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THE SPIRIT OF STUFF:
WHAT I LEARNED WHEN I SOLD (ALMOST) EVERYTHING

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Rachel Perry Schrank

June 2009

Advisor: Tony Gault, M.F.A.

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ABSTRACT

The following document is a report submitted in conjunction with a video project. The video is a personal documentary, filmed in Denver, Colorado and Mexico City, Mexico, which explores the spiritual connection that people have with their material objects. The report is comprised of a project proposal and a post-production report. The proposal discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the project, and offers a plan for the film's production. The post-production report discusses my filmmaking process in retrospect, reviews production problems and solutions, and includes a final schedule and budget.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: An Introduction to Stuff and Us……………………………………. 1

Chapter Two: Literature Review……………………………………………….. 3
- Why Stuff Matters…………………………………………………………. 3
- Theory Shopping: A Guide……………………………………………….. 5
- Social Science Perspectives……………………………………………... 6
- Objects as Language: A Structuralist Approach…………………………...9
- Stuff and Stories: A Narratological Approach…………………………… 14
- Connections From Dream Research……………………………………… 17
- Too Much Stuff, Not Enough Meaning……………………………………21
- Reclaiming the Meaning of Stuff: Dream and Play……………………… 23
- Plans for My Film Based on These Theoretical Perspectives……………. 25
- Material Culture on Film and Television………………………………… 28
- Documentary Modes……………………………………………………… 33

Chapter Three: Production Plan……………………………………………….. 36
- Modern Hieroglyphs as an Organizing Motif…………………………….. 36
- Divining and Defining Modern Hieroglyphs…………………………… 37
- Reading Modern Hieroglyphs…………………………………………… 39
- Target Audience…………………………………………………………... 40

Chapter Four: Post-Production Report……………………………………….. 42
- Pre-Production: Cultivating Serendipity, Developing Relationships……. 42
- Production: Serendipity in Full Force…………………………………… 44
- Post-Production…………………………………………………………… 45

Chapter Five: Production Analysis…………………………………………… 47
- Questions Answered and Unanswered…………………………………… 49
- A Return to the Documentary Modes…………………………………….. 48
- Filmmaking Problems and Lessons Learned…………………………….. 50
- Pre-Production: Creative Procrastination………………………………… 51
- Production: Spontaneity vs. Preparation, and a Lesson Learned………... 52
- Post-Production: Lessons Learned While Editing……………………….. 53
- The Problem of the Final Cut (the Sixth Finger)………………………… 54
- The Problem of the Self-Portrait………………………………………….. 56

Works Cited…………………………………………………………………… 58

Appendices…………………………………………………………………….. 60
- Appendix A: Proposed Schedule………………………………………… 60
- Appendix B: Proposed Budget…………………………………………… 61
- Appendix C: Final Schedule………………………………………………62
- Appendix D: Final Budget……………………………………………….. 63

Tell me what you buy, and I will tell what you are and who you want to be.
--James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation*

Chapter One: An Introduction to Stuff and Us

It's no secret that contemporary American society is built upon materialism. The car you drive, the clothes you wear, the size of your television—these things serve as markers of status and identity for modern Americans. As a country of individualists, we have learned that the best way to express our unique selves is not to create, but to buy, to display, and to collect. Thus the capitalist machine continues to churn out the latest trinkets—Beanie Babies, iPods, Hummers—and we continue to buy them.

Of course, there are plenty of Americans who reject the habit of overconsumption, those who resist the call of the mall in favor of a simpler, less cluttered lifestyle. Sometimes the disgust with materialism comes suddenly: have you ever, in the midst of a move for instance, wanted to throw everything you own into the backyard and torch it?

Yet, even if we indulged these violent and irrational urges, we would still be left with a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion. We would still need a few material objects—some (gasp) *stuff*—to survive. Not only that, no matter how much we change or grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually, we will always be left with the same basic physical self as we started with. In order to survive, we all must be a little bit materialistic, because our bodies and brains are physical, material. We cannot fully escape from stuff, because we *are* stuff. So, whether we are hoarders or minimalists, stuff is inescapably present in our lives.

One central question will serve as a starting point for the story I want to tell in this documentary about humans and stuff. This question is: how does stuff make meaning in our lives? This single question leads to a number of questions about the specific ways that stuff might make meaning. For instance, in what ways—physical, emotional, spiritual, and interpersonal—do people living in America today define themselves through (or against) material stuff of all kinds? How do we (and have we) use(d) stuff to construct past, present, and future narratives about ourselves and our world? How is the act of storytelling like the act of collecting and sorting through stuff? Finally, how can the language of stuff be deciphered, what are its component parts, and what does it look like?

One way that I plan to get at these questions is by gathering, examining, and deconstructing others' stories about themselves and their stuff. Of particular interest to me in my exploration of the narrative function and symbology of stuff in people's lives are my own and other's dreams about stuff, because these should get past our rational explanations of the function of stuff in our lives to the deeper connections that we have with stuff. Another approach will be to examine the parallels between "stuff management"—my term for the gathering, maintenance, selling, and otherwise managing of stuff—and storytelling. For instance, in the same way that a film editor takes a collection of raw footage and turns it into a story, we trim some things out of our lives and place other things on the mantle in the center of our homes, thereby creating, through the symbology of stuff, a narrative about ourselves.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Why Stuff Matters

A central reason stuff matters is in the major role it plays in the cultivation of our value systems and in the formation of our identities. A good place to examine this interplay of stuff and identity is in the act of shopping. In the Introductory chapter of *The Shopping Experience,* editors Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell argue that when we shop, we interact with the potential objects of our desire in various ways. We experience the object aesthetically, examining its form to determine whether it pleases us or not. We experience the object viscerally, touching the object, maybe trying it on. We also experience the object symbolically, through "acts of imagination in which the self is mirrored in the potential object of acquisition" (4). In this interaction, a shopper actively engages in the act of identity formation by comparing her inner sense of self with the object in question. She asks questions such as, "'*is that for me?' ; 'Am I like that?' ; 'Could that be (part of) me?' ; 'Could I be like that?' ; 'Would I like to be like that?'*" (4). In this interaction, the shopper considers not only the aesthetic and visceral qualities of the object, but also its symbolic meanings, as inscribed by culture and as decoded at the moment of the shopper/object interaction.

With the aid of Malcolm Barnard's *Fashion as Communication,* I will be more semiologically precise. When Jane considers buying a miniskirt, the skirt is a sign that functions on the level of both denotative and connotative meaning. On the denotative

level, Jane recognizes the 'common-sense, obvious meaning' of the skirt, the factual components which comprise its existence (Barnard 84). Thus the skirt's denotative meaning includes facts such as: it is made of denim, it was made in the United States, it is a Tommy Hilfiger skirt, it is fifteen inches long, it is a size six. On the connotative level, Jane considers the things that the skirt makes her "think or feel," that is, "the associations" that the skirt has for her (Barnard 85). For instance, Jane might think that the skirt is too short for a woman her age, that it will make her look trampy. Yet she also might like the patriotic red, white, and blue Hilfiger logo, the skirt's classy dark blue color, and the fact that it's a $40 skirt on sale for $8. On the connotative level of meaning, Jane's impressions of the skirt are determined by her value systems, which are in turn influenced by cultural and social factors such as Jane's age, race, nationality, class, etc.

In this way, every one of our shopping encounters is an act of self-definition, in which we decide whether the values connoted by each object coincide with or contradict our own value systems. But if the average consumer knew this, would it help him have more control over his relationship with stuff? In his book *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism,* James B. Twitchell argues that if Americans really understood their relationship to stuff, they might not be as prone to its bedazzling influence. Twitchell contends that, "[i]f we craved objects *and* knew what they meant, there would be no signifying systems like advertising, packaging, fashion, and branding to get in the way. We would gather, use, toss out, or hoard based on some *inner* sense of value" (11).

So how do we cultivate this inner sense of value? As we have seen in Jane's shopping example, one way that people build their own value systems is by considering different philosophies and comparing them with their own. One of my purposes in making this film is to present a number of philosophies about stuff in an accessible and attractive way to the viewer, thereby allowing each viewer to build upon her own inner sense of value as she comes to understand her own relationship to stuff. Perhaps a good place to start would be with some theory shopping.

Theory Shopping: A Guide

Because producers and advertisers in the western world have recognized the desire of the consumer to establish his or her unique identity through stuff, in the past few decades, we have experienced an explosion in consumer choice. Walk into your local Wal-Mart to buy a toothbrush, for instance, and you will find an astonishing array of choices: toothbrushes in a range of colors, brands, and degrees of softness; toothbrushes for children and for adults; toothbrushes with cartoon characters on them; manual and electric toothbrushes; square toothbrushes, curvaceous toothbrushes and technological-looking toothbrushes. In an age in which the consumer is bombarded by value-laden purchase appeals from every possible angle, where can we begin to decode the relationship between humans and stuff, and how can we organize our journey?

In this section, I hope offer a broad introduction to how we humans derive meaning from our stuff. This guide has seven subsections. The first section will be a sampler of theoretical perspectives on the subject from psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Second is a discussion of the ways in which objects, as a system of signs, are like and unlike language. The third section will look at the place of objects in narrative

structure. Fourth is an examination of how we might derive meaning from objects in the language of dreams. The fifth section discusses how having too much stuff can lead to a lack of meaning. The sixth section offers a suggestion for how to reclaim meaning from our stuff. Finally, the seventh section discusses the ways that the information gleaned in the previous six sections might inform my film.

Social Science Perspectives

The relationship of humans to their stuff has been examined from a wide range of theoretical perspectives in the social sciences. In order to introduce these perspectives on stuff, let's remove the toothbrush from the Wal-Mart aisle and look at a singular example, as if in an art gallery behind glass, in order to examine the object from every angle. I will offer as an example a hot pink toothbrush made by the brand Equate.

In their book *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self,* Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton draw on the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and anthropology in an attempt to explain the many functions of things as symbols that interact with the self. Their list will serve as an excellent starting point for our toothbrush analysis.

Drawing on Freudian psychology, the first symbolic function of stuff that the authors explain is the function of things as symbols which "mediate conflicts within the self" (22). In this view, an individual seeks an outlet for the expression of libidinal desires which are in conflict with the internalized censoring mechanisms that have been formed as a result of social conditioning. In this process, the individual might develop an attachment to "an object whose shape, function, or name is similar to a bodily part or process" in order to safely express his or her desire (22-23). So, from this perspective,

this toothbrush could be a stand-in for the expression of sexual desire, with its hot pink color (reminiscent of flesh tones) and phallic shape.

Like Freud, psychologist Carl Jung also saw objects as symbols that expressed the deep desires of the psyche. But while Freudian psychology tends to reduce symbols to definitive, clinical meanings, Jung viewed symbols as being more open-ended and subject to interpretation by the individual who manifests them. In Jungian psychology, "symbols…must be rediscovered by each person in a different way, depending on his or her location in cultural space and time" (25). In the Jungian view, symbols hold a mysterious meaning, which must be deciphered by the individual on his or her path toward "discovering new psychic skills and achieving higher forms of relatedness to the cosmos" (25). It is difficult to imagine how this toothbrush might help a person achieve this, but were it to show up as a central symbol in a recurrent dream, it would be up to the dreamer to interpret it. From the Jungian perspective, perhaps the toothbrush symbol could be telling someone to take better care of themselves, or to become a dentist.

Both Freudian and Jungian psychology tend to be less interested in people's actual experiences with objects in everyday life and more interested in objects' symbolic functions in dreams and fantasies. On the other hand, anthropologists have often studied the use of objects in ritual and everyday life in a variety of cultures. One main anthropological tradition is to view objects as "signs that express qualities of the self" (25). As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton explain, "[i]n almost every culture, objects are chosen to represent the power of the bearer" (26). For instance, in Nuer culture, a man's fighting spear is a source of pride for the individual who bears it. The spear is an extension of the individual, an object "which stands for the strength, virility,

and virtue of the person" (26). In this view, the pink toothbrush could represent its female owner's femininity (pink), her boldness (hot pink rather than pale pink), and her ability to practice good hygiene.

Another view of the symbolic function of stuff in people's lives, and one which has been studied extensively in the fields of anthropology and sociology, is that of the object as a sign of status. The kind of power conferred by status symbol is similar to the example of the Nuer warrior's spear, but instead of expressing "raw kinetic energy" and personal attributes, the power conveyed by the status symbol "consists of the respect, consideration, and envy of others" (29), as well as "the power to control others" as a result of the status conferred upon them (31). A particular object might become a status symbol because it is rare, because it is expensive, because it is old, or "simply by attracting the attention of people who have status" (30). Because it was probably one of the cheapest toothbrushes in the store, in this view, the pink toothbrush would not confer status upon its owner. Its brand name, "Equate," suggests that it is equal to other, more expensive, toothbrushes without being as pricey.

Each of the theoretical perspectives above emphasizes the "ways objects can be used to express, or to create, personal qualities" and to differentiate the owner from other people (33). In contrast, the next perspective which Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton discuss is that of "objects as symbols of social integration" (33). Drawing on the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim, the authors explain that in every culture, certain objects are thought to be "repositories of spiritual force" (34). These objects of spiritual significance are signs which "express the basic goal that unites [a culture or community] and gives it purpose and direction" (35). These objects need not be specifically religious;

they can work to unite the spirit of a community on a secular level as well, as does the American flag. In this view, as a symbol of social integration, our pink toothbrush lacks spiritual significance. However, other somewhat common items have sometimes been chosen as community totems; for instance, the red hat society unites spunky women over fifty in chapters around the country. Red hatters gather to support each other in greeting "middle age with verve, humor, and élan," all while wearing (of course) red hats (www.redhatsociety.com).

The symbolic functions of objects that I have just outlined are a brief introduction to some of the perspectives from which psychology, anthropology, and sociology have viewed the meaning of things in our lives. These should begin to shed some light on the ways in which stuff helps people define themselves, and on the kinds of stories our stuff can tell about us.

Objects as Language: A Structuralist Approach

In a chapter entitled "Clothing as Language," from his book *Culture and Consumption,* Grant McCracken discusses the ways in which objects functioning on the symbolic level are like and unlike language. McCracken delves further into anthropological studies of objects (in this case, studies of items of clothing) as mediums which can express "particular ideas in the mind" (58). For instance, clothing has been shown to express cultural categories, such as "rank, sex, marital status, occupation, etc." (59). Clothing has also been studied as an expression of "cultural principles" (59). For instance, a study of Elizabethan clothing showed the ways in which the contradiction between hierarchical and egalitarian ideas in Elizabethan society was manifested in "the design of the ornamentation…of doublets and breeches" (59-60). Clothing has also been

studied as an expression of "cultural process," in that it is particularly useful as a means "for exercising the metaphoric and performative powers of ritual" (60). For instance, "clothing can be used to mark…the transition from one cultural category to another that occurs in the rite of passage," as is the case with a graduation gown (60). Clothing has also been shown to express "social distance," as is the case with the "Ethiopian toga," which can be used to "acknowledge status differences and shifts in the tone of a relationship" (60). Lastly, clothing has been studied as an expression of "change and history" (61). For instance, numerous historical studies of fashion have shown how clothing "serves as a communicative device through which social change is contemplated, proposed, initiated, enforced, and denied" (61).

In order to further explore the symbolic richness of clothing objects, many researchers have used the metaphor of "clothing as language" (62). However, because of the overuse of this metaphor, McCracken contends that "it is necessary to examine the relationship between clothing and language and determine where the similarities hold and where the differences exist" (62). McCracken's deconstruction of the clothing as language metaphor will be useful in our attempt to understand the ways in which objects in general can be compared to language.

McCracken begins his deconstruction by introducing some terms from structural linguistics. According to structural linguists Jakobsen and Halle, "speech…implies the operation of two linguistic principles" (63). The first of these principles is "selection," which "occurs when the speaker selects a linguistic unit from each paradigmatic class to fill each of the corresponding 'slots' that make up the sentence" (63). A "paradigmatic class" consists "of all the units that can potentially fill the same slot in a sentence," such

as the class of nouns, or all of the synonyms for a particular word (63). The second of these linguistic principles is "combination," which "occurs when the speaker combines the units selected from the paradigmatic classes into a syntagmatic chain" (63). A "syntagmatic chain" is any combination of units in a linear order, such as a chain of units that might make up a sentence. Together, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of speech help to define the meanings of particular linguistic units as well as the meaning of larger chains of units, such as sentences, and chains of chains, such as paragraphs, and so on.

Meaning making through speech is governed in each particular language by a "code," which "consists in a specification of the units of the paradigmatic classes and the rules for their syntagmatic combination" (63). In language as we traditionally understand it (i.e. in the case of the English language), the code greatly restricts choice on the level of word structure but becomes less and less restrictive as the speaker combines words into phrases, phrases into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and so on. This "ascending scale" of combinatorial freedom allows language "to stand both as a collective and systematic means of communication and as an instrument of endlessly various expressive potential" (64).

Using these concepts of structural linguistics as his tools, McCracken goes on to cite a number of reasons why clothing and language differ in important ways as sign systems. As evidence, McCracken uses examples from a study he conducted in which participants were asked to "read" a variety of outfits.

The first difference between clothing and language sign systems which McCracken points out is the unimportance of linearity in the reading of outfits. While the

meaning of a sentence can change or become nonsensical depending on word order, McCracken argues that "clothing presents the parts of its 'syntagmatic combination' simultaneously, and it is simultaneously that they are read (65).

Second, McCracken argues that in the reading of outfits, "the exercise of even a small degree of combinatorial freedom by the wearer created not discourse, but confusion" in the minds of the participants (66). For instance, when the participants were shown outfits which were assembled according to the conventions of particular subcultures, they quickly identified the people wearing them from a "vocabulary of social types," labeling them with terms such as "housewife" or "hippie" (64). When the participants were then shown outfits which included mixtures of conventions, they would either ignore the items of clothing which did not fit into the dominant convention connoted by the outfit, or they would "attempt to reconcile contradictory messages" by making up an explanatory story such as "he wears that jacket because he used to be a businessman, but it doesn't fit with the pants and shoes because he's lost his job and is on the skids" (65). Finally, when the participants were shown outfits which were "still more anomalous," McCracken claims that they were generally unable to guess anything at all about the wearers. Because greater degrees of combinatorial freedom in the outfits seemed to create a greater degree of confusion in the readers, McCracken argues that "when clothing as a code is most like language, it is least successful as a means of communication" (64).

McCracken then sums up the differences between material culture (i.e. stuff) and language "as expressive media" (68). First, he suggests that "the nonlinguistic codes of material culture" may "communicate things that language proper cannot…[or] does not"

(68). McCracken argues that because material culture does not possess the same degree of combinatorial freedom as does language (as was shown in the example of clothing), stuff "allows for the representation of cultural categories, principles, and processes without at the same time encouraging their innovative manipulation" (68).

I disagree with McCracken on this point, because I believe that the very existence of the linguistic codes which underlie material culture encourages their manipulation. While some people may choose not to challenge the code, others respond to these rules by breaking them. Our cultural codes have become increasingly complex as a result of this manipulation. The world of fashion, for instance, has become increasingly playful with the traditional codes of meaning. For example, recent developments in women's shoe wear have displayed this trend with shoes that mix the sportiness of a tennis shoe with the sexiness of a high heel.

Art is another means by which the cultural categories, principles, and processes represented by material culture are often manipulated. Artists can sometimes crack the code and manipulate messages created by objects in a more fundamental way. For instance, if an artist places a red high-heeled shoe on display in a gallery, she is asking her audience to consider all of the cultural meanings associated with that object. If an artist references that object in a syntagm alongside other references, for instance, next to a picture of the Grand Canyon, she is asking her audience to think about the meaning of each of the objects in a new way. Even though some people, like McCracken's outfit readers, might not "get it," art does challenge the codes of meaning embedded in material culture in important ways.

Stuff and Stories: A Narratological Approach

Narratology, the study of the linguistic structure of narratives, is another theoretical approach which will help round out our understanding of the ways that humans make meaning from stuff. In his classic *Morphology of the Folktale,* Vladimir Propp breaks down the structure of all folktales into a number of component parts which he calls "functions," or actions in the narrative which happen to characters in the story (19). Propp details a number of these functions [such as "kidnapping or abduction" or "thefts in various forms" (130)] and organizes them according to the sequences of the folktale in which they are found. For instance, "kidnapping" and "theft" occur as part of the "villainy" sequence (130).

As part of his investigation, Propp outlines two fundamental roles that objects can play in the folktale narrative. The first of these roles is as the object of the hero's desire. The desire for a particular thing, or as Propp defines it, a "lack" of something, plays an important role in the narrative as the impetus which sends the hero of the story on a quest to find that thing (32). Propp sorts possible lacking objects into several categories. For instance, the lacking thing could be a "magical agent," such as magic "apples, water, horses, sabres, etc." (33). Alternately, the hero could be lacking a "wonder" of some kind, that is, a thing which doesn't have magical powers but which is still desirable for its rarity, expensiveness, or beauty (33). In another instance, the hero could be lacking something more mundane, such as "money" or "the means of existence" (33).

A second fundamental role which an object can play in a folktale narrative is as "a magical agent" which aids the hero in his or her quest (40). This magical agent is not necessarily the one that served as the impetus for the hero's quest (above). In this role, a

magical object is somehow obtained (for instance, through purchase, theft, or discovery) by the hero. This magical agent could be an object out of which a being, or "helper" who will further aid the hero in his or her quest, might appear (40). For instance, the magical object could be a bottle out of which a genie appears. Alternately, the magical agent could be "objects possessing a magical property" (40). For instance, magical swords, invisibility cloaks, or Dorothy's red shoes could fall under this category.

With these categories, Propp clarified the role of objects as narrative elements which serve as impetus for further action, or functions, in the timeline of the story. However, these functions are not the only significant consequence of objects in a narrative structure. In his essay on "The Structural Analysis of Narratives," Roland Barthes discusses another way which objects can make meaning in a narrative, as "indices" (92). Indices refer "not to a complementary and consequential act but to a more or less diffuse concept which is nevertheless necessary to the meaning of the story; [for instance,] psychological indices [concern] the characters, data regarding their identity, notations of 'atmosphere,' and so on" (92). That is, while functions are the syntagmatic consequence of an object in the narrative structure, indices have paradigmatic consequences, because their referents lie on a different level of meaning from that of the story timeline. For example, the functional meaning of the receipt of a magical cloak suggests its later use further along in the narrative, while the indicial meaning references information such as the cloak wearer's personality traits or the theme of invisibility.

Barthes further refines the classification of the roles that objects can play in narratives by dividing functions into two subcategories. First, in relation to the possible functions associated with material objects, Barthes observes that functions are "not all of

the same ‘importance’: some constitute real hinge-points of the narrative…; others merely ‘fill in’ the narrative space separating the hinge functions” (93). The hinge-point functions, which Barthes terms “nuclei,” are akin to the consequences of an object in a narrative as detailed by Propp; these are cases in which an object serves as an impetus for further action which is essential to the forward movement of the story. For instance, as Barthes explains, if a telephone rings in a story, “it is equally possible to answer or not to answer, two acts which will unfailingly carry the narrative along different paths” (94).

In contrast, the ‘filler’ functions, which Barthes calls “catalysers,” are actions which are “trivial incidents or descriptions,” such as, between the telephone ringing and a character answering it, “[he] moved toward the desk, picked up one of the receivers, put down his cigarette, etc.” (94). The objects involved in these functions can also be seen as trivial in the forward movement of the story, yet they still serve a purpose as “areas of safety, rests, [and] luxuries,” descriptive elements which connect the more significant elements of the narrative syntagm (95).

As I have discussed above, in the structure of narratives, every material object mentioned is somehow significant to the story. While this significance might be attributed to the talent of the story’s author, Barthes argues that this significance “is not a matter of art…, but of structure,” because, “ in the realm of discourse, what is noted is by definition notable” (89). That is, because we can observe each element of the story, each element has meaning. As Barthes explains, “art is a system which is pure, no unit ever goes wasted, however long, however loose, however tenuous may be the thread connecting it to one of the levels of the story” (89-90).

In the case of many folktales or fictional stories, we might assume that the meanings of objects in a fictional story are decipherable partially because the story has been consciously crafted by a meticulous author or by a number of folk storytellers over the years. In contrast, because dream narratives are authored by our subconscious minds, the meanings of the objects that appear within dreams may be more difficult to decode.

Connections From Dream Research

A good starting place for understanding how we create meaning through stuff in dreams is to ask ourselves why we dream in the first place. I would like to argue that, as is the case with stories, we dream because our minds are trying to make sense of our experiences in the waking world. A particular characteristic of the dream narrative is that they often make this "sense" through a combination of bizarre associations. Neuroscientists such as Allan J. Hobson have argued that our minds create dream narratives in order to combat the disorientation which occurs when our brains fire off a string of images, feelings, and associations from the waking world. Thus, these narratives come "as a consequence of random chemical bombardment," and in an effort to organize and categorize the information gleaned from life (States 17). Thus it seems that dream narratives may be authored by our subconscious minds for the same reasons that McCracken's subjects (above) felt it necessary to make up stories in order to explain the randomly pieced together outfits which didn't fit easily into one category or another. That is, one important function of both dreams and stories seems to be that they help us bring order to the randomness of life.

In his essay "The Poet and Day-Dreaming," Freud provides another reason why we might dream. Freud argues that for adults, "unsatisfied wishes are the driving power

behind phantasies," or daydreams (176). Thus, like the feeling of lack that sets Propp's folktale off on his adventure, our dissatisfactions set us off on our own adventures of the imagination.

But how does this dissatisfaction connect to our current discussion about the meaning of material objects in dreams? The answer to this question comes in the connection that Freud makes between childhood play and adult daydreaming. According to Freud, when a child plays, "he creates a world of his own" by rearranging "the things of his world" and reordering this world "in a new way that pleases him better" (174). Like adult daydreaming, the child's play is motivated by an unfulfilled wish. But unlike the daydreaming adult, who must conceal his libidinal wishes, the playing child has no reason to conceal his one main wish, "which is to be grown-up" (176).

Also unlike the child, the adult must conceal his desire to play as a part of the process of maturity. As Freud argues, "[a]s they grow up, people cease to play, and appear to give up the pleasure they derived from play," because their society expects them to do so (175). When a person ceases to play and begins to daydream instead, "he only gives up the connection with real objects" (175). That is, daydreaming for Freud "is a continuation of play" in a more concealed, and less material, way (175).

A connection between identity formation, daydreaming, and material objects can be drawn from Freud's thoughts here. In the process of daydreaming, the mind connects "three periods of our ideation" (177). First, "[t]he activity of phantasy in the mind is linked up with some current impression…which had the power to rouse an intense desire" (177). Second, the mind "wanders back to the memory of an early experience, generally belonging to infancy, in which this wish was fulfilled" (177). Third, the mind

"creates for itself a situation which is to emerge in the future, representing the fulfillment of the wish;" in other words, it creates a daydream (177).

While neuropsychologists such as Hobson suggests we regard material objects in dreams, and the narratives which connect them, as the result of random neurons firing, Freud suggests that material objects in dreams should be read psychologically, as important elements of the process of our ideation, and as expressions of our unfulfilled wishes. How are we to rectify these two opposing viewpoints on the meaning of stuff in dreams? If we side with Hobson, are we to assume that the randomness of objects in dreams renders them meaningless? If we side with Freud, what are we to make of the sheer volume of seemingly trivial things that appear in our dreams night after night?

In his book *Dreaming and Storytelling,* Bert O. States suggests a middle ground. States accounts for the relative mundanity of most dreams with the concept of the "script," "a generalized representation of an ordered sequence of events" which is "learned in waking life and stored in the symbolic memory" (106). For instance, my script for going to school would include an ordering of events such as packing my bag, driving my car, walking into the school building, etc. According to States, dreams are a combination of these scripts from everyday life mixed with "mnemonic activation" which causes seemingly random and bizarre elements and associations to enter our dreams (106). States argues that it is these scripts from waking life which comprise both the "formal organization of dreams," as well as "the basis of all stories and fictions" (107). In addition, States argues that we do not dream about every object, situation, and feeling from everyday life because of "repressed latent desires," as the Freudian approach would have us believe (100). Rather, "if we could hypothesize a perfectly healthy person with

no hang-ups, no neuroses, no childhood traumas…we could presume that he or she would dream about the things we have been talking about *simply because they constitute the narrative of life*" (100).

If this is the case, then can we derive any meaning from the trivial "stuff" of everyday life in our dreams? States argues that in dreams, even if every object does not carry profound meaning, that this stuff has a cumulative meaning.

> …psychoanalytic theory tends to overlook the fundamental power and ubiquity of the trivial, how it accumulates into patterns of concern and tension, and how the trivial carries with it our deepest psychic investments, being, so to speak, the rhythm that corresponds most dependably to the organic heartbeat. The truth is that the trivial shopping trip carries just as much emotional current as the quest for the Golden Fleece… (100)

As the previous sections have shown, stuff serves as an impetus for dreams and stories. Stuff can symbolize various aspects of our personal and social identities. Stuff can serve as a language through which we communicate. The presence of stuff helps constitute our experience which dreams and stories organize, while its absence makes us all heroes driven on a quest. As States suggests, even trivial stuff has a kind of cumulative meaning in our lives. Given the symbolic place of significant and insignificant objects in our lives, as these meanings have been deciphered through psychology, anthropology, sociology, structuralism, narratology, and dream research, how does stuff make meaning in our modern lives? Most importantly, how should I go about making a film which will begin to answer this question? What do we do with all this stuff?

Too Much Stuff, Not Enough Meaning

As the above sections show, a primary function of stuff in our lives is to make meaning for ourselves. But, as States argues, the problem of the trivial is that there are so many material objects in our lives that they cannot possibly all be significant. This is just as true in waking life as it is in dreams; perhaps even more so, because the narratives of our waking life, in the absence of self-reflection, are to some extent "authorless" and "unmediated by language" to an even greater extent than our dreams are (29). Luckily for us, however, we have an ability in waking life to sort through all of the stuff that we are bombarded with. In his book *Principles of Psychology,* William James discusses this ability:

> Millions of items in the outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no *interest* for me. My experience is *what I agree to attend to.* Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind—without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos. (402)

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton refer to this selective interest as "attention," an ability which allows us to allocate limited psychic energy toward some action or thing (5). Through the allocation of this attention, we actualize our intentions and cultivate our goals as part of the process of identity formation (8). Through our attention to them, material objects are inextricably bound up in this process. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton explain,

> When someone invests psychic energy in an object—a thing, another person, or an idea—that object becomes 'charged' with the energy of the agent…Part of the person's life has been transferred to the focal object—part of his or her ability to experience the world, to process information, to pursue goals has been channeled into the task to the exclusion of other possibilities. (8)

So, as the authors argue, when we spend time attending to an object--for instance, when we spend time looking for new curtains or polishing a coin collection--we are making an investment of psychic energy in that thing to the exclusion of other possibilities. The authors argue that "this lost invested energy can turn into a gain if as a result of the investment the agent achieves a goal he or she has set for his or herself. Accomplishing a goal provides positive feedback to the self and strengthens it in allowing the self to grow" (8). This model of the relationship of humans to their stuff leads to an important question: With so much stuff in our lives in modern western society, and with so much of our attention spent on the acquisition and maintenance of this stuff, are we gaining on our investment?

Let me explain a simple reason why I think the answer is a resounding no. In our modern, highly industrialized western society, we currently have an excess supply of stuff as compared with the personal psychic energy which we have available to spend on that stuff. This is because we have developed machines which will produce mass amounts of material items without the necessity of humans attending to each and every item. As a result, most items that we own—for instance, household items such as dishware, lamps, bedspreads, etc.—come to us with a deficit of psychic energy already built into them. While, as James Twitchell argues, "we have developed very powerful ways to add meaning to goods," such as "advertising, packaging, branding, and fashion" (12), this lack of human energy is embedded in each machine-made item that we buy, and it amounts to a lack of significance, a lack of meaning in our stuff.

Unlike the Nuer warrior with his small collection of handmade and highly (personally and collectively) significant items, we are left with too many objects for the amount of psychic energy that we can personally and collectively invest. The result of this surplus of machine-made stuff in our lives is that many of the objects that we own are not meaningful to us. We are left surrounded by empty containers which should contain meaning but do not, an emptiness behind the façade of abundance, and with an unquenchable lack that sends everyday heroes on quests to the shopping mall again and again.

Reclaiming the Meaning of Stuff: Dream and Play

In the above sections, we have seen how stuff makes meaning in our lives psychologically, socially, linguistically, narratively and subconsciously (through the language of our dreams). Yet at the same time, we have seen that a core problem in the relationship of humans to their stuff in modern western society is that we have too much stuff and not enough meaning to fill it with. The following section argues that the creative activities of dreaming and play can be used as tools to reclaim from our stuff some of the meaning we have lost.

In the introductory paragraph of André Breton's "Manifesto of Surrealism," Breton muses that "[m]an, that inveterate dreamer, daily more discontent with his destiny, has trouble assessing the objects he has been led to use, objects that his nonchalance has brought his way, or that he has earned through his own efforts…" (3). One reason that man has trouble assessing the meaning of objects in his life, according to Breton, is the preponderance of the "realistic attitude," which confines man to literal understandings of the meaning of things in his life (6). For instance, Breton complains

that many of the authors of his day waste the reader's time with endless descriptive detail like "so many superimposed images taken from some stock catalogue" (7). As an example, Breton quotes a passage from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* which describes a room with a long list of objects:

> *…A sofa with a tall back turned down, an oval table opposite the sofa, a dressing table and a mirror set against the pierglass, some chairs along the walls, two or three etchings of no value portraying some German girls with birds in their hands—such were the furnishings.* (7)

This description of listless items of "no value" can be read as a commentary on the empty nature of objects in our modern lives, a commentary which is in agreement with our assessment of the deficit of meaning in modern stuff as was discussed above. But while Dostoevsky's response to this deficit of meaning seems to be to pessimistically bemoan the situation, Breton has a different response.

Breton sharply critiques Dostoevsky's pessimism by arguing that it "may be unworthy for any man to crystallize," "the empty moments" of life (8). Rather than dwell on the emptiness of the realistic, Breton argues that we should look to the neglected territory of our dreams for an answer to the problem of emptiness in our modern world. It is this distaste for the real and a reverence of the dream which leads Breton to declare his allegiance to *surrealism,* or as Breton defines it, to "the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations," to "the omnipotence of dream," and to the "play of thought" (26). Thus, Breton seems to suggest two tools—dreaming and playing—which might help us reclaim meaning from stuff in our lives. As I will discuss in the production plan section (below) these two tools will be invaluable assets in the

process of making my film, with which I hope to play my part in the reclamation of meaning from stuff in our lives.

Plans for My Film Based on These Theoretical Perspectives

As a review, the main objective of this film will be to understand the ways in which stuff makes meaning in our lives, or put another way, to understand the ways that we derive meaning from our stuff. In the process, I hope that my film will serve to reclaim some of the meaning we have lost through the mechanized nature of stuff production in our modern world. After all this theory shopping, a brief description of the ways in which I plan to use the above theories to accomplish these objectives should help to clarify my purpose thus far. The strategies which I discuss here will be discussed in further detail in the production plan section (below).

As you will recall, the first section of theoretical approaches above dealt with the meanings of material objects as they are formulated in the expression or creation of personal qualities. One way that I plan to get at the self-expressive and identity-forming characteristics of stuff in my film is by interviewing individuals about one material object that they believe is most representative of their identities. For instance, I might interview my boyfriend's mother, who is a hairstylist, about her most cherished pair of scissors, or a musical friend about her guitar.

The second section above discussed the structuralist approach. Under this category, I discussed the ways in which objects could be regarded as being like and unlike language. In order to explore this approach in my film, I plan to explore particular code systems which determine the meaning of stuff as language. Code systems I would like to explore include feng shui, the code of collecting, the code of domestic life, the

code of professional organizers, and the DNA code. In this exploration, I hope to look for incidences in which a code is either upheld by traditional followers of the code (as might be the case with an avid feng shui practitioner) or challenged by those on the fringe (as is the case with extremely messy people, or people who have bizarre taste in home décor).

The third main theoretical approach discussed above is the narratological approach. In order to explore this approach in my film, I plan to look for stories from everyday life which mirror the mythic role of the material object as a presence which aids someone in his or her "quest" or as an absence which provides the impetus for that quest. For instance, I might accompany someone on a journey to find a "magical agent" such as the perfect soap dish which might, for instance, give its owner the power to pull a decorating scheme together.

The fourth main theoretical approach discussed above was that of dream research. In relation to this approach, I would like to further explore the ways in which the dream narratives of my subjects, as well as narratives which I might make up, incorporate scripts from waking life with seemingly random objects and associations. In order to do this I might interview people about recurring dreams of objects as well as reenact these dreams. In addition, I would like to intersperse moments from my own dreams about objects throughout the larger narrative of the film. I would also like to explore, perhaps through superimposition and montage, States' concept of the trivial in dreams as stuff and actions which "accumulate…into patterns of concern and tension, and…carr[y] with [them] our deepest psychic investments, being…the rhythm that corresponds most dependably to the organic heartbeat" (100). Lastly under this category, I might contrast

children's play with adult's daydreams about stuff in order to test Freud's theory about the connections of play and daydreaming.

In the fifth section above, I discussed the theory that a surplus of machine-made objects, combined with our limited psychic energy, creates a situation in which we are left with too much stuff and not enough meaning. This theory needs to be tested. In order to do so, I might film at a factory which manufactures a common household object, or perhaps one which manufactures an object which people invest with a great deal of psychic energy, such as a doll factory.

Finally, in the sixth section above, I discussed Breton's surrealist solution to the lack of meaning in our stuff. In response to Breton's suggestions, I plan to explore both playing and dreaming as actions through which we might recover some of that lost meaning. In order to explore playing, I could observe children at play, particularly with objects which either refer directly to the grown up world (like a dollhouse) or which do not seem to hold any resemblance to the grown up world (I am reminded here of how as a child I used to play for hours with pennies, naming them, sorting them, and giving them personalities). Another thing I plan to do to explore playing is to observe adults playing with toys. Still another thing I might do would be to reenact playing scenes from my own and other's childhoods, to uncover the potent meanings of stuff which we might find there. In addition, as I have discussed previously, I plan to explore dreams, through interviews and reenactments, as a place of potent meaning-making. Lastly, I plan to rediscover the world of play for myself through fantasy, by planning, reenacting, and filming scenes with toys and objects, in order to, as Freud says, create a world of my own

by rearranging the things of my world in a new way that pleases me better. After all, rearranging things in a pleasing way is what filmmaking, and film editing, are all about.

Material Culture on Film and Television

In this section, I will briefly discuss films and television shows which will inspire and inform the film I plan to make, in form, content, or both. As we will see, each of these films offers its own version of how we might derive meaning from stuff.

One main genre which I plan to draw inspiration from is that of the object-focused television show. In this category, I include shows such as *The Price is Right, Room Raiders, Clean Sweep,* and *Antiques Roadshow.* While these shows differ in format and content, my use of them--as an audio-visual example of the cultural significance of various objects--would be very similar. For this reason, I will only discuss two of these shows below: *Antiques Roadshow* and *Room Raiders.*

On PBS's *Antiques Roadshow*, ordinary people bring their potentially valuable antique collectibles to the traveling "roadshow" to be examined by knowledgeable appraisers. As the audience looks on, the appraiser discusses the meaning of the object in question in terms of its historical significance and monetary value, while the owner discusses the object's meaning in terms of its relation to family history, emotional significance, etc. For instance, in a recent episode, a saddle from John Wayne's production company was featured. While the saddle's owner discussed the meaning of the object to her family (it was given to her father by John Wayne, she rode on it since she was ten years old), the appraiser discusses the object's meaning in the context of the larger history of John Wayne's production company and in monetary terms. In the context of my thesis, discussions like this one might serve as a contrast between the

historical and monetary meanings of an object and the deeper psychological and spiritual meanings of that object.

MTV's *Room Raiders* is another possible source of the cultural meanings associated with objects. In this show, an attractive twenty something man or woman "raids" the rooms of three members of the opposite sex in order to determine which of the three he or she would like to date. While the rooms' inhabitants are away, the raider gathers clues about the inhabitants' personalities by reading his or her stuff. The show's format also includes off-site commentary by the stuff's owners, who continually critique the raider's reading of their personalities.

As did McCracken's subjects, the raiders on the show continually read the collection of objects in the inhabitants' rooms in order to make judgments about the inhabitants' personalities based on a vocabulary of social types. For instance, a raider might determine that an owner of a baseball mitt is "sporty," while an owner of spiked black bracelets is "goth." These social types then carry with them a number of associations in terms of personal characteristics (i.e. the "sporty" guy is probably hypermasculine and physically fit while the "goth" guy must have long black hair and be into kinky sex). In addition, the raiders tend to comment on the syntagm of certain elements of the inhabitants' rooms, making judgments according to the rules of particular codes. For instance, a raider might judge an inhabitant's combination of a leopard-print futon cover with rainbow-themed curtains as "nasty" because it does not conform to the socially accepted code of tasteful home decoration.

In presenting both the raider's interpretation of stuff-as-identity as well as the inhabitants' commentary on that interpretation, *Room Raiders* suggests that some sort of

knowledge about a person can be gleaned from reading his or her stuff, but it also suggests that the knowledge gained can be biased, inaccurate, and highly subjective. The show is an interesting cultural artifact which can tell us a lot about the codes regarding identity which are currently prevalent among teenagers and twenty-somethings.

As I discussed above, the main way that object-focused shows such as *Antiques Roadshow* and *Room Raiders* might prove useful to my project could be as actual footage which I might include in my film in order to provide information on the cultural meanings of various objects. Another source of footage which could serve as a carrier of cultural meaning might be television advertising such as is found on QVC, The Home Shopping Network, The Shop at Home channel, and various infomercials. One notable feature of the sales presentations on these networks is their continual use of status appeals. In a recent viewing, I noted that the hosts were peddling jewelry by appealing to the audience's desire for rarity (i.e. with stones in rare colors and from mines about to cease production) and quality (i.e. rings with "exquisite detailing"). In addition, they used celebrity status appeals (i.e. Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt are wearing these, so you should too). Again, footage from advertising sources such as these might serve as a contrast between mainstream cultural meanings of items and deeper psychological and spiritual meanings.

Turning away from television and toward film, I would now like to discuss two films which will serve me as thematic and formal inspiration. One of these is *The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal* (2001) by Matt McCormick, a film which plays with codes of meaning in an intriguing way. The satirical premise of this film is that the blocky splotches of mismatched paint, which graffiti removal "artists" leave on outdoor

walls throughout the urban landscape, constitute an art form in the tradition of "abstract expressionism, minimalism, and Russian constructivism" (http://www.rodeofilmco.com/graffitiremoval.php). This art form is "subconscious" because it is regarded as an art neither by the government employees who paint these works nor by the governmental system which mandates that these works be created.

The concepts presented in *The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal* are pertinent to the film I want to make in that this film asks its audience to read a product of culture according to the codes of a meaning system which is utterly different than the way it would usually be made. Thus as a result of the inspiration I glean from this film, I might present my audience with mundane cultural artifacts (such as a pair of scissors, for instance) and ask my audience to "read" them according to an unexpected meaning system, such as that of the ancient divinatory systems such as tarot cards or Celtic runes.

Another means by which I would like to uncover the meaning of stuff in our lives is by reading and interpreting the symbols produced by the subconscious in dreams. In films such as *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and *At Land* (1944), Maya Deren creates dreamlike narratives in which objects take on the sort of significance which they might have in dreams.

In *At Land,* a woman (played by Deren) emerges from the sea and subsequently traverses a landscape which shifts unexpectedly from natural to civilized space. For instance, in one sequence, the woman climbs through driftwood onto a dining table, then through a thicket to a chessboard at the end of the table. At the chessboard, she seems to make the chess pieces move through the power of her gaze, until a white pawn is

knocked off of the table. Throughout the rest of the film, the woman seems to be searching for the white pawn, as if it is one of Propp's magical agents.

What meaning can we make from the symbol of the white pawn in this film? One possibility would be to read the white pawn as a symbol of the woman's primal nature, or in Freudian terms, her id. When the white pawn appears on the chessboard on the dining table and later at the shore, the black chess pieces, symbolizing ego and her more civilized nature, dominate the symbol of the id. After the white pawn is dropped off the table and into the sea (a symbol of the subconscious) the memory of her primal self starts to fade. Yet the symbol of the white pawn reappears twice, first as a younger man dressed in white, and then again as an older man draped in a white sheet. While the possibility of reclaiming her primal (and sexual) self through the younger man seems promising at first, she loses interest at the sight of the older man; this is symbolized by a cat jumping out of her arms.

After this second loss of the white pawn, the woman seems to have completely forgotten what she was looking for, but she still continues to search. We see this in a scene near the shore in which she is frantically collecting rocks and dropping them again, she seems unable to carry or keep track of what she so desperately needs. When she again finds a chess board, this time between two women playing chess on the shoreline, she tricks the women, reclaims the white pawn, and runs with it through all of the previous scenes as her former selves watch her. At last we see the woman, clutching the white pawn in her hand, running on a sandy shoreline further and further into the distance. This last scene symbolizes the woman's reclamation of her primal self as she melts into the distance along the shoreline between consciousness and subconsicousness.

Like Deren does in *At Land,* I would like to explore the meaning of objects as magical agents and powerful symbols of the self, both through reenacted dream narratives as well as through fantasies which have a dreamlike narrative quality.

Documentary Modes

In my exploration of the ways in which stuff makes meaning in our lives, I plan to use elements of various documentary modes, as outlined by Bill Nichols in his book *Introduction to Documentary.* In the following section, I will discuss each of the documentary modes I plan to draw upon, as well as some particular ways in which I might put these modes to use.

The primary mode that I plan to use in the making of my film is the performative mode. According to Nichols, this mode "underscores the complexity of our knowledge of the world by emphasizing its subjective and affective dimensions," and draws on the traditions of "poetry, literature, and rhetoric" (131). To achieve these ends, performative documentaries freely use expressive techniques such as reenactments, dream narratives, poetry, song, and flashbacks. In my documentary about stuff, I plan to use reenactments of my own dream narratives as well as staged scenes which illustrate my musings about stuff. In addition, I would like to collect the dream narratives, musings, and stories of others and illustrate those as well.

In addition to the performative mode, I also plan to employ elements of the poetic, expository, participatory, and reflexive modes. As Nichols explains, the poetic mode "sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing…to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions" (102). As such, this mode uses montage as its primary editing convention. One way I could use montage might be to

explore the idea (discussed above in section e) that individuals in modern western society tend to have too much stuff, most of which doesn't carry enough meaning. As an example, I could cut together a montage of several images from dish soap and laundry detergent commercials which show the stains of meaning being washed away from the objects again and again.

According to Nichols, the expository mode "assembles fragments of the historical world into a..rhetorical or argumentative frame," and often assumes a "voice-of-God" narrating style which purports to be objective (105-107). One way that I might incorporate this mode into my film would be to use found footage from vintage expository documentaries and instructional films. Because these films were often made by large corporations or the government, they should serve as interesting repositories of cultural information regarding the material object in question.

Another mode which I plan to use in my film is the participatory mode. In this mode, the filmmaker gathers observational footage of real-life events with an emphasis on "the nature and quality of the encounter between filmmaker and subject" (116). This approach can be contrasted with the observatory mode, in which the filmmaker attempts to disguise his or her presence during the act of observation. In the participatory mode, the filmmaker becomes a social actor in the world of the film, and is free to interact with the film's subjects as well as participate in their struggles. In the tradition of this mode, I will gather interviews of my subjects about the meaning of particular objects in their lives. In addition, I might use the conventions of this mode to observe subjects doing things such as sorting, maintaining, and shopping for stuff. Yet another way I might use this mode would to film myself doing these same things.

The last additional mode which I plan to use in my documentary is the reflexive mode. As Nichols explains, this mode draws attention to the problems inherent in the act of representation by focusing on "the process of negotiation between filmmaker and viewer" (125). This mode questions poetic, expository, observational, and participatory conventions which seek to represent truth or reality by challenging techniques such as "evidentiary or continuity editing, character development, and narrative structure" (126). In addition, this mode draws audience attention to the act of filmmaking itself and the problems inherent in using a representation of reality as a stand-in for actual experience. Working in this mode, I might foreground the physical nature of the film or videotape itself, and show how the collecting of footage might result in my own struggle with an overwhelming pile of film and/or tape. That is, just as a plethora of footage might be too much information for me to sort through in order to make a coherent story, the owner of a large collection of stuffed animals, for instance, might struggle with how to organize them, how to store them, and how to add and subtract objects from his or her collection.

Chapter Three: Production Plan

In the above sections, I have discussed theoretical approaches to the ways that stuff makes meaning in our lives, films and television shows which will serve as inspiration in the making of my film, and documentary modes which will guide its production. In light of all of this information, I have found a simple motif which will channel all of this knowledge into an organized and coherent structure.

Modern Hieroglyphs as an Organizing Motif

According to the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia,* records of Egyptian hieroglyphics "have been dated about 3000 B.C.," making this system "the oldest recorded language known to modern human beings" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_language). In terms of its linguistic structure, hieroglyphics consist of phonetic characters (which denote particular sounds in the language), logographs (which denote morphemes or words), and determinatives ("which indicate the semantic category of a spelled-out word without indicating its precise meaning") (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_language). Even while the meaning of a particular symbol could be reduced to a phonetic sound, as Orly Goldwasser argues in an online abstract of his book *From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs,* the hieroglyphic symbol "is never entirely rid of its basic iconic meaning, which continues to haunt all the structures of signification it may participate in" (http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Abstracts/Goldwasser_95.html). That is, hieroglyphic symbols

are first and foremost pictorial, and as such, they carry with them a host of metaphoric meanings, in addition to their literal functions within the linguistic structure.

One aspect of the meaning of hieroglyphic symbols which I would like to consider is their spiritual significance. According to Richard Hooker et. al., "[t]he Egyptians called their writing, *medu netcher*, or 'the words of the gods'" (http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/EGYPT/MEDU.HTM). This phrase points to a "powerfully important insight into the Egyptian world view. If the 'words of the gods' are pictures and things, that means that the entire world is a speech by the gods, full of meaning and symbol; this means that the universe itself can be 'read'" (http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/EGYPT/MEDU.HTM).

Divining and Defining Modern Hieroglyphs

As a motif which will inform my film, I would like to focus on this metaphorical function of the hieroglyphic symbol by organizing my film around particular objects-as-symbols, in order to create my own collection of modern hieroglyphics. Then, drawing inspiration from the Egyptian worldview, I would like to "read" objects, in real life and in dreams, as messages with inherent spiritual significance. That is, I plan to read these objects as messages from my own personal pantheon, as well as in the contexts of the other theoretical perspectives (psychological, sociological, linguistic, etc.) listed above.

To begin the production process, I plan to choose the objects which will make up my collection of modern hieroglyphs by looking first to my own dreams. I will keep a dream journal (either in writing or on video) in order to find symbols which seem to hold potential as totems for my journey into the meaning of stuff. (Thus far, three sorts of objects which have presented themselves in this manner are scissors, coins, and a

collection of dishes.) In addition, I plan to look to my waking life for objects which take on a sudden significance in my life (such as the seventy pounds of scissors which a friend of mine recently purchased) or which seem to mysteriously reappear in various contexts. (As an example of such a recurrence, for a period of a few weeks last summer, I kept happening upon items in stores which had a drawing of a rooster on them). Another way that I might choose my objects of study is by looking to my "fantasies" about stuff. For instance, ever since I began this project I have held an image of a dollhouse in my mind, so I would like to make the dollhouse one of my objects of study. Another means by which I might find objects to study will be to begin with the objects symbolized by the characters of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. In addition, I might look to other pictographic alphabets which I feel drawn to, for instance the Phoenician and Canaanite alphabets.

Once I identify an object which I would like to study, I will delve into the meanings of that object through various means. First, I will continue to look to my dreams. In order to stimulate dreams about the object, I will place the object at my bedside (or a picture of the object if necessary) and gaze at it before I go to sleep. The dreams which result from this experiment will serve as fodder for the dream reenactments and fantasy sequences which will be central to my film.

This experiment, which depends on the workings of my subconscious and the mechanism of chance, is admittedly risky. However, my previous experience with my rich dream life, as well as with the strange coincidental occurrences of waking life, lead me to believe that the universe and the strange workings of my own mind will not let me down. The mystery of this process is something I would like to preserve, and even to engender.

Next, I plan to delve into the meanings of my chosen objects through an investigation of their meanings in divinatory systems such as the tarot, runes, coffee grind readings, etc. As another part of this means of investigation, I might interview a psychic in order to see what meanings he or she gleans from particular objects. In addition, I will consult others about their dreams and fantasies, as well as any curious happenstances, in regard to the objects in question.

Reading Modern Hieroglyphics

As a hero in one of Propp's folktales might ask, where will the magical scissors, coins, or dishes lead me? I am happy to answer that at this point, I don't know. It is my plan to allow these symbols to shape the story I am about to tell, and in the process to allow different theoretical systems which have read the meanings of objects to seep organically into the narrative. As such, I plan to investigate meanings on the level of my personal subconscious first (through my own dreams), and then on the level of the collective unconscious (through divinatory systems, psychics, and friends). After I have made these explorations, I plan to further explore the meaning of objects on the level of the personal conscious mind, and finally on the level of the collective conscious mind.

On the level of personal consciousness, I plan to investigate my own and others' stories about stuff by way of interviews and observatory footage. For instance, I might interview a little girl about her dollhouse and film some observatory footage of her playing with that dollhouse. Or, I might interview a coin collector about his collection and then accompany him to a coin show. On this level of the investigation, I will consider some of the theoretical perspectives discussed above in formulating my

interview questions, for instance, I will consider the ways in which the objects in question function as markers of identity for my subjects.

My investigation of the meaning of stuff on the level of collective consciousness will be the most theoretically complex. In this phase of the investigation, I will edit my film to include more complex layers of meaning from sources such as found footage (from television shows, instructional films, etc.), “experts” (i.e. feng shui practitioners, professional organizers, professional theoreticians), and books (i.e. the texts which present the theoretical perspectives above).

Thus I plan to organize the process of my production in phases, beginning with an investigation of the meaning of stuff in my personal subconscious, and moving on to its meaning in the collective subconscious, in various individual’s conscious minds, and according to the meaning codes and theoretical systems which are part of our collective consciousness as a culture. In terms of the editing of my film, I would like to edit throughout the process, perhaps in sections according to the phases which I have just described. By first creating a personal core of meaning and then moving outward to encompass collective, cultural, and theoretical perspectives on the meaning of stuff, I hope to reestablish an inner sense of value not only for myself, but for my viewers as well.

Target Audience

My target audience for this film broadly includes the entire human race, for we are all owners of a certain large or small amount of stuff. More specifically, however, this film should appeal particularly to modern western audiences, since it will comment

on some issues (notably the problem of too much stuff coupled with a lack of meaning) which are more characteristic of highly industrialized societies. In addition, I plan to submit this film to independent film festivals, so it will be targeted to festival audiences as well.

Chapter Four: Post-Production Report

Due in part to my love of the serendipitous (and my tendency to procrastinate) in retrospect my production process bore little resemblance to the initial schedule which I laid out for myself in my proposal. However, I am sure that, as a result of a process laden with fertile pauses, big surprises, and plenty of twists of fate, I have made a better film in the end. In the following sections, I offer a behind-the-scenes look at my own filmmaking process: pre-production, production, and post-production.

Pre-Production: Cultivating Serendipity, Developing Relationships

From the beginning, I extended an open invitation to chance, hoping to make serendipity a co-creator of my film. In the process I initially proposed, I intended to find the subjects of my film, the "totems for my journey into the meaning of stuff," by looking to my own dreams for salient objects of interest, as well as into my "waking life for objects" which took on a "sudden significance" (see above, 38). This phase was to last about two months, at the end of which time I planned to have identified the material objects which would serve as the focus for my film.

In reality, at the end of two months I had found no new objects of interest, and my old objects of interest (scissors, coins, a collection of dishes) were not showing up in my dreams as I had hoped. So, I waited, hoping that perhaps my magical objects needed just a little more time to manifest themselves. I like to think of this process of waiting as more than simple procrastination. This was a time of divination, fermentation, and

cultivation, during which I honed my film's focus and, over the course of months, developed relationships with people who would be my subjects and collaborators.

To be sure, I had my moments of avoidance and wrong turns away from the path. With classes out of the way, I had begun my working life. That summer I was running a video production company with my then boyfriend, working long hours alone at an editing bay. Instead of meaning-laden objects, most of my dreams were populated with fragments of other people's weddings, mixed with messages about my tumultuous dead-end relationship, and the heavy sadness of my own loneliness.

And still, I waited for my subjects to appear. In November, I finally took a job at the local Apple Store as a one-on-one software tutor. Slowly my loneliness began to lift, and a host of interesting characters began showing up in my life.

More than occasionally, the subject of my thesis film would come up in conversation with a co-worker or one of my clients. This was a critical phase in which I was honing my one-line pitch, and learning to talk about my film to potential collaborators. I would describe my film as being about "the hidden meanings of material objects." After the usual response of "wow, that's a broad topic!" I would describe my developing process with a fishing metaphor, saying, "I like to throw my net wide open and then see what swims into it."

Meanwhile, while I was hashing out my one-line pitch and trying to refocus my search for film subjects, I met and became friends with a few clients who had their own fascinating relationships with material objects. Among them were a retired fashion illustrator, an artist, a personal organizer, and a ghost hunter. In my ongoing conversations with these new friends about the meaning of stuff, it became clear to me

that the subjects that I had been waiting for might very well be human beings, not inanimate objects. After months of fishing, I'd finally caught something interesting.

By this time, I had begun to envision my film less as an exploration of specific objects and more as a series of interviews of individuals and their relationship to their material objects. I had some interesting subjects lined up, and I was just gearing up for the production phase in earnest when something incredible happened: I fell in love.

This was late August of 2007. Within a week, I had decided that I was going to move to Mexico as soon as I could to begin a new life with Paul, who I had met in Denver three years previously but who only now had confessed his long-held feelings for me. With my impending move, it became clear to me that production on my film would have to happen now or never, before I moved to Mexico. At the same time, I knew that my own journey through the process of getting rid of most of my possessions would be the perfect narrative to tie together the interviews I had already planned, as well as many of the other themes regarding the meaning of stuff that I had been thinking about.

Production: Serendipity in Full Force

Beginning in early September 2007, I began filming my own life, trying to include anything and everything that might be pertinent to my own journey of "destuffication." I filmed myself packing, took pictures of my apartment as it filled with boxes and emptied again, documented my friends taking away my things, filmed my yard sale and porch sale. I also tried to document my emotional journey: I recorded video chats, diary entries, phone calls to my mother. During all of this, I also took advantage of opportunities to talk with other people about the hidden meanings of material objects in

their lives. I scheduled interviews with my "experts," and rejoiced at the number of great subjects who just showed up ready to talk at my porch sale and yard sale.

This was an amazing time for me. I began feeling that my film was making itself, after an incredible two days of interviews in Melissa's front yard. When a professional videographer randomly showed up when I most needed her, during the last hours of my porch sale, I was thrilled. Serendipity, my muse, had come through again.

I kept filming and documenting during my journey to Mexico. I planned an excursion to the Isla de las Muñecas as a possible ending to my film, as well as a spiritual culmination of my personal journey. I was extraordinarily pleased with the footage I got there, but I wasn't sure I wanted to end on that note, so I continued to film a few more scenes, notably the interview with Anthony and my father during my November trip to Denver, and a visit to my storage space in Arizona the following year.

Post-Production

Editing did not directly follow production. Once I finally got settled in Mexico, I realized I had a big year ahead of me. Paul had asked me to marry him, and we began planning a wedding for May of 2008. After the wedding and a long honeymoon, I settled down to start editing in September of 2008.

My first task was to log the thirty-four hours of footage I had shot. This phase took a long time, maybe a month. I logged the formal interview footage very precisely, with word-for-word transcription. The other footage I logged less precisely, but I made sure that I looked at absolutely everything I had shot. I then organized this footage by tape in a Final Cut Pro project file, and subclipped sections of footage with descriptions

of the action as well as tags for various themes which I thought I might want to emphasize in editing.

Next I moved on to editing (discussed in more detail below) which I did off and on for another four months. At this writing in early April 2009, I have completed three cuts of the film, each one a little shorter and more focused. After I achieved a final cut (picture lock and audio levels fully edited) the audio was handed over to a friend who does audio mastering for a final polish (compression, effects, etc.).

In the next few months, I hope to move on to subtitling in Spanish and French, rights acquisition, packaging, and marketing to film festivals and television. Festivals I am considering are spiritually oriented (such as the Gaia Film Festival in Boulder, Colorado, or the Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival in Idaho), documentary-focused (such as the South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas, or the San Francisco Documentary Festival), or take place in one of the places I call home (such as the Festivus Film Festival in Denver, Colorado and the Riviera Maya Film Festival in Playa del Carmen, Mexico).

Chapter Five: Production Analysis

In the following chapter, I offer a short discussion of questions answered and unanswered by the film, a return to the documentary modes, and finally some filmmaking problems I observed during my process, and lessons learned as a result.

Questions Answered and Unanswered

Next I would like to return to the guiding questions which I posed at the beginning of my project proposal, in order to briefly discuss the ways in which I hope I have addressed these questions in my film. They are:

> …[H]ow does stuff make meaning in our lives?...[I]n what ways—physical, emotional, spiritual, and interpersonal—do people living in America today define themselves through (or against) material stuff of all kinds? How do we (and have we) use(d) stuff to construct past, present, and future narratives about ourselves and our world? How is the act of storytelling like the act of collecting and sorting through stuff? Finally, how can the language of stuff be deciphered, what are its component parts, and what does it look like? (above, page 2)

Though I can't claim to have produced a definitive answer to any of these questions in my film, various scenes in the film can be read as examples of the way that stuff makes meaning in our lives. As an example of the ways that people in America today define themselves through material stuff, a purple-haired girl at the yard sale says this about clothing:

> Clothing can sometimes bring out our inner energies—what we want to become, how we want to present ourselves—and if you want that can relate to our spiritual insides (*The Spirit of Stuff,* 2009).

As an example of how the film addresses how we use stuff to construct narratives about ourselves and our world, a man at the yard sale tells a story about American overconsumption through a narrative about the things he finds at garage sales, and a woman at the yard sale is inspired by the kaleidoscope to tell a philosophical narrative about the way life works:

> It's special because every time you turn this it's different, and philosophically, every day, or every minute, your life is different (*The Spirit of Stuff,* 2009).

While the above questions are answered fairly explicitly in the film, the connection between storytelling and collecting and sorting through stuff is alluded to in the scene featuring the "Keeper of the Things" and her totems, which she creates to tell a story about every day of her life. It is notable that these totems can be read completely differently by the other women who view them. For instance, Barbara (the woman who spoke earlier about the kaleidoscope) tells a story inspired by one of the totems which is very personal, and quite likely bears no resemblance to the story that the artist was telling herself when she made it.

My last question, which asks how the language of stuff can be deciphered, what its component parts are, and what it looks like, is not specifically addressed in the film. In order to answer this question, I feel I would have had to employ a more reflexive point of view, calling attention to the editing process itself and using the film to question the norms of filmmaking and narrative structure. As it stands, I feel I needed the complete

hour to even begin to address the first three questions. I will leave the last question unanswered, perhaps as a guiding question for a future film.

A Return to the Documentary Modes

Though I made mention of all five documentary modes in my proposal, only three of them—the performative, poetic, and participatory modes—made it into the final cut. Below is a brief discussion of how I used each of these modes.

The primary mode that I had planned to use in the making of my film was the performative mode. This mode "underscores the complexity of our knowledge of the world by emphasizing its subjective and affective dimensions," and draws on the traditions of "poetry, literature, and rhetoric" (Nichols 131). Though in the end I did not use some of the performative elements I had planned (such as dream reenactments and staged scenes) I did use the performative mode during the Mexico City scene to describe my emotional experience as I experienced the city for the first time. Recorded many months after the footage was shot, the voiceover draws on mythological references pulled freely from the world pantheon, and makes no claim to objective or unmanipulated truth. The voiceover is a performative, poetic translation of my subjective emotions at the time:

> I felt light as a feather in this world between worlds. It wasn't quite like heaven, more like a captivating Purgatory. As we watched, Time played the barrel organ in a jolting rhythm, reminding us our time on earth is never really free. (*The Spirit of Stuff,* 2009)

The poetic mode, most commonly associated with montage editing, "sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing…to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions" (Nichols 102). One example of my use of the poetic mode in the film is the fast-paced montage of still images which serves as a

transition between the yard sale and apartment scenes. I intended this montage, littered as it is with random images of boxes and objects and an apartment in disarray, to create a sense of chaos, as well as to speed up the pacing of the film as the story drives toward the big move to Mexico.

Another mode which I planned to use in my film was the participatory mode. In this mode, the filmmaker gathers observational footage of real-life events with an emphasis on “the nature and quality of the encounter between filmmaker and subject” (Nichols 116). In practice, this became my primary mode. Throughout the film, my position as filmmaker, whether behind the camera or in front of it, is not disguised. Rather, it is my interaction with my subjects which is the focus of the film. My interaction with my friends during the apartment scene, or with Paul in the video chat scene, are perfect examples of the participatory mode in action.

Filmmaking Problems and Lessons Learned

In the following section, I hope to address a number of filmmaking problems which I encountered at various stages of the production process. These problems were sometimes technical, sometimes artistic, and sometimes philosophical, and more than one of them kept me pondering into the wee hours of the morning. While I can’t pretend to have found simple solutions for any of them, each of these filmmaker’s quandaries has taught me something valuable about the process. As a filmmaker for life, I know these are lessons I will return to again and again.

Pre-Production: Creative Procrastination

As I discussed above, from the inception of this project, I wanted to make serendipity an active collaborator in my filmmaking process. As such, I planned for a short waiting period in the beginning of the project, during which I had hoped to divine and intuit the significant objects which would be the focus of my film. This waiting period, due to the pressures of everyday life and my own tendency to procrastinate, spanned a longer time frame than I had originally anticipated. However, as I discussed above, this long waiting period allowed me to discover and develop relationships with my future subjects and collaborators, and to turn themes and symbols which I was interested in over and over in my mind, seeing them from every angle, polishing them like rocks in a tumbler.

In retrospect, I see that this contemplative time was actually a very fruitful and fecund phase in the pre-production process, and that certain things that became central to my film, such as the friendships I had developed with most of the interview subjects, could not have been planned, scheduled, or rushed.

This is not to say that procrastination is always the best avenue at every moment in a creative endeavor. Certainly there are times to get down to work, when time is of the essence and shooting and editing need to happen within a certain time frame. But in the case of this film, I am glad I allowed myself this time for creative procrastination.

Let me be clear. Creative procrastination is a particular kind of procrastination, a kind of half-work, half-play. It is not sheer avoidance of the paper you have to write. It is not running the other way from your advisor in the hallway. It is, however, a kind of half-focused meandering. Talking about your project with old friends and strangers alike.

Wandering your city looking for new angles on your subject: people, objects, events. Reading newspapers, watching movies, listening to music. Keeping your eyes peeled and your ears open for anything that piques your interest which might relate to your subject.

For me, these chance connections that I might make while creatively procrastinating are some of my favorite moments in my own creative process. These are moments when I know my muses are present, when I feel the winds of serendipity gently nudging me toward something wonderful: a lesson to be learned, a new experience, an unforgettable friendship, a film I can be proud of.

Production: Spontaneity vs. Preparation, and a Lesson Learned

And now, a confession. In the same way that I like to collaborate with serendipity in my pre-production process, my natural proclivity during production is to be easy-going and spontaneous. While this certainly helps my subjects appear more natural and less constrained, I have to admit that my love of spontaneity sometimes leads me to relax my standards of production a little too much. I forget about my occasional lapses in judgment until I'm sitting in the editor's chair, trying to make an interview work without much B-roll, or trying to fix some audio which was sloppily recorded. While the director and cameraperson in me love to be spontaneous, the editor in me wishes I had been a little less spontaneous and a little more prepared, with a plan for shooting B-roll or an extra lapel mic on hand.

This quandary illustrates one of the difficulties of being a low-budget filmmaker. Operating on the lowest of budgets—as was the case with my film—one person might try to be director, cameraperson, producer, sometime actor, editor, musician, voiceover artist,

and more, sometimes all at once. In this model of filmmaking, with so many roles filled by just one person, it's no wonder that some details get forgotten.

My lesson learned in my struggle with spontaneity vs. preparation is this: know thyself, and find help when you need it. At this point in my creative career, I am not interested in beating myself up about the things I sometimes forget to do in production. I am interested, however, in knowing myself as an artist, recognizing my strengths and weaknesses, and then finding other people to work with who might be a good complement to my talents. That way, the next time I shoot a feature film, I will know exactly what to look for in a production assistant: someone who will be prepared when I am being spontaneous. Someone who will focus on audio when I am focusing on video. In short, someone equally committed to the projects, who will be there every step of the way to help me remember what I have a tendency to forget. This is not laziness, this is just smart project management.

Post-Production: Lessons Learned While Editing

In retrospect, I am very happy with my editing process. Three key circumstances contributed to my success. First, the detailed logging that I did at the beginning of the post-production phase really helped me mentally digest the thirty-four hours of raw footage that I was faced with by the end of production. During this phase I was able to spend quality thinking time with my footage. As I logged, I kept columns in Final Cut Pro where I could mark clips for recurrent themes, poignant moments, important statements, and beautiful imagery. I also chose to transcribe dialogue from the interviews (using a simple, free program for the Mac called Transcriptions), so that I could better understand the points each subject was making and how my subjects' arguments might fit

together. Though I sometimes felt I was spending too much time going over details, in the end, all the time I spent on logging was absolutely worth it. When I finally sat down to edit, I knew every minute of my footage, and I put together a first rough cut, easily and confidently, in a surprisingly short amount of time.

Second, though I recognize that not every film would benefit from this, I feel it was an advantage to be able to wait almost a year between the end of the major production phase and the beginning of post-production. Especially because my film is autobiographical, that time gave me some much-needed personal distance from the footage that I would not have had otherwise.

Third, my initial confusion about how to structure the film actually worked to my advantage in the end. During logging and the initial phase of editing, I thought I might organize the structure of the film around particular objects or themes rather than with a chronological narrative. Because of this, I did a lot of thinking about which parts of my footage served different symbolic themes that I was interested in, and I initially organized my footage both chronologically and thematically. For example, one theme of many that I noticed throughout my footage was that of time expressed as revolution and turning. The record player footage, my spinning dance under the purple sheet, the barrel organ player, the time totem, and the spinning footage at Isla de las Muñecas all fed into this theme. In a "notes" column in Final Cut Pro, I tagged all of this footage with this theme so that I could easily retrieve all of its associated clips. When I changed my mind about the film's structure and began editing chronologically, I had already chosen many wonderful moments that were thematically interesting to me. As a result, I was able to piece together a chronology which has many recurring symbolic and thematic elements

(i.e. doll/body, death/afterlife/rebirth). Though this process initially grew out of my own confusion regarding the film's structure, I am very happy with the results. I plan to use a similar system of footage organization in my future film projects.

The Problem of the Final Cut (the Sixth Finger)

As an editor, I like to think I have a good sense of rhythm. Like a musician improvising, I edit by feeling first, sensing how one shot should follow another, building a sense of harmony or discord, setting the tempo, letting the story tell itself through the rhythm of the edits and the melody of the content. In the case of this film, these editing instincts served me very well. Very well, that is, until I was confronted with the problem of the final cut.

By the time I had finished the second rough cut, I knew the contours of my film from beginning to end. It had ceased to become a collection of shots and scenes, and had become its own entity. I knew it like a song I'd heard again and again, like a path so familiar I could walk it in the dark. Like the curves and contours of my own body, I knew where it dipped and where it rose, where it jumped and bumped and where it was smooth.

Meanwhile, others were not quite so attached. My advisor implored me to cut several more minutes from the film, including parts of the porch sale sequence ("too self-indulgent") and the second interview with Anthony ("too repetitive"). A couple of my filmmaking friends agreed. I resisted, but after a breakthrough conversation with another filmmaking friend, I realized that my instincts, my feelings, could only take me so far when it came to the final cut. This was a cut that wouldn't feel quite as good as the others. In fact, I thought, maybe this cut is supposed to hurt a little.

I began to think of the final cut as being a lot like chopping off a sixth finger. A sixth finger, though unappealing and useless to the rest of the world, seems quite natural to its owner. And yes, it hurts when a sixth finger gets chopped off. One other thing: it is unadvisable to try to chop off your sixth finger by yourself. I, for one, could not do it. My film was all the more my flesh and blood because it was about *me* and *my* experience. So, like a brave patient, I found a willing friend whose artistic sensibilities match my own, who went through the film shot by shot and told me (via telephone from Seattle) where to cut. With eyes peeking through my good hand, I let Chad do the chopping for me.

Specifically, Chad helped me trim a few extraneous moments from the apartment scene and the porch sale sequence, as well as from the final interview. He suggested that I overlap some of the less intriguing visual moments (walking up stairs, for instance) with my voiceover, so that I ended up losing time, but not content. In the final interview with Anthony, he noticed that a lot of screen time was spent on my restatements of what Anthony had just said. Chad suggested that I cut out my summaries, which were repetitive, and less powerful than Anthony's original words. These and other suggestions added polish and focus to my film, and subtracted seven minutes from the film's final running time.

The Problem of the Self-Portrait

In every artistic medium, including film, artists have attempted to create autobiographical representations of themselves. During the process of making this, an autobiographical film, I sometimes found myself thinking about some of the problems of autobiography that all artists, no matter the medium, must face.

We make self-portraits to achieve a certain distance from the self, to see ourselves from another vantage point. If we cannot see ourselves just as others see us (and our subjectivity says we cannot), then at least we can add ourselves to the crowd of observers. We hope, if not for objectivity, for a more distant subjectivity which allows us to see larger patterns in our lives, and how we might fit into the larger world; we examine how the light from the window falls on our faces in the mirror.

For the filmmaker, the large part of this examination happens in editing. For me, there was a sometimes unsettling distance between my editing self and the self I saw in the mirror of my then year-old footage. This was not something I had expected. There were times in the editing room when I felt annoyed at my former self, or, in turn, when I longed for her enthusiasm. I saw her as me and not me, perhaps like a younger sister.

And like an older sister, the editing self—the one holding the paintbrush, pen, or clay—may never be able to simply like and accept the one in the mirror without judgment. We have an intimate relationship with ourselves that stretches back over too many moments of folly and insecurity. The older sister always knows what the younger one's true motives are, when she's being genuine and when she's wearing a mask.

In this constant interplay between the sisters, the editing self and the self in the mirror, where is truth? Can the editor claim to be making a truthful rendition of her former self, when she has just as strong an agenda as the girl in the mirror? My answer for myself in my film was this: as an actor in my film, I perform a version of myself specific to a certain narrative at a certain time in my life. In the voiceover recorded a year later, my editing self performs an older, wiser version of me. As an editor, I tried to combine the two in an interchange where both versions of myself have a chance to

engage each other in dialogue. I believe that this dialogue among various versions of myself is as close to autobiographical "truth" as any artist can hope to get.

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Appendix A: Proposed Schedule

June 1 – July 20, 2005 (7 weeks)	Production Phase 1: The Personal Subconscious (Decide on objects of significance, collect and film personal dream narratives, edit)
July 20 – September 7 (7 weeks)	Production Phase 2: The Collective Subconscious (Consult psychics, research tarot etc., interview friends re: objects of significance in dreams and happenstance, edit)
September 7 – October 26 (7 weeks)	Production Phase 3: Personal Consciousness (Gather stories, film interviews and gather observational footage of self and others, film story reenactments, edit)
October 26 – December 14 (7 weeks)	Production Phase 4: Collective Consciousness (Collect found footage, interview "experts", layer theoretical musings into already edited material, continue edit)
December 14 – February 15, 2006 (9 weeks)	Continue edit, ROUGH CUT DUE February 15 Apply for Graduation by approx. March 11
February 15 – April 29 (10 weeks)	Cont. edit, THESIS PROJECT DUE April 29
April 30 – May 20	Work on thesis reflection paper Thesis defense approx. May 6
May 20 (Approx.)	THESIS DUE to grad studies
June 3 (Approx.)	Graduate

Appendix B: Proposed Budget

Item	Unit cost	Quantity	Total
Mini DV tapes	$4.55 ea. + $5 shipping (www.tapestockonline.com)	40 @ $4.55 ea.+ $5	= $187
Eastman Ektachrome Super 8 Color Reversal Film (for Dream Reenactments)	$16.99 ea. + $5 shipping (www.sbfilmaudio.com/super8)	10 @ $17 ea. + $5	= $175
Film Processing	$14 per roll + $20 shipping (www.yalefilmandvideo.com)	10 @ $14 ea. + $20	= $160
24fps Super 8 Camera	Approx. $250 (www.ebay.com)	1 @ $250	= $250
Long Distance Phone (Need Landline for Recording)	$3 per hr. ($.05/min)	12 @ $3	= $ 36
Cassette Tapes (for Recording Phone Conversations)	$5.80 for 10 + $5 shipping (www.tape.com)	10 @ $5.80 + $5	= $ 15
Psychic Fees	$100 per hr.	5 @ $100	= $500

TOTAL $1,323

Appendix C: Final Schedule

Jun. 2005 – Sept. 2007	Pre-Production
Sept. 2007 – Nov. 2007	PRODUCTION
Dec. 2008 – Sept. 2008	*Project Hiatus: Get Settled in Mexico, Plan Wedding, Travel on Honeymoon*
Sunday, Sept. 21, 2008 - Friday, Jan. 16, 2008	Return from Europe (Honeymoon) September 20th. Finish shooting, edit.
Oct. – Nov. 2008	Pick-up Shots (xylophone music and storage space)
Friday, Jan. 16, 2008	ROUGH CUT DUE
Friday, Jan. 30, 2009	Meet with Professor Gault (via video conference or in person)
Friday, Mar. 13, 2009	SECOND ROUGH CUT DUE
Friday, Mar. 27, 2009	Meet with Professor Gault (if necessary, via video conference or in person)
Friday, Apr. 10, 2009	THESIS PROJECT DUE
Friday, Apr. 24, 2009	THESIS DEFENSE. Thesis reflection paper DUE
Friday, May 29, 2009 (Approx.)	THESIS DUE to Graduate Studies Office
Friday, Jun. 5, 2009	Commencement

Appendix D: Final Budget[1]

Item	Price Per Unit	# Budgeted	# Actual	Budgeted Total	Actual Total
Mini DV tape	$4.55 ea. + $5 shipping (www.tapestockonline.com)	40 @ $4.55 ea.+ $5	35 @ $4.55 ea.+ $5	$187	$164
Eastman Ektachrome Super 8 Color Reversal Film (Dream Reenactments)	$16.99 ea. + $5 shipping (www.sbfilmaudio.com/super8)	10 @ $17 ea. + $5	0 @ $17 ea. + $5	$175	$0
Film Processing	$14 per roll + $20 shipping (www.yalefilmandvideo.com)	10 @ $14 ea. + $20	0 @ $14 ea. + $20	$160	$0
24fps Super 8 Camera	Approx. $250 (www.ebay.com)	1 @ $250	0 @ $250	$250	$0
Long Distance Phone	$3 per hr. ($.05/min)	12 @ $3	8 @ $1.80 (www.skype.com)	$ 36	$14
Cassette Tapes (for Recording Phone Conversations)	$5.80 for 10 + $5 shipping (www.tape.com)	10 @ $5.80 + $5	10 @ $5.80 + $5	$ 15	$0
Psychic Fees	$100 per hr.	5 @ $100	5 @ gratis	$500	$0
Ecamm Recording Bundle (for Recording video chat and skype)	$21 (www.ecamm.com)	0 @ $21	1 @ $21	$0	$21
Travel to and from Xochimilco (Subway, Bus, Taxi)	$20 round trip	0 @ $20	1 @ $20	$0	$20
Xochimilco Park Entrance	$2 per person	0 @ $2	2 @ $2	$0	$4
Boat to Isla de las Muñecas	$20 round trip	0 @ $20	1 @ $20	$0	$20
Xcaret Park Entrance (Recording Xylophone Music)	$25 per person	0 @ $25	2 @ $25	$0	$50
Audio Mastering (Discounted)	$10 per hour	0 @ $100	10 @ $10	$0	$100
DVDs	$ 0.50 per disc	0 @ $ 0.50	8 @ $ 0.50	$0	$4
FedEx Charges (Mailing from Mexico to US)	$40 per shipment	0 @ $40	4 @ $40	$0	$160
TOTALS				**$1,323**	**$558**

[1] Not including screening, distribution, marketing to festivals, etc.