminis-

cence become more prominent; first, because the person has begun to build up a past, and also because the goal of preserving one's past self and experiences becomes more important.

In addition, there is a shift from an emphasis on egocentric meanings in childhood and adolescence to a social orientation in adulthood. Other people become increasingly embodied in the artifacts adults cherish as special, and the adult comes to see his or her own self as inseparable from family and kin and friends and co-workers. The social self comes to the fore. Those who, tempered by their life's experiences, avoid being possessed by a consumer culture that elevates utility to the ultimate goal of life, perhaps learn in later years to let go of the materiality of this world and to appreciate its transience. They learn to cultivate experiences and grow through interaction with their environment and, finally, complete this potential process of development with a shift in old age to goals that will realize the cosmic self. Those who do, begin to disengage from the social fabric in its actuality and conceive of social life as part of the broader harmony of nature itself.

Although each of these three levels of the self potentially emerge at an appropriate phase of the life cycle, all three are always available for cultivation. Authentic being, or "the good life," can only come about by the establishment of some balance among the three, which is not contingent upon one's age. But we do want to draw attention to what seems to be the course of the self from a developmental perspective. Of interest is that, like in folktales where the destination ultimately is the original point of departure, the individual discovers what was always there to begin with.

A child may value objects purely for the sake of experiences without concern for outcomes. Nonetheless, there are inevitable consequences that shape the kind of person that child will become. Through experience the person may come to realize that transactions with objects always do produce outcomes regardless of whether or not the individual is aware of this. A person who never goes beyond adolescent self-centeredness will increasingly come into conflict with the laws of the two other levels of the self. The development of the broader potentials and possibilities of the self will not only be arrested but negative outcomes will also follow as a result of this undeveloped state of self. A person who cannot reach out and integrate him or herself with the wider networks of

meaning is ultimately in a state of deprivation. It is the third level, the cosmic self, that is undervalued in our modern culture, as our empirical results suggest, whereas the first level seems to be over-emphasized. The valuing of the personal self as the sole ultimate goal, which often is actually a goal of a private self, can thus be seen as privative, as deprivation rather than as ultimate fulfillment, because it excludes those larger patterns of meaning whose internalization and personification are essential to the reality of human existence. In the modern world people seem to want to be "private," to maximize the world of "one's own," and to cultivate idiosyncrasy as the means to personal fulfillment. But this is literally idiocy (*idion:* one's own) in the long run. The ultimate goal of personality is not to be a private, it is to become a general, in the technical sense of a sign with the fullest development of real relations to others and the world.

In exploring the processes through which things come to be endowed with special significance, we have seen that transactions with objects are not simple physiological processes but require complex cultivation. The elements of the process of cultivation are its aesthetic quality, the way in which psychic energy is channeled, and its outcomes or goals. What emerges from this discussion is a view of what the authentic self looks like. It is a self, first of all, capable of being perceptive; that is, a self that can experience its environment and interpret that environment on the basis of experience and not only because of previously accepted conventions of interpretation. The perceptive self is one capable of aesthetic experience (*aisthētikós:* perceptive) and can allow the intrinsic qualities of an object or situation to be fully realized in the interpretation.

The free self is also one capable of *flow*, of attending to objects and activities in a way that allows the psychic energy given to the object to be returned to the person as enjoyment. Through integrated patterns of attention, the free self furthers the process of cultivation by channeling psychic energy in effective ways and by growing in the process.

The authentic self also cultivates its intentions and goals. It can criticize its own ultimate goals and refine them. The free self is one that is personal, social, *and* cosmic. It is assured of its relative autonomy, related to a living network of family, friends, co-workers and citizens, the living and the dead, and it is, or strives to

be, related to the larger harmony of forces in the universe. The free self is an answer to the questions, "Who am I?" "Who are you and we?" and "What and why is it?" and, at the same time, it is these questions, seeking their answer in a continual process of cultivation.

It appears, then, that at every level of consciousness and self-consciousness there is a critical element that is essential to the development of the free self: critical elements that enable one to break out of the constrictions of heredity and convention to realize the intrinsic qualities of things. A critical attitude is one that enables a person to overcome an alienated environment or potential dispersion of his or her own psychic resources through integrated attention and to reflect on what is worthy to be lived or pursued as an ultimate goal. So often we think of freedom as absolute individual autonomy, the completely unfettered. But to be free means to be free *for some purpose*. Freedom seems to be a culmination rather than a beginning, an achieved state of affairs. Freedom is often contrasted with necessity, the compulsive force of experience. Necessity is how we *must* act (or, more strictly, react), but freedom is how we *must* choose. Necessity, it is often said, is what binds and keeps us from what we would really like to do if we were free. However, if we are free *for some purpose*, then there is also a sense in which we are bound to that purpose. As Cicero said, to be completely free one must become the slave of a set of laws. The cultivation of a way of life oriented by ultimate goals, themselves capable of cultivation, seems to be how a free self might develop. Indeed, pursued with all one's psychic energy, the process of cultivation would eventually compel the self to become free.

CHAPTER 8

Signs of family life

We turn now to see the process of cultivation at work in some concrete profiles of families. These case studies are geared to provide a different level of interpretation from the ones used in previous chapters. Through them we shall try to show how cherished possessions, persons, and events may be integrated in a pattern that reflects the goals of the self and the family and acts as a template that motivates the cultivation process.

We have already discussed the empirical patterns associated with cherished possessions. In statistical comparisons, however, the context for the individual is usually lost. The sign is turned into a variable in an attempt to determine the norms of common meanings, that is, the empirical context. With this purpose accomplished, we shall now return to the individual and family context in order to explore the richness and multiplicity of meanings that things can hold for their possessors. Here we hope to explore the transactions between people and things by concentrating on the signs of family life. In many families a common set of concerns was expressed in the meanings attributed to the ecology of signs in the household – the objects, events, and admired persons shared by family members. When these meanings are directed toward related goals, it is possible to see them as "signs of family life," or vital webs of relationships that give each family a unique identity. In the "warm" families discussed in Chapter 6 one of the goals shared by the members is the cultivation of the family itself; the psychic activity of each person supports the others' goals. In "cool" families persons tend to cultivate their personal goals without concern for the family as a whole. But even in these families one might discern a common theme, characterized by dissonance rather than by harmony.

Two pairs of case studies will be presented. The first takes one of the warm and one of the cool families. The second pair will illustrate even more directly the pathology of privacy in a family with diverging goals and another family's quest for continuity.

In pursuit of warmth

The following case studies will compare a warm family with a cool family. Although the parents of the cool family were already divorced for about seven years at the time of the interview, there are some interesting similarities between the two families. All four parents are upper-middle class persons in their middle thirties. The warm family has four children and the cool family three. We interviewed the oldest child in each family, both of whom were 11-year-old boys. Perhaps the best way to begin is to present each family's descriptions of the social atmosphere, feeling, or mood of its home:

Warm mother: I think it's pretty. I'm prejudiced . . . It's lovely – that's important. It's sometimes loving, sometimes not. It's fairly typical: happy, affectionate, busy, very busy.

Warm father: It's one of several new homes in a basically old neighborhood. The street is diverse and integrated – I'd indicate that quickly (to someone who had never seen it). It has an open feeling, in terms of neighbors that come and go, children's friends who are welcome here, they spend time here, sleep over. Kids come here and spend half the day here. So it's an open place, pretty much. It's open in the sense that our friends and neighbors are diverse – that's a real asset.

Warm child: It's not like any used house – in a couple of generations we'll get the family spirit in here. No one died. We'll hang great granddad over the fireplace. There's not quite enough room. I could use my own bedroom. Once it's fully decorated it will be pleasant. It's not stylish, but warm. I wouldn't want a mansion. It's such a nice atmosphere, nothing spooky.

Cool mother: I would love the house to be in continuously perfect condition, and organized, but it never works out that way. I think the house reflects that a family lives there, I hope some sense of order. It's pretty casual, I think, when people knock on the door, I think they feel welcome, not intimidated.

Cool father: It's a brand new condominium that I moved into in September. It's a high-rise condominium. It has yet to glean any type of personality, except my dirty clothes on the floor. It's sterile, plastic right now . . . It's cold. It's a brand new building. I've just moved over and I'm not certain I'll remain here just because of these qualities that I detect here.

Cool child: It's a good home, because everyone cares about our dog. If anything happens to any one of us – like one of us goes to the hospital – my mom has to come see us, because she doesn't know what's going on.

The contrast between the two sets of descriptions of the home is quite striking, and as will become apparent, provides rich indicators of the emotional life of these families. Both fathers, for example, describe their living places as "new," but this newness means a sterile, artificial, and literally an emotionally "cold" environment for the cool father, whereas the newness of the warm father's home seems not to have any effect on the emotional warmth it contains. The cool child's description has a quality of disturbance in it: He chooses to use an example of going to the hospital to show that his mother cares for him. The warm boy also uses a bizarre example, "We'll hang great granddad over the fireplace," but in his case the example is a joke referring to the establishment of a sense of family spirit: "in a couple of generations we'll get the family spirit in here." Perhaps the two mothers' descriptions are the most similar, with the sense of the sometimes tempestuous nature of the household, but again, there seems to be more of an emphasis on the need for order in the cool mother's description, whereas the warm mother emphasizes affectionate qualities.

Both mothers are fairly conventionally oriented housewives, whereas the fathers are both professionals who share a passion for nightlife. The cool father's trips to nightclubs signify the deep problems that caused his family to fragment in the first place, as will become clearer later. The warm father's interest in nightlife represents his deepest values and also current problems – he is a jazz musician by avocation who has cultivated a lifelong interest in the music and philosophy of jazz – but in his case he has tried to reconcile the responsibilities of family life with his love of staying out late at night to play music. In comparing the warm father with the cool father, we see an empirical example of the difference between the authentic and free self and its opposite: One has traveled to nightclubs as part of a quest for the aesthetic experience and flow activity of listening to and performing jazz music; the other attends these places in phobic retreat from the personal problems he has been unable to confront. Instead of flow activities, he cultivates individual evenings of pleasure, which add up to alienated attention patterns and self-destruction rather than to the integration of the self.

Of the five people the warm father, Mr. R, most admires, two were related to jazz: Charlie Parker, the great alto saxophonist, and Mr. R's own saxophone teacher. About his teacher he says:

He was a very strong influence musically, of course, but more than that, music was a way of socialization for me, being an only child. He had beginning students play in bands, in groups, to make a few bucks. There was a different life-style than I had been used to. I had contact with a wider variety of people than I would have otherwise. I admired him very much. He passed away. I liked his life-style and his values. He enjoyed people as opposed to things; music was very important for which he gave me my appreciation which probably wouldn't have been there otherwise. This relationship started in grammar school. He tuned me into intellectual things. Money was not important. It was important to do what he enjoyed which was teaching and playing. He kept his own hours. He spent hours with a student or me if he felt he was accomplishing something, instead of a one-half hour evenly divided cubicle of a lesson.

Mr. R's description of his former saxophone teacher provides a view of some of his most personal values. Elsewhere, in answering what his hobbies are, he said:

The music thing is an all pervasive avocation, it's almost a profession. I wouldn't classify it as a hobby. I enjoy playing, meeting people – musicians themselves are an interesting lot. We all do something besides playing, they have a nutty sense of humor and are fun to be with. There's an element of ham in most musicians, they enjoy playing in front of a lot of people. "Music is good for the soul," as a teacher put it.

These statements take on added significance, however, in the context of Mr. R's increasing responsibilities as a father and professional because it is precisely the freedom to do what you want when you want to do it that is being threatened. Throughout all the areas of the interview Mr. R makes reference to the fact that he has less and less time for his music:

(What do you do with your closest friends?) My friends are musicians . . . working with them on weekends. Most of them do something else in the day. It used to be every weekend – I'm going through a change there – it used to be every weekend, now every month or less.

His ambivalent feelings over the loss of free time in which to play music also come through in his responses concerning the most important events in his life. He mentions getting married early as affecting him in "a lot of ways" because:

We never had a lot of free time together. My first son was born the last day of school and we didn't have the money to travel and run around. We already had one child by the time I was out of school.

Graduating from business school was also important because:

It meant I didn't become a musician. I became an executive because I was not dead certain that I wanted to do anything else. It provides me with an opportunity not to make that decision. You're always learning.

The other most important event in Mr. R's life was "having children." He describes this influence on his life in terms of its two effects:

(1) It's had a very good effect. I enjoy kids – being a parent going through all the things with them – outings, scouts – it's warm and satisfying for me. (2) On the other hand, they're also a very limiting factor. I just can't chuck work and go off to the Virgin Islands for a couple of months. I have trouble playing (music) weekends like I used to. I can't go into a band as easily.

So all these responses indicate a kind of tension or ambiguity in his feelings toward increasing family and professional responsibilities. But he is genuinely devoted to his family and work and is moving toward integrating the disparities in his values. Mr. R describes his wife as warm and as a stabilizing influence on him:

She's a very warm, gregarious person, it was important to her and to me to have several children. She handles them very well, she's an excellent mother. Both my mother and father came from large families . . . We prefer this kind of family life. She's sociable, entertains, goes out . . . she's well balanced emotionally – more than I am. The benefit I derive from her is a sense of normalcy; she's a good and loving mother, takes marvelous care of children; a tremendously stabilizing influence; otherwise I'd be on the road someplace!

The way he describes "normalcy" and "stabilizing influence" might sound like an exaggeration until one looks at her description of her cherished possessions: She mentions about thirty objects, more than almost anyone else interviewed, and almost all of these things are associated with family, tradition, and stability. Mrs. R has shaped her life around these values, which reappear throughout the interview. The five people who have made a difference in her life are her four children and husband, and the five people she admires are her husband, parents, older sister, and a girlfriend who was a "middle child" like herself, but who interestingly has overcome a number of obstacles to become an artist. She goes on to say about this friend that "she does beautiful work and managed to create a happy environment in spite of many obstacles." She also admires her sister for her achievements rather than for family concerns ("She set a goal and worked toward it. She got a college education and teaches, she put herself and my brother-in-law through school"), which is the only other place in the interview where achievment is valued instead of family devotion, faintly suggesting that she might also have some need to devote herself to something other than the family. But the explicit theme

of her interview again is devotion to family – what she values about both her father and her husband: "My husband is very bright, hard working, and devoted to his family. He's unselfish in big things and gives to the family before himself."

Mrs. R belongs to a number of organizations, all related to her children: She is an officer of three different Parent Teacher Associations and a former den mother in the Cub Scouts. At one of the PTAs she is on the Teacher Evaluation Committee and says: "I'm currently writing a form for this, also a form for a model multi-grade classroom. I'm proud of this." Mrs. R seems to have channeled any occupational needs through these associations, which are connected with her children; all of her attention is given ultimately to her family.

How much Mrs. R devotes herself to her family becomes even more obvious when examining what she considers the most important events in her life and their effect on her. The first she mentions is marriage:

It changed my way of living. Forever! No more Miss. It meant I was sharing life, I had someone else to share decisions with, I had to give up some of my independence.

The next events she describes, the births of her four children, also involved a loss of independence, but as Mrs. R says:

It meant lots of work, dirty diapers. I gave up my job to stay with the children. I was a social worker. It was no great loss, I enjoy staying home. I have responsibility for others, to help them grow up.

This channeling of her psychic energy toward goals involving "responsibility for others" is also evident in her description of the other most important event in her life, her own father's death and how this affected her.

I had a great sense of loss. I felt cheated. He died before my son was born. I wanted to share more with him. I wanted him to see————(names oldest child).

It seems clear that this woman's self is almost entirely invested in the social self, so that even the sense of grief she felt at the death of her father is mediated by the family constellation: Her father died before he could see her first born, before the continuity of the family could be concretely realized in the transaction among grandfather, mother, and child. Much of the meaning of her father's death is that this sign of family continuity, the experience of three generations of the family meeting together, was denied her.

When we turn to the 11-year-old boy, it is clear that he shares the same emphasis on family warmth and integration as his parents. As mentioned previously, he literally describes the emotional tone of his home as "warm," and says that this new house will build up a sense of "family spirit." His closeness to his parents is also apparent in other responses to the home interview. All his objects taken together mean, "They're telling me what my parents really look like, who I came from. Without them I wouldn't be here." Like his father he mentions a great jazz musician, Louis Armstrong, as one of the people he most admires.

One of the interview questions asked the respondent to describe the special objects of the rest of the family, and his description of what he thinks his parents value most is both accurate and penetrating for an 11-year-old:

The things my mother has from her father – she likes those because he died. A couple of china sets she got from her wedding. Dad has a recording of himself from a long time ago when he was my age playing saxophone on the amateur hour. He has a couple of old baseball bats. Dad doesn't have too many emotional things.

Even his most personal or private objects, which for most children and adolescents are things such as diaries that they don't want their parents to see, are "a couple of pictures of Dad when he was really young and some of grandfather on father's side."

The special objects named by this boy are his comic collection, a bench he likes to sit on in the alcove, "Dad's tools," and the TV set, about which he says:

I like to watch it but I could live without it. I would not be death stricken. I would be terribly bored because every evening I gobble up my dinner and sit in front of TV for two hours hypnotized, and I fall asleep.

About his dad's tools, which his father also mentioned as one of his own special possessions, he says:

I like to build a lot of things, a project for Scouts, a box to hold something, a catapult. Dad and I, we're building a car now for a Pinewood Derby race. It uses gravitation power. When I'm older I'll have to patch holes in the wall or put in a ceiling.

When we compare the significance of these tools and the activity of building things at home with what his father says, we are provided a clear example of the process of role modeling. Mr. R. said:

I do most of the yard work myself, and some work in the house. I find that's a relaxation, and so therefore I'd say the tools and the bench I have downstairs. It's almost in the way of a pastime or hobby. It's relaxing. Other impressions are that it's a pain in the neck. (What would it mean not to have them?) I wouldn't be anywhere as upset as if someone ran off with my piano. Tools represent a hobby, relaxing, things that need to be done. It would be an economic problem, if it weren't here, more than anything else.

Not only is this boy influenced by the particular kinds of things his father likes to do but his answer also shows the more general socialization into the instrumental male sex role stereotype. One of his other responses, to the question: "Are there any objects that have been special in your life, but which you no longer possess?" suggests that the parents may be actively trying to channel his psychic activity into the standard male sex role stereotype. His answer was, "A doll, a Buckingham palace guard from England, which my parents brought back. My mother gave that to the girls. She took it away from me because they had a collection."

As mentioned earlier, Mr. R. seems to be at a turning point in his life. The demands on his psychic energy from work and family have increased and he no longer has the time to perform the music he loves so much. On the one hand, some of his deepest values are about music "being good for the soul," the freedom that jazz represents both as a life-style and in his perception of it as music. Playing improvisational music allows him to have a deep experience of flow, in which all his attention is given to the free unfolding of psychic activity. But on the other hand, he is devoted to his family and, perhaps less so, to his work, which demand a kind of responsibility from him that seems almost antithetical to the jazz life. The object that he seems to cherish most is a sign of this current conflict, as well as an attempt at a harmonic resolution.

Mr. R. is a saxophonist "by avocation," yet he does not mention his saxophones as special objects. They are mentioned, however, as his most personal or private objects, which suggests that he has already relegated this part of his life to the private sphere, no longer a regular feature of what he does and what he is now. But an instrument is mentioned as his most prized possession – the piano he recently purchased. Clearly, from his description of it, the piano acts as a symbol that both unifies and transforms the competing demands on his attention and goals. Also, notice in the following description of the piano how his tone changes when confronted by the possibility of no longer having it. This seems to

evoke the heart of his conflict and perhaps indicates that the re-channeling of his psychic energy is not yet complete.

We just acquired it, it's used, but a nice roaring large one. I like to do some playing. I'm not a pianist. My oldest child is studying piano. It's important to me that he like it and do well with it. (Why?) I've had lots of fun playing (music), both in meeting people and simply because I enjoy it. I would like him to have the opportunity. He may not go far with it, but I want it available to all of them, not just the oldest.

(What would it mean to you not to have the piano?) I'd be pretty damn mad! I really enjoy that. I think that at times I had delusions of being a musician rather than a businessman. As time goes by I find it more and more difficult to work weekends as I used to. Financially, playing evenings, it's not as rewarding as it used to be – I can make more money working a few hours on Saturday than actually going out jobbing. So that incentive isn't there to go out and play, although I like to do that. Also because of the children being older, I have more and more responsibilities at the office and at home, it's very difficult to go out and play on the weekend. Saturday night is the only time my wife and I get a chance to be together socially and I don't want to eliminate that possibility by going out and playing. And also unless you play almost every week, it's very hard to play two or three weekends – it's almost an all or nothing proposition. So the piano, I think, takes the place of that to some extent. Not entirely, but I can still sit down and amuse myself playing the piano and to some extent it replaces the time I spent jobbing. So, pretty damn mad.

The piano acts for this man as a symbol that can bring his love of music and the free jazz life together with the competing demands placed on him by family responsibilities. It is a symbol well suited for this, because it has been one of the essential instruments of jazz ever since its beginnings in the "bawdy houses" of New Orleans and also because it is one of the most "domesticated" instruments in any American household, serving as an instrument for children to learn music, a center for family gatherings, and a conventional piece of "fine" furniture. In fact, Mr. R. even mentions this latter aspect as one of the reasons he acquired the piano:

It was being advertised in the newspaper by a fellow on Lake Shore Drive. It was a spur of the moment thing. I'd always wanted a large, better piano. Also my wife and children wanted a piece of furniture for the living room. I tried it, it seemed like a good buy, although it was probably more than we could afford at the time.

So the piano represents a kind of compromise, a redirection of goals toward family responsibilities and a rechanneling of attention toward flow activities within the home. It is also an instrument of the role-modeling process, through which he passes on his love of music to his boy. As a piece of furniture it acts as a sign familiar to this family, indicating to them something about their

shared interests. Judging from statistics on the amount of time families spend watching television, it would seem that this object is the most popular sign of shared family interests in the American home today. But unlike a television, the piano also enables this family to share perceptive experiences that they themselves create and enjoy and which depend on the craft they learn and the attention they give to practicing that craft. Like all signs, this piano has its own potentials and limitations, and the potentials it holds for experience depend on the extent to which they are cultivated.

But there is also one thing about this family that stands out by neglect. Nowhere does Mrs. R mention her husband's love of jazz or his saxophonic avocation. The only place she does mention his interest in music comes at the end of her description of the piano, the first special object she named when describing what it would mean not to have it:

The piano. It's pretty, useful, and makes beautiful music; I feel proud to own it. I've wanted it for a long time. (What would it mean to you not to have it?) It would mean a lack of music. A big empty place in the living room. My son would have to practice in the basement and he would be unhappy. It gives a lot of pleasure to my husband and my son and we would miss that pleasure.

The lack of attention given to her husband's interest in music as a way of life in various parts of the interview is in striking contrast to her husband's responses. Throughout the metropolitan portion of the interview, for example, it is obvious that Mr. R's "cognitive map" of Chicago is based largely on the places where music is performed. Mrs. R's view of the city does not include these places; instead, she mentions various museums, restaurants, and shops. Perhaps the conflict her husband has been experiencing and attempting to resolve is shared in reverse by Mrs. R, who dedicates herself to her family. The piano represents Mr. R's redirection of goals and attention toward the sphere of the home and family, but one wonders if Mrs. R feels a pull toward the opposite direction – increasing attention to the development of her own personal self or to activities outside the sphere of the family. The admiration of her sister and her friend for nonfamily-related achievement only faintly suggests such needs. Or maybe Mrs. R is completely satisfied with her present course of life, but these signs indicate that some further cultivation of new goals of her own might be beneficial and might even help her to perceive better her husband's needs. What the piano also represents, however, is that

there is a cost for keeping a family warm and that sometimes the burden of that cost needs to be redistributed among family members to avoid a rigid habitualization to roles, responsibilities, and goals.

As mentioned previously, Mr. E, the cool father, described his new condominium literally as "cold," sterile, and plastic. He attributes this to the fact that he has just moved in, but in examining his complete interview, one sees that the concept of home is very important to him, yet home is always somewhere other than where he lives. In describing where he feels most "at home," he says:

The den . . . I always feel more comfortable in the den portion of any home. They're more comfortable there and typically the more comfortable furniture is in them. The warmer colors usually decorate the den. I spend a great deal of time in the country, and that's actually where I feel the most at home and the most comfortable. The outdoors life and what not. And in the dens that I have had, they've all been decorated with that kind of atmosphere in mind. In other words, leather furniture. Typically I have mounted animals. Isn't that terrible, those rotten trophies. There the artwork and what not is all primitive artwork.

In the metropolitan portion of the interview, where one would not expect descriptions of home to be prominent, Mr. E begins by describing Chicago itself as home ("Really, it's home you know"). The place in Chicago that is most special for him is his parents' home:

It's really special. Of all the places that are special to me it is that area and there's really nothing else that special to me. (You mentioned the bars before?) Bars. I was just kind of kidding you, as a joke. That's where I go to chase ladies. (Would you say they're special?) No, I wouldn't say so. No, there's really only the one place I would consider special and that's my parents' home where we were born and where my mother continues to live and where all my brothers and sisters recongregate three or four times a year.

In describing his neighborhood, he says:

Where I live is a very affluent area. There's not very many families. It's probably the most international area of Chicago, if there is one, and believe me, it's very limited with that quality. (What is special for you in your neighborhood?) I don't want to use the word excitement, and not the word transient, but it's a changing neighborhood and has a lot of interaction. The atmosphere is special, it seems to be a much freer and less tied down area and I like that quality . . . most of my friends that I see are down located in that area and my social life really revolves around that area. (What's special about your friends?) Their mobility. And they're all involved in terms of what's going on, in terms of new things. They're

not limited. They're not driving a station wagon and living in the suburbs with three kids, going to a cocktail party and playing bridge on the weekends.

Mr. E, who has three children, does not channel his psychic energy into driving a station wagon with three kids in the suburbs and going to cocktail parties, presumably because he believes this is an inauthentic kind of existence. Instead, when asked what he does in his neighborhood and with friends, he replied:

Smoke dope, play cards, socialize, whatever people will do. Watch TV, watch a sporting event ... Usually every night of the week I'm going to someone's house or to a restaurant or going to meet some people at some event or going to a movie or something. It's very active. You rarely stay at home unless some people come over ... I really don't center my life around my apartment. My farm in Indiana is really — and my mother's home — are really the places. This (apartment) is just really a stopping off place. I have one of these in New York as well. I don't really center my life around it.

So although the concept of home is very important to Mr. E and shows up throughout his interview, his own home is only a stopping off place in a life of frenzied activity and heavy drinking. He is on the move every night of the week, socializing at friends' places, nightclubs, or restaurants and is also frequently traveling to the country or Europe for some skiing or hunting or vacationing in other exotic places. Apparently, he must be constantly on the move, searching for the warmth of sociality and companionship in a world of mobile friends who are not "tied down," who like to "get down, get loose, and chase it" as he says elsewhere. But his search for adventure seems to be more of a retreat or escape *from* something than a quest; a phobic retreat from himself and the continuity of his existence, from home itself. The more he pursues his goal the further he is from it, and the more atomized his existence becomes. What could be pursuing him down the path of self-evasion? What is making him long for home at the same time leading him away from it, stealing his psychic energy in a life of dissolution? Perhaps the answer lies at home.

Mr. E names four objects as special, some knicknacks and prints that his mother gave him and which were special for this reason, and also some Caribbean prints and a sculpture. The sculpture, a wood relief carving, is by far his most important possession, and he says about it:

It's something I bought personally many years ago in the Virgin Islands. It holds a lot of memories for me. I used to travel down there every month for a couple

of years. (The memories?) That's private, I won't go into them. It's a beautiful piece. It's an award-winning piece and I happened to kind of search it out and find it on my own in a small little art gallery. (Without it?) I'd be pissed if somebody came and snatched it. Yeah, I'd be pissed. But it wouldn't be earthshattering. If I lost any object I own ... I can't think of any object I'd be truly shattered. It wouldn't last more than a week. The only thing I'd really miss would be this wood relief. The rest of the things I have are much newer and of much less importance. The carving I've had for six, seven, or eight years.

It seems unusual that a man whose life is so oriented to excitement, new things, and not being tied down, and who is constantly on the move, should be so attached to the memories associated with one particular object from his many travels. It could be the intrinsic beauty of this sculpture that makes him value it above his other possessions, but he seems to emphasize the period in which he bought it as most significant. The rest of his belongings are "newer and of much less importance." But why should the fact that they are newer make them less important? What makes the memories of these trips six to eight years ago so important to a man who frequently travels to warm vacation spots? Our next indication is given when we turn to the most important events in his life and how they affected him.

Mr. E mentions his divorce and the death of his father as the two most important events in his life, and both of these occurred about six to eight years previously, which suggests a connection between these events and the significance of the sculpture. Mr. E said:

My divorce. I'd say really my divorce was probably the most important because it was one where I feel I became really more of an adult and realized my own self and decided to set up my own life from my own decisions. Because I was twenty-one or twenty-two or something when I got married and still wet behind the ears. It was really just an awakening, a going out on my own, and that's why. It's a time that I established my independence.

(Any others?) Well I guess everyone says the birth of your first son, but I don't know. (Was it important?) Well it was important, but it's, well at the time it was important, but now when I look back right now on the births of my children, the actual birth, the fact of my children is very important to me but the event of their birth is nothing. The fact of their existence means something.

The loss of my father. That was a critical time. It was a big loss, because not only were we very close — recreation, business, socializing — we had a very close relationship even though there was quite a few fights among all of us, some pistol burners in there, but we were very close. We have hunted together and it was a very intimate bond. That's his picture there (points to the only photo in the

room, on one of the walls). Other events I don't think even rank with those two as far as importance. No period in time, no one event that stands out for me.

The outcome of these events seems to be a sense of being alone. The close bond with his father ended with his father's death, and the meaning of his divorce is the establishment of his own "independence." In describing his divorce, he says "my own" no less than four times – "my own self," "my own life," "my own decisions," "a going out on my own" – and in doing so seems to be emphasizing the goal of a private self not influenced by others. But his divorce had outcomes other than the establishment of his own independence, because it is also among the most significant events in the lives of his ex-wife and oldest child.

Mr. E's oldest boy mentioned his parents' divorce and when he found out about the divorce as the two most important events in his life:

When my Mom and Dad got divorced. My Mom was kinda sad. They just couldn't talk, because my Dad had a bad temper. I didn't know because I was three-and-a-half or four. My Mom told me when I was six.

When I found out about the divorce. I just got real sad. I didn't think my Dad had that bad a temper. But I found out when I was eight, because he even yelled at our friends.

The divorce has had a strong impact on this boy and it shows up in other responses. We asked all respondents, for example, what they do when there is a marriage in the family and this boy responded by assuming it would be his mother getting married and that it "wouldn't be such a happy occasion."

First, I ask my Mom who it is; then I help calm my Mom down, because she gets kind of excited. I'd probably want to go to the wedding. It wouldn't be such a happy occasion.

He mentioned his mother and father as the people who have made the most difference in his life, but interestingly enough, it is his mother who is wholly "productive," whereas his father is the one who provides "escape":

Mom. She cooks, without her we wouldn't have any good meals, just sandwiches. Without her we wouldn't have any money, we'd have to get jobs.

Father. He brings us down to the farm. My Mom can't do it, because she has to work on Saturdays and Sundays.

This boy mentioned a football, the family dog, and the house itself as special objects. About the house he says:

Because if I didn't have one, I wouldn't live in anything. Everything that's special to me is in it. The only thing that we could live in would be an apartment, we couldn't afford it. It wouldn't be any fun. We wouldn't have a backyard.

Now this is a very concrete description of the house, but what he seems to be emphasizing is the importance of home and the security it provides. The saddest thing this boy said was not about his parents but in response to a question about whether there are any objects that have been special in his life but which he no longer possesses. This 11-year-old boy said, "I had a baby sister, but she died."

To respond to a question about objects with this answer shows that this tragedy must hold some meaning for him, even though he was much younger when it occurred. It also is interesting that his father did not even mention it, although he almost discussed the birth of his children as an important event. Instead, he said it was the "fact of their existence," not the birth, that was important, but even this was not so important as his divorce and the death of his father.

When we turn to the most important events in the life of Mrs. E, the same constellation of negative events shows up – the death of her mother and her own divorce – except she also includes the birth of the daughter who died, the event which her ex-husband seemed to be hinting at but could not mention:

The birth of my daughter. That was a trauma, a tremendous trauma. By the time I was pregnant with this child there were terrible marital problems, it was a terrible pregnancy, a lot of his not coming home, not showing up, a lot of drinking. Maybe I had some guilt about whether I really wanted this child, she was late, he was upset with me, for being late, for being pregnant. I think when the doctor said "There's something wrong with your baby," I saw the birth, I thought he was kidding. As time progressed, it got worse, we had her home, then at a hospital. The marriage got worse, I thought I was strong. And I still had three young children at home.

From this she went on to describe the divorce, and it is clear that the two events are interrelated:

My divorce. We were separated for over a year. The baby had died, the youngest was also seriously ill, all these tests on the relationship, and it got to the point where we couldn't hide any more, he really was putting situations in hand to provoke a divorce. I thought he'd shape up. I was seeing a marriage counselor. But after some time, I was convinced that it was the right thing to do, the natural thing, and I was almost exhilarated.

It appears that the strain of having a child who died shortly

after birth, and another seriously ill proved too strong a test for this marriage and caused it to break apart. Around the same time as these events, Mr. E's father, to whom he was strongly attached, died, and his response to these hard facts was to retreat from them by "not coming home, not showing up, a lot of drinking." In retreating from home, he took the same path as his own father, who also drank heavily. Maybe this also explains his frequent trips to the warm tropical islands, where he found refuge in a relationship freed from responsibilities, symbolized in the wood carving.

Despite the fact that her ex-husband was not around when she needed him most, Mrs. E mentions him along with her parents as having made the most difference in her life:

> He really changed my life. I don't blame him . . . I'm the eldest. I predominantly dated him from high school through college. He waited all through family troubles, responsibilities, like a knight in shining armor, and although he gave me financial support, there was nothing else. We grew at different rates, wanted different things. It was a difficult role conflict for me – I'd always felt the more dumped on you were, the better person you were. The relationship was not fulfilled. When I was separated I realized that I wanted more. Getting divorced was a big thing. My ex-husband has complicated my life tremendously, but I feel fortunate to have had a second chance.

She also mentions her former sister-in-law and mother-in-law as people she admires. They are both women who, like herself, dealt with many family problems and had "endurance." The first special object Mrs. E named was the antique sewing machine purchased "with my own money" right after the divorce, which meant both her new independence as well as being a part of her home "that reflects an old established, a link with the past." Of the nine special objects Mrs. E mentioned, five were related to her ex-husband or his family, such as wedding gifts or a table purchased with her former mother-in-law. These responses indicate a need to maintain continuity with the past but perhaps also (and we can only speculate here) reveal that she may still feel some ties to her ex-husband or has not completely worked through the divorce. She still finds some kind words, in the previous quotation, to describe him as one of the people, along with her parents, who made the most difference in her life.

Mrs. E's own father had trouble with alcohol, and she says her own brother is a "good person, very kind, generous, like my father in some ways. I would want someone in a relationship like my

brother." Perhaps if Mrs. E admires the qualities of her brother and through him, her father, she unwarily set up the preconditions for her troubles when she married Mr. E, who like her father, is a problem drinker. But these kinds of questions are better left to depth psychologists, because the information provided on our interviews stops short of what one would need to make this kind of inference. What we do find, however, is a woman who has had to confront an enormous amount of tragedy and family problems on her own, and who has had to reorganize her patterns of psychic energy in order to care for her family. All her attention is given to her children, through either the job she holds to help support them or her activities at home. She would not even wish to see her friends more if she could, because "my life is full enough now, I feel if I have any extra time, I owe it to my children." Her goals, since the time of her separation and divorce, are concerned with the value of "endurance" and of dealing with the hard facts of one's existence. These were revealed in her response to whether or not she would say she is a religious person:

> My gut reaction is to say no, I'm not religious because religious to me is going to church every day, but my religion per se, in a very loose sense of it, I just think you've got to have faith, it's gotten me through a lot of things. It goes back to the self concept I've gotten very sensitive to: It doesn't happen to somebody down the street, it does happen to me, and I've got to prepare myself for that. Nobody gives you a break, you have to really word hard. I've always known it will pay off, but I don't sit and wait.

In Mrs. E and her husband we see necessity and freedom pulled apart and dichotomized instead of unified. As their troubles mounted Mr. E increasingly took the path of least resistance, which he thought would lead to freedom. Mrs. E increasingly had to confront the family difficulties on her own and did this by giving herself to her family. She appears to be tempered by these experiences, but they also appear to have cost her dearly, leaving little or no time for her own enjoyment. Mr. E, by contrast, seems to have more time of "his own" than he knows what to do with. His conception of freedom as untethered release from all responsibilities is a goal he appears pretty much to have obtained, but the consequence is a life drifting aimlessly in search of a home it continually moves away from. But we should also remember that this goal is not completely of his own choosing. Rather, there were hard and tragic facts during that period of time that proved too

much for him to handle, which have scarred him to this day, and which, in the end, caused his family to fragment.

The pathology of privacy and the problem of continuity

Whether or not a family is emotionally integrated depends in the last analysis on whether its members, and the parents in particular, have been able to cultivate goals that transcend the level of the individual self. If differentiation is the parents' main concern, the family will suffer from the "pathology of privacy" that results when not enough psychic energy is left over to realize the communal goals of the family. The two case studies that follow present two families at the two extremes on the dimension of emotional integration. In the first, the family members' transactions with an old oak bed, an object that was special to all of them, illustrates the diverging goals that prevent the family's integration; in the second case, the shared objects and activities of a yearly ritual concretely show the harmonious development of intentions of that family.

The bed is perhaps one of the archetypal symbols of family life. The word bed itself derives from the Indo-European base *bhedh*, meaning "to bury" or "a sleeping hollow in the ground," and with the sense of being both a resting place and a foundation. Center of procreation, love, birth, and death, the bed is both the source of social life and, at other times, the place one goes to be alone. For the Z family an oak four-poster stands out as a "dominant symbol" (Turner, 1967) reflecting many family themes simultaneously. This family seems very traditional on the surface but is facing deep tensions underneath – tensions related to many contemporary trends that are shaking its very foundations.

We could have chosen a Freudian or Jungian approach to this case study because much of the data lends itself to the kinds of dynamics – repression, denial, regression, and so on – that psychoanalysts discuss so well. But instead we wish to deal with the case at a level that Freudian or Jungian analysis seems not to be particularly well suited to handle. We shall discuss the relation of the family to the level of community, using Arendt's (1958) dis-

cussion of the household and the *polis* as the interpretive framework.

Freud's theory, for example, is surely a family theory because it makes the Oedipal family feud key to the development of consciousness and the self. But because it makes the life of the community – political, social, historical, and otherwise – all epiphenomena of underlying individual unconscious wishes, it is not capable of dealing with the community on its own terms. Even the family as a social unit is ultimately reducible to individual intrapsychic representations rooted in instinctual conflicts. As the single most popular psychological theory of the twentieth century thus far, it is the psychological exemplar of what Arendt described as the dominance of the family or household template over the community in the modern world.

Hannah Arendt (1958) describes the distinction between the household and the *polis* in ancient Greek thought – how the former referred to a realm of inequality where necessity ruled, whereas the polis was a community of equals that transcended necessity, or mere living, in an attempt to "live well." She believes that the polis declined, or was taken over by the "social," so that by the Middle Ages community life was organized as a large "household." An example in more modern times is the rise of economy. The word derives from the Greek *oikos* ("household") and originally referred to the maintenance of household affairs, but in Western capitalism it has come to dominate political life under the principle of utility. A higher valuation of privacy and individuality, with both positive and negative consequences, is associated with these developments, as well as, almost paradoxically, the rise of faceless mass societies that Arendt believes ultimately destroy the foundation of the household in addition to the polis. We shall explore here, and in the following case study, the "psychic economy" of the family in order to see how certain household signs can act as the foundation of family integration and continuity.

The oak bed was mentioned as a special object by both the daughter and her mother. Mrs. Z described her daughter's bed and the long family tradition associated with it:

We have my great grandparents' bed which my daughter sleeps on . . . which has great fascination because we're the fourth generation to have it. It's very small for a double bed and it amazes me that 3 sets of parents slept in it and conceived

children in it! She can hardly sleep in it and she's only 14! (People are getting bigger.) That's true. Actually, my father couldn't sleep in it because he was over 6 feet tall. So it passed directly from his parents to me.

Shortly after Mrs. Z was interviewed, she and her husband had to "take back" this bed from their daughter because they decided to sleep in separate rooms due to their continuing marital difficulties. Mr. Z moved into the adjoining study and needed a bed, so his daughter went back to using her old bed that she had used until she was given the oak bed four months earlier. The general family tension resulting from the new sleeping arrangement is reflected in the daughter's statements that her most private objects are her own thoughts and writings that she wouldn't want "them" (her parents) to see:

(What are your most private or personal objects?) Any sort of thoughts that I happen to write down or any of the work that I happen to do for school. I can't even stand my parents coming into the school. I feel they are intruding on something tht is mine, something that I can only deal with because I can. I'm the only one who can really deal with anything that goes on over there. No real objects I guess except for my work; papers that I write are probably the only things that I don't want them to see, especially if it has my mind or emotions in it.

Likewise, when we asked her what all of her special objects, taken as a whole, meant to her, she replied:

The fact that it's mine and they can't get into it. They probably couldn't understand most of the stuff I have. And I feel that my privacy is something that I need and my thoughts are something that is mine and I don't really want to share them with people. So I guess it's my privacy. Together it all means my inner thoughts.

Her emphasis on privacy in these statements can probably be seen against the general background of the importance of privacy and autonomy for adolescents in general, which was discussed in Chapter 7 in relation to territoriality in the home. But considering the specific tensions in her family at the time of the interviews, her parents' marital difficulties seem to have found expression in what should be the sign of family continuity – the bed – and also have intruded on this daughter's symbol of autonomy and privacy:

My parents' bed. It used to be in my room, it's gone now and I liked it a lot. It was a beautiful bed. They took it back. It was comfortable and pretty . . . I've never had a bed of my own. The ones I had were sold. And they were twin beds that I had when I was a little kid. When I had that [the oak bed] I grew attached to it and if it was gone I think I would be pretty upset. Just the fact that it was some-

thing that I liked a lot . . . My sister has a bed that is going to be hers when she leaves the house and has her own family and my parents went out and bought that a couple of years ago, and I can't stand sleeping on twin beds. I think I am going to fall out. I wish I had my own, a nice double bed. I had the bed for four months.

When we examine Mr. Z's responses the theme of privacy is again important but for different reasons. He describes a tension between his own family and his friends from a men's liberation group, a tension between the exclusiveness and privacy of the household and the openness of a community of friends:

(Do you wish you did more, or other things, with your friends?) I have as much access to my friends and they have as much access to me as all of us need. Yeah, there are other things I would like to do. People I really care about and people who care about me – I would like to move towards breaking down sexual exclusiveness. But this is very risky. I don't know if I could handle it or if they could handle it. My fantasy would be that some day I would live in a commune in which everyone would live with everyone else, in which there would be no possessiveness, in which children could choose parents, they could choose adult models on the basis of their own needs, rather than biological lottery. A bisexual community. I'm not sure that I'm ever going to realize this, but it is very attractive. I furthermore consider this a Christian vision, although that might seem strange. I think this goes back to the early church. It was practiced by the Christian Socialists in the nineteenth century – open, sexually free. Just enormously loving, nurturing communities. I would like to live some day in a place where I am not part of a family which my friends are apart from. But rather my friends and my family are one and the same, under the same roof, or in the same apartment building.

Interestingly, Mr. Z is committed to what he claims is a Christian vision of community, which is itself modeled after the family as the basis for community (see Arendt, 1958, p. 49). One problem with this vision, whether or not it is the authentic Christian vision or only some modern distortion of it, consists in viewing the salvation of one's soul as the ultimate goal and a common concern to all rather than viewing the community itself as the ultimate goal that transcends the individual lifespan of the individual. This latter view of community, which Arendt discusses as the Greek conception of the polis, is:

What we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and who will come after us. But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public . . . Through many ages before us – but now not any more – men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something they had in common with others to be more permanent than

their earthly lives . . . There is perhaps no clearer testimony to the loss of the public realm in the modern age than the almost complete loss of authentic concern with immortality . . . [which is] testified to by the current classification of striving for immortality with the private vice of vanity. Under modern conditions, it is indeed so unlikely that anybody should earnestly aspire to an earthly immortality that we are probably justified in thinking it is nothing but vanity (Arendt, 1958, pp. 50–1).

It is obvious in Arendt's discussion that the purpose of the *polis*, or community is to give permanence, or continuity, or even a kind of immortality to its members through their identification with it and the psychic energy they *freely give* to it. As such, it stands opposed to the private interests of the individual, even though today we see the striving after immortality as a "private vice of vanity." One implication is that the real foundation of the self, far from being private and buried under a social façade, rather is found in the cultivation of continuity itself, in and through the community that transcends the individual life span and gives it permanence. But we would not want to make any hard and fast distinctions between household and community, as Arendt sometimes seems to do, because the family can also act as a microcosm of the community, giving objective continuity and permanence to one's existence. In discussing the difference between the two, we might, instead, associate the family with the social self and the *polis* with the cosmic self.

Mr. Z seems to want to treat his friends as family and his family as a community of friends, so that all relationships will be equally personal. His remarks express an ideal of egalitarianism in *all* relationships, a socialistic communality that could rise above social necessities and hierarchies as well as any petty egoistic claims to privacy and exclusivity. Strangely enough, however, privacy is currently very important for Mr. Z. He has recently moved out of his wife's bedroom into the adjoining study and mentions the *privacy* of his own "space" as why this new room is the place where he feels most at home in the entire house:

(Where in your home do you feel most "at home"?) I'll have to answer this in a little bit of detail. There's a lot of tension between my wife and me right now . . . We're in separate bedrooms now. This is only as of a couple of weeks ago. So I'm really tripping out on *my room*. Not in hostility to her, I think we both like this, that we have our own space. So I'd have to say now that this room which was the study, is sort of my space now, and I've got my posters around, and I *really* like that. And it's adjacent to her room, so we have access to one another. But I'd say that room.

Mr. Z's emphasis on the privacy of his new room – that he has his own space and can hang his own posters that express his own identity – suggests more of an adolescent self-centeredness than the ideal of social communality he would like to realize. Mr. Z was also one of the few people to name himself as one of the five people he most admires. His description of what all of his special possessions mean to him also illustrates his orientation toward a private self rather than toward his family:

Not a great deal. If I lost all of them [possessions] I'd still be here. And if I can affirm myself, which I think I'm finally able to do at the age of forty, after a *long* struggle, then you know, who gives a shit really.

In both his idea of a communality of friends and family, and his valuation of how wonderful it is to have his "own space," Mr. Z's family has no voice. He expresses wishes for complete freedom, but the wishes of the other members of his family do not seem to matter. His ideal of unencumbered freedom has brought about the very tensions that caused him to move from his wife's bedroom, but he sees only new autonomy provided by his new room and completely misses the pain and suffering he has caused his wife and daughter. He has attained autonomy at the expense of removing the most important sign of his daughter's autonomy, the oak bed.

Instead of serving as an archetype of family unity and continuity, the bed has been turned into a sign of family separation and has come to represent the pathology of privacy. Mr. Z presents us with a sort of caricature of Arendt's discussion of the distinction between the *polis* and the household and the dissolution of each that for her characterizes the modern world:

The *polis* was distinguished from the household in that it knew only "equals," whereas the household was the center of the strictest inequality. To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another *and* not to be in command oneself. It meant neither to rule nor to be ruled. Thus within the realm of the household, freedom did not exist, for the household head, its ruler, was considered to be free only insofar as he had the power to leave the household and enter the political realm, where all were equals . . . Equality . . . far from being connected with justice, as in modern times, was the very essence of freedom: to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed (Arendt, 1958; pp. 30–1).

Throughout his interview it is apparent that Mr. Z seeks to "move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled" exists. His

goal is to do away with all forms of social and biological hierarchy so that a true communion of equals might be achieved, but he seems to realize the opposite result: alienation of those closest to him and an overvaluation of privacy and his own individual self. His attempts to liberate his "true" inner self can be seen on one level as a denial of household responsibility and have brought about a real threat to the continuity of the family. The bed, a sign of four generations of family continuity, has now become a sign of familial discord.

We see a completely different configuration in the O family. Here family tradition and continuity are consciously valued ideas, symbolized in objects and activities that serve to cultivate these goals for the whole family. Mrs. O, the mother, mentioned Christmas tree ornaments and photos of her children as her most special belongings. Christmas is the most special occasion of the year for the whole family, a time for family reunion and a way of celebrating the customs of the mother's ethnic origins. All the other members of the O family also mentioned Christmas as the most special holiday and gave detailed descriptions of how they ritually celebrate this occasion. Describing the ornaments, Mrs. O said:

All the ornaments we have I've made over a period of years, and the ones I've bought I've picked out especially for the children, for each one of them, thinking that they'll take them with them when they're older. And so the ornaments are a sort of review of my married life, when each one was made, under what conditions.

When we asked what it would mean not to have the ornaments, she replied:

I would be very, very upset. Decorating the house at Christmas is a massive effort, and if I didn't have them, I'd have a hard time trying to convince myself that I was going to enjoy it as much. I would be really crushed.

Likewise, if she no longer possessed the photos of her children:

I would be very crushed . . . Nothing would be lost other than just a piece of paper, but it's a trail of the past, sort of a sentimental thing.

The importance of family tradition and continuity described here is celebrated and renewed in the annual ritual Christmas dinner:

Everyone in my family looks forward to Christmas all year. We celebrate a traditional European Christmas, with all the traditions surrounding it. My parents

make it special, my mother makes it special I should say because it's really her thing. She goes to the trouble of cooking a traditional meal which means three or four days of preparation for a twelve-course meal. We always have someone else not from the family come to share in the meal, somebody that doesn't have any other place to go. It's also all the traditions that go with the meal that make it special. We put straw under the table cloth, and at the end of the meal everybody pulls out a piece and depending on how the straw is bent, my mother will tell your fortune. The straw is also reminiscent of the manger. It's a real communion, a very special spirit, and all the food is traditional, food that we don't have any other time throughout the whole year. It is just *so* special, I hope it never leaves.

Mr. O also emphasizes the importance of the Christmas feast for the whole family:

On Christmas Eve, we have a traditional European meal, which I was introduced to when I met my wife. I only hope that my mother-in-law can pass this along and my wife to her daughters so that we can perpetuate this. This is a time for getting together. My in-laws have always been thankful for what they have at Christmas. We've always had peripheral type relatives or friends of the family – never hesitated to ask a friend.

Unlike Mr. Z of the previous case study, Mr. O seems to feel no disjunction between family and friends, and this most highly revered rite of *family* continuity, the Christmas dinner, has a link to the larger community built into it: the extra table setting traditionally set aside for some friend or stranger.

Mr. O is an avid collector, who names old records, tapes of radio shows, and coins as his special objects. He also described a family tree that he is creating, which again expresses this family's interest in continuity:

My family tree. With *Roots* being on the TV last year, my eldest daughter got an interest in history. I have a family history. I have it all the way back to when the first O's came over in 1630. My daughter had some questions put to her in school, but they just went back two generations, so I think we're going to put together a family tree this spring and summer . . . I have it written out. A lot of it is typing. My family had family reunions and they'd come from all over the country, some of them, and they'd put this thing together in bits and pieces. They'd write letters asking, "Am I related to you?" So I have all this.

When asked what all of the objects he names meant to him, Mr. O replied:

I don't know if I could really describe it. It's a lot of sentiment. In some ways I'm a sentimentalist. To me, they're links with parents, links with the past. I can relate all these things with people, times, and maybe events. It's not like going to an antique store and buying a watch. Most of the things have been given to me and have a meaning.

The theme of family continuity is just as important for both maternal grandparents, but they have a very different perspective on the permanence of objects. Three of the four objects mentioned by the grandmother remind her of the old country. One of these is a portrait of her daughters, done when she and her husband were penniless after the war:

This was a very hard time in our life. It was the war, we lost everything. And we left our country, we didn't have nothing. We been on the road, and to me that's very dear. It's sentimental picture. I would be very, very sad if I didn't have.

Having representations of her children is essential for this woman, just as it is for her daughter. The portraits communicate a visual image of the children and a "trail of the past," to use the mother's words, through which memories of particular experiences or emotions can be recalled. The grandmother's feelings are embodied in a more traditional form, an oil painting, whereas the more recent technological form of photographs embodies the mother's meanings; but each of these objects enables the women to cultivate relationships and experiences by comparing current situations with past ones.

The grandparents had to flee their native country when their two daughters were infants, and as the grandmother said:

You know what, in my life I lost twice, everything. And I mean everything. When my daughter was four, when we left our country, and the second time when we come from Austria up to Bavaria. I left everything. And they have just one dress, one pair of underwear. And that's all what we have. And that's why I didn't give much value to things. I like, I enjoy, but . . .

When we compare the grandmother's attitude toward the loss of cherished possessions with her 10-year-old granddaughter's description of her most important objects – "Arfie," her stuffed dog, and "Shari," her stuffed teddy bear – we see a clear example of the contrast between experience and innocence:

Arfie. He's in my room and I've had him since I was born. He's all worn out and I sleep with him at night. Shari. She's in my room. I've had both of them since I was born. [Without] Shari, I'd be *very, very* sad; I'd probably cry too, I'd miss her a lot. She's really small. And I can put her in a suitcase and carry her anywhere. Arfie is bigger and he has a voice box so he makes a lot of noise. But Shari is small, compact and she's really cute.

The O family as a whole devotes its attention to the goal of cultivating family continuity. Things tend to acquire meaning because they are signposts of family history, which help family mem-

bers re-experience crucial events and relationships they share. In doing this the artifacts also preserve, vitalize, and transmit to those who will come after, the goal of family and ethnic continuity that is an essential aspect of the identities of these people.

It is fitting to complete this chapter with one final example of how simple household artifacts can be alive with a multitude of meanings. A woman who was born and raised in Chicago gave the following description of family photographs:

Photographs . . . That is the link with the past, the pictures of people that I never knew, and whom my children will certainly never know. I'm the kind of person who looks up relatives. It's a link with the past, the knowledge that these people are a part of our lives. I consider the loss of an irreplaceable photo a terrible, terrible loss. When I took a photo I liked, I always had a zillion copies made – but often forgot to give them to people – but I wanted to make sure somewhere there was another copy, in case anything happened to the original. But the ones my mother has from Europe are just irreplaceable. The people are all dead. All of their belongings were confiscated. There's nothing left.

It's a very emotional issue for Jews who lost family during the Holocaust, and I don't know any Jewish people who didn't lose someone, some members of his family, whether it was someone he knew or didn't know . . . All of my mother's five brothers and sisters, their husbands and wives, their children, her cousins, all of her childhood friends, everybody was slaughtered. Some died in the concentration camps, starvation and torture. Some were killed, pulled right out of their homes, and murdered, not just by the Nazis. One niece remained, the one whose paintings I have, she lives in Paris. And her contact with her sister – the only other [one] left of the whole family, dozens and dozens of people – she learned from her sister what happened to the family. They all lived in neighboring towns . . . Some were sent to concentration camps. Others were just killed on the spot. Butchered by the local townspeople, who were given free rein by the Nazis to kill the Jews.

My mother came to America when she was fifteen, her brother and her sister were here. The rest were killed, and their homes looted. It's very obvious that this has colored our feelings and thinking about a lot of things. There's no denying that what we call the Holocaust has had a profound effect on Jewish people living all over the world. My mother went through a terrible emotional, a terrible few years. She's never stopped crying about her family. But in recent years it affected her mentally – she would say, "The trucks are coming, they're coming for me!" She had terrible dreams that were so real she would say, "My brothers and sisters, I saw the blood running!" On her it was even worse, because she knew these people, I didn't. But I have the pictures and I see them. It's heartbreaking to know that these little children – one of my mother's brothers was killed when he wouldn't give up his children, when they were taking them away. And they just battered him to death, on the spot. The whole thing was just so horrible . . . My mother said to us, "Do you know what they're doing, they're making soap out of Jewish people." And my brother and I both said, "Ma, don't get so upset, this is the twentieth century, things like that don't happen now. That was in the Middle Ages." And it turned out to be true. The whole horrible

nightmare. And that was a terrible thing to take. And even now we know of people who perpetrate pain, torture, and suffering on other people and seem to enjoy it. It's a terrible, frightening thing.

This remarkably vivid description of family photographs exemplifies the importance of tangible artifacts for expressing deep human needs for relationship and continuity, as well as the fragility of the material world we create around us and the people and institutions that make up the world – the fragility of civilization itself. The mother who described these photos did not experience the Nazi holocaust directly; it was *her* mother who was forced to move to America and whose entire family was exterminated. But the holocaust is a deeply and painfully felt part of her life, vividly symbolized by the photographs of her murdered ancestors and kin. These representations enable her to internalize and keep alive images of family and a sense of family and ethnic tradition. They convey historical experiences involving her kin, her ethnic people, her present community and nation as well as that of her ancestors, and in conveying this emotionally charged information, these photos serve as a terrible reminder of the precariousness of moral standards and civilized life. Through these photos this woman's identity and sense of self have been enlarged to include experiences that have been transmitted indirectly to her through symbols and which give her a broader perspective in which to confront life. They illustrate how the cultural microcosm of the home can reflect what people already are, as well as projecting organized patterns of psychic energy that can be cultivated to influence conduct toward goals – in this case, toward a goal of preservation and continuity. One of the important functions of cherished household objects is precisely their ability to provide tangible, enduring, and vitalized signs that can communicate the continuity of one's experiences, relationships, and values.

CHAPTER 9

Meaning and survival

In preceding chapters we have tried to unravel the ways in which the self develops through transaction with the symbolic environment of the home. The objects that constitute this environment help to channel their owners' psychic energy toward goals that give meaning to life. Some of these goals appear to be limited to satisfying a person's needs; some include the well-being of others, some aim toward wider patterns of harmony. It is now time to view this process of cultivation more closely, in order to attempt to provide a context for individual development within the history of the human species. Only from this broader perspective can we evaluate the significance of symbolization and assess the various goals that men and women create to direct their lives.

Throughout the millions of years of the evolution of life on our planet, the various species of bacteria, plants, and animals have struggled to create their form and to maintain it through time. To do so they had to capture energy from the environment – sunlight, chemicals, the fibers and flesh of other living things – and to use it to shape matter according to the blueprint contained in their genes. Thus the basic sources of energy were transformed into tens of thousands of differentiated life forms, each attempting to impose and retain its own form of order.

One of the reasons that the Earth has supported such a variety of life forms has been the fact that none of them have been able to gain an advantage over others in this process of transformation. Each species has found a few or only one way to use energy for its own purposes. A lion needs the protein from the flesh of its prey but cannot utilize any of the innumerable other sources of energy contained in leaves, grasses, wood, the ores and shales of the earth, or the bonds that keep molecules and atoms together.

Other species, specialized in transforming each of these other manifestations of energy, use them to perpetuate their own life form. Therefore no one organism has been able to monopolize life, and the various forms have in time developed that ever shifting interdependence that we usually refer to as "the balance of nature."

This balance was disrupted in the last thousands of years – the equivalent of a few seconds in evolutionary time – by the human conceptual ability to abstract the idea of energy from its various objective manifestations and by the technological ability to extract energy from wherever it could be found. From the discovery of fire to that of steam, electricity, and nuclear energy, the history of humankind is an incredibly rapid takeover by one animal species, a species that has learned to shape manifold energies to its own purpose.

Until recently, this history was greeted with pride and complacency by most fellow humans. The flexibility humans had shown in adapting to every ecological niche was pointed out as proof of their superiority over all other forms of life. Such ingenious creatures could not fail to prevail.

But the sturdy optimism of the recent past has by now developed some worrisome cracks. The very success of our species has caused problems that few had anticipated. Despite the fact that self-awareness and a high degree of self-control are what characterize humankind, one of the main problems has been the gradual loss of controls over the use of energy. These controls had been built into former species by their ignorance. A given species of plant, bird, or mammal was no threat to the livelihood of most others simply because it had no way to exploit the source of energy other species were depending on for their own survival. These "natural" restraints have fallen, one after the other, to human ingenuity – so have the traditional cultural restraints that have guided human conduct for millennia. In their place are the principles of utility and expediency, which now dominate modern culture over much of the world. Thus humans are in the presumably unprecedented position on this planet of being able to absorb all the physical energy they can find and to reshape it to their purpose.

The ability to extract energy from the environment has not developed at a uniform rate across all human groups. The technolog-

ical societies of the West have broken away from the rest of the world and now consume an inordinate amount of planetary resources, whereas the others look on with envy and increasing rage. Already the disparity is such that it almost qualifies as a social "speciation" – a differentiation of human groups into separate species distinguished by utterly different behaviors and energy requirements. Because cultural information (as opposed to genetic) is passed on through socialization, one might expect that sociocultural "speciation" will continue to create impassable barriers separating the haves from the have-nots.

Possibly, this splitting of humanity might be reversed by either decreasing the rate of energy transformation of the industrial nations or increasing the rate of underdeveloped societies until it approaches parity. The second solution is, of course, the one pursued by the newly self-conscious underdeveloped countries. This would be a fine goal, except that according to what we know now it would lead even more speedily to the final depletion of planetary resources and thus to the destruction of the world as a life-supporting system.

The problem seems to be that modern industrial modes of thought are based on a foundation of the *dia-bolic*, the raising of utility and unlimited differentiation to the level of an ultimate goal. When utility or the "expected pleasure" an object can bring is taken as the ultimate, the doorway to fragmentation is opened, because presumably the only limitations placed on a given utility value are other utilities or "expected pleasures," and effects in the long run need not be considered – or are at least of secondary importance. The philosophy of utility is based on a series of discrete individual sensations of pleasure and not on a continuous cultivation of the purposes that make up one's life and integrate one with others and with enduring patterns of meaning. Thus the earth, the forests, the dwellings, and the psychic energy of people can all be mined for the specific utility of the transaction, regardless of what wider consequences or outcomes these acts might cause.

How can humankind escape this vicious circle in which its unlimited appetite devours the world on which its life depends? No question requires an answer more urgently nor is more difficult to know how to begin answering than this one.

We might start by asking the simple questions, where does all

the energy go? What do we do with the life-sustaining resources we transform according to our purpose? For other kinds of animals the answers would have been easy. The energy goes to keep the animal alive until it reproduces and to ensure the survival of the species. To achieve this, a certain limited amount of calories have to be taken from the environment and transformed into both the physical shapes of the organism and its movements. Generation after generation, for millions of years, from mosquitoes to whales, the only energy requirement of an animal was to keep its biological order intact.

With the development of self-consciousness humans increasingly began to need energy not only to maintain their biological form; now they needed it also to give shape to forms envisioned in their thought. Thus they labored to build pyramids and Gothic cathedrals; they wrought snowmobiles and television sets. It is not possible to assess the survival needs of humans simply in terms of biological requirements; the dreams of new forms, of new patterns of matter and action, must also be reckoned in the equation simply because they are inseparable from the evolution of the human species (Geertz, 1973). Humans have ceased to be purely biological beings content with reproducing genetic form. Each generation seems to create new desires for what we assume is needed for our existence: for the average contemporary American it might be owning two cars, a private jet to take us wherever we want, and a market that can provide for all our whims.

The problem, then, is that there are no limits to these aspirations. Yet the physical energy that is needed to give them shape and the psychic energy that is necessary to extract, transform, maintain, and dispose of those shapes we create have definite limits. The drain on the material world subsequent to our constantly escalating needs is almost certainly going to result in a catastrophic failure of the ecology. Unless we humans learn to change the kind of creatures we have become, unless we alter our purpose, we shall be remembered among the galaxies only as a form of cancer that destroyed its host and killed itself in the process.

What form this change may take and how it is to be accomplished is difficult to know at this point. But pieces of the answer are available, and the first steps may be to look them over and begin to wonder how they could fit together.

Essentially, this problem can be stated in a simple form: How can we break our addiction to material energy without losing the specifically human ability to give shape to our dreams? The solution to this problem is implicit in the analysis presented in the previous chapters. This consists in learning to find meaning in signs that enrich life and offer opportunities and possibilities for growth without requiring great inputs of material energy or the depletion of scarce and contested resources. In principle, it is a simple solution, one that worked for millennia before the dawn of the modern age. In practice, however, it might be as difficult to carry out as would be curing a heroin addict by telling him to stop using the drug and, instead, to do something constructive. Yet faced with the alternative of a declining economy and, even more important, an ever escalating exhaustion of the environment, one must consider the necessity of a radical cure no matter how painful and difficult it becomes.

First, we should examine more closely the nature of the addiction. Why have humans been using increasing amounts of physical energy to shape material objects far beyond their needs? A great deal of the energy we consume goes to provide comfort: more and more elaborate houses, clothes, food, and gadgets. The energy we use still serves ends that mimic basic needs – food, warmth, security, and so on – but have now become addictive habits rather than necessities. Although the distinction between habit and necessity is so elusive, it is no less essential to draw. At what point does the natural enjoyment of food fade into gluttony? When does a desire for a comfortable home provided with labor-saving devices escalate into an inexhaustible drive to possess for the sake of possession? Such questions were asked in the past within the context of the great religions. Since the Enlightenment and the rise of "classical materialism" they have been dismissed as questions based on the limited moral assumptions of Christianity – merely "symbolic" – and hence having only a quaint historical interest. It now seems, however, that the mortal sins of Christianity are sound intimations of the kind of excess that can lead humankind to its doom. These moral issues of the past are revealed as scientific questions bearing on our future survival.

Anthropologists and historians have recently begun to point out that the apparent poverty of Stone Age hunters and gatherers should not be viewed as helpless deprivation but more as a matter

of choosing a style of life that provided a comfortable margin of survival and more leisure time than people have experienced since:

Scarcity is not an intrinsic property of technical means. It is a relation between means and ends. We should entertain the empirical possibility that hunters are in business for their health, a finite objective, and that bow and arrow are adequate to that end. (Sahlins, 1972, p.5)

The main thrust of Marshall Sahlins's argument is that the quality of life in the most "primitive" cultures is not demonstrably inferior to that of ours. The concern with accumulation, the fear of not making it in the "struggle" for existence that haunts our days is foreign to them.

The world's most primitive people have few possessions, *but they are not poor*. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods . . . above all, it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization. (Sahlins, 1972, p.37)

Two kinds of materialism

By becoming entirely dependent on a market economy, we have become vulnerable to fears that we have tried to assuage by developing increasingly expensive symbolic demonstrations of our autonomy and power. Material possessions serve as pacifiers for the self-induced helplessness we have created. That terminal materialism is a recent achievement of Western industrial culture, rather than a "fact of nature" has been argued by many, notably by Karl Polanyi:

Animal dependence on food has been bared and the naked fear of starvation permitted to run loose. Our humiliating enslavement to the material, which all human culture is designed to mitigate, was deliberately made more rigorous. (Polanyi, 1957, p.115)

Although food itself is a necessity of life, who owns it, how we get it, what we eat, how we eat, when we eat, and how much we eat are specific habits cultivated within a range of cultural options. The question, then, becomes: What goals do these habits represent and how might they be cultivated toward the optimal direction?

The point is that a habit of consumption can become an end in itself, feeding on its autonomous necessity to possess more things,

to control more status, to use more energy. Consumption for the sake of consumption becomes a fever that consumes all the potential energy it can get access to. In a different context we have called this runaway habit of possession "terminal materialism" and contrasted it with "instrumental materialism," in which the possession of things serves goals that are independent of greed itself and have a specific limited scope within a context of purposes (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1978).

This distinction illustrates the moral or pragmatic basis for the valuation of material goods – how the *purpose*, rather than the bare fact of material possession itself, should form the ground of a criticism of materialism. For most people the term materialism conjures up an image of crass self-centeredness, of mindless consumers buying needless things and devoting their lives to a shallow quest for the acquisition of money and possessions that will serve as status symbols. But it is also apparent that goods can serve the "common good" for a person or culture. Indeed, they are essential to it, which is why we were led to develop the second definition of materialism. This is a use of "instrumental" in the Aristotelian, not functionalist, sense (Aristotle, 1973 pp.600ff.).

Instrumental materialism involves the cultivation of objects as essential *means* for discovering and furthering goals, so that the objects are instruments used to realize those goals. In this type of materialism there is a sense of directionality, in which a person's goals themselves may be cultivated through transactions with the object. This does not imply that possessions are used solely as means, because they also produce immediate enjoyment, consummations of experiences that are in a sense their own ends. What is being emphasized is that even these ends operate within a context whose purpose is the fuller unfolding of human life. This, then, is a context-related materialism, as opposed to terminal materialism, in which there is no sense of reciprocal interaction in the relation between the object and the goal. The end is valued as final, not as itself a means to further ends and hence not subject to cultivation. In other words, outcomes of transactions that conflict with the terminal goal are ignored. In this sense of materialism "the end justifies the means" because when one values something only as an end in itself, other possible ends or outcomes can be ignored.

In fact, when these distinctions are applied to a theory of human cultural evolution, it appears that Darwinian theory, and cer-

tainly the more individualistic sociobiology, are terminal theories of evolution when applied to humans. They are terminal because they exclude what is most characteristic about the human species – the ability to cultivate ultimate goals through self-control. In the Darwinian and sociobiological perspectives only the survival of the species or of one's own genes constitutes the ultimate goal, and this a priori goal is considered final and not subject to criticism through cultivation. Growth only serves as a mere means for the mechanical principles of the goal and is ultimately separable from it. In our view, by contrast, real growth is the essence of the goal of evolution itself: The ultimate purpose of evolution is also subject to growth. Although the ultimate "goal" of other animals is to live, the ultimate goal of humankind is conditioned by additional evolutionary purposes as well, which determine us to live well. The development of communicative capabilities for artistic expression and pragmatic activities, for purposeful "inquiry" in a broad sense of this term, infused new goals into evolution itself and are embodied in our very physical being. Thus *human* evolution consists in the cultivation of adaptive and creative ways of living. It is the realization and embodiment of purposes and goals – intelligence in its broadest sense – in concrete patterns of emotion and thought. This is what constitutes a culture, not the mere fact that it is a genetic blueprint nor even a "system of symbols and meanings," but that it is a concrete belief that lives and breathes in the minds and hearts of its members. A vital culture is one in which persons devote their psychic energy through continual cultivation and in return are given a broader conception of themselves. It depends on the cultivation of its members for its continued existence.

How can one escape the deadly inertia of terminal materialism? The prognosis is not very bright, given that our goals and institutions are now geared to maximize each person's drive to consume.

The most basic change needed to turn things around is a change in the meaning we derive from possession of goods and energy. We must realize that the relationship between well-being and consumption is not linear. It is true that ownership of things and control over physical energy are "good" because they provide the means for living. But as many have indicated it does not necessarily follow that *more* means *better*. Although consumption approaches a point of diminishing returns in terms of physical and

psychic comfort, its costs keep mounting. There is no rational way to justify the ravaging of the planet's resources in terms of any real benefits that we are supposed to derive from escalating consumption. We must face the fact that we are squeezing our world dry simply to feed a habit that gives no joy.

The disparity between benefits and costs of consumption is nowhere as obvious as when one considers optional leisure habits. Although only about 5 percent of energy expenditure goes to formal leisure activities, this in itself is still not an inconsiderable proportion of the total resources we consume (Fritsch and Castleman, 1974). Spending an hour on a snowmobile uses up about a hundred times as much energy calculated in BTUs as an hour spent in cross-country skiing. Is the former activity a hundred times "better" than the second? If not, why do we expend scarce resources on it? Again, the answer seems to be that habit encourages us to engage in senselessly wasteful behavior (Csikszentmihalyi, 1979). Or, to take another example, to make and operate a color television set takes many times the physical energy needed to make books. Yet watching TV appears to be a much less positive experience than reading, if we are to trust what respondents themselves say (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1977).

We are not advocating the abolition of snowmobiles and television sets in a latter-day, scientifically based Savonarola-like revulsion against conspicuous waste. Such movements have little chance of succeeding. On the other hand, we have already questioned the assumption that happiness lies in a blind pursuit of terminal materialism. And we should begin in earnest to explore alternative goals for human ingenuity, goals that will allow for the realization and even evolution of human potentials without destroying the environment.

The obvious lack of relationship between the costs and benefits of material consumption has thus far gone unnoticed by those in charge of social and economic policies. When in the last magazine issue of the seventies the *New York Times* asked two dozen leading economists about how to stem the spiraling inflation and consequent social problems, the experts agreed on precious little, except on two goals shared by almost all: (1) production must somehow be increased and (2) consumption must be stimulated. Not one of these famous economists questioned the consequences of persevering in the pursuit of these goals. Like good technicians,

they thought within the framework of their discipline and no fur- ther. They argued about how to get the next fix to the addict and how to find increasingly large doses of the drug in the face of dwindling supplies.

While economists with Nobel prizes and similar accomplish- ments view the future in terms of ever expanding consumption with no compunction, a small but growing group within the pro- fession has begun to explore alternative visions of a life that is not exclusively dependent on terminal materialism. Some of their book titles suggest the tack they are taking: *The Joyless Economy* (Scitovsky, 1976); *Small Is Beautiful* (Schumacher, 1975); *The Household Economy* (Burns, 1977); *Muddling Toward Frugality* (Johnson, 1978); *The Sane Alternative* (Robertson, 1979); *The Con- server Society* (Valskakis et al., 1979). From a perspective of ulti- mate survival, it seems quite clear that the direction pioneered by the maverick economists is the only sane one.

One point on which the defenders of a life of increasing mate- rial comforts will surely take a stand is that all the objects we own and all the energy at our command decrease our slavery to rou- tines, thus increasing our free time. Therefore "labor saving de- vices" are liberating, and the more we own the freer and better life becomes. Up to a certain point this argument is true. How- ever, here again, the relationship between possessions and free- dom is not linear but, rather, resembles an inverted "U." The Swedish economist Linder noted some years ago, on purely theo- retical grounds, that increases in productivity and ownership ac- tually *reduce* one's available free time (Linder, 1970). The three main reasons for this are: (1) when one's time is worth more on the market, one will lose more by not working, hence free time becomes increasingly expensive until one "cannot afford" to re- lax; (2) the more consumer objects one owns, the more time one has to spend in consuming; and (3) material possessions require increasing allocations of time for their maintenance. Because of these processes, Linder argues, productivity and consumption de- crease the amount of psychic energy under one's control. If Lin- der is right, the ultimate irony of our addiction to material goals becomes even more poignant. The more a person's psychic en- ergy is invested in terminal values, the less is left to experience the benefits that objects usually provide, and thus less remains to pur-

sue other goals. The petrification of consciousness seeping into material objects is not merely a metaphor but a concrete fact.

The cultivation of new goals

The only weapon we have against the deadly power of a terminal materialism is the human ability to create meaning. By attributing meaning to a goal, we can channel psychic energy in practically any direction we choose. We possess the capacity to change goals and grow in new directions; however, our current dilemma is that this very ability has created terminal materialism and has brought us to the dead end we seem to be headed for. But what goals are being cultivated in this vast expenditure of the earth's resources? At what point in the process of the *dia-bolic*, the fragmenting force of terminalism, are psychic resources – the ultimate goals that motivate one's life – exhausted? Why does the time of great- est material wealth in the United States appear to be marked by so many signs of purposelessness and lack of direction? The bright guiding principles of rationalism and enlightenment never pre- dicted that the "black box" of science and technology would un- leash Pandora's troubles on to the world.

Perhaps this age, which holds linear progress and differentia- tion as ultimate goals, has reached its end, and now it is time to put the coin, the *sym-bol,* back together. The human ability to create meaning, our chief asset and deficit, is the only hope for changing our deadly habit. If the distinguishing feature of human beings is self-awareness and self-control, we must exercise and cultivate this capability to alter the direction of our culture – revis- ing and redirecting our goals.

It is not entirely unrealistic to hope for such a change in values. After all, there are enough examples of people who have made such a change in their lives, in both the past and the present – those inspired by a religious vision, for instance. Occasionally, such individuals claim that "their kingdom is not of this world." This was usually taken to mean that there exists a divinely or- dered kingdom of God beyond our planet, and the believer lives by its rules instead of earthly material values. But we might rein-

terpret the statement to simply referring to a way of life that is not *yet* of this world, to one of those revolutionary possibilities that foreshadow a future order of things.

Some artists also have been notorious for living in a different world, less concerned about material rewards than most of us. Vasari's descripton of the character of Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simon Guido, although drawn four centuries ago, is typical of many other artists before and since:

He was a very absent-minded and careless person, as one who, having fixed his whole mind and will on the matters of art, cared little about himself, and still less about others. And since he would never give any manner of thought to the cares and concerns of the world, or even to clothing himself, and was not wont to recover his money from his debtors, save only when he was in the greatest of straits, his name was therefore changed from Tommaso to Masaccio ["Oafish Tom"], not, indeed, because he was vicious, for he was goodness itself, but by reason of his great carelessness. (Vasari, 1959 (1550), pp. 42–3)

This "great carelessness" is simply explained: the artist has not enough psychic energy left to invest in practical concerns because most of his attention is consumed by creative activity – "having fixed his whole mind and will on matters of art . . ." This does not mean that he is not also a realist in his everyday life; his whole existence is dedicated to the reality of the imagination, to actualizing his dreams and turning them into beauty. In the process he makes the possibilities of his imagination "of this world," while investing the world with vision.

The apparent carelessness to the affairs of this world, which has been the hallmark of many creative persons, might ultimately be extremely practical. It might seem strange, for instance, that the author of the *Critique of Practical Reason* was alleged to have held an egg in his hand for three minutes, waiting for his watch to boil in the pot. But on the other hand, it is also rumored that the townspeople in his community used to set their watches to his afternoon walks. The important fact is that Kant's vision of a new order has had such a profound effect on subsequent thought that it actually created a new world.

Consider the case of scientists whose lives are dedicated to learning the laws of "this world." Scientists are most peculiar seeming beings who unlike most people take delight in discovering that they have been wrong about some scientific question. Scientists are actually (or should be) glad about this because they move that much closer to the truth of nature through such a dis-

covery. Those who discover alternative worlds find compelling goals in them by which to redirect their lives.

These examples suggest that it is not hopelessly unrealistic to expect that goals can be cultivated to exert a moderating restraint on terminal materialism. They prove that it is indeed possible for people to invest most of their psychic energy in goals that are "not of this world" – that include possibilities for experience and growth transcending existing conditions and conventions.

To create new meanings, however, is not easy. To be a viable alternative, "symbolic feedback" must be valued for its own sake and not for what it can buy in the marketplace. Together with the skills learned in cultural activities, we must also learn to appreciate symbolic rewards – not as pale substitutes for "real" material rewards but as things having their own intrinsic worth as well as being capable of further cultivation.

To learn a cultural practice – art, music, philosophy, or mathematics – takes time. To do so voluntarily takes a felicitous match between the person's skills and motivation, on the one hand, and the specific form of the symbolic order, on the other. It is more difficult to get involved in the world of music if one is tone deaf, or in the world of mathematics if one is unable to deal in abstract cognitive operations. Yet presumably all humans have the potential to respond to some motivating goals that do not rely solely on great physical expenditures – to love, for instance, in which a relationship with another becomes the reward for the self and a goal worth cultivating in its own right.

Having the potential for learning a set of cultural skills is, however, not enough. One must be introduced to the skills early, have models to imitate, and be supported by a social milieu that finds meaning in the given pursuits. To provide such conditions is the task of "cultivation" at the sociocultural level. Without doubt, the cultivation of resourceful goals is a very expensive proposition, mainly in terms of psychic energy rather than in terms of nonrenewable physical resources.

In recent history the cultivation of symbolic skills at the social level was attempted through the institution of universal education. At least some of its proponents had hoped that training all youth in skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and various other symbolic crafts would increase the possibilities for the authentic development of the self. Needless to say, in this respect the

compulsory education experiment has not been a great success. Instead of becoming a training ground for alternative goals, it has been co-opted to serve the production and consumption needs of existing conditions. The only concession to the aims of training survival skills for a new world, to liberate youth from the deterministic grip of unlimited material needs, is the so-called "liberal education" now available only to the very rich or the very talented, confirming again, alas, the prejudice that symbolic skills are a frill for the few who can afford it rather than a necessity for all if the human species is to survive and flourish.

Besides the fact that schools are expected to train youth to perform in the world, the dozen years or so of formal compulsory education pose another obstacle to finding meaning in symbolic feedback. That is, a system of actions and rewards can become more meaningful when people attend to it voluntarily. When attention is coerced, the things on which it focuses may not be sought for their own sake and thus will not become intrinsically valuable. It is possible, of course, to start learning something under compulsion, gradually begin to like it, and then become captivated by it. When Plato said in the *Laws* that the secret of education was to teach young people to find pleasure and pain in the right objects, this is what he possibly had in mind: Education consists in getting people to be intrinsically motivated to pursue the ultimate goals that give meaning to life.

Compulsory mass education can rarely achieve such a difficult change. What it typically does is to provide youth with symbolic tools to pursue terminal material goals. The students' goals are not affected; they learn to use the symbols of science, mathematics, or art without absorbing their autonomous meanings. Their intrinsic motivation remains that of pursuing a "good life" defined in terms of production and consumption, without gaining a glimpse of the alternative worlds that these practices potentially make available.

There are exceptions, of course. A few athletes learn to live for the sake of perfection in the symbolic world of their sport, undeterred by the terminal materialism engrained into the goals of professional athletics. A few artists are content with the rewards of their art, unmindful of the rampant commercialism of the national "art scene." A few scientists derive more reward from the knowledge they acquire than from the government grants or professional reknown that they might obtain. It is these "mutants" that we need to understand if we wish to know how, despite all the pressures to the contrary, some persons are able to avoid having terminal materialism control their lives.

These reflections might seem to have strayed rather far from the empirical content that provided the basis for the study reported in the earlier chapters of this volume. Yet such is not the case. The far-reaching speculations about the emergent power of cultivation have developed quite naturally from considering what respondents said about their relationships with objects in their home.

For example, we found that things are cherished not because of the material comfort they provide but for the information they convey about the owner and his or her ties to others. The market value, the physical energy invested in an object is not the reason that it becomes special to its owner. A battered toy, an old musical instrument, a homemade quilt provide meaning that is more central to the values of people than any number of expensive appliances or precious materials. Yet despite this fact, it is doubtful that many of our respondents would willingly forsake the pursuit of limited material resources. The habit of acquisition and the addiction to consumption will motivate their expenditure of energy even though these are not the source of their most significant rewards.

The important question that needs to be answered is whether these patterns of meaning can provide the continuity that is so vital to a culture. As expressed by John Dewey:

The best we can accomplish for posterity is to transmit unimpaired and with some increment of meaning the environment that makes it possible to maintain the habits of decent and refined life. Our individual habits are links forming the endless chain of humanity. Their significance depends upon the environment inherited from our forerunners, and it is enhanced as we foresee the fruits of our labors in the world in which our successors live. For however much has been done, there always remains more to do. We can retain and transmit our own heritage only by constant remaking of our own environment. (Dewey, 1957, p. 23)

The transmission of a heritage and the process of cultivation, which are at the heart of cultural life, are dependent on some enduring continuity to the meanings that are to be conveyed, which in turn involves an internalization of the moral standards and norms of the community and a continual refinement of these standards. Community, as Arendt (1958) has said, is a state of

plurality. It is the social world in which we live: the sum of the people, transactions, habitats, traditions, and institutions that form a vital aspect of everyday life. Insofar as community is the ensemble of relationships, experiences, values, norms that serve to orient our actions and ultimate goals, then community is itself purposive or normative or directive. It is by internalizing those around us, as well as the broader community, that we cultivate the goals through which the self develops and which in turn enrich the vitality of and give direction to community life. We may live in a finite and limited community of people, habitats, and beliefs, but the meaning of this actual community is only realized when it is projected against the horizon of an unlimited community, the personification of cosmos, whose aims are capable of being continually revised toward some ultimate goals. It is this unlimited community that forms the ground of our social ideals and toward which our actual community life is aimed.

What characterizes the community represented by this sample? Perhaps what is most notable is the diversity of the artifacts themselves as well as the range of meanings that can be symbolized even by the same types of objects. We see a group of individuals of various ages who have many things symbolizing personal experiences, but the artifacts themselves tend to be idiosyncratic, perhaps indicating the intense need to differentiate oneself from the surrounding community as one of the ideals of the community of modern life. American culture seems to be based largely on goals of novelty for its own sake, pure individuality, and the passion to possess people and things briefly. But when differentiation, originality, and individuality are taken as ultimate goals in themselves, apart from the discourse of the common life, they ultimately lead to chaos, fragmentation, and nothingness (Rochberg-Halton, 1979c). What good is it to gain a world totally of one's own when there is no one else to appreciate it? Actually, the achievement of pure originality, novelty, and individuality leaves no one at all to appreciate it because even self-awareness and self-control consist of a dialogue with the internalized signs of community – Mead's "generalized other." The pure "I" apart from all others is merely a vanishing point. Yet the modern quest is to find a single Archimedean point with which to move the world. What we need to realize is that the Archimedean center is not an atomistic vanishing point but that community itself is the fulcrum with which to

move the whole world.

Perhaps the major icons of continuity in American culture today are photographs. They seem able to provide a record of one's life, and of the lives of one's ancestors, and can be handed down to one's descendents. But these again are individualized to particular families and may not have the publicly shared value of a religious item or perhaps even a coat of arms.

On the one hand, this may be a sign of a fragmentation of shared cultural values. This freedom imposed by the relaxation of standardized cultural values may have the unwanted effect of making it easier for the patterns of meanings symbolized in the environment of the home to become ephemeral – to be manipulated by a mass culture whose ultimate goal is utility rather than quality of living. On the other hand, the variety and originality of these meanings may actually be a sign of the health and the vitality of contemporary urban life. If nothing else, our study has begun to indicate some of the alternative symbolic values that are operating within the shadow of the main terminal material goals. These might provide new directions for the investment of psychic energy, more in line with a continued evolution.

Summary

Perhaps the most important goal evident in the sample we studied is the one referring to family relationships. This, of course, is one of the oldest symbolic inventions of man; as Lévi-Strauss has said, it is with the creation of kinship systems that man made culture possible (Lévi-Strauss, 1949). At the same time, the meaning of kinship is still in the process of emergence, and no one knows its ultimate form and power. The values associated with a child's relation to his or her parents, the relationship of husbands to wives, of each to his wider kin, are continually redefined both in terms of intensity and quality. At present, for instance, the bond between spouses is as weak as it has ever been in the recent history of Western societies. Yet the quality of the relationship might have gained in consequence: As marriage becomes more voluntaristic, it has a chance to be more intrinsically motivating. As family cooperation dwindles in its economic importance, its symbolic rewards might increase.

Clearly, even in contemporary America the symbolic value of

kinship is extremely important. Family relations provide an enor-

mously rich variety of information that only they can provide; in this sense the family is an emergent goal, not just an entity that can fulfill existing needs. Reading an old Bible with the names of one's ancestors inscribed on the frontispiece gives a person a direct experience of his or her origins, a link with the past; it provides an identity with a specific ethnic group and with a set of historic events. Such information helps to define one's self-concept, extending the roots of individuality into a network of past existences. Conversely, the drawings and photos of one's children that so many adults cherish are signs of the self's extension into the future; they prefigure the development of one's descendents who will carry on the psychic order one has created to generations to come.

Objects of this type embody the attention that persons invest in each other, thereby forming transpersonal units. They are tokens of remembrance, respect, and *love;* that is, of the reaching out beyond the constraints of self-interest narrowly defined to establish bonds that enlarge the being of the individual and unite people. When used in this way, household objects serve a symbolic purpose; the materialism involved in the transaction is instrumental.

We have seen that homes in which objects are signs of warm symbolic ties between family members are different from homes in which such meanings are absent. Families that lack shared positive emotional meanings live in a barren symbolic environment: The houses they inhabit and the objects they own are material things – having no other value – to be used and consumed. In such homes children grow up concerned with the safety of their own selves, with little psychic energy left over to care for others. Their goals, like the goals of their fathers, are bent on the achievement of terminal rewards, on the immediate gratification of needs conditioned by the consumer culture. Emotional isolation prevents members of these families from getting involved in broader community affairs; deprived of meaning within the home, they cannot find it outside the home either.

Probably, the habit of terminal consumption thrives most glaringly in those families that cannot generate warm symbolic meanings. A "cold" family seems to breed terminal materialism by not being able to cultivate the basic symbolic skills and rewards of human existence, that of representing the transpersonal value of the

individual. This conclusion was not proven by our study and its findings but emerges as a hypothesis. It remains the task of future research to explore whether in fact "warm" families are less addicted to the consumption of physical energy, in an objectively quantified sense, than the members of "cold" families are.

Although kinship was found to be a strong source of meanings at least in some of the households we studied, broader symbolic systems referring to larger cultural aggregates were conspicuously absent. We have seen that ethnic, political, national, or religious relations rarely gave meanings to the objects that people cherished in their homes. From this we might conclude that, as a culture, we lack at present a system of pervasive goals that could act as active restraints on terminal materialism. There is, for instance, no clear indication of a status system independent of material value that could serve as a meaningful source of rewards. "Status symbols" are, by and large, usually reducible to the expensiveness of the object. This lack of generally accepted alternatives to materialism could be interpreted as an ominous sign for our future survival.

At the same time, there is evidence that although goals of universal currency are lacking, both subgroups and individuals within the sample find ways to assign meanings to certain values. Books may represent universal human concerns, or the particular lore of a profession; tools reflect the discipline of a craft and cameras the aesthetic requirements of photography; and plants are tokens of a complex of beliefs representing nurturance and concern for the ecology. For some, sports equipment expresses athletic values; for others, art objects or antiques symbolize participation in a system of aesthetic goals. This diversity suggests a pluralism of material culture, which overlaps with the political and ethnic pluralisms said to characterize our society. It might be taken as a sign of vigorous health, unless the fragmentation of values turns out to weaken the power of any combination of discrete alternatives to stem the attraction of terminal materialism. Also, on this score, the present study permits no clear prediction; it can only raise the issue for further study.

The majority of cherished objects do not relate the user to any larger system or to any other individual; they are valued because they produce an enjoyable sensation or interaction. Stereo sets, for instance, help to modulate moods, to change the direction of

consciousness from boring or worrisome information to a more enjoyable state by redirecting attention into the pleasing patterns of music and lyrics. A child values a bicycle because it represents freedom, the acquisition of skills, pleasurable experiences, and the opportunity for future enjoyment. Such meanings might at first seem to be entirely self-centered, without ties to any enduring patterns transcending the personal self. This is not necessarily the case, however. It depends to a large extent on the inherent character of the experience. Music, for instance, can have a powerful transformative value in addition to its immediately enjoyable qualities. It may direct the listener's attention to the values of a great tradition (see Redfield and Singer, 1954), a counterculture, or a social protest movement. Or it might provide, in its syntactic structure, a foretaste of a cosmic order that in many cases has "religious" or "spiritual" consequences (Heifetz, 1980). Similarly, sports not only produce a sense of physical well-being and psychological satisfaction but might also relate the participant to other people and often give a sense of transcendent harmony that is similar to the consequences that music, art, literature, or other symbolic systems provide (Novak, 1976).

Thus even objects cherished for the experience they make possible, those we categorized as referring to the Self, might involve important values that go far beyond the person as an individual. Here we must conclude that the medium is not necessarily the message: By knowing that a person values a stereo set, we cannot know for sure what consequences the interaction will produce. These depend on what music is being played and on how the music is interpreted. Unfortunately, in the present study we were not able to measure such subtle distinctions.

But the enjoyment objects make possible has another, more radical impact on terminal materialism. Enjoyment, or the flow condition in which one acts with total involvement and excludes the pressing concerns of everyday life, is an excellent prototype for alternative goals. This seems to be the evolutionary significance of what Bentham has scornfully dismissed as "deep play": It provides scaled-down models of *how it feels to live in terms of different sets of goals*. In play the values of terminal materialism may be temporarily subverted, and one can directly experience how it would be if we lived by different rules (Csikszentmihalyi, 1980). Thus through play the gambler suspends concern for economic

actualities and the wisdom of the marketplace; the athlete ignores pain and fatigue; the musician disregards the criteria of "usefulness" that may otherwise apply in everyday life. Playful, enjoyable activities are again like mutations of mainline material goals and means. Like genetic ones, many of these symbolic mutations may be unviable as substitutes for the demands existence places on us to develop a workable livelihood. However, as Huizinga (1950) has suggested, many of the symbolic forms that by now are more or less integrated into mainline culture, and partially leaven the heavy dough of terminal values – systems such as art, religion, and science – may have started out as games that, through mimicry, could reflect the ultimate goals of a culture.

Most of the time enjoyment provides only an escape from the conflicts of life, that is, when the person still holds on to terminal goals and uses play as a relief from their irritations. But if the play experience causes one to release terminal values, even for a while, then it is no longer useful to speak of escape; it is more like an emigration, the moving to a new place to build a different life, and for this reason enjoyment should be distinguished from pleasure. It is in this sense that Einstein used the word "escape," as the creation of a new reality, when he wrote: "I agree with Schopenhauer that one of the most powerful motives that attracts people to science and art is the longing to escape everyday life" (quoted in Nisbet, 1976, p. 12).

Thus it is essential to cultivate enjoyment because it is one of the most powerful means to experiment with alternatives to the trap of routine. Pleasure does not lead into new territory because the means to it may change but the goal itself does not grow. Enjoyment, on the other hand, consists in satisfying goals themselves capable of cultivation. The "good life" is not a life of pleasure seeking, but it does involve the pleasurable experience of enjoyment. We derive enjoyment from the use of our own skills or the skills of others: from superior performance in athletics, music, work, or social interaction. Enjoyment, which leads into the future, must be tended to survive; otherwise, it turns into mere pleasure.

To find enjoyment in life, and new goals to give value to it, one must have a peculiar relationship to one's environment. We have attempted to describe this by borrowing Dewey's term *perception*. We have seen that some people tend to see their world primarily

in terms of already defined meanings; they encounter only embalmed experiences drained of life and the possibility of growth. Experience ruled by recognition prevents learning, precluding the discovery of new alternatives. In a culture ruled by material values, a person who depends on recognition sees only material values. He or she is consigned to live on the one dimension of agreed-upon reality, without the skills to break out of its constraints. Perception is perhaps the most basic skill, the key to learning and even to evolution. Its loftier manifestations we call "creativity," but by doing so we risk placing the end of a continuum of skills on a pedestal, and ignoring the rest of the spectrum.

The habit of perception must be cultivated. This is the real goal of a liberal education. To "liberate" people is not just to set them free of the already determined meanings in things but to *impose* on them the choice to discover the objective possibilities in things and the freedom to conserve the past and to create new values and a new world. This process of liberation does not happen spontaneously because the wisdom of the past has trained us to hold on to goals that have been of service before. But the wisdom of the past must constantly be reinterpreted and cultivated in order to create the wisdom of the future.

Perception appears to be the starting point for both individual liberation and rescuing the species from the limitations of terminal goals. Perception is a precondition to enjoyment, to learning, to growth, to freedom – hence to the qualities of experience that transform people from totally determined entities into open systems of self-cultivating energy. It gives value to life by making each act of perception a unique, objective experience. In the words of an English psychoanalyst, "It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 65). At the same time, it is through the outcomes of acts of perception that new patterns of thought and emotion emerge, patterns that might constrain terminal materialism and redirect its energies.

Envoi

In conclusion, reflection on the results of this study have led us to see materialism in a somewhat new light. Material production and

consumption cannot serve as the main goals of our communal efforts. Instrumental, or context-related, refinable goals can provide alternative directions for psychic energy and rewards that are worth living for.

The task of retooling our motivational system from one set of values to the other is not simple, requiring the intense cultivation of goals at all levels: from the self-conscious development of skills on the part of individuals to the indispensable formative efforts of parents, to the institutional practices of schools and community organizations and, finally, to the policy decisions of national governments. At this point most European nations have ministries of culture and even of leisure; what would be fitting – at least symbolically – is to have a department of symbolism whose mandate would be to encourage the development of "symbolic" skills in the population, thereby setting them free as persons and helping to prevent the material collapse of society. Unfortunately, such a turn of events is highly improbable. Whenever the power of symbols is recognized by a government, more often than not it is exploited to repress rather than to liberate people – witness Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry. But, by and large, symbolic power is simply ignored because it does not show up in the gross national product (GNP), and there are no strong constituencies clamoring to learn how to use it.

Yet somehow we must learn how to use symbolic energy before all the physical resources are burned up. The world is not made just of fuel, it contains things that can make us grow and change our natures – change our needs. Things can have meanings that may transform the very world in which we live. But things by themselves alone cannot help us; only in the way we relate to them is their symbolic energy released.

The meaning that releases the symbolic power of things is created, first of all, by the act of perception. The primary skill one needs to unlock the magic of things is that of seeing them objectively and subjectively at the same time, thus joining the nature of the perceiving subject with the nature of the object. This act of bringing together two entities in a process that unites while preserving the distinctive characteristics of the elements is the basic symbolic act – *sym-ballein*, to "throw together."

The second skill naturally grows out of the first: the ability to enjoy one's actions. The flow experience, which focuses a person's

attention on the task at hand, is symbolic because it brings together the psychic processes of the person and unites them with a set of objective stimuli in the environment. This is opposite from the state of alienation, in which one feels separated from oneself and from the elements of one's life. Flow gives intrinsic value to whatever one is doing, even when the task is not meaningful in terms of material values.

The ability to perceive and to flow make it possible to develop the third skill that is necessary to control the need for material rewards: cultivating the ultimate goals of one's existence. People who discover the objective possibilities of things through perception cease to see the world strictly in terms of their own needs and thus see many new things to do in it. If these actions are enjoyed, they will gain meaning and be valued independently of the hierarchy of terminal material goals that is our modern heritage.

There is an urgent need to develop vital cultural practices – ways of living – that have the potential for *long-term* growth. We need to cultivate those objects, activities, and environments that can inspire the fullest unfolding of human potential now and in the future; patterns of meaning that do not have a self-destructive exhaustion of physical and psychic resources built into them. If there is any truth to the myth of progress that has gripped the modern mind it is that things can be changed for the better. The mistake in the modern pilgrim's progress has been to equate better with more so that all life's problems can be solved technically simply through more goods or more information. But as Herman Melville said over a century ago in his fantastic documentary of the modern mind, *Moby Dick:* "Why then do you try to 'enlarge' your mind? Subtilize it." The cultivation of a way of living calls for pragmatic and not simply technical or expedient solutions (Habermas, 1973). We Americans pride ourselves on being a "pragmatic" people, but it is a shallow, inverted, modern definition of pragmatic that equates it with utility or expedience – "better" with "more" – that is increasingly proving to be unrealistic. To be pragmatic means that one is guided by moral standards oriented toward the good life of the wider community and that one willingly redirects one's goals when it appears that one's own actions, or the actions of one's community or culture, will have self-defeating or even disastrous consequences.

The goals one can create are not all at the same symbolic level

but can be seen to range on a continuum of increasing synthetic power or generalizability. At the lower end, the goal is to prove one's individual existence, one's control over the environment. At this level, flow joins the elements of one's self into an active participation with a domain of challenges: Toys, sports equipment, books, tools, and musical instruments are some of the concrete signs through which this goal may be achieved. The next level usually is the one in which the self grows to include – and be included in – the network of family relationships. Here the goal expands from seeking rewards to one's own intentions to finding meaning in rewards obtained by others. The self expands to the "social" level, and one's ability to enjoy is increased by being able to share the enjoyment of others. Finally, one might reach the level of what we have called "cosmic" goals. Here one perceives objective relationships between the self and the wider patterns of order: the community, the species, the ecology as a whole, and practices like one's occupation or craft, art, music, or religion. Now the possibilities for meaningful action expand geometrically, as do the opportunities of experiencing perception and flow. Motivated by a broad, enduring set of goals, the self is no longer dominated by the needs that have shaped it thus far. It can take on the challenges and responsibilities of freedom and use meaning to fashion a new world in which to live.

APPENDIX A

Procedures and interview notes

Procedures

The selection criteria for this study were to gather a socioeconomically stratified sample of three-generation families from Evanston and Rogers Park. To accomplish this, census tract information concerning income was used to select neighborhoods in Evanston for canvassing, which would range from lower to upper income. Once the neighborhoods were selected, teams of canvassers would cover an area on a door-to-door basis. They described the general outline of the study to potential respondents and established whether the family possessed the characteristics needed for the study: three interviewable generations all living within the general Chicago area. The usual course was to interview both parents, one child, and one grandparent. Potential respondents were given a flyer that restated the goals of the study and which listed telephone numbers they could call for more information. Rogers Park respondents were selected on the basis of telephone canvassing, and in some instances two-generation families were selected.

Approximately 1,000 households were canvassed in Evanston, and at over half of these there were no response on the initial round. Of those households where there was a response, 21 percent of those contracted refused participation, 61 percent were not qualified for some reason, and 15 percent were interested in participating in the study and also met the criteria. Some who accepted dropped out before the entire family could be interviewed, but it is also important to point out that the acceptance rate might have been somewhat higher if the criteria did not include three generations of one family who all lived within the Chicago area. The acceptance rate for the 20 families from Rogers Park was lower, closer to 10 percent, which was due primarily to the use of telephone canvassing instead of personal contact.

Rogers Park is the northernmost community within the Chicago city limits and is contiguous with Evanston. Of the total sample, 69 percent live in single-family houses. In Evanston, where single family housing predominates, 75 percent of the families live in this type of housing, as opposed to 50 percent in Rogers Park. Evanston was selected as the target site of the "program project," a group of independent studies carried out by the Committee on Human Development and funded by the Naional Institute of Aging (grant no. PHS-5P01-AG00123). It was originally selected because the age of distribution matched predictions for the general U.S. population of the year 2000. Both Evanston and Rogers Park are very old communities for the Chicago area, and both have a long tradition of social, ethnic, and economic diversity.

The sample thus consists of 315 persons (141 males and 174 females). There are 79 children, consisting of 46 males and 33 females. Their ages range from 8 to about 30, with 80 percent of the children under 21. A few older "children" were actually young married adults who were the youngest generation that could be interviewed, and who had interviewable parents and grandparents. In the middle generation there were 82 mothers and 68 fathers. Seventy-seven persons comprise the grandparents' generation, with 26 males and 51 females. Nine great-grandparents were also interviewed, of which 8 were women, forming a small subgroup of four-generation families within the sample.

Of the total sample, 67 percent are white, 30 percent are black, and about 3 percent are Latin, Oriental, or some other racial compositions. Socioeconomic status was determined on the basis of the middle-generation father. For families without a father in the middle generation, the mother was used as the index. Families were divided into either upper-middle class or lower-middle class on the basis of the father's education and occupation. Occupational status was based on the Hollingshead index, whereas college degree or beyond was taken as a measure of upper educational status. If educational achievement and occupational status differed greatly, as they did in a few families, the occupational status was taken as the more important indicator. Interrater reliability in determining the socioeconomic status of families was 94 percent. Of the whites, 66 percent received an upper-middle class socioeconomic status rating on our two-point scale, and the remaining 34 percent were placed in the lower-middle class, whereas only 22 percent of the blacks were in the upper-middle class and 79 percent were in the lower-middle class. The composition of the lower-middle class is 50 percent white and 50 percent black, whereas the upper-middle class is 87 percent white and 13 percent black. These standings are fairly representative of the lower socioeconomic status of American blacks.

The fieldwork began in April 1977 and was completed by January 1978. Each respondent was interviewed in his or her home (with the exception of some grandparents) for about two hours, with mostly open-ended questions and checklists. These ranged across three "concentric" areas of reference: the home, the neighborhood-community, and the Chicago Metropolitan area. The main question in the home section of the interview dealt with (1) what objects in the home were special to the person being interviewed; (2) why these things were special; (3) what it would mean not to have the object; (4) when the object was acquired; (5) how the object was acquired; and (6) in which room the object was located. Other questions concerning objects were also asked, such as what things were most personal or private and what all of one's objects meant as a whole. While respondents filled out checklists and a shortened form of the Jackson Personality Research Form, the interviewers filled out an inventory of the living room, which accounted for the presence or absence, as well as stylistic aspects, of various objects.

All interviewers underwent an intensive training before doing actual interviews. They were instructed in the purposes of each of the questions and were asked to complete at least one practice interview with someone of their choosing before entering the field. The practice interview was reviewed by the project director with the interviewer, or in some cases the trainee would discuss the

practice interview with experienced interviewers. Each of the interviewers were also given the following notes:

Interview notes (General)

1. When taking out new interview forms, check and make sure they are complete. There are two sets of interview forms. All the differences pertain only to the URBAN LIFE-STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE. Form 1 has the Neighborhood and Holiday checklists and Form 2 has the Activities and Metropolitan checklists.
2. There may not be enough room on the form for a lengthy answer. Use the back of the form if necessary, marking the front with an (over) and putting the number of the question on the back of the form.
3. Be sure to write down general comments on a question, particularly when the respondent (R) is unable to think of an answer for that question, e.g., "I don't really have any objects that are special to me . . . Ever since the fire when I was a little boy and all my baseball cards were burned up, I haven't really gotten attached . . ."
4. Probes (statements made by the interviewer) should be written in parentheses. Probes that are normally part of the question need not be written in, e.g., (any others?) But, at the end of a section, probes and final statements should both be written in, e.g., (anyone else?)
                    No, not offhand
   Probes serving as labels should be written in to delineate the parts of the question being answered.
5. When asking questions about what is special, occasionally one is asked whether this means something special in the present or from the past. Answer to the effect that we are interested in what is special now, but if something used to be special and still holds an important place for a person, we are also interested in this information.
6. If you can, sit so the R cannot see your forms, but don't go to any great lengths to hide them. The idea is that if R sees the number of slots to fill up, he may feel compelled to do so. Also, if a person is taking a while and is having trouble thinking of things to say, then tell him or her that we are interested in what springs to his mind, that it isn't necessary to force the issue.
7. Reflect back to R his level of excitement and let him know that you are hearing what's important to him, e.g., the R may feel an object has extra special meaning. Reflect this back to him in the tone of your comments.
8. *Turning in Interviews:* Each answer on the forms you turn in should be self-contained, e.g., if a person has already told you how he or she acquired an object, you may not have to ask this again when you come to that part of the question. But when you are filling in the form to be turned in, BE REDUNDANT and state again how the object was acquired – and put a note that this was mentioned before (e.g., 13 years ago, cf., #4B), if necessary.
When turning in interviews, please write your name and R's name in *pencil.*

Also, please pencil in whether it's Evanston or Rogers Park. If the people live outside these areas, write down in pencil where they live, the name of the Evanston or Rogers Park family it is to be put with, and then mark it Evanston or Rogers Park. Also mark G_1, G_2, G_3, accordingly.
Finally, draw lines to separate responses if it is necessary.

Beginning the interview

1. Try to situate yourself so that one R cannot be influenced by another person, i.e., seat yourself alone with R and out of the hearing range of other Rs who may be answering the same question.
2. If you are going to be doing more than one person in a sitting, you can give the second person the Jackson Personality Inventory to fill out while waiting. Do *NOT* give any other forms, even the Urban Life-styles Questionnaire, as this will bias their responses on the oral part of the interview.
3. If R has any questions at the beginning of the interview, you might briefly explain the general structure of the interview – that it moves from questions about Chicago to R's own neighborhood and home, and then to questions about holidays, important life events, etc. If R has particular questions that might influence what he or she is going to say on the interview form, tell R that it would be better if you could answer the questions after the interview itself and then remember to do this if the questions are still relevant.
4. Explain that we would like to tape the interview in order to save time, because one can't write as fast as one talks. The tapes are then erased and used again. If R seems to be upset about being taped and asks you not to use it, then just try to get the answers as verbatim as possible. The tape allows you to establish more rapport with R because you will not have to be busy writing and can listen and look at R more.

Consent form

1. Treat the consent form as nonchalantly as possible. People become a bit afraid when they have to sign something. You might try to explain what it says first and then let them read and sign it. Some people do have trouble understanding what it means, too. Thus explanations may help save them some embarrassment as well as ease their minds.
2. Get parents to cosign for minors.
3. Note the time to yourself when you begin the interview.

generation families, we shall try to compare this with what the others actually mention.

9. This question should be asked even if the person does not have children. But the interviewer should note if the person does not have children (unless we have this information elsewhere).

11. The point of this question is to get the global response of the person, one description that characterizes all the objects.

APPENDIX B

Interview schedules

Home interview form

Question numbers

1. We are trying to get a description of the home and rooms as the larger context in which the objects are placed. We are also interested in how people define their living space. Be sure to get a description of both the emotional tone and the physical characteristics of the home.

3. This question concerns the places that people mention as where they feel "at home," and the range of emotions or reasons that people give for this place. Possibly the places and significations can then be linked with the special objects.

5. This is the main question of the home interview and of the entire interview, and so the interviewer should make sure the person mentions each aspect of the question and is specific enough. We are interested in (1) the rooms that the objects are located in, (2) what the objects are, (3) why the objects are special, (4) what it would mean to the person not to have the objects, (5) when the object was acquired, and (6) how the object was acquired.

By using the word "special" we mean that the object has some meaning, value, memories, importance, or feelings "attached" to it for the person. We are interested in how the object functions symbolically for the person but we do not want to use the word "symbolically" because it might not be understood and because it might limit the person's answer. The word "special" leaves it up to the person to define the signification of the object. It is vague and open enough so that the person can give a wide range of significations.

The interviewer will probably have to ask the person to define certain objects more carefully. For example, we found that many people mentioned "some pictures on the wall." We should know if the art is original, a print, mass produced, etc.

The interviewer should also be sensitive to the general scoring categories of kinds of objects and significations, to make sure the answers are specific enough.

8. We are interested in what respondents *think* are special objects for parents or children (if they have children). If we interview three-

HOME INTERVIEW

1. Could you describe your home to me, as if I were someone who had never seen it?
(Interviewer - if respondent describes social atmosphere, feeling, or mood but not physical description, then probe for physical description. If physical description given, then vice-versa).

2. What are the rooms in your home?

3. Where in your home do you feel most "at home"? Why there?

4. Are you trying to have a certain style or atmosphere in your living room? Describe.

5.A. What are the things in your home which are special for you? Could you name the rooms these things are in and tell me why they are special. (Interviewer - remember that parts B, C, and D of this question will be asked sequentially. Also, use additional sheets for any section if necessary.)

ROOM	OBJECT	WHY SPECIAL
___	___	___
___	___	___
___	___	___

5.B. What would it mean to you not to have this thing? (Interviewer - list the objects the person has already named in 5.A.)

OBJECT	WITHOUT OBJECT
___	___
___	___
___	___

5.C. When did you acquire these things? B. How did you acquire each of these things? (Interviewer - D is only for objects for which the circumstances of acquisition have not already been described.)

OBJECT	WHEN ACQUIRED	HOW ACQUIRED
___	___	___
___	___	___
___	___	___

6. If you had a fire in your home, what objects would you save?

7. Are there any objects that have been special in your life, but which you no longer possess?

8. What do you think are your parents' most special objects? Your children's most special objects?

      PARENTS   SPOUSE   CHILDREN

9. What objects are special for you to give to your children? Why?   (Interviewer - if respondent
   has no children ask "...would be special if you had children?")

10. What are your most private or personal objects - either ones that you've already mentioned
   or others.

11. What do all of your special objects, taken together as a whole, mean to you?

Interviewer:
Date:

METROPOLITAN INTERVIEW

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word Chicago? Why? How would you broadly describe Chicago?

2. What are the places or things in Chicago that are special to you in the daytime and night time? Could you describe the daytime places first

WHERE   WHY SPECIAL

DAY

NIGHT

If more space needed use reverse side

3A).How would you describe your neighborhood?

3B).What is special for you in your neighborhood? Why?

—————
—————
—————
—————
—————
—————
—————
—————
—————
—————

4. Has your neighborhood changed much over the years? In what ways?

5. Is there a community of which you feel you are a part?   How would you describe it?

6. Where do you go in your neighborhood? How often do you go there per day, week or month? What do you do there?

LOCATION	FREQUENCY	REASON FOR BEING AT LOCATION

7. Where do you go outside your neighborhood in the greater Chicago Metropolitan Area? In a year how often do you go there? What do you do there?

LOCATION	FREQUENCY	REASON FOR BEING AT LOCATION

8. What parts of greater Chicago make you feel:

HAPPY

SAD

IN TOUCH WITH OTHER PEOPLE

POWERLESS

FREE

EVENTS INTERVIEW

Interviewer:

1.A. Who are the five people who have made the most difference in your life? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

B. Who are the five people you admire most? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What holidays and events during the year are most special to you - and why are they special?

HOLIDAYS AND EVENTS   WHY SPECIAL

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What do you do when there is a birth in your family? A marriage? A death? How would you feel if there were no ceremony attached to this event?

BIRTH

MARRIAGE

DEATH

4. What have been the most important events in your life, and how did they affect you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. What are the things you do with your closest friends? How would you feel if you didn't have these friends? Do you wish you did more, or other things with your friends?

6. Would you say you are a religious person - and why?

7. Do you participate in any clubs, organizations, or associations (for example, religious, ethnic, professional, family, community, political, recreational, and so forth)? What do you do? How often do you go to meetings or take part in these activities? Do you see any other members outside of these meetings? (If yes, probe for number and frequency.)

ORGANIZATION	WHAT DO YOU DO	HOW OFTEN	SEE MEMBERS OUTSIDE

8. Do you have any hobbies or collections? Why do you like these things?

9. If you had the time and money to do anything you wanted, what would you do?

INTERVIEWER - RECORD LENGTH OF THE INTERVIEW TO THIS POINT _____

Left panel (rotated):

How special is each of the following activities for you? How often do you do each of the following activities?

	HOW SPECIAL							HOW OFTEN			
	Not at all special		somewhat special				very special	Hours per day	No. of Times/Week	No. of Times/Month	Less frequent or Never
Shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
TV:Sports	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
TV:Entertainment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
TV:News	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Cooking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Listening to the radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Listening to records or tapes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Reading Books	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Hobby _____ (fill in)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Reading the newspaper	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Visiting family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Visiting friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Getting together with people at a tavern or lounge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Going to a movie	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Going to parties	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Going to religious services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Gardening/Care of plants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Going downtown	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Going to museums	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Travelling outside Chicago: for business	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
for vacation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				

(Fill in most relevant time scale)

Right panel:

HERE IS A LIST OF THINGS IN THE CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA. FOR EACH ITEM, CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT BEST REPRESENTS HOW SPECIAL IT IS FOR YOU, AND MARK HOW OFTEN YOU ACTUALLY GO TO EACH PLACE.

	Not at all special		Somewhat special		Very special			No. of times/week	No. of times/month	No. of times/year	Less frequent or never
LAKE MICHIGAN	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
CEMETARIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
ART INSTITUTE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
PARKS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOODS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
NORTH MICHIGAN AVE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
GHETTOS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
THE SEARS TOWER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
FOREST PRESERVES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
MUSEUMS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
THE PICASSO STATUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
BUCKINGHAM FOUNTAIN	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
THE PACE OF LIFE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
LAKE SHORE DRIVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
BAHAI TEMPLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
RESTAURANTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
CONVENIENT TRANSPORTATION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
FRIENDLINESS OF PEOPLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
SKYLINE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
PARADES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
BEACHES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
FACTORIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
THE LOOP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
SHOPPING CENTERS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
ENTERTAINMENT (e.g. nightclubs, movies, theaters)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
CITY HALL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
CONCERTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
PRO SPORT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
O'HARE AIRPORT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
NEWSPAPERS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
RECREATION AND SPORTS FACILITIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
MARSHALL FIELD'S	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
THE WEATHER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
YOUR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
THE LAKE FRONT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
ART GALLERIES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
ZOOS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				

The last time each of the following events occurred, what did you do? with whom? where? what special objects were involved? You may check more than one response in each category; please check any and all which apply. If you did nothing at all special, please check the first box and proceed to the next event.

	T.V. SPECIAL	activity	PARTY OR SPECIAL FOOD	OUT (VISIT,MOVIE,ETC)	RELIGIOUS	ALONE	IMMEDIATE FAMILY	who	RELATIVES	FRIENDS	OWN HOME	RELATIVE'S OR FRIEND'S HOME	RESTAURANT OR NIGHTCLUB	where	CHURCH/SYNAGOGUE	PUBLIC PLACES	special objects	GIFT(S)	CARD OR PUBLIC DECORATIONS	NOTHING
NEW YEAR'S																				
VALENTINE'S DAY																				
MEMORIAL DAY																				
4th of JULY																				
LABOR DAY																				
BIRTHDAY (OWN)																				
MOTHER'S DAY																				
FATHER'S DAY																				
ANNIVERSARY (own or parents)																				
ELECTION NIGHT																				
SUPERBOWL																				
MISS AMERICA PAG.																				
PRO SPORTS																				
ST. PATRICK'S DAY																				
COLUMBUS DAY																				
HALLOWE'EN																				
THANKSGIVING																				
CHRISTMAS/HANUKKAH																				
YOM KIPPUR																				
EASTER/PASSOVER																				
ADVENT/ROSH HASHANAH																				
SATURDAY																				
SUNDAY																				
FRIEND'S VISIT																				
FRIEND'S ILLNESS																				
FRIEND'S MOVING																				
OTHER (specify)																				

Here is a list of things that may be special to you in your neighborhood. For each item, circle the number that best represents how you feel about that item.

ASPECTS OF NEIGHBORHOOD	Not at all true of my neighborhood			somewhat true			very true of my neighborhood
1. Nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Convenient Transportation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Convenient to Work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Convenience to Shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Convenient to School, Church, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Safety, Protection	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Parks, Lawns, Trees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Beauty of Streets and Houses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. People - Neighbors, Friends, Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Things in Neighborhood (eg. Library, Church, Museum, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Events (Parades, Community Activities)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Quiet, Peacefulness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Entertainment (Restaurants, Taverns, Theaters)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX C

Coding categories and definitions

Object categories

The first step in analyzing the data consisted in grouping the household artifacts that people mentioned as special into a limited number of categories. The 41 categories that are subsequently listed seemed adequate to account for all the 1,694 objects mentioned by the 315 respondents. Some of the 1,694 "objects" are groupings of objects, for example, if a respondent said "my plants" or "my art" and did not choose to differentiate separate objects, it would be scored as one object. In formulating the main kinds of objects, the attempt was to inductively draw the categories from the objects named by respondents. Some of the categories are grosser than others, e.g., furniture may be broken down into separate categories of dining room sets, chairs, and so on. But the intention was to draw out categories that would characterize different general kinds of objects and the resulting categories did seem accurate, because interrater reliability was 95 percent.

1. *Furniture*. Refers to objects on or in which to place things or sit, e.g., tables, chairs, dressers, desks, etc. Beds, lamps, carpets, and other appliances will be scored separately.
2. *Bed*. R explicitly names a bed, not a couch.
3. *Visual art*. Refers to the full range of two-dimensional representations other than photographs, commonly hung on a wall. (E.g., an original Picasso as well as a *Last Supper* reproduction from a 5¢ & 10¢ store would be included in this category. Paintings by children or other family members are included in this category.)
4. *Sculpture*. Refers to all plastic art, or the range of three-dimensional representations and crafted objects, excluding weavings and furniture, which are usually displayed for generalized "aesthetic" reasons. Like the Visual Art category, it includes the range from "high art" (e.g., a maquette by Chicago artist Richard Hunt) to mass-produced items (such as a Don Quixote statue), and objects made by friends or relatives (e.g., a burnt match crucifix made by one woman's son).
5. *Collections*. Refers to objects that people collect, *which do not fall into any of the other object categories*, e.g., an art collection named as an object would be coded under Visual Art, not under Collections. The kinds of objects that would be coded under Collections would include rock or butterfly collections, comic books, letters.

6. *Musical Instruments*. Includes the mention of all musical instruments, e.g., piano, guitar, etc.
7. *TV*
8. *Stereo, Tape Players*.
9. *Radio*.
10. *Books*. Includes books in general, as well as particular books, e.g., Bible, Proust.
11. *Photos*. All mention of photos coded under this category. If R mentions "pictures," check to see if this refers to Photos or Visual Art.
12. *Plants*.
13. *Plates*. This category includes the mention of "dishes," china, "cups," "mugs," pewter dishes.
14. *Silverware*.
15. *Glass*.
16. *Pets*. Make sure the animal is alive and not a stuffed toy.
17. *Aquariums*.
18. *Appliances*. Includes the mention of washers, dryers, toasters, microwave, etc.
19. *Refrigerator*.
20. *Lamps, Chandeliers, Sconces*.
21. *Clocks*. Includes all wall clocks, alarm clocks, grandfather clocks, etc.
22. *Tools*. Includes lathes, hammers, "tools" in general, and electric *tools*.
23. *Sports Equipment*. Includes golf clubs, basketballs, jogging shoes, etc. Does not include athletic *clothes*, which will be coded under Clothes.
24. *Trophies*. Includes all trophies, awards, medals, ribbons, badges, citations or merit of achievement, and animals caught or shot and stuffed, e.g., dolphin, moose.
25. *Camera*. Refers to all photographic *equipment*, not the photographs, which will be coded under Photos. Includes cameras, tripods, dark rooms, and other photographic equipment.
26. *Toys*. All mention of toys, excluding objects that are explicitly athletic equipment and the subcategory of stuffed animals.
27. *Stuffed Animals*. Includes all mention of toy stuffed animals. Be careful to check that the named animal is stuffed and not alive, especially when a name is used, e.g., "Arfie." A formerly live animal that has been stuffed by a taxidermist should be coded under Trophy, e.g., dolphin, moose.
28. *Clothes*. Includes all mention of attire, excluding athletic footwear.
29. *Jewelry*. Includes all mention of jewelry, wedding rings, high school rings, watches.
30. *Quilts, Textiles*. Includes all forms of weaving, excluding carpets.
31. *Carpets*.
32. *Fireplace*.
33. *Bath*.
34. *Room*. Kitchen, breakfast nook, bedroom, recreation room, etc.
35. *Miscellaneous*. Refers to the idiosyncratic objects that do not fit any of the other categories. *Make a separate list* of any object that falls into this category, e.g., clubhouse.
36. *All*. "Everything," includes mention of the whole house or all objects.

37. *Scrapbooks*. Family trees, papers, poetry, diaries.
38. *Vehicles*. Cars, trucks, bicycles.
39. *Telephone*. C.B. radio, two-way communication devices.
40. *Yard*. Garden, backyard, etc.
41. *Candlesticks*.

For some operations the object categories were grouped into two broad classes: action objects and contemplation objects. Those objects whose use involves some physical handling, interaction or movement were coded in the action category; those whose use is mainly through reflection or contemplation were coded in the contemplation category.

Action objects				*Contemplation objects*	
2	Bed	22	Tools	3	Visual art
6	Musical instrument	23	Sports equipment	4	Sculpture
7	Television	25	Camera	5	Collections
8	Stereo	26	Toys, games	10	Books
9	Radio	27	Stuffed animals	11	Photos
12	Plants	28	Clothes	13	Plates
16	Pets	32	Fireplace	14	Silverware
17	Aquariums	33	Bathroom	15	Glass
18	Appliances	38	Vehicles	30	Quilts, textiles
19	Refrigerator	39	Telephones, etc.	41	Candleholders

Meaning classes and categories

The next step was to develop "meanings" categories (such as the object is valued as a "souvenir," or because it was a "gift," or for the "experiences" it provides) in an attempt to classify and statistically compare the meanings embodied in the various kinds of objects by respondents. Like the objects categories, the meanings categories were drawn out of what seemed to be the most common descriptions given by respondents, and were proven to be statistically reliable by comparing the results of two independent coders (approximately 85 percent for all generations). The two coders spent considerable time and effort to define the rules for coding, because this portion of the coding was so context-bound. A total of 7,875 "significations" were recorded for the 1,694 objects, and these were coded into the following 37 categories of meaning. These 37 categories of meaning were also grouped into 10 broader meanings *classes* for comparisons that did not need as much detail. The broad class of Memories, for example, includes the categories of meanings referring to Mementos, Recollections, Heirlooms, Souvenirs, and "Had It for a Long Time."

Nonpersons coding classes and categories

I Past
   A Memories
      1 *Memento*. Memories in general, not associated with particular occasion. Includes description of sentimental associations.

"It gives me memories of my aunt in California"
"It connects me with the past"
"Reminds me of family dinners we used to have"
"I guess it's just a lot of sentiment"
"Because I love them"
"We've had it for so many years" is *not* coded for memento but will be coded under "Had it for so long" category.

2 *Recollection*. Memories of *specific* occasion(s) in respondent's lifetime.
"Reminds me of last Christmas"
"I got it as a wedding present"
"I got it for my birthday"
"We signed the bottom of this"

3 *Heirloom*. Object handed down in family.
"It belonged to my grandfather"
"These pewter mugs have been in my family since the 1700s"

4 *Souvenir*. Memory of a place. The object was purchased at the place by either the respondent or by someone known to the respondent who gave it to the respondent, e.g., "We got these in Tunisia." Don't forget that this is a memory of a place, so a description of a memory of some place would be coded here instead of under memento.

5 *"Had it for a long time."* The respondent describes the object as special because he has had it for such a long time, either in R's own possession or in the environment that the person has lived in (e.g., "this clock has been here since before I was even born, and so it's special just because I'm used to it always being here").
The reference must be to the length of time the object has been around. E.g., simply stating, "I've had it since the kids were born" would not be sufficient to be scored for this category, because the reference might be to the birth of children. This would include examples indicating an actual time period the object was in the respondent's possession, e.g., "We've had it for 15 years." Any time reference of *10* years or longer will fall under this category.

B Associations
6 & 7 *Ethnic, Religious*. Some reference is given to *R's own* ethnic or religious group (or own religious belief).
"This porkskin plate comes from Mexico and reminds me of my country"
Check *R's* ethnic identity before coding this one.

8 *Collections*. Object or set of objects are explicitly valued as a collection.
"My comics"
But "We have a lot of art" would *not* be a collection because there is no mention of the art as a *collection* as being special.

9   *Gift.* Object is special because it was given as a gift. "I would never want to part with that *egg cup* because it was given to me by a very dear friend."

II. Present-Future

A   Experience

10 *Enjoyment.* Refers to positive feelings associated with the object and somehow explicitly described by the respondent.
"It makes me happy"
"I like to work with these tools"
"Entertaining"
"I dig it"
"Unhappy without object" does not get coded as enjoyment.

11 *Ongoing Occasions.* Object used for events or everyday activities that regularly occur. Includes descriptions of regular use of object.
"We sit in front of this fireplace each Christmas"
"We sit in front of this fireplace on weekends"
"I enjoy the piano and I learn a lot from my lessons *each week*"
"My bed is very special because it's warm and because I sleep in it *every night*"
"Kitchen – *I cook all the meals* here and like the room"
"Silverware – We use this for our Sunday dinner"
NOT: "I like to cook gourmet meals,"no indication of frequency

12 *Release.* The feeling of release that some of the respondents said the object enabled them to achieve – escape, venting frustration.
"My piano is a release for me"
"Venting frustration"

B   Intrinsic Qualities of Object

13 *Craft.* Made by hand either by respondent, kin, friend, or someone or someone known by respondent. Tools used to make other things are not Craft but Accomplishment.
"My daughter made this potholder for me"

14 *Uniqueness.* The object is described as being one of a kind, unique. The object is either physically unique or explicitly described as unique because of personal associations *connected with that object* for the respondent. The object is unique, not the personal association.
"I could never replace this"
"I made this at a certain point in my life and could never do the same thing again"
"It's one of a kind"
NOT Unique: "These are very rare"
"There were only 100 of these ever made"
Original oil painting. Even though this is a unique object, it must

be explicitly described as such by the respondent.
"It's all I have from my father's family, I wouldn't have it to pass on"

15 *Physical description.* Respondent gives a physical description of the object. Usual descriptions include references to size, texture, or color, and employ such characteristic words as: Large, wood, brass, copper, mahogany, chipped, naugahyde, etc. For painting and sculpture, a description of the representation itself will be coded as a physical description (even though this will sometimes be coded as style also), e.g., "Painting. It is a fiesta scene."
"I like his work, especially the way he depicted the cloud formation"
"Sculpture. It's all brass. It's a fourth-century Sumerian [*sic*] sculpture"
The preceding example would be coded for physical description *as well as* for style
"Painting. This is a painting of someone in my wife's family"
Descriptions of people represented in family photos, etc., are to be taken as physical descriptions.
This also includes references to the *contents* of an object – e.g., enumerating different kinds of pictures in a photo album.
Examples of Style not physical description:
"Living room. That's a very warm room. It has a comfortable atmosphere"
"Chair. It's a good piece of furniture"
"Painting. It's got a sense of antiquity"

C   Style

16 *Style.* Some decorative, fashion, or design aspect is mentioned. Also includes descriptions of ambiance, atmosphere.
"The colors match the rest of the room"
"My new Jaguar says something – it is distinctive"

D   Utilitarian

17 *Utilitarian.* The object is valued for convenience, saving time, money, energy. Also includes a description of the value of the object as an investment.
"My washer allows me to have more time"
"And someday I'll be able to sell these paintings at a tremendous profit"
Be careful that descriptions of appliances, etc. actually include a functional referent: "my new sewing machine was a Christmas gift" would *not* be scored as utilitarian.

E   Personal Values

18 *Embodiment of an Ideal.* The object is described as embodying personal values, aspirations, goals, achievement, *that are desired or sought after.* The object embodies the sought goal, not just some-

thing already achieved, which will fall under the Accomplishment category. If the object embodies the sought goal *and* the achieved goal, it will be coded for both. But there must be some explicit description of the object as embodying an ideal for the respondent.

"I've been taught to live by the Bible as close as I can"
"Books. Cause you can learn a lot and grow from them"
"Plants. Because my plants are a symbol of life for me"
"Reminds me of what a good friend he was, of our relationship and the friendship." Here the value of friendship is embodied.

19 *Accomplishment.* The object is described as manifesting the creativity or accomplishment or some achievement of the respondent. It refers to something *already achieved.* The object indicates that the respondent is competent in some endeavor or in life in general. This category refers to the accomplishment of the actual respondent. It refers to the respondent's immediate family only when it is clear that the respondent is a part of the activity or signification.

"It makes me feel like I can do something"
"It makes me feel like I'm accomplishing something"
"These pots show that even though I'm handicapped, I can still create something beautiful"
"Our whole family pitches in on decorating these Christmas eggs. It shows our talent"

20 *Personification.* The object is described as having the qualities of a person, either an actual person or a metaphoric person. The object represents some known person or the respondent himself or has a quality *of personhood* itself. The object should have the quality of a whole person, not just a partial quality.

"Dog. He's a part of the family"
"I'd feel almost like I was missing a person with it"
"It's me"
"Poochie is like one of the family"

NOT Personification: "It reminds me of my grandmother"
"It reflects her warmth"

Person codes

A Self
  1 *Self.* Code for self any time the respondent is an explicit reference of the object. The respondent singles out something about himself or herself in relation to the object. E.g.,
  "Tools. Because I like to work with tools"
  "TV. Because I like to watch TV"
  "Air conditioner. You really need it in the summer. It keeps you cool"

"This is special because I can make something"
"Game. I love to play it"

BUT: "I love to play pool with my family" would *not* be scored as self; it would be scored as Family, and all family references implicitly include the respondent.

HOWEVER: "TV. I love watching it by myself, or with the whole family" would be scored for both Self *and* Family, because R. singles himself or herself out.

"Books. I learn from my books. You can get lost in them"
"Guns. Shooting is my hobby"

B Immediate Family
  2 *Spouse*
  3 *We.* We or us use when description is vague – any mention of other person *not* specified.
  4 *Children*
  5 *Parents.* Mother/Father
  6 *Siblings*
  7 *Grandparents*
  8 *Grandchildren*
  9 *Whole Family (Nuclear).* Respondent refers to the whole family, e.g., "I enjoy watching it with *my whole family*," or names all the members of the nuclear family, e.g., *"The children and my wife and I* all get around the table for breakfast on Sundays."

  Code 2 through 9 when one of these family members is mentioned, BUT if the entire nuclear family is mentioned individually, code under whole Family (Nuclear) only, not for each individual.

C Kin
  10 *Relatives.* (Outside immediate family, e.g., the three generations).
  "It used to belong to my *uncle,* who I thought a lot of"
  "Photo. It was taken when we were visiting my *cousins* . . ."

  11 *Ancestors.* (Outside respondent's own grandparent)
  "Family tree. You can trace our family all the way to 1600"
  "Photo. This is an old family photo from the last century"

  12 *In-Laws.*

D Nonfamily
  13 *Friends.* Person is described as a friend, e.g.,
  "We got this from *friends.*"

  14 *Associates.* Respondent names someone from an associational context. Relation of the respondent to the person named is primarily through the association, e.g.,
  "I got that from a *friend at work*" (person named in work context)

"Cadillac. *My Clients* may resent it, but I think I deserve it"

15 *Role models, heroes, admired people.* Object is valued in reference to some public figure or role model, e.g., teacher.
"Books. I admire all of Robbe-Grillet's books. They have so much personality"
"TV. I love to watch *The Hulk*"

Acquisition categories

The following are the categories used in coding how special objects were originally acquired (interrater reliability for all generations 86 percent). For a discussion of how acquisition affects the meaning of special objects see Rochberg-Halton, 1979b, Chapter 6.

1 *Purchased.* The object was acquired as a purchase regardless of who bought it.
2 *Gift.* The object was given as a present to the respondent.
3 *Inherited.* The respondent must mention the fact that the object was *owned* and not recently purchased by the previous generation, or the respondent lived with the object as a child and it was out of his possession for a number of years (e.g., in parents' possession) or the object was part of an inheritance (e.g., "When my grandfather died my sister got the statue and I got this plinth").
4 *Crafted.* The respondent either made the object, designed it, grew it, created the idea, or somehow performed the operations that yielded the object (e.g., took the photos, grew the plants, etc.). Or someone else made the object in one of these ways but has *not* given the object to the respondent (e.g., "I like the wall hanging my sister made").
The object must be accessible to the respondent and is usually found in his home. If someone else made it and then gave it to the respondent, code it as *Gift.*
5 *Found.* The respondent found the object.
6 *Award.* The object was acquired as an award or trophy (e.g., a diploma, bowling trophies, etc.).
7 *Hand-me-downs.* An older sibling or relative has outgrown the object (e.g., clothes, toys) and these now belong to the respondent.
8 *Traded.* The respondent traded or bartered something for the object.
9 *Moved into house.* The object was acquired when the respondent moved into the house.
10 *Other.*

Gift: subcodes

Occasions
1 Birthday
2 Christmas
3 Wedding
4 Anniversary
5 Religious Occasion
6 Multiple Occasions

Persons
1 Spouse/Lover
2 Parents or Parents-in-Law
3 Grandparents
4 Grandchildren
5 Children
6 Relatives or "family gave it to me"
7 Nonrelatives
8 Sibling(s)

Attitudes toward the home

By using the following coding system below, two raters scored blindly all protocols with a 90.8 percent agreement.

Coding of home interview question #1

Three codes to be used: 1   Positive
2   Neutral
3   Negative

1 Positive

a Any description of the home that uses adjectives connoting a positive emotional tone; e.g., "warm; happy; fun; affirmative; cheery; cozy; special ambience; friendly; free."
Do Not code "comfortable" here, nor positive descriptions of physical characteristics, i.e., "large; beautiful; warm" (when referring to temperature)

b Or any statement of positive affect toward the home, e.g., "I really like it; There are a lot of things in it I like; I love my home."

2 Neutral

a Any description of the home that *does not* use adjectives connoting positive emotional tone.
i.e., "It is pretty; it is a good home; it's medium sized; it's OK; it's nice; it's relaxing; it's comfortable; it's spacious."

b Qualified descriptions, i.e., "we work to make it feel somewhat homey, sometimes we succeed;" "cluttered, disorganized, but comfortable;" I wouldn't say it's serene . . . I wouldn't say it's chaotic;" "it's warm . . . messy mostly."
When such statements are accompanied by unqualified positive feelings, Score 1 (Positive).

3 Negative

a Any description of the home that uses adjectives connoting negative emotional tone.
E.g.: "It's kind of dead; it makes me feel scared; frustration; oppression; no family spirit; it's cold; disorganized."

APPENDIX D

Additional tables

Table D.1. *Frequency of special objects*

		Number of objects mentioned as special in each category	Percentage of total sample mentioning at least one special object in each category. (N = 315)
01.	Furniture	187	35.9
02.	Bed	43	13.7
03.	Visual Art	136	25.7
04.	Sculpture	108	19.0
05.	Collections	49	13.3
06.	Musical Instrument	77	21.6
07.	TV	68	20.9
08.	Stereo (record player)	74	21.6
09.	Radio	24	7.6
10.	Books	79	22.2
11.	Photos	93	23.2
12.	Plants	48	14.9
13.	Plates	68	14.6
14.	Silverware	17	5.1
15.	Glass	36	8.3
16.	Pets	29	8.3
17.	Aquariums	11	3.5
18.	Appliances	56	13.7
19.	Refrigerator	16	5.1
20.	Lamps	31	8.9
21.	Clocks	30	7.2
22.	Tools	12	2.8

Table D.1. *(cont.)*

		Number of objects mentioned as special in each category	Percentage of total sample mentioning at least one special object in each category. (N = 315)
23.	Sports Equipment	33	8.3
24.	Trophies	21	4.8
25.	Camera	8	2.2
26.	Toys	15	4.1
27.	Stuffed Animals	18	3.8
28.	Clothes	21	5.4
29.	Jewelry	31	8.5
30.	Quilts, Textiles	31	7.9
31.	Carpets	20	5.1
32.	Fireplace	15	3.8
33.	Bath	11	3.5
34.	Whole Room	26	6.7
35.	Miscellaneous	67	17.1
36.	Whole House	9	2.9
37.	Scrap Books	23	5.4
38.	Vehicles	20	6.3
39.	Telephone	9	2.9
40.	Yard	15	3.5
41.	Candlesticks	9	2.9

Table D.2. *Social class differences in the distribution of objects and meanings mentioned at least once by respondents*

	Percentage of respondents mentioning special objects		
	Upper-middle class	Lower-middle class	Probability value of chi square
Visual Art	37	14	.0001
Stereos	28	16	.01
Radios	4	12	.01
Plants	5	23	.0001
Clocks	3	13	.001
Carpets	9	1	.007
Whole Room	4	10	.05
	Percentage of respondents mentioning meanings		
Gift	34	47	.03
Embodiment of Ideal	31	18	.01
We	39	26	.01

Only significant differences are reported.

Table D.3. *Generational differences in the distribution of special objects mentioned by respondents*

		Percentage of respondents mentioning object			
		Child (N = 79)	Parents (N = 150)	Grandparents (N = 86)	Probability value of chi square
1.	Furniture	32.9	38.7	33.7	NS
2.	Beds	29.1	8.0	9.3	.0000
3.	Visual Art	8.9	36.7	22.1	.0000
4.	Sculpture	6.3	26.7	17.4	.0009
5.	Collectibles	17.7	12.0	11.6	NS
6.	Musical Instruments	31.6	22.7	10.5	.0039
7.	TV	36.7	11.3	23.3	.0000
8.	Stereos	45.6	18.0	5.8	.0000
9.	Radios	11.4	6.0	7.0	NS
10.	Books	15.2	24.0	25.6	NS
11.	Photos	10.1	22.0	37.2	.0002
12.	Plants	8.9	19.3	12.8	NS
13.	Plates	6.3	14.7	22.1	.0165
14.	Silverware	1.3	4.0	10.5	.0191
15.	Glass	3.8	11.3	7.0	NS
16.	Pets	24.1	4.0	1.2	.0000
17.	Aquariums	8.9	2.0	1.2	.0104
18.	Appliances	5.1	17.3	15.1	.03
19.	Refrigerator	11.4	1.3	5.8	.004
20.	Lamps	7.6	9.3	9.3	NS
21.	Clocks	6.3	8.0	7.0	NS
22.	Tools	2.5	4.7	0.0	NS
23.	Sports Equipment	17.7	5.3	4.7	.0019
24.	Trophies	6.3	5.3	2.3	NS
25.	Cameras	0.0	3.3	2.3	NS
26.	Toys	8.9	3.3	1.2	.0365
27.	Stuffed Animals	11.4	1.3	1.2	.0003
28.	Clothes	10.1	2.7	5.8	NS
29.	Jewelry	7.6	11.3	4.7	NS
30.	Weavings	5.1	8.0	10.5	NS
31.	Carpets	2.5	7.3	3.5	NS
32.	Fireplace	7.6	3.3	1.2	NS
33.	Bath	3.8	2.7	4.7	NS
34.	Whole Room	8.9	3.3	10.5	NS
35.	Miscellaneous	20.3	16.7	15.1	NS
36.	Whole House	3.8	2.7	2.3	NS
37.	Papers	7.6	4.0	5.8	NS
38.	Vehicles	12.7	6.0	1.2	.01
39.	Telephones	6.3	1.3	2.3	NS
40.	Yard	0.0	6.7	1.2	.01

Table D.4. *Sex differences in the distribution of special objects mentioned by respondents*

	Percentage of respondents mentioning object		
	Males (N = 141)	Females (N = 174)	Probability value of chi square
1. Furniture	32.6	38.5	NS
2. Beds	12.1	14.9	NS
3. Visual Art	24.1	27.0	NS
4. Sculpture	10.6	25.9	.001
5. Collectibles	14.9	12.1	NS
6. Musical Instruments	20.6	22.4	NS
7. TV	29.1	14.4	.002
8. Stereos	28.4	16.1	.01
9. Radios	7.1	8.0	NS
10. Books	19.9	24.1	NS
11. Photographs	14.2	30.5	.001
12. Plants	5.0	23.0	.0001
13. Plates	7.8	20.1	.004
14. Silverware	2.1	7.5	NS
15. Glass	2.8	12.6	.003
16. Pets	11.3	5.7	NS
17. Aquariums			
18. Appliances	9.9	16.7	NS
19. Refrigerator	6.4	4.0	NS
20. Lamps	7.8	9.8	NS
21. Clocks	6.4	8.0	NS
22. Tools	6.4	0.0	.002
23. Sports Equipment	17.7	.6	.0001
24. Trophies	8.5	1.7	.01
25. Cameras	4.3	.6	NS
26. Toys	6.4	2.3	NS
27. Stuffed Animals	1.4	5.7	NS
28. Clothes	4.3	6.3	NS
29. Jewelry	7.1	9.8	NS
30. Textiles	2.1	12.6	.001
31. Carpets	3.0	5.2	NS
32. Fireplace	2.8	4.6	NS
33. Bath	2.8	4.0	NS
34. Whole Room	4.3	8.6	NS
35. Miscellaneous	19.1	15.5	NS
36. Whole House	5.0	1.1	NS
37. Personal Papers	5.7	5.2	NS
38. Vehicles	9.9	3.4	.03
39. Telephones	2.8	2.9	NS
40. Yard	6.4	1.1	.03
41. Candlesticks	1.4	4.0	NS

Table D.5. *Generational differences in the distribution of meanings associated with special objects*

	Percentage of respondents referring to meaning			
	Child (N = 79)	Parents (N = 150)	Grandparents (N = 86)	Probability value of chi square
Memento	30.4	57.3	62.8	.0001
Recollections	22.8	58.0	46.5	.0001
Heirloom	10.1	26.0	19.8	.02
Souvenir	6.3	26.7	26.7	.0007
Had It Long Time	16.5	10.0	17.4	NS
Ethnic	2.5	10.7	14.0	.0356
Religious	1.3	8.0	9.3	NS
Collections	20.3	14.0	12.8	NS
Gifts	31.6	44.0	41.9	NS
Enjoyment	89.9	76.0	74.4	.02
Ongoing Occasion	46.8	52.0	43.0	NS
Release	38.0	22.7	9.3	.0001
Craft	20.3	44.0	27.9	.0006
Unique	10.1	25.3	8.1	.0006
Physical Description	38.0	51.3	43.0	NS
Style	54.4	61.3	64.0	NS
Utilitarian	69.6	42.0	43.0	.0002
Embodiment of Ideal	21.5	23.3	29.0	NS
Accomplishment	39.2	36.7	14.0	.0003
Personification	15.2	15.3	15.1	NS
Intended Heirloom	2.5	11.3	9.3	NS
Self	97.5	87.3	76.7	.0004
We	30.4	36.7	27.9	NS
Spouse	6.3	46.0	37.2	.0001
Children	3.8	49.3	38.4	.0001
Mother	29.1	27.3	23.3	NS
Father	29.1	20.0	12.8	.03
Siblings	15.2	8.7	10.5	NS
Grandparents	13.9	11.3	11.6	NS
Grandchildren	0.0	2.0	22.1	.0001
Whole Famly	11.4	22.7	31.4	.008
In-Laws	3.8	14.0	14.0	.05
Relatives	5.1	11.3	9.3	NS
Ancestors	5.1	8.7	4.7	NS
Friends	32.9	20.7	23.3	NS
Associates	6.3	10.0	11.6	NS
Heroes	12.7	25.3	16.3	.05

Table D.6. *Sex differences in the distribution of meanings associated with special objects*

	Percentage of respondents referring to meaning		
	Males (N = 141)	Females (N = 174)	Probability value of chi-square
Memento	40.4	61.5	.0003
Recollections	37.6	52.9	.01
Heirloom	12.8	26.4	.004
Souvenir	16.3	25.9	NS
Had It Long Time	13.5	13.8	NS
Ethnic	5.7	12.6	NS
Religious	2.8	9.8	.03
Collections	15.6	14.9	NS
Gifts	27.7	50.6	.0001
Enjoyment	79.4	78.7	NS
Ongoing	48.2	48.3	NS
Release	26.2	20.1	NS
Craft	33.3	33.9	NS
Unique	17.0	16.7	NS
Physical Description	44.7	46.6	NS
Style	51.1	67.8	.004
Utilitarian	52.5	46.6	NS
Embodiment of Ideal	22.0	26.4	NS
Accomplishment	36.9	26.4	NS
Personification	7.1	21.8	.0005
Intended Heirloom	5.0	11.5	NS
Self	87.9	86.2	NS
We	33.3	32.2	NS
Spouse	30.5	36.2	NS
Children	26.2	42.0	.005
Mother	19.1	32.8	.01
Father	21.3	19.5	NS
Sibling	7.8	13.2	NS
Grandparents	6.4	16.7	.001
Grandchildren	3.5	9.8	.05
Whole Family	18.4	25.3	NS
In-Laws	7.8	14.4	NS
Relatives	6.4	11.5	NS
Ancestors	8.5	5.2	NS
Friends	22.0	26.4	NS
Associates	7.8	10.9	NS
Heroes	22.7	17.2	NS

Table D.7. *Most frequent types of objects serving as vehicles for the various meaning categories*

Meaning Categories	Objects and percentage of meaning category
Memories	
Memento	Photos (21%), Furniture (10%), Visual Art (10%)
Recollection	Sculpture (12%), Furniture (11%), Visual Art (11%)
Heirloom	Furniture (24%), Plateware (16%), Glass (9%)
Souvenir	Sculpture (21%), Visual Art (19%), Plateware (14%)
Had It Long Time	Furniture (21%), Sculpture (11%), Pets (9%)
Associational Contexts	
Ethnic	Plateware (16%), Sculpture (14%), Visual Art/Book (12%)
Religious	Books (36%), Sculpture (20%)
Collections	Collectibles (50%), Books (13%)
Gifts	Sculpture (15%), Furniture (12%), Plateware (10%)
Experiences	
Enjoyment	Furniture (9%), Stereo (7%), Visual Art (7%)
Ongoing Occasion	Television (13%), Plants (8%), Books (8%)
Release	Stereo (17%), Musical Instruments (15%), Television (11%)
Intrinsic Qualities	
Craft	Visual Art (31%), Furniture (15%), Sculpture (13%)
Unique	Photographs (19%), Visual Art (17%), Plateware (9%)
Physical Description	Photographs (16%), Visual Art (13%), Furniture (12%)
Style	Furniture (17%), Visual Art (12%), Sculpture (10%)
Utilitarian	Appliances (14%), Furniture (11%), Television (7%)
Personal Values	
Embodiment of Ideals	Books (27%), Plants (12%), Musical Ins./Sculpture (7%)
Accomplishment	Furniture (16%), Trophies/Visual Art (9%)
Personification	Plants/Pets/Stuffed Animals (12%)
Intended Heirloom	Furniture (22%), Visual Art (18%)

Table D.8. *Most frequent types of objects serving as vehicles for the various person-related meaning categories*

Person categories	Objects and percentage of meaning category
Self	Furniture (10%), Stereo (7%), TV/Books, Musical Inst. (6%)
Immediate Family	
Spouse	Furniture (20%), Visual Art (11%), Sculpture (9%)
Children	Photos (14%), Musical Inst. (10%), Visual Art/Furniture (10%)
Mother	Furniture/Plateware (12%), Sculpture (10%)
Father	Furniture (13%), Photos (9%), Visual Art (8%)
Siblings	Stereos/Photos (15%)
Grandparents	Furniture (22%), Plateware (14%), Photos (11%)
Grandchildren	Photos (50%)
Whole Family	Photos (26%), Visual Art (8%), Furniture (7%)
Kin	
In-Laws	Furniture (22%), Plateware (13%)
Relatives	Photos (20%)
Ancestors	Plateware (19%), Furniture (15%)
Nonfamily	
Friends	Visual Art (19%), Furniture (10%), Sculpture (9%)
Associates	Visual Art (26%)
Admired Persons	Visual Art (43%), Sculpture/Books (9%)

Table D.9. *Date of acquisition of special objects for three generations*

Percentage of objects acquired in a given time period

	Children	Parents	Grandparents
1975–77	39	19	11
1973–74	20	11	6
1971–72	13	11	6
1967–70	14	19	9
1962–66	6	18	11
1952–61	6	13	15
1942–51	.2	7	15
1900–41	0	2	26

Table D.10. *Number and percentage of how special objects were acquired*

	Number of objects	Percentage[a]			
		Purchased	Gift	Inherited	Hand crafted
Furniture	187	46	26	16	6
Bed	43	63	12	19	—
Visual Art	136	54	28	7	15
Sculpture	108	38	44	3	18
Collectibles	49	71	29	4	4
Musical Instruments	77	55	30	10	3
TV	68	72	24	2	—
Stereo	74	62	35	—	1
Radio	24	54	42	—	
Books	79	70	29	5	3
Photos	93	32	23	12	37
Plants	48	52	65	2	8
Plates	68	31	32	34	—
Silverware	17	35	47	29	—
Glass	36	22	44	33	—
Pets	29	41	48	—	7
Aquarium	11	36	64	—	—
Appliances	56	57	27	4	2
Refrigerator	16	88	6	—	—
Lamps	31	48	26	3	3
Clocks	30	20	40	33	3
Tools	12	83	25	8	—
Sports Equipment	33	49	52	—	—
Trophies	21	5	5	—	10
Camera	8	63	13	—	13
Toys	15	47	47	—	7
Stuffed Animals	18	6	83	6	6
Clothes	21	71	24	—	5
Jewelry	31	26	48	19	—
Textiles	31	23	23	16	36
Carpets	20	80	5	—	5
Fireplace	15	7	—	—	—
Bath	11	9	—	—	—
Whole Room	26	19	4	—	12
Miscellaneous	67	25	22	8	16
All	9	33	—	—	22
Scrapbooks	23	9	13	—	44
Vehicles	20	60	35	—	—
Telephone	9	78	22	—	—
Yard	15	—	—	—	20
Candlesticks	9	11	22	56	—
Totals	1,694	45.7	30	9	8.8

[a]The percentages in this table sometimes total less than 100, because they were acquired in a less frequently mentioned category that was not included in the table (see Acquisition Categories); sometimes they total more than 100, because more than one category was mentioned.

---

more than one category was mentioned.

Table D.11. *Number and percentages of meanings associated with acquisition categories*

	Number of objects	Percentage[a]			
		Purchased	Gift	Inherited	Hand crafted
Memento	321	36	28	16	14
Recollection	285	43	35	9	8
Heirloom	140	5	18	74	2
Souvenir	145	52	26	17	3
"Long Time"	79	44	44	10	6
Intended Heirloom	63	35	25	32	5
Ethnic	50	30	32	30	2
Religious	25	32	40	12	—
Collections	60	58	32	5	8
Gift	250	11	80	9	1
Enjoyment	689	55	29	5	8
Ongoing Occasions	263	57	25	3	7
Release	99	66	28	3	3
Craft	205	26	24	7	43
Uniqueness	81	33	31	16	20
Physical Description	274	46	28	11	13
Style	473	50	29	8	7
Utilitarian	300	61	22	2	4
Embodiment of					
Ideal	112	56	29	5	5
Accomplishment	166	40	17	2	31
Personification	58	35	50	7	7
Self	1,031	54	27	3	9
We	190	48	17	13	6
Spouse	197	52	26	7	11
Children	210	38	36	10	15
Mother	137	19	41	37	4
Father	86	23	38	27	9
Siblings	41	17	27	22	17
Grandparents	65	8	31	65	2
Grandchildren	32	19	44	9	16
Whole Family	97	33	23	12	24
In-Laws	54	13	37	35	7
Relatives	41	22	44	32	12
Ancestors	27	7	4	85	4
Friends	117	39	52	4	3
Associates	42	36	38	7	14
Admired Persons	89	60	20	6	8
Total	6,585				

[a]See footnote to Table D.10.

References

Adams, H. *Mont Saint-Michel and Chartres*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1959 (1905).

Adams, J. R., Schuaneveldt, J. D., and Jenson, G. O. Sex, age and perceived competency as correlates of empathic ability in adolescence. *Adolescence*, 1979, *14*(56), 811–18.

Alighieri, D. *De monarchia*. Florence: Rostagno, 1921 (1317).

Altmann, J. *The ecology of motherhood and infancy in the savannah baboon*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Ardrey, R. *The territorial imperative*. New York: Atheneum, 1966.

Arendt, H. *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Aristotle. *Politics*. In R. P. McKeon (Ed.), *Introduction to Aristotle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Augustine, Saint. *Confessions*, ii, 4. In G. Howie (Ed.), *St. Augustine: On education*. Chicago: Regnery, 1969 (orig. ca. 450 A.D.).

Bakan, P. (Ed.). *Attention*. New York: Van Nostrand, 1966.

Bailin, H. The development of physical concepts. In T. Mischel (Ed.), *Cognitive development and epistemology*. New York: Academic Press, 1971.

Baldwin, J. M. *Mental development in the child and race*. New York: Macmillan, 1906 (3rd ed. rev.).

Barrett, W. *The illusion of technique: A search for meaning in a technological civilization*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1978.

Beaglehole, E. *Property: A study in social psychology*. New York: Macmillan, 1932.

Bellah, R. N. Introduction. *Emile Durkheim on morality and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Benedict, R. *The chrysanthemum and the sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946.

Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. *The social construction of reality*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1967.

Bernstein, R. Peirce's theory of perception. In E. C. Moore and R. S. Robin (Eds.), *Studies in the philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964.

John Dewey. New York: Washington Square Press, 1966.

Praxis and Action. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

The restructuring of social and political theory. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

Bettelheim, B. *Symbolic wounds: Puberty rites and the envious male*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954.

Binet, A. La concurrence des états psychologiques. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'etranger*, 1890, *24*, 138–55.

Bloch, M. *Land and work in medieval Europe*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

Block, J. H. Conceptions of sex role: Some cross-cultural and longitudinal perspectives. *American Psychologist*, 1973 (June), 512–26.

Boorstin, D. J. *The Americans: The democratic experience*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

Booth, L. Ten specialists in different fields discuss life in the future. *Chicago Tribune*, September 23, 1979, Sec. 9, p. 34.

Bronfenbrenner, U. *Two worlds of childhood*. New York: Pocket Books, 1973.

Burns, S. *The household economy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1977.

Canaan, J. Symbol development in adolescence. Unpublished research paper, Committee on Human Development, University of Chicago, 1976.

Chance, M. R. A. Attention structure as the basis of primate rank orders. *Man*, 1967, *2*, 503–18.

Chapin, F. S. *Contemporary American institutions*. New York: Harper and Bros., 1935.

Chodorow, N. Family structure and feminine personality. In M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Eds.), *Woman, culture and society*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974.

Comstock, G. et al. *Television and human behavior*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

Coser, L. A. The case of the Soviet family. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 1951, *56*(5), 424–54.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. Sociological implications in the thought of Teilhard de Chardin. *Zygon*, 1970, *5*(2), 130–47.

From thermodynamics to human values: A transition yet to be accomplished. *Zygon*, 1971 (*6*(2), 163–7.

Beyond boredom and anxiety. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975.

The release of symbolic energy. Paper presented at the American Art Therapy Association Meetings, Baltimore, 1976a.

What play says about behavior. *Ontario Psychologist*, 1976b, *8*(2), 5–11.

Phylogenetic and ontogenetic functions of artistic cognition. In S. Madeja (Ed.), *The arts, cognition and basic skills*. St. Louis: Cemrel, 1978a.

Attention and the wholistic approach to behavior. In K. S. Pope and J. L. Singer (Eds.), *The stream of consciousness*. New York: Plenum, 1978b.

The value of leisure: Towards a systematic analysis of leisure activities. *Research papers on leisure and cultural development, #2*. Waterloo, Ontario: Otium Publications, 1979.

Some paradoxes in the definition of play. In A. T. Cheska (Ed.), *Play as context*. West Point, N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1981, 14–26.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Beattie, O. Life themes: A theoretical and empirical exploration of their origins and effects. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1979, *19*(1), 45–63.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Graef, R. Socialization into sleep: Exploratory findings. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 1975, *21*(1), 1; 3–18.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Kubey, R., Television and the rest of life. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1981 (in press).

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Larson, R. Intrinsic rewards in school crime. *Crime and Delinquency*, 1978, *24*(3), 322–35.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., Larson, R., and Prescott, S. The ecology of adolescent activity and experience. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 1977, *6*(3), 281–94.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Rochberg-Halton, E. People and things: Reflections on materialism. *The University of Chicago Magazine*, 1978, *70*(3), 6–15.

Cumming, E. and Henry, W. *Growing Old*. New York: Basic Books, 1961.

Davis, J. A. Living rooms as symbols of social status: A study in social judgment. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1955.

Dawkins, R. *The selfish gene*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

de Chardin, T. *The phenomenon of man*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

De Quincy, Q. Raphael. In R. Duppa and Q. De Quincy, *The lives and works of Michael Angelo and Raphael*. London: Bell and Daldy, 1872.

Dewey, J. *Human nature and conduct*. New York: Random House, 1957 (1922).
   Art as experience. New York: Minton, Balch, 1958 (1934).
   Peirce's theory of linguistic signs, thought and meaning. *Journal of Philosophy*, 1946, *43*(4), 85–95.

Dewey, J. and Bentley, A. F. *Knowing and the known*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975 (1949).

Dixon, J. C. and Street, J. W. The distinction between self and non-self in children and adolescents. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 1975, *127*, 157–62.

Douglas, M. *Purity and danger*. London: Routledge, Kegan, 1966.

Duncan, J. S. and Duncan, N. G. Social worlds, status passage and environmental perspectives. In G. T. Moore and R. G. Golledge (Eds.), *Environmental knowing*. Stroudsberg, Penn.: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 1976.

Durkheim, E. *The division of labor in society*. New York: Free Press, 1964 (1893).
   The elementary forms of the religious life. New York: Free Press, 1965 (1915).
   Suicide. New York: Free Press, 1966 (1897).

Erikson, E. H. *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton, 1950.

Evans, Pritchard, E. E. *Nuer religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974 (1956).

Fairbairn, W. R. *An object relations theory of personality*. New York: Basic Books, 1954.

Fortune, R. F. *Sorcerers of Dobu*. New York: Sutton, 1963 (1932).

Freedman, B. J. The subjective experience of perceptual and cognitive disturbances in schizophrenia. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 1974, *30*, 333–40.

Freud, S. *The interpretation of dreams*. New York: Avon Books, 1965 (1900).

Fritsch, A. J. and Castelman, B. L. *Lifestyle index*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1974.

Fromm, E. *The sane society*. New York: Rinehart, 1955.

Furby, L. Socialization practices with respect to possession and ownership. *Oregon Research Institute Bulletin*, 1974, *14*(20).
   Possessions: Toward a theory of their meaning and function throughout

the life cycle. In P. B. Baltes (Ed.), *Life-span development and behavior*. (Vol. 1). New York: Academic Press, 1978, pp. 297–336.

Geertz, C. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Getzels, J. W. Creative thinking, problem-solving, and instruction. In E. R. Hilgard (Ed.), *Theories of learning and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Getzels, J. W. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. *The creative vision*. New York: Wiley, 1976.

Gloag, J. *A social history of furniture design*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1966.

Goffman, E. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974.

Goodman, N. *Languages of art: An approach to a theory of symbols*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968.

Guntrip, H. *Psychoanalytic theory, therapy, and the self*. New York: Basic Books, 1971.

Gusdorf, G. *L'expérience humaine du sacrifice*. Paris: P.U.F., 1948.

Habermas, J. *Theory and practice*. Transl. John Viertel. Boston: Beacon, 1973 (1971).

Harvey. P. H. and Greene, P. J. Group composition: An evolutionary perspective. In H. Kellerman (Ed.), *Group cohesion*. (in press).

Hauser, A. *The social history of art*. (Vol. 2). New York: Vintage, 1951.

Heidegger, M. *Being and time*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
   What is a thing? Chicago: Regnery, 1967.
   Poetry, language, thought. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Heifetz, M. L. An empirical examination of music listening as an autotelic activity. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1980.

Hilgard, E. R. The trilogy of mind: cognition, affection, and conation. In *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 1980, *16*, 107–17.

Hollingshead, A. B. *Elmtown's youth*. New York: Wiley, 1949.

Huizinga, J. *Homo Ludens*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1950.

Husserl, E. *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*. New York: Collier, 1962 (1931).

Isaacs, S. Property and possessiveness. In T. Talbot (Ed.), *The world of the child*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1967 (1949).

Jackson, D. *Personality research form*. Goshen, N.Y.: Research Psychologists Press, 1967.

James, W. *Principles of psychology*. (Vol. 1). New York: Dover, 1950 (1890).

Johnson, W. *Muddling toward frugality*. San Francisco: Sierra, 1978.

Jung, C. G. *Psychological types*. London: Routledge, Kegan, 1949.
   Psyche and symbol. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958.
   Two essays on analytical psychology. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1961 (1953).

Junker, B. Room compositions and life styles: A sociological study in living rooms and other rooms in contemporary dwellings. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1954.

Kahneman, D. *Attention and effort*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Kohut, H. *The analysis of the self*. New York: International Universities Press, 1971.
   The restoration of the self. New York: International Universities Press, 1977.

Larson, R., Csikszentmihalyi, M., and Graef, R. Mood variability and the psycho-social adjustment of adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,* 1980, *9,* 6, 469–90.

Laumann, E. O., and House, J. S. Living room styles and social attributes: The patterning of material artifacts in a modern urban community. *Sociology and Social Research,* 1970, *54*(3), 321–42.

Lefebvre des Noettes, M. *L'attelage et le cheval de selle à travers les âges.* Paris, P.U.F. 1931.

Le gouvernail: Contribution à l'histoire de l' esclavage. *Mémoires de la société des Antiquaires de France,* 1932, *78,* 712–45.

Lepper, M. R. and Greene, D. (Eds.), *The hidden costs of reward.* Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978.

Le Roy Ladurie, E. *Montaillou.* New York: Vintage, 1979.

Lévi-Strauss, C. *Les structures élementaires de la parenté.* Paris: P.U.F., 1949.

Linder, S. B. *The harried leisure class.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

McGhie, A., and Chapman, J. Disorders of attention and perception in early schizophrenia. *British Journal of Medical Psychology,* 1961, *34,* 103–16.

MacLuhan, M. *Understanding media.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Marcel, G. *Etre et Avoir.* Paris: Aubier, 1935.

Martin-Barro, L. Household density and crowding in lower-class Salvadorans. Unpublished PhD dissertation. University of Chicago, 1979.

Marx, K. Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844. In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx–Engels reader.* New York: Norton, 1972.

Maslow, A. H. The creative attitude. *The Structuralist,* 1963, *3,* 4–10.

Mauss, M. *The gift: Focus and functions of exchange in archaic societies.* New York: Norton, 1967 (1925).

Mayr, E. *Animal species and evolution.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Mead, G. H. *Mind, self, and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

Mead, M. *Growing up in New Guinea.* New York: Morrow, 1930.

Mehrabian, A. *Public places and private spaces: The psychology of work, play, and living environments.* New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of perception.* London: Routledge, Kegan, 1962.

Milgram, S. The Experience of Living in Cities. *Science,* 1967, March 13, 1970, 1461–8.

Neugarten, B. (Ed.) *Middle Age and Aging.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Nisbet, R. *Sociology as an art form.* London: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Noelle, E. and Neumann, E. P. (Eds.), *The Germans: Public opinion polls 1947–1966.* Allensbach: Verlag für Demoskopie, 1967.

Novak, M. *The joy of sports.* New York: Basic Books, 1976.

O'Dell, F. A. *Socialization through children's literature: The Soviet example.* Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Parsons, T. and Bales, R. T. *Family, socialization, and interaction process.* Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955.

Peirce, C. S. *The collected works of Charles Sanders Peirce.* Hartshorne, C. and Weiss, P. (Eds.), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931–5. Vol. 1–6

Perec, G. *Les Choses: Une histoire des années soixante.* Paris, Julliard, 1965.

Piaget, J. *Six psychological studies.* New York: Random House, 1967.

Polanyi, K. *The great transformation.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

Portmann, A. *Animals as social beings.* New York: Harper, 1961.

Redfield, R. and Singer, M. The cultural role of cities. *Economic development and cultural change,* 1954, *3*(1), 53–73.

Richards, O. W. *The social insects.* New York: Harper, 1961.

Robertson, J. *The sane alternative.* St. Paul, Minn.: River Basin, 1979.

Rochberg-Halton, E. The meaning of personal art objects. In J. Zuzanek (Ed.), *Social research and cultural policy.* Waterloo, Ontario: Otium Publications, 1979a.

Cultural signs and urban adaptation: The meaning of cherished household possessions. Unpublished PhD dissertation. University of Chicago, 1979b.

Reality, community, and the critique of modernism in Melville and Peirce. Paper presented at the Peirce session of the joint meeting of the Charles S. Peirce Society and Semiotic Society of America. Bloomington, Indiana, 1979c.

Object relations and role models: Adolescent possessions and the cultivation of the self. Paper presented at the 1980 Psychology of Adolescence Conference. Michael Reese Hospital, Chicago, June 1980a.

Where is the self? A semiotic and pragmatic theory of self and environment. Paper presented at the 1980 Annual American Sociological Association Meeting. New York City, August 1980b.

The triadic theory of meaning: Why Peirce's semiotic is as simple as 1,2,3. Paper presented at the 1980 Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction Meeting. New York City, August 1980c.

Qualitative immediacy and the communicative act. *Qualitative Sociology,* in press.

Rochberg-Halton, E. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. The symbolic use of household objects. Paper presented at the 1978 Annual American Sociological Association Meeting. San Francisco, September 1978.

Rosenmayr, L. and Köckeis, E. *Patterns of Living and Housing of Middle Aged and Older People.* U.S. Govt. Printing Office: Public Health Service Publication #1496, F. M. Carp and W. Burnett, (Eds.), 1966, pp. 29–46.

Sahlins, M. *Stone age economics.* Chicago: Aldine, 1972.

Culture and practical reason. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

The Use and Abuse of Biology. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977.

Sartre, J-P. *Being and nothingness.* New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.

The meaning of "to make" and "to have": Possession. In Clark E. Moustakas (Ed.), *The self: Explorations in personal growth.* New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1956.

Schachtel, E. G. Metamorphosis: *On the development of affect, perception, attention, and memory.* New York: Basic Books, 1959.

Schudson, Michael S. Review essay: On tourism and modern culture. *American Journal of Sociology,* 1979, *84*(5), 1249–58.

Schumacher, E. F. *Small is beautiful: Economics as if people mattered.* New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Scitovsky, T. The joyless economy. New York: Random House, 1976.

Searles, H. F. *The nonhuman environment.* New York: International University Press, 1960.

Seligman, M. E. P. *Helplessness: On depression, development and death.* New York: Freeman, 1975.

Sherman, E. and Newman, E. S. The meaning of cherished personal possessions for the elderly. *Journal of Aging and Human Development,* 1977–8, *8*(2), 181–92.

Shield, P. H., Harrow, M., and Tucker, G. Investigation of factors related to stimulus overinclusion. *Psychiatric Quarterly,* 1974, *48*, 109–16.

Shweder, R. Illusory correlation and the MMPI controversy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 1977, *45*, 917–24.

Simmel, G. *On individuality and social forms.* Ed. intro. Donald Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

The philosophy of money. Transl. T. Bottomore and D. Frisby, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978 (1900).

Slater, P. Social limitations on libidinal withdrawal. *American Journal of Sociology,* 1961, *67*(3), 296–311.

Smith, M. B. Competence and socialization. In J. A. Clausen (Ed.), *Socialization and society.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1968.

Perspectives on selfhood. *American Psychologists,* December, 1978, 1053–63.

Strauss, A. L. *Mirrors and masks: The search for identity.* San Francisco: Sociology Press, 1969.

Sullivan, H. S. *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry.* New York: Norton, 1953.

Thompson, E. P. *The making of the English working class.* New York: Vintage, 1963.

Turnbull, C. M. *The forest people.* New York: Simon, Schuster, 1961.

Turner, V. *The forest of symbols.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967.

The Ritual Process. Chicago: Aldine Co., 1969.

Liminal to liminoid in play, flow, and ritual: An essay in comparative symbology. Rice University Studies, 1974, *60*, 53–92.

Turner, V. and Turner, E. *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

Valaskakis, K., Sindell, P. S., Smith, J. G., and Fitzpatrick-Martin, M. *The conserver society.* New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

Vasari, G. *Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors and architects.* New York: Random House, 1959 (1550).

Veblen, T. *The theory of the leisure class.* New York: Mentor Books, 1953 (1899).

Warner, W. L. *American life: Dream and reality.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Yankee city. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.

Washburn, S. L. Speculations on the interrelations of the history of tools and biological evolution. In J. N. Spuhler (Ed.), *The evolution of man's capacity for culture.* Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1959.

Weber, M. *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.* New York: Scribner, 1958 (1934).

Werner, H. The concept of development from a comparative and organismic point of view. In D. Harris (Ed.), *The concept of development.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957.

White, L., Jr. *Medieval technology and social change.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Winnicott, D. W. *Collected papers.* New York: Basic Books, 1958 (1951).

Playing and reality. New York: Basic Books, 1971.

Wolfe, Tom. *The painted word.* New York: Ferrar Straus and Giroux, 1975.

Name index

Subject index