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### PRECIOUS OBJECTS: Manufactured Stories, Strata Serving Set

Evan Alton Hutker  
*Syracuse University*

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**PRECIOUS OBJECTS:  
Manufactured Stories  
Strata Serving Set**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of  
the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
May 2012

Honors Capstone Project in Industrial and Interaction Design

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Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date: April 25, 2012

## Abstract

My Capstone work explores the way an object can capture the essences of the people and events that it experiences, thereby creating sentimental value for the user. The project is composed of a research phase and a design phase; these two phases cumulated in a research document and a product design.

My research phase began by exploring the value created in the relationship between users and their precious objects. At the core of this relationship is the importance of an object's provenance. Substances can be duplicated but history cannot. We will always value and desire to be in contact with the essence of an original. We preserve the essences and memories of others and ourselves in the objects that we touch. The recorded provenance of an object reveals the story of its owner.

From my research, I found that there are three main themes in the stories that users tell about their precious objects: the object has contacted an individual who is significant to the user, it has touched the user in some way, or it has experienced an important event.

This conclusion informed the brief for the product design, which was to create a product that physically changes to record the stories of the people, places, and events that it has experienced.

My design is a response to the way we currently record memories by digitally capturing and recording our experiences as they occur. Shared online, these digital photographs, videos, and play lists no longer have a physical reference.

The Strata serving set stores these digital memories, allowing the physical object to tell its own story. The set is composed of a cheese board, a cracker bowl, and a cheese knife. Each object is a separate study on how this system can be mechanically applied; this potential application of this system is not limited to these three objects.

Each object is physically altered by the addition of 'jewels,' which are glass, wood, or acrylic attachments. These jewels are digital storing devices that receive and store digital media wirelessly from smart recording devices such as cameras, phones, and computers. The buildup of these layers of jewels and stories create a strata of memories and stories. The traditional and natural materials gain a patina from a lifetime of use; it is designed to become a family heirloom.

The Strata cheese set is designed to gain sentimental value in the eyes of the user by storing his/her stories and memories. By creating stronger bonds to our objects, I believe we will have a more fulfilling relationship with our physical environment and with others.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Carr for being my ‘spirit guide’ throughout this this long process; Eric Holzwarth for helping me stay on track and for interesting conversations; Francesco Nericì helping evaluate my work; and also everyone who let me talk to them about the objects they love most in their lives.

I would particularly like to thank Ana as well as my parents Mark and Carla, who kept encouraging me and put up with me talking about this stuff too much.

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# STORIES

technology of reproduction will make things go away. Walter Benjamin suggested that history, mechanical reproduction emanated parasitic dependence on the real. Artwork in the world... would no longer be important, only the artwork in the world... But there is, by definition, only certain status associated with in contact with the artists... history, as it came into existence, impressive than the technology that explain this history that explain away." (p.140)

## WHY ORIGINALS

Bloom, Paul. *How Pleasure Works*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2009. 25.2011

### QUOTE

"In the last century, philosophers have argued that the technology of reproduction will make things go away. Walter Benjamin suggested that history, mechanical reproduction emanated parasitic dependence on the real. Artwork in the world... would no longer be important, only the artwork in the world... But there is, by definition, only certain status associated with in contact with the artists... history, as it came into existence, impressive than the technology that explain this history that explain away." (p.140)

THESIS  
MANUFACTURED  
STORIES

Evan Hutker  
2011



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## FORWARD

I have grown up watching my father, the architect, design and build beautiful homes, buildings, and spaces for his clients. Ingrained in my mind is his mantra “build once well.” This is one of the ways that he seeks to create a structure that will become an heirloom in his client’s family. His goal is to increase the “Life Equity” of the building, which describes the relationship between the building and its residents as a family and culture changes over time.

To him, these two elements of “build once well” and “Life Equity” are a large part of creating ‘heirlooms to live in.’ That is, spaces that will bring together, respond to, and help define a family’s dynamic for generations.

As the comedian George Carlin once said, “Home is where you keep your stuff while you’re out getting other stuff.” Despite his satire, Carlin points out that in much the same way that spaces hold meaning and purpose in our lives, so too do the objects and things that we fill those spaces with.

In the English language there is a separate word for when a house becomes more than just a shelter: Home. I don’t know that we have a word for an object that gains this sort of emotional investment. This work is part of my search for that word.



Towards the discussion of precious objects, I think it’s important to define a line between an object and a possession. An object is any entity that has a defined physicality. A possession, as I am using the term, is an object with significant value to a specific person or a culture. Possession is not yet the proper term for this idea as it doesn’t evoke the same feelings that ‘home’ does for shelters. It will do for now.

**PRECIOUS OBJECTS**  
POSSESSION VALUE

## A PRECIOUS OBJECT IS A POSSESSION THAT SOMEONE HAS A DEEP EMOTIONAL CONNECTION WITH.

As humans, we've evolved with objects. We've been using objects even before we were Homo Sapiens. In an article entitled *Domesticated Cyborgs*, Kevin Kelly, a technologist and co-founder of Wired Magazine argues; "Our ancestors first chipped stone scrapers 2.5 million years ago to give themselves claws. By about 250,000 years ago they devised crude techniques for cooking, or pre-digesting, with fire. Cooking acts as a supplemental external stomach." Once we had gained this artificial organ, we could evolve smaller and smaller teeth, and expanded our diet. Our invention altered our genetics.

We don't use objects because we are human. We are human because we use objects.

Using objects is just as much a part of the experience of being human as are culture, society, and death. Kelly continues: "If technology is an extension of humans, it is not an extension of our genes but of our minds. Technology is therefore the extended body for ideas" (Kelly, 2010). Technology, or objects that we create are symbiotic with us; they are part of the human organism; they are a projection of our minds onto the exterior reality of the world. We have evolved away from living without; they are now as much a part of our bodies as are

our limbs or organs. The study of the way we interact with our objects now becomes a study kinesthetics: how we move these 'limbs' says a lot about who we are and how we perceive and experience life.

There are several spectra describing the way we value and interact with objects. At one extreme we have museums and churches that protect objects of historical value, special collections, and religious idols, while at the other extreme we have dumps where we throw our disposable razors and old refrigerators.

At one extreme we have TV shows about people who horde objects in their homes often past the point of sanitation or sanity, and at the other extreme we have mendicant sects swearing off all worldly possessions.

At one extreme we have technological objects that are so complex, and have had so many people involved in the process of their creation that they seem to be magic; they are un-makable and even un-repairable by any one individual. At the other extreme we have the few possessions that Gandhi carried with him, almost all of which he made himself from natural materials. In between these extremes we have the values of heirlooms, sustainability, longevity, quality, craft, repair, authenticity, patina,

and even the very concept of ownership.

If we take the subject a step further, we can examine the objects that we elevate above ourselves. What about the objects we bow before? That we put behind glass or bars? The objects that we can't touch, or that only certain people can? Why do we swear on the bible, die protecting the flag, or fight over burning either? An object can take up as much or more space in our minds than it does in our world.

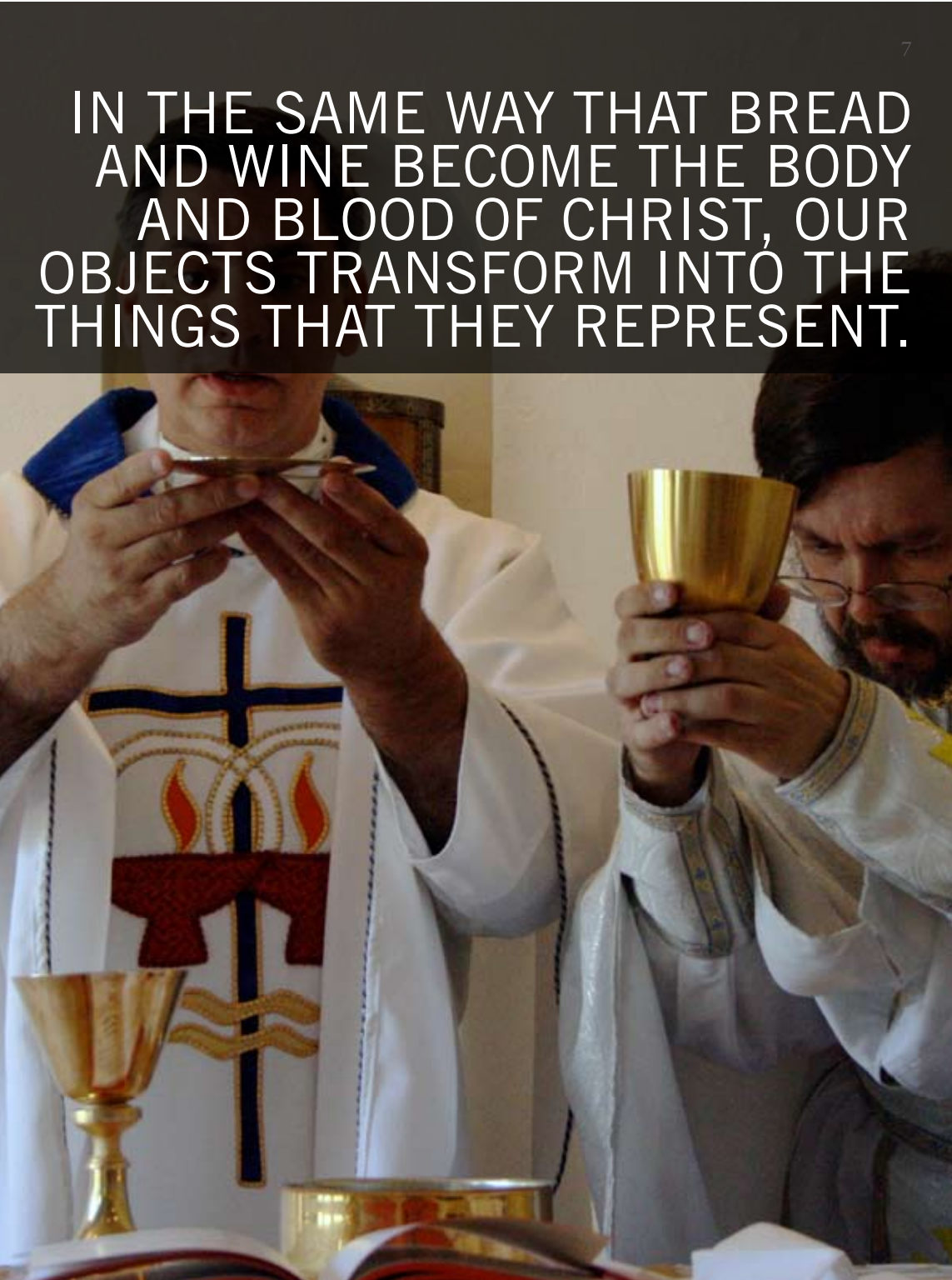
How we treat objects also tells us a lot about what we value in our society. From the aspect of religion, in the bible, God says "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (NIV, Gen. 1:26). This Abrahamic concept of man's god-like dominion over the earth speaks to the 'western' ideals of capitalism and consumption. This ideal directly contrasts the 'eastern' Shinto belief in Kami, the idea that every earthly object has its own spirit, and should be respected. Even within the practices of religion, objects are essential to ritual: vestments, imagery, idols, crucifixes, rosaries, and prayer rugs all have coded metaphysical meanings. We use objects to represent even the most intangible of ideas.

Not only do we use objects to represent ideas, but we also personify objects, giving them human qualities. The play between object and idea is the basis for branding: we use the objects we own to define us, and show others our personalities.

In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard proposes that there are four ways that we can value an object. The first is functional value, or the objects instrumental purpose. The second is its exchange value; what it is worth in time, money, or trade. The third is symbolic value; this is the value that a subject assigns an object in relation to another subject. The fourth is sign value, which is the value of the object within a system of objects and the ideas it signifies. This is all to say that an object can never be read as just an object as it is innately covered in layers of cultural and personal meaning. Baudrillard argues that because of these layers, 'true reality' no longer exists: nothing is simply what it is.

These are all just some of the elements that make up the broad subject of precious objects. My definition of a 'precious object' is something a person has a truly deep emotional connection with. It is something that we assign more value than its utility or purpose suggests. When we invest ourselves either personally or culturally in a common object, it is transubstantiated into something more than its mere physical existence; it creates meaning.

I'm interested in what makes us love the things we own, or covet the things we don't. How do we assign value to an object? How do we invest ourselves in an object? And are there common characteristics in the objects that are so important to us? In short, how and why do precious objects exist?



IN THE SAME WAY THAT BREAD AND WINE BECOME THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST, OUR OBJECTS TRANSFORM INTO THE THINGS THAT THEY REPRESENT.

## MAP OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

### VALUE

Objective v. Subjective

### ATTACHMENT OBJECTS

Safety  
Childhood

### AESTHETICS

'It works better because it looks better.'  
Positive feedback

### UNIQUE

One of a kind, Irreplaceable  
Art

## PRECIOUS OBJECTS

### SUSTAINABILITY

The most sustainable object is one you never have to replace

### UTILITY V. FUNCTION

An object is worth the function it can perform  
'Rational' theory of value  
Diamond rings are valuable because they have no utility.

### PLEASURE

Sensation

### MATERIALS

Rare materials, gold, ivory,  
Tactile or aesthetics

### THE 'ESSENCE OF AN OBJECT'

Provenance  
Contagion Theory  
Object as Individual  
Religious Relics

### MEANING

What does the object say about us?  
What does it say to readers?  
What was the makers intent?

### ENDOWMENT EFFECT

School Pride and Nationalism  
Ownership

## ESSENCE

### CONTAGION THEORY

Collectors  
JFK's golf clubs, George Clooney's Sweater -Bloom

### NAMING AND OBJECT AS INDIVIDUAL

Cognitively treat object as a person  
Theseus' Ship: What is the essence of an object?  
Identical twins are different people!

### PATINA

Football helmet scars  
Endowment effect  
Antique roadshow

### HEIRLOOM

Passed down  
Contains essence of previous owner  
Contagion Theory

### AGE

Old v. New... We value both

### BUSINESS PLAN

Toms 1 for 1 shoes  
Further Soaps and Candles

### CHARITY

(RED) Products

## STORY

### CRAFT V. MANUFACTURE

Do we care about this difference?

### HOW IT WAS MADE

Machine v. Hand

### FORM

Relationship between process and form?

### HOW WAS IT DESIGNED?

Nervous System  
Ross Lovegrove

### PROCESS

Blast Stools  
PeakT Noise table  
Algorithms  
Breeding Tables

### THEORY OF STORY

W. Benjamin  
J. Baudrillard  
D. Dutton  
Bloom  
Old Way of Seeing

### BRAND

"Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind" -Shakespeare  
What does the product say about who you are?  
Owner takes on the brand values: Abercrombie rejects the Jersey Shore

### PURCHASE EXPERIENCE

Apple, Malls, Retail, Marketing

### AESTHETIC THEORY

Wabi Sabi (imperfection and rustic)  
Western Theory of 'perfection' (greek Kouros Sculptures)  
Modernism

### EXPERIMENTS

Provenance  
Patina  
Object Stories  
Interviews

### CUSTOMIZATION

Exactly how you want it  
Is it really unique?  
Or just one of a set of possibilities?

### IKEA EFFECT

Investing oneself in a product by assembly  
Relationship with yourself, the maker

### QUALITY

How do we judge this?  
Who makes it?

### ART

No Utility, but lots of story and value  
Photographs v. Painting -Walter Benjamin  
Value from human creation?

## ESSENTIAL OBJECTS

Purpose is perhaps the primacy of an object. When we encounter a new object, its use is the first factor we use to identify it. To make the world easier to understand, our minds group objects by creating mental symbols for similar objects. The characteristics associated with this symbol then help to define the individual members of the group. Basically, our mind uses stereotypes as shortcuts to identify objects. One of the main criteria that delineate the groupings is function. If we don't know what an object does, we don't know what it is. We can know its properties, such as material and shape, but we won't truly understand it until we understand its function.

Several years ago, I encountered this object. I had no clue what it was; I had never seen it before. I thought it was a beautiful object; I could identify the materials and the form, both of which told me about its relative worth and construction as an object. It was just sculpture until I learned what it was created to do. It is a pipe stand.

This object did not fit any of my mental gestalts of object symbols. This specific function is foreign to my generation meaning that gestalts are culturally coded. I couldn't understand the object because I had never encountered this function.





## TOOLS ARE VALUED AS EMBODIMENTS OF THE FUTURE EXPERIENCES THEY ENABLE.

I consider the pipe stand an ‘essential object.’ It was designed and exists to exclusively perform a single utility action. The utility of an object is its work or tool potential, while the function of an object is the broader reason that it exists. The form of these objects is a direct response to doing no more and no less than that specific utility action. With the pipe stand, the materials are used in simple and honest ways; the bronze is structural ballast, while the cane wrapping protects the wood of the pipe. There’s something beautiful in this simplicity.

The value of an essential object then, is not only the simplicity of the design solution, but also what the function allows you to do. A bottle opener may be just a piece of metal, but it lets you open a beer at the end of your day.

All of these bottle openers are essential: they have a variety of forms, which sometimes obscures their utility, but ultimately the only rational operation that they can perform is opening a bottle. Their value then, is their simplicity, their wit, and their position as gatekeepers or enablers to an experience. These tools are valued as embodiments of the future experiences they enable.

## INTANGIBLE CONCEPTS ARE OFTEN EMBODIED IN PHYSICAL OBJECTS.

At the other end of this spectrum is the intentional absence of utility, which also creates value. The psychologist Geoffrey Miller asks, rhetorically, “Why should a man give a woman a useless diamond engagement ring, when he could buy her a nice big potato, which she could at least eat?” (Bloom, 2010). His answer is that the lack of utility and the expense of the gift is the very point of the object. It has a very important function without any utility.

A lack of utility shifts the value of the object to the meaning it represents. The purpose of a diamond ring is a symbol for the cultural convention of marriage; it is a way to create a physical connection to a mental idea. Many objects in our daily lives exist as physical embodiments of mental concepts. These symbols must be based in a cultural vocabulary so that others may read their meanings.



As value is such a subjective and individual concept, we have needed to develop systems that allow us to exchange this value. The most common way to do this is through money. By basing an arbitrary and intangible concept such as worth on an arbitrary and tangible object such as gold or bills, we have created a type of language that we can use to talk communicate relative value. Thus money has become a physical symbol for the idea of value.

The language of money allows us to communicate value, but by limiting the conversation of value to money, we could lose some of the richness of individual sentiments.

In reaction to this disparity over value measurement, the Mexican Government began a program that allows artists to pay their taxes with their own artwork. José San Cristóbal Larrea, the director of the program says, “We’re helping out artists while building a cultural inheritance for the country.”

To measure what’s owed to the government, “There’s a sliding scale: If you sell five artworks in a year, you must give the government one. Sell 21 pieces, the government gets six. A 10-member jury of artists ensures that no one tries to unload junk” (Hawley, 2010).

The organization has collected some very expensive pieces by artists such as Diego Rivera. The government doesn’t sell them, but keeps them as ‘cultural heritage objects.’ This is a systematic acknowledgement of the relative value of objects as well as the subjective value of artwork. The Mexican Government has avoided defining the value of these objects through the language of money and is recognizing their value as part of the Mexican cultural heritage. This is a radical idea in government, but for some reason it seems to make so much sense on a practical level.

At the same time that the Mexican Government is acknowledging the subjective value of art, there are still many instances where this doesn’t work. Accepting artwork as payment can create bizarre disparities. In this exchange by the humorist David Thorne with a creditor, he tries to pay his bills with a digital image he has created.

We see the humor in this situation because of our innate value for physical things; a digital image does not exist in ‘reality.’ This reality disconnect is the major difference between paying the Mexican Government with physical artwork and paying with MS Paint artwork, yet this difference is the divide between a practical solution and a ridiculous situation.

Thorne drives this home when he asks for his artwork back; we all know that it now exists in multiple inboxes and can never truly be ‘given back.’ As there are copies of it, it is not the original or authentic artwork, there’s no point in giving it back as it has no value. In a digital media, it is near impossible to establish the authenticity of an original.

**From:** Jane Gilles  
**Date:** Wednesday 8 Oct 2008 12:19pm  
**To:** David Thorne  
**Subject:** Overdue account

Dear David,

Our records indicate that your account is overdue by the amount of \$233.95. If you have already made this payment please contact us within the next 7 days to confirm payment has been applied to your account and is no longer outstanding.

Yours sincerely, Jane Gilles

**From:** David Thorne  
**Date:** Wednesday 8 Oct 2008 12:37pm  
**To:** Jane Gilles  
**Subject:** Re: Overdue account

Dear Jane,

I do not have any money so am sending you this drawing I did of a spider instead. I value the drawing at \$233.95 so trust that this settles the matter.

Regards, David.



**From:** Jane Gilles  
**Date:** Thursday 9 Oct 2008 10:07am  
**To:** David Thorne  
**Subject:** Overdue account

Dear David,

Thank you for contacting us. Unfortunately we are unable to accept drawings as payment and your account remains in arrears of \$233.95. Please contact us within the next 7 days to confirm payment has been applied to your account and is no longer outstanding.

Yours sincerely, Jane Gilles

**From:** David Thorne  
**Date:** Thursday 9 Oct 2008 10:32am  
**To:** Jane Gilles  
**Subject:** Re: Overdue account

Dear Jane,

Can I have my drawing of a spider back then please.

Regards, David.

## HUMANS INNATELY APPRECIATE PURITY AND HONESTY IN AN OBJECT'S EXISTENCE.

Material is one of the hallmarks of authenticity. The physicality, the touch, look, properties, as well as the cultural and personal meanings behind wood versus metal, plastic, or gold affect the way we perceive an object. Each material has a history, and its tradition of use, its manufacturing constraints, the difficulty of obtaining it, where it comes from, and its stylistic associations all impact our reactions to its value.

As humans, we are obsessed with material; we innately want to know what things really are and what they are really made of. We are explicitly aware of our interest in essences. In *How Pleasure Works*, the psychologist Paul Bloom proposes that, "This interest shows up in the curiosity that many people have about the underlying intentions of an artist or storyteller and, in particular, about whether a story is real or make-believe...." Just as we care about the division between fact and fiction in stories, our culture is fascinated in knowing "who is using plastic surgery and Botox and hair plugs and the like. In general, modern attempts to obscure what we see as the real person often trouble us, morally and aesthetically, and this is reflected in the unease we feel about various physical and psychological enhancements" (Bloom, 2010).

Material authenticity is a large part of value. We want to be dealing with the real and the original of everything. There is a visceral pleasure of experiencing the source or the authentic: concerts still sell out despite the availability of MP3s in your pocket.

Humans innately appreciate purity and honesty in an object's existence. We value the tradition of a material as well. Style and material are often grouped together as technology defines the limits of a style.



## AESTHETICS

After modernism, the idea of 'style' has become a charged subject. In the modernist/postmodernist battle to determine the place of form and its relationship to either symbol or function in design, a deeper issue was being hashed out: the value of authenticity versus artifice. If, as Robert Venturi proposed, a house could look like a duck, it did not matter what the materials of its construction were. A building's appearance was no longer based on the way it functioned, but as the expression of symbol.

Regardless of who is right, the way an object looks expresses its place in the visual language system of a culture. The aesthetics of a style are akin to the object's personality, what it says to a reader rubs off on the owner. We use our objects to show off who we are.

My high school lacrosse coach used to say about our team uniforms: "Look good, play good." The way things look defines our perception of them; we act on our beliefs and they reinforce themselves. As the adage goes: you only get to make a first impression once. The ways things are first presented deeply affect our relationship with them.

Often, reality takes a back seat to our perceptions of a situation. In a paper called *Can People Distinguish Pate from Dog Food?* psychologists found that people can't. "If you grind up a product called 'Canned Turkey & Chicken Formula for Puppies/Active Dogs' in a food processor and garnish it with parsley, people cannot reliably distinguish it from duck liver mousse, pork liver pate, liverwurst, or Spam" (Bloom, 2010). This is how our beliefs affect our preferences; what we think we know about an object or situation doesn't change the experience itself, but alters the value we give to that experience, and colors the way we talk and think about it. If something looks like it works well, or is a piece of junk, we will assume it works the way it looks.

Our sensations are still important in experiencing the world around us, but they have always been influenced by our beliefs. This leads to a mutually reinforcing cycle.

This is exactly what my lacrosse coach believed: if we looked like we were good at lacrosse, we would believe it and play better, while our opponents would also believe it and play worse. Our perception of an object, which includes our knowledge of it as well as the cultural symbolism associated with it, becomes the reality of that object. The way we see it determines the way we think it is.



Unknown Ceramicist, Syracuse University, NY

**Japanese Tea Bowl, 2008, Syracuse, NY**  
Earthenware Ceramic, Glaze

In the Japanese Tea Ceremony tradition, a tea bowl becomes more beautiful as it shows its age. Cracks that have been filled are not signs of imperfection, but celebrations of the bowl's long life.

This bowl has been used by Evan consistently throughout his collegiate career; caffeinating him both in and out of studio. Over this time, the bowl has gained immense sentimental value; its crazy glued cracks representing a history of loving use. The bowl is more than just a vehicle for caffeination; it is a reminder of the inherent beauty of simplicity and natural materials as well as the importance of permanence of objects despite the passing of time.

On loan from Evan Hutker, 2011

## DISPLAY CASE

We are used to seeing objects behind glass cases in museums and in jewelry stores. These are conventions that communicate the worth of an object by altering our perception of that object. By limiting our access and contact to an object, or elevating it above other objects an object can gain an aura of veneration.

We are used to seeing valuable objects treated this way. Expensive materials, luxury items, rare artifacts are agreed to be valuable and when celebrated in this way fit with our cultural understanding of their worth.

However, what about the possessions that we value personally? Our objects with immense sentimental value rarely have a cultural value. In our minds these possessions are already highlighted and exist on mental pedestals, but I wanted to know what this would look like in the physical world. Here are two examples of my possessions, as they would exist if they were in the museum of Evan Hutker.

The pedestal acknowledges our relationship with a common precious object. We still have access to these objects but they become distanced from us in a way reminiscent a museum. There is an element of lust that returns to the object/human relationship. This plinth is also a media to showcase the things we value to others, helping project our personality through our values instead of our consumption.



Anheuser-Busch, 1852, St. Louis, MO

**Busch Beer, 2011, St. Louis, MO**  
Aluminum Can, Beer, Realtree Camouflage

This Can of Busch beer was part of a 12 pack of beers that were bought on a 'beer run' to a local Hess station, which occurred on a Tuesday evening in October. The beers were drank by Kurtis Schiackenberg, Dan Lütsey and Evan Hutker while they worked on various Design Projects. While they were not as productive as they could have been, this experience was an endearing moment of bonding between the friends. Although this Busch represents just part of the friendship that these individuals share, it is also a larger symbol for the power of shared experiences to connect individuals.

On loan from Evan Hutker, 2011



## WE ARE OBJECT VOYEURS, TRYING TO PEEK AT THE TRUE ESSENCE OF MATTER.

Our personal history with a specific object and our perceptions of that relationship affects itself. This theory is called the ‘Endowment Effect,’ which suggests that our personal history with an object make us value it more. Paul Bloom gives the example, “Suppose you ask someone how much she would pay for a coffee cup, and suppose she says \$5. You take the money and hand over the cup, and then ask how much she would take to sell the cup back.... people usually won’t take \$6 for it. Its worth increases radically. It’s different now. It’s hers, and this raises its value- a phenomenon known as the endowment effect. Indeed, the longer a person owns an object, the more valuable it becomes” (Bloom, 2010). We want to feel good about our choices, so we inflate the value of the ones we’ve made, and denigrate the one’s we haven’t.

Ownership is one of the more powerful relationships between object and user. Owning something is an outward expression of who we are, our values, and the choices we make. When we own an object, we are defining ourselves.

The meaning that is associated with an object transfers its meaning to the owner. All the factors so far, utility, aesthetics, material, authenticity, endowment, ownership, and history all form the essence of an object. In our quest to find authenticity we are really looking for the true nature of an object. We want to know about it beyond its physical accidents. We are object voyeurs, trying to peek at the true essence of matter.





## ESSENCES SHIP OF THESEUS

“...the Ship of Theseus - that was made entirely of wood when it came into being. One day a wooden plank is cast off and replaced by an aluminum one. Since the change is only slight, there is no question as to the survival of the Ship of Theseus. We still have the ship we had before.... The changes continue, in a similar way, and finally the Ship of Theseus is made entirely of aluminum. The aluminum ship, one may well argue, is the wooden ship we started with, for the ship we started with survived each particular change, and identity, after all, is transitive.

But what happened to the discarded wooden planks? Consider this possibility, suggested by Thomas Hobbes: ‘if some man had kept the old planks as they were taken out, and by putting them afterwards together in the same order, had again made a ship of them, this, without doubt, had also been the same numerical ship with that which was at the beginning’ and so there would have been two ships numerically the same, which is absurd.’...one might well argue that the reassembled wooden ship is the ship we started with.” (Chisholm, 1976)

This is the logic puzzle that the Greek historian Plutarch created to think about the essence of objects. Is Theseus’ ship the replaced ship or the reassembled one? Is the identity of the object contained in its material or its essence? Regardless of the answer, the point is that we care about this issue. If we acted only upon ‘reality,’ it would not matter which was the original ship because there is no object essence in reality; there is only matter.



## PROVENANCE

Provenance describes the life of an object, from its earliest known existence all the way to its current state; this history is a guide to the objects authenticity and quality. It is one of the most important factors in antiques dealing. David Rudd runs Dalton's antique shop, one of the premiere dealers of authentic Arts and Crafts Movement furniture, much of which is over 100 years old. On preserving the value of antique furniture Rudd states that, "Provenance is very important to keep. The pedigree should stay with the piece. You have to know where it came from and where it has been so that you can ensure the history and value. The fact that it is a family heirloom doesn't increase its sale value, but it can help to ensure the pedigree of the piece. Just like a purebred dog, you have to know and document its history."

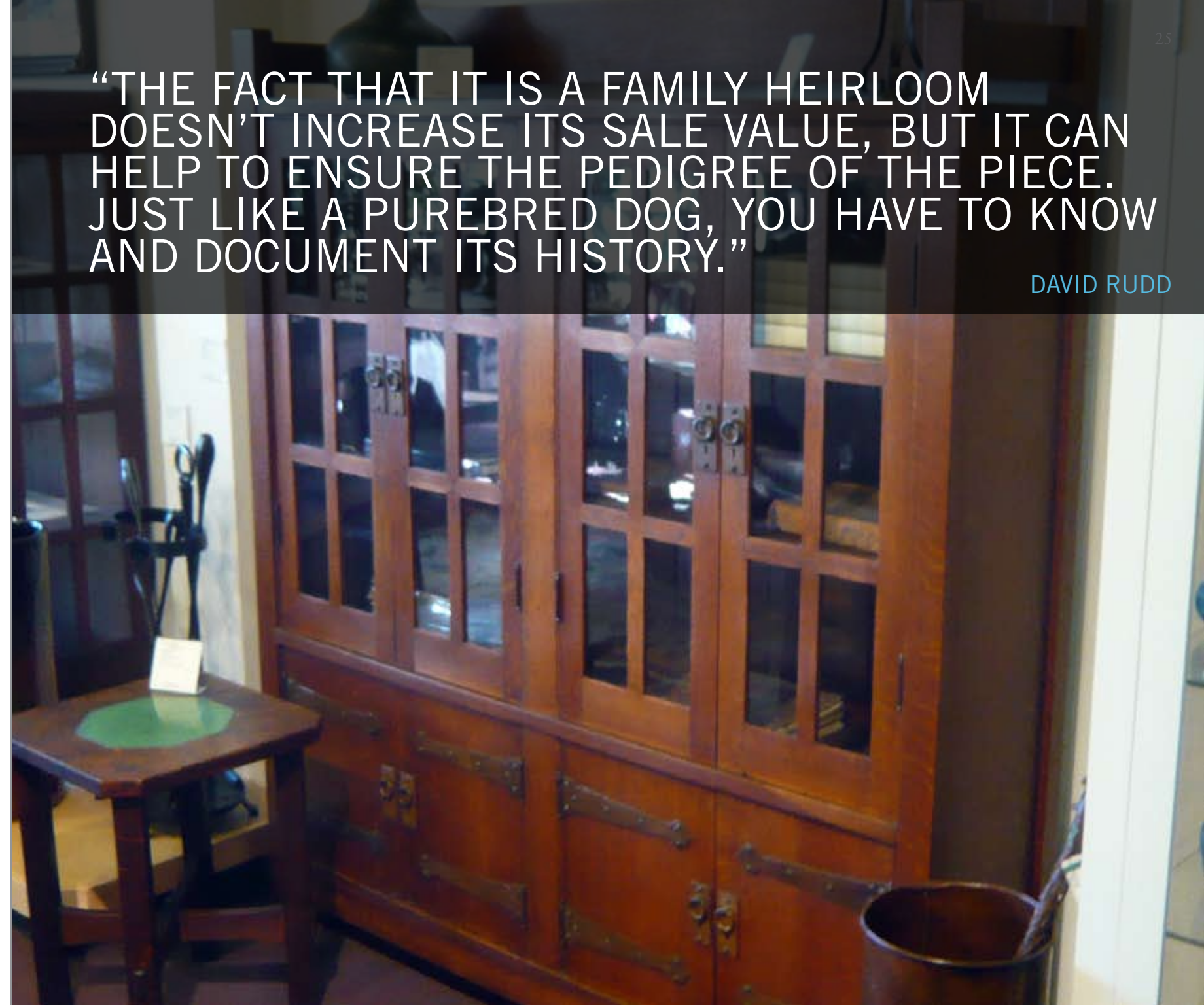
This information needs to be kept secure throughout the piece's life. This is particularly difficult with Arts and Crafts Movement furniture, as it went out of style in the 50's and people stopped keeping track of the provenance.

When evaluating a piece to purchase for the store, Rudd looks at several things.

1. Maker. Rudd needs to know where and when the piece comes from and what it is. There is a pyramid of makers, the most sought after are more rare, and as they become more common they are less valuable.
2. Condition. This is paramount to the resale value. However, apologies can be made for certain designs and makers. Original finishes fetch a higher prices, while refinished pieces go for a lot less.
3. Aesthetics. Rudd evaluates how good the piece looks as a design, and how it fits into the idea of the Arts and Crafts movement.
4. Patina. The wood choice and graining must look good the wear and patina.

"THE FACT THAT IT IS A FAMILY HEIRLOOM DOESN'T INCREASE ITS SALE VALUE, BUT IT CAN HELP TO ENSURE THE PEDIGREE OF THE PIECE. JUST LIKE A PUREBRED DOG, YOU HAVE TO KNOW AND DOCUMENT ITS HISTORY."

DAVID RUDD



## PATINA

The patina of an object is the surface appearance that an object acquires over time and use. It is often a criterion for collectors of vintage objects. When antiques dealer Margaret Doyle is looking for new pieces she is interested only in pieces with “robust form and great patina” (Moonan, 2011). In the last few years there has been a surge in the popularity of vintage and patina.

Major retailers have caught onto this trend and are beginning to sell vintage or handmade objects, “or produce items with that look.... West Elm is promoting items by Etsy vendors, Restoration Hardware has commissioned artisans to design products that look antique, and Pottery Barn is selling vintage pieces like pickling jars from Hungary and pillow covers made from old grain sacks” (Weinstein, 2011).

As the popularity of ‘one-of-a-kind’ things begins to spread, some decorators argue that they are becoming ‘design uniform.’ This loops back to the postmodern/modernism debate; to be ‘authentic’ does something have to be old, or is looking old just as good? Are these objects artificially imitating the style of patina, or can we manufacture a history of wear into a product? The question remains as to where we draw the line as individuals or as a culture between authentic and artificial.



## PATINA

There is a growing culture of collectors looking for “old stuff, rustic stuff, American stuff, stuff that was designed, above all, to be useful, but whose handsomeness grows more burnished with each passing year.” This culture acknowledges that objects that were ‘built once well’ get better and more beautiful as they age. They celebrate the era from the late 19th century through the 1940’s when American objects were built to last. “It is a simpler,

more rustic and American-inflected style that... emphasizes objects that are well-made, durable and useful: wire storage baskets, machine-age metal tools, leather couches, canvas bags, colorful woolen blankets and interiors made of barn wood” (Weinstein, 2011). This is an aesthetic style built around objects that will grow and age more beautiful over time.

“WHEN WE’RE REFINISHING A PIECE, WE SOMETIMES TRY TO REINTRODUCE SOME HIGHLIGHTS WHERE THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN WEAR. WE DON’T DISTRESS THE PIECE, BUT WE MIGHT MAKE IT LIGHTER WHERE THE HANDS GO.”

DAVID RUDD

### STATUE OF LIBERTY NIKE DUNKS

As home furnishing companies are beginning to pick up on the appeal of patina, consumer goods are noticing. This NIKE high-top sneaker, inspired by the Statue of Liberty, incorporates a layer of green, which is meant to rub off with wear, exposing the copper underneath, similar to the composition of its namesake. The patina is manufactured into the product, and is designed to manifest at an accelerated rate.

These sneakers probably pose a conundrum to collectors: keep them mint, distress them and wear them down to the copper, or distress them a bit before sealing the surface?



### BRASS PEN

This variation of the common, disposable ballpoint pen is made by Minimalux from a single sleeve of brass. “The pen is not plated or lacquered in any way, thus allowing its surface finish to change with use and age - eventually developing a rich natural patina and becoming uniquely personal to its owner” (Minimalux, 2011).

The material of this pen embraces the inevitable patina of use as part of the design. The product comes without the prestige of the patina, and only time and use will create it. It is a time-release product, celebrating durability and quality as a status symbol.



## ACCELERATED PATINA

Inspired by the process of patina expressing the use history of object, I created a system of accelerated aging. By creating stickers out of thermal cash register paper I could apply this heat and pressure surface to a variety of surfaces. Over a several week period I collected use data of several objects.

One of the more interesting results was my water canteen. Along with the black marks from scratches and hitting the floor several times, the paper formed a corrugated texture from repeatedly being stuffed into my backpack. This patina has resulted from a specific repeated action.



## ACCELERATED PATINA

I also created 8.5x11 sheets of 'patina paper' with the thermal cash register paper. I stuck these onto the face of a clipboard and did all of my writing over that surface. Over the course of a week the patterns of my pen strokes began to become apparent. It would have taken years of writing on the clipboard to create this accelerated recorded history.

This experiment changed the static user/object relationship to one of give and take. The surface clipboard was responding to my actions upon it, generating a record of our interaction, enhancing my relationship with the object.



## PRODUCT ID

To record the macro user/object relationship, the design studio Musta Design created a system called Product ID, which aims to track the stories of individual objects, cataloguing their provenance.

“Product ID is a way of changing the world by giving value to the things we buy, own and use. Long-lasting products and furniture have stories to tell and lifespan to take care of. Product ID gives information needed in recycling and reusing of materials” (productid.info, 2011).



A template for the Product ID form, featuring a black arrow-shaped logo with the text 'PRODUCT ID' inside. The form includes fields for 'I got this from', 'manufacturer', 'name', 'design', and 'made in'. Below these is a 'NOTES' section with a 'DATE' column. The footer contains the text 'Everything has a story.' and 'musta design'.



“LOVE LOOKS NOT WITH THE EYES, BUT WITH THE MIND.”  
SHAKESPEARE

## CONTAGION THEORY

An important aspect of an object is its history before it got to you. Where something has been and who it has come into contact with, creates part of its essence. Objects can be vessels that contain the essence of a person, place, or event. This is the concept of ‘souvenir;’ the object is not only a reminder but also a part of the actual thing; not just a component of the remembered subject, but an embodiment of the whole.

This idea that once two things have come in contact with each other, their essences are somehow joined is called Psychological Contagion. “...through physical contact, [certain objects] become imbued with an individual’s essence. It is not merely that the object brings to mind the idea of the person, then; it is that the object actually retains some aspect of the person” (Bloom, 2010). We treat the object as if it were the history of the object itself; the object transubstantiates into the history it represents.

Why else would “Lot 755: a set of golf clubs in a red and black bag with the initials ‘JFK’ monogrammed on the outside. ...[sell] for \$772,500” (Buchwald, 1996)? If the buyer had simply wanted to be reminded of JFK, a poster would have done just fine. Instead, the buyer knows, as any human knows, that there is something different about this set of clubs from any other like it. It has a unique history, which makes it the only one of its kind; through contact, the clubs contain the essence of JFK.

Contagion Theory works in both positive and negative ways. Psychologist Carol Nemeroff offers one example: “If I have my grandmother’s ring versus an exact replica of my grandmother’s ring, my grandmother’s ring is actually better because she was in contact with it — she wore it. So we act like objects — their history is part of the object” (NPR, 2011). However, many states have laws that make real estate agents disclose information about ‘stigmatized’ homes.

Contagion Theory is why we care so much about authenticity and originals. Contagion theory causes us to think of objects as individuals because “Substances can be duplicated’ history cannot” (Bloom, 2010).

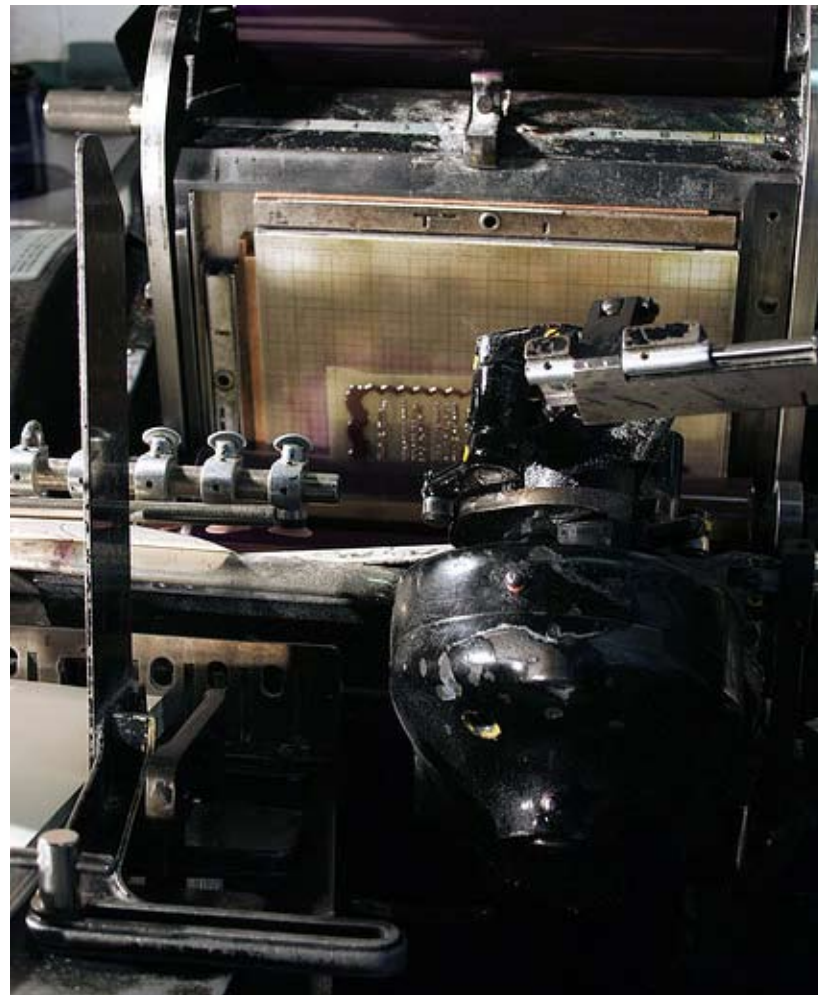


## ORIGINALS

In the last century, philosophers believed that new technologies of mechanical production would end our preference for originals. Walter Benjamin argued that “for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the world of art from its parasitic dependence on the real.” Andre Malraux suggested that “originals would no longer be important, because every museum could contain all the artwork in the world....”

Now, over 170 years after the invention of the Daguerreotype, originals are as important as ever. By definition, there can only ever be one original. It will always have a certain status above copies as it has come into contact with the artist. “Most of all, the original has a special history, as it came into existence through a creative process, far more impressive than the technical skill of a forger. It is our sensitivity to this history that explains why the love of originals isn’t going to go away” (Bloom, 2010).

Regardless of how ubiquitous mass production and reproduction has become, we will always value and desire to be in contact with the essence of the original.



BECAUSE OF THE WAY OUR MINDS WORK, WE COGNITIVELY IDENTIFY VALUABLE OBJECTS AS INDIVIDUALS, IN THE SAME WAY THAT WE IDENTIFY OTHER PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS.

## OBJECT AS INDIVIDUAL

When an object is valuable and has a story, we think about it as an individual. We focus on individuals for everything that is valuable to us. Bloom argues that, “This is how we reason about artwork, consumer products, and sentimental objects. If I owned a painting by Chagall, I would not be pleased if someone switched it with a duplicate, even if I couldn’t tell the difference. I want that painting, not merely something that looks just like it. A knockoff Rolex is going to be worth less than the real one, regardless of how good it is...”

This treatment of things with identical properties as individuals has evolutionary roots. The evolution of love (which kept us faithful to our companion and our offspring alive) is one of the main reasons we irrationally crave the authentic: we will protect our child before another even if they look similar. We treat important objects in our lives as individuals, because in a sense we fall in love with them. We do not base our love on their superficial properties, but on ‘who they are inside,’ on their essence.

In object valuation “the individuals are not social beings, but we tend to think of them as if they were” (Bloom, 2010).

We behave with certain objects as if they were people. Because of the way our minds work, we cognitively identify valuable objects as individuals, in the same way that we identify other people as individuals. Although objects can have identical properties, to us their essences make them different.







“STORIES ARE ABOUT PEOPLE,  
AND WE ARE INTERESTED IN  
PEOPLE AND HOW THEY ACT.”

PAUL BLOOM

Humans are innately empathic creatures. We often put ourselves in another person's shoes so that we can understand them better and also to learn from their mistakes or successes. So if individual humans matter, then the objects that we treat as individuals should be very interesting as well. In life, "...everything is either a social being or has been in contact with a social being, and so even the most mundane things have histories. This is their essence. And from some of these objects... this essence is a source of great pleasure" (Bloom, 2010).

SO, WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS,

HOW CAN WE DESIGN UNIQUE, MEANINGFUL,  
AND PERSONAL STORIES INTO MANUFACTURED  
PRODUCTS? CAN THESE STORIES AFFECT THE  
WAY USERS INTERACT WITH PRODUCTS?



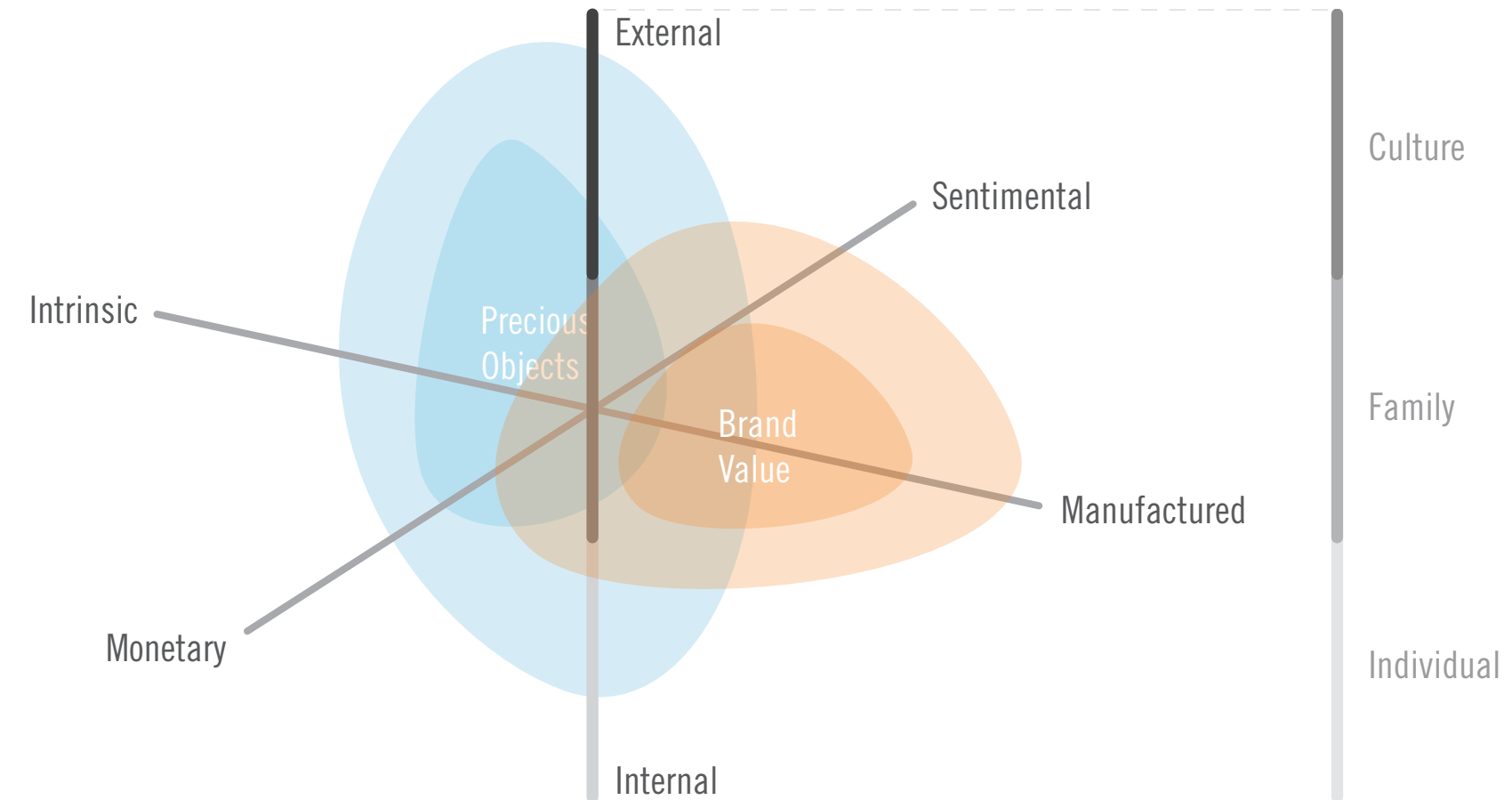


## STORIES & SPECTRA

There are several spectra that can describe an object story. The first spectrum is how the story was created, it could either be manufactured intentionally for a specific purpose, or it could have developed organically without intent or is intrinsic to the object. The next spectrum is between the internal and external nature of the story; the story can be known only to the subject, or to a large group of people or a culture. The last spectrum is similar as it gauges objective or subjective value of a story, which could have sentimental or monetary value. An object story can exist anywhere on these three axes.

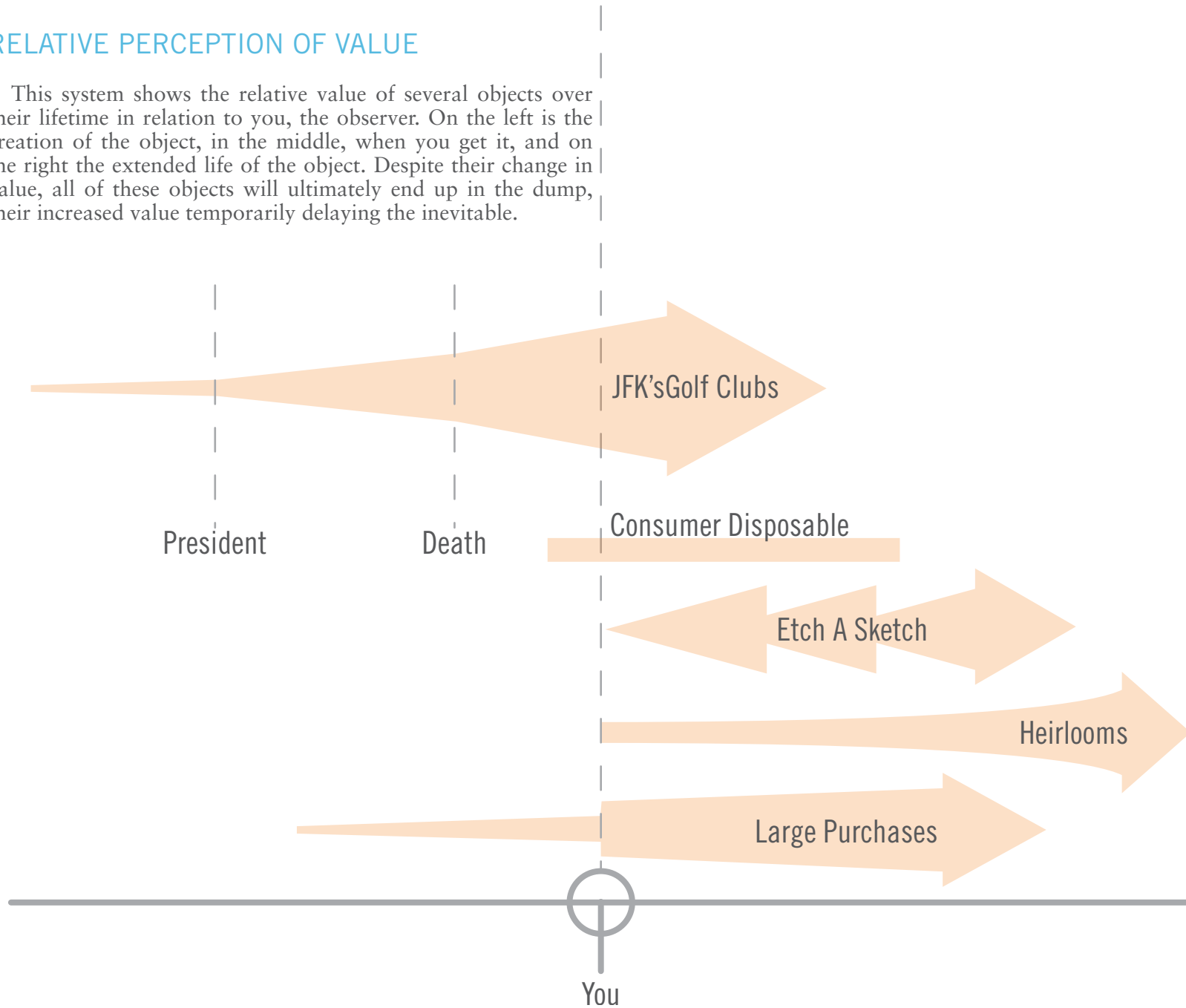
Brand stories exist between the external, manufactured, and monetary factors. A business creates the story around their brand, and makes sure as many people as possible know the story so that they can monetize the object. The opposite of brand would be a story, which is intrinsic, internal, and sentimental. A vacation souvenir is an example of this; it's not expensive and it has personal value not because of what it is, but because of where it was bought. Family heirlooms have similar stories except they are external, as they are known within the family

## THE 3 DIMENSIONS OF STORY VALUE



## RELATIVE PERCEPTION OF VALUE

This system shows the relative value of several objects over their lifetime in relation to you, the observer. On the left is the creation of the object, in the middle, when you get it, and on the right the extended life of the object. Despite their change in value, all of these objects will ultimately end up in the dump, their increased value temporarily delaying the inevitable.



## SIGNIFICANT OBJECTS

*Significant Objects*, a website, is a literary and anthropological experiment, which “demonstrated that the effect of narrative on any given object’s subjective value can be measured objectively.” The creators describe the project as “A talented, creative writer invents a story about an object. Invested with new significance by this fiction, the object should — according to our hypothesis — acquire not merely subjective but objective value.”

The creators purchased a variety of thrift-store objects for an average cost of \$1.25. These items were then auctioned off on eBay; “for item descriptions, short stories purpose-written by over 200 [notable] contributing writers” ([significantobjects.com](http://significantobjects.com), 2011). The objects raised a total of nearly \$8,000, which was distributed to the contributors and to nonprofit creative writing organizations.

This mermaid was originally purchased for \$1.00. It was sold with a story by Tom McCarthy for \$68.00.



## OBJECT STORIES

In this experiment I sent Friends, family, acquaintances, and anyone who would listen to me a short story about a precious object of mine. I asked them to send me back a story of their own based on one of their possessions that they love. I wanted to see the range of objects as well as the rational behind their choices. This is my precious object:

### JAPANESE TEA BOWL

Evan Hutker

I had to buy this bowl at the beginning of my college career for a class about Japanese Art History. At the time, I didn't like it that much, but since then I've come to love it. Not only do I think it is beautiful in its simple and natural materials, but it has kept me caffeinated during many late nights and early mornings working in the studio.

I also love that it has many super-glued cracks in it; it shows how long I've had it. Evidently, in the Japanese Tea tradition, a tea bowl becomes more beautiful as it begins to show its long life. I love the history of the bowl, as well as the fact that it's just a little bit different than what everyone else is drinking coffee from.

After using it consistently for the past 5 years, it's now one of my favorite objects.



### NECKLACE

Ana Mihai



For most people precious jewelry is something to be shown off. This gold necklace from my grandmother is something that I wear only occasionally because though it is precious the feelings it evokes are always bittersweet as I miss my grandmother dearly. It reminds me of her and her endless selflessness, as the necklace was hers and she chose to give it to me when she moved back to her home country. Now, though I hardly ever get to see her I can look at the necklace whenever I want and think about her or wear it and feel like she is still close-by. It will always be one of my most precious objects.

## GRANDMA'S JUICER

Dawn High

After Grandma Wolf died, Aunt Juanita put in her basement a box full of stuff from Grandma's house that nobody wanted. I, of course, found a bunch of stuff I wanted and this was one item. It reminds me of the oranges, kumquats, oysters, cypress knees and stuffed alligators Grandma and Grandpa brought us back from Florida at Christmastime. (They'd leave Indiana again after the holiday and return for the summer in spring.) I always cringe when I see cooking shows where the cooks squeeze a lemon half upside-down in their bare hands so the seeds won't get in the food. Well, long ago they invented this handy item which really works because the glass is sharp, it gets all the juice (no need to roll the lemon), lets you know how much juice you have and you can see the seeds (easily removed with a utensil -- or fingers, if you must). It works equally well for oranges and grapefruits. And, it's pretty, too. I keep it on the shelf in Grandma Wolf's glass-front, Duncan Phyfe corner dining room cabinet.



## KEYCHAIN

Dawn High

My second item has been on my keychain for at least 15 years (except when I travel). I use this X-ACTO brand mini matt knife regularly to cut fresh flowers from my yard (and maybe other places) on my way to work, or cut the extremely tight tape and plastic wrap off a rolled-up watercolor print from China in the parking lot of the post office. It's especially good at birthday parties when somebody has to get a tight ribbon off or open heat-sealed plastic packaging encasing a present. I usually cut open Dinah's and Indy's wormer packs with it. I carry my keys at night and I always feel just a little bit more secure with a knife in my hand I can whip around Ninja fashion if need be. I haven't been able to find the blades for it for a long time. Dad sharpened this one a few times. It may be rusty, but the blade just keeps on working for me. And it's always close by when somebody asks, "Anybody got a knife?"



## COMMEMORATIVE COIN

Lawrence ‘Pops’ Hutker

This gold coin was given to me by “you” about 6-7 years ago. It was given to me when I was delivering \$5 for A’s and you had emptied my wallet. I had stated many times that I thought grades and academic excellence was really important and that I wanted my Grandchildren to do well in school. Evan had received one of these medal each year from Falmouth Academy, and he asked me if I would like to have the one he had just received. I have considered the coin a cherished gift for all these years. I told Evan that I would not store it away, it would be in my pocket every day and that I intended to use the coin as a golf ball marker on the golf course. Evan thought that was a good idea, and so did I. That is how I use the coin, and it has given me many opportunities to place it on a green that it may never see again and many that it has seen many times. The coin is much larger than an ordinary golf ball marker, and therefore is usually inquired about. Marking my golf ball with Evan Falmouth Academy award has allowed me to tell the story, many times, of how it to my possession and how proud I am of the Grandson who gave it to me. I will continue to carry my prized possession with great pride—thank you Evan.



## \$5 GOLD PIECE

Janet ‘MawMaw’ Hutker



One of my most precious items is a gold coin. The coin is a \$5 gold piece that is dated 1900 and the coin was given to my father Maynard Hetrick to commemorate his graduation from Ball State College. My father, your Great Grandfather, was a commercial arts teacher and taught for more than 40 years. The coin was one of my parents prized possessions as well, because the only time it was opened and inspected was during the annual spring cleaning. The spring cleaning included opening the cedar chest and re-arranging it ‘s contents, thusly the gold coin was inspected, cleaned and replaced for another time. Upon the death of my parents the gold coin became mine and I did not want to hide it anymore, so I took the coin to the local jeweler and had it mounted into a necklace. I have worn the necklace with pride for many years and upon my death my plan is to bequeath it to your Father Mark.



## MY BED

Mary 'Harly' Hutker

One of the first things I ever designed was my bed. Before our move to Falmouth, Dad and I sat down one night on the Vineyard in our old living room and brainstormed. He gave me one of his black "designing" pens (the ones you had to hold sideways for the ink to come out), and a piece of paper and we sketched out ideas. The frame we designed had cubbies under the mattress to store my knick-knacks and cantilevered nightstands on either side for my lamp and alarm clock. The whole bed was to rest on bright orange six-inch wheels so that I would be able to move it around my new room in endless arrangements. Aside from its design, the material and fabrication has given it sentimental meaning to me. Grandpa Harlan, an engineer turned woodworker, built the frame of wood from our family farm in Indiana. The maple is infested with wormholes. Everything about it is sincere. This project started to get me excited to move to Falmouth, and started to soothe my apprehensions about leaving home. I knew I would have something in Falmouth that would be entirely mine.



## GRANDPA'S GUN

Tim Hutker

As a little kid we would spend every New Year's eve with Grandma & Grandpa Hetrick, while Mom & Dad rang in the New Year at Uncle Ev's. Each year just after the "Ball dropped", Grandpa would go out the side door (I would be right at his side) to shoot off his shot gun to celebrate the New Year. I have been Blessed to have received this gift after his passing and can not remember a New Year it has not fired since! I Love celebrating these memories each year.



## MEMORY BOX

Mark Hutker

I like boxes  
They are like little houses  
The inside and the outside often tell different stories  
Something about boxes arouses curiosity of what is inside  
I can't pass by a box and not open it

This box I picked up at a yard sale, sundry years ago  
Sanded it down to an essential woodwork  
Testing transparency of oil paint, a new finish  
Seeking a secret revealed, so I tested gold leaf inside.  
Found feet somewhere.

Inside this box is life with my wife and children  
Manifest in photographs and memorabilia  
Why I picked this box for such treasure is a mystery  
Maybe a moment in my life with space to try something new  
A simple vessel, what is in there

Time to sand and finish a simple container  
Play around with a coat of color distorts the wood grain  
Gold leaf layered reflecting something is changing on the inside  
Meaning feels evolutionary, seeping in, quietly  
Change, no stopping that . . .



## SWISS ARMY KNIFE

Leo Wiegman

My favorite item is my Swiss Army knife for two reasons. First, this knife was a gift from Julie, my wife. Over the past thirty years I have had several pocket knives. Before this one, I had a black Swiss Army knife, but I lost it. Here's how I lost it. I used to travel a lot and always had my pocket knife with me. After 9-11, I was going through security to board a flight. They flagged me for my pocket knife and told me I had two choices: toss the knife into the contraband box and lose it. Or go back to the main terminal and find some place that would let me mail it back to me. I could not imagine simply discarding my knife. So I dashed back to the main terminal, happened to find a mail shop, bought a small padded envelope, put the knife in it, and put ample postage on it. I just made my flight. A week later, the envelope arrived in Croton, slit open and empty.

Without a word, Julie gifted me this new one, that I have not lost now for quite a few years. Second, it does so many little things well from opening wine bottles at picnics to trimming knots while fishing.



## MY CLASS RING

Mark Harlan

At the end of my 3rd year at the U.S. Air Force Academy, I received my class ring - made of shiny white gold. One side bore the emblem of the Academy and the other a special design unique to my class. I couldn't justify shelling out the money for an expensive star sapphire, so I chose a dark blue synthetic sapphire from which gleamed a little star of white light. For many years I enjoyed peeking at the little speck of light that sparkled from the stone at various angles. Having moved to Egypt, I often played pick-up basketball at the university. I put my wallet, watch and ring in a gym bag beside the court. When the game was over, I went to fetch my bag – but it was gone! I searched all around the area to no avail. Before returning home, I notified the janitorial staff.

At a weekly prayer meeting, I shared what had happened –as well as the sentiments I had expressed to God: “Lord, I know that material possessions aren't the most important things in life and that I can't take anything with me – but I just wanted to enjoy it that ring while I'm here on earth.” So we prayed for it to be found (though in a developing country, I had little reason for hope of its recovery). A few days later, I checked with the school janitor and he said my bag had been found in a rest room—the money was gone from the wallet, but the ring was still there. “Hallelujah!”

So I guess that's why class ring has such value to me.

## FRESHWATER PEARLS

Carla Hutker

I like jewelry. I like to get it, wear it and think about how it will one day be passed down to my children or grandchildren. I have pieces that belonged to my grandmothers and aunts that make me very nostalgic for my childhood. I also have some “one of a kind pieces” that Mark had designed for me that commemorate special birthdays and/or anniversaries. They are some of my greatest treasures. I also have a long string of pearls that are very perfect, beautiful and expensive and when I wear them I feel so regal. But if I could only grab one piece while the house was burning down it would be a simple strand of fresh water pearls in a little leather heart shaped box that Mark gave to me on our 2nd anniversary. Actually, the box came before the pearls. He and Jon McKee went on a trip one summer on the Sea Cloud before we were married. He got the leather heart shaped box in Italy and had my Initials embossed on the top. He came back from that trip with the most incredible stories and fueled my desire to go to Italy myself some day. But the pearls in that box are what are so precious to me. We had moved to Martha's Vineyard in June of 1985. Mark had left SMM to run an office on the Vineyard. We were living week to week on his paychecks and there was no extra money for anything but necessities. Shortly before our 2nd Wedding anniversary in August, Mark received a bonus check from SMM which he cashed right away and bought this string of pearls for me. I was totally surprised. These pearls were the most precious piece of jewelry I had ever owned (except my wedding ring) and it make me feel really loved that he just spontaneously bought these for me. When I put them on these days I am reminded of how little money we had and how far we have come since then. And even though we didn't have much back then, we were happy to be together and excited about our future together. These pearls were just the beginning of all the good things yet to come.



## TEA MUGS

Eric Holzwarth

I hate to be redundant, but your email put me in mind of tea. I love tea, and have a cup each morning, and every afternoon around 3:00. I started the afternoon habit when my mother, a western Canadian (with strong British and Scottish roots), used to have it with me after school, when I was a kid – often with her fabulous chocolate chip cookies. I always find tea soothing and calming. It's great for afternoons at work.

On weekend mornings, I make home-made chai, with fresh lemon grass and a special mixture of spices I brought back from my last trip to India. They were ground by my Indian mother (I was an exchange student in high school), who passed away last year at the age of 90. I was fortunate to have been able to see her the year before. So tea brings back thoughts of home, of caring, of deep personal contact. And tea is very different than coffee; you have to make it, then let it steep. It makes you wait. Sit. Be patient. Then you drink. The Japanese have a phrase for impatient, irascible people. Of such a man, they will say "he has no tea in him."

These cups, for tea, remind me of my two sons. The choir one I bought as a fundraiser for the Syracuse Children's Chorus, which my son Steven attended as a child. He had a voice like an angel then. He still sings today, in college, but of course now he had an adult voice – still wonderful. This is the cup I drink from every afternoon, at the office, and the cup brings back all those associations for me. The other cup was a gift from my older son, Michael, from when he visited England with his grandmother when he was ten. Michael loved all things medieval and Tolkien, and he purchased this cup for me at Stonehenge. I was so touched that this 10 year old boy thought of his father at that moment. It's my weekend afternoon tea cup, and always brings me to mind of him, with a smile. It's chipped, but I still love it.



## WOOD DUCK

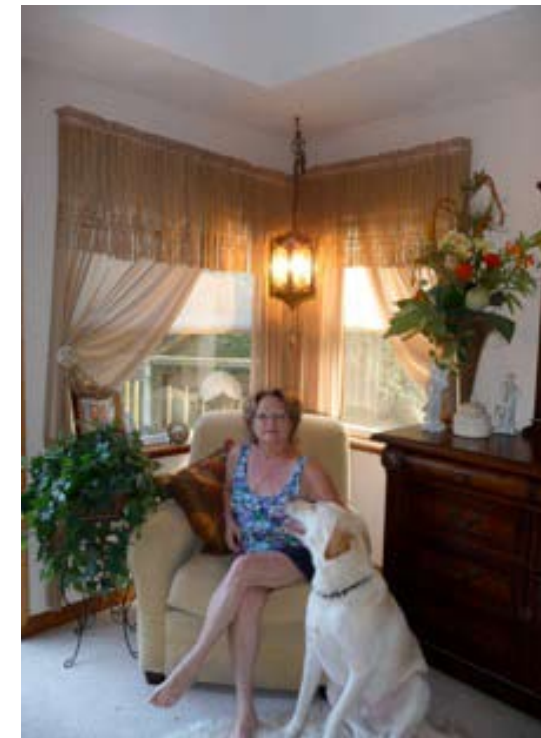
John Potts



John's object is a wood duck that he shot while hunting with his father. John was 13 years old. It was a type of duck that his father had always wanted to shoot but never got the opportunity before he passed away. John has always treasured the memory of that hunting trip with his father.

## GRANDMA'S LIGHT

Nancy Potts



My object is a light that belonged to grandma Hetrick. I remember it hanging over her couch in their living room. When lit, it gives off the most beautiful illumination on the walls and ceiling. Currently it hangs in a special corner of our bedroom. Each time I look at it I think of grandma and grandpa and very fond memories of growing up.

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE MAKER

Although there is a wide range of possessions and stories in these responses, they all seem to have one common thread: they embody some sort of relationship. The relationship is either with ourselves or another person. These possessions connect us to who we were, and who we want ourselves to be. They symbolize the bond with share with another person through the provenance of that object.

Much like our personal relationships, our object relationships are punctuated by time, either inflection points in our lives or a continuity of use. They act as reminders of other people, and past experiences or future goals. The ‘maker’ of these objects is the person who was at the inception of the object into your life; this person’s essence stays with the possession for as long as it exists. Our relationships with these objects are then a relationship to the maker. The ultimate provenance of an object is its creation, and the person who invested themselves in its existence. Our relationship to the maker is thus the ultimate gauge of provenance.



OBJECT STORIES ARE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS.



## ART

Art is perhaps one of the obvious precious objects. Art rarely has any semblance of utility, but it is studied, lauded, exhibited, and often expensive. There is a wide range of reasons that we could value art; it is visually pleasing, familiar, expensive, or positive associative meanings. I agree with Paul Bloom when he argues, “We are also interested in how paintings are created, and we get pleasure from what we infer to be the nature of that creative process.” The philosopher Denis Dutton argues that part of the appeal of works of art is their function as ‘Darwinian fitness tests.’ He claims that the roots of art lie in sexual selection.

Dutton proposes that, “the human artistic urge has been shaped in the same way [as bowerbirds and peacocks to impress mates with beauty]. Good art is difficult

to do. A good artist is a good learner and planner, exhibits intelligence and creativity, and is successful enough at surmounting the immediate obstacles of life... to find the time and resources for these non-utilitarian inventions” (Bloom, 2010).

We have evolved to appreciate art based on its relationship to its maker. Whether we are impressed with the artist’s technique, skill, or ideas, we must understand the provenance of the work. We must either know who the artist was, or the context of its creation in society or art history. Our appreciation of artwork stems from our belief that artwork contains the essence of its maker.

Our appreciation of art and how we value it is in part based on our understanding of how we think it was created. Because of our evolution to appreciate virtuoso

displays of skill, we are motivated to seek out and create them ourselves, and we receive pleasure from such displays. “This is another instance of essentialism at work, another case in which objects are thought to have invisible essences that make them what they are. For something such as a hunk of meat the essence is material; for a human artifact such as a painting, the essence is the inferred performance underlying its creation” (Bloom, 2010).

This focus on an objects history helps explain why we prefer originals. Original works were created by this display of skill. No matter the subject in an artwork, humans are always present as by definition there is always a creator and an audience. The artwork is the media that connects these individuals.

## ERR

In his art exhibition entitled, Err, Jeremy Hutchinson contacted various factories around the world, asking for their workers to produce ‘incorrect’ versions of their normal products. When these everyday objects lost their function, they became artwork. Hutchinson claims that Err is about “creating deliberate miscommunication... forging a moment of poetry within a hyper-efficient system of digital exchange. It’s about an invisible global workforce, and their connection to the relentless regurgitation of stuff. It’s about Duchamp and the readymade, but updated to exist within the context of today’s globalised economy. It’s about the rub between art and design, the mass-produced and unique, the functional and the dysfunctional” (Williams, 2011).

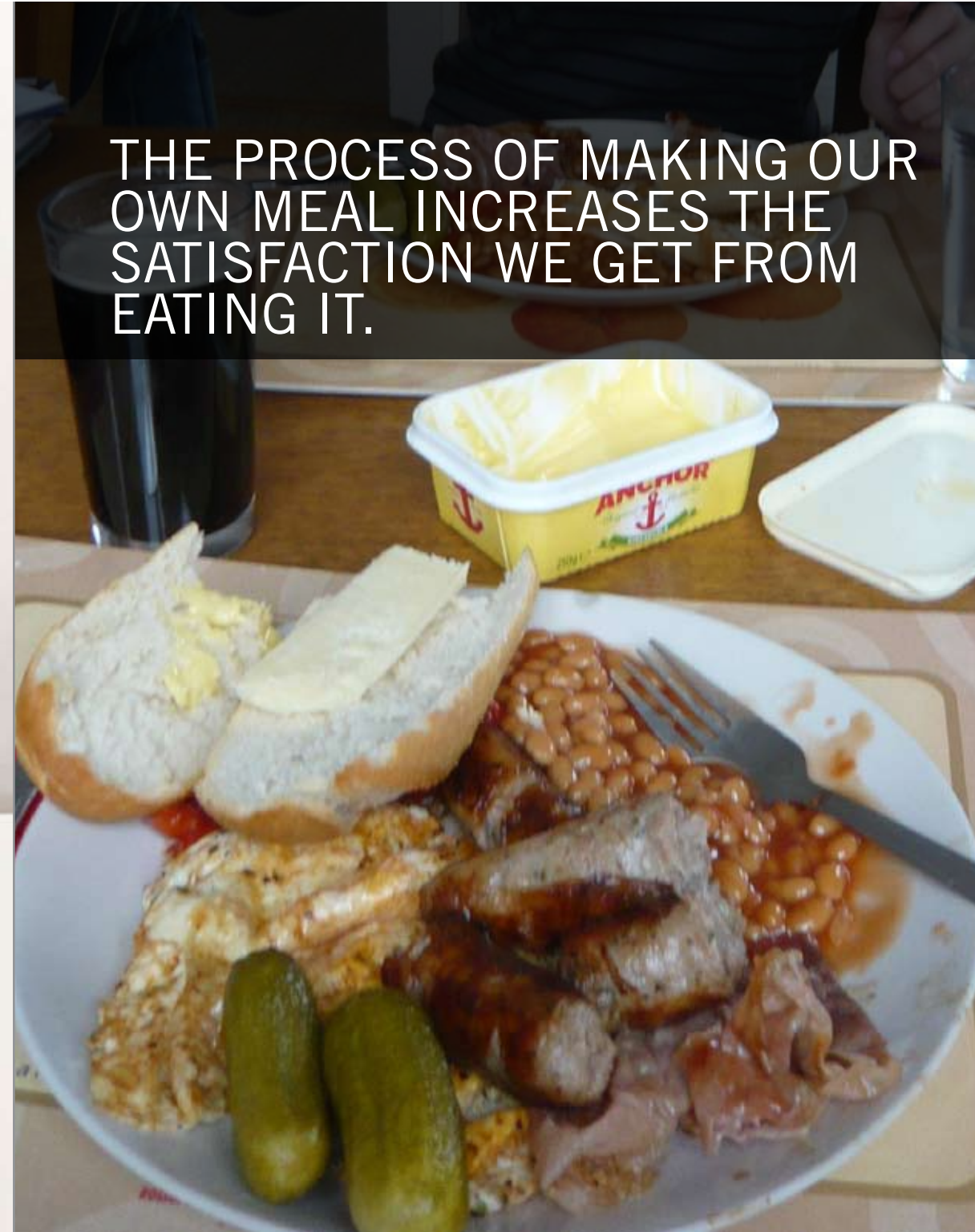
This work also seems to be about a consumer’s relationship to the maker of an everyday product, or rather, the lack of this relationship. This artwork plays between the dichotomies of craft versus manufacture. It reminds us that our products don’t just appear off of the boat; they have histories of manufacture by real people before they come to the US.



## IKEA

We can have a relationship with ourselves as the maker. When we put effort into creating something it increases the value we give to it. In the 1950’s, instant cake mixes were unpopular when they were introduced until, “the manufacturers changed the recipe so that the housewives had to do some work on their own; they had to add an egg. This made it a better product” (Bloom, 2010). Enhancing value through effort is called ‘the IKEA effect,’ a term coined by the psychologist Michael Norton after the Swedish store, which sells furniture that you have to assemble yourself. If you are investing your time in the process of creating something, you are putting some of yourself, your essence, into it. If we can value others’ creations, we will almost certainly value our own.

THE PROCESS OF MAKING OUR OWN MEAL INCREASES THE SATISFACTION WE GET FROM EATING IT.



## BUSINESS NARRATIVES

Stories are powerful tools that businesses can use to develop their brand and create a culture and feel around their products. Often customers are buying into the compelling stories and lifestyles that a business tells rather than the reality of the product.

Further soaps and candles, husband and wife startup, uses their story as a way to establish the ethos of the company. On their website, they explain that One day, “Megan... walked into the garage and became alarmed at what her husband had accumulated: drums of glycerin, a byproduct of the biofuel distillation process. Megan stared at her grease-covered soul mate and lovingly suggested he clean up his act. That’s when Marshall decided to take things one-step FURTHER.

...the soap made from Marshall’s glycerin is returned to the bathrooms of the very restaurants from which it originated creating a perfect, sustainable circle. And now you can participate in this circle too” (furtherproducts.com, 2011).

This compelling narrative has several levels. First of all, it is the story of the American Dream: a couple following their passion. Second of all it is for a good cause, working towards social and sustainability awareness. If you use a Further product part of that story becomes your story. Your mind associates you with this hip new company, which is trying to improve the world. Buying their product makes you feel good.

Another example of how a compelling story can be used in business is TOMS shoes. Their website explains their origins this way: “In 2006, American traveler Blake Mycoskie befriended children in Argentina and found they had no shoes to protect their feet. Wanting to help, he created TOMS, a company that would match every pair of shoes purchased with a pair of new shoes given to a child in need. One for One” (toms.com, 2011).

This is a win-win scenario: the story motivates people to buy the shoes, the children get shoes, and TOMS profits. This narrative is at the core of their business plan; it differentiates their product from most of the other consumer goods it competes with. These shoes have a personality and a story before they are ever bought. By buying and wearing the shoes, the customer is part of a community of people who not only know the story, but share similar values. The shoes act as a physical manifestation of the story, which encourages retelling of the story.



## NERVOUS SYSTEM JEWELRY

Story can be implicit in process. The Nervous System design studio “works at the intersection of science, art, and technology. We create using a novel process that employs computer simulation to generate designs and digital fabrication to realize products. Drawing inspiration from natural phenomena, we write computer programs mimicking processes and patterns found in nature and use those programs to create unique and affordable art, jewelry, and housewares” (n-e-r-v-o-u-s.com, 2011).

The compelling forms of this jewelry are based on the organic structures of diatoms and cell structures. The story is obscured, but as a piece of jewelry, it works well as an object of conversation. Their website allows customers to choose existing designs, or use software they’ve developed to create their own based on a sandbox toolkit.



## BREEDING TABLES

The designers Clemens Weisshaar and Reed Kram set out to design not one, but an infinite number of tables. Breeding Tables was an attempt to “bid farewell the idea of designing one product to be mass manufactured as a reproduction of the original prototype. In fact they have developed a process that allows for the production of a multitude of individually different pieces of furniture tapping the full potential of current production technologies” (kramweisshaar.com, 2011).

An algorithm permutes a design based on a set of functional parameters and the inputs of the previous design, thus each design is different and influences the design of following generations. “Each table is representative of an algorithmic model and simultaneously in her uniqueness, a model for further objects of her species.” If there is a story behind the design of each object, than this system is the never-ending story. Each story influences the ‘plot’ of the next one, permutating ad infinitum.



## BRAIN WAVE

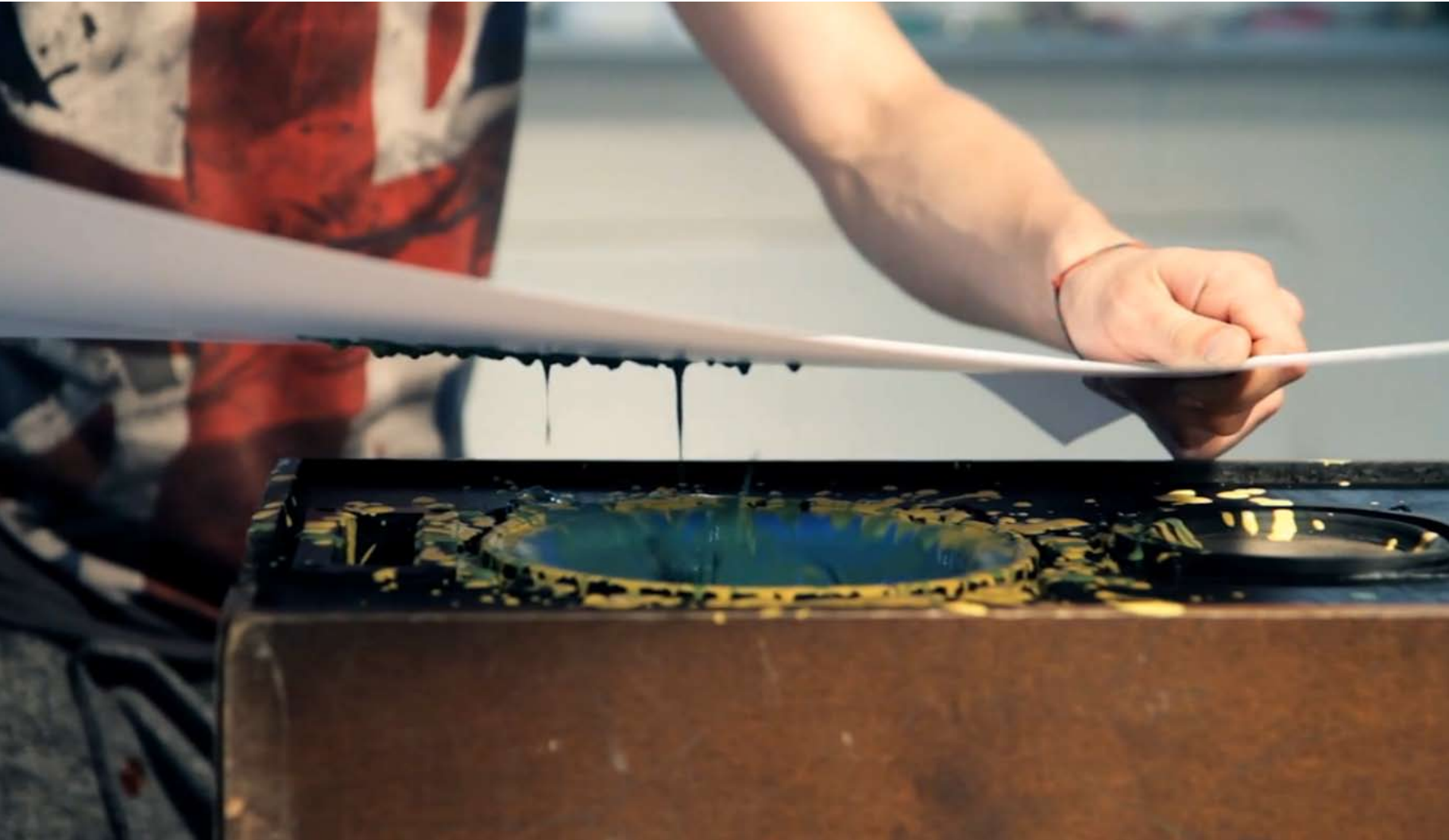
The design of this sofa was generated by the shapes of the brainwaves measured by an elektro-encefalogram (EEG) attached to the designer’s head by a set of electrodes. The designer could control the shapes generated by opening and closing his eyes and thinking about the idea of comfort. The designer claims that “the concept is a reference to a futuristic workflow in which the designer only has to close his eyes and the computer ‘prints’ the result out” (Maassen, 2009).



## TRUE VOL. 1

“Every piece of the album artwork was created by the song itself. We might have helped by pouring paint onto blasting speaker membranes and catching the paint spills on paper, we might have helped by playing the drums with paint splashing drum sticks, but the real artist was the sound. We were just instruments” (instrumenti.in, 2011).

In this design, form follows process. The artwork that represents the music was created by the music itself in a predetermined automated process. If an object can be made to look like anything (a duck) then any form that is chosen is arbitrary. Although this process may be arbitrary, the forms generated by this system are the most predetermined, although variable, possible.



“...MY RELATIONSHIP TO FURNITURE AND CONSTRUCTION IS BASICALLY MY DIALOGUE WITH A TREE, WITH A COMPLETE AND PSYCHIC EMPATHY ... SINCE DESIGN NEED NOT BE A PERSONAL EXPRESSION, THE FUNCTION OF CONSTRUCTION BECOMES PRIMARY.”

GEORGE NAKASHIMA





## COGNITIVELY WE TREAT POSSESSIONS THAT HAVE STORIES AS PEOPLE.

Possessions are enlivened by their essences. If we treat possessions as if they are people then their styling, which is composed of the physical accidents of material, aesthetics, and provenance, combined with our cultural and personal perceptions, create their personalities. Style is the projection of an object's personality. Just as we try and make friends with people with similar interests and personalities we look for objects with similar personalities to our own. Our aesthetic tastes result from our search to surround ourselves with friends, be they objects or similar minded humans.



In a system where manufacturing tolerances are defined by an attempt to make everything 99.99% identical, we cannot expect every object to have an individual story or essence. As a culture we value individual expression, yet the language of form and products has limited our communication to a set number of visual permutations.

Currently, owning an object shows others who we want to be perceived as; they do not show us as we really are. Objects could have unique stories and essences in the same way that each human has a unique personality. This would allow greater connections to form more quickly between us and our objects. We could create precious objects right off of the production line.

## STYLE IS THE PROJECTION OF AN OBJECT'S PERSONALITY.



## JUST AS WE FALL IN LOVE WITH PEOPLE, WE FALL IN LOVE WITH OBJECTS.

As our relationship develops with an object over time, we begin to form deep emotional attachments to them. We fall in love with these objects. The roll of design in the future may be to play more of the matchmaker, matching values and characteristics between user and object.



How can we design unique, meaningful, and personal stories into manufactured products? We can use the lessons of patina, provenance, and relationships to imbue made objects with their own essences. The designs of these objects would have sentimental value before you obtained them, and they would grow in subjective and perhaps objective value as they age.

Objects that get better with age are a sustainable proposition, as they need not be replaced. By developing the 'life equity' of common objects, we can create enduring value for generations of users. Building to last will create layers of meaningful relationships between objects and users, causing interactions with the things we own more fulfilling and enriching.

## OBJECTS WE LOVE MAKE LIFE BETTER AND MORE FULFILLING.



## PATINA IS THE PROJECTION OF AN OBJECT'S CHARACTER.

A possession records its growth and survival through its wears and bruises. If style is personality, then an object's patina is its character. Through years of aging a possession comes alive by revealing its pattern of use. As we scar and wrinkle with age, we wise and enlivened with experience and love, I believe the same is true with our possessions.



## PATINA IS THE HALLMARK OF DESIGNED PERMANENCE, THE COUNTER TO DESIGNED OBSOLESCENCE.

Patina is the opposite of designed obsolescence. It celebrates the growth and maturity of an object as a beautiful process of becoming. It embodies the idea of designed permanence, of building once well. By honoring the idea that things can get better with age, we begin to shift the paradigm of cradle to grave consumerism, shifting our values from objective to subjective. Over time generations of essences will imbue lasting objects with histories of dynamic relationships, turning objects into possessions.

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Both of these designs  
however they are not unique to

①  
DIT WAS MADE



## PROCESS

- Blast Stools
- Nervous System
- TRU Album
- PeakT Noise table
- Algorithms
- Breeding Table

ONWARD AND  
UPWARD. MY  
THESIS WORK  
CONTINUES  
INTO MY FINAL  
SEMESTER.

 THANK YOU

relationship between process and form?

Relationship between process and form?

QUOTE  
"Nervous System of science, that employs fabrications, patterns, phenomena, affordances"

Nervous System.php  
Nervous System. 2011

**NERVOUS SYSTEM**

**ROSS LOVEGROVE**

**BLAST STOOLS BY**





STRATA  
SERVING SET  
THESIS DESIGN WORK

Evan Hutker  
2012

TECHNOLOGY IS THE MANIFESTED PROJECTION OF OUR MINDS ONTO THE PHYSICAL WORLD. WE HAVE EVOLVED BEYOND A POINT OF NO RETURN; OUR POSSESSIONS ARE NOW AS MUCH A PART OF OUR BODIES AS ARE OUR LIMBS OR ORGANS.



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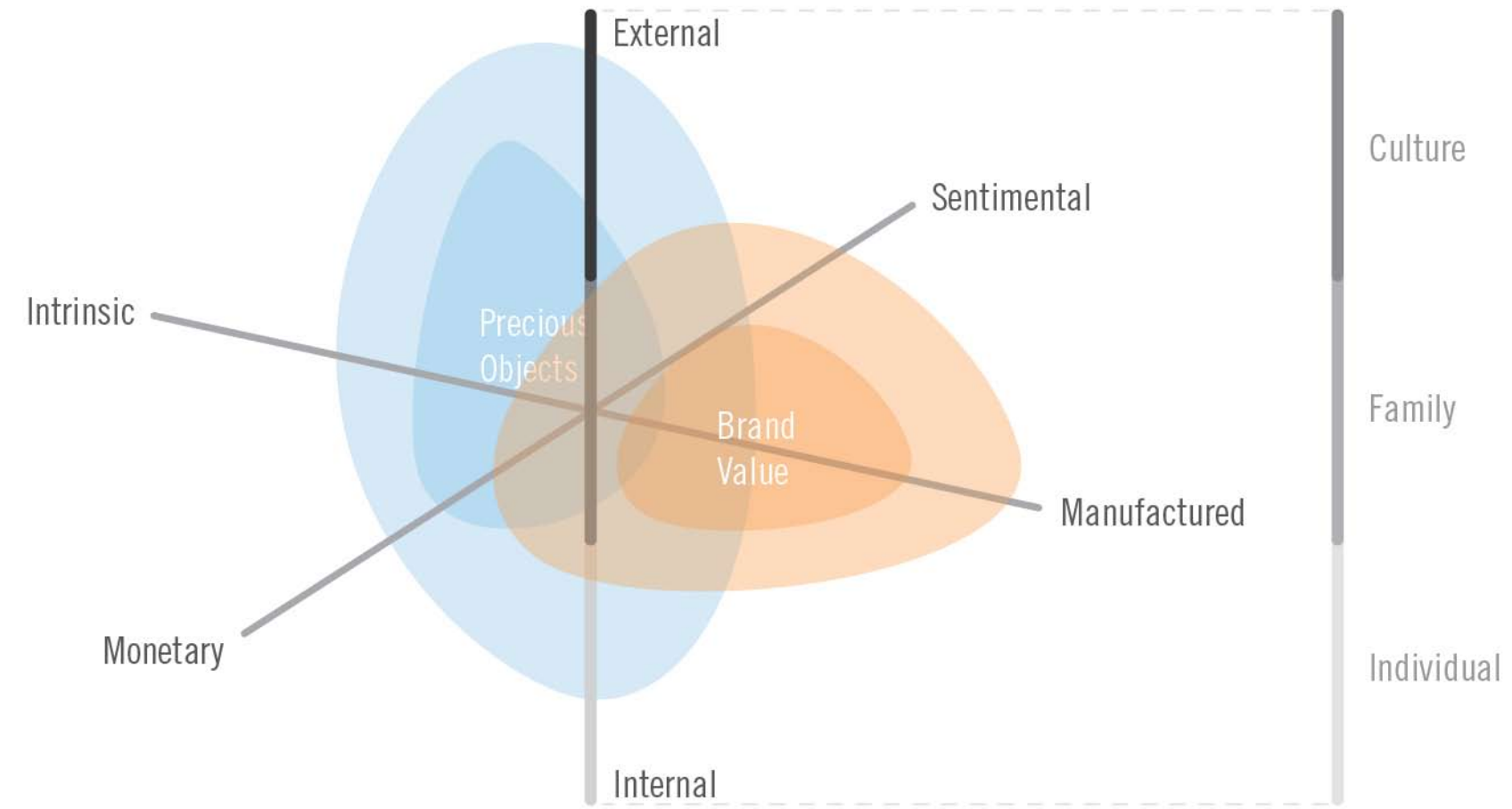
REVIEW OF RESEARCH 4  
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DESIGN SOLUTION 28





**THIS DESIGN WORK IS BASED ON MY PREVIOUS SEMESTER'S RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT OF PRECIOUS OBJECTS AND THEIR STORY VALUE.**

# REVIEW OF RESEARCH: THE 3 DIMENSIONS OF STORY VALUE



Substances can be duplicated but history can not. We will always value and desire to be in contact with the essence of an original. The stories and provenance of an object create its essence, which consumes the physical nature of the object embodying those intangible concepts.

There are several spectra that can describe an object story; an object story can exist anywhere on these three axes. My goal is to encourage, preserve, and celebrate these rich, organic narratives.

ERIC HOLZWARTH



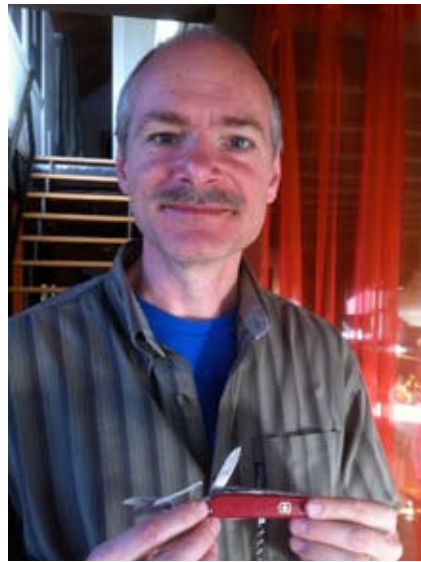
TEA MUGS

I hate to be redundant, but your email put me in mind of having a cup each morning, and every afternoon around afternoon habit when my mother, a western Canadian Scottish roots), used to have it with me after school, with her fabulous chocolate chip cookies. I always find it calming. It's great for afternoons at work.

On weekend mornings, I make home-made chai, with special mixture of spices I brought back from my last trip to India. My mother passed away last year at the age of 90. I was fortunate to see her the year before. So tea brings back thoughts of deep personal contact. And tea is very different than coffee. It makes you wait. Sit. Be patient. Japanese have a phrase for impatient, irascible people: "he has no tea in him."

THESIS

LEO WIEGMAN



SWISS ARMY KNIFE

My favorite item is my Swiss Army knife for two reasons: it's a gift from Julie, my wife. Over the past thirty years I have had several. Before this one, I had a black Swiss Army knife, I lost it. I used to travel a lot and always had my pocket knife. I was going through security to board a flight. They found the pocket knife and told me I had two choices: toss the knife or let me mail it back to me. I could not imagine simply discarding it. I dashed back to the main terminal, happened to find a mail box, put the knife in it, and put ample postage on it. A week later, the envelope arrived in Croton, NY.

Without a word, Julie gifted me this new one, that I have had for a few years. Second, it does so many little things well from opening a can to trimming knots while fishing.

THESIS

DAWN HIGH

11.03.2011



KEYCHAIN

My second item has been on my keychain for at least 15 years (except when I travel). I use this X-ACTO brand mini matt knife regularly to work, or cut the extremely tight tape and plastic wrap off a rolled-up watercolor print from China in the parking lot of the post office. It's especially good at birthday parties when somebody has to get a tight ribbon off or open heat-sealed plastic packaging encasing a present. I usually cut open Dinah's and Indy's wormer packs with it. I carry my keys at night and I always feel just a little bit more secure with a knife in my hand I can whip around Ninja fashion if need be. I haven't been able to find the blades for it for a long time. Dad sharpened this one a few times. It may be rusty, but the blade just keeps on working for me. And it's always close by when somebody asks, "Anybody got a knife?"

THESIS

HUTKER

THERE ARE 3 MAIN PLOTS TO ANY OBJECT STORY:

- IT CONTACTED YOU SIGNIFICANTLY
- IT CONTACTED SOMEONE IMPORTANT TO YOU
- IT EXPERIENCED A SIGNIFICANT EVENT

OBJECT STORY ANALYSIS

	Ana	Dawn	Janet	Larry	Leo	Mark	Nancy	Tim	Dawn	Eric	Evan	Carla	Harly	John	Mark
Owned by Another	Red		Red	Red			Red	Red	Red						Red
Given by Another	Red			Red	Red			Red	Red	Red		Red	Red		
Inflection Point	Orange				Orange	Orange						Orange		Orange	
Owned for a Long Time		Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange		Orange
Used Frequently		Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange		Orange
Material	Metal	Metal	Gold	Metal	Metal/Resin	Metal	Metal	Wood/Metal	Glass	Ceramic	Ceramic	Pearl	Wood	Duck	Wood

Analyzing the object stories that I collected further, I identified 5 basic plots to these stories. some objects had only one, some had several, but they all centered around events in time, and other people.

Most of the materials were long lasting and natural.

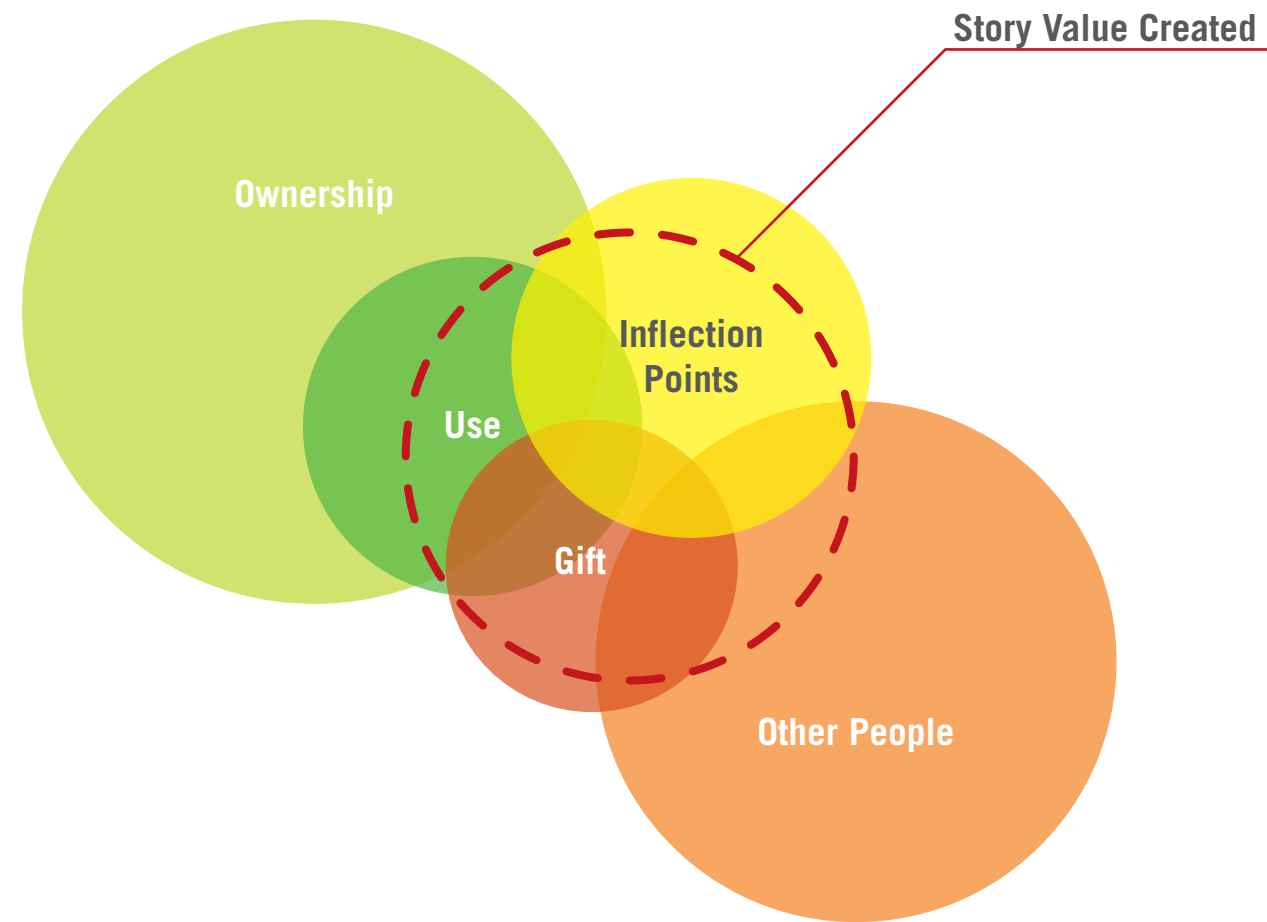
OBJECT STORIES ARE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

I collected personal stories about possessions with sentimental value; the kind of possessions that connect us to who we were and who we want ourselves to be. They embody the bond we share with another person through their provenance, which ultimately consumes its physical properties and existence.

BRIEF:

CREATE A PRODUCT THAT PHYSICALLY CHANGES TO RECORD THE STORIES OF THE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS THAT IT HAS EXPERIENCED.

## DYNAMICS OF OBJECT STORIES



This graphic is based on my analysis of object stories. The 'sweet spot' with a great potential to create value from stories, is the point where an object exists between two users at a specific point in time. The object becomes a souvenir of the event, and also captures the essences of the users.

WE PRESERVE THE ESSENCES AND MEMORIES OF OTHERS AND OURSELVES IN THE OBJECTS THAT WE TOUCH. WE INNATELY VALUE THE RECORDED PROVENANCE OF AN OBJECT AS IT REVEALS THE STORY OF ITS OWNER.





# LARGE SCALE MIND MAPPING



## TRENDS

“Young consumers catalog life events as they happen, and thus have built an ongoing, open archive of personal history: a store of digital memory. As such, their bygone experiences have an increased presence—and relevance—in everyday life. ...this PAST PRESENCE, [will be constantly connecting them to] inspiration and ideas from the ever-present past.” (Cassandra report, 2012)

“this year people will upload over 70 billion photos to Facebook, suggesting around 20% of all photos this year will end up there. Already Facebook’s photo collection has a staggering 140 billion photos, that’s over 10,000 times larger than the Library of Congress.” (1000memories.com, 2011)

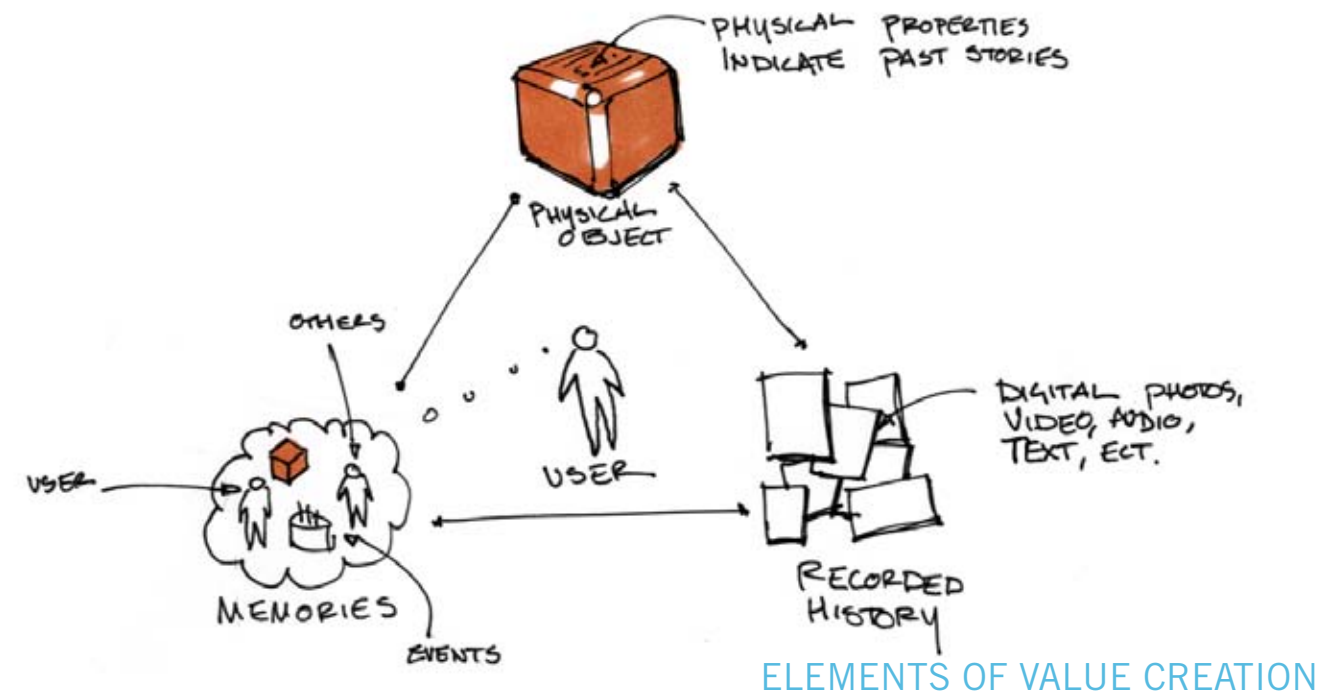
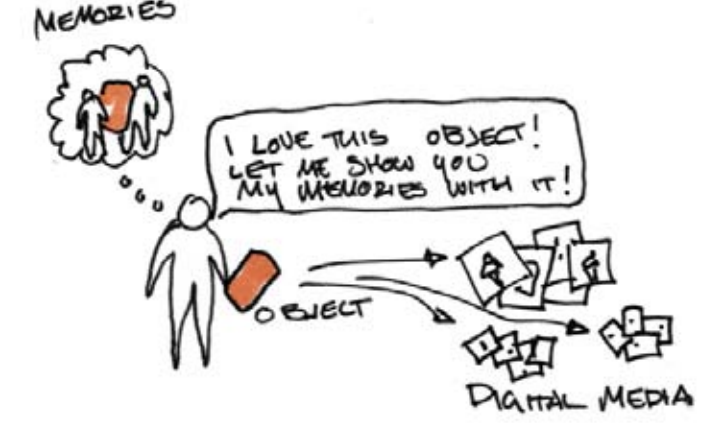
WE DIGITALLY CAPTURE OUR STORIES; SHARED ONLINE, THEY NO LONGER HAVE A PHYSICAL REFERENCE. STRATA EMBEDS THESE DIGITAL MEMORIES INTO OUR PHYSICAL OBJECTS.



CURRENT OBJECT STORIES



POTENTIAL OBJECT STORIES



HOW CAN WE EMBED THESE DIGITAL MEMORIES INTO OUR PHYSICAL OBJECTS?

# CHEESE SET



CHEESE CULTURE SPANS MANY CUISINES

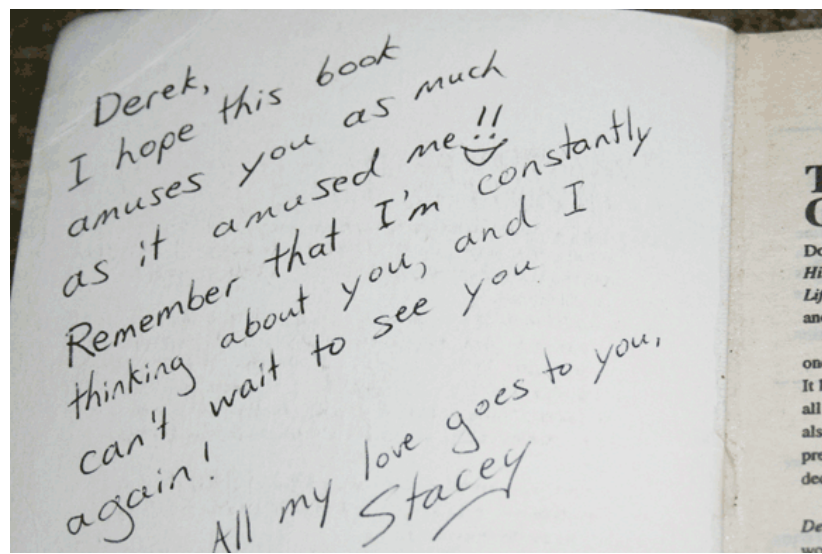
A serving set is often the focal point of a group activity. It multiple users interact with a single serving dish over a lifetime of events.

This system could embody a wide range of serving dishes. A cheese set provides an opportunity to experiment with the application of this system to this object, as there are three diverse objects in the set: A knife, a cheese board, and a cracker bowl. Many cuisines enjoy a cheese course at varying times of day.

This system records the experiences that mark the strata of memories in our lives. The serving set physically changes as it gains memories.



BROOCH REPRESENTING A FAMILY TREE



BOOK DEDICATIONS CAPTURE EMOTIONS

# INDIVIDUAL 'JEWELS' ARE ADDED TO RECORD AND REPRESENT SPECIFIC OBJECT STORIES.

WE ALREADY RECORD ALMOST ALL OF OUR EXPERIENCES WITH 'SMART' DEVICES



JEWELS WIRELESSLY STORE VIDEO, PHOTOS, AUDIO, ECT. CREATED BY ALL USERS AND DEVICES



DIGITAL MEDIA STORING JEWELS ARE ADDED BY USERS. THE BUILDUP OF THESE LAYERS OF STORIES CREATES A STRATA OF MEMORIES.

JEWELS BECOME A PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL REMINDER OF THE OBJECT'S USERS AND ITS PROVENANCE.

THIS MEDIA CAN BE RETRIEVED FROM JEWELS LATER

# PRECEDENT INSPIRATION



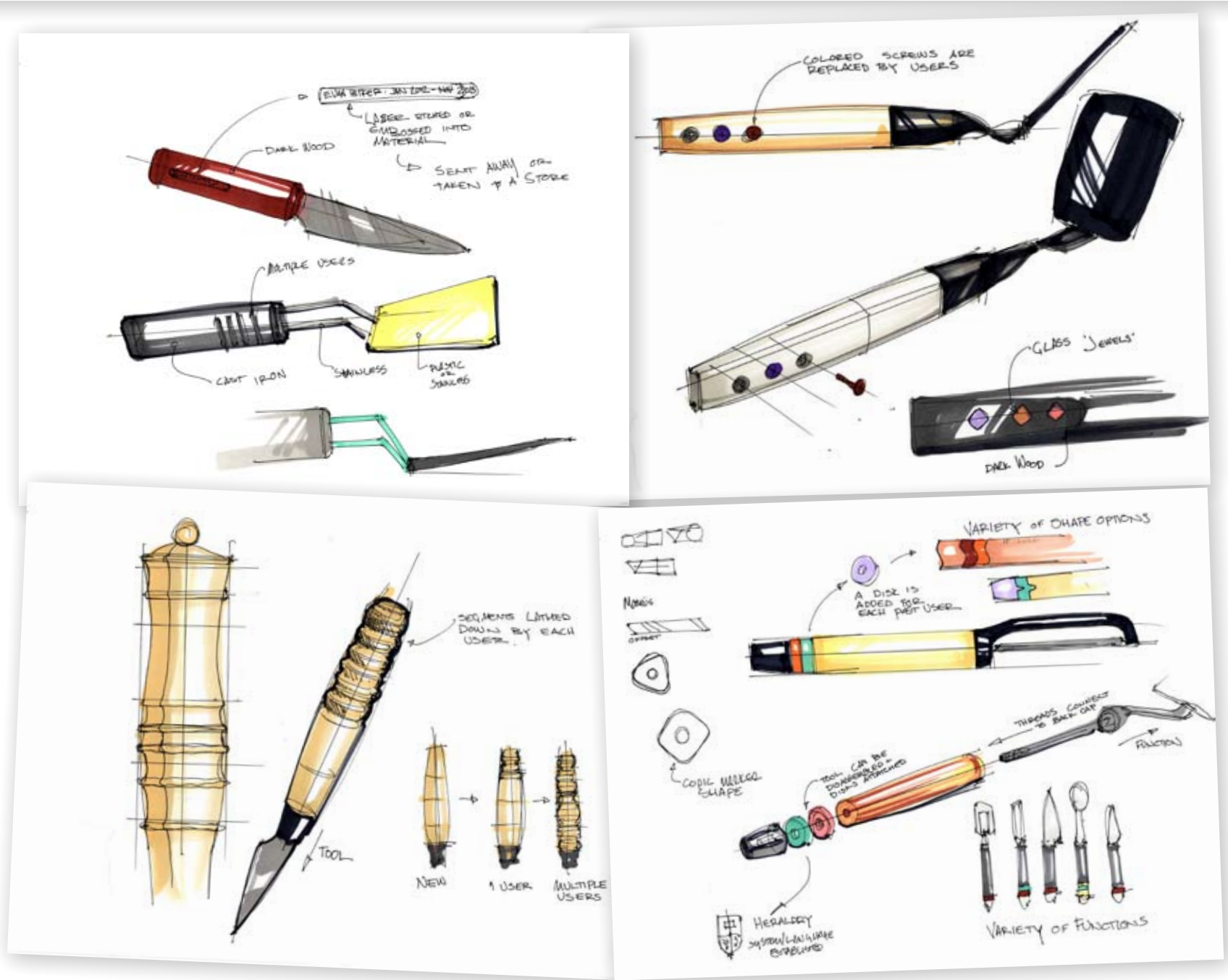
# FORM INSPIRATION



# INITIAL CONCEPTS

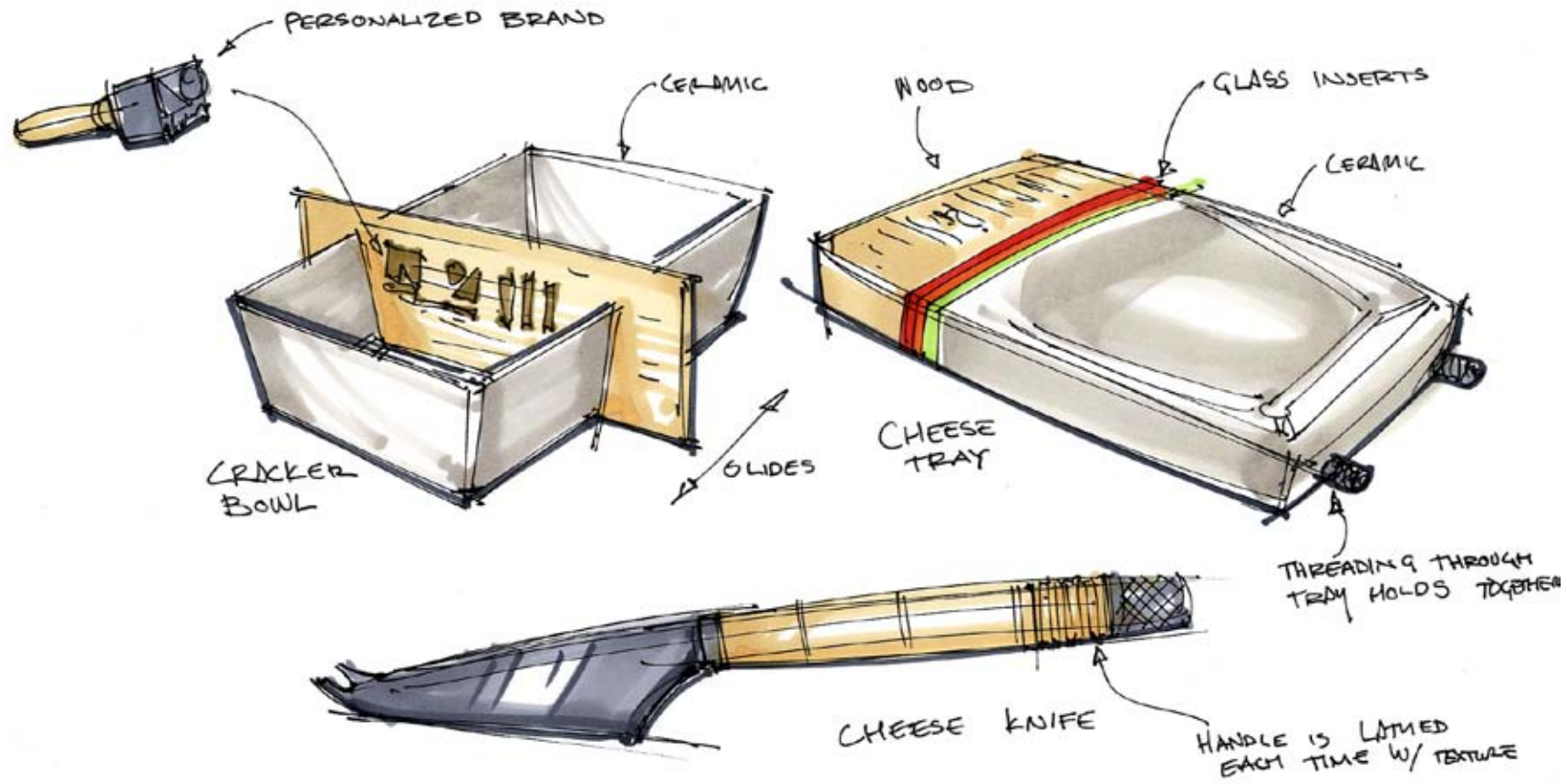


# INITIAL CONCEPTS

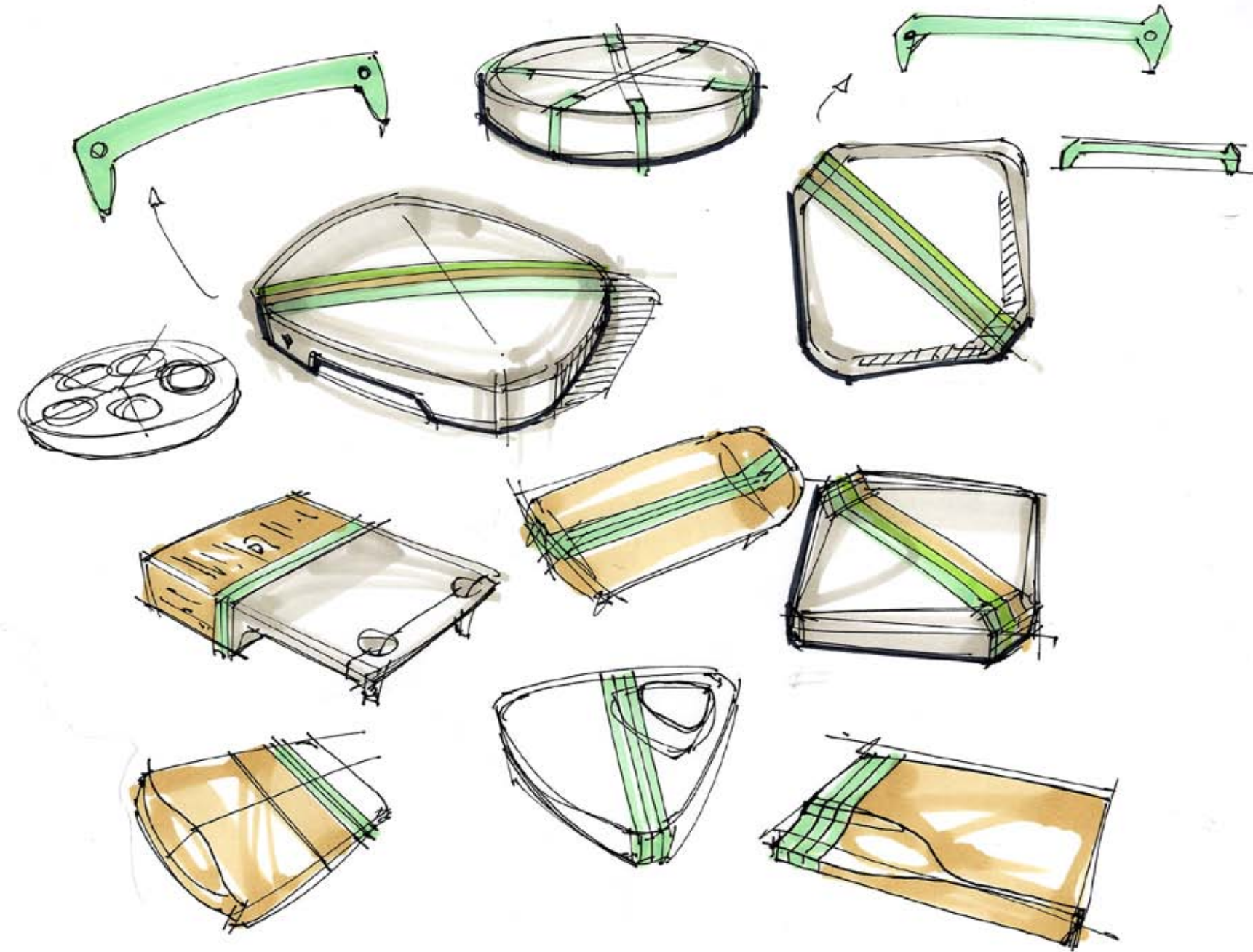




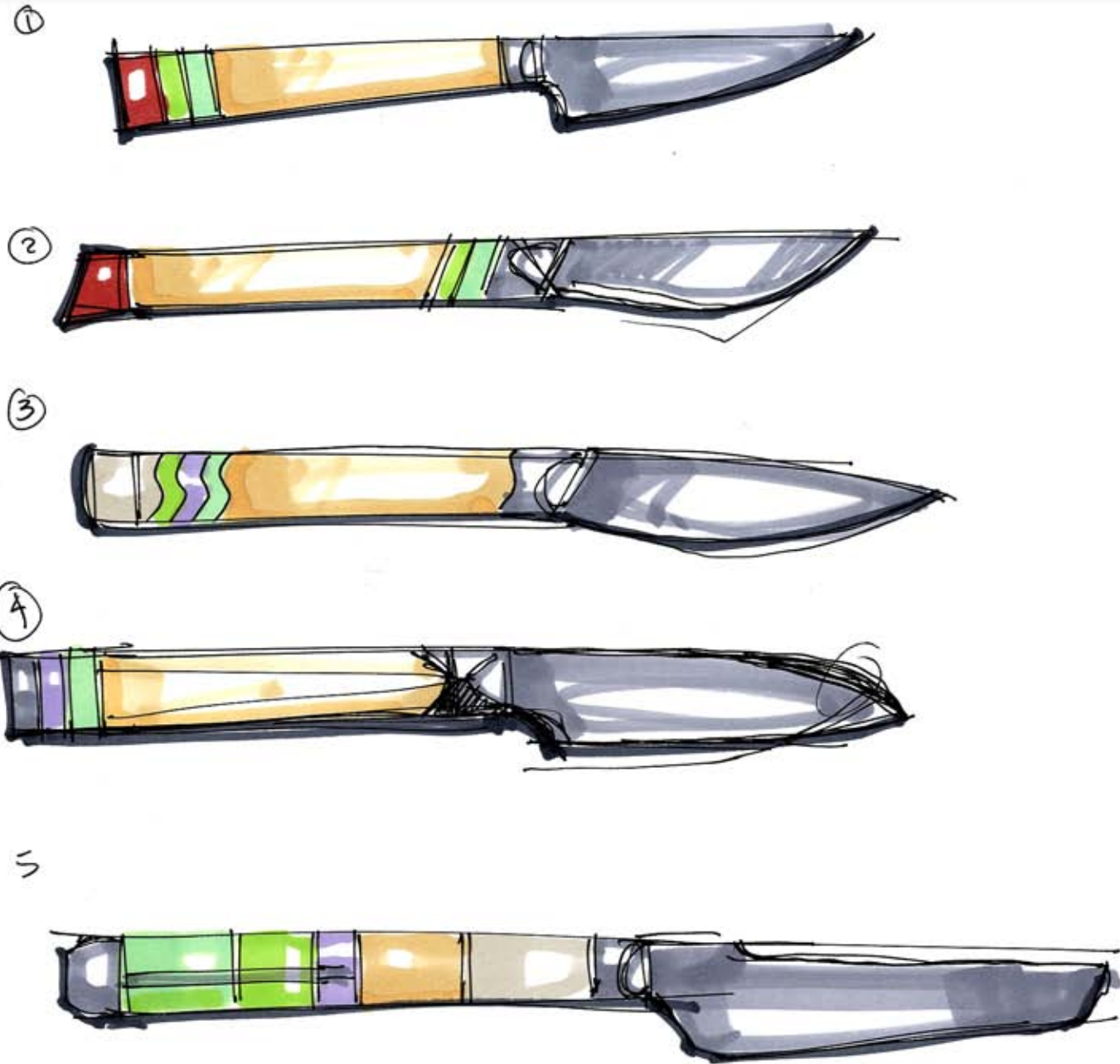
# FUNCTIONAL CONCEPT



# FORM CONCEPTS

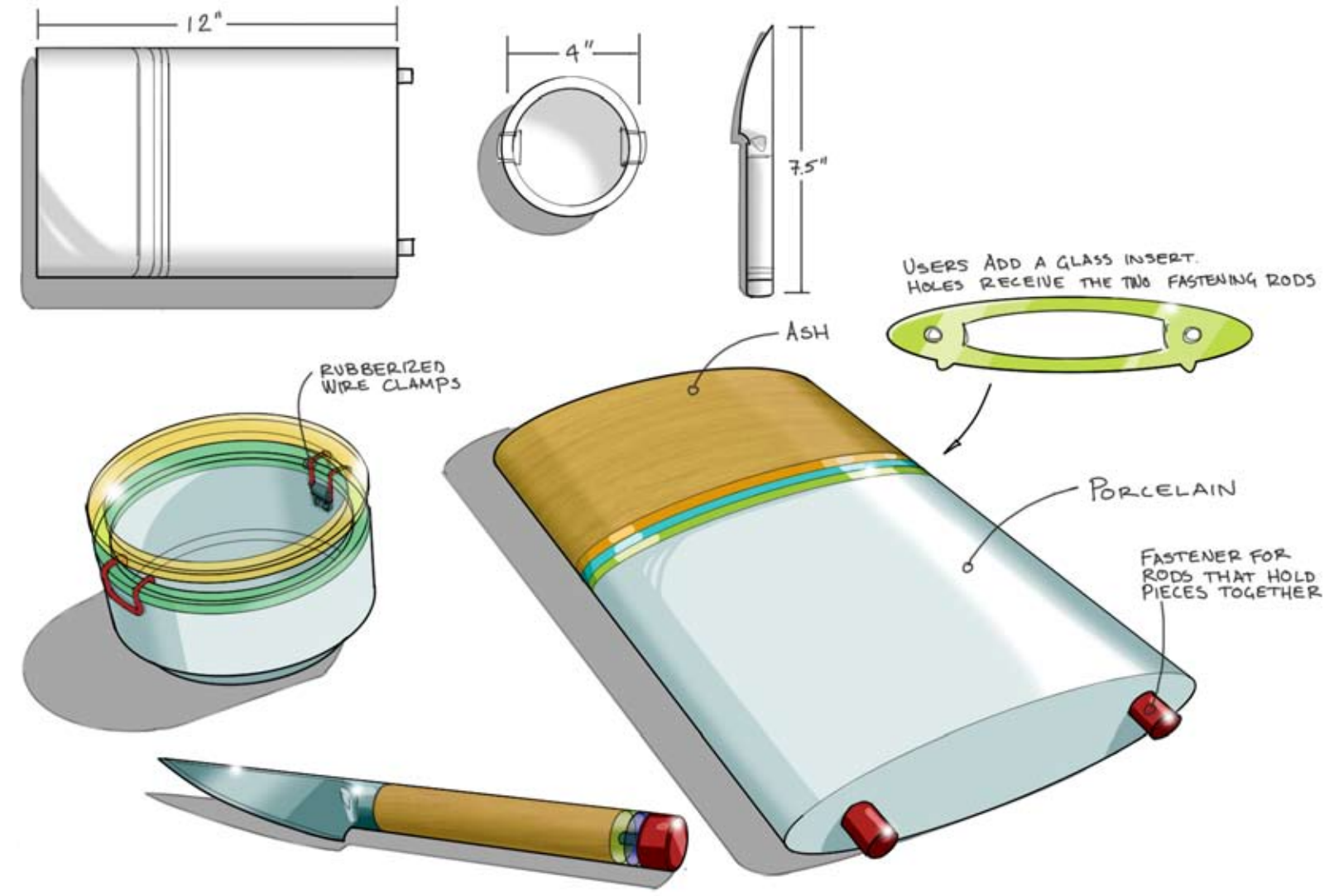


# FORM CONCEPTS



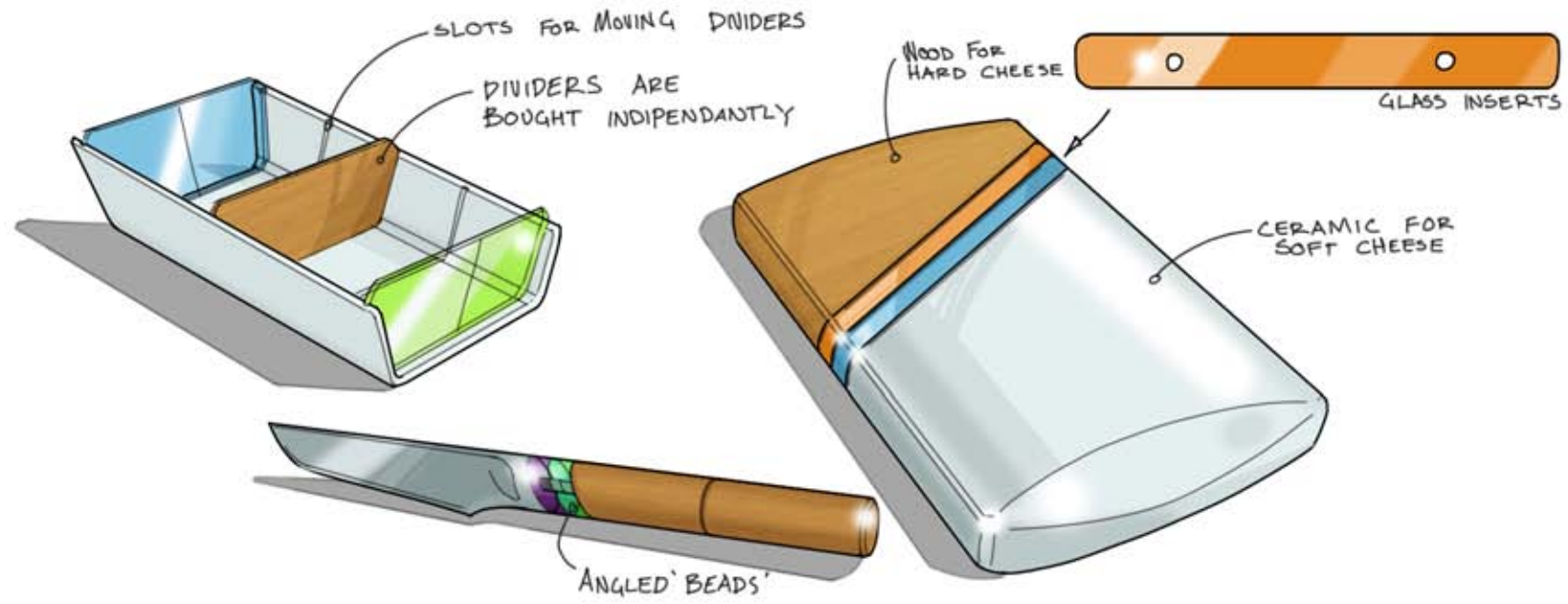
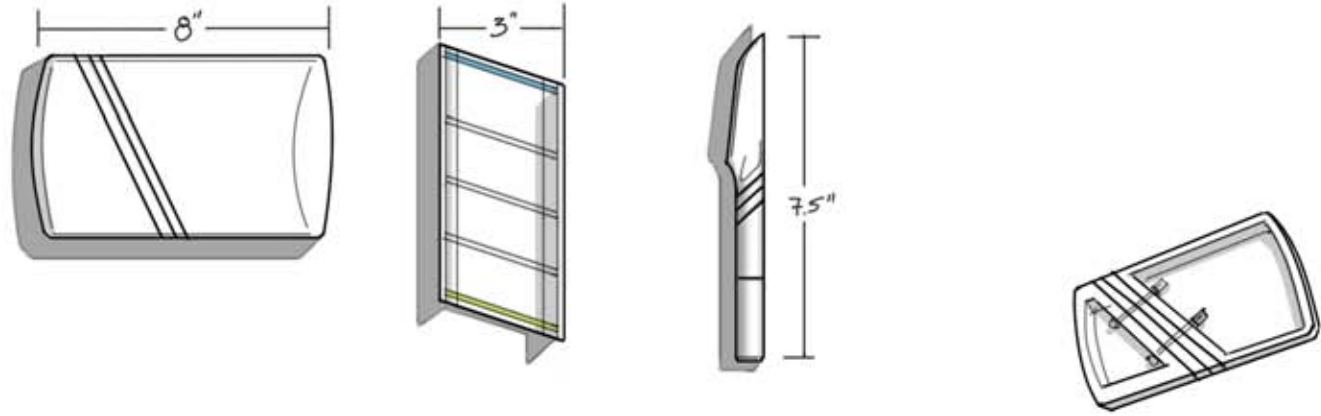
# CONCEPTS

## CONCEPT A



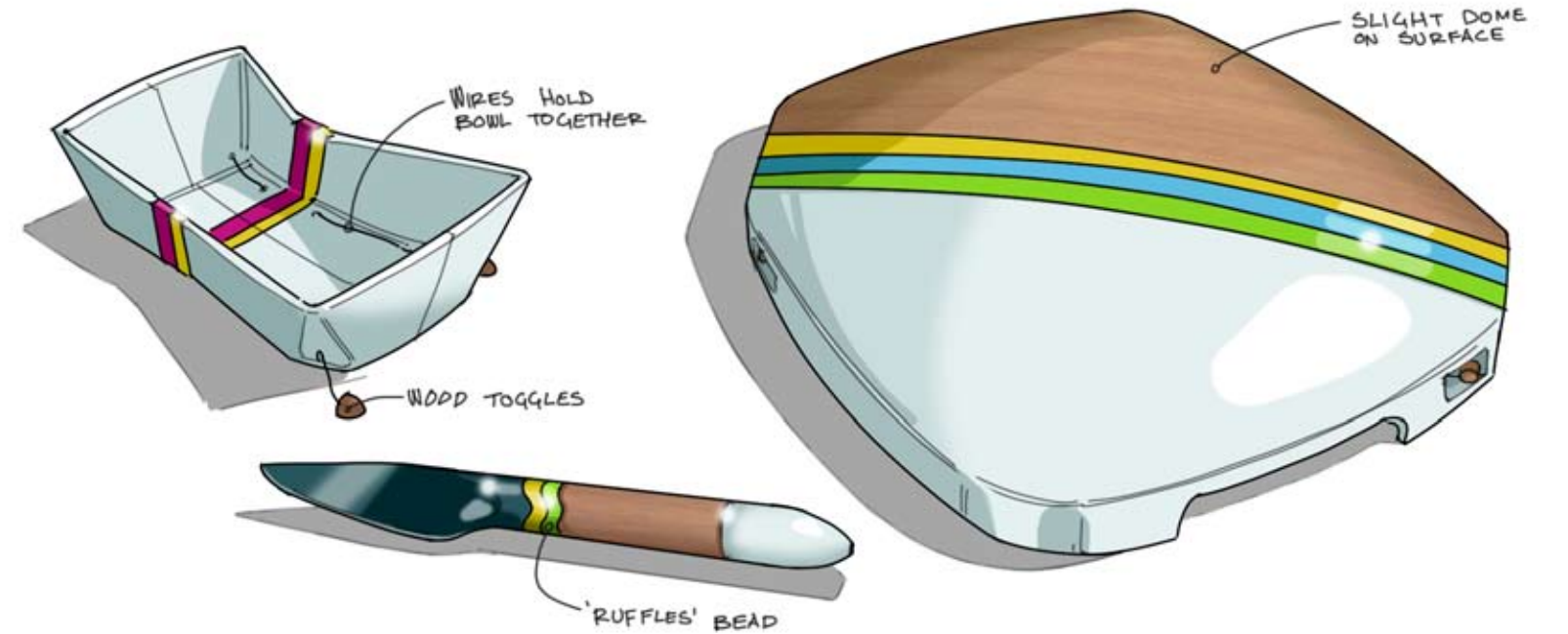
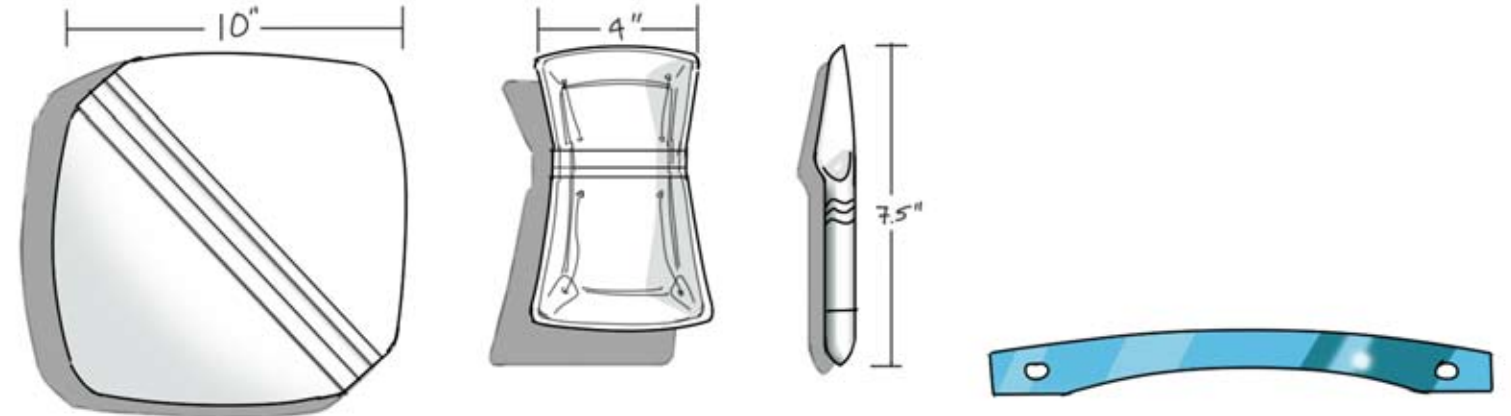
# CONCEPTS

## CONCEPT B



# CONCEPTS

## CONCEPT C



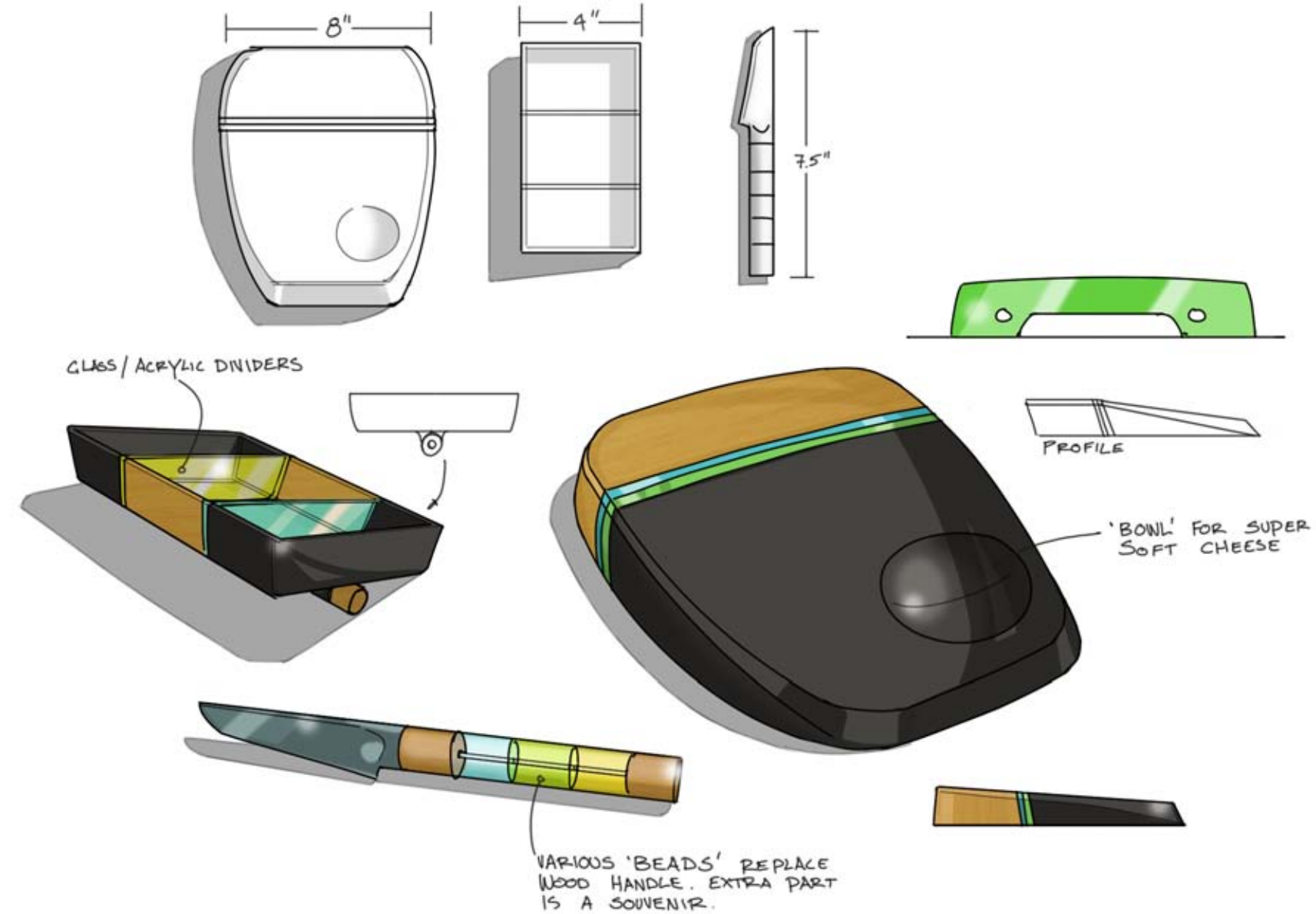
# CONCEPTS

## CONCEPT D



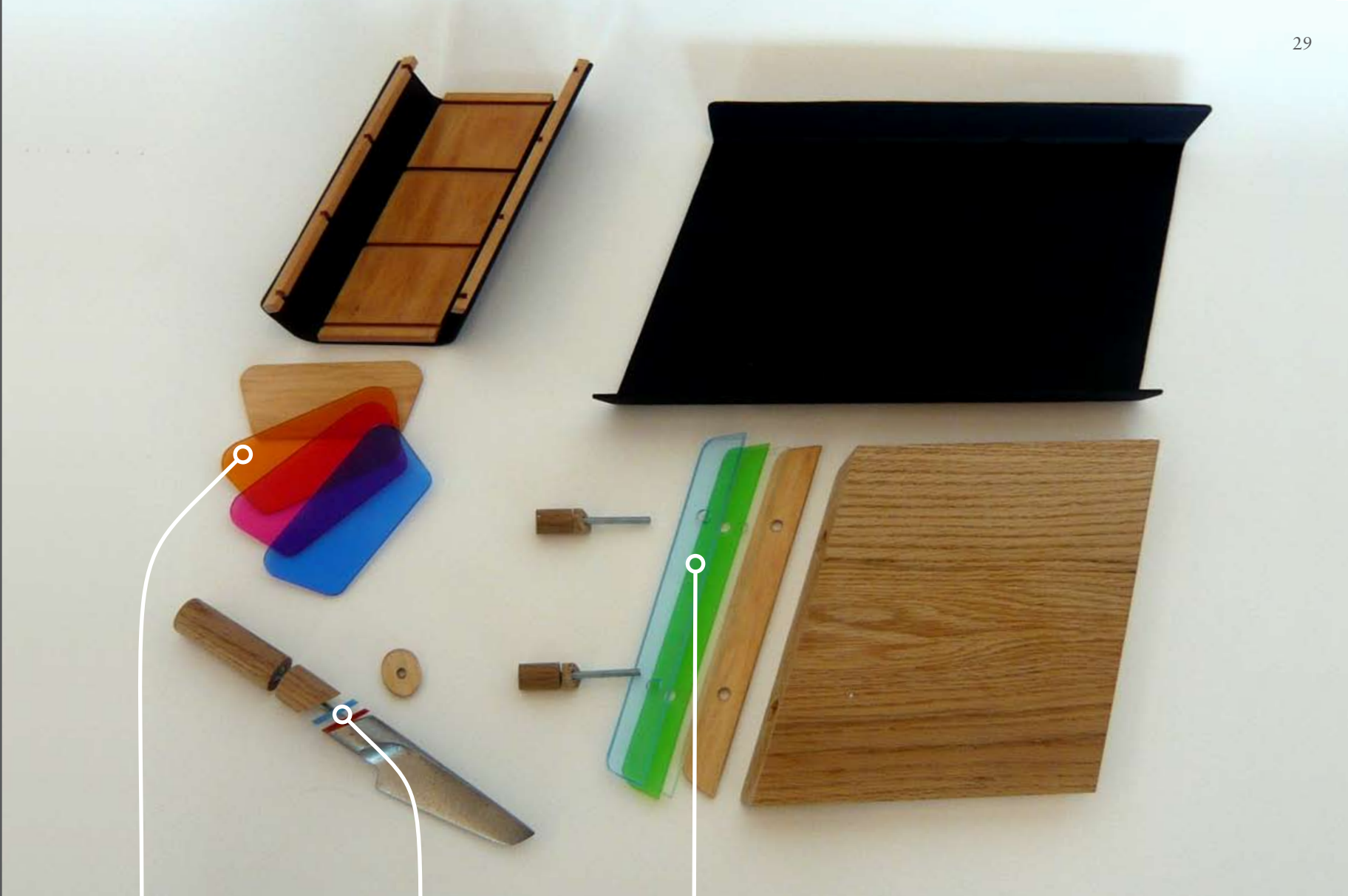
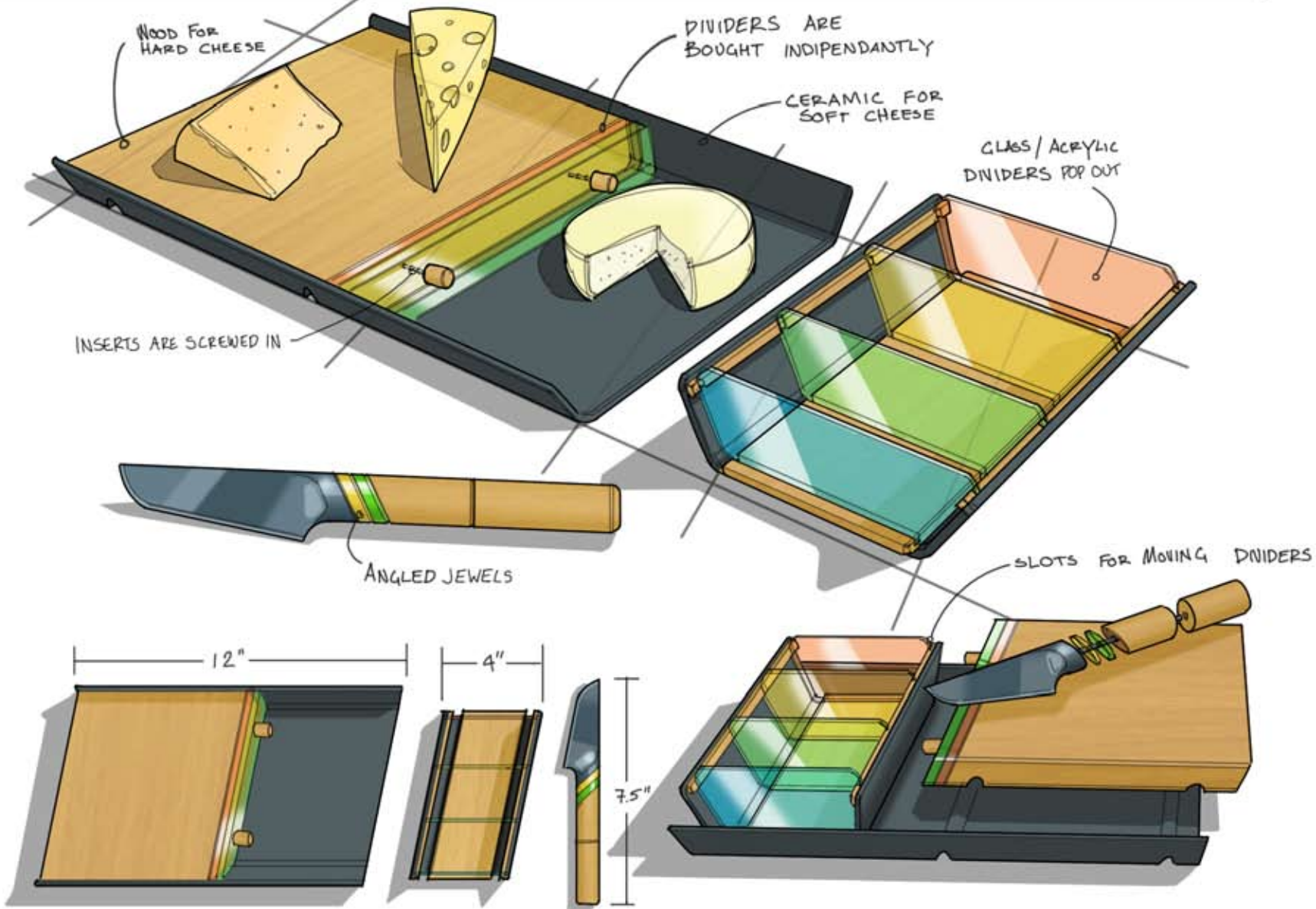
# CONCEPTS

## CONCEPT E



# FINAL CONCEPT

CONCEPT Final



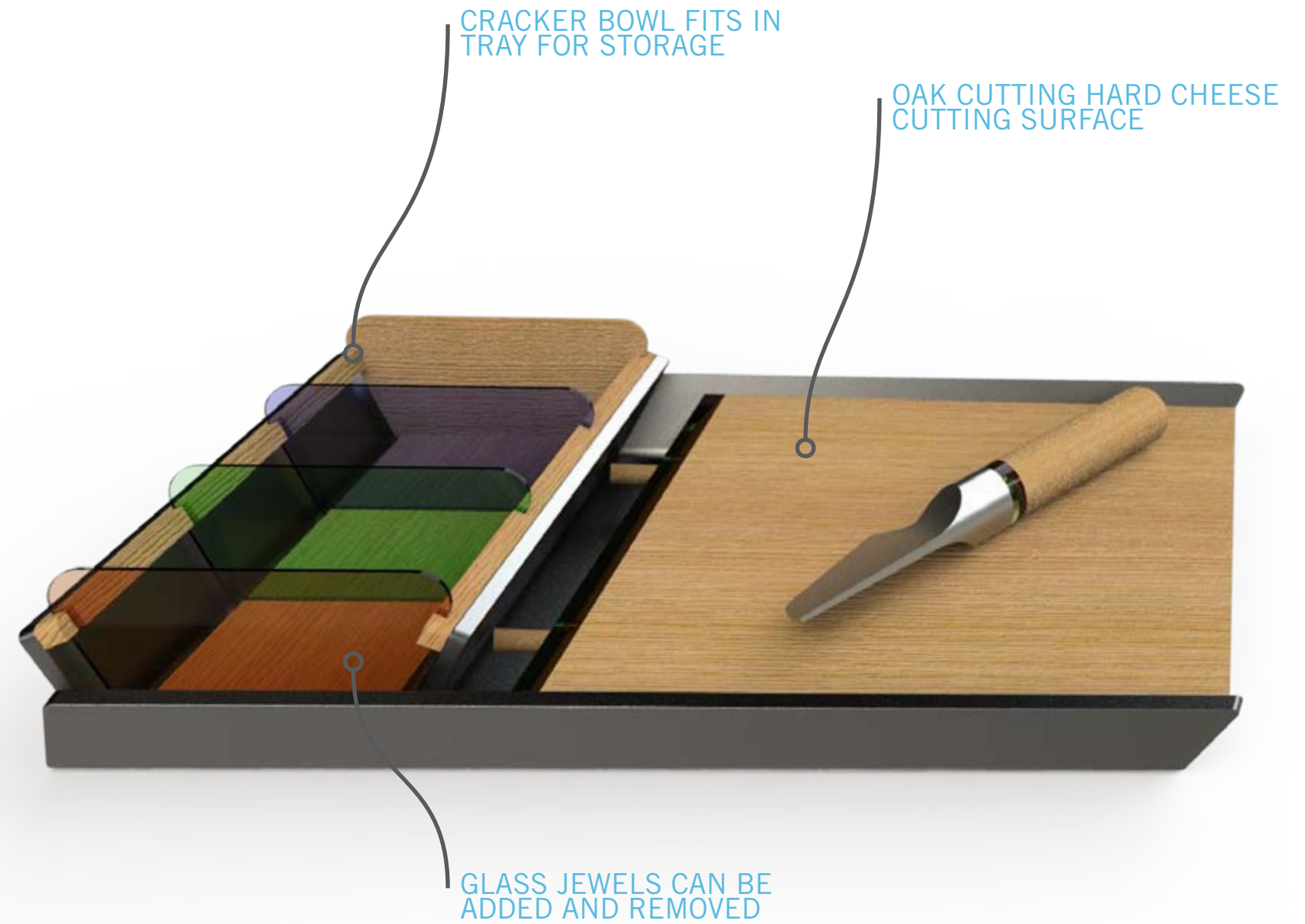
- 


**PERSON**  
Grandma  
The Miskells
- 


**PLACE**  
Roof Deck  
John's House
- 


**EVENT**  
The Wedding  
Sam's Birthday

3 shades of Glass represent a 3 types of subjects of stories. Various shades allow multiple jewels of the same type, Creating a visual display of the stories contained.



# CONTROL DRAWINGS

KNIFE	PART
1	Blade
2	Back Handle
3	Glass Jewel
5	Middle Handle
6	Glass Jewel

BOWL	PART
1	Ceramic Tray
2	Wood Frame
3	Glass Jewel
4	Glass Jewel
5	Glass Jewel
6	Glass Jewel

**STRATA Cheese Set**

DATE April 22, 2012 NAME Evan Hufker

SIZE A DWG. NO. Cracker Bowl & Cheese Knife REV.

SCALE:1:4 SHEET 1 OF 2

# CONTROL DRAWINGS

ITEM NO.	PART
1	Ceramic Tray
2	Oak Board
3	Oak Screw Sheath
4	Screw
5	Glass Jewel
6	Glass Jewel

**STRATA Cheese Set**

DATE April 22, 2012 NAME Evan Hufker

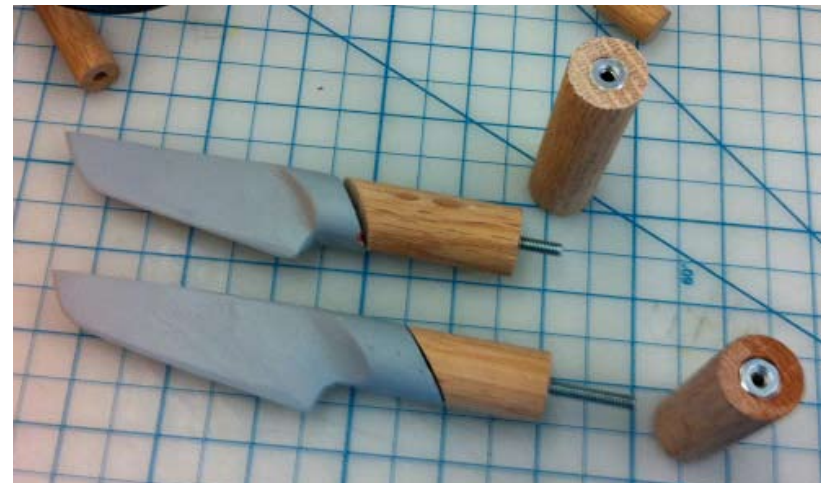
SIZE A DWG. NO. Cheese Board REV.

SCALE:1:4 SHEET 2 OF 2

# APPEARANCE MODEL CONSTRUCTION



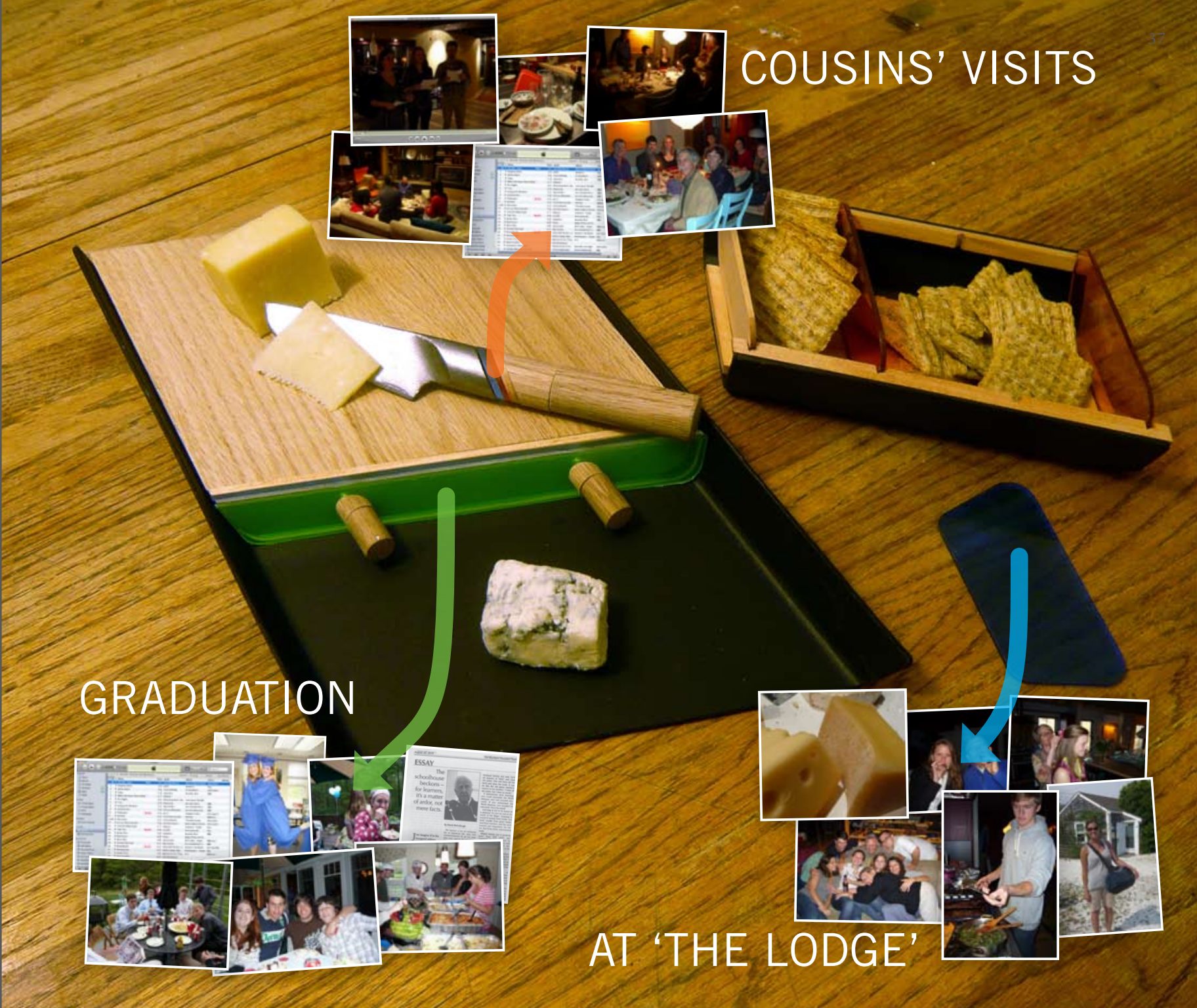
# APPEARANCE MODEL CONSTRUCTION







THE OAK SURFACE ALLOWS FORCEFUL CUTS THROUGH HARD CHEESE. THE CERAMIC DOES NOT ABSORB THE MOISTURE OF SOFT CHEESE.



COUSINS' VISITS

GRADUATION

AT 'THE LODGE'



# MADE IN AMERICA LABEL

## PRECIOUS OBJECTS, MADE IN AMERICA

Rising labor and shipping costs, decreasing automation costs, and issues of quality, communication, and turn around time, are driving manufacturing back to America.

'Made in America' is a trending subject, with blogs such as 'A Continuous Lean' championing American made goods.

*With their emphasis on intelligent design and quality construction, ... the label Made in the U.S.A. is more meaningful than ever.* (Fast Company, 2011)

*Two-thirds of voters believe manufacturing is central to our economic strength, and 57 percent believe manufacturing is... central to our economic strength.*(AAM, 2010)

*Companies—particularly the small to medium-size businesses...—are taking a long, hard look at the downsides of extending their supply chains to the other side of the planet.* (Wired, 2011)

## FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION REGULATIONS

Unqualified 'Made In USA' claim.

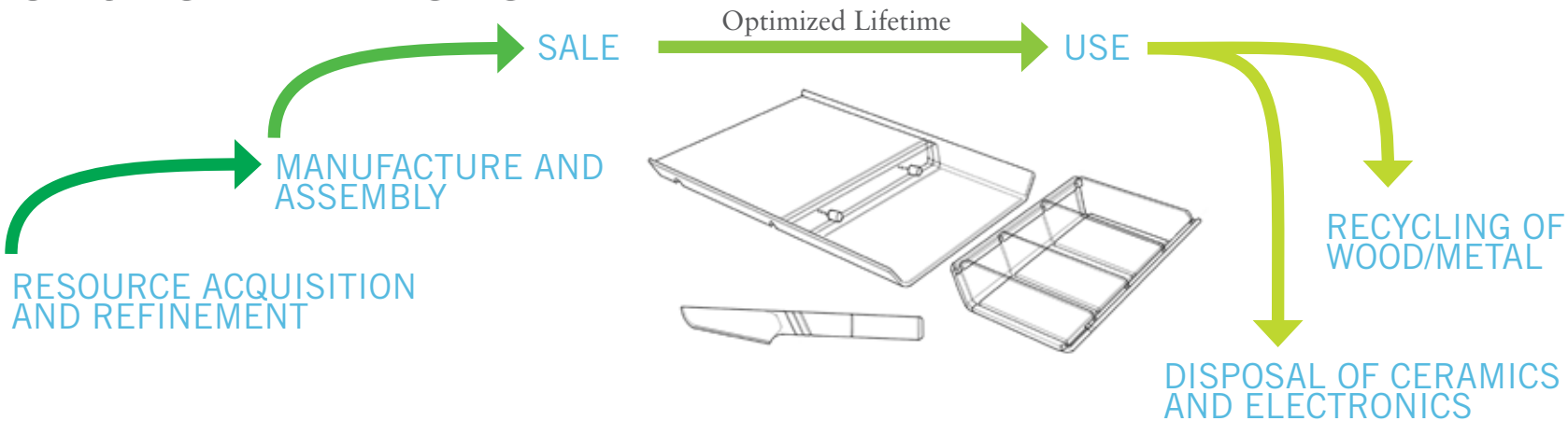
Virtually all parts of the product are processed within the U.S.

Final assembly occurs within the U.S.

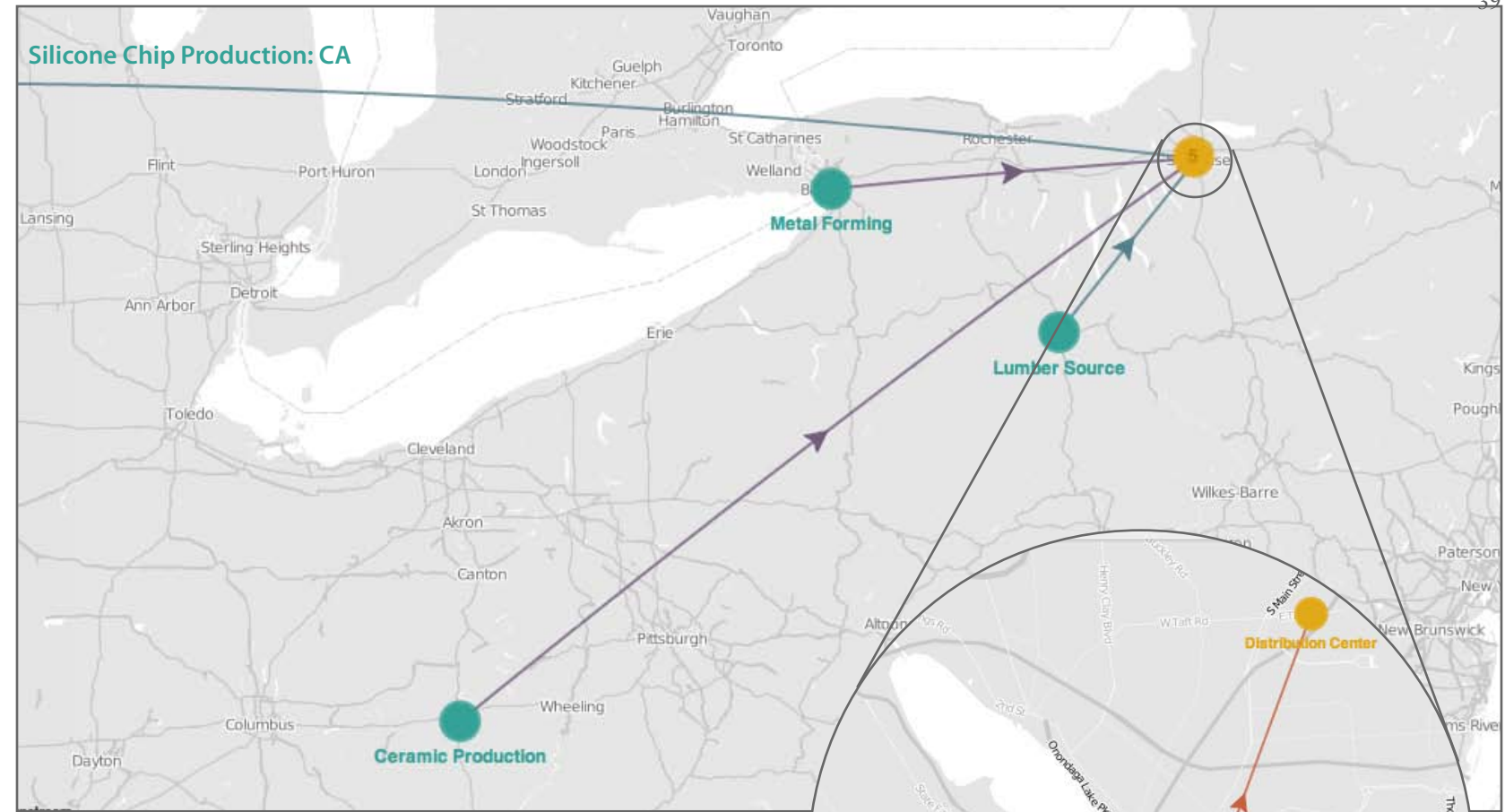
Negligible foreign content in final product.



## OBJECT LIFE CYCLE



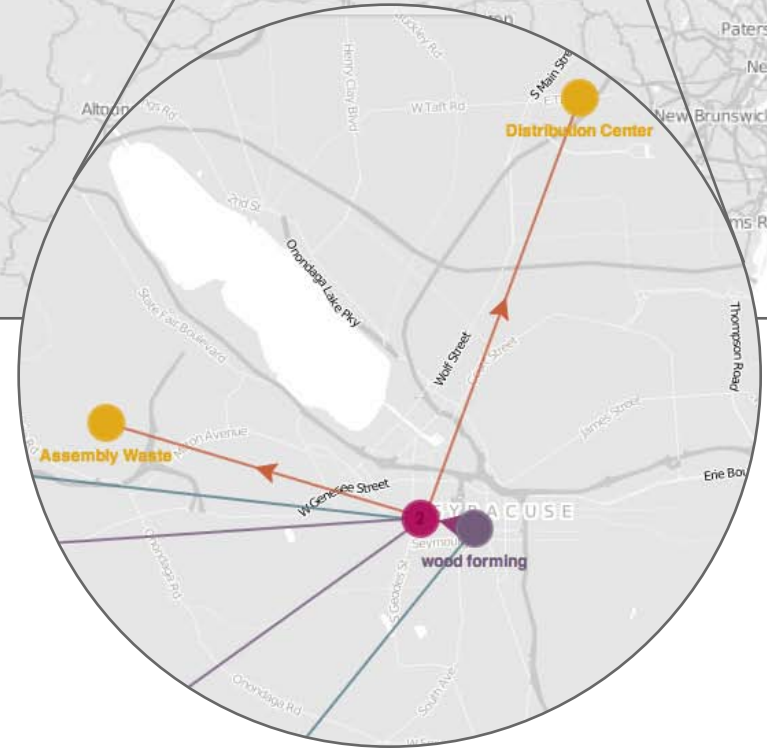
## Silicone Chip Production: CA



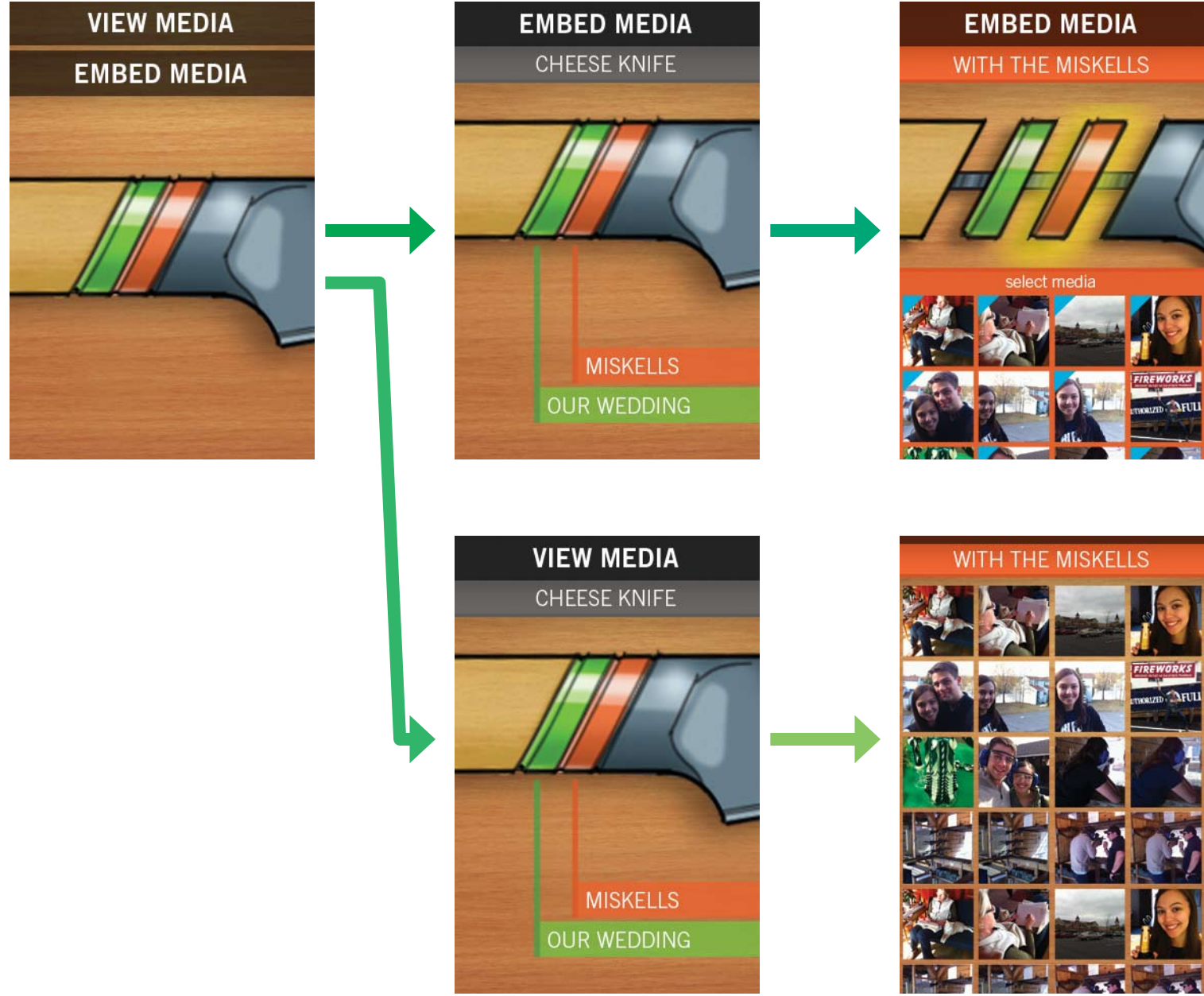
## SOURCEMAP

- STAINLESS STEEL // NEW YORK
- DIGITAL HARDWARE // NEW YORK/CALIFORNIA
- RED OAK // NEW YORK
- CERAMIC // OHIO
- GLAZES // OHIO
- GLASS // OHIO

All raw materials are gathered within the United States. All manufacturing of components occurs within New York State. Assembly and distribution happens in Syracuse.



# DIGITAL APP ARCHITECTURE



RFID TECHNOLOGY ALLOWS WIRELESS CONNECTION TO SMART COLLECTING DEVICES





**STRATA SERVING SET**

## Creative Response

I have grown up watching my father, an architect, design and build beautiful homes, buildings, and spaces for his clients. Ingrained in my mind since youth is his mantra “build once well.” This is one of the ways that he seeks to create a structure that will become an heirloom in his client’s family. His goal is to increase the “Life Equity” of the building, which describes the relationship between the building and its residents, as a family and culture changes over time.

To him, these two elements of “build once well” and “Life Equity” are a large part of creating ‘heirlooms to live in.’ That is, spaces that will bring together, respond to, and help define a family’s dynamic for generations.

As the comedian George Carlin once said, “Home is where you keep your stuff while you’re out getting other stuff.” Despite his satire, Carlin points out that in much the same way that spaces hold meaning and purpose in our lives, so too do the objects and things that we fill those spaces with.

In the English language there is a separate word for when a house becomes more than just a shelter: Home. I don’t know that we have a word for an object that gains this sort of emotional investment. ‘Heirloom’ comes close to meaning, but it focuses more on an object’s longevity and family associations throughout time. Looking back at my research, it has seemed to center around the search for this word. Though I didn’t find that specific word, I thoroughly explored its definition.

I first began thinking about this project in early of 2011, over a year ago. My original goal was to identify the main factors that create sentimental value in an object, and how that value forms an aura that elevates common objects to a special status in our minds and in our culture: precious objects. I was not interested in simply important objects, such as things that keep us alive, protect us, or sustain us (though many of these objects do become precious); I was interested in looking at the things are valuable cognitively, perhaps with no logical or apparent reason for their worth.

I began working earnestly on this project while studying abroad in London. With no grounding yet in any research I was at a loss of where to start. I decided to put a stick in the ground and ‘start anywhere.’ Inspired by the amazing museums and world artifacts throughout the country, I began by documenting the way that viewers interacted with these objects. I looked at how the artifacts were presented and protected, tracking the formal language of museums and galleries, as well as taking photos of display cases and velvet covered ropes, signs and security guards. The objects that we elevate above ourselves fascinate me. The objects that we bow before, or that we put behind glass, or that only certain people can touch. Just the idea that there are large institutions dedicated to preserving physical artifacts from the past seems to validate the pursuit of this study.

After about a month of recording the interactions between museumgoers and the displayed objects, I realized that the gallery environment is detached from our normal day-to-day reality. Visitors to a museum come primed to expect works of art or artifacts to be valuable, and

treat them that way. Their actions and reactions are highly dictated by cultural assumptions of the purpose of and conduct within museums and art galleries.

During my semester in London, I took a class with Forbes Morlock: “Reading Pictures, Seeing Stories.” One of the topics of the course was the communication amongst viewer/reader, medium, and artist/author in any creative work. The viewer of any work sees it through a sequence of progressively finer ‘frames,’ these frames can be of art history, the artist’s reputation, the culture or location of the work’s exhibition, or the viewer’s past. This framework led me to bring the focus of my research to a more intimate level with the viewer of an object. I wanted to explore the way culture, history, evolution, and perception lead to the intimate creation of sentimental value.

As well as looking at the subject from a personal level, I also wanted to explore the historical and cultural factors that could influence our current perceptions of subjective value. I think that how we treat objects also tells us a lot about what we value in our society. It’s amazing that we swear on the bible, die protecting the flag, and have opinions about the flammability of either.

I began to look at objects and the treatment of the natural world from a religious aspect. In Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, God says “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (NIV, Gen. 1:26). To me this Abrahamic concept of man’s god-like dominion over the earth speaks



to the 'western' ideals of capitalism and consumption. This ideal directly contrasts the 'eastern' Shinto belief in Kami, the idea that every earthly object has its own spirit, and should be respected. In religious practices also, objects are essential to ritual: vestments, imagery, idols, crucifixes, rosaries, and prayer rugs all have coded metaphysical meanings. We use objects to represent even the most intangible of ideas.

Not only do we use objects to represent ideas, but we also personify objects, giving them human qualities. This play between object and idea as a symbol is the basis for branding: we use the objects we own to define us, and show others our personalities.

I took some time to read several excerpts from various philosophers on object theories. In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Jean Baudrillard proposes that there are four ways that we can value an object. The first is functional value, or the objects instrumental purpose. The second is its exchange value; what it is worth in time, money, or trade. The third is symbolic value; this is the value that a subject assigns an object in relation to another subject. The fourth is sign value, which is the value of the object within a system of objects and the ideas it signifies. This is all to say that an object can never be read as just an object as it is innately covered in layers of cultural and personal meaning. Baudrillard argues, and I agree, that because of these layers, 'true reality' no longer exists: nothing is simply what it is.

One of my favorite quotes on this subject is by the artist Robert Irwin, who said, "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees." Meaning that if we look at a car we are conditioned see the symbol of a car

(the cultural associations coded ideas associated with cars and driving culture), not the curves of the bent metal and glass. I think the idea that physical objects are replaced in our minds by the memories and cultural associations behind them is absolutely true. These objects take on the essences of the ideas behind them, often regardless of their physical nature.

This idea is at the core of the idea of precious objects. The ideas behind them, the stories, the people, and the events to which they are associated consume them, and replace their essence. My definition of a 'precious object' is something a person has a truly deep emotional connection with. It is something that we assign more value than its utility or purpose suggests. When we invest ourselves either personally or culturally in a common object, it is transubstantiated into something more than its mere physical existence; it exudes and creates meaning.

When I came back from London to America, I began working at a product design consultancy over the summer. I was part of a team that designed consumer goods for mass markets; there was not much thought of longevity or sentimental value that went into the designs. This was not because the designers did not care, but because our clients did not find these aspects relevant to their brands and products. After this experience of designing consumable goods, and as a maker of things in a culture so devoted to object impermanence and the consumption of things, I decided that I needed to justify the idea that objects could and should command an aura of value beyond their function.

After reading Dennis Dutton's theory on the evolutionary roots of art and tool making in *The Art Instinct*, and talking with Eric Holzwarth,

my honors advisor, and Don Carr, my thesis advisor, I came to the realization that humans have co-evolved with objects. We've been using objects even before we were Homo Sapiens. We developed stone tools, evolutionarily replacing our need for primal survival skills with our need for with a need for complex reasoning. We developed fire to pre-digest our food, and our teeth became smaller, and our diet expanded. Our inventions altered our genetics. We don't use objects because we are human; we are human because we use objects.

Our fascination and reliance on objects predates our human culture, society, and language. The technology that we create is not a separate entity from ourselves; it is in fact an integral part of the human organism. Technology is the manifested projection of our minds onto the physical world. We have evolved beyond a point of no return, and our possessions are now as much a part of our bodies as are our limbs or organs.

To me, this all meant that studying the way we interact with our objects had become a study of kinesthetics. The way in which we move these 'limbs' directly impacts who we are, and how we perceive the world.

In an effort to trim down this massive subject into something more manageable, I began to mind map the ideas that comprise precious objects. I identified the themes of value, attachment objects, aesthetics, uniqueness, sustainability, utility, pleasure, material, and history as components of this larger idea. I brought this diagram of the subject to Eric Holzwarth, and Don Carr, as a prompt for a series of conversations.

One of the more interesting ideas we talked about was that of the multiple spectra which create object value. At extremes, museums and

churches protect objects of historical value and religious idols, while we do not hesitate to throw our razors and old refrigerators in the dump. There are TV shows about people who hoard objects in their homes while mendicant sects swear off all worldly possessions.

We have technological objects that are so complex, and have had so many people involved in their creation that they are un-makable by any one individual. And we still have simple objects, like the ones that Gandhi carried with him, almost all of which he made himself from natural materials. In between these extremes I was also fascinated by the subjects heirlooms, longevity, quality, craft, repair, authenticity, patina, and even the concept of ownership. The biggest common thread that we found stitching together all of these examples was the importance of history on our perception of an object's value.

One of the books that I drew the most inspiration and research from was *How Pleasure Works* by Paul Bloom. His book discusses the evolutionary and social roots of our deep emotional connections to others and our objects. He argues that the common thread in all stories is that they are about people; there is a protagonist or antagonist or someone in every story that has ever been told. Every person we care about also has some sort of history; these stories create an emotional impact upon us, and create empathy for that person. If stories are about people, then any object that has a story, our mind will begin to treat as a person. We don't actually think that objects with stories are people, but I believe that cognitively, these objects take up the same type of space that our personal relationships do in our mind.

Thus, when we fall in love with an object, it is almost the same love that we feel for others. I think this conclusion makes sense when we look at the evolutionary roots of tools; well-made stone hand axes are evolutionary metonyms for an individual's fine motor skills and intelligence, a key factor in sexual selection. We care about objects that have stories, because those stories have to do with other people, and we have evolved to care about what an object says about a person.



My early method of concept development and refinement was mind mapping. I charted every idea, subject, and case study in a matrix. I created a wall size diagram of the dimensions of my research. I adhered pages of case studies and articles, which supported the headings of these subjects. This way I could go back to them quickly and begin to chart out how I would tell the story of the research.

In the process of this secondary research, I began looking back to my work in London, which I had thought no longer particularly relevant. I began thinking about how we elevate our own sentimental objects in our minds above others. I wondered what it would look like if I were to curate a museum of my own life. I created a simple black pedestal with a black frame above it, which defined a cubical display space. I put several common objects (one at a time) that had sentimental value to me on the pedestal, and created placards below to reference the traditional museum display technique.

One of these objects was a beer can that I had drunk with several of my studio partners while we were up late working one night. I wrote an objective analysis of the importance of the beer can as an artifact of my life. I think this is the way in which our minds organize objects with stories in our minds. They are highlighted and become distinct even from identical objects. While this experiment did not have any quantitative results, the qualitative paradigm shift of visualizing how our mind experiences the physical world was very worthwhile.



Based on these findings and much of my secondary research, I created another spectrum of story value to work within. This spectrum began to define the differences between organic object stories and manufactured object stories. We all know manufactured object stories: Coca Cola will make you happy, Chevrolet trucks will make ladies like you, Budweiser will make you popular. These are brand stories that manufacture artificial back-stories and mythologies behind consumable objects. I'm more interested in intrinsic and sentimental stories that organically emerge from an individual's relationship with an object. These relationships can be external or internal, such as a child's love of a security object, or a celebrity's chewing gum being sold on eBay. While the lines between these spectrums are blurred, I think we all have an innate understanding of which stories are authentic and which are artificially manufactured.

This was one of the big issues that I've wrestled with throughout this entire project. Can an organic story be designed into an object? Does purchasing an object with the intent for it to be a precious object negate the organic nature of its value growth? And can this object ever be as innately and sentimentally valuable as a common object that became loved by chance?

I'm still not completely sure that I have a solid answer to those questions. I do however think that the power of evoked memories is an innate and powerful force. One of my favorite case studies that I found was a brass pen casing that covers common ballpoint pens. The high quality and minimal brass casing is meant to patina and age over time; it is meant to get

better with age. The memories of use are being recorded into the material of the object itself.

I decided to pursue the subject of patina further. I went to talk to Dave Rudd at Dalton's antique furniture showroom. In his business of reselling mostly Stickley furniture, much of which is nearing 100 years old, preserving the patina and the provenance of each piece is essential. His customers are looking for that aged feel and to purchase the history of the object. The story of the piece's past is of paramount importance for collectors.



I set off to develop my own method of creating an accelerated patina on objects. I took thermo-paper rolls that are normally used in cash registers, and I adhered them to blank stickers. I set them around academic buildings on areas of high contact, such as doors, handles, desks and chairs. I tracked their change in appearance over the course of several days. I considered this experiment a failure as all I got were dirtier pieces of paper. However, this discouragement made me focus more on the stories behind the patina, the natural accidents of a history of use.



Mid way through my fall semester back at Syracuse, most of my research had been secondary; I had been reading books, articles, and looking at existing experiments and projects on the subject. To get a more personal view of the subject I began asking everyone I could to tell me a story about his or her favorite objects. I asked for the stories behind common objects with sentimental value, the kind of objects that give you joy when you use them or look at them.

I interviewed people in person as well as sending away requests via email. I got a wide range of responses to my query. People were excited to share their stories about their precious objects. Individually, the stories were each unique, but analyzing the stories as a whole, several patterns emerged. I realized that there were essentially three basic plots to any objects story: either the object had contacted the user significantly, or it had contacted someone significant to the user, or it had experienced a significant event.

Ultimately these three ‘plots’ of object stories led me to my design brief. Which was to create a system that allows a set of objects to embody these three plots. The object would have to contact others, be present in the owner’s life, and be involved in significant events, and it would have to show this interaction physically.

Before I could begin designing, however, I needed to finish the research portion of the project. As the fall semester wound down, I felt that I had enough research to compile into a book. Organizing this varied range of research was difficult; the most logical solution was to arrange it chronologically. The plot of the book was close to the process of my

research throughout my fall semester. As I am a very visual person, I wanted there to be a lot of images to support the text; ultimately, the book became eighty pages long.

The process of writing this book was very meditative. At the start of writing it, I had several ideas for the conclusion. I wanted to touch on the idea of patina and ownership, as well as celebrating a relationship with an object. As I wrote, I also realized that I wanted to talk about the idea of object permanence and the dichotomy between precious objects and consumer culture, specifically designed obsolescence. I wanted to focus on how having precious objects in our lives, and having a more fulfilling relationship with our physical environment can enrich our lives.



Years ago, a professor told me that he didn't value anything physical, as objects were only physical and temporary, particularly in our consumer society. He valued only his personal relationships and experiences. I took up argument with this position, although most of my life is enriched by the things I do and the people I surround myself with, I could think of many things that I owned that simply made my life better. Every time I use my

favorite mug or put on my favorite belt, I feel happier. I am convinced that there are objects that we interact with in the world that make life better.

When I came back to school for my spring semester, I had already laid the foundation for my design work. From the research completed I was ready to design ‘an object that contacts others, is present in the owner’s life, and be involved in significant events, and shows these interactions physically.’

After much brainstorming, I realized that a serving dish would well represent this system. As something that repeatedly interacts at social gatherings with friends and family, a serving dish experiences multiple events and personalities. I chose a cheese serving set: a knife, cracker bowl, and cheese board.

I have always loved cheese and cracker hors d’oeuvres, so for me this project took an even more personal turn. ‘Cheese culture’ spans multiple cuisines and can be enjoyed at a variety of meals/non-meals. This system could really exist on any object or set of objects, but once again I felt like I needed to drive a stake in the ground and commit to something. The cheese set represents three different ways that this system of adding physical elements to represent memories could work if applied to any range of other products.

I wanted the system to contain and represent these memories in a physical aspect, but also harness the power of digital technology. Unfortunately, digital objects rarely seem to become heirlooms or precious objects. They usually become obsolete with new technology; my challenge was to integrate digital technology in a way that would not interfere with

the timelessness of the physical object. I felt that simple storage devices would have long term potential. Although floppy disks are now outdated, they still contain the data. With the advent of wireless communication, RFID technology can be accessed with a wide range of devices. I also believe that in the near future all digital devices will become 'smarter,' meaning they will be able to interact with each other without much human contact.

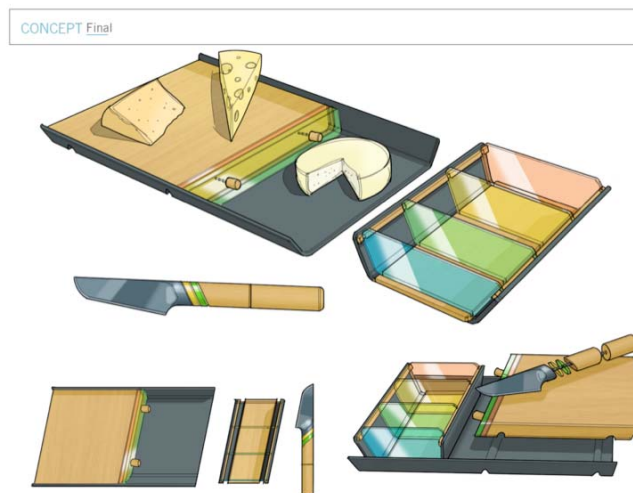
My concept centers on the observation that we are continuously collecting digital media: photos, video, audio, recipes, narratives, play lists, scores, ect. Digital technology has allowed us to effortlessly and inexpensively document our lives; something that has not been possible before now. While all of this data is being generated, it is stored on remote devices that do not have any relation to where the memory was created. The concept is based upon the question: what if our objects could tell their own stories? And record their own provenance?

I filled up another wall with post it notes in the process brainstorming the way this system worked and how it interacted with the user. I ended with the concept of adding a physical element to common objects; each element would act as a storage device for digital media. Not only would it record the history of its life or the people that interacted with it by collecting the digital information, but it would also act as a physical memento as well.

After several rounds of sketching, I settled on 'jewels' that would be added to the object in a way that would change the function of the object. The knife and cheese board would have a metal screw that would attach and detach these jewels to the object, making the handle of the blade longer,

and altering the cutting surface of the cheese board. As for the cracker bowl, the dividers for the different types of crackers could be snapped in and out by a friction fit, creating different container shapes.

Material selection was particularly important to me. In my analysis of the object stories from my interviews, I realized that all of the objects were either made from metal, wood, or natural materials such as wood or animals. There was only one object that had any plastic on it (a Swiss Army knife). While designing the set, I stuck to traditional materials such as ceramic, metal, wood, and glass. These materials will also provide a wonderful patina as they age with use, another factor from my research that I incorporated.



I do much of my design thinking via sketch explorations. I try to iterate and explore new forms and mechanics in thumbnail format before determining the final design. I spent a while sketching to determine exactly how these ‘jewels’ (my term for the physical elements added to the set) would be attached and what the cheese set would comprise of. I decided on

a cheese board that was half wood for hard cheese, and half ceramic for soft cheese. This was a better use of materials as the wood does not absorb the moisture of the hard cheese as much, and can be aggressively cut into through a hard cheese. The ceramic works well for soft cheeses, which do not require much force to cut, and it could be cleaned more easily. Once I had figured out the threading system and the members of the set, I rendered five semi-final concepts on the digital pen tablet, drawing them over a sketch model photograph underlay. After getting feedback from professors and classmates I synthesized several aspects of the leading designs into a final design.

Once I had completed the final design, I had two weeks to create the appearance model before spring break and the first presentation of my almost completed thesis. As the CNC mill, laser cutter, and 3D printer were all backed up with other student's thesis work, I decided to make all of my model without the aid of any computer controlled machine tools.



For the cheese board, I thermo-formed a 3/16 sheet of styrene over an MDF buck that I had made on the table saw. I spray painted this with

black textured automotive spray paint to mimic the black glazed ceramic that the product would be if manufactured. I cut a board of red oak on the table saw to register into the grooves in the faux ceramic base. I did not finish this wood, as it is the cutting surface for the hard cheeses and did not want any chemicals to leech into the cheese; it will also gain a patina more quickly unfinished. The wood board is held into the ceramic base by a friction fit, and can come apart easily for washing in the sink.

In making the cracker bowl, I used the same process that I used to create the base of the cheese plate. I glued in several pieces of model making quality balsawood that I stained to look more like the red oak (the actual product would use unfinished red oak). I used the table saw to dado grooves into this wood that the dividers register into. The dividers were made from colored acrylic boxes that I cut up on the band saw and finished on a circular sander.

For the handle of the knife I used a lathe to tap holes directly into the center of a  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch red oak dowel. I embedded two nuts into the backmost piece of the handle. The nuts received the bolt that I glued into the back of blade, sandwiching the plastic jewels in place. I made the blade by using the band saw to cut the profile of the blade out of acrylic sheet, then filling in the shape with Sulpey clay. Once I baked the Sculpey onto the acrylic, I gave it several passes of sand paper and Bondo contour putty before I spray painted it with a metallic looking coating.

I mocked up the different slides for the digital app in Photoshop to show the feel and function of what the real thing would be. However, I am still trying to wrestle with the issue of technological objects being perceived

as ‘timeless.’ I believe the technology in the set takes a back seat to its physical functions; it is a cheese set first, and a memory box second.

Overall, my aim was to push the conceptual edge of this product while still remaining grounded in practical functionality. I’d like to think that the cheese set could be a successful product in the near future, when more and more devices become wirelessly and seamlessly connected; current technology is not yet integrated enough.

Formally, I tried to push the envelope of the visual language of serving dishes. As the set incorporates technology, the form needed to express its futuristic approach to storing memories. For the cheese board and cracker bowl, I took a golden section rectangle and shifted it into a parallelogram. The wood cutting block creates the golden square within the section. The concept for the cheese board and cracker bowl are containing black glazed ceramic ‘U’ shapes that receive red oak functional members. The dividers of the cracker bowl are largely filleted trapezoids overlaid onto a simple backdrop of minimal wood on black glazed ceramic.

While I wanted the form to express its futuristic function, I also wanted to keep this visual language separate from the conceptual technology behind it, keeping it grounded in current production techniques. I tried to retain the traditional feel of serving dishes and food culture via the material choice of time tested steel, wood, and ceramic. I tried to keep my feet planted in the past and in reality, while looking ahead to explore the conceptual and technological future of the product. The design is principally concerned with its functional considerations: it still cuts cheese and holds crackers.



Hopefully, my work with this project will not end here. I would like to continue developing this product, perhaps reeling it back technologically to work better with current capabilities. As I've attempted to design it to be made from simple production processes and inexpensive materials, I'm interested in exploring the possibility of having it manufactured locally. I would also like to further explore the potential market around this product, and the business model that might accompany it.

Overall, I have been very pleased with the final result of this Capstone process. At the start of this project I did not know what the final product would be or look like; I am surprised and excited by the outcome. This yearlong journey was very exploratory, and the final discovery of my final product made the difficult and long journey worthwhile.

## Works Cited

All work in 'Manufactured Stories' is internally cited on pages 74-75

'Strata Serving Set' Images Cited:

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## Summary of Capstone Project

This Capstone work explores the ways that designers can encourage users to find sentimental value in their everyday objects. My research examines the practical and theoretical aspects of why we feel emotional connections to common objects. From the conclusions I drew in this research I designed a set of products aimed at maximizing the sentimental value felt by the user.

I began this project by researching the idea of ‘precious objects,’ looking for common threads in the relationships that users have with everyday objects they feel a deep emotional connection with. Of the many cultural, personal, and evolutionary roots of sentimental value, the issue of an object’s provenance is paramount. Substances can be duplicated but history cannot. We will always value and desire to be in contact with the essence of an original.

We preserve the essences and memories of others and ourselves in the objects that we touch. The recorded provenance of an object reveals the story of its owner. For millennia, proto-humans attracted mates by displaying their dexterity, fitness, and cognitive faculty through the construction of stone hand-axes. These simple tools were metonyms for the maker’s genetics. Thus, through sexual selection we have evolved to believe that objects can contain the essences of individuals; this is called contagion theory.

Even in our world of industrially manufactured and mass consumed products, we still believe that objects can contain the essence of an

individual or a past event. While we behave as if these essences were contained in the objects themselves, they really only exist in our minds. However, we recognize patina and physical marks of aging as physical manifestations of an object's interaction with other people.

This theoretical background explained the creation of our attachment to objects; to understand the personal implications of this phenomenon I collected stories about precious objects. I asked a wide range of people to tell me a story about a common object they love and personally regard as irreplaceable. From these narratives I found that are three main themes in the stories that users tell about their precious objects: the object has contacted an individual who is significant to the user, it has touched the user in some way, or it has experienced an important event.

This conclusion informed my brief for the product design, which was to create a product that physically changes to record the stories of the people, places, and events that it has experienced.

From this brief I designed the Strata cheese set, which is composed of a cheese board, cracker bowl, and cheese knife. The design is a response to the way we currently record memories by digitally capturing and recording our experiences as they occur. Shared online, these digital photographs, videos, and play lists no longer have a physical reference.

The Strata serving set stores these digital memories, allowing the physical object to tell its own story. Instead of the essences of others in objects being contained in our minds, they can now truly be contained in the objects themselves. This system for objects to record their own narratives could also work with a variety of other objects.

Each object is physically altered by the addition of ‘jewels,’ which are glass, wood, or acrylic attachments. These jewels are digital storing devices that receive and store digital media wirelessly from smart recording devices such as cameras, phones, and computers. The buildup of these layers of jewels and stories create strata of memories and stories. The traditional and natural materials gain a patina from a lifetime of use; it is designed to become a family heirloom.

Visually, all three pieces in the cheese set relate to each other. In each object, the jewels are angled off of the orthogonal axes at a uniform bias; if the objects were lined up, the jewels’ major axes would all be parallel. The concept is that these three objects were originally rectangles that have been slanted to become parallelograms.

Each object is a separate study on how the jewels can attach and modify the form and the function. The jewels are not ‘charms’ attached to the objects, but alter the way they are used: the knife elongates, as does the cutting surface of the cheese board, while the bowl can change to accommodate different contents.

In keeping with my research, I chose traditional materials that will patina beautifully. Durable Red Oak will withstand constant use as the handle of the knife and cutting surface for hard cheese. The ceramic gives the set a traditional feel, while its black glaze adds a modern twist. The materials respond to the concept of the overall feel of the set, which is meant to acknowledge its ‘futuristic’ digital elements, while also referencing the traditional materials associated with heirlooms, quality manufacture, and longevity.

I explored the potential of this product being made in America. As a cheese set it is aimed at a more bourgeois/luxury market, where the perception and reality of 'quality' is important. As the set is meant to increase in value with time, it needs to last as long as possible. My design allows for common and inexpensive production processes to be used in its construction, making it more feasible to be manufactured in New York State, with most raw materials sourced in the USA.

These products are meant to increase in sentimental value as they are used and as they gain the stories and memories of users. I designed this set with the knowledge that in the near future most digital devices will be 'smart' allowing them to wirelessly connect to the jewels and transfer data. The conceptual nature of this feature would not be currently practical, but within the next two to five years I believe technology will make the concept viable.

In our disposable world of consumer goods, fast fashion, and fads, objects that we keep with us and emotionally connect with will be increasingly important. These objects are more sustainable as they only need to be manufactured and transported once. As many of our relationships and activities become digitized, strong emotional connections to our physical world will become increasingly important.

Objects that stick with us and grow in value help us find a sense of place and fulfillment in our physical world.

**Onward and Upward!**