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SITUATING HEIRLOOM PRESENCE WITHIN THE FAMILY NARRATIVE:
THAT IS/WAS THEN, THIS IS/WAS NOW

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Rachel Lee Savorelli

December 2022

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Rachel Lee Savorelli

2022

SITUATING HEIRLOOM PRESENCE WITHIN THE FAMILY NARRATIVE:
THAT IS/WAS THEN, THIS IS/WAS NOW

By

Rachel Lee Savorelli

Approved August 19, 2022

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ABSTRACT

SITUATING HEIRLOOM PRESENCE WITHIN FAMILY NARRATIVES: THAT IS/WAS THEN, THIS IS/WAS NOW

By

Rachel Lee Savorelli

December 2022

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Janie Harden Fritz

Intramundane objects often become “intergenerational transfers of contaminated objects,” commonly known as heirlooms (Holmes; Heisley and Cours 425; Belk 151). Rather than priceless possessions, heirlooms are mostly ordinary objects, such as photographs, gardening tools, and flatware. Regardless of rarity or monetary value, as familial artifacts, heirlooms compel an ethic of responsibility. One might argue that heirloom traditions lack relevance in an era that is future-oriented, champions progress, and suffers from neophilia—infatuation with everything new. However, research exists that argues people esteem the formation of kinship traditions (Curasi, Arnould, and Price “Ritual”). For this project, the term ‘heirloom-ing’ performs interrelations of the communicative practices of story-telling, ritualizing, and kin-keeping that contribute to heirloom preservation and continuation. A narrative ethics background structures family communication to both make meaning and make sense of ongoing and changing practices across generations. Heirlooms situated within family narratives as *petit récit*

bond kin and sustain time and space connections in the holistic space of *praxis*. Interdisciplinary insight into the perspectives of material culture, new materialism, the gift, communication ethics, and family narrative provides ‘object discourse’ for discussing heirlooms in scholarship.

Heirlooms, like gifts, exist within an asymmetric, agapic framework of acknowledgement rather than demanding reciprocity within an exchange system of recognition (Schrag *God as Otherwise* 119-120; Belk and Coon). Identifying objects as inalienable and indexical counters a consumerist culture that needlessly and recklessly discards objects it considers inert and insignificant.

Various disciplines, including communication and rhetorical studies, advance theories of ‘new materialism’ that promote the vitality of matter erstwhile curtailing human communication.

While this project encourages an ethic of responsibility toward material culture, it rejects a “flat ontology” or equal agency for the material object and the human subject. While this most recent ‘material turn’ raises critical questions about human and object relationships, these philosophies lack fore-structure for heirlooming, ultimately threatening the rhetorical nature of heirlooms and the human condition.

Chapter One explores scholarly literature within the social sciences and humanities on the discourse of material culture and introduces key principles and terminology for understanding materiality, culture, and material culture.

Chapter Two introduces new materialism research and considers its influence in the social sciences and humanities, arguing that the tenets of the movement do not provide space for heirloom *praxis*.

Chapter Three addresses gift scholarship and the grammar of gift-giving compared and contrasted with heirlooms and heirlooming.

Chapter Four confronts excessive consumerism through practices that extend an object's life, which includes collective care and responsible engagement rather than repurposing and transforming for individual taste or trend.

Chapter Five presents the narrative as a source of strength for kinship bonds and as an essential guard for heirloom retention.

DEDICATION

To my grandparents, Amos Elmer Meyers and Dorothy Mae (O'Bruba) Meyers.

Without the myriad of *things* you left behind, this project may not have been realized.

I love you and miss you very much.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would first like to acknowledge the unwavering support from the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies, the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, and Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. I have received more encouragement and grace from the inspiring faculty of the department, and it is because of you that I have finally arrived. I am proud to be a part of this institution and am beyond grateful for the opportunity to complete my doctoral degree at Duquesne. I want to express my thankfulness, in particular, to Dr. Richard H. Thames and Dr. Ronald C. Arnett for their intellectual insights and for explaining the practices of our studies in their own particular ways within the classroom. I have endless notes from your thoughtful lectures that I will keep and continue to consult in my personal and professional life. Dr. Thames and Dr. Arnett have enlarged my understanding of life and impacted the way I experience the world. You have instilled in me the insatiable desire to learn more. In addition, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to Dr. Erik Garrett. I know my work was assigned to you late in this project, and I am grateful for your time and commentary.

I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Arneson for getting me started and keeping me going at several obstacles along this journey, and I extend my special gratitude to Dr. Janie Harden Fritz for continuing that reinforcement as my dissertation director and seeing me through to the end. Your enthusiasm for research and belief in your students is unparalleled.

Mrs. Rita McCaffrey and Linda Rendulic have assisted me with essential clerical work throughout the process of being a graduate student, and your patience and professional directives were essential to navigating my attainment of this degree.

Thank you to everyone who prayed for me. I have wonderful friends and family. Thank you to my parents, Jeffrey and Connie Meyers, for your steadfast support of me and my academic goals even when you did not understand why I kept striving for more degrees! Thank you to my in-laws, Sam and Lorraine Savorelli, for always offering your time so that I could study. Finally, to my husband, Steven, for making the meals, watching our wild little man(iac), Anthony Joseph Savorelli, and reinforcing my determination so that I would not give up—I am so grateful for your love.

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Introduction

Situating Heirloom Presence within Family Narrative:

That Is/Was Then, This Is/Was Now

“To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts, is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that ‘we’ are...” (Barad “After the End” 539).

This dissertation argues that heirlooms are more than old, inert objects relegated to the past. Heirlooms are ‘rhetorical artifacts.’ They are traces of continuing presence, a communicative heritage. Even unremarkable, mundane heirlooms are laden with meaning as participants in family conversations and performers in family traditions (Holmes). As collective inheritance, potentially layered with stories accumulated over generations, heirlooms merit a particular regard involving an ethic of responsibility that includes respectful engagement and stewardship in kinship (Lillios). With enduring degrees of agency, heirlooms offer clues to the past as well as a sense of shared identity and belonging for the present and future (Holmes; Lillios).

To support this argument, the research that follows brings together scholarship on material objects, communication ethics, and family narratives to explore and examine the rhetorical nature of heirlooms and their degrees of agency. The following questions guide this process: How does current scholarship in the humanities and social sciences discuss matter and

materiality? How do heirlooms function as rhetorical artifacts? How do they ‘communicate’? How do heirlooms invoke a communicative ethic? What is heirloom presence? How might the tenets of heirlooming foster a sense of identity in a consumerist culture? What role do heirlooms play within a family narrative?

In the article, “Connectedness and Worthiness for the Embedded Self: A Material Culture Perspective,” Deborah Heisley and Deborah Cours attribute the designation of heirlooms as “intergenerational transfers of contaminated objects” to Russel Belk’s article, “Possessions and the Extended Self,” who in turn references Claude Lévi-Strauss’s book *Le Totémisme Aujourd’hui* (English translation, *Totemism*, 1963) as the source for describing object contamination, where “contaminated” refers to “the acquisition of possessions of another person that have been intimately associated with that person” (Belk 151; Heisley and Cours 446). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an heirloom as: “A chattel that, under a will, settlement, or local custom, follows the devolution of real estate. Hence, any piece of personal property that has been in a family for several generations” (“heirloom, n1”). Heirloom etymology develops from Middle English *heirlome*, tools or implements, which are transmitted to heirs (Gilchrist 172).

In his pioneering work on gifting, Marcel Mauss writes, “Even when the *thing* has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him” (emphasis added 12). Not only are Mauss’s ideas worthy of attention but so is his language. Today, as stated above, this essence that Mauss indicates is called “contamination,” which can be positive or negative (Belk); these concepts and others that form object discourse are further considered in Chapter One.

An overview of basic terms begins to shape the discourse throughout this project. While different disciplines engage in their own discourse, this can lead to confusion across disciplines or even within perspectives. For example, within the theories of ‘new materialism’ use of

different terminology to describe a similar concept as well as employing terminology without explanation has led to incompatible strands of approaches toward understanding materialism (see Gamble, Hanan, and Nail), which are further explored in Chapter Two. From a material culture interpretation, Ian Woodward clarifies the nuances among terms for the material component of material culture that are qualified for purposes of clarity in this current project. Woodward explains that materiality “is often used in conjunction with things, objects, artefacts, goods, commodities, and, more recently, actants” (15). In general, things have a broad and mundane quality (things is different from “focal things;” see below); objects are recognizable through the senses; artefacts are the material traces of prior human use; and goods have an economic component similar to commodities.

For example, when an object is produced for the marketplace, it is commodified, but once purchased, it leaves the marketplace, is decommodified, possibly singularized, and transformed, depending on the practices within which the object is placed. While all terms are relevant to this study, because, as many scholars subscribe, an object transforms as it shifts within places, spaces, and time (Han and Weiss; Kopytoff; McCracken; Woodward), Albert Borgmann’s essay, “Focal Things and Practices,” provides insight for regarding heirlooms as “focal things,” as analogous to “the force of nature,” inseparable from their contexts, and also fully appreciated “when we learn to understand that focal things require a practice to prosper within” (59). Focal things do not just happen; they are cultivated. Thus, the hope for this project is that heirlooms are communicated as “focal things.”

In their article, “How Individuals’ Cherished Possessions Become Families’ Inalienable Wealth,” Carolyn Folkman Curasi, Linda L. Price, and Eric J. Arnould differentiate between objects of individual importance and those that they describe as “inalienable wealth,” which

“hold an imaginary power over a group and embody an understanding that requires their possessors to keep these objects within their group’s membership” (609). This concept originated with Mauss and was elaborated by Annette Weiner. Curasi et al. argue a key difference between a personally cherished object and one that becomes an heirloom: While an individual may possess *and* own an object, an heirloom may be possessed by an individual but *not* owned (610). An individual, who is in possession of an heirloom, assumes the responsibility for its care. A constructive presentation of “possession” does not solicit claims of “control” and “power” but, instead, communicates an ethic that obligates a priori responsibility for others that dismantles the matrix of economic exchange. As Calvin O. Schrag explains, substantiating and situating the gift as love moves it beyond and outside of the economics of exchange. This is the love for the Other, a type of unrequited love. Hence, Schrag suggests a grammar other than a consumerist culture for the gift that is also applicable to heirlooms in an ethical relationship with nature, where the words “custodian” and “steward” replace “owner” as caregivers rather than controllers (*God as Otherwise* 108).

Certain possessions may become inalienable over time without formal acknowledgement, yet a certain shift in sentiment occurs that marks an object’s inalienability (Curasi et al. “How Individuals”; Heisley and Cours). With collective and communal significance, heirlooms as distinct objects, call for an ethic of responsibility that requires stewardship. Curasi et al. suggest that “families conceive of inalienable wealth as eternal and capable of linking group members across time and space” (“How Individuals” 620). As a result, keepsakes that become heirlooms represent more than personal, esteemed possessions. They are irreplaceable and meant to be kept from the market (619). Curasi et al. differentiate between personal objects as “keepsakes” and those that they describe as “inalienable wealth,” where kin recognize the significance of these

objects of embodiment as set apart from other objects and requiring special care (609). For her research, Roberta Gilchrist points to the work of Janet Hoskins for distinguishing between heirlooms and biographical objects, where heirlooms are public and biographical objects are personal; however, as Gilchrist indicates, biographical objects may become heirlooms, which is an area Gilchrist attends to as does this project. In the same way, there are public objects brought into the private realm and vice versa.

Additionally, Helen Holmes aligns her research on inheritance practices with the delimitations outlined by Finch et al. in the 1990s, where heirlooms and keepsakes are in separate categories, and heirlooms require “familial duty” but do not hold symbolic value while keepsakes have much symbolic value and are “items to be treasured, acting as symbolic reminders and representations of their previous owners” (176). While the terminology of the source is upheld, for this current argument, heirloom is the preferred term, yet it is also recognized as a keepsake—cherished and treasured with symbolic and mnemonic representation that requires an ethic of responsibility and should be appreciated for its existence no matter how commonplace; in addition, if an object lacks any of the affects necessary for commitment, they can be cultivated. For example, an object lacking a narrative can begin to acquire stories at any time. An heirloom must begin somewhere. In “Objects of Memory: The Ethnography and Archaeology of Heirlooms,” Katrina Lillios explains, “Heirlooms can be defined better by what they do, rather than by what they are” (244). Heirlooms must start somewhere, and oftentimes, they come as everyday commodities that go through the processes of singularization and decommodification once they enter the home (Kopytoff; Epp and Price 821).

An heirloom is not synonymous with an antique, yet engaging the rhetoric of the past often engenders an object with enchantment. To acquire antique status, an object must be at least

one-hundred years old. An heirloom, on the other hand, need not be old. While ‘antiqueness’ creates an ethereal quality to its association with the past (Anton), an heirloom only requires the intention to ‘pass forward’ or ‘pass on,’ which may occur at any stage or age of an ‘object’s biography’ (Kopytoff). ‘Vintage’ items are popular in fashion and home décor, where buyers often seek to return to a more recent past and replicate an aura of nostalgia (Belk; Heisley and Cours; Türe and Ger). In her research on objects discovered by new inhabitants that were left behind by previous home owners, Caron Lipman explains, “Importantly, accounting for a sense of the past’s extended presence also requires that we acknowledge the possibility that, within the ordinary Western home, some past objects are granted forms of what might be broadly categorized as supernatural agency, and the folkloric beliefs and rituals continue to shape modern homemaking” (Lipman 95). For example, some residents believe that uncovered objects, which are unearthed during renovations, should be left undisturbed so as to not disrupt the home’s mystique. Families also construct private shrines of family relics and religious icons, imbuing the home with mystical and spiritual affect (Türe and Ger). Ian Woodward writes that as a field of inquiry, material culture studies (MCS) does not focus only on how people use objects but also how objects “have a type of power over us” (vi).

Much of the significance of an heirloom is its connection to others, particularly family members who have died. Gifts and heirlooms hold universal significance; they are a ‘language’ that all cultures perform; however differently, they are still practiced and esteemed. The complexity of heirlooms and heirlooming comes to fullness in communicative *praxis*. Philosophical theory alone is not concerned with acting, doing, or making, but *praxis* is concerned with acting as it is informed by thinking and displays a type of knowledge called *phronesis*, a mode of reasoning that focuses on process, doing, and deeds (Arneson 5). Schrag

suggests “thinking beyond pure theory—theory of reality, theory of knowledge, theory of this and theory of that—so as to reclaim the space of praxis in which the manifold expressions of thought and action are situated” (“Rhetoric Resituated” 166). Schrag calls for the reunion of philosophy and rhetoric through communicative *praxis*, which begins with thinking of communication as practice. This current project considers how an heirloom as an interwoven and intergenerational communicator reveals itself in kinship. While heirlooms bound up in narrative have a better chance of survival than an heirloom with no previous background or context, narrative alone is not enough. A collective interplay of hermeneutical insight is necessary for constituting, interpreting, and engaging heirlooms. As Schrag explains, “Hermeneutics as the performance of interpretation is at work wherever there is speech and action, and it is this speech and action that is at once an understanding and an expression of meaning through which both self and world are disclosed” (170). Heirloom as an embodied practice within the hermeneutical space of *praxis* offers glimpses into the interstices of narrative heritage. An heirloom is a polysemy of voices; glimpses into lives and whispers of the past emerge through hermeneutical phenomenology, an orientation and interpretation of lived experience.

Heirlooms function as more than mundane props in the background of life; they share in the constitution of family identity and act as performers in narrative construction. In fact, heirlooms become elements in living narratives more than any other objects in people’s lives (Curasi et al. 238 “Ritual”). A family narrative is a part of a family’s heritage, which often includes “the history, stories, and values of the previous generations of the family” (Curasi “Inheritance” 799). Arnett et al. write, “A narrative is a story agreed upon by a group of people” that includes the meanings of human life (*Communication Ethics Literacy* 37). The ‘goods’ of communication ethics are virtues worth negotiating for posterity; these are the values families

believe are important. These values are not immutable; they are continually conferred. ‘Goods’ as kinship virtues are defined within a family’s narrative, which reciprocally guides and shapes practices that continually unfold as the *telos* of heritage. Curasi writes, “Values are communicated and transferred via the stories that are bundled with cherished possessions” (“Maybe It IS” 84). The chapters of this dissertation explore the possibilities and capacities of heirlooms while encouraging the practices of expression and extension of family ‘goods’ as immaterial virtues that deepen relational bonds. The things people surround themselves with matter; materiality is significant for its association with identity, memory, and culture. Woodward states that George Simmel, one of the foremost classical sociologists, “had the most explicit interest in how material culture defined the nature of modern experience” in comparison to other theorists of his time, such as Karl Marx (20). Simmel realized that society had become inundated with products, and he understood that all of these commodities needed to be distinguished from the myriad of other things surrounding modern lives, and he saw the importance of material objects to shape human identity.

Heirlooms are customarily regarded as objects of family identity and stability; as the “materialization of family meanings and traditions—as identity anchors;” and as “meaning-laden objects valued for their authentic links to the family;” however, recent research challenges orthodox scholarship and real life practices, indicating, instead, that heirlooms as sources of change (Türe and Ger 1, 3) to be reshaped and reconfigured to suit current fashion or mood. An heirloom is customarily bequeathed by a family member as either a pre-death gift, or as part of the relational inheritance process, and “is often considered as the receipt of a legacy, that is, part of a family heritage” (Curasi 798). This project argues that altering heirlooms for personal preference is an act of “emotivism” (MacIntyre) or individualism that rejects respect for lineage

and disregards communal bonds. In their article, “Ritual Desire and Ritual Development: An Examination of Family Heirlooms in Contemporary North American Households,” Curasi, Arnould, and Price state: “Heirlooms are a special kind of bequest from the dead to the living” (240). This “bequest” communicates an unending ethic of responsibility that continually extends from forbearers to heirs. Heirlooms bind others through heritage.

The significance of heirlooming is not a lost practice. Gilchrist considers “the social importance of inter-generational artefacts to past societies and the material practices that surround the curation of objects” (170). While Gilchrist argues that medieval heirlooms were selected for materiality, her findings remain applicable to the present. While research on current day practices suggests that heirlooms are most often not costly artefacts, materiality still matters, and heirlooms are still selected for their potential to become heirlooms. Curasi et al. underscore their informants’ manifest desire for ritual, which may lead them “to extract items from the commodity sphere with the intention of injecting them into the sacred domain of heirloom possessions” (245). Gilchrist explains that archaeologists consider heirlooms “as repositories for *collective memory*” (170) and that both archaeologists and anthropologists view heirlooms “as serving a mnemonic function” (171).

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt articulates how the “common good,” once the province of public life in antiquity, shifted to the household in the medieval era, a turn that delimited responsibility for the public sphere and gave rise to the muddled realm of the social (28-35). Heirlooms in postmodernity have origins as objects in public, social, and private realms, later becoming associated with kinship over the course of time. As Arendt states, in antiquity, there was no “political economy” (29). Politics occurred in the *polis* and anything dealing with “the survival of the species” was relegated to the realm of *oikos*, the household. The private or

intimate sphere of the home is the primary place for the gathering and dwelling of the family and, thus, the traditional setting for heirlooming, where practices validate and implicate a family's ethical goods within the engagement of heirlooms. An individual learns how to navigate right and wrong within the context of the home, which is private action that extends into the social and public spheres (see Arnett et al. *Communication Ethics* xii, xvi). Goods prompt action. Families as intimate, private institutions are small, prolonged communities that negotiate norms and demonstrate values through practices. Historical artifacts and monuments, as well as certain public spaces, are a part of national inheritance. In his article, "Possessions and the Extended Self," Russell W. Belk's scholarship underscores particular places and communal constructs as indexical (140). While Belk differentiates between objects of self-extension and those that are not, he emphasizes that the "extended self" includes not only personal items but also communal objects, other people, and certain places. Considering the recent turmoil and contention over national monuments and their representational multiplicity, one can grasp the complexity of objects of inheritance, both at the familial (private) and national (public) level.

While this project is concerned with kinship, inheritance, and material property, emphasis is relegated to intramundane and ordinary objects or the "minutiae of inheritance" (Holmes 176), designated through commonplace and domestic practices and the rituals and traditions of family *praxis*. Schrag describes "communicative praxis" as prepositionally textured (*Communicative Praxis*). In his development of "communicative praxis," Schrag explains, "Discourse and action are *about* something, *by* someone, and *for* someone" (viii, 17). Applying Schrag's communication model for heirlooming could assume several forms. For example: Heirlooming is *about* crafting, shaping, and inculcating the family narrative—through heirloom inclusion in traditions and rituals; *by* kin engaging heirlooms—in the remembering and (re)telling of stories

that comprise the narrative whole; and *for* kinship, connecting ancestors and descendants through time and space. Schrag's textured prepositions applied to the topic of heirlooming enlivens familial discourse and everyday action within the family narrative. The arrangement of action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*) is the *vita activa* for the Greek polis, but Arendt adds that the existence of this relationship was a "...pre-polis experience and tradition" (*Human Condition* 26).

Heirlooms bind others through heritage. A family narrative is a part of a family's heritage, which often includes "the history, stories, and values of the previous generations of the family" (Curasi "Inheritance" 799). Arnett et al. write, "A narrative is a story agreed upon by a group of people" that includes the meaning and good of human life (*Communication Ethics Literacy* 37). An heirloom is customarily bequeathed by a family member as either a pre-death gift, or as part of the relational inheritance process, and "is often considered as the receipt of a legacy, that is, part of a family heritage" (798). For past cultures, some aspect of the giver being "contained" in the gift was quite literal (Mauss 12).

According to the original work on gifting by anthropologist Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, to offer a gift to someone is to offer a part of oneself, making the gift active and invested with life; this, argues Mauss, imposes "obligation" and a duty to "reciprocate" (11-13). Mauss' fusion of giver and gift forms "...an animistic quality to the gift" (Mifsud 93). Mauss writes, "Even when the thing has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him" (12). Mauss's insight creates a parallel for heirlooms as a type of gift that endorses an ethic of responsibility, best understood and developed through *praxis*. In his introduction to Mauss's text, E. E. Evans-Pritchard declares that one of Mauss's themes commits life as interwoven with others, where an embedded nature leads one to place common interest above self-interest (v-vi). Mauss's existence confronted the

vestiges of The Great War. As Evans-Pritchard claims of Mauss, “He took over the labors of his dead colleagues” (vi). Oftentimes, one does not choose the challenges of life, but one does choose how to confront and conduct those challenges.

Inquiries Guiding This Research

As vibrant materiality engaging meaningful, collective practices that shape individual and familial identity, heirlooms convey potential efforts leading toward “the good life.” Drawing upon various realms of scholarship, this project synthesizes interdisciplinary research for the coordinates of heirlooms, narratives, and communication ethics while exploring the intersection and concepts of materiality, gifting, and consumption (each detailed within their own chapter). The following questions guide this process: How do heirlooms fit within a family narrative? Identifying kinship as grounded in narrative and tradition, what does an ethic of responsibility toward heirlooms entail? How do the tenets of heirlooming foster a sense of identity in a postmodern, consumerist culture?

Three primary texts serve as focal works, directing the response to these inquiries: Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* is drawn upon throughout this project, particularly for his argument on life as narrative; Calvin O. Schrag’s *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* is engaged for the implementation of heirlooming within praxis; Schrag’s book, *God as Otherwise Than Being: Toward a Semantics of the Gift*, is the principal resource for considering heirlooms as a type of gift. Additionally, rhetorician and material culture scholar Christine Harold’s book, *Things Worth Keeping: The Value of Attachment in a Disposable World*, provides conceptual resources for dulling hyperconsumption.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter One situates heirloom presence as irreplaceable, inalienable, (Mauss; Weiner) and indexical (Grayson and Shulman) while introducing and exploring scholarly literature that discusses the language of materiality and object discourse, particularly as it is encountered and endorsed in material culture studies, consumption studies, and consumer research—three leading areas for understanding how people attend to matter and materiality. Heirloom is argued as an embodied practice that involves various rituals and traditions, which are discussed in Chapter One, such as conventional “forms of transmission” (Epp and Arnould 83); and rituals like kin-keeping, curating, displaying, disposition, and distribution. In his scholarship, Belk refers to heirlooms as “intergenerational transfers of contaminated objects.” Belk points to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s book *Totemism* as the source for object contamination, where “contaminated” refers to “the acquisition of possessions of another person that have been intimately associated with that person” (Belk 151; Heisley and Cours). The fascinating concept of “contamination” holds significance for heirloom continuance.

Practices, rituals, traditions, and heirlooms interweave family histories, narratives, and values—all “forms of communication” (Epp and Arnould 82). Heirloom discourse is situated within the revolving family network, an intimate institution that shares and contests roles, values, and meanings. The family and the home are the social context or “habitus” (Bourdieu), where persons learn and form relationships, values, and language as phenomenological processes. Some examples of family values noted in scholarly literature include appreciating hard work; overcoming adversity; supporting art and culture; honoring patriotism; continuing religion; and sustaining family and marriage (Curasi “Maybe It IS” 84).

Despite its rich horizon, the realm of heirloom research, as well as the number of scholars exploring the topic, is limited and predominantly confined to marketing professors in consumer

and consumption research. This tendency is due, perhaps, to anthropology's ethnographic approach to the study of humankind, initiated by Bronislaw Malinowski's 1922 research on the *kula* ceremonial exchange system of the Trobriand Islands. Malinowski did more than attempt to objectively depict the system or view it as economic exchange; he described rituals and meanings bound to exchanged objects "as entwined in the people's culture of myths and beliefs..." (Dant 916). The exchanges integrated social connections and possible status through exchange; despite no economic gain, reciprocity creates community (Belk and Coon 401-402). Jennifer Mason and Stewart Muir report that sociologists have showed little concern for everyday traditions, arguing that researchers bias traditions as imposed metanarratives or modern illusions (608). Archaeologist Alfredo González-Ruibal remarks that the postmodern terrain is so obsessed with movement, fluidity, and transformation to the neglect of any characteristics of objects as social stabilizers (15). González-Ruibal blames the modernist bias of the social sciences and an academic emphasis on globalization for dismissing "maintenance activities," arguing that history, anthropology, and archaeology favor transformation (15).

Curasi et al. note that while significant research into rituals within politics, organizations, and entertainment exists, limited research has considered family rituals ("Ritual" 255). Their research on shared meaning and the role of heirlooms in enduring traditions is in response to that void. For example, from their interviewed informants, they perceive "the presence of an affective state that might be described as a desire or longing for ritual..." (237). The authors surmise that this "desire or longing" is due to "a tacit understanding of ritual's role in broadcasting, enacting, and commemorating important family values" (237). Living in a world of uncertainty and precarity, it makes sense that people long for rituals for connectedness and continuity. Conversely, the authors note that the postmodern condition renounces tradition. Nevertheless,

and despite this “affective state,” research shows that most rituals do not continue past a single generation (260). Additionally, *affect* has assumed a broad, contemporary role in material culture studies and the advent of new materialism (see Chapter Two).

While heirloom practices do not guarantee absolute conservation and continuance, the recognition and acceptance of an ethic of responsibility advocated throughout this work may foster further kinship motivation for heirloom conscription. Heirlooms are a “present absence” (Knappett 39). Even while heirloom presence is often indicative of human absence, heirlooms are liminal reminders that life continues—a source of future-oriented hope. Collective practices engaging heirlooms and others evokes and invokes presence. In their edited book, *Mobility, Meaning, and Transformations of Things: Shifting Contexts of Material Culture through Time and Space*, social anthropologist Hans Peter Hahn and anthropologist Hadas Weiss assert that an object’s “presence” conjures stories that require special care (3).

Chapter Two

A posthuman reaction to humanism has garnered favor across disciplines, and within the humanities and social sciences, a new materialist framework has accentuated matter and materiality as vibrant, vital, actants, delimiting the human subject and human communication (Barad “Posthuman”; Bennett; Harold). Known as new materialism(s), the theories and proponents of this perspective(s) contest social construction; retort the ‘linguistic turn;’ and advocate “agential realism,” which imparts all matter as alive and active (Barad “Posthuman”). In her book, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Economy of Things*, political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett levels human and nonhuman agency, asserting, “A lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and

once humans themselves are assessed not as autonomous but as vital materialities” (23). New materialism declares that matter is “becoming” (Coole and Frost 10).

General ideas informing heirlooms and families in academic research and the contemporary trend of altering heirlooms’ physical attributes to inject them with relatability prompts marketing professors Meltem Türe’s and Güliz Ger’s article, “Continuity through Change: Navigating Temporalities through Heirloom Rejuvenation.” Türe and Ger consider Bruno Latour’s work on agentic material as a touchstone for their research. The authors suggest that if matter is neither inert nor inanimate, then “heirloom objects cannot be excluded from such becoming” (2-3); this concession is a reference to the edited work of Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, a book that explores several strands of new materialism. Chapter Four responds directly to Türe and Ger’s promotion of “heirloom rejuvenation,” ultimately arguing that most disruption to the physical elements of an heirloom are committed from the modernist agenda of individualism. Heirlooms take the focus off of the self and foster attention for others. Communication begins within the collective, not the individual (Arnett et al. “The Rhetorical Turn” 115).

In addition, the authors discuss “heterogeneous uneven time,” where past practices continue to hold resonance for the present and future; the authors propose that heterogeneous time accords with Heideggerian *becoming*. Barad, recognized as a leading new materialist, states: “What is being called into question here is the very nature of the ‘self,’ and in terms of not just being but also time. That is, in an important sense, the self is dispersed/diffracted through time and being” (“After the End” 531). Chapter Two debates whether heirlooms and heirlooming might find an alliance with or within new materialist thought.

This project was greatly challenged by aspects of new materialism and its promotion in rhetoric and communication studies by various scholars. After careful consideration, Chapter Two concludes that rather than texturing heirlooms, new materialism reduces heirlooming possibilities. While the discourse of new materialism is engaging and alluring (Katz), it is a wrong turn for the direction of the humanities and human sciences. Heirlooming as “communicative praxis” offers interpretation and seeks meaning; meaning cannot derive outside of human thought (Cates, Brunner, Moss; Hyde and Smith; Ong). Thought cannot occur outside of human language (Ong). The reality of new materialism is that it grossly deforms the human condition in its disregard for the intentionality of human communication, action, and purpose; it does not provide space for “communicative praxis” and largely rejects *teleology*. Equating human and nonhuman ontology could result in devastating effects for both humans and nonhumans, and ecology—a primary concern made of new materialism. As Schrag inquires: Why does philosophy continually reduce “the concretely existing speaking human subject?” (“Philosophy and Communication” 337). Schrag’s question resonates within Chapter Two while also segueing into the next chapter.

Chapter Three

This chapter relies heavily upon a close reading of Schrag’s *God as Otherwise Than Being: Toward a Semantics of the Gift* to understand the grammar of the gift and the place of materiality in Western philosophy. Schrag critiques the shortcomings of the metaphysical, epistemological, and theological traditions and the grammars they impose. He instead seeks a new grammar or new discourse that he conditions “in the margins of the philosophical tradition from the Greeks onwards” (26). As he shifts and sifts through the theories and treatises of previous philosophers, Schrag finds language and possibilities in the works of Plato, Heidegger,

Levinas, and Derrida, among others. For example, from Book IV of Plato's *Republic*, Schrag uncovers the language of "above," "beyond" and "surpassing" within translations of the Greek *epekeina* and nuances of "to be" in *ousia* for Socrates' request to engage "the Good," as "hyperbole," which later in the fourth and fifth centuries is Pseudo-Dionysius' exclamation of "the Deity as *huperousios*—as superessentiality and superexistentiality" (58-59). It is out of Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology and Neoplatonism that Schrag declares, "Negation thus boils down not to a claim for absence but to a recognition of difference" (60). Schrag attends Emanuel Levinas in "his reconfigured grammar of alterity and transcendence" (64). As Schrag explains, it is "otherwise than" rather than "different from" that extends Levinas' alterity to beyond matters of being (65). Schrag thinks with and against Heidegger throughout the first part of his book, and in closing the first section, Schrag suggests that the erasure of Being in *Zur Seinsfrage* "carries a positive signification..." and "...can thus be seen as an invitation to poetic thinking and dwelling, of which indeed much is made in the later Heidegger" (70). Such a dwelling, it is here argued, houses narrative and heirlooms as narrational elements.

Schrag does not deconstruct; rather, he reconstructs a "new grammar," offering "communicative praxis," a narrative form, where speech and action reshape the discourse of divinity and religion (xiv-xv). As Schrag exclaims, it was never the approach or methods or theories from the past that came under suspicion; rather, it was always God's essence or existence (22). Schrag writes: "In the history of religion, both in the West and in the East, the problem of presence in ethical life has been coupled with the problem of presence in religious places, names, artifacts, rituals, ceremonies, and sacraments. It is here that the traditional distinction between the sacred and the secular, the holy and the profane, reaches its most

intensive expression” (83). The semiotics of gift and icon are interrogated for possible understandings and/or misunderstandings related to heirloom significance.

Mauss’s insight into the custom and social prestige of gifting was quite original (Douglas). From Mauss’s work on gift cultures, to Jacques Derrida’s denouncement of the impossibility of the gift (“The Time of the King”), extensive scholarship has shown the immense importance of gifting as a topic that has crossed disciplines and discourses (Mifsud 90; Schrift). Derrida’s argument has not been the final word on the gift. A contemporary theorist on the gift, Jacques T. Godbout positions the gift within the family while in his article, “Exchange and Subjectivity, Commodity, and Gift,” Jon Baldwin contests the gift/commodity binary, where the gift is viewed as “enabling” relations and the commodity as “disabling” (378-388). Chapter Three, leading into Chapter Four seeks to bring heirloom commodities into the realm of the gift.

By expounding on several definitions of gift and explorations of its rhetorical role offered by theorists in various contexts of gifting situations, this chapter explores the language of the gift to determine if gift and heirloom are harmonious and companionable, finding agreement with Schrag that the gift does not demand obligation nor reciprocity but retains qualities of its own.

Chapter Four

In their groundbreaking work, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood bring anthropology and economics together, critiquing normative consumption, rational choice theory, and utilitarian assumptions of why people want goods. These goods are not the values of communication ethics; however, material goods (objects, commodities, things) convey values as communicators of the lifeworld. As craftsmanship declined and manufacturing increased in the early twentieth century, industrialists developed stories aligned with brands to connect consumers with products (Harold 25). Douglas

and Isherwood center the cultural dynamic of goods as the purpose behind consumption, validating objects as organizers, communicators, and conveyers of social values rather than mere ornamentation for “conspicuous consumption,” which was the conventional view since Thorstein Veblen’s 1899 publication, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Douglas and Isherwood contend that demand cannot be determined by the physical properties of goods. As the authors explain: “Goods, then, are the visible part of culture. They are arranged in vistas and hierarchies that can give play to the full range of discrimination of which the human mind is capable. The vistas are not fixed: nor are they randomly arranged in kaleidoscope. Ultimately, their structures are anchored to human social purposes” (44). As material culture, humans communicate with objects, such as heirlooms, and the discriminations and judgments heirlooms convey are, thus, ethically constituted.

Harold’s work provides various suggestions to counter the Western glut of goods (commodities). Her submission that one might learn empathy for materiality from hoarders is a curious idea examined in this chapter. Harold makes clear that “consumption practices” are one of the primary causes for the world’s waste problem (6-7), resulting in an astounding amount of garbage, which entails waste the size of continents floating in Earth’s oceans, and existing “through our efforts to satiate that hunger to belong and connect,” which in a consumer culture is consummated through the endless purchase of endless commodities (3). While this project does not focus on championing the retention of heirlooms as an environmental effort to reduce waste, it does confront the rhetoric of consumerism and consumption, where everything becomes disposable even when it is not broken. The interminable world of material goods has not increased human happiness (Harold). Advertising focuses on engaging the consumer in the moment of sensual contact while ignoring all other stages of a commodity’s existence, and

Harold's work suggests that raising awareness is not enough to combat the powerful forces of advertising. As she explains, Target and IKEA have mastered exploiting modern consumer culture, creating "what evolutionary psychologists call the hedonic treadmill" (135). With so many superfluous purchases, there is little to no bond created between person and object, or what is described as "the kind of attachment that inspires stewardship" (136)— a feeling and commitment that an heirloom, by designation, should invoke. Part of an ethic of responsibility toward heirlooms critiques practices of personalizing, transforming, and renovating them to suit current curatorial needs or trends (Türe and Ger). Chapter Four rejects such modifications as modes of individualism that rebuff tradition.

Toward that end, this project aims to include heirlooming as another important way to connect people to objects they already have that surround them in their daily lives (or to reunite people with the things resigned to basements, hidden in attics, and forgotten in storage). Harold adds that in order to alter consumption practices, "we must find new points of entry" (18). While heirloom practices are certainly not new, the current cultural climate (e.g. inflation, ecological concern) as well as the socially shifting population (e.g. the current retirement of baby boomers) already involves a stream of objects ready for involvement. Trends, fashion, and nostalgia drive the continual market of antiques, vintage and retro items, and secondhand or "preowned" items (Türe and Ger). Celebrating the beauty in the mundane as "evocative" and approaching things with a sense of "awe" or "wonder" may promote attentiveness to what is, was, and will remain materially, physically always *somewhere* (Bennett; Greenblatt; Harold; Holmes; Turkle; Witmore). Archaeologist Laurent Olivier writes, "Material things embed themselves in all subsequent presents; long after they have ceased to be of use or to exist, they continue to be" (206). As emphatic elements, heirlooms are other-worldly indications of the ephemerality of life.

Chapter Five

Narrative as a structure or framework for understanding virtue ethics is an approach that presents life as a story with purpose. Arnett explains, “A narrative is a temporal home of ethical goods that yield identity and direction” (“Communication Ethics” 43). Every human life has a story, and every story has a purpose that involves discourse and action; these stories find meaning(s) within family narrative. Fritz describes several communication ethics frameworks that “could be explored as a virtue ethics approach supporting a good connected to a particular human *telos*” (“Communication Ethics and Virtue” 708). Family goods are designated through practices and the narrative framework is comprised of the stories kin members tell and share as they engage with and attend to heirlooms through *praxis*.

Heirlooms become elements of living narratives more than any other objects in people’s lives (Curasi et al. 238 “Ritual”). When indexical association fades, “narrative intervention” maintains inalienability (Curasi, Price, and Arnould “How Individuals’ Cherished Possessions” 616). While MacIntyre’s argument against “emotivism” (10-11) and support for a narrative understanding of life is woven throughout this project, his narrative countenance is emphasized in Chapter Five. As MacIntyre maintains in his Aristotelian tradition: “man is essentially a story-telling animal” (216). Knowing how one is situated within the family narrative opens an individual to appreciate how the self is always embedded with others while also fostering an individual story to make sense of human purpose. Price et al. describe how common binaries that initially seem divisive are combined as “complex bundling,” where the self and other, past and future, life and death accumulate and are put together in narrative (185). In her article, “Living with the Past at Home: The Afterlife of Inherited Domestic Objects,” Caron Lipman writes, “The understanding of the home as shared over time leads to decisions informed by a framework of

values balancing individual rights with an understanding of collective responsibility, the latter often reflecting a desire to preserve the home's past as part of an ethic of respect, care, and custodianship" (85). Maintaining heirlooms like maintaining the home, maintains relationships.

According to Mandy P. Hendry and Andrew M. Ledbetter in their article, "Narrating the Past, Enhancing the Present: The Associations Among Genealogical Communication, Family Communication Patterns, and Family Satisfaction," most research on family communication is limited to parent-child communication and communication between parents (117). "Rarer still are studies that consider how the extended family network extends across time and history," write the authors (117). Family communication scholarship presents theories and studies, such as those by communication professor Jody Koenig Kellis on Communication Sense-Making that demonstrate deepening kinship relations. Kellis and April R. Trees write that narratives assist family, who are dealing with difficulty and strife, in healing (49). They explain, "Putting experiences into words enables individuals to create a coherent description of what happened and develop insight" (50). Finding objects that connect with past experiences and people and layering the objects with stories may lead to their procurement of heirloom status.

This section orients concepts and terminology carried over into chapter discussions, including: communication and narrative ethics, practices, presence, *praxis*, traditions, and the postmodern family. A postmodern condition is a tapestry with dangling threads of eras, ethics, narratives, and traditions all vying for expression. Arnett and Holba state, "Postmodernity is an intertextual cacophony of historical voices coexisting within multiple narrational neighborhoods" (46). Differing views of communication ethics are reciprocally guided by differing narratives. Based upon the work of MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, Arnett added narrative ethics as a fifth inquiry to James W. Cheesbro's four communication ethics categories (Arnett "Communication

Ethics” 43; see Arnett “The Status of Communication Ethics”). Communication ethics puts differing, divergent, and conflicting perspectives into dialogue, attuning one to others. In their material culture research on the embedded life, marketing professors Heisley and Cours describe how kinship is intertwined with the other (438). Heirlooming ascribes narrative ethics as the background for guiding and understanding domestic practices tied to the goods of kinship.

In a philosophy of heirlooming, the good of the family is the theme of a family’s narrative, which is guided by continuing communicative practices engaging heirlooms—a type of adaptive and responsive communication ethics method (see Arnett et al. *Communication Ethics Literacy* 6). For Arnett et al., “Communication ethics literacy is the sorting out and discernment of goods that we protect and promote” (5). Watching, and learning rather than telling and demanding are keys to communication ethics literacy. The authors stipulate that questioning assumptions and navigating competing goods are paramount to tying “...a given good to a particular narrative structure” (9). A narrative requires communicative interpretation for ethical direction. Different narrative grounds hold differing virtue arrangements. Fritz writes, “Tying communicative practices to perennial questions related to the good life for human beings, personally and collectively, places communication squarely within the purview of virtue ethics, which offers theoretical and practical grounding for the role of communication in human flourishing” (701). Arnett explains, “Communication ethics is the origin of understanding what matters between and among persons” (“Communication Ethics” 31). Communication ethics emphasizes the importance of practices, where one finds existing embedded identity, situated in the expressions of the past (Arnett et al. *Communication Ethics Literacy*; Heisley and Cours; MacIntyre).

MacIntyre argues that one cannot disentangle the moral condition of modern culture from an interior standpoint. One must find ground outside of this problematic position to effectively comprehend and critique it. Postmodernism deflects universal conceptions and narratives though fragments of such continue to revolve within a postmodern condition. MacIntyre defends and appeals to Aristotelean virtue ethics to grasp the disconnection in modern moral thought that began its separation in the late Middle Ages and early modern world (ix-x). Aristotle's teleology indicates the ontological difference between who one *is* and who one could *become*. MacIntyre states that this is the ethics of science. He explains, "Ethics therefore in this view presupposes some account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal and above all some account of the human *telos*" (52). Concurrently, Arnett proposes, "Narratives are dwellings of value-laden purpose" ("Communication Ethics" 44). Practices, ethics, and traditions present rather than impose life with possibilities and potential.

The rejection of teleology and of life understood holistically, argues MacIntyre, results in subjective standards of fragmented, episodic, and disconnected experiences, lacking purpose and direction (33-34). MacIntyre assigns "emotivism" as the moral mode of advanced modernity deficient in a context of practical beliefs and the common good (10-11). He further suggests that the manifestation of vapid moral evaluation is, in part, due to its positive celebration advanced as individual freedom from constraints and restraints that once held an individual in check within social bonds. Out of emotivism arises the sovereign individual agent that acts for herself (62). The finding and forming of identity is beholden within narrative, where the "common good" resides. The goods that one values are related to the community, which comprises the individual. Because common sense, once situated in tradition, is no longer common, families, as small

communities must attune to their common practices and experiences to realize belonging (Arnett and Holba 214).

In his prologue, MacIntyre remarks that when the tradition of virtues re-emerges, it occurs within everyday life, calling family practices a specific space for re-engagement (xv). Virtues reside within a narrative structure (Arnett, Fritz, and Bell; Fritz 712). Family practices occur within the family narrative. MacIntyre offers several examples of practices, two of which are most applicable here: the practices of “sustaining a household” and “the making and sustaining of family life” (187-188). Practices cannot flourish in societies in which the virtues are not valued (MacIntyre). It is reasonable to argue that practices will not flourish within families who fail to engage the virtues. Practices are defined by MacIntyre as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity” toward which certain goods are aimed and attained (the internal and external goods of the practice). Taking her lead from Arnett’s prior literature on communication ethics, Fritz writes, “Narrative, a story larger than any of the participants and irreducible to the sum of their interactions, provides a common meaning center external to the self to bind persons together, even under conditions of personal dislike” (706). While kin have a choice as to whether they continue, reorient, or reject heritage, the hope is that contemporary family members realize their responsibility to those before them and those yet to come (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 254).

The backdrop of narrative ethics for heirlooming provides an end toward which heirlooming is directed, understood as the good of the family. Responsibility for heirlooms forms through situated patterns of heirlooming within the space of “communicative praxis” to guide “*responsiveness*” (Schrag *Communicative Praxis* 204). Accentuating particular practices that lead to the “good life,” MacIntyre presents human existence as a “narrative quest” (218-219). A

quest provides choices and paths; one's quest is not pre-determined but is best pursued with a plan. A narrative framework structures a natural concept of unity (MacIntyre). Unity does not mean determined or inflexible. The use of narration to understand ethics and an ethical life are the focus of MacIntyre's book. In *God as Otherwise than Being*, Schrag shifts from ontology to ethics, arguing for the "disclosing function of narration" (88). In this sense, narrative *reveals, uncovers, divulges*. Family narrative engaging heirlooming discloses *telos* as family heritage and legacy. Emphasizing shared meaning behind practices communicates legacies. In order to maintain, amend, or discard a legacy, one must know what her legacy entails (Epp and Arnould 83). Practices, virtues, and narratives are not fixed; they are continually navigated, (re)defined, and implemented throughout engagement over time and space as each family member adds a layer of existence to the whole.

Postmodernity acknowledges petit narratives and accommodates traditions in plural, particular, and local contexts as opposed to an imposed universal or modern metanarrative. As Schrag posits, all postmodern everything encounters "lessons that can be learned from the ways of narrative" (*God as Otherwise* 42). Thus, ethics recognizes space for experiencing difference with postmodernity and communication ethics. Fritz writes, "From this surfacing of goods, learning from difference and the identification of particular interests emerge as interlocutors discover each other's perspectives" (707). From their study, Mason and Muir submit "that tradition as lived and experienced does not simply or even usually involve straightforward repetition and replaying of historical practices" (614). The results of their study on family and tradition suggests "that ceremonies and rituals can be sites of ambivalence and conflict rather than compliance" (614). Still, practices and traditions offer possible direction and encourage dialogue when faced with uncertainty and difference. One might find certain heritage domains

cumbersome; others recognize themselves as descendants, where even their sense of purpose is tied to a curatorial pattern of objects (McCracken *Culture* 44-45).

One confronts and experiences alternative values and narratives in the world through communication with others. Schrag states that for Levinas, ethics as first principle calls for “an ethic of responsibility” to the face and voice of the other (85). Schrag concludes that what is required for an absolute response is an asymmetrical presence, because the issue, as Schrag acknowledges, is “the traditional metaphysics of presence, which dissects everything into polarizing opposites (substance/attribute, subject/object, essence/existence, form/matter, actuality/potentiality, activity/passivity), [and] has become a popular pastime...” (85). However, to avoid the so-called objective criteria of metaphysics, Schrag announces “[t]he presence and self-identity of the ethical subject... [as one] embedded within the temporal becoming of the self, occasioning an experience of presence borne by a remembrance of that which has been and an anticipation of that which is yet to come. Temporality enters into the very constitution of the ethical subject” (85-86). Importantly, Schrag stresses, the identity here is a “*personal* identity” that is situated in its historical moment (86). According to Arnett et al., “A historical moment announces itself by the questions that require our attention; how we answer those questions shapes our lives and offers us identity” (*Communication Ethics Literacy* 11). Narrative materiality of presence initiates family identity (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 240). Heirlooms share the journey and shape the narrative quest of individual life and committed lineage.

Uncovering one’s heritage and discovering the lives of others is an awakening that life is not one’s own; when one speaks, she communicates “not for herself but for her family” (McCracken *Culture* 46). In his article, “Alasdair MacIntyre’s Contribution to Communication Theory,” Jason Hannan provides a valuable understanding of tradition and its interrelationships

for this project: “A tradition can best be understood as a collective conversation extended through history about a shared set of social practices” (186). Traditions are linguistic concepts tied to a particular historical moment (188). They are thoughtful, coordinated virtues, an acquired disposition or *hexis* (habit) with respect to activity and capacity—both actions and emotions or feelings. *Habitudes* for Aristotle enable identity, which directs one’s capacity for decision-making (Arnett et al. *Communication Ethics Literacy* 8). In Terence Irwin’s translation and closing glossary for *Nicomachean Ethics*, he defines *hexis* as a “state,” like a state of being:

This means literally having, possession...A *hexis* is a first actualization or ACTIVITY, and hence, in relation to complete activity, a type of CAPACITY...the state has been formed by repeated activities...Because it has been formed by training, VIRTUE is a state rather than a mere capacity or FEELING AND IT IS FIRMER AND MORE STABLE THAN A MERE CONDITION... (349)

Within *praxial* presence of heirlooming, meaning finds responsibility. In their reflection on philosophical inquiry of the phenomenon of past and presence within philosophy of communication, Igor E. Klyukanov and Annette M. Holba write that “presence” is not stationary (333). The authors reflect: “As such, presence is a hermeneutic, semiotic and phenomenological process of intersubjectivity and intercorporeality” (333). Hermeneutics and phenomenology together affront subjectivity. Heirlooms are material proof of ancestral ties to the past. An indexical object can offer a sense of “corporeal co-presence” (Price et al. 188). Heirloom involves maintaining the presence of others with the heirloom as a trace—of those not even met—that one will never meet, but where past, present, and future convene in the mediated “presence that is presupposed in the representation of the signified content” (*God as Otherwise*

Schrag 81) carried forth through *praxis* "...within the interstices of this amalgam of discourse and action..." (95). While scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences seek interpretations, they approach understanding from different perspectives or metaphors as Paul Ricoeur describes with the "hermeneutical arc" (Schrag "Communication and Philosophy"). Heirloom as a "hermeneutical arc" is a horizon of meanings and interpretations.

Philosophy of communication is story-centered as it responds to questions emerging from the historical moment (Arnett "Defining Philosophy"). Within philosophy of communication, practices are paramount. In *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication*, Arnett and Holba attest to the importance of practices from the position of a craftsman. The authors explain, "The craftsman understands that there is a meaning-centered story behind practices that announce the 'why,' the importance of a given craft" (3). There must be purpose and meaning for practices to continue. One cannot stand above history or tradition (Arnett and Holba). Hannan maintains that a person could not have language nor therefore thought without the conditions of tradition, and he emphasizes that people are not confined by inherited traditions; however, he explains that both "moral identities and vocabularies" emerge from inherited traditions (186-188). Arnould and Epp write that kin are influenced and affected by family legacies despite whether they choose to accept or reject such legacies (82). Culture and communication are acts of meaning that require a context of tradition for understanding (Gadamer). Hans-Georg Gadamer initiates "all understanding takes place within tradition, and that all our understanding is already affected by history" (Moran and Mooney 312). Entering a practice is to also enter into a tradition (MacIntyre 194). Traditions involving heirlooms bring people together and allow them to feel a part of something more than the self (Heisley and Cours).

In their essay, "The Rhetorical Turn to Otherness: Otherwise Than Humanism," Arnett,

Fritz, and Holba discuss the inherited “everyday communicative consequences” of modernity (115). They argue against a moderate Enlightenment assurance in universal rationality that breaks bonds with others and abandons commitment to traditions (116-117). All communication has ethical implications due to its rhetorical, persuasive nature (Arnett et al. *Communication Ethics Literacy* 38-39). Tradition is lived and living experience (MacIntyre 222; Mason and Muir 614). Heirlooms are embedded within lived traditions. The transition and transmission of special objects is often recognized as keeping a tradition (Price et al.). A living tradition is not blind adherence to authority. Hannan writes, “We might later adopt a different tradition, but we cannot rise above traditions altogether” (186). A postmodern position argues against an unquestioned idealization or oppressive conservation of the past. This attitude has led many in the academy to push back against tradition, claiming tradition holds little to no impact on contemporary lives (Mason and Muir 608; see Giddens 1991, 1999). As Curasi et al. argue, “Theories that announce the end of tradition in postmodernity need to take into account this temporal framing of family traditions” (261). However, authors also note that while family members may believe their traditions are eternal (238, 246), research indicates most traditions tend to not extend past one generation (Hendry and Ledbetter 117).

One cannot fall to “the illusion of standing above history and traditions” (Arnett et al. “The Rhetorical Turn” 117). In fact, a total rejection of tradition is a rejection of order, of common sense, and of *phronesis*, which does not result in difference and diversity but rather ignores difference, often resulting in confusion, potentially leading toward chaos. MacIntyre describes “the emotivist self, in acquiring sovereignty in its own realm lost its traditional boundaries provided by a social identity and a view of human life as ordered to a given end” (34). Such a life was formerly acknowledged *telos* through *phronesis* and *praxis*. MacIntyre

explains *phronesis* as texture between rhetoric and philosophy and conventional, time-honored practices (Hannan). While narrative negotiation is ongoing, narrative incoherence is existential crisis when one's narrative becomes "unintelligible," lacking any sense of unity, purpose, or direction, leading to a sense of "dissatisfaction" (MacIntyre 216) and "fragmentation," where a person is inattentive to others (Arnett et al.). Hannan explains that traditions are concepts. He writes, "The very founding of a tradition is made possible by the use of concepts, and the use of concepts itself is inextricably tied to a particular language used in a specific social, cultural, and historical setting" (188). Concepts are linguistic and language is communal. Literacy designates tradition, which proclaims shared understandings of selfhood (Roberts and Westad 92). Time-honored traditions offer coordinated coherence, communal comfort, and continual connectivity in a world of precarity and uncertainty.

In "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship," Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith appeal to philosophical hermeneutics to explore the ontological nature of the relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric. The authors cite Gadamer for his explication of *praxis* within the hermeneutical situation, where Gadamer explains that "language is not only an object in our hands, it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world" (Gadamer qtd. in Hyde and Smith 350). Within the ontological realm of the "historical-hermeneutical tradition of understanding," the culturally conditioned process of intersubjective understanding emerges within language, becoming a creative and dialectical experience (Hyde and Smith). Interpreting contextual human-object entanglement is likewise an imaginative involvement that provides a temporal understanding of family practices, narratives, and traditions. Heirloom communication within a narrative framework compels a return to otherness in support of the human condition as heirloom presence thwarts ongoing practices of

“emotivism” and individualism. There is reason to presuppose that an understanding of the complex nature of practices within one’s own family opens one to appreciate a multiplicity of practices and the distinctions and difference among others (Heisley and Cours).

The postmodern family is recognized and comprised differently than the traditional, modern family (Holmes). In postmodernity, a family is often a network of individuals with a manner of connection, typically biological, but usually consisting of more or other than blood relations. A more recent nomenclature is “chosen family,” formed for sexual and gender orientation bringing people together—though the usage is not limited to LGBTQ+ communities. As sociologist Janet Finch relays in her article, “Displaying Families,” a contemporary family is understood “more by ‘doing’ family things than by ‘being’ a family” (66). The following definition of *family* comes from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and provides a basis from which to build:

[A]ny household consisting of people who have long-term commitments to each other and are (usually) raising children; such a group as a fundamental social unit or institution. In wider sense: any group of people connected by blood, marriage, adoption, etc. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

A family is considered a small social structure of communicative bonds within a “special context” of connections (Heisley and Cours 438). Thus, family is recognized here as a general network with some system of relations. A common symbolic representation of family is the family tree as a living and growing part of nature with a core of veins like dispositions running through the trunk, where branches continue to grow and spread, stemming from offshoots, representing, for example, in-laws and godparents. No tree is self-reliant; it cannot subsist through its own capacities. People are commonly grafted into a family beyond marriage and birth

as blended and extended families. There is a prevailing power that binds people over the years as together they experience major life events, celebrations, and milestones, such as holidays, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, and funerals. Douglas and Isherwood define these experiences as the visible “markers” of culture (51). They explain: “By the presence of his fellows at his family funerals and weddings, by their regard for his birthdays, in their visits to his sickbed, they render marking services to him. The kind of world they create together is constructed from commodities that are chosen for their fitness to mark the events in an appropriately graded scale” (51). These commodities are often goods that become the heirlooms that leave their mark on lives, resulting in a trace of posterity.

Chapter One

“This is not relativism; historical enquiry discloses the situatedness of enquiry. It discloses the extent that standards of truth and rational justification—in terms of practices—vary from time to time and place to place” (MacIntyre xii).

Chapter One Overview

Chapter One provides an overview of scholarly literature on materiality: objects and heirlooms within material culture and consumption studies, consumer research, anthropology, archaeology, and communication studies. Emphasis is on the language and terminology found in the social sciences and humanities scholarship to discuss materiality, such as Belk’s “contamination.” Selections outside of communication studies are recognized for having rhetorical implications and are also included for interdisciplinary connections. This chapter explores how scholarship presents cultures and discusses materiality and what constitutes this discourse, such as the intended meaning in the giving, receiving, and curating of heirlooms. Heirloom offers a hermeneutical entry into the legacy of kinship and temporal interpretation and meaning. Epp and Price pose the question: “Why do some cherished objects end up in storage while others retain an active role in our lives?” (821). Several possibilities are considered for influencing heirloom endurance, keeping them active and out of the hidden recesses of the home. This chapter does not surmise a consensus among perspectives but moves toward synthesizing scholarly interpretations as hermeneutic persuasion, advancing the importance of sustaining familial, domestic practices and rituals engaging the materiality of heirlooms within narrative heritage for both self and kinship identity.

Chapter One Introduction

In the final clause of his well-known definition of man, Burke incorporates, “Goaded by a spirit of hierarchy,” (*Language* 13), adding a couple of pages later, “But if that sounds too weighted, we could settle for, “Moved by a sense of order” (15). Douglas and Isherwood center communication as the purpose behind consumption, demonstrating goods as the dynamic means for organization. They describe the consumption of goods according to patterns and rhythms of life performed in practices and rituals (3). These patterned forms are “marking services” for classification and categorization, established through communication (50). The authors acknowledge there is a physical aspect of appreciating these “services,” but they insist “the other part is the enjoyment of sharing names” (51). They explain *culture* through examples of sports and the particular terminology employed and enjoyed by athletic enthusiasts in the exchange of judgements and evaluations (52). Somewhat playfully, they admit: “We have used naming as a useful ploy for shifting the view of consumption from goods to culture and for insisting that any choice between goods is the result of, and contributes to, culture” (52). For his book on culture and consumption, McCracken presents a general view of the topics. He explains: “By ‘culture’ I mean the ideas and activities with which we construe and construct our world. By ‘consumption’ I broaden the conventional definition to include the processes by which consumer goods and services are created, bought, and used” (*Culture and Consumption* xi). Using consumption forces one into the realm of commodities, where there is awareness of the commodification and reification of life (Prodnik 142). However, Arjun Appadurai explains that “commoditization lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors” (15). Furthermore, he states an object is a commodity from a particular view within capitalist modes of production, and a commodity does not always remain a commodity; it transforms depending on time and place

(17)—just as an heirloom is one “phase” of an object’s cycle; an object or thing can move into another category or conceptual term. Igor Kopytoff’s “The Cultural Biography of Things,” follows the object as it traverses contexts and thus inheres different judgments, so that an object’s value at one point might lie in its use and at another time, its value is tied to memory (Hahn and Weiss 2).

There are various academic approaches regarding the discourse of materiality. From a material culture interpretation, Woodward clarifies the nuances among the terms for the material component of material culture. Woodward explains that materiality “is often used in conjunction with things, objects, artefacts, goods, commodities, and, more recently, actants” (15). In general, Woodward explains that things have a broad and mundane quality; objects are recognizable through the senses; artefacts are the material traces of prior human use; and goods have an economic component similar to commodities. For example, when an object is created for the marketplace, it is commodified, but once purchased, it leaves the marketplace, is decommodified, possibly singularized, and transformed, depending on the practices within which the object is engaged. While all terms are relevant to this study, because, as many scholars subscribe, an object transforms as it shifts within places, spaces, and time (Han and Weiss; Kopytoff; McCracken; Woodward), Borgmann’s essay, “Focal Things and Practices,” provides insight for regarding heirlooms as “focal things,” as analogous to “the force of nature,” inseparable from their contexts, and also fully appreciated “when we learn to understand that focal things require a practice to prosper within” (59). Focal things do not just happen; they are cultivated.

Douglas and Isherwood also submit that through the discursive practice of naming, human beings engage in the rational process “of the individual’s commitment to an intelligible

world” (52). In other words, culture is linguistic. The world of *nomos* is ethical; it is the nature of the human world. One cannot separate the word from the act or the word from the object (Burke). Human beings develop language and create phenomena that represent their reality. Nature makes things and humans, embedded in nature, imitate nature by making things through a process of *mimesis*, which for Aristotle was “words imitating things” (*Rhetoric*). As Burke reminds readers: “There is an implied sense of negativity in the ability to use words at all. For to use them properly, we must know that they are not the things they stand for” (*Language* 12).

In his five clause definition of man, Burke’s first clause describes man as “the ‘symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal’” (*Language* 6). Objects conduct meaning as substitutions, which, as Burke states, “is a quite rational resource of symbolism.” Human beings are rational because they possess the power of speech. Other animals use their voices to express pain and pleasure, but only human voices are charged with reason. Speech is a signal of the rational ability to determine what is just or unjust, as well as harmful or innocuous to the peculiar human being. Richard Thames writes that Burke stated, “We are bodies genetically endowed with the ability to learn language” (“The Meaning of the Motivorum’s Motto” 20). Thames points the reader to Burke’s essay “In Haste” for similar wording, where Burke states: “...our bodies being physiologically in the realm of nonsymbolic motion, but genetically endowed with the ability to learn a kind of verbal behavior I call symbolic action” (330). Cultural anthropologist David Parkin, in “Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement,” extends the idea of identity formation and symbolic objects. He argues along with others (Belk) that physical objects aren’t simply associated with a person but “extend that personhood beyond the individual’s biological body” (303). Parkin’s understanding is phenomenological, and he calls this process “a kind of socio-material prosthesis” (304).

Heirloom is phenomenological (Thomas; Parkin; Myers; Marcoulatos; Harold), inviting families to navigate and interpret life together within a narrative structure.

Again, in regard to Burke's final clause, he explains: "The principle of perfection is central to the nature of language as motive," and turns to Aristotle, explicating, "the Aristotelian concept of the entelechy, the notion that each being aims at the perfection natural to its kind (or, etymologically, is marked by a 'possession of telos within'" (*Language* 16-17). Aristotle's biological entelechy becomes Burke's metabiology (Thames "Nature's Physician"). Burke argues that words have literal effects on a person, and he provides the example of language inducing "biologic motions" (*Language* 7). Burke asks, "Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us?" (6). The question and answer point to Burke's realism adapted from the Aristotelian tradition. While Aristotle argued that language provides people with the potential for rationality, he was also a realist, who recognized that possessing language does not guarantee rationality, which is why he developed his *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* as necessary components of persuasion (Walker).

Heirloom as "symbolic action" informs and hermeneutically persuades the shaping and sharing of family culture. Rhetoric is collaborative meaning-making and the continual ambition for understanding how that meaning is made (Harold 20; 104). Hermeneutics invites interpretation, which aims toward understanding. Understanding is, thus, an interpretation, which is then made known through rhetoric; therefore, rhetoric as "*telos*...situates and moves the hermeneutical situation in and through time" (Hyde and Smith 354). From Heidegger, Hyde and Smith agree that the "hermeneutic circle" is ongoing but not to be disparaged as a trap; instead, as Heidegger states, "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it the right way" (352n24). Hurdley describes how ritual use adapts as family members adjust to an

heirloom. She explains, “In a hermeneutic circle of narrative and material content, each augments and benefits from the other’s meaning” (723). Douglas and Isherwood position culture as an arrangement of inherited meanings for making sense of the present (42-43).

Understanding the meaning-making process is foundational to communication studies. Hyde and Smith clarify the meeting of rhetoric, hermeneutics, meaning, and interpretation. The authors elicit: “Meaning is derived by a human being in and through the interpretive understanding of reality” (348). Curasi et al. claim, “Ritualization enables people to solidify cultural categories for action and interpretation, and thereby create temporary orders of truth and reality” (261). Meaning moves, transitions, and transforms (McCracken). Arnett explains, “Our conception of what is true and false resides within narratives that call forth perspectives, limits, and practices that adhere to a given story” (16-17). As a “fundamental condition of human experience,” rhetoric makes meaning known in the “showing of understanding by interpretation” (354). Hyde and Smith’s interplay of meaning and interpretation are essentially assumed in the pronouncement of Douglas and Isherwood for communication and understanding materiality. For as they determine, “Man needs goods to communicate with others and for making sense of what is going on around him. The two needs are but one, for communication can only be formed in a structured system of meanings” (67). A family communicates with kin members through the engagement of heirlooms in rituals to temporally interpret and understand the human experience. Heisley and Cours argue that such objects allow a person to situate herself within “the context of the larger social order” (425). As the authors emphasize object significance, they implement four types of object symbolism from a material culture perspective: “sentimental objects, prestige markers, status symbols, and icons” (426). Sentimental indexical objects serve the purpose of connecting actors to their embedded selves and others; prestige markers allow actors’ access to

classification and discrimination systems that mark the worthiness of their own and their families' merits and achievements; status symbols mark and communicate actors' norms and roles as they participate in the hegemonic processes of the social institutions they are embedded in. Finally, Heisley and Cours suggest that myth and ritual attach values to icons at the levels of the self, family, community and culture.

While appraisals of culture are widespread, anthropologist and literary critic Clifford Geertz's definition has continued influence. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz provides two semiotic concepts of culture. In his first definition, Geertz states: "Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (5). Geertz's anthropological and literary perspective orient his definition to position the human as "the culture-bearing animal" (see Burke *Language* 23). Culture and communication are acts of meaning that require a context of tradition for understanding (Gadamer). Geertz affirms the importance of tradition and context as well. Geertz asserts that an interpretive perspective views reality as existing beyond facts (Putnam). Later in his book, he offers another definition of culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life" (89). Both of Geertz's definitions orient culture as action or as Burke's "symbolic action." The "symbolic action" of heirlooming occurs through the transferring, receiving, and maintaining of heirlooms. Heirlooms are symbolic of the shared significance of a family (Curasi et al. "How Individuals" 609).

Indexicality

Semiologist Charles Sanders Peirce's empirical pragmatism was the logical relationship of theory and action that emphasized science over tradition (Arnett and Holba 136, 189). Arnett and Holba state that "[c]entral to Peirce's philosophy is the clarity with which human beings make sense of ideas and frame their conception of objects" (136). In their research on semiotics and irreplaceable possessions, Grayson and Shulman use semiotics as a theoretical grounding and the concept of indexicality to determine the representation process, and how special objects become inalienable and inimitable. The authors explain that while Saussure's semiotics rested on the mental process of sign and signification, Peirce's introduced a third element outside of the self: the object (18). In a modern framework, the object is considered to exist in the objective world, rather than within the subjective mind. When a person defines an object as irreplaceable, authenticity is essential, a replacement or replica cannot fulfill the role of the original. Saussure's model does not offer a place for such objects. Context is central to an heirloom's meaning. Peirce considered context as an anchor to the real world. In Peirce's semiotic system, there is "a different type of phenomenological experience or 'mode of being'" that supplies an "anchor" within the real world (18). In the Peircian model, the iconic mode is related to the senses; the symbolic mode is constructed as *nomos* or "convention;" and the indexical is related to the empirical (18-19). An object becomes material verification of an event or experience, something concrete and outside of an immaterial process (17-18). Human beings "mark" memorable experiences with objects.

As Shulman and Grayson explain, just like physical evidence is submitted as confirmation of a crime, indices are viewed as factual, as proof that an experience, an event, or a person existed, creating an impermeable relationship between subjective person and objective reality. Due to the embedded indexical connection, a replacement or "reproduction" is

considered inauthentic and an impossibility. Indexical objects are “extensions of the self,” and involuntary loss of special possessions (through theft, burglary, or disaster) has been described in a similar manner to the grief one experiences with the loss of a loved one (Belk 142). In his book, William James pains the loss of possessions akin to losing a part of oneself, which results in “...a sense of the shrinkage of our personality, a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness, which is a psychological phenomenon by itself” (1890, p. 293; qtd in Belk 143).

Communication studies might refer to specific objects as a type of synecdoche. In 1890, William James wrote in *The Principles of Psychology* that possessions provide a sense of self (291). Over one hundred years or two centuries later, Turkle opens her book by writing, “I grew up hoping that objects would connect me to the world” (3). Objects help people to identify themselves, situate themselves, and understand their embedded nature in relation to others. As Belk writes, “Through heirlooms...individual family members [are able] to gain a sense of permanence and place in the world that extends beyond their own lives and accomplishments” (159). Belk’s writing aligns with Barad’s and MacIntyre’s, no matter how different their life views. In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre describes a person’s historically situated life: “What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of tradition” (221).

Contamination

According to Heisley and Cours in their article, “Connectedness and Worthiness for the Embedded Self: A Material Culture Perspective,” the term *heirloom* is colloquial; therefore, some academic research relies on Belk’s coinage, “intergenerational transfers of contaminated objects” (425). Belk points to Claude Lévi-Strauss book *Totemism* as the source for object

contamination. Heisley's and Cours's study claims, "Contaminated possessions hold sentimental associations. The possessions index personal histories and relationships within the family" (438). In the process of self-extension, "contamination" refers to how "both good and bad aspects of objects are seen to attach to us through physical contact or proximity" (Belk 140). An heirloom is contaminated as it is inextricably tied to a person whose remnants *taint* the object, leaving residue, which is passed on to others. The word "contaminate" is a curious choice as there are no positive descriptors or definitions; rather, those included refer to corruption through touch, making something impure, inferior, undesirable, and unfit for use. Nonetheless, in this process, residue is transmitted through objects, which are passed on to others.

The acquisition of possessions of another person are, hence, intimately associated with that person (Belk 151). The difficulty in disassociating an heirloom from its giver is part of the intention for heirlooms. In their study, Curasi et al. found, "Jewelry, for example, is a common heirloom item. Its choice is surely due in great measure to positive contamination gained through repeated close body contact with previous owners. Jewelry is often thought to be part of the extended self of its original owners, and because its acquisition is often linked to other life transitions, is apt to be dense with narrative associations" ("Ritual" 260). One example Belk describe is that it is unacceptable in some cultures (he employs the word "disgusting") for someone to display the bones of a deceased family member; however, cremated remains, such as in an urn on a mantel, remains widely practiced in some cultures. This may also be the most extreme and acceptable retention of an heirloom.

Handmade articles are positively contaminated, where the creator is imbued in the object. An older respondent in Price et al.'s study described her handmade items as self-extensions. The authors quote the older woman as saying, "All of my crochet is a part of me. Like that throw

there. [Indicating a throw on her couch.] Everything I make is like a part of me. Then I can give these things to others. Like giving them a piece of me (“Older Consumers” 189). Heisley and Cours describe the positive contamination of a bookcase that was handmade by a grandfather and great grandfather even though it is not anything ornate (Heisley and Cours 439). The authors also include the interview details of an old, worn toy chest and a ring with two teeth marks on it around the gem, where the contamination for both is positive because they endorse feelings of nostalgia (438). The authors write that the flaws “only enhance their value because the damage serves as physical evidence of personal contamination, and that seems to make nostalgia more potent” (439). McCracken devotes an entire chapter in his book to the value of patina.

Inalienable Wealth

Türe and Ger state that “inalienability refers to an heirloom’s ability to embody an individual’s lineage and move through time while referring to one’s original ancestral roots” (3). The term “inalienable objects” is first associated with Marcel Mauss. Alienable and inalienable objects in anthropology have predominantly focused on gift-exchange in indigenous cultures. However, one outcome of Curasi et al.’s research, “How Individuals’ Cherished Possessions Become Families’ Inalienable Wealth” shows that the concept of “inalienable wealth,” developed by Annette B. Weiner from the initial work of Mauss, extends to North American middle-class families. As inalienable wealth, heirlooms are often a part of family rituals and tied to family traditions that act as connections for kin members (Curasi et al. “How Individuals”; Curasi et al. “Ritual”; Holmes; Weiner).

Certain possessions may become inalienable over time without formal acknowledgement, yet a certain shift in sentiment occurs that marks an object’s inalienability (Curasi et al. “How Individuals”; Heisley and Cours). With collective and communal significance, heirlooms as

distinct objects, call for an ethic of responsibility that defers stewardship. Curasi et al. suggest that “families conceive of inalienable wealth as eternal and capable of linking group members across time and space” (“How Individuals” 620). As a result, keepsakes that become heirlooms represent more than personal, esteemed possessions. They are irreplaceable and meant to be kept from the market (619). Curasi et al. differentiate between personal objects as “keepsakes” and those that they describe as “inalienable wealth,” where kin recognize the significance of these objects of embodiment as set apart from other objects and requiring special care (609). Curasi writes, “Values are communicated and transferred via the stories that are bundled with cherished possessions” (“Maybe It IS” 84).

Without family members to impart inalienability, an object cannot manifest itself to become an heirloom. Bradford indicates that alienability and inalienability are not intrinsic, but “attach to objects as the result of meanings, uses, and social functions that the owners and gift recipients of objects have ascribed to those objects” (95). Heirlooms do not have to be priceless in the marketplace to attain their status. Instead they become inalienable wealth for the family through heirlooming as “communicative praxis,” accommodating the object to remain active within the family network, which keeps an heirloom from recommodification.

Rituals

In Chapter One of his book, *Culture as Communication*, James Carey describes “a transmission view of communication and a ritual view of communication” (12). Carey then illustrates how a “transmission view” is based on a transportation metaphor for sending information across space with intention to control. The second concept, a “ritual view” is collective. Carey turns to etymology, arguing, “This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms ‘commonness,’ ‘communion,’ ‘community,’ and ‘communication’”

(15). For rituals during the Middle Ages, people believed both person and object were transformed as in the spiritual, Catholic practice of the transubstantiation during communion, where the bread and wine mysteriously, or perhaps miraculously, become the body of Christ in the Eucharistic offering (Gilchrist). Burke explains, “In totemic thought, as in the communion service, consubstantiality is got by the eating of food in common” (Burke *Philosophy* 28-29). Epp and Price announce, “Any ‘we’ may perform its own rituals, stories, social dramas, everyday interactions, and intergenerational transfers and may be challenged and changed as it interacts with other identity bundles” (50). Rituals supply spiritual enactment within the home, and there is, of course, a spiritual level for heirlooms as objects remaining or “left behind” by those who are deceased as a certain form of “immortality” (Belk; Heisley and Cours 39; Unruh).

The word *ritual* is found within the word *spiritual*. The description provided here by appropriately connects act and meaning for “symbolic action”:

Ritual is an activity whose imminent practical aim has become secondary, replaced by the aim of communication; this does not preclude ritual from having other, less immediate practical goals. Form and meaning of ritual are determined by tradition; they are malleable according to the needs of any present situation, as long as the performers understand them as being traditional. (Graf *Oxford*

Reference)

Rituals are often connected to the church and religion and observed through customs and ceremonies, such as the sacraments, the saints, and baptism. Heisley and Cours write, “Icons are artifacts that become imbued with values through myth and ritual” (433). The “ritual view” of communication maintains society and cultures through “the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey 15). Carey explains, “If the archetypal case of communication under a transmission view

is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and community” (15). Culture creates order through relational frameworks, where people classify and categorize as they attune to patterns of collective representations for themselves.

Douglas and Isherwood mark consumption as a ritual activity (45). Throughout their work, they point to the patterns that shape human thought. They detail how practices, rituals, and traditions comprise culture. In the home, the engagement of heirlooms develops the family culture, which is passed on and reorganized by each generation. Through heirlooming, the interpretation and meaning behind values embodied in heirlooms are communicated. However, while information is passed on and can be controlled by benefactors, interpretations and meanings—the *why*—behind practices cannot be imposed. Aristotle realized that communication emerges from the gaps; this is the hermeneutic space of the in-between of human communication, where information becomes meaningful (Harold 106). Each generation inherits information, yet interpretation and meaning are established within descendants’ settings and contexts (Douglas and Isherwood 43). Curasi et al. argue, “Ritual does not mold people. Through ritual, people fashion and mold their world. Ritual is a tool for social and cultural jockeying; it is a performative medium that negotiates authority for and in relationships (261). Rituals as the patterns of living practices are continually adjusted and negotiated; they are neither fixed nor static.

Scholars hold varying interpretations for the enactment of *rituals*. Within consumer research, Curasi et al. mention two views of rituals: The Durkheim opinion of “mechanical solidarity” and a more open, creative understanding of fluctuating yet binding activities to which their research subscribes (“Ritual” 247). In a six-year study involving heirlooms and rituals,

Curasi et al. depict ritual as a combination of features from the past and present as “bricolage,” a term conferred to Claude Lévi-Strauss in his 1962 book, *The Savage Mind*, where he describes mythical thought patterns (237). Applying this to heirlooming, kin bring heirlooms into new practices within previously established rituals, thus activating and indicating their authentic role as though emanating from tradition (248; Arnould and Price 2000). Without continuing engagement, heirlooms and rituals lose meaning (260). As the authors explain: “Families compose ritualized activity as bricolage, a French term, that literally translates as ‘puttering,’ or ‘do-it-yourself,’ and was introduced by Lévi-Strauss to describe the compositional tactics found in traditional mythology” (237).

Turkle stresses that Lévi-Strauss, “who described *bricolage* as a way of combining and recombining a closed set of materials to come up with new ideas,” provided a way for her to think about objects as enframing life (*Evocative Objects* 4). Curasi et al. stress the combination of engaging past practices with individual experience to continue, commemorate, and customize rituals (“Ritual” 247-48). The combination of engaging past practices with new experience continues and commemorates rituals as a collective nexus of identity. As Belk explains, “Our accumulation of possessions provides a sense of past and tells us who we are, where we have come from, and perhaps where we are going” (160). Heirlooms are bearers of meanings (Woodward *SAGE*). Shared meaning is constructed and reconstructed through the family narrative, consisting of the stories, myths, and rituals that shape an understanding of the values and traditions of collective living.

As McCracken explains, meaning is constantly “moving,” transitioning, and transforming (1986). Douglas and Isherwood confront concerns with meaning, asking and responding with examples to what rituals *mean*:

But what is meaning? It flows and drifts; it is hard to grasp...rituals serve to contain the drift of meanings...Before the initiation there was a boy, after it a man; before the marriage rite there were two free persons, after two joined as one...To manage without rituals is to manage without clear meanings and possibly without meanings...More effective rituals use material things, and the more costly the ritual trappings, the stronger we can assume the intention to fix the meanings to be. Goods, in this perspective, are ritual adjuncts; consumption is a ritual process whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events. (43)

Rituals are “communicative performances” or “enactments” (Epp and Price 51). These engagements are openings for narrative formation. Furthermore, as Curasi et al. write, “Storytelling figures prominently in the creation of family rituals. Rituals are reenacted with cherished possessions serving as the adhesive to which the family history, values, and beliefs adhere” (248). “Through repeated display, use, and storytelling, certain objects are imbued with meanings particular to family” (261). Heirlooms as part of giving discourse inextricably link persons and relations, becoming not just objects but part of a relational matrix (check: Mifsud 94). Heirlooms support rituals to become family heritage while rituals support kin to find meaning in heirlooms (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 248, 255). Through rituals, family members reach to the past to find meaning in heirlooms (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 255). Several research findings in consumption and consumer studies, primarily conducted by marketing professors suggest that narrative and rituals are essential for heirloom continuity (Türe and Ger; Heisley and Cours; Curasi et. al. “Ritual”; Arnould and Epp; Epp and Price). In order for objects to be meaningful, they must be included in rituals (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 239; Harold; Douglas and Isherwood).

Disposition Rituals

Praxis and *phronesis* affect awareness in the strategic action of “disposition rituals” (Curasi et al.), a communicative process of passing an heirloom forward that considers transfer occasion and type (Heisley and Cours 437). The ritual of passing on objects or passing forward and bequeathing heirlooms are referred to as “disposition activities” (Price et al. 185). Because these rituals tend to occur at poignant intersections of life, such as rites of passage and progression or coming of age celebrations, these laden events are emotional, affective occasions (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 237). Price et al. writes, “On such occasions, participants are ready to hear and tell stories and remember the event itself as a story” (193). While cherished objects may be dispersed at any time—and may, in fact, be given to the first person who requests or compliments the object (Price et al. 191)—most dispositions occur at specific points in time and pre-determined events, such as: in the form of gifts during a celebration, such as a college graduation or wedding; in a repeated pattern, such as an anniversary (and also during the same rite of passage as the previous possessor, in keeping with tradition); or designated in a will or through a caretaker (Price et al. 195). Price et al. suggest that “...using a ritual as a transfer occasion allows the cherished object to bundle narratives of two generations or two lives together. The object is embellished by the inherent intertextuality of ritual occasions” (193). The authors explain that people are primed to remember events as stories.

In their research, Epp and Arnould describe the “forms of transmission” for intergenerationally contaminated objects (83). Kin-keeping is one such practice that includes not only custodianship of heirlooms but also a commitment to engage heirlooms in practices involving descendants. Kin-keeping can also involve simple sharing of photographs, recipes, and other familial culture (83). Epp and Arnould also portray kin-keeping practice that involve passing forward family legacies. Of course, using and engaging in practices does not guarantee

heirloom practices will survive. However, narratives, family interaction, modeling, and verbal instruction serve as indicators that heirloom practices will endure. How cherished and special objects become heirlooms through disposition rituals can be simple or complex, depending on available communication liaisons (Finch 77). Disposition rituals can be commemorative, mournful, or somewhere in between as they evoke complex emotions (Price et al.). Venerating heirlooms as preservers of lived memory is sometimes a difficult hermeneutic enterprise because of their reminders of human absence. In heirloom acquisition, there is almost always mortal loss or the future acceptance of impending loss.

Disposition rituals are bittersweet. Citing key works by Kopytoff on “object biographies” and de commodification as well as Weiner’s description of inalienability, Price et al. describe what they call “porous ownership boundaries” in the phenomena of disposition rituals. They explain: “When an older consumer recognizes that ‘this is no longer mine, it belongs to someone else,’ this has less to do with the object’s physical location and more to do with the *location of the object’s meaning*. This is particularly the case when de commodified possessions become singularly associated with the original owner and thus acquire inalienable qualities” (my italics Price et al. 194). Belk claims that Jean-Paul Sartre believed “giving possessions to others as a means of extending self—[are] a special form of control” (150). Sartre wrote of the control of the giver. An heirloom can be thought of as a symbol of control, which can be challenged. While an heirloom might hold negative energy, family members can choose to maintain the object and stories while adjusting and altering the power behind it without altering its form. The heirloom defined as such has distinction for not being owned but rather as a possession as already indicative of timeless inalienable wealth whose one or initial meaning transforms over time. Furthermore, passing forward is an indication that one realizes the heirloom is outside of the

bounds of singular control. Relinquishing an heirloom to the next of kin is letting go with hope for the future.

Disposition may create friction among family members who believe they deserve a certain item. At the same time, passing forward family treasures while one is still alive allows the heir to learn the narratives, to ask questions, and to practice, in a sense, as an apprentice. If items are stored or hidden and not unearthed until after an ancestor dies, the narrative may die with them. At this point, the inheritor must decide what would have been important and why or, perhaps, she decides what can be made to be important and transformed. Family heirloom performance is transformative. MacIntyre likewise details the “transformation” and “enrichment” that occurs in practices (193) just as since Appadurai and Kopytoff’s key works on objects having biographies has led to widespread acceptance that objects transform in different environments. Both materiality and traditions must be ‘flexible’ in order to carry on to the next generation.

Material Culture Studies

In 1950, Lévi-Strauss brought attention to Mauss’s work in “Introduction à l’oeuvre de Marcel Mauss,” where Lévi-Strauss explains that symbols only exist in a shared system, “which must be collective”—an important article that influenced Deleuze, Lacan, Barthes, and Derrida (qtd. in Culler 7; 12). Jonathan Culler explains that Lévi-Strauss asserted material objects and events hold meaning and, therefore, function as signs, and that objects and events make meaning through “a network of relations, both internal and external” (8). Lévi-Strauss’s 1949 book, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, examined kinship terms to understand systems of relations. In 1962 Lévi-Strauss’s “La Totémisme Aujourd’hui” was published in French and in English the following year, a result of his structural anthropology and a discussion of the use of objects by

various tribes as identity markers, he memorably determines that “natural species are not chosen because they are ‘good to eat’ [*bonnes à manger*] but because they are ‘good to think’ [*bonnes à penser*]” (qtd. in Culler 162). Curasi et al. explain that heirlooms may be considered “totemic remains” indicative of the “extended self” (“Ritual” 240). Stories may convert everyday objects into “evocative totems of self, family, and tradition with potential powers of protection and transformation” (Price et al. 197). People appreciate heirlooms as objects separate from the myriad of materiality that surrounds contemporary living; however, everyday objects often become the family heirlooms. These vicissitudes enact the “mythical horizon” that protects heirloom inalienability (Curasi et al. “Ritual”).

Lévi-Strauss understood that it was not the differences but the resemblance of differences that are important for understanding cultural meaning. As Culler writes, “Levi-Strauss proceeds by recognizing that the allegedly exotic totemic practices of primitive tribes are a logic of the concrete, not fundamentally different from the logics civilized peoples develop” (9). Culler also discusses *Mythologies*, where Lévi-Strauss addresses the function of myths as conventions. In a similar fashion, one may inquire: “How do heirlooms ‘think’ within families? How are they ‘*bonnes à penser*’ pour la famille?” As Culler notes, “a logic of the concrete” is shared by both myth and literature (11). Culler highlights several aspects of Lévi-Strauss’ works, which hold resonance here, beginning with his text on Mauss and the impact it had on notable scholars, followed by his quotable reference as goods to think, as well as his determinations on myth, involving rituals. Finally, Culler states that Lévi-Strauss argued for the necessity of the collective, realizing that the individual stood alone and, therefore, outside of meaning. Culler includes Lévi-Strauss’ closing quote from *Triste Tropiques*: “The ego is not only hateful; it has no place between a *we* and a nothing (“Le moi n’est pas seulement haïssable; il n’a pas de place

entre un nous et un rien”) (13). Heirlooms confront individualism and “emotivism” (MacIntyre), continually directing one toward the collective, the community, and the other.

Myth

Myths are not guileless fantasy. Humans live by myths (Midgley), and myths operate at both grander scales and the level of the family (Heisley and Cours 434). Myths are ordering, a way to make sense of the human experience and a continual (re)understanding of the past with the present and the future through relational events (Murray 2; Douglas and Isherwood). One of the historical concepts Oswyn Murray stresses is that “man lives in his imagination, and his history is the history of ideas” (1). Just like any other history, if family stories are not continually cultivated and conveyed, they lose meaning and disappear (Curasi et al.). Douglas and Isherwood describe their work in the “ethnographic present” as “a continuous present,” where everything meaningful reverberates across time (10). The authors write, “It [the “ethnographic present”] assumes a two-way perspective in which the individual treats his past selectively as a source of validating myths and the future as the locus of dreams” (10). Heirlooms are physical traces of the family history—its myths and dreams, past and future. In *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Robert Bellah et al. write, “Narrative is a primary and powerful way by which to know the whole. In an important sense, what a society (or person) is, is its history” (302). An individual’s history is embedded within the history of others; thus, to understand one’s identity, it is necessary to consider the stories and traditions of ancestors and their legacies (MacIntyre 222; Belk).

Consumer research regards heirlooms as “ritual props,” prompting “the mythological horizon” of past to future (Curasi et al., “Ritual” 259, 256); whereas, material culture studies claims that as research moves away from artifacts as human ‘props,’ an understanding of the

‘power’ of things emerged (Tilley; Woodward). However, when an object is imbued with meaning, a sense of power is instilled in the object as well. Regarding all objects at the same level is an impossibility and is perhaps part of the problem leading to hyperconsumption. According to a posthumanist perspective, “there is no outside of matter just as there is no outside of meaning, and thus ontology consists of ‘a multitude of entangled performances of the world’s worlding itself’ (Barad). While this understanding of Barad’s presents itself as verisimilitude, meaning must be situated in order to occur. Barad’s claim almost makes meaning an impossibility. Meaning cannot occur outside the realm of human communication. As a “fundamental condition of human existence,” rhetoric makes meaning known in the “showing of understanding by interpretation” (Hyde and Smith 354). Placing heirloom presence into a narrative structure presents a situated and temporal meaning. Barad is, in fact, shaping her own narrative from a posthuman understanding.

Meanwhile, the metaphor of a horizon is a meeting of myth and meaning, which is always at a distance. In their study on objects and narratives, Humphries and Smith suggest that “practices and people *reciprocally* influence what meanings and potential uses are attributed to an object. Objects do not enter social life with pre-determined meanings. Rather, an object has a horizon of possible meanings” (486). Lévi-Strauss developed three separate communication systems comprising social life: the communication of goods, women, and words (Douglas and Isherwood 61). In their appraisal, Douglas and Isherwood insist these three communications cannot be separated and must exist within a theory of consumption (61). They write: “The meanings conveyed along the goods channel are part and parcel of the meanings in the kinship and mythology channels, and all three are part of the general concern to control information” (61). As Ong asserts that human thought can only occur within a communicative context.

Heirlooms are mediums to “mythic deeds” of the past, allowing kin within the confines of time to share in timeless family accomplishments (Curasi et al. 240).

Encounters with materiality are so common within everyday practices that the mere presence of objects often goes unnoticed, thus, requiring a conceptual shift and an analysis of the relationship between the materiality of the corpus and the materiality of practice (Coole and Frost 38—this is in one of the essays in the book). Hahn and Weiss direct their reader to Stephen Greenblatt’s essay, “Resonance and Wonder,” where he implores a human response to the “wonder” resonant in even mundane objects. Greenblatt pronounces that “cultural artifacts do not stay still, they exist in time, and they are bound up with personal and institutional conflicts, negotiations, and appropriations” (11), part of his New Historicism critique to literature that he applies to museumology as well. Greenblatt explains how artifacts source charisma (12). Certain objects provide “cultural resonance” (Woodward 28). Greenblatt’s ideas of “resonance and wonder” themselves hold “cultural resonance.” They are also applicable to the home in its display as the setting of familial showcase—a way to ascertain the aura of a family. Harold writes that “[a]ura explains why rituals allow us to invest objects with meaning...” (94). Greenblatt does not limit the museum experience to the visual. He accords other senses and perceptions as well. He speaks to the reverberations of sound that echo from the voices of things, and what is particularly striking is his emphasis on continual presence when he announces, “I want to avoid the implication that resonance must necessarily be linked to destruction and absence; it can be found as well in unexpected survival. The key is the intimation of a larger community of voices and skills, an imagined ethnographic thickness” (27). Greenblatt stresses the importance of context and interaction within current voices and the echoes of those that resound through time.

The ‘cultural turn’ and the ‘linguistic turn’ impacted the development and interest in studying formed matter as culture (Woodward 5). Not until the late 1970s and early 1980s did “cultural studies” originate and anthropology move beyond its confines of indigenous groups to explore contemporary concerns as Wilk points out in his introduction to the most recent publication of Douglas’s and Isherwood’s *World of Goods*. (Wilk 2). The ‘cultural turn’ was also influenced by Jean Baudrillard, who emphasized object analysis in the capitalist formation of the 1970s (Harold 27, 15). Baudrillard’s work shifted focus from the subject to the object (Harold 27). Since the ‘cultural turn,’ the concepts *biographies of things* (Kopytoff) and *travelling objects* have framed research on material culture, drawing attention to “shifts of location and meaning,” as well as “shifts in space and time” (Hahn and Weiss 1-2).

Part of the developments for studying materiality as culture led academic inquiry beyond that of museum scholars and archaeologists and the garnered interest from consumption studies and poststructural and interpretive theories with the discursive work of Clifford Geertz and Michel Foucault (Woodward 4-5). The interpretive study of material objects developed from several influential publications that drew upon scholars ranging from Veblen and his theory of consumption to Lévi-Strauss’ theory of structuralism. Material culture studies (MCS) has presupposed objects have a utilitarian or referential meaning (Rosenstein 144). MCS has held an object-centered, interpretive approach that “emphasizes the role of artifacts in human meaning making and activities” (Jung et al. 60), exploring the concepts of ‘narrative’ and ‘performance’ to discover “how objects acquire cultural meaning and efficacy within social contexts” (Woodward 151). In the inaugural publication of the *Journal of Material Culture* in 1996, the authors write: “The study of material culture may be most broadly defined as the investigation of the relationship between people and things irrespective of time and space” (JMC 5).

Communication studies have been challenged by materiality and how to account for it, particularly in space and time (Coole and Frost 1).

The 'linguistic turn' highlighted the study of meaning and interpretation of material culture (Woodward 3). As Woodward posits, "But why are objects held to matter?" He responds, "The answer is not just because they are more plentiful or ubiquitous, but because they are involved in social representation or symbolism, and are recognized as containing important meanings for social action" (28). In hyperconsumption, objects paradoxically matter too much and too little as people binge and purge material things (Harold 89)—a crucial concern of Chapter Four that positions heirlooms as a temper for excessive consumption practices. Harold explains that considering inanimate objects as brought to life only through subjective use "has produced one of the most challenging rhetorical obstacles to promoting practices that might reorient our engagements with them" (17). Exploring the interconnections between "the nature and language of attachment," Harold writes that objects "carry within them a dialect and an accent composed of feel and footprint, form factor and function" (20). She suggests that objects exist through an "intricate network of communications" (20). Current scholars applying theories of new materialism often invoke the word "entanglement" to describe network relations (Barad; Tilley et al.; Turkle).

MCS is a more recently designated multidisciplinary field with focused inquiry into human-object relations. The publication of Daniel Miller's book, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, which in 1987 brought attention to the lack of concern for materiality in academia (Woodward 25). In his book, Miller also applies concepts and methodologies from the humanities and social sciences to cultural practices of consumption. The following year, in 1988, Nadine Pence Frantz acknowledges a "conceptual shift" in scholarship within material culture

“away from perceiving these material objects as mute artifacts...towards perceiving them as constitutive elements of human understanding...through their reflective function within a given culture” (791). Frantz offers a basic and concise definition of *material culture* as “the physical material objects that cultures create and use in the course of common life” (791). The study of material culture explores how people use objects to socially construct their world and reality, challenging the assumption that the natural sciences have exclusive access to the material world while the social sciences only have access to the social realm (Woodward *SAGE*).

Material culture studies has parallels with critical studies in exposing and possibly displacing or overcoming power structures. The field applies three key theoretical approaches to apprehend meaning and interpretation: Marxism and critical theory, structuralism and semiotics, and cultural and symbolic methodologies (Woodward 5). An interpretive approach considers the representation of symbolism. Immanuel Kant’s view of reality as existing beyond facts is the ground of the interpretive perspective (Putnam 1982). A discursive perspective questions “what discourse does in particular social, political, and economic situations...and how it interacts with material realities” (Conrad and Sollitto). The works of Geertz and Michel Foucault directed interest in discourse and discursive practices in philosophy and the social sciences (Coole and Frost; Woodward). In a poststructural framework, the human subject is a product of discourse and that discourse is both an abstract and an object (Stormer “Articulation” 258). Marxian scholarship tends to separate discourse and object (Bost). For Marx, “A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another” (qtd. in Appadurai 7). As Kopytoff writes, “From a cultural perspective, the production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process: commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing” (64). In his study

on “anachronic” artefacts, imprints, and “survivance,” published in 2013, Knappett explains, “The move to think of artefacts as having biographies, social lives, or itineraries has been a crucial development in the reinvigoration of material culture studies in the last twenty-five years” (47). Hahn and Weiss pose “itineraries” as a “multitude of meanderings...not intended by the objects but inheres in them, [and] should be regarded as a constitutive element of material culture” (7-9). Objects do not need to travel to be itinerant; instead, this is more about perceiving an object’s shifts in time and space.

While there is no question that objects matter, there remain various ways of understanding exactly what “matter” *is*. In their 2011 article, “Acknowledging Substances: Looking at the Hidden Side of the Material World,” Hahn and Jens Soentgen point to limitations of the anthropological inheritance for MCS, positing concern for the preoccupation with “things” as “matter plus form,” rather than “substances,” as “matter without form,” suggesting that material culture is not tantamount to “formed matter” (19-20). Both “heterogeneous” and “ambiguous,” *materiality* is difficult to define (Tilley et al. 3). In their article, Humphries and Smith submit: “We do not define materiality as just the concrete thing itself (the chair, painting, keyboard or the 914 Xerox copier), or even its physical constitution (wood, plastic, metal, glass). Rather, we use the term to refer to the engagement between bodies, tools, materials and substances that occur through physical things” (483). Harré explains that “substance” has two ontological applications for philosophers: “Individuals are semipermanent bearers of at least some group of permanent properties” and “the word for stuff, for solids, liquids and gases” (23). For the most part, materiality has been differentiated from spirituality or mental or intellectual realm—the ‘immaterial.’

Professor of social studies of science and technology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sherry Turkle claims in the introduction to her edited book, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think with*: “Material culture carries emotions and ideas of startling intensity. Yet only recently have objects begun to receive the attention they deserve”— in part due to the priority in modernity given to abstract, scientific, and intellectual thought (6-7). A modernist approach to “cultural entities” is dualistic in nature, where “material constitution” and “social import” are separated in the process of analysis, dichotomy, and reduction (Marcoulatos 245). However, Dreyfus suggests that repairing the reductive and atomistic divide may be “overcome” through its inherited recognition (Dreyfus). While this seems limited, it is the impetuses of Barad that one must acknowledge and be responsible for what one inherits (“After the End”), which is also urged in this project for an ‘ethic of responsibility’ toward heirlooms. In celebration of twenty years of publication, the *Journal of Material Culture*, Geismar et al. indicate: “It is not an exaggeration to say that an appreciation for material culture has become mainstream in many fields, from sociology to art history, philosophy and science studies” (3). In addition, while the dualist nature of approaching matter and materiality continues to be challenged, a posthuman view of matter and materiality has recently taken shape out of feminist studies and philosophies of science. The dynamics of this effort emerges in the various strands of new materialism, which is the focus of Chapter Two.

Chapter Two: Matter, Materiality, and New Materialism(s)

“In fact, a psychology of poetry, so conceived,
is about as near to the use of objective, empirical
evidence as even the physical sciences”

(Kenneth Burke, *Philosophy*, 21).

“And He answered and said unto them,
‘I tell you that if these should hold their peace,
the stones would immediately cry out”

(Luke 19.40 KJ21; emphasis added).

Chapter Overview

The general history of philosophy, as well as communication studies, has been challenged by materiality and how to account for it, particularly within considerations of space and time (Coole and Frost 1; Harold). The solution by proponents of new materialism is to shift away from any emphasis on human communication (Barad; Bennett; Coole and Frost). Barad, referencing the work of Joseph Rouse, suggests that the belief that human beings have more, better, or even direct access to representations and not the things represented is historical rather than logical (“Posthuman Performativity” 806). Representationalism, Barad argues, is a separation of internal and external as marked by Descartes that continues in the philosophical belief that a representation is more accessible or real than the actual (806).

New Materialism has intensified since the twenty-first century, “emerging out of the various turns initiated in the late 90s: the ontological turn, agentive turn, species turn, the turn or re-turn to things and so forth” (Witmore 204). Harold explains: “In the humanities and social sciences, this materialist turn acts as something of a corrective to the excesses of the linguistic

turn and the attendant social constructivist approaches that dominated much of twentieth century critical theory, and which continues today” (16). Accordingly, Coole and Frost suggest, “Recent developments thus call upon us to reorient ourselves profoundly in relation to the world, to one another, and to ourselves” (6), and new materialists argue that foregrounding the material allows for discussion of the limitations of “the so-called cultural turn” that are arguably “exhausted” (6) and provides an improved vantage to contend with permeating and pressing issues presented in the twenty-first century, such as in the realms of ecology and technology (2-3). However, in his article, “Burke’s New Body? The Problem of Virtual Material, and Motive, in Object Oriented Philosophy,” Steven B. Katz surmises, “Perhaps the pressing issue is that Objects are not only actants along with humans, but also are becoming the more important focal point of philosophy and rhetoric in a ‘posthuman,’ digital age.”

Katz’s concern is justified through various publications in rhetoric and communication studies journals over the past decade. While there is no agreed upon definition or singular aim for new materialism (Coole and Frost; Witmore), Christopher N. Gamble, Joshua S. Hanan, and Thomas Nail critique three strands they describe as “incompatible trajectories” but that “share at least one common theoretical commitment: to problematize the anthropocentric and constructivist orientations of most twentieth-century theory in a way that encourages closer attention to the sciences by the humanities” (“What Is New Materialism?” 111). Arguably, these models are another bout of “physics envy,” similar to the social studies ardent shadowing of the natural sciences during the Enlightenment (Mumby; Randall). While turning to science—exclusively quantum physics—for a solution to a humanist framework and a continued modernist mindset, new materialists fail to consult biology or an organic view of life, nor do they turn much attention to any concepts preceding Descartes, who initiated the division between nature

and culture. An Aristotelian framework, such as Burke works from is organic. In his description of Burke's "metabiology," Thames explains, "What we can know of Nature begins with what we can know of ourselves, because we are a part (perhaps the synecdochic part) of It" ("Nature's Physician" 20). Thus, as Thames states, Burke argued that when humans damage Nature, they are likewise damaging the human condition. Such a connection would seem to align with new materialism. However, new materialists have demonstrated their dedication to progress in science, and thus, a commitment to what Burke called scientism.

Chapter Two Introduction

Chapter Two navigates the narrative of new materialism(s) through the respective storied elements of several influential new materialist proponents, such as Karen Barad and Jane Bennett, as well as articles that discuss their work and the implications of new materialism for academic scholarship more generally. While new materialists opt for a posthuman framework, they still engage in narrative elements to explain their perspective. These elements include: agency, performativity, entanglement, diffraction, intra-action, vibrant matter, vital matter, and ambient rhetoric, among others. In "Fictionality in New Materialism: (Re)Inventing Matter," Toblas Skiveren, with his literature background, questions the use of fictional elements, such as storytelling, for explaining the real and for ways to transcend humanism. Skiveren adeptly navigates the use of fiction and an understanding of new materialism though he does not address narrative as life or any Aristotelian or MacIntyrean philosophies. The coverage of new materialism in this chapter is far from comprehensive or exhaustive. The purpose is to adequately provide background to determine the relevance of new materialism theories and perspectives for possible relevance to heirlooms and heirlooming. While the authors discussing new materialism may not consider themselves 'new materialists,' they are either regarded as

influential in the new materialism movement(s); labeled “new materialists” by other scholars; or pursuing and supporting specific new materialism affinities in their work.

New materialism practitioners and advocates recognize rhetoric to shape the ideas of their purpose, which are complicated and multifaceted and include: improved human happiness (Bennett); more sustainable practices (Bennett); political advocacy (Bennett; Barad); ethical care and respect of matter (Bennett; Barad; Harold; Witmore); extending agency to objects (Barad; Bennett; Latour); and ecological action (Barad; Bennett; Harold). In 2016, *Review of Communication* published a “special issue on ‘Figures of Entanglement’” with articles based on the work of physicist and feminist philosopher Karan Barad, surveying possible applications within rhetorical and communication studies for her “intra-active entanglement” (Gamble and Hanan 265). Gamble and Hanan venerate Barad’s influential book, *Meeting The Universe Halfway*, referring to the text as a “tour de force” and “ground altering work,” applauding the issue’s submissions and future possibilities for rhetorical and communicative scholarship (265, 276). In their Guest Editor’s Introduction, they write, “While generally sharing poststructuralist affinities, this turn [to materiality and matter] aims to refigure meaning in less anthropocentric and more ecological terms” (265). Three years later, in their 2019 article, “What is New Materialism?” Gamble et al. name and describe three new materialism approaches: “negative new materialism,” “vital new materialism,” and “performative” or “pedetic” new materialism (112).

In general, the different modes in the ‘material turn’ (also dubbed ‘the speculative turn’) counter the ‘turns’ that preceded it, such as the ‘cultural turn,’ ‘linguistic turn,’ ‘rhetorical turn,’ and all of the humanist underpinnings associated with those ‘turns.’ New materialism research is not a truly *new* search but a reorientation toward matter (Gamble et al.; Coole and Frost). In

1998, Ronald Walter Greene published “Another Materialist Rhetoric,” which was an initial argument for ‘new materialism’ in rhetoric, and in 2015, he published “More Materialist Rhetoric,” extending his argument. However, much of new materialism is aligned with physics; Barad, one of rhetorical studies’ favorite new materialists, does not directly address rhetoric. Furthermore, Stormer directly contests any of Burke’s work to ground or generate the new materialist identity (“Rhetoric’s Diverse” 303-304). For example, Stormer writes that “dialectical synthesis” does not apply to these new ideas as “[t]he practice being called for is profoundly horizontal and reticulate; affinities between things are ‘not conceived as being nested,’ meaning discovery of some higher unity is not the aim” (“Rhetoric’s Diverse” 303-304). Gamble et al. extend a welcome to “a growing cross-disciplinary effort to challenge longstanding assumptions about humans and the non-or other-than-human material world” (111). They also suggest the rhetoric of the various strands are incompatible.

In their overview of anthropologist and sociologist Vicky Kirby, Gamble et al. accept Kirby’s contention that there is no clear line between nature and culture. The authors explain how she approaches her understanding: “Instead, she begins from the premise that if there is no radical or absolute boundary line between things, including between humans and non-humans, then humans have no more monopoly over what counts as intelligence, language, or even scientific inquiry than anything else” (124). Human beings are a part of nature, and human communication is an extension of nature, yet humans are more than a plant or a star; to claim otherwise is reductive—though new materialists argue they are not reductive but rather “flat”—as in supporting a “flat ontology” (Barad). Kirby’s examples are rhetorical. Gamble et al. insist that a “performative” or “pedetic” approach as driven by Barad holds the most promise for posthuman efforts. Barad’s perspective does not fixate on differences but on performative

distinctions. Rather than a representational perspective, where human beings reflect through language, Barad acclaims a “performative understanding,” which she argues entails direct “practices of engagement” or an “understanding of discursive practices” that does not include turning to language but is, instead, a “contestation” of language that enacts ontology (*Meeting* 133). Disposing of entelechy and teleology, new materialism argues for a flat-ontology and distributive agency.

Performativity

While acknowledging that performativity is largely supported and explored within gender studies, such as in Judith Butler’s work, ‘performative’ is not limited to gender enactment, yet, nonetheless maintains political dimensions (Barad “Posthumanist” 807). Discursive practices for Barad include attending to “questions of meaning, intelligibility, significance, identity formation, and power...” (807n7). While these are rhetorical considerations, Barad, however, details that the ‘performative’ alternative she proposes is not congruent with the ‘performativity’ described by Butler nor aligned with others from science studies, such as Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour (807). In fact, Barad stakes that not all performance is ‘performative’ (807-808). For her, ‘performativity’ exchanges linguistic representations for “discursive practices” (802). As Barad asserts, “Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real” (802). While Barad describes ‘performative’ as consisting of “discursive practices,” these practices engage materiality not humanity, because, as Barad insists, language is not the gateway to reality.

Hence, for Barad, a linguistic performativity is ironic; matter is performative in “practices/doings/action” without linguistic actualization (“Posthumanist” 802). Barad poses

several provocative questions in her article, asking: “What compels the belief that we have a direct access to cultural representations and their content that we lack toward the things represented? How did language come to be more trustworthy than matter?” (801). Perhaps Robert Wess has the best response. In his essay on Richard McKeon and Burke, Wess writes, “While words are secondary to things and thoughts in some sense, as well as in much philosophy in previous centuries, there is also a sense in which words are not only existents, but also the primary existents, the one and only gateway to everything else.” The only way to make sense, interpret, understand, and make meaning out of matter is through human communication (Cates et al.) Wess states that while most academics suppose Derrida’s influence initiating the ‘linguistic turn,’ the humanities and social sciences were already in the midst of the turn to language when Derrida was born in 1930. As Wess explains, logical positivists aimed to align language with scientific terminology. When Richard Rorty abandoned the analytic tradition, he acknowledged the ‘linguistic turn,’ followed by the ‘rhetorical turn,’ and his work made the phrase, ‘linguistic turn,’ better known (Wess). Wess writes that Burke and later McKeon indicated, “why rhetoric, not scientific correctness, is the logical culmination of philosophy’s ‘turn to language.’” Gadamer’s research led him to similar findings.

Arnett et al. submit that for Gadamer, “the radical Enlightenment points to truth, and the modern Enlightenment points to control of the human environment based upon the word ‘method’” (“The Rhetorical Turn” 116-117). Gadamer turned to Dilthey, who was concerned with scientific and objective hermeneutics and wanted a method akin to science. The question he set himself was like that of Kant’s in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant equated the enlightenment with public reason (use as a scholar), which is connected to writing and speech (Ercolini? 3). Just as Kant questioned the condition that made objective science possible, Dilthey

wanted to know what conditions made objective knowledge of the human sciences possible. Kant is recognized as the transition to modern thought, the dividing point of the history of ethics (MacIntyre 190). As Gadamer explains, particular questions frame the identity of a given historical moment or context. The choice of the method determines the truth one finds. Because the radical view of Enlightenment lost out to the moderate perspective, faith in reason, method, and universals undermined any value of tradition, giving rise to individualism (Arnett et al. “The Rhetorical Turn”).

Descartes framed the importance of method in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, the method of the physical sciences assumed precedence and was applied to all forms of inquiry (Randall 261). Descartes is commonly credited with having defined the inquiry standpoint that marked the transition from the medieval to the modern period (Ercolini; IJsseling; MacIntyre). He was of the conviction that to do philosophy in a way that can produce compelling results requires that one first systematically lay out the rules of procedure and the criteria of truth that are to govern the investigation” (Check DQ Schrag 16-17).

Since antiquity, lines have been drawn between science and rhetoric and between expository and persuasive discourse (Cohen). IJsseling writes that all modern philosophy, particularly modern science, became disdainful toward rhetoric. A basic principle of science becomes the rejection of rhetoric. The father of modern science and philosophy, Descartes argued against tradition and against experience in his search for scientifically justified truth. Descartes separated thought from language. He argued that language is neutral. Yet as IJsseling points out, the revolutionary ideas of both Bacon and Descartes were situated in language and tradition and were born out of those who came before them, embedded in narrative. There was also a rejection of theoretical wisdom found in philosophy, and *phronesis* as practical wisdom

used in the arts of rhetoric and dialectic—neither of which are method-centered. New materialism, it should be noted, rejects dialectics as it opposes synthesis (see Keeling; Stormer “Rhetoric’s Diverse”). Reason became the ground of *a priori* knowledge privileged by Descartes and Spinoza, among other supporters of the Enlightenment.

In his argument, Marcoulatos suggests that “people do not perform their lives, the same way we (typically) do not perform breathing or walking; they simply live them” (246). However, breathing does not involve choice; therefore, it is not within the realm of *nomos*; for all animals to live, they must breathe. Breathing is not predominantly about motivation or purpose. Breathing is a biological, physiological capability for all living animals. Barad advocates “an agential realist ontology” or “relational ontology” for her posthuman performative understanding of materiality in which there exists no exclusive, individual entities; rather, everything is already involved through “intra-action”—as opposed to *interaction*, which initiates from a previously unentangled, or separated, solitary “component” (“Posthumanist” 814). Life for human beings is situated and embedded, and Barad’s notion of “intra-action” compliments this understanding that contrasts with individualism. Neither subjects nor objects are the center of a narrative framework as narrative assumes that position (Fritz 707).

Narrative ethics as a communicative ethic works to dispel the negation of human communication (Arnett “Communication Ethics” 36). Heirloom proclaims an ‘ethic of responsibility,’ which requires reflective and reflexive family practices. Conversely, Schrag claims that the Greek term *praxis* is too often and too simply translated as “practice” since *praxis* can also “be translated as ‘action,’ ‘performance,’ or ‘accomplishment,’” (*Communicative Praxis* 18-19). As Schrag explains, Aristotle’s initial framing of *praxis* is a way of understanding the world that is different from *theōria* and its connection to *epistēme* (19). In addition, Schrag

explains Aristotle's relations and differentiations of *praxis*, *phronēsis*, *poiēsis*, and *technē* while Schrag also addresses the confusion among English derivatives, which tend to conflate cognates, specifically commenting upon the problematic relations of *technē* with "technique" and "technology" (see Heidegger's "Questions of Technology"; see Borgmann's "Focal Things and Practices" discussed in Chapter One). As Schrag moves through the etymology and definitions for several philosophical and rhetorical terms involving thought, language, and action, he concludes: "Communication and praxis intersect within a common space. Communication is a qualification of praxis. It is the manner in which praxis comes to expression. Praxis is also a qualification of communication in that it determines communication as a *performing* and an *accomplishing*" (22-23). Heirloomed, validated in the space of "communicative praxis" of discourse and action, also manifests as a performative demonstration that is phenomenological and involves matters of choice and purpose in the realm of *nomos*.

As Barad and Storrer consent, *performative* yields various definitions and applications in academic scholarship ("Posthuman"; "Articulation"). New materialists operate under posthuman "terministic screens" (Burke *Language*), effectively and enticingly engaging language to restructure their perspective. Bennett explains in her introduction that subjectivity is abjured in her work for the "focus on the task of developing a vocabulary and syntax for, and thus a better discernment of, the active powers issuing from nonsubjects" (ix). In a postmodern current, Bennett speaks for that which has no voice though this is another point. The nonsubjects does not have language. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke quotes T. S. Eliot: "We have no objects without language" (61). Both Barad and Bennett describe alluring arguments through scintillating discourse. In Katz's exploration of new materialism for Burke's opus of work, Katz contends the movement is motivated by "transcendental idealism," despite new materialists'

ethical denial of such interest. Rather than idealism, Schrag suggests that “at the end of philosophy, we find rhetoric—a body of thought dealing with the probably, not the ideal: with praxis” (“Rhetoric Resituated”).

Kent argues that performance takes place “on the hermeneutical level” (135), which must engage phenomenology... Again, for *praxis* and “performance,” Schrag establishes, “The verbal root of praxis, *prasso* (πράσσω) houses the related senses of doing, acting, performing, and accomplishing” (19). However, Barad does not indicate concern with etymology; she describes what performative is largely through what she suggests it is not in contrast to others who have engaged the word in their scholarship, thus, exemplifying the aspect of the nonverbal in Burke’s first clause in the definition of man: “Language referring to the realm of the nonverbal is necessarily talk about things in terms of what they are not—and in this sense we start out beset by a paradox” (*Language* 5). However, as Burke acknowledges, “...such terms are sheer emptiness, as compared with the substance of the things they name” and Burke insists that language is in the realm of “our animality, and some from our symbolicity” (6). Perhaps this is what Barad is trying to get to, and she finds herself constrained by her perspective and confined by language; she is not the first intellectual to experience this frustration. Carpentier and Van Brussel write that “while discourses are very necessary, to provide meaning to the social (including death), the discursive is simultaneously confronted by a structural lack when it symbolizes that same social” (105), placing human communication in a double-bind.

Carey argues that scholars often lack an understanding of the human condition and then the ability to be able to put it into words—to interpret interpretations. We struggle to read the human text, a sequence of symbols that holds understanding (46). In order to explicate how communication researchers should analyze culture, Carey describes a scene: “Let us imagine a

conversation on the meaning of death” (43). He then describes four people arguing about when life ends, and the following responses are given: when there are no brain waves; when there is no heartbeat; when three days have passed; when food is no longer gathered and consumed. Carey comments that all four answers are empirical and quantifiable. The third person happens to be an Irish peasant, and in this culture, death is social, where the person is considered dead after his separation from the community. The fourth is a member of a tribe, who is considered deceased seven days prior to when the heart stops beatings because to this culture, life ends when nourishing the body ends (44). Though Carey suggests that while death is a “universal, transhistorical, transcultural phenomenon,” or as close as one may find, death is still “in its concrete manifestations, as fiercely resistant to reduction to laws, functions, powers, and interests as one can imagine” (45).

Becker argues that “the complex symbol of death” is never gone, only repressed in the living (22). This is due to the “existential paradox” that humans are “half animal and half symbolic” (26). Becker describes the wonder of the human consciousness that allows one to contemplate and apotheosize human life. He articulates the failure to compromise between body and symbol, becoming ultimately, “The tragedy of man’s dualism, his ludicrous situation, [which] becomes too real. The anus and its incomprehensible, repulsive product represents not only physical determinism and boundness, but the fate as well of all that is physical: decay and death” (31).

However, rather than being trapped or frustrated, Burke takes delight in the power of human communication. One of Burke’s anecdotes alludes to Coleridge’s poetic practice of word play, turning “subject” and “object” to “sumject” and “omject” to expose their difference by resemblance (*Philosophy* 16). Arguably new materialism is an ‘ideology,’ and if so, as Burke

illustrates, “An ‘ideology’ is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it” (6). In fact, new materialists do subscribe to a certain ideology that motivates their narrative—scientific materialism. In order to be understood, new materialist rhetoric and use of rhetorical devices show how they must proceed through language. They are not writing to chemicals, who would no sooner understand if they wrote to them using the language of the periodic table of elements.

Though the questions regarding performative reach back to antiquity, the term performative is associated with J. L. Austin’s speech act theory and the “doing” and “saying” of speech acts from his book, *How to Do Things with Words*, first published in 1955, while Derrida’s poststructural modifications and Judith Butler’s use of *performative* in gender have occurred more recently (Bard “Posthumanist” 808n1; Stormer “Articulation” 272). Interestingly, Austin rejected theater performance as *performative* (Reinelt). It was Derrida who reclaimed performative to include theater performance as iteration. For Butler, the possibility of difference in the performative is the “structural break between the previous form of the utterance and the iteration” (Reinelt). Thus, difference is not guaranteed, only possible. Janelle Reinelt’s entry on “performative” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theater and Performance* demonstrates the power that lies within performance and performing social norms, i.e. *nomos*:

The usefulness of these theories [i.e. Derrida’s and Butler’s] for performance theory and criticism lies in the enquiry into what ‘laws’ or norms of social behavior are reinstated in various stagings (for example, tropes of the nuclear family, heterosexuality, racial inequality and prejudice, or national myths), and what deviations or transgressions appear to challenge confirmation of the repetition. How much difference in the iteration (the

performance) is enough to upset the cultural norm? And how much voluntary power do individual subjects need to alter their habitual citations of the norms of their culture? The force of the performative is precisely its claim to power, thus performances can be seen as sites of struggle over contested social norms...However, repeated successful iterations result over time in a kind of sedimentation that makes transformation difficult, even extraordinary.

Reinelt's description seems to suggest heirlooming is performative; in addition, because of heirlooming's reliance on tradition and the practices and rituals that become tradition, heirlooming performativity is continuously under contention. The notion of liberation and finding freedom from the bonds and binds of tradition is an existential lie of individualism (Arnett et al. "The Rhetorical Turn"). As MacIntyre proclaims, it is not after commitments to others are "stripped away" that the "real" self is found (33). Likewise, there is no meaning when language is stripped away from materiality (Cates et al).

Mythic Divide

The "mythic divide" between subject and object are results of mechanistic thought emerging from the Scientific Revolution. Hahn and Soentgen point to the rise of modern science for a lack of acknowledgement of substance (23). They write, "The structure of this dilemma can best be clarified by the Cartesian system that divided the world centuries ago in *res cogitans* and *res extensa*" (23). Here is a place of convergence for rhetoric and new materialism. For Aristotle the problem was metaphysical "because of his theory of substance and categories," where "there are two kinds of things: substances that are individual entities and features that are irreducible attributes" (Meikle 13). As Meikle writes, for Aristotle, "[t]wo things cannot simply be said to be 'equal' without qualification" (13). New materialists, however, do not return to Aristotle. Instead

as Lukács states, “quantification is a reified cloak spread over the true essence of the objects” (1971, 166, but was this in Baldwin?). Life becomes a matter of quantification rather than qualification. Examining the rhetorical turn from the moderate position of the Enlightenment, Arnett et al. argued: “The communicative problem was not and is not now the individual, but a philosophical system of universal assurance through rationality that functions as the tool for individualism unresponsive to the multiplicity of traditions within which the human finds identity” (“The Rhetorical Turn” 117). New materialists also argue that humans are not autonomous. However, they disagree that as Arnett et al. contend, “We live in a world as dialogic companions with creation, not the controllers of life” (118).

MacIntyre insists that agents are “situated;” one way to understand this is to consider people existing within a setting where “that setting has a history, a history within which the histories of individual agents not only are, but have to be situated” (206). MacIntyre observes, “Both purposes and speech-acts require contexts” (210) and this is “because action itself has a basically historical character” (212). Modernity has rejected tradition, where “the notion of individualism emerges when narrative awareness of traditions that shape consciousness is lost, leaving them forgotten or taken for granted” (Arnett et al. “Rhetorical Turn” 118). Similar to MacIntyre, Becker states, “Our whole world of right and wrong, good and bad, our name, precisely who we are, is grafted into us; and we never feel we have the authority to offer things on our own” (48). What Becker uncovers is that most people do not know why they do what they do; why they crave success; why they must procreate; why they must assign their names to buildings and clothing labels and academic endowments (4). Becker insist that “society is and always has been: a symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules for behavior, designed to serve as a vehicle for earthly heroism (4). Such a system allows

humans to find value and meaning in their lives (5)—even if the emphasis is making meaning by indicating there is no meaning—essentially what new materialists attempt to do, without, of course, clearly stating that is what they are doing.

Prior to modernity's rejection of Aristotle, the world did not emphatically distinguish binaries, such as quality and quantity. Aristotle was not reductionist; he did not separate mind and body as he was a realist/naturalist (Thames "Unforgetting a Tradition" 117). Furthermore, Thames insists that Burke shared with Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, and the Stoics, as well as with Whitehead and Bergson, indeed with the classical and medieval worlds, a conception of *Nature as an organism*, not a machine" ("Nature's Physician" 20). New materialists want to bridge the divide, but without changing their background of quantum physics, they cannot, despite their use of rhetorical elements. Without attention to the background, new materialism's foreground practices are incapable. Thames explains in his article, "Unforgetting a Tradition: Kenneth Burke, Karl Marx, and Aristotelian Naturalism," how "Burke assimilates Marx and Spinoza into Aristotelian naturalism (or realism), a tradition that dominated American philosophy 1900-60, one with which Marx was identified in practice..." 116). Aristotle also tried to rejoin what his mentor, Plato, had separated: rhetoric and philosophy (IJsseling).

Schrag argues for a reunion of rhetoric and philosophy through communicative *praxis*, rejecting the modern view of epistemology and connecting rhetoric to hermeneutics (*Communicative Praxis*). For Aristotle, *paradeigma* is an inductive argument that produces generalities (see *Rhetoric*; Walker 279). With the connection of *mythos* and *logos*, *paradeigma* becomes persuasion in the realm of probability (the realm of rhetoric), as in the way something will likely occur within given parameters. *Mythos* became *hypothesis*, which was the term for a basic plot or story constituting a poem's subject matter. In contemporary studies, hypothesis is

primarily connected to science and mathematics and hardly ever courted in the language arts (literature and composition). While much of the Enlightenment separations are now recognized as a “mythic dichotomy” (Woodward), there remains a modern tendency to separate things and a desire to collect and categorize them in an effort to order, understand, and control (Belk). In addition, there remains a tendency, quite prevalent today for activists of climate change to forget that a hypothesis is a rhetorical supposition. New materialists claim ecology as a central aim, and they disparage the notion of human control. However, their impetus is really another form of control. While new materialists deride the idea of human control over nature, they somehow still believe that science has the power to fix nature, which is another method of control.

A rhetorical argument exists in postmodernity over what constitutes the “good life” (Arnett et al. *Communication Ethics Literacy* 16). While Bennett cites ecological sustainability as one of her guides, she asserts that human control over the earth is human “fantasy,” a word she incorporates several times in her preface, she fails to realize that fixing or subverting, or flipping the supposed detriments to the environment is simply another form of control, and, thus, another “fantasy.” While there is no doubt that human beings need encouraged forms for protecting ecological substrates, it is also apparent that the ideology or agenda new materialists such as Bennett look to problematize is ironically what she advocates. Bennett wants organic, holistic, live matter, but she negates teleology, purpose, and capacity of the live human being, whose “survival and happiness” she claims to advance. New materialists do not advance “the good life.” This is a result of modernity, where “the good” was abstracted from the virtues, and by the twentieth century, the abstracted end became manifested in equally abstract means (Thames 585). Thus, as Thames explains in his entry, “Political Economy” in the *Encyclopedia of Identity*, “With means and ends so completely abstracted from life, the distinction between

natural and conventional blurs” (Thames 585). Thus becomes the identity the West inherits that has since separated human beings “from what is natural and valuable in the world” (586).

New materialist ecological proponents ultimately seek to impose control by adamantly insisting humans have no control. Burke explains this as “an attempt to *redefine the situation itself*” (*Permanence* 220). A “ritual view” of communication rather than a “transmission view” alters one’s perspective as discussed in Chapter One. Because new materialism is a substrate of scientific materialism, it operates from atheistic background (Meyer 7). According to Meyer, philosopher of science, “Like other worldviews, scientific materialism attempts to answer some basic questions about ultimate reality...Most fundamentally, scientific materialism offers an answer to the question, ‘What is the entity or the process from which everything else came?’” with their answer “affirming that matter, energy, and/or the laws of physics are the entities from which everything else came...as the uncreated foundation of all that exists...as self-existent” (7-8). Announcing many of her influences in her Introduction and revealing her bias, Bennett admits, “I pursue a materialism in the tradition of Democritus-Epicurus-Spinoza-Diderot-Deleuze more than Hegel-Marx-Adorno” (xiii). Both ancient atomism and new materialists insist that matter is not only epistemological but also ontological (Gamble et al. 113).

In his essay, “Nature’s Physician: The Metabiology of Kenneth Burke,” Richard Thames describes Burke’s frustration with the scientific method as it obscures “purpose” (19). Katz writes that Burke was likewise troubled by “the lessening role of entelechy and the increasing role of mechanism in mimesis.” Katz considers new materialism misaligned with Burke, perhaps for teleological understanding. Tellingly, new materialists also reject purpose as unnecessary. If new materialists deny any “purpose,” for humans or nonhuman, this may present an incommensurability. Teleology is not a concern for new materialists since they argue there is no

end to know, thus, lacking entelechy and essence (now referred to “unknowable interior”) hold nothing. Even science now accepts there was some beginning for everything; therefore, there is an end; though in physics, there is no motivation or nothing one is drawn toward, as in purpose, which means any force or energy must come from behind, which is what Thames explains Burke condemned as mechanistic (“Nature’s Physician” 19).

New materialists suggest they are not reductive; however, this is because they do not consider Aristotelian thought. While “final cause” and “formal cause” are often conflated, “final cause” determines purpose or ends and use and “formal cause” is the form that allows creation and completion. Modern scientists abandoned “final” and “formal” causes. In analytical philosophy, Aristotle’s four causes are reduced to “efficient cause,” thus eliminating entelechy and teleology (Thames “Political”). In modernity, Nature is deified and purpose forgotten, becoming instead agency, rather than a pantheistic Burkean appreciation “from naturalistic to theistic,” where purpose is restored (Thames “Nature’s Physician” 21-22). Burke rightly viewed purpose as a human motivator (Thames 19). Purpose is not the same as “final cause;” rather, it is a limited case of “final cause” involving choice. Burke also recognized the difference between humans as not just another animal, but one where human beings are “differences of kind” and not “differences of degree” (*Language* 50). Thames directs readers to both Burke’s *Grammar* and the work of Marjorie Green for elaborating on “difference of kind” (29n1). Thames speculates on Burke’s thought-process:

Not until the *Grammar* does Burke make a careful distinction between purposes intrinsic to the nature of biological organisms and human purpose—probably after reading more Aristotle and thinking more deeply about the difference among growth/development, animal appetite, and human action. As Marjorie Green notes

(135), the transformative observed in growth and development are directive, not purposive. Purposive action involves deliberation and choice; but nature does not deliberate or choose. (29n1)

Thames continues his note with Greene exemplifying sound reasoning in her explanation of nature's design and development as an endless source of contemplation for man. Because in his *Grammar*, Burke addresses his understanding of Spinoza, this is an invitation to consider how Burke's insight into Spinoza reacts with a new materialist position since new materialism considers the theory supported by Spinoza's *conatus*.

Gamble et al. explain that scholars have shown a preference for a vital materialism that emanates from Deleuze's understanding of Spinoza (119). Spinoza espoused everything is made from the same substance (Bennett x). Spinoza's *conatus* is for vital materialists, intrinsic affect where matter becomes "relations of *forces as such*" (Gamble et al. 120). Bennett contends, "This same-stuff claim, this insinuation that deep down everything is connected and irreducible to a simple substrate, resonates with an ecological sensibility" (xi). While the connection to Spinoza is justified, curiously, once again, there is no deep investigation into the cultural manifestations surrounding an intellectual's situatedness. MacIntyre comments upon how aligning with a name or a particular philosopher does not offer the ground of the philosophy but a narrowed view that may not provide the web of connections with the theories, practices, and cultures of that historical moment (10).

However, an Aristotelian view defines things by their end. Action proceeds from a beginning to an end; there is no other way for it to proceed (Schutz and Luckman). As Schutz and Luckman explain, doubt stands at the beginning of every action; the missing link between the doubt and beginning action is called a decision (43, 46). Any matter or being lacking

language lacks the ability to make decisions beyond behaviorism. MacIntyre's example of W. V. Quine is a remarkable example for stipulating the requirements for a science of human behavior (83). MacIntyre writes that Quine established that a true science for the study of human behavior requires "vocabulary which omits all reference to intentions, purposes, and reasons for action. Just as physics, to become a genuine mechanical science, had to purify its descriptive vocabulary, so must the human sciences" (83). The absurdity of Quine's proposal is not lost on everyone. MacIntyre clarifies, "What is it about intentions, purposes and reasons that make them thus unmentionable? It is the fact that all these expressions refer to or presuppose reference to the beliefs of the agents in question" (83).

Toward the end of their article, Gamble et al. assert: "For us, there is '*nothing but matter*' but unlike old materialisms this is not a reductionistic claim because matter is not a substance that everything can be reduced to. Matter, for us, is a fundamentally indeterminate performance or process-in-motion" (125). Their belief that there is only matter is an active agential choice. As Meyer explains, "Because materialists think that matter and energy are the foundational realities from which all else comes, they deny the existence of immaterial entities such as God, free will, the human soul, and even the human mind conceived as an entity in some way distinct from the physiological processes at work in the brain" (8). New materialists extend the modernity divide rather than dissolving it.

In discussing Burke's metabiology, Thames explains that whether one views Spinoza's pantheism as naturalizing God *or* as deifying Nature, "the state is set for modern science to omit God" (21). From Barad, Stormer seeks a "distributive agency." New Materialists shift along the spectrum in consideration of "[a] theory of distributive agency," where the subject is not a singular actor of outcomes (31). This makes sense when considering the embedded self. The

term agent, according to Bennett is itself representative of distribution (see p. 33), where there is a collapsing of cause and effect. “Actant,” Bennett admits, is Latour’s word, which she explains “is a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events” (Bennett viii). It is also deductive rather than presupposed. Bennett chooses to turn toward “a more distributive agency” (ix).

In their study, Epp and Price point to the work of Andrew Pickering and his 1995 publication, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* to grapple with the notion of object agency. Pickering refers to the interaction and transformation of person and object in their engagement as “the dance of agency” (“The Storied Life” 821). Their argument has much to do with agency. Epp and Price present a statement on object agency that resonates with this project: that objects do not “demonstrate purposeful intention but rather that objects are active, or mobilized as part of a network and nested in a set of practices that may be intentional or embedded in the habitus of everyday life” (2009, 822?). It is this interplay, relationship, ‘dance,’ entanglement, network that is here examined.

Stormer appeals to a theory of “distributive agency,” where the subject is not a singular actor of outcomes (Bennett 31). He writes, “Actants include subjects, such as speakers or players, objects such as various technologies or architectures, cultural memories that help navigate the mass complex connections and meanings, and much more” (275?). Bennett concurs with Latour, using phrases, such as “distributive agency” and “efficacious powers” to describe a new language that starts with the object rather than the subject.

Woodward explains that the use of actant emerges from sociology of science and technology, which views people and objects as inextricably linked, and where both humans and

nonhumans are able to act (15; see SAGE). Bruno Latour is widely recognized for developing Actant Network Theory (ANT), which dissolves modernist binaries. This move attempts “to overcome any a priori distinction between the social, technological, and natural worlds, and emphasizes the inextricable links between humans and material things” (Woodward 15). Woodward states, “According to this theory, objects are not only defined by their material quality, but by their location within systems of narrative and logic laid out by social discourses related to technology, culture, economy and politics” (16). “Actant,” explains Bennett, “is a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events” (viii).

The realm of probability is that of rhetoric as a continuum, where discursive practices of argumentation and persuasion allow for continual consideration within a historical moment” (Vickers? 431?). For Burke, *nomos* is action. In his *Grammar*, Burke details how an agent makes choices, which are both ethical and poetic, and where motives are linguistic and variable by culture. However, Burke recognizes that organic entities are more ambiguous; the mechanistic world creates an action-motion distinction, yet there is an intermediate realm. Also, “[l]ike Aristotle, Burke extends the organic beyond biological being” (Thames 20). Thus, Burke disrupts “trained incapacity” and problematizes knowledge to open up new possibilities.

Within academic literature, material objects and materiality are in and out of focus, depending upon the assumed worldview or analysis. Prior to the ‘cultural turn,’ emerging from consumption studies and poststructural and interpretive theories, the study of materiality in academic inquiry was relegated to the collection and classification of museum scholars and archaeologists, who emphasized social relations rather explicitly concentrating on the

interactions between people and things (Tilley 2; Woodward 3-5). Since the latter half of the twentieth century social construction occupies perspectival dominance (Coole and Frost 1-2, 6; Harold 15). When the term and theory, “social construction of reality” were introduced in 1966 in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s seminal book, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, a new way of thinking appeared, transforming Western philosophy. While social construction emerges from phenomenology and extends back to the nineteenth century, it did not result in a paradigm shift until the late 1970s and early 1980s (May and Mumby).

Following this new arrangement, social construction holds tremendous implications for the study of matter and materiality. A constructionist view suggests the possibility of other determinations since meanings are not fixed in objects. However, more recently, because of its humanist domain, social construction has attracted criticism. One of the main issues is that within this view “[t]he social world is typically divided into meaning and materiality” (Marcoulatos 246), continuing the modernist trend of opposition and dichotomy. Because the material world is predominantly viewed as socially constituted and constructed, a division between meaning and materiality persists (Marcoulatos 246). Igor Kopytoff’s “social biographies” indicates that a “mythic dichotomy” between people and things places intense limitations on understanding contexts (Woodward 15). A modernist approach to “cultural entities” is dualistic in nature, where “material constitution” and “social import” separate in the process of analysis, dichotomy, and reduction (Marcoulatos 245). “It is exactly because the material world has been constituted as a theoretical construct [i.e. social construction] in contrast to a metaphysical or spiritual domain that a genuine fusion of meaning and materiality is usually perceived as counterintuitive” (246).

The history of rhetoric is a circuitous journey of the in-between of relationships and a constructive and restorative art of past partings in separated realms of theory and practice, language and deed, word and thing (Bizzell and Herzberg 16). Burke shows in “Things Are” how one cannot separate the word from the act or the word from the object since human beings cannot exist outside of language. Burk asks, “Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us?” (*Language* 6). The question and Burke’s answer point to his Realism. Burke’s writing indicates that words have literal effects on a person, and he provides examples of language inducing “biologic motions.” Lines between action and motion are perhaps not so clear. As Hahn and Weiss discuss, a cultural artifact “is always embedded in a multitude of contexts with tensions surrounding their roles, usage, and meanings” (1). Every object has “transformative potentialities and eventually becomes integrated into a network of family practices, objects, and spaces that are co-constitutive of the Erikson’s lives and the hopes and fears for who they are and may become” (Epp and Price, 2009, 820).

New materialism is framed in this Chapter as a “rhetorical interruption” (Arnett) that compels attention and should not be simply dismissed as another fleeting, fashionable scholarly mode. The intention of this Chapter is to uncover a partial and temporal response to the following questions: What is new materialism? Why has new materialism garnered interest within communication studies (particularly with a premise that limits if not trivializes human language)? How might new materialism perspectives aid in understanding the significance and meaning of heirlooms? While the often poetic language of new materialism seemingly provides another storied layer for understanding and meaning of heirlooms, there is no hermeneutical and phenomenological opening for human interpretation and meaning. Life is about interpretation (Heidegger), and that is what new materialists, in fact, attempt to do; they seek meaning and

understanding, yet just as eagerly, they seek out ways to remove human communication from the process. This project views new materialism as a wrong turn for rhetorical and communication studies. Rhetoric propelled by communication ethics proffers a narrative framework from which to make meaning known, and for this project, that includes an ethic of responsibility toward heirlooms.

Nathan Stormer's conviction is that rhetorical studies must engage different understandings of the "human" and evaluate its own humanistic rhetoric ("Articulation" 258). In modernity, knowledge is privileged and considered cumulative. A postmodern condition problematizes notions of progress and linear time. A relational and embedded nature are part of a communicative ethic that recognizes life's fluidity and uncertainty, two familiar motifs in postmodern scholarship. Postmodernity disrupts access to knowledge, reality, and truth. In their research on object narratives, Clare Humphries and Aaron C. T. Smith argue that *materiality* is more than the "thing itself;" rather, materiality includes engagement *with* others, both human and nonhuman entities in co-narrative creation; what the authors describe as "knotted, object-infused versions of narrative" (491). Stormer makes a similar appraisal in his material examples of the horrors of slavery. Stormer writes, "Slaves, slave owners, the tools of torture (whips, chains, knives, dogs, guns, rope, fire, property law) were all actants in the articulate conditions of this rhetoric. They were active partners in the rhetoric, not just what it referred to" (269). Removed from context, these objects many meanings as representatives and symbols. There is no rhetoric without a rhetorical situation. Such an understanding of artifacts or things is concomitant to Burke's questioning in, "What Are the Signs of What? A Theory of 'Entitlement,'" where he demonstrates that a word is reliant upon its "extra-verbal 'context of situation'" (or "scene" in Burke's dramatism) (359). Stormer argues against Burke's "symbolic action" ("Rhetoric's

Diverse Materiality”) In 2014, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* dedicated an issue to new ontology and the posthuman. In the introduction entitled “Pushing the Limits of the Anthrops,” the authors confirm the issue’s purpose: “This special issue on extrahuman rhetorical relations aims to further the thinking of rhetoric beyond the human symbol use” (Davis and Ballif 348).

Human beings are rational animals because they possess the power of speech. Other animals use their voices to express pain and pleasure, but only human voices are charged with reason. Speech is a signal of the rational ability to determine what is just or unjust, as well as harmful or innocuous to the peculiar human being. Burke’s definition of man. Alternatively, posthumanism further disrupts the human narrative and instead of revisiting tradition and looking for ways to bridge this impasse, it doubles down in the absence of narrative.

While Hahn and Weiss consider the “metaphor of travelling goods,” they likewise critique its truth by writing, “After all, it is not things as such that travel, but people and their economic and social status that place these commodities in or out of their reach...The mobility of things is not an autonomous experience, but the consequence of particular practices and cultural differences” (7). As Tilley et al. denounce, “The object and the objectivity of things supposedly stand opposed to the subject and subjectivity of persons” (3). While material culture studies attempts to bridge that divide, their efforts weren’t radical enough, inculcating in a ‘new material turn’ that looks to science for healing. However, as Harold submits, “But we know from decades of academic research and philosophical meditations on the question of subjectivity that human beings are certainly not autonomous, and rarely ever sovereign” (14).

Katz encounters Object-Oriented Philosophy (OOP) and explores whether Burkean theory is open to objects assuming agency as actants with motives. For a process that eschews language, NM heavily relies on discourse to distinguish its own motive, which authors, such as

Bennett acknowledge. In what Gamble et al. refer to as “failed materialisms,” matter is not knowable to human beings. The authors explain that both Jacques Lacan’s and Judith Butler’s approaches are “failed materialisms” because both set boundaries, even in Butler’s performative alternative; both sanction ontological separation between language and matter (118). For Butler, Gamble et al. claim, matter is only “active” in its resistance to be apprehended by language.

Schrag explains that the separation of language from *logos* substituted a narrowed and fixated version of reason for the scientific method and its rubric of objectivity to restrict the reach of knowledge to objectifiable data, an intentional break with the ancient and medieval “ontological’ reason” founded on a metaphysics inextricably tied to logic as *logos* (18). During the archaic era of Homer, *mythos* indicated general possibilities or outcomes as a form of argument, inseparable from *logos*. Walter Fisher’s “narrative paradigm” was based upon MacIntyre’s theory of the narrative self (Hannan 183). In contrast to the reigning rational world paradigm that regards everyday conversation as irrational, Fisher’s narrative paradigm insists meaningful communication occurs via story-telling, where human experience is the main plot. Fisher approaches the narrative paradigm as “a ground for resolving the dualisms of modernism: fact-value, intellect-imagination, reason-emotion, and so on” (10). The Cartesian system created a dichotomy whereby if one system is regarded as “rational,” all others become “irrational” to construct “opposition” (Vickers 431).

Opposition includes the rejection of a humanist framework, consisting of traditional realist modes of representation and social construction, due to the exclusive sovereignty granted to human beings (Bennett; Coole and Frost; Barad). Social construction is accused of emphasizing the visual, “the geometrical optics of reflection” (Barad “Posthumanist” 803). Social constructive philosophies reason human beings inhere the capability of perfecting society,

but nature is recalcitrant and limits *nomos* in the number of choices humans make. Harold further justifies this through the etymology of *subject*, which stems from Latin *subjectus*, “to place something under” *but also* “to expose to,” which recognizes human embeddedness. Rhetoricians and communication scholars typically attend to the etymology of words. For example, Storrer portrays a definition of *articulation* and *taxis* that considers the etymology of the words without simply redefining them to suit his purpose (“Articulation”). Scholars within other realms of scholarship included in this research, while assumingly more attentive to language due to the ‘linguistic turn,’ demonstrate more concern with altering words and revising definitions and less concern with etymology. Perhaps this is due to a modern inheritance of inattentiveness toward traditions as well as Greek practices and the languages of Greek and Latin, or, perhaps, it is a part of new materialism’s reaction to language as excessive. Examples from Barad and Bennett exemplify this linguistic practice.

In his discussion of the “reorganization of the sensorium” and human being’s relation with language, particularly the *word*, Walter Ong describes transitional and transformational effects from the oral-aural world to Western print culture. Ong briefly describes other eras, then depicts the importance of the eighteenth century in greater detail when the West altered “the commitment of sound to space,” and, thus, changing human beings’ sense of navigation and notion of interaction with the physical world (63). Ong describes human beings’ assessment of the material universe as “curiously silent.” The “social solidarity” and collectivity of the Middle Ages was displaced by “the rise of a theoretical individualism. Of course the world was not silent but was silenced by human beings, whose sensorium shifted to vision. Ong depicts the pervasive outcomes of a print culture that manifested the entire sensorium toward sight:

By the eighteenth century Descartes' logic of personal inquiry, silent cerebration, had ousted dialectic, an art involving vocal exchange, as the acknowledged sovereign over human intellectual activity. The new logic was not the art of discourse...it was the art of thinking...presumably uninvolved with communication (as thought in fact can never be, since it is always nested in language even when it is not overtly verbalized in the interior consciousness or exteriorly). (64)

Barad describes separated subject from object ("Posthumanist" 815). Several NM authors suggest various conceptual shifts to reunite and reorient, such as Barad's replacement of the Cartesian cut with a localized "agential cut" or "agential separability" that allows ontological relations to emerge through internal "intra-actions" within phenomena that, Barad claims, offers a new understanding of cause and effect and "the possibility of objectivity" because there is no outside of matter; the exterior is always within the phenomena due to the localized "agential cut" (815).

New materialists are critical of scholarly reflection, arguing that reflexive practices are recursive. For instance, social constructionists believe that knowledge is a reflection of culture (Barad, *Meeting* 86). However, Barad argues that reflexivity is really just a reflection of resemblance and, instead, proffers "[t]he phenomenon of diffraction" (*Meeting* 71). One of Barad's key terms from quantum physics, "diffraction" is a "doing" ("Posthumanist" 803), "a mutated critical tool of analysis," (n3). As Barad explains it, "diffraction" is a way "of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of reactions of difference and how they matter" (*Meeting* 71). "Diffraction," she continues, is an "entangled phenomenon" that offers insights into the "entangled effects differences make" with an emphasis on the "effects" of difference, not directly on "differences" (73). "Entanglement" is

a current term coming from the work of Barad and Bennett. As Woodward explains, “By dissolving the boundary between people who act and objects which are seen as inanimate or outside, the term actant is designed to overcome any a priori distinction between the social, technological and natural worlds, and emphasizes the inextricable links between humans and material things” (SAGE).

Wess, a former student of McKeon’s, argues that McKeon’s pluralism led him to rhetoric, which coincided with the ‘rhetorical turn.’ Wess explains that McKeon’s pluralist was more than acknowledging differing perspectives, “but in the hard sense of seeing the nature of things as fundamentally ambiguous, so that there is no one way to disentangle this ambiguity.” Alas, is this not what Barad and Bennett claim? Burke writes: “Men’s modes of symbolic action are simultaneously untanglings and entanglements. And these pieces [his essays included *Language as Symbolic Action*] are offered in that spirit” (viii). Barad is not the first to engage the nature of entanglement to living experience. Barad describes diffraction as an ability to read multidisciplinary texts through multiple lenses, both tying everything together and realizing that everything is already always tied together, where “the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of ‘exteriority within’” (“Posthumanist” 803).

As an analytical tool or insight, “diffraction” is partly a reaction to social construction, which distinguishes between, and thus separates, the social from the natural or Nature, with a predilection to social configurations and explanations for reality (*Meeting* 86). Barad also explains that her version of “diffraction” is not to be confused with Donna Haraway’s use of the term (though Barad acknowledges her appropriation of the term from Haraway). Haraway, as Barad explicates, employs the term as a metaphor, a fourth semiotic category (“Posthuman” see note 3 on 803). One must proceed from the literal to have a metaphorical. Wess describes the

humorous and goading story of Burke's explanation to students (and audience) that he meant his dramatism literally, not metaphorically; however, his own Burkean scholars told him he was wrong and that he had it confused (see Wess and Brock et al.).

Nonetheless, while "diffraction" is understood, defined, and explored in various ways, it is not exceedingly clear how this perspective adds to the notion of an interplay of differing yet constituting perspectives or entities endlessly woven and rewoven, becoming enmeshed, or to include another Barad's neologisms, "entangled" in such a way that there is no way to disentangle the human from the non-human. "Diffraction" for Barad might in one form be akin to what Schrag calls for as a breakdown of disciplinary silos as the barriers that keep scholars and their studies and thus the matter they study separated. Indeed, Gamble and Hanan describe "diffraction" as a "reading through" as a different way of seeing, or viewing, or experiencing, and understanding (276).

Barad suggests that Niels Bohr held an "ontic" interpretation of the "measurement problem" of quantum physics while Erwin Schrödinger's and Werner Heisenberg's were "epistemic" (122). Barad explains Bohr's understanding of "position" as "*specific physical arrangements*" (814). Position cannot be determined unless there is already something else with which to compare, and if position is determined using an "apparatus," such as a ruler, this is still within relations of phenomena, apparatus, observer— "intra-actions," and such certainty is never fixed; such a move is an "*agential cut*" (814-815). For Barad, there is no Cartesian separation between subject and object since there is no separation of cause and effect. Light is a wave or particle ("cause") depending on the apparatus ("effect") used; thus, it is "the phenomenon of light intra-acting with the apparatus" (815n21). Barad implicates an apparatus in the "constitutive role in the production of phenomena" (816), which then as Barad might concur

leads to a discernment of whether “...we are genuinely observing the application of a real technology or rather instead the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of such a technology”? (MacIntyre 85). Now, MacIntyre’s question relates to the human sciences; however, new materialism is perhaps such a “science.” Bennett finds fault with Guattari’s interpretation of the ecological problem, stating that what Guattari pronounces is an “impossible fact that humans are both ‘in’ and ‘of’ nature, both are and are not the outside” (114). In fact, Bennett, while interested in Guattari’s philosophy, bemoans the parallel of his three ecologies with Roman Catholicism’s trinity, which he describes. While the Holy Trinity is not only a part of Roman Catholicism, the point is that Bennett disagrees with the possibility of being within and apart. Quantum physics challenged classical physics implicating that object and observation and object and apparatus are always already entangled. In quantum physics, light is wave *or* particle, depending on the object (apparatus) used to investigate or measure it; this breakthrough has since been extended to matter as well. Thus, what might appear to be separate bodies and boundaries are really relational and porous (Barad “Posthumanist” 814?).

Chapter Three: The Heirloom as Gift

“Nature is no longer viewed as having value only through its subjugation to the needs of the human species. It has an integrity of its own, not simply subject to human contrivance and control. It is a gift, donated to the sojourner along life’s way, entrusted to the human species for its stewardship” (Schrag 93).

Chapter Overview

In his book, *God as Otherwise Than Being: Toward a Semantics of the Gift* Calvin O. Schrag seeks a postmodern possibility of a different grammar to reconsider discourse on Deity. Grammar holds political and ethical connections, making any grammatical shift complex; one cannot simply change grammar without rhetorical implications, such as a change in meaning. This chapter presents a close and careful reading of Schrag’s text to explore whether his grammar of “gift” and “giving” offers a place for heirlooms and heirlooming. Is the heirloom the same as the gift? While there are parallels to the phenomena of the gift and that of heirlooms, as well as affordances in giving and receiving, based upon the breadth of the gift as described by Schrag, an heirloom remains within the ethical and narrational realm of *nomos*. In their study, Russell W. Belk and Gregory S. Coon claim that the exchange theory of gift-giving established by Mauss has been the dominant model in social sciences, rendering it difficult to think otherwise (393). Thereof, the prevailing paradigm of the gift is one of reciprocity (Belk and Coon). However, it is thinking otherwise, that Schrag argues one must attempt in order to move the gift out of the bounds of economics and social exchange and reciprocity. Situating heirlooms as intramundane objects requiring an “ethic of responsibility” involves a “hermeneutics of

praxis” as explained by Schrag. Schrag describes *praxis* for understanding presence as “a praxis textured as an amalgam of discourse and action” (94). Heirloom as *praxis* allows one to consider heirlooms inalienable, indexical, and beyond the confines of the marketplace and within the adaptable and flexible family narrative.

Chapter Three Introduction

Gift-giving is a cultural performance with universal demonstration. Within contemporary, interdisciplinary studies, the theme of the gift has become a meeting place for extensive scholarship (Schrag xv; Schrift 1997, 3). Philosophical and theological writing on the practice of gift-giving extends back to the Greeks with particular attentiveness inside the Judeo-Christian tradition (Schrag xv; 106). Mauss is regarded as the first scholar to elaborate on the practice of gift-exchange (1990 for the essay according to Schrag 106) in his 1925 essay, *Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, published as a book in 1950 and translated into English in 1954—arguably the “greatest book in modern anthropology” (Godbout 11). Joining sociology and anthropology, Mauss (the nephew of Émile Durkheim as well as his colleague) proposes the quality of inalienable objects and the social system of gift-giving as a reciprocal, a form of symbolic exchange, where in the tribes he studied, gift-giving was obligatory. Belk and Coon accept the following definition of gift “as a good or service (including the giver’s time, activities, and ideas) voluntarily provided to another person or group” (Belk qtd. in Belk and Coon 394) adding “through some sort of ritual prestation” and expanding *prestation* “as an explicit ritual or ceremony of giving and accepting,” including a simple expression of presentation and gratitude (394). In regard to heirloom giving and receiving, as Chapter One indicates, heirlooms are generally bequeathed in three ways: at a predetermined ritual and in-line with previous traditions, such as when a mother gives her sweet sixteen ring to her daughter

when she turns sixteen; in accordance with a will, where a testator has designated the heirloom recipient; and more openly or spontaneously, where, perhaps, the first family member to request or compliment the heirloom becomes the beneficiary (Price et al; Heisley and Cours). Price et al. suggest, “Remembered disposition norms and rituals of a previous generation, a kind of family legacy, can also precipitate disposition decisions or concerns” (Price et al. 185). Thus, responses greatly range from expectation and gratitude to surprise with no one alive to thank or commend; no matter the response or lack of response, commemoration through heirloom is ethical practice. In addition, Belk and Coon note that gift exchange, unlike economic transactions, “are ideally staggered in time,” perhaps as a bond of trust that also induces a long-term commitment (402). In his opening, Mauss points to the moral, economic, aesthetic, religious, mythological, and social phenomena of gifting transactions and customs (choose which edition). Mauss declares *gift-exchange* a social contract (see Schmidt “Wampum as Maussian” 134), and the gift as “*total social fact*” (Mauss 79), where all social and cultural realms are included, making gift-exchange a moral quality (Schrag 107; Woodward 91).

Jacques Godbout explains the primary social relations as arenas for “intersubjectivity,” including kinship, marriage, and friendship, and secondary sociality and the sphere of “intermediation,” including political, theological, and commercial domains (138). He explains, “From a phenomenological point of view, we could say that primary sociality provides an arena for intersubjectivity and that the gift is its concrete manifestation” (138). Mauss claims gift morality as eternal (check to review 70). In similar thought, Belk describes the concentric circles of objects with which people surround themselves, a demonstration of moral symbolism. He writes, “The possessions central to self may be visualized in concentric layers around the core self, and will differ with over individuals, over time, and over cultures that create shared

symbolic meanings for different goods. However, there is another sense in which the individual has a hierarchical arrangement of levels of self, because we exist not only as individuals, but also as collectivities” (152). For Mauss, “inalienability” designates the symbolic nature of the gift (Belk and Coon 402). The “bond” is formed between giver and receiver as the object is “part of the giver’s extended self” (402; also see Belk). As previously discussed and quoted by Belk and Coon, Mauss’s description of the connection established between giver and receiver is visceral, literal, and spiritual. Mauss writes, “This bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself...while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence” (10). Mauss presents an affectivity of gift-exchange.

Transcendence and history are two areas of exploration for understanding how one communicates about heirlooms. In transcendence, inanimate objects move beyond their function and materiality “to forge social relationships and reveal the passage of time in people’s lives” (Jung et al. 62). From symbolic and inalienable and indexical representations to gesture and trace in contamination is added potential transcendence. Burke writes, “Substitution sets the condition for ‘transcendence’” (*Language as Symbolic* 8). According to Burke, the name or naming exceeds the physical object from “motion and matter” within time and space to something magical or mystical that Burke calls “the realm of essence and spirit” (8). Heirlooms as “contaminated” objects are believed to hold the essence of the giver and of family legacy (Belk). As Belk explains, “...there seems to be a desire to bask in the glory of the past in the hope that some of it will magically rub off—a form of positive contamination” (149). Through contamination, ancestors leave their mark, so to say, which also stands as a physical reminder of accomplishment. Belk writes, “Just as we seek to extend ourselves by incorporating or owning

certain objects, we may still seek the sympathetic magic (contagion) of possessions that retain a part of the extended self of valued others” (149).

Objects like mementos and heirlooms are often considered memory containers that capture a time—a moment, a celebration, an event—and that the object enchantingly contains that memory, though, of course, “time cannot be contained” (Olivier 207). Still, an heirloom’s connection to the past, the future, and the unknown, as well as its association with deceased ancestors, often relates an ethereal or other-worldly experience for many who hold such objects, an experience of something “evocative” or “uncanny” as described by Turkle (*Evocative* 8). Heirlooms are collective memorials of past experiences that can lead to future thought (Turkle). As Arnett et al. write, “A community of memory lives with infinity of possibility, unlike the totality that assumes that one can possess, hold, and understand a given moment in time alone” (120). Schrag explores the relationship between *kairos* and *chronos*. Laurent Olivier, an archaeological curator, explains in his article, “The Past of the Present: Archaeological Memory and Time,” that a shift in the perception of time occurred right before the Second World War, evinced by the work of Walter Benjamin, which erupted previous understandings of an accumulation of linear, historical time (208). Olivier remarks that Henri Bergson described modernity’s understanding of time as cinematic, in separate, static sequences (208). Bergson contended that memory made time relative, where memory allows “the past into the present” (Zelizer 210). Olivier writes, “Time now escapes from the little box in which people had thought to contain it” (209).

The English version of Benjamin’s *Illuminations* was published in 1968 with an Introduction written by Hannah Arendt. In her opening sentences, Arendt describe “posthumous fame” (1); a strange notion but quite appropriate for an heirloom (as the fame was, Arendt

argues, for Benjamin). Benjamin is believed to have committed suicide in his escape from the Nazi regime. While there should never be glory in suicide, it has been romanticized at times in art and literature, most famously in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* though possibly up to twenty-one total Shakespearean characters died from suicide. Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, "It seems to me that the whole of philosophy is only a meditation on Shakespeare" (47). The absolute darkness surrounding suicide is utter despair. MacIntyre suggests that suicide is the tragic effect of one's narrative becoming incomprehensible to himself.

Corey Anton writes about the lingering effects of antiques as more than just material objects: "We come to see the object in terms of what is no longer here; the item itself hints and alludes to a mysterious otherworldliness" (369). Anton clarifies that the age of the object is not what makes it antique—there is no "antiqueness;" rather, antiqueness points to how the world around the object has been altered.

Through contamination, ancestors leave their mark, so to say, which also stands as a physical reminder of accomplishment. Belk writes, "Just as we seek to extend ourselves by incorporating or owning certain objects, we may still seek the sympathetic magic (contagion) of possessions that retain a part of the extended self of valued others" (149). According to Heisley's and Cours's study, "Contaminated possessions hold sentimental associations. The possessions index personal histories and relationships within the family" (438). Curasi et al. explain, "Belongings of the deceased are sometimes thought of as totemic remains, especially when viewed as part of the deceased's extended self" (240 "Ritual"). As Belk explores in his leading article, "Possessions and the Extended Self," part of a person's sense of self resides in the objects she possesses; objects are extensions of a person. Belk writes that a person might consider his neighborhood or even a historic monument, such as the Statue of Liberty, to be of the extended

self (140). As objects of the extended self, heirlooms are recognized as exemplifying more than the mundane even if the object per se is mundane because objects are connections and commitments to others. Consider the commitment invoked by Lady Liberty. If one does not know the background of this statue, one certainly recognizes in its placement in New York City's harbor that she is a sign of America. Turkle's work explores similar findings in mobile technology that replaces much face-to-face communication while devices become self-extensions. In her book she argues that the Internet and our interaction with technological gadgets have altered our sense of "actuality," of reality as it has continued to alter our sense of time and space.

In his prominent book *The Presence of the Word*, Walter Ong articulates how the development of typography followed by the dispersion of print disrupted the power of the spoken word, altering oral-aural sensibilities of time and space (63). In his discussion of the "reorganization of the sensorium," Ong describes the displacement of the oral and communal culture, resulting in a loss of the *word* grounded in presence (Kaufmann 161). One description of Ong's theme "...is that the eye gives knowledge of surfaces, while the ear gives knowledge of interiors" (Kaufmann 161). Modernity's ensuing visual emphasis inaugurated linear thought, which eventually resulted in the quantitative, objective, and scientific world and the solitary individual extracted from the communal. Ong writes, "The world of intellect and spirit and the physical universe itself became curiously silent in man's way of conceiving of them" (63), adding, a few pages later that "[t]he devocalization of the universe extended to outer space" (72). By the eighteenth century, human beings' interactions with the environment and their sense of reality was a completely different experience from prior periods (63). Ong insists that the "reorganization of the sensorium" necessitated a "reevaluation of both the word and thing in their

relationship to human life...” (236). Sight fixes and fixates on objects and dissects; vision is sequential (41, 129). This enactment leads to important *insights* concerning science, control, progress, and human obsession with things. Human beings are “addicted to sight” focusing attention to what is directly in front of them (128). Hahn and Soentgen suggest that the visual world has caused a pre-occupation with objects in hyperconsumption (21 or 22). These effects impose implications for making sense of heirlooming, moving practices out of chronologic and accumulative and into temporal and narrativial. Collective understanding meets in the “fusion of horizons,” when past and present are transformed (Gadamer).

As the telescope transformed space, the photograph transformed time. Postmodernity does not follow modernity. Knappett discusses the art historian term *anachronic* to describe objects as those that are across eras or historical periods “to capture the tension between times,” describing structural objects as those that are “defined by survival and persistence, rather than by movement” (38-39). These conditions resulted in “a movement which concerns the representation of the world,” from discoveries of land, at sea, and in the sky during the sixteenth century that opened up a different perspective. The study of such conditions and differences is likewise a rhetorical initiative (207). To forget or neglect the past causes disorientation and a fetish with the future in the form of modernity’s notion of progress. As Arnett et al. explain, people delude themselves into thinking they only need to look toward the future, neglecting the past.

Mauss proposes the quality of “inalienable objects” and the altruism and egoism of gift-giving (Douglas). He argues that gifts are never “free” in that gifts have a sort of “power” that further obligates the receiver—at some point, a return gift is required. Douglas writes that for Mauss, gifting is “a perpetual cycle of exchanges within and between generations” (xiii), where

not only is there no such thing as a “free gift,” but there also cannot be, for “[r]efusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties” (ix). The expectation of a return gift places “reciprocity” as the mark of exchange (Belk and Coon 394). Mauss describes the gift as a way to acquire and determine honor within the tribes he studied (Schrag 107-108). The social exchange is beneficial. Thus, Mauss’s system of reciprocity includes certain virtues, such as the code of honor—a quality acquired through practice. The scholarly literature on exchange is marked by three models: economic, social, and agapic. According to Belk and Coon, the agapic model includes romantic, brotherly, spiritual and familial love (406).

In regard to Mauss’s insight, Woodward writes: “Gifts then are not inert but are alive and personified, and achieve a type of magical, spiritual hold over giver and receiver, such that receiving a gift is akin to receiving a part of a person’s essence” (91). The rhetorical act of attributing the notion of “power,” and “spiritual essence,” and “trace” to objects frames qualities of heirlooms. Mauss argued that gifts are never “free” in that gifts have a sort of “power” that obligates the receiver to reciprocate; gifts are a contract that at some point requires a gift in return. “For Mauss, the donor of a gift imparts part of their personality in the gift and expects it to be returned” (Parkin 318). Mario Schmidt further argues that “Mauss regularly attributes anthropomorphic features to objects” (40). Furthermore, Mifsud claims that one may speak of the intimacy of a gift as a connection to the person in a way that creates “an animistic quality to the gift” (93).

According to Burke, the name or naming exceeds the physical object from “motion and matter” within time and space to something magical or mystical that Burke calls “the realm of essence and spirit” (8). Following the airplane crash that killed Carole Lombard in 1942, her husband, Clark Gable, insisted on ascending the mountain to find *something* that would help him

to grieve or, perhaps, to acknowledge the reality of death since there was not a body for identification. Before even reaching the crash site, Gable spotted a rhinestone barrette with several strands of blond hair still in it—the same barrette he had given to his wife, Carole, the previous Christmas. A material object may offer a sense of closure or at least provide a trace of a former presence. Another example of an heirloom trace might be a lipstick kiss blotted onto a woman’s handkerchief. Gestures initiate imprint. For Mauss, “Gesturing is central to the cultural construction of the body” (Knappett 41). “It is gesture that links the body to the substrate [medium] and the eventual trace” (Knappett 41). A trace indicates former presence. Knappett writes, “The trace is a presence that substitutes (metonymically) for an absence” (Knappett 39). Language performs the act of substitution.

Burke explains in *Language as Symbolic Action*: that symbolism as “*substitution*” is an act (7, 14). As humans communicate with heirlooms, they perform substitution in various ways. Writing on the use of ancient seals and the imprints they leave, Knappett opens his essay by describing the plot of the film, *Alps*. The plot revolves around human substitution following death, where the person who dies is temporarily replaced by another person who acts as the deceased to aid those who are grieving (37). While this macabre act of human death substitution would likely be regarded as an unhealthy and unacceptable way to mourn the loss of someone, a similar, though living performance (and though, perhaps also troubling, it is not a morbid practice) occurs in Japanese traditions. Turkle’s best-selling book, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, illustrates how human relationships are being replaced by technological connections. It is worth noting that technology is an unlikely heirloom source for several reasons. Technology, despite being used or perhaps abused as a replacement for others, is distant and lifeless. Turkle describes the practice of Japanese families

hiring substitute family members to visit elderly kin. Knappett writes that “death leaves an absence that all we wish to do is fill with a presence...and material objects may do the job of providing at least some level of contact amidst the loss” (37). The parallel is presented to merely indicate the extreme need for intimate connection with other people and the lengths people will go to in order to fill that void.

In her research on medieval heirlooms, Gilchrist presents heirlooms as connections to “secular rites of personhood and family” and the church (Hahn and Weiss 12). Gilchrist argues that because of the social and physical materiality of heirlooms, they “were selected and endowed with spiritual power” (12). Because certain secular rites, such as marriage, baptism, and funerals were performed by the Church, “[m]edieval heirlooms were therefore not only memory objects, but also sacred objects” (12). Belk writes: “McCracken described how individuals and cultures, through idealized and nostalgic visions of the ‘golden age’ of a misty past, use the past to maintain values that never existed. With such an unassailable image of the past, antiques from that era become powerful symbols by which we may listen to the past and hear it confer its imagined virtues upon us” (150). People invest “psychic energy” in an object to which they have directed efforts, time, and attention. This energy and its products are regarded as a part of self because the things have grown or emerged from the self (Belk 144). Curasi et al. find, “In establishing a trust, older family members may make cherished possessions sacred” (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 253).

Based on the concept of contamination in anthropology, heirlooms also become traces of kinship. The residue of heirs is transmitted through objects, which are passed on to others, and the acquisition of possessions of another person are intimately entangled with that person (Belk 151). Heirlooms as “contaminated” objects are believed to hold the essence of the giver and of

family legacy (Belk). The object is given meaning through a story a person tells that contains “sympathetic magic” (Belk; Harold). Belk refers to this positive contamination as “a desire to bask in the glory of the past in the hope that some of it will magically rub off” (149).

When Schrag seeks to decipher ethical presence from sacramental presence, he refers to the work of Jean-Luc Marion and his “Eucharistic hermeneutics,” in an effort to avoid idolatry, where the concern is *how* and *whether* religious objects hold spiritual presence. As Schrag explains, idolatry can be placed within the object or within the mind. He writes, “Either the presence is in the thing, the physical elements of bread and wine with their distinctive chemical properties, or it is in the mind of the believer” (90). One must delimit how far or deep or beyond the reach of an heirloom. According to Marion, idolatry may be avoided when considering presence as a gift of charity (Schrag 90). Schrag also discovers recourse to Marion for distinguishing between icon and idol. Marion’s explanation is that an idol is mere reflection, not transcendence; an idol reflects the human gaze. An icon is able to move the gaze outside of and beyond the self and is not a reflection but, instead, attains something invisible (understood as faith). It makes sense in the advent of type and print with its emphasis on the visible that a tendency to idolize became so pronounced. Schrag explains, “Hence, the task is to secure the iconic function of the elements against any contamination by the idolatric” (90).

The idol is limited to worldly pursuits while the icon may proceed and extend beyond perception. Schrag further explains the semantics of the religious symbol by appealing to the work of Paul Tillich, who describes how both a symbol and sign point beyond to something else; however, a sign simply points to its signified concept; unlike a symbol, “it does not disclose a dimension of depth within the structure of human existence that addresses one’s ultimate concern” (90-91). The purpose for this clarification is the danger of faithlessness that Schrag

states is Tillich's concern: "...Tillich sees the principal threat to religious faith as the misconstruing of its thesaurus of sacred physical and cultural objects as a storehouse of signs bereft of symbolic power" (91). Commitment to family is compromised when members fail to recognize the dimension of collective power within heirlooms.

Schrag uses the ultimate symbol of Christianity, the cross (although all religions have holy symbols), which points beyond its physical wooden substance and its form of one beam perpendicular to another beam to show the power of objects. The cross reaches beyond to salvation, the crucial act of Christ dying on the cross to save the human species from eternal death because of their sins. The cross points to hope in eternal life for those who have faith in its symbolic power—power that lies beyond the object as sign or signifier. Heirlooms are often religious icons, such as a Bible (Woodward; Curasi et al.) or a cross necklace, for example, or another type of religious artifact passed down within the family line (Gilchrist); heirlooms disclose fundamental human conditions. Heirlooms represent life and death as well as family values. Heirlooms are understood as inherited items, passed down to the next of kin by a previous generation. To deface a cross is blasphemous and sacrilegious. To deface an heirloom is irreverent and profane. Cultures recognize the defacement or destruction of personal, private or communal, public property as a crime. The purposeful disfigurement or damage (or rejection) to an heirloom is typically leveled at past associations in an effort to remove negative reminders that the object represents, but it is an act that abandons hope and disregards the power of narrative.

Derrida took Mauss's ideas, turned them on their head (à la Marx to Hegel), and disrupted the entire concept of the gift (Schrag 107). In *Given Time*, Derrida claims the impossibility of the gift. Schrag recognizes that within the grammar of possession, dispossession,

ownership, reciprocity and reward, one cannot move the gift outside of consumerist discourse within the foundation of production and exchange that considers the gift as private ownership (xv, 108). As he writes, “Objects need first to be produced, distributed, and owned before they can be given away” (108). Thus, economic discourse traps the gift. Within modernity, gift discourse is in opposition to economic discourse. Exchange of gifts is contrasted with commodity exchange (Appadurai 9). Appadurai argues that the “spirit of the gift and that of commodity exchange are fundamentally contrastive and mutually exclusive” (11). He adds, “Though there have been some important recent attempts to mute the exaggerated contrast between Marx and Mauss, the tendency to see these two modalities of exchange as fundamentally opposed remains a marked feature of anthropological discourse” (11). Still, as Appadurai writes, commodities and things are “the medium of gifting” (5).

Baldwin critiques granting the gift only positive power in opposition to the commodity. He discusses how a gift can also be an indicator of darkness, reinforce hegemony, and limit one’s freedom. Belk’s and Coon’s study focuses on romantic love within the agapic love paradigm, remarking how romantic love is the “idealist conception that stands in stark contrast to the realist conceptions of the exchange paradigm” (406). As they explain, “Agape is sacrificial where eros is acquisitive; agape is unselfish where eros is egocentric; and agape gives freely where eros is possessive,” adding, “Whereas social exchange may symbolize erotic love, in the romantic model love is agapic” (407). In modern, capitalist markets, there is little relation between ethics and economics as understood from a contemporary view, where economics has been dubbed a science (Meikle 5). As Burke wrote, “Just like the body moving differently depending on the ideology that inhabits it,” people think differently in the rhetorical marketplace (Symbolic Action 8?) The world is organized around money, where money is the “God term,” as “the ultimate

motivation” (Burke *A Grammar* 355). MacIntyre eschews using “ideology” because he claims Marx changed the meaning, which is the meaning assumed. Instead, MacIntyre prefers “masks” and “concealments,” which provides a more demonstrable illustration. If one thinks in terms of ethics, rather than economics when encountering gifts and heirlooms, the path is much different.

MacIntyre declares, “The contemporary vision of the world, so I have suggested, is predominantly, although not perhaps always in detail, Weberian” (109). Interestingly, the phrase accorded in this project to describe the action one assumes for heirlooms, “ethic of responsibility,” initially comes from Max Weber’s speech, “Politics as a Vocation” given in 1919. Weber argued against the moderate Enlightenment project that denied God’s existence and ended the ethics of the Middle Ages, ushering in rationalism and the belief that everything in nature was under human control (de Villiers; Arnett et al.; Randall). Once there is no longer a Prime Mover and no final cause, all that remains is efficient cause, action becomes motion, and theories such as behaviorism emerge. As Randall confirms, “The eighteenth century was preeminently the age of faith in science” (279). For Aristotle (antiquity) “ethics and demand are contrary actions” (Arnett et al. “Dialogic Turn” 81). Rather than finding or developing an alternative to religion and the Catholic Church, the authoritative institution of the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment instead shifted faith to the power of reason and science as the new truth with method as its guide. The period commonly called the Enlightenment consisted of two variants: moderate and radical. Arnett, Fritz, and Holba submit that for Gadamer, “the radical Enlightenment points to truth, and the moderate Enlightenment points to control of the human environment based upon the word ‘method’” (116-117). It is the moderate Enlightenment that is both remembered and upheld by modernity, which a postmodern condition critiques.

According to Belk and Coon, “Weber argued that rationality is equally opposed by the otherworldly sphere of religion and by the inner-worldly sphere of love, which itself becomes a religion” (407). MacIntyre writes that the position of the seventeenth and eighteenth century modern was “conceit” (81), and as he further explains, “This conceit of course was, as such conceits always are, the sign of an unacknowledged and unrecognized transition from one stance of theoretical interpretation to another. The Enlightenment is consequently the period *par excellence* in which most intellectuals lack self-knowledge” (81). As MacIntyre further explicates, Aristotle’s three texts: *Ethics*, *Politics* and *De Anima* explain human action and which acts to perform (82). The problem was, and still is, that the philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries separated fact and value; moved fact to the realm of science and value to morality; and rejected a teleological perspective associated with an Aristotelian framework (77). In fact, Aristotle, once recognized as the father of economics, has come under modern scrutiny since the Enlightenment, where his work has been condemned as entirely ethical and lacking any connection to or understanding of market economics (Meikle 1-2;181-2). Because these men found their views of empiricism and natural science to be at odds with Aristotle’s classical views, an Aristotelian perspective was rejected, and, therefore, his theories of nature and human action were rendered irrelevant (81). Scott Meikle’s description is much more vivid: “Aristotelianism was torn up with vigor” (181), and Hume advocated that Aristotle’s work be thrown into the fire (182).

As Meikle explains, “Hume brought together the most radical [philosophical basis] ...the elimination of metaphysics, the separation of ethics from reason and its attachment exclusively to sentiment, the dissolution of the notions of substance and nature, and with them any notion of real and incommensurable thinghood” (181). Thus, the problem is the nature of exchange

(Meikle 12). Meikle explains, “The commensurability which the market has established in the exchange of products has come to be extended to everything as a matter of routine” (196). Meikle states that if something (he uses the example of orphans) does not have a market exchange value, experts will invent one as insurance companies and hospitals place a value on “a kidney, an education, a life” (195-196). Misreadings and misunderstandings of Aristotle Mumby proclaims the problem of the transition in the breakdown of the dualistic thought that “reconfigured the relationship between subject and object, mind and body, individual and society, and so forth” (103). Once there is no longer a Prime Mover and no final cause, all that remains is efficient cause, action becomes motion, and theories such as behaviorism emerge.

Christian theology, in stressing the rational, personal, and purposive acts of the Creation as the embodiment of the Creator’s pervasive will, had treated such principles as *scenic*. That is, they were not merely traits of human beings, but extended to the outer circumference of the ultimate ground. Hence, by the logic of the scene-act-ration, they were taken as basic to the constitution of human motives, and could be deduced from the nature of God as an objective, extrinsic principle defining the nature of human acts. But when the circumference was narrowed to naturalistic limits, the “Creator” was left out of account, and only the “Creation” remained (not as an act, however, but as a concatenation of motions), the narrowing of the circumference thus encouraged a shift from the stress upon “final cause” to the stress upon “efficient cause,” the kind of cause that would reside not in a “prime mover,” but in a “last mover” (as the lever with which a man moves a stone could be called the last mover of the stone)...For the naturalistic terminology, in eliminating the principles of personality and action from the ultimate ground of motives, leads consistently to ideals of definition that dissolve the personality and its actions into

depersonalization and motion respectively. In naturalism there is no Creator; and nature is not an act, but simply “the given.” (79)

Part the concern with the spirit of gifting, is based on a common definition and understanding of the word *reciprocity*. A different view of reciprocity as unity may provide a different understanding that doesn't snare reciprocity in a negatively connotative trap. If one views reciprocity not as a form of give-and-take, but as one more akin to the Greek word for reciprocity, *antipeponthos*, a certain bond emerges. As Meikle explains, Aristotle rejects “the Pythagorean view that justice in general is reciprocity;” and though Aristotle rejects reciprocity (*anipeponthos*) for both corrective and distributive justice, he accepts it for exchange justice as the proportion of things (Meikle 10). This word has caused debate in the arguments within economics and gift theories (see Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*; Polyani *The Great Transformation*; Meikle; Finley; Derrida). Economies do not exist outside of social relations, socially constructed markets.

The first part of Schrag's book, “The Problem of Being and the Question about God,” reevaluates classical doctrines of metaphysics and theological concepts and constructs within traditional conversations on the existence and essence of God. After contemplating influences from antiquity to postmodernity, Schrag considers implications from the ‘linguistic turn’ that condition a “new grammar of God-talk” (26) in poetics, which he accords to “the ordinary language school and by latter day hermeneuticists and deconstructionists who have highlighted the revelatory function of poetic thinking and given prominence to the role of narrative” (31-32). As Schrag explains, in his *Republic* Plato delimits ontology while the ultimate principle of the Good as *epekeina tes ousias* and his forms or essences go “beyond” and “otherwise than” being (58). Schrag suggests that emphasizing language and vocabulary within the resources of

narrative and storytelling may offer a different path for the gift than that of traditional philosophical commitments and their limitations (32; 105). Still, as Schrag indicates, the God of the poet is not the God of theology and religion (71). Thus, Schrag moves to his next section entitled “From Ontology to Ethics” in Part Two of his project and points to a semantics that invokes “the gift” as beyond ontology to an ethical transcendence of the “call of the other” and “otherwise than being” as posited by Levinas (72). Within Schrag’s explanation, the self is awakened through the rhetorical interruption of the presence of a gift from the other that calls for an ethic of responsibility that extends beyond the here and now—culminating in “the field of praxis” (95). This chapter concurs with Schrag’s discursive experiment and aligns with several of Schrag’s central arguments: the resuscitation of the gift from the exploits of deconstruction, the ethic of responsibility to the other, and the nuances of the gift. It is within this clearing that an heirloom resides. An heirloom as cultural and familial inheritance cannot precede the ethical; heirlooms reside within *nomos* as “symbolic action.”

Schrag’s project like that of Plato’s in the *Republic* and the fifth-century Neoplatonist, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, is “to think beyond or otherwise than being construed as essence, idea, or form” (11). Schrag’s alternative grammar moves the gift into the aneconomic as Mifsud does with rhetoric. As Mifsud suggests, “When rhetoric is put in touch with the legacies of the gift economy, we can imagine it [rhetoric] not so much as a tool but a gift” (101). It is reasonable to parallel a shift for the heirloom as inalienable wealth intended to remain outside of the exchange economy and the marketplace. Schrag’s work removes the gift from the realm of exchange relations, thus eliminating the paradox of the gift as obligatory reciprocity. It has already been explained that the recognition of an heirloom as inalienable wealth, moves it outside of the state of ownership. This is the attitude or manner in which an heirloom heralds.

Schrag finds further appropriate grammar for the gift by moving away from the meanings of ownership and exchange toward inheritance, “understanding of our relation to the earth by viewing it as that to which we belong” (109). In recognizing one’s relation to an heirloom, there is only reciprocity in *belonging*.

Schrag explains Heidegger’s move from questions of Being to a crossing out or erasure of Being as a move to “an event of appropriation that lies beyond the horizon of the ontic-ontological difference” (77). According to Derrida, after the deconstruction of the subject, what remains is “a certain responsibility” (qtd. in Schrag 78), an incredible affirmation for not only the gift and the heirloom but certainly for the human subject. Derrida’s claim is a clear “gesture to his former mentor, Emmanuel Levinas, [which] would seem at this stage to become rather pronounced” (78). From the works of the later Heidegger and the later Derrida, Schrag draws the “appeal to the grammar of event and appropriation” and the “appeal to responsibility” respectively, in which “we appear to be thrust into another space, a space of an ‘ethic,’ or more precisely a ‘protoethic,’ that is in some manner otherwise than Being” (78). Levinas adjusts Husserl’s acknowledgement of another to the other (*l’autre*) as an ethical demand (79-80). As Schrag explains, “The ethical move beyond ontology opens the self to responsibility. Subjectivity becomes translated into responsibility to and for the other” (80). Later in the book, the move is rewarded as “This opens a new perspective for talking about God, problematizing the concept of transcendence in classical theism, a concept that was based on the metaphysical determination of the infinite as the culminating point in the scale of being” (111).

The ethical discourse Schrag distinguishes offers several ruminations for heirlooms, such as his explanation that a presence of responsibility to the other for the ethical subject “is a presence and self-identity embedded within the temporal becoming of the self, occasioning an

experience of presence borne by a remembrance of that which has been and an anticipation of that which is yet to come. Temporality enters into the very constitution of the ethical subject” (85-86). Schrag explains that this identity is “*personal*,” interwoven within the historical moment as a “character” embedded within a narrative, who must negotiate and navigate the terrain of relationships and events (86), such is the identity of kin who are thrust into heirloom *praxis*, which often occurs around *epideiktikon*, such as calendrical celebrations and eulogies in death.

In his final section of Part Two, “From Ethics to Gift,” Schrag concludes that the gift precedes both the Good and the ethical. Schrag writes, “The Good in the thought of Plato and the ethical as conceived by Levinas are indeed otherwise than being. But the gift is older than either the Good or the ethical, surpassing both as a resource for our discourse and action” (104). A final point to make here from the first section of Schrag’s book is his explanation of Søren Kierkegaard’s identification of the ethical life as one “of decision and commitment” (86); so too is the ethic of responsibility for the descendants, who in presence (which subsumes both past and future) responds as “heirloom holder.” Schrag emphasizes the hope opened by the presence of the gift as unconditional love, as *agape*, relying primarily upon on the Christian Bible as well as Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*. Schrag writes, “The ethical subject is a subject that is present to itself both in its memory and in its hope. A self that has nothing to remember and nothing for which to hope is a self bereft of ethical substance” (87). Hope offers continuance as an heirloom also extends hope. Remembering is an embodied practice (Barad “After the End” 539).

There are certain life events that expect gifts, such as birthdays, bridal showers, and weddings. While an heirloom might be expected, it also might come as a surprise or might not be given at all but rather inherited following death. While heirlooms are generally thought to be passed-on following death, they may be dedicated to the next of kin during life, which may make

story-telling easier to convey. Furthermore, the response of the receiver would generally be somewhat different than gratitude. In fact, the response should be greater as there should be an immediate sense of responsibility associated with receiving an heirloom. As Schrag writes, “Nietzsche remained unable to free the gift from the economy of exchange relations that transform the gift into an expectation that solicits a return” (105). Schrag explains that such a return might be a simple act of appreciation but that even this places the gift within the service economy. He states, “Reduced to the status of filling a need, the gift functions as a coefficient of bondage within a matrix of exchange relations. This, according to Nietzsche, is the vicious cycle of gift exchange, illustrative, quite clearly, of Hegel’s celebrated master/servant dialectic” (105). Nietzsche’s thought revolves around dualism.

Moreover, even if there is a reciprocity, it cannot be equaled. The honor associated with an heirloom is familial but it is most often tied to first owner. For example, inherited war medals can never match or equal the sacrifice of those who earned or received them. To let the sacrifice be forgotten, however, is shameful and irresponsible. “They extend the achievements and competencies of celebrated forebears contemporary family members and they privilege contemporaries through the protective spirit of their ancestors” (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 240). The inheritor of a handmade gift cannot respond in an equal manner; however, expressing appreciation and pride in becoming the next owner is an honorable response. “Through them [heirlooms], people can lay claims to some of their [ancestors] innate skills and accomplishments...” (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 240).

Schrag recognizes that within the grammar of possession, dispossession, ownership, reciprocity and reward, one cannot move the gift outside of consumerist discourse within the foundation of production and exchange that considers the gift as private ownership (xv; 108). As

he writes, “Objects need first to be produced, distributed, and owned before they can be given away” (108). Thus, this discourse traps the gift. However, Schrag offers an alternative grammar of the gift, shifting first to those who give and receive, and suggesting that “the grammar of custodian and steward might be more fitting than that of owner in characterizing one’s relation to nature...To give a gift is to acknowledge the facticity of preexistent natural kinds, antedating their distribution in artificially constructed private and public spheres” (108-109). Schrag’s project like that of Plato’s in the Republic and the fifth-century Neoplatonist, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, is “to think beyond or otherwise than being construed as essence, idea, or form” (11). Schrag’s alternative grammar moves the gift into the aneconomic (Mifsud).

It is within praxial presence that the responsibility to the other in the advent of heirloom practices and performances can find meaning that can be communicated. Schrag states, “Our discourse and action is always responsive to prior discourse and action” (96). The heirloom as gift is offered, “through the existential givenness of discourse and action,” in the event of lived history through the call, “a soliciting presence,” from the other to which one must provide the “ethic of the fitting response” (99). This response, however, moves beyond the ethical to the semantics of the gift (101). It is here that this project parts ways by remaining within the ethical rather than moving into the religious realm, where Schrag hopes to “advance our investigations into a new semantics for talking about God” (105). This project has much human aims, yet it is still worth proceeding to an understanding of Schrag’s move from ethics to gift as a way to consider communication surrounding heirlooms.

Schrag indicates that his search, his project began with God and wound up with the gift. This dissertation project is not to be viewed as an inverse, where discussion of the gift winds up as a discussion of God. However, Schrag’s work provides space for understanding the

philosophical importance of the semantics of the gift and more general material discourse. As Schrag writes, “Things of the world, from a religious perspective, are gifts—tokens and bestowals not to be devalued. The natural kinds of nature are presented for our enjoyment and care” (93). In his next paragraph, Schrag continues to draw the parallels of gift and nature: “This interpretation of the sacramental principle opens the door to a new view of nature. Nature is no longer viewed as having value only through subjugation to the needs of the human species. It has an integrity of its own, not simply subject to human contrivance and control. It is a gift, donated to the sojourner along life’s way, entrusted to the human species for its stewardship” (93). The depiction and vocabulary of an heirloom as “donated to the sojourner” and “entrusted...for its stewardship” are integral to increasing the appreciation not only for heirlooms but for material objects in general as a way to challenge overconsumption and an ecology of objects, two topics discussed elsewhere in this project.

Schrag problematizes previous discourse on God-talk and analyzes the philosophy on gift-giving, gift-exchange, and gift-talk and the ideas and concepts that framed the gift in different eras, particularly theological, metaphysical, and ontological traditions in an effort to rescue the gift from a position of impossibility within the narrow straits of exchange relations. As Schrag explains in the last sentence of his book, “We began with the question about the meaning of God and we have ended up thinking and writing about the gift” (143). It is with Schrag’s grammar of the gift in demarcating the ontological and ethical with which this chapter aligns, moving heirlooms into the realm of praxis as Schrag does with the gift. Schrag explains that by delimiting ontology, one finds space to reformulate the question of ethics as the “call to responsibility an invocation to perform a fitting response” that holds priority over being but also delimits the ethical, suggesting that the gift antedates both the ontological and the ethical (104).

As Schrag explains, “The gift becomes manifest more decisively in the throes of narrative disclosure and rhetorical showing than in demonstrative proofs and formal argumentation. The gift is an event rather than a being. Events are told rather than inferred” (139). In such a horizon, the event of heirlooming (the giving and receiving of an heirloom) become epideictic.

An heirloom is hope in its anticipation. In his response to Kierkegaard and I Corinthians, Schrag writes, “Love is efficacious only when it is translated into works. Love is action. Love achieves its incarnation in the presence of praxis, where it conjoins with hope” (135). He adds, “Love binds together a working or acting with a hoping or anticipating” (136).

Part of the context surrounding the giving of an heirloom must be through love as Schrag identifies for the gift. This love is not the love of eros or philia, but agape love. It is love that covers but never suffocates. It is the love of sacrifice. As Schrag explains, “Such a love, in the guise of a gift that expects nothing in return, outside of the bounds of the economy of reciprocal social transactions, appears to have all of the features of an impossible ideal, given the fragility of the human condition” (132). As Schrag further explains, for Derrida and Kierkegaard, though from different perspectives, this cannot occur and will end in disenchantment. For Derrida, there is an impossibility of the gift in that once the gift is recognized as such, it fails to be a gift, and, instead, it becomes “an obligation demanding reciprocity” (Mifsud 90). In his reading of Derrida, Schrag interprets it as such: “The gift is annihilated in the moment it is given and received” (132). However, if the gift is an ethic of responsibility then as Schrag draws from Levinas, whose insight comes from Henri Bergson, “Responsibility is without concern for reciprocity” (Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 137).

Schrag moves to transcend the gift beyond consumer and moral properties; to free the gift from “the economy of interactions within our personal and social existence,” it becomes clear

that an heirloom must remain a qualified gift within the realm of human practice. Schrag allows the gift to become sacrifice. Heirlooms may symbolize sacrifice, but they cannot become sacrifice.

Chapter Four: Heirlooms after Hyperconsumption

“If it is said that the essential function of language is its capacity for poetry, we shall assume that the essential function of consumption is its capacity to make sense. Forget the idea of consumer irrationality. Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing, and shelter; forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty” (Douglas and Isherwood 41).

Chapter Four Overview

This Chapter considers economy and political economy as it aligns with the focus of curtailing consumption practices and replacing or reducing their impact with heirloom ritual (rhetorical) practices. Ethics are tied to practices and all communication holds ethical implications (Arnett et al. *Communication Ethics Literacy* 9). Capitalism was not meant to have an ethical component; human beings were to bring the ethic to capitalism (see Douglas and Isherwood). In similar fashion, postmodernity requires one to identify her ethical position as well as others and then enter into open dialogue (Arnett et al. 16). Economics, once the province of the private household, separate from the public polis, is now “political economy,” which pervades every aspect of life (Arendt; Bataille in Mifsud 10; Thames). Prior to the seventeenth century, economic was ethics (Randall; Thames). In his entry, “Political Identity,” Thames opens his contribution with his thesis on the shift of economies from antiquity to the present. He writes, “Economy in general was understood as the art of household management [*oikos*]; political economy was understood as the same art applied to the polis, or political entity. Before the 17th

century, economics was deemed a matter of ethics and politics and after the mid-19th century, a science” (584). As Thames indicates economics in antiquity was an “art;” while no longer an art, economics also not a science. Economics is not ethically neutral nor is the study the same everywhere over time; at least since Thomas Kuhn, there is recognition of the social sciences as “pre-paradigmatic” (*The Scientific Revolution*). Thames describes how differently a person found identity in traditional society prior to modernity and individualism, a relevant point throughout this project and discussed in this Chapter to encourage a return to engagement within a traditional understanding of the qualities of the past within a narrative framework.

Rather than a result of capitalism, Appadurai asserts that a materialist culture and worldwide access to consumption goods “was a *prerequisite*” (37). This follows a historical trajectory of inheritance. Inheritance as a process occurs across societies and cultures with indications that such transfers existed in the archaic era (Curasi “Inheritance” 798). Inherited assets were considered necessary for survival in preindustrial societies, and certain heirlooms, such as china and silver, denoted status and prestige (798-799). Beginning around the sixteenth century, the inheritance process became less essential following the advent of the consumer culture and government assistance programs, which afforded other avenues for identity and sustenance (799). Demonstrating one’s identity through consumption behavior became more popular than the possession of family heirlooms. Although medieval and early modern families transferred more material objects, contemporary middle-class and upper-class families still engage in the inheritance process and partake in heirloom practices (800). Even ordinary objects can be rich with meaning when placed within a narrative; the presence of materiality invites narrative elements within a context (Hurdley 723). Families are not impotent in determining the ethical and material goods they pass forward.

Chapter Four Introduction

Barad's opening quote for this project asserts a reminder that people must assume responsibility for the past they inherit. Harold suggests that "we do have some choice about what kinds of systems we want to inherit. Consumption is never an act of passive reception" (29). In a similar vein, assuming a different view of democracy as a rhetorical phenomenon instead of the traditional view that rhetoric emerged from the polis, opens a different path, which leads to a different understanding of practices (Walker). Arnett and Holba offer a call to consider perspectives from outside of the status quo. They write, "Our critical insights come from assuming the vantage point of difference and contrasting perspectives, and then coming to a judgment in terms of the good offered by a given perspective" (39). Altering the background allows one to attend to foreground practices and their adjustment. Because postmodernity is not an accumulation of history and time but an understanding that all pasts are present though fragments, this means pre-modern culture still resides in our midst. Therefore, a claim for a return to more traditional practices is not an impossibility. One cannot return to the past, but taking the time to learn from the past offers insight into current processes. Douglas and Isherwood exclaim that consumption is "...the vital source of the culture of the moment" (37). Culture, including its political and economic practices are rhetorical demonstrations, meaning they are matters of choice.

This chapter confronts a question that seeks to (even if ever-so-slightly) counter endless, or perhaps needless, consumption through the *praxis* of heirlooming: The question: "How might one find an object worth keeping, let alone enriching, when lacking functionality and/or continual appeal?" is resonant with Harold's inquiry and her efforts for "building on rather than repudiating what we have" (18). Finally, considering heirlooms an ethic of responsibility guides

disagreement with work of Türe and Ger that renovation for self-expression and updating heirlooms for temporal relatability are the best answers for heirloom continuation.

Amidst a contemporary consumerist culture with an insatiable material appetite for new and on-trend designs and styles, where aesthetics trumps function, there also exist old, mundane objects, often of little economic value that may also lack utility. Harold submits that nothing big box retail stores have to offer “is necessarily up to the difficult task of inspiring what we might think of as a genuine emotional bond between a person and an object such that the former feels obligated and committed to the latter—that is, the kind of attachment that inspires stewardship” (135). Stewardship is an ethical practice that goes beyond the individual. While ethics find ground in emotions, modern ethics are personal preference, a theory of “emotivism” detailed by MacIntyre. In humanistic psychology, the focus is on the internal (Arnett, 1981, 207), on the self where dialogue invites a person to experience “feelings” and “attitudes” within him or herself (204). In a phenomenological approach, “feelings” and “attitudes” are experienced “between” the persons and not inside of them (Arnett, “The Status” 204). Instead of realizing oneself and recognizing one’s individual position, dialogue might require a person to abandon one’s motives and might incur internal struggle (205). As Arnett stated, “dialogue is honesty in relation to what is called for by the rhetorical situation ‘between’ persons” (205). Meaning is found in the between.

Prior to modernity, industrialization, and mass production, the aesthetics of everyday, commonplace objects were not demonstrable because life was also not mechanistic. However, craftsmanship was a common, embodied practice. Harold concedes that “true craftsmanship has become rare in an age when the trades are in decline and everything...is treated as temporary and disposable” (Harold 125, 128). Arnett and Holba attest to the importance of practices from the

metaphor of a craftsman. The authors explain, “The craftsman understands that there is a meaning-centered story behind practices that announce the ‘why,’ the importance of a given craft” (3). There must be purpose and meaning for practices to continue when heirlooming is understood as “a given craft.” Finding a story and adding storied layers to an heirloom narrative initiates commitment.

With the arrival of the capitalist market came the advent of advertising to encourage continual consumption. Aesthetic capitalism is a more recent approach that makes even the mundane an alluring option that requires no “enduring commitment” (Harold 20). Meikle explains that “current economics is a matter of style rather than substance” (195). For example, a simple can opener was once that—nothing more than a device that effectively opened cans. Today, can openers are manual or electric, as well as offered in practically any color; an opener can be personalized; an opener can be monogrammed; have extra padding for arthritic hands; be customized with a college logo; as well as offer the buyer not just assistance in the ability to open cans but also suggest a gateway to a pleasurable experience of can opening. Harold caustically remarks: “In the new aesthetic world order, we are invited to ask ourselves, ‘What does my stapler say about me?’” (84). In the democratization of design, consumers are led to believe they can lead a fuller life by purchasing a cool stapler. Objects are rhetorical as they have communicated differently in different spaces at different times. Harold concurs that objects have not held the same meaning “across the historical evolution of capitalism,” (21) which is indicative of the rhetorical nature of the marketplace.

Thames writes that “the machine metaphor prevailed when modern science eliminated the organism of medieval thought” (“Nature’s Physician”). The Newtonian Scientific Revolution quantified nature; organic and holistic thought were replaced with mechanistic and atomistic

thought. The “individual” became a bundle of desires whose “identity” is tied to the stream of “goods” he is persuaded to purchase, then discard for something new (disregarding use-values they retain). Thus capitalism’s immensely productive machinery is maintained in perpetual motion (Thames “Political Identity” 586). “A product’s use-value is natural and given; its exchange-value is conventional and problematic because different products and the labors producing them are incommensurable.”

One cannot form an identity alone. In his entry...Thames explains that capitalism is maintained by individuals, who connects themselves to the objects they acquire—but then easily disposes of for new objects despite the previous ones’ ability to still function (“Political Economy” 586). Nonetheless, as Thames states, these objects, for at least a temporary period, provide the buyer with a sense of identity. Belk writes that the things one owns forms, develops, and supports identity throughout life, and identity is likewise developed and defined by the “passive receipt of objects” (150). The goal or purpose of this chapter is to argue for finding, keeping, and maintaining heirlooms while also extending the practice to other objects in general. to keep adding chapters to an object’s “social biography” (Kopytoff). According to Woodward, Georg Simmel, one of the foremost classical sociologists, “had the most explicit interest in how material culture defined the nature of modern experience” in comparison to other theorists of his time like Marx (20). Simmel recognized that modern society was inundated with goods, and he realized that all of these goods needed to be distinguished from the myriad of other objects surrounding modern lives. Simmel acknowledged the importance of materiality with which people surround themselves to shape their identity.

Objects hold a certain power (Douglas and Isherwood; Woodward). Western culture, particularly American culture, has a tendency to stuff closets, cram basements, fill garages, and

pack attics with objects that can even spill over into rental storage units. In other words, people have so much stuff, they have to pay to store their stuff (Harold). Harold claims many Americans cannot park in their garages because the space has been filled with objects and boxes containing even more objects (30). In the extreme, hoarding is a disorder, yet minimalism is frequently regarded as modern, chic, and even morally superior. Harold claims that the minimal movement is “often dressed in aesthetic or even spiritual garb” (Harold 32). Keeping one’s possessions to an ideal average sounds respectable, but there is no ideal or specific number of objects one should own; however, many consumers dance around excess. Just as there are consumer practices, there are “simplicity practices” and so-called experts who are paid to help command the excess (Harold 32). Oftentimes, the effects of consumption lead to a demand for control through the process of organization and disposition. Harold writes, “Modern consumers appear to be obsessed with buying, collecting, organizing, displaying, storing, and increasingly downsizing their belongings” (31). Any of these practices taken to the extreme can be detrimental to one’s well-being like hoarding, as already mentioned, but also becoming, for instance, an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). In fact, Harold admits that the minimalist movement is too complex for her to cover in her book (34)—a strange paradox of minimalism bearing too much.

Harold does mention several criticisms of the minimalist trend, such as the loss of memories and identity with the displacement of objects, but she also touches upon the oppressiveness and monetary cost of the minimalist lifestyle. In regard to economic cost, Harold explains that someone who does away with most of her objects must hold the capacity to simply re-purchase objects on an as-needed basis, something reserved for those with disposable income (35). She describes it as a form of “potlatch,” a ritual performed by Native Americans of the

Northwest who destroy any leftovers—any excess (Harold; Wallendorf and Arnould 26) to display disposal simply because they can. as part with just “Like potlatch participants who get rid of possessions purely to show they have the ability to do so, Kondo and her followers celebrate less the actual objects they keep than the empowerment they enjoy when discarding the ones they no longer want” (72).

Also, Harold insists, “Memories are one of the central reasons we decide to keep certain objects and not others” (35). Memory is a primary argument for heirloom guardianship that is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. However, heirlooms as memory objects are worth touching upon here for their mnemonic value as a reason to keep and attend to them. Since one is shaped by the past, one is, hence, shaped by memory. Collective memory is about much more than the past; it is “a vision in bold relief of the past as it is woven into the present and future” (Zelizer 217). Gilchrist submits, “Heirlooms are understood as objects which served as repositories for collective memory, representing the material emblems of ancestral past” (170). The objects one holds communicate memory and identity.

Maurice Halbwaches (a student of Henri Bergson and Émile Durkheim) developed the concept of *mémoire collective* in the 1920s that is still significant to current memory studies (Erl 303). As Belk writes, “Possessions are a convenient means of storing the memories and feelings that attach to our sense of past...an heirloom may record and recall family heritage just as a historical monument may help to create a sense of a nation’s past” (148). Heirlooms invoke particular feelings of nostalgia, heritage, and sentiment, which kindle strong emotions and intimate connections with the past (Maurantonio 87). Turkle explains how the personal objects and paraphernalia in the “memory closet” she went through weekend after weekend at her grandmother’s apartment in Brooklyn helped her to understand members of her family and to

connect herself with her family's past, "a clue to my personal identity" (*Evocative 3*)—and to her father, whom she never knew. A person's sense of self is embedded in a collection of memories and pasts, not just those of one's personal experiences but those of an entire network of relations, including, of course, ancestors but also those who are not blood or biological relatives. For example, an individual has connections to various geographical locations simply because of where previous friends and family members have lived.

Heirlooms provide a sense of belonging; they express a way of being a part of something larger than the self. Belk references William James to emphasize the collective of humanity. James writes, "And our bodies themselves, are they simply ours, or are they us? (qtd. in Belk). An anecdote entitled "Suitcase" by Olivia Dasté in Turkle's edited book describes how the author was forced to hastily find memory objects of her grandmother, carefully and quickly gathering particular items of meaning from her grandmother's small apartment in Bordeaux as Dasté's mother hurriedly and dismissively tossed the grandmother's belongings into the trash. Dasté's grandmother passed rather suddenly, and so in the fresh and poignant midst of loss, Dasté was forced to choose objects from her grandmother's personal items as makeshift heirlooms. Dasté describes the objects as having little market value, but they are reminiscent of her grandmother and of special times spent together. People do not want memories of loved ones to fade, yet they usually do over time; heirlooms provide tangible, concrete reminders as meaningful containers of memories (Belk). The suitcase full of the grandmother's things serves as an enduring reminder. Schrag's work replaces loss with the giving of love. Heirlooms are a way to preserve relationships and the love that remains when bodily proximity is no longer possible; they maintain connections with predecessors and performers within a family narrative.

In his article, Baldwin references a letter written to Walter Benjamin from Max Adorno, where Adorno states that forgetting is reification (382). To forget is to reify. Adorno writes that “objects become purely thing-like the moment they are retained for us without the continued presence of their other aspects: when something of them has been forgotten” (Adorno qtd. in Baldwin 382). What might Adorno mean by “their other aspects?” Perhaps part of what Adorno wanted to convey is the importance of conveying the stories of objects. In his article notes, Baldwin describes Benjamin’s insistence that part of forgetting is not telling stories. As Benjamin writes in *Illuminations* regarding mechanized art, “It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences” (Benjamin qtd. in Baldwin 392n1). Through stories, people are not merely passive consumers but become “active producers of meaning” (Hurdley 718-719). Through stories, people are also honored and remembered.

The concept of reification was advanced by Marxist Georg Lukács. Marx’s economic theory brought social and political awareness to the complexity of commodities and the deception of commodity fetishism in industrial capitalism, and though he addressed the bourgeoisie and proletariat, he offered little comment on consumers. Lukács, following in the Marxist tradition, explained that Marx’s radical revolution failed to occur due to the totalizing effects of consumption on society through reification, which translates as “the thing-making,” where everything, including people and their practices, are commodified (Harold 24). As Chapter Two expresses, treating nature and culture as lifeless matter to control has caused extraordinary implications to the detriment of relationships with others and with the planet. Martin Jay describes reification as “the petrification of living processes into dead things, which appeared as an alien ‘second nature’” (qtd. in Harold 24). In their theories on commodity-

exchange, Marx, Simmel, and Lukács argue that what happens in the market spills over, where everything becomes commodified, fetishized, reified.

As Thamus writes the machine metaphor prevailed when modern science eliminated the organism of medieval thought (“Nature’s Physician”). Workers in the factories were transformed into interchangeable human parts of the machine in this most dehumanizing of cultures, and all aspects of life, including art, came to be patterned after the machine (Stratton 25). The metaphor of man as a machine became the model of efficiency. Reification in fact reifies itself and also relies on the Cartesian bifurcation of reified and non-reified realm and ‘dualist philosophy’ of oppositions (Baldwin 383).

Thingification, a morphing of objectification and reification, where all relations are turned into a means for human control, is avoided through communicative *praxis*. According to thing theory, people only become aware of objects when they malfunction, no longer appear pristine, or are recognized as outdated and outmoded (Brown; Coole and Frost). At that point, objects are demoted to the realm of the mundane (if they weren’t already) and are more readily and easily discarded. Rather than devaluing objects, even those of little monetary worth or limited utilitarian value, one must attend to materiality as “focal things,” which requires continual care and communication (Heidegger; Borgmann). Appadurai states: “Taking my lead from Veblen, Douglas and Isherwood, and Baudrillard, I suggest that consumption is eminently social, relational, and active rather than private, atomic, or passive” (31). Maintaining and extending consumption as such requires *praxis*. Baldwin believes in the importance of attending to “Marx’s notion that ‘commodity exchange begins where community life ends.’”

Communicative ethics attends to community. Heirloom as a rhetorical art brings unity.

Considered the “founding father” of the field of consumer studies (McCracken 80), Veblen positions goods exclusively as status symbols. He views “conspicuous consumption” as a function of social class and consumerism. Apparently, most of Veblen’s critique was lost on those to whom it was directed, but the book made a lasting impact. Douglas and Isherwood debunk Veblen’s theory, arguing that all goods communicate meaning, and proclaiming: “Let us put an end to the widespread and misleading distinction between goods that sustain life and health and others that service the mind and heart—spiritual goods” (49). These are all part of the human condition. Essentially, Douglas and Isherwood restored the lives of objects. They realized that goods “also make and maintain social relationships,” which as they announce provides “a much richer idea of social meanings than mere individual competitiveness” (39). Later, Appadurai observes the importance of the context to illustrate objects (13). Douglas and Isherwood and Harold flip the guilt of luxury, such as Veblen’s symbol status claim as well as Bataille’s “accursed share.” Part of the allure of heirlooms is found in their limited use. Celebrations are marked with the use of special objects. “Also implied is the idea that expenditure on luxuries is slightly immoral. This is ever-tempting but misleading, as we shall see. Part of our task will be to restore the neutrality of luxuries in the eyes and hearts of economists” (69). Having more empathy toward heirlooms might keep them from re-commodification and extend their biographies entwined with the family narrative.

To return to Harold’s facetious example of how a stapler defines consumer identity, the point Harold makes is somewhat in jest, but she, of course, recognizes that a person’s things, just like a family’s heirlooms, convey identity. Because of Harold’s aim, which is to encourage attachment, not necessarily rebuke consumption, one must consider how she wishes to portray herself and what her things convey to others. As this author sits at her desk, which happens to be

a desk that was her father's and once was a desk in a Union Railroad office, there is an old stapler sitting on the desk (and, to be honest, quite a few other things). The stapler happens to be the stapler from her grandmother's office. What is immediately noticeable, are the stapler's features. The stapler is heavy and cannot be held in one hand to staple. The weight of the stapler makes it impossible to just toss aside. The size of the stapler makes it difficult to keep in a drawer. This is an imposing stapler.

The stapler was made by Boston Wire Stitcher Company and has "Made in the United States" engraved on the bottom. It has patent numbers and a pending patent number etched into its base. A quick Internet search indicates that the company has a legacy that formed in 1896. Thomas Briggs, the creator, was a stapler pioneer and designed the first foot-operated wire binding machine in 1903. Boston Wire Stitcher Company dedicated all of its facilities to the war effort during WWII. The point is, this stapler will probably outlive this writer as it has outlived previous owner(s); and now there's a story behind it. This is a stapler one can be proud to display and has managed to acquire heirloom status, transitioning from various desks over what might be nearly one hundred years, becoming a communal, collective practice. Stapling is not a practice. However, this stapler has stapled many important documents, including ones for this project. Even Briggs, as the stapler inventor, certainly had those before him to credit for his stapling success, standing upon rather than above tradition.

Aura and affect are two motifs in Harold's work. Once described pejoratively, object attachment, primarily since the foremost 'material turn,' has been reclaimed as a necessary companion in subject-object relations (Harold). In the late 1920s, pediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott was the first to view attachment to objects as normal human development; beforehand, object attachment was viewed as "pathological or fetishistic" (Myers 560).

Woodward explains that Winnicott presented “transition objects” as “projection,” from self to object, and “introjection,” from object to self, as a dialectical process for transferring meaning in people-object relations (140). Psychologist Elizabeth Myers’s phenomenological study suggests that “well-functioning adults” have “special possessions” and that such items represent “a person’s growth and change,” whether “situational” (561), such as dealing with a death in the family, or “developmental,” such as a rite of passage (563). While these cherished or special possessions are various keepsakes with personal meaning, Myers notes “developmental similarities” among the informants in her study as anticipated stages that transcend the individual. In addition, personally “cherished possessions” and “sentimental objects” are likely heirloom targets (Heisley and Cours 132).

Harold critiques harmful denotative associations to attachment. She explains: “With these objects, attachment has the potential to inspire a sense of obligation, a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the object of one’s attachment” (42). While Harold does not discuss inheritance practices or heirlooms, she does address how stories provide a deeper and more meaningful attachment that extends the mnemonic and symbolic value of objects well beyond the short-term. Designating heirlooms as inalienable wealth deems these objects as irreplaceable; however, maintaining this status requires inheritance practices to preserve kinship attachment for the future. Heirloom practices provide a hermeneutic space for *praxis* and *phronesis* within the home that may counter hyperconsumption by attuning to collaborative, communicative meaning-making with materiality in the collective giving and sharing of mundane objects (Schrag; Harold; Bennett; Curasi et al.; Douglas and Isherwood). Heirloom prominence opposes hyperconsumption and hyper-disposal.

Harold suggests people may even learn from hoarders not how to avoid hoarding but rather how to acquire object empathy. Harold similarly problematizes the stereotype of hoarding as a consumption disorder. Harold is not suggesting that people should practice hoarding; however, she does suggest that hoarders have an empathy toward objects that elevates even the mundane to a proper appreciation (49). Current research shows the extreme empathy of hoarders, an empathy marked by “tremendous compassion and even a degree of awe” (Harold 75). Studies of hoarders continually show their incredible sense of connectedness and intense observational quality (Harold). Hoarders seem to embody the type of “intra-action” and “entanglement” that Barad subscribes as well as the deep appreciation and sense of wonder toward objects that Bennett, Greenblatt, and Witmore encourage. In addition, Harold explains there are some hoarders who believe they are “archivists of their family or the era in which they live—a responsibility they take very seriously” (50). Empathy may supplement an ethic of responsibility toward heirlooms.

As a rhetorician, Harold repeatedly returns to established definitions and the etymology of words for further understanding of her topics. She explains that “empathy also means the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it” (75). According to Harold research claims that hoarders overwhelmingly demonstrate the characteristic of empathy though it is quite limited in general consumer culture. Because hoarders are so attached to the objects that surround them, removal of objects as “self-extensions” is akin to act of violence against oneself (51). Harold suggests: “Empathy may be one step toward interrupting the dual fantasies that we are fully ever in control and that durable goods ever really disappear” (Harold 75). Listening is an essential ethical and empathic component to communicative *praxis*.

Another word, “imagination,” is also worth engaging in praxis. Thames brings attention to Adam Smith’s avocation of ‘imagination’ for economic motivation (“Political Identity” 586). *Praxis* and narrative opens imagination, which encourages more imagination. Thames writes that imagination is “the ability to see ourselves in others’ situations” (586). The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that “including remembered objects and situations” is part of defining imagination. The capacity for imagination is dulled in a culture that is “amusing itself to death,” through television and screens that imagines for its viewers—to reference Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Postman claims, “As a culture moves from orality to writing to printing to television, its ideas of truth move with it.” The realm of truth is found within language. As Calvin Troup asserts, “An individual can ask the question of truth and attempt to answer it only through language” (127-129). Modernity loses sight of the question. Modernity tends to conflate truth and reality, but, in reality, truth disappears. Having more empathy toward others is certainly an admirable quality. While the stapler is obviously a mundane object, many heirlooms hold allure because of their quality and scarcity. Celebrations are marked with the use of special objects.

Influenced by Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, and Barthes, Baudrillard added a sign value to Marx’s use-value and exchange value, citing traditional Marxism as too limited to critically make sense of a postmodern consumerist culture. Woodward marks Baudrillard’s first two books as “sociological in nature,” where he “tries to come to grips with the special problems associated with abundance, excess, signification, and structure” (73-74). Putting the word “object” into Baudrillard’s terms, an object develops from “a thing that is no longer just a product or a commonality, but essentially a sign in a system of signs of status” (Appadurai 45)

Douglas and Isherwood state, “High-quality goods, like lace frills and best china, are pure markers...quality itself is scarce...All goods to some extent emanate messages about rank, sets of goods even more so. The class of pure rank-markers could be the high-quality versions that serve no other purpose, like the best porcelain, the family heirlooms, ancestral portraits” (85). Bringing out cherished objects for special events is part of what sets both the objects and the events apart from others. Goods do not exist in vacuums; meaning occurs within the interplay of all goods.

One’s identity is likewise entangled with objects as those objects are connected to and “contaminated” by others (Belk). MacIntyre finds recourse within embodied virtues directed toward the “common good” to illustrate how moral precepts were once impersonal standards within a context of practical beliefs and supporting practices within community (xiv-xv). He explicates:

In many pre-modern, traditional societies it is through his or her membership in a variety of social groups that the individual identifies himself or herself and is identified by others. I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover ‘the real me.’ They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties. (33)

This abandonment of tradition, MacIntyre submits, is problematic for this historical moment, which advocates decision-making as personal preference through what he terms “emotivism,” detaching oneself from communal ties. It is unethical to dismiss or ignore what matters to others (“Communication Ethics” Arnett 31).

Contemporary interest in discovering family lineage (Mason 29) speaks to people's need for community and identity. Human beings are social animals. Based on popularity, online heritage websites show that individuals are motivated to know their extended familial and ancestral ties (Hendry and Ledbetter 117). There is increased interest for genealogical information, most likely due to convenient Internet services offering virtual connections and DNA testing to unite relatives, as well as television shows geared toward "those searching for their roots" (Hendry and Ledbetter 117; Mason). Sites like *Ancestry* connect kin members and allow registered users to access format, such as uploaded personal documents, newspaper articles, and photographs. One can find old, handwritten letters, pictures of heirlooms, and access to birth and death records, as well as census and immigration information and more on ancestors and living relatives. The site announces, "There's No Better Way to Find Generations of Your Family and Their Stories" (*ancestry.com*). Heirlooms are fashionable curation elements, collectibles, and identity markers in an age where antiques, vintage, retro, throwback, and eclectic styles are popular (Türe and Ger).

The juxtaposition of old and new décor is a prominent renovating blend presented on television, such as on house flip reality shows and the various home remodeling series on entire networks like Home and Garden Television (HGTV). Other shows, such as *Pawn Stars*, *American Pickers*, and *Antiques Road Show* all highlight the marketplace value of objects; still, through questions of origin and use, these programs and their hosts also emphasize the importance of the narrative—of the storied object. These shows capture and share the utilitarian function, the design appeal, and the context surrounding an object's formation. One may search for, sell, and buy pre-owned goods on well-known sites like eBay, but there are many others that have followed suit like Mercari, Poshmark, and TheRealReal, which offers luxury goods at a

discount. Local antique shops, second-hand shops, and familiar non-profit options like Salvation Army and Goodwill are common places for donations but also for purchasing unique items with the added benefit of helping others. While these purchases are certainly consumption practices, Curasi et al. declare, “Consumer goods, the ubiquitous material of consumer culture, is a natural scaffold from which to build family rituals (“Ritual” 260). Once brought into the home, these objects attend decommodification rituals (Price et al.). Of course, one must also remember their own stash of hidden goods and those of family members’, as well as those objects that surround them in their daily lives. Often, family do not need to look further than their own basements and attics “may have lain dormant for years” (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 246).

An ethic of responsibility moves against heirloom renovation as reification. Harold critiques the popularity of purging perhaps more than hyperconsumption. In fact, her central question guiding her inquiry relates to “building rather than repudiating our attraction and attachment to objects” (18). Throughout her book, she draws upon the effects of popular organization guru, Marie Kondo, her Kondo Method, and her devoted “konverts” (69). Harold explains that the “method essentially performs a highly aestheticized ritual of expenditure” (69). Overindulgence has consequences. Kondo’s method is to hold an object in one’s hands, and if there is a spark of “joy,” the object should be retained (70). If not, out it goes. Harold describes the social media pictures of people, who have conversely indulged in Kondo’s method, surrounded by piles of garbage bags full of purged objects. Harold states, “The KonMari Method ritualizes, aestheticizes, and even fetishizes disposal” (72). While Harold insists this is not Marie Kondo’s intention, the real “joy” is generated through disposing rather than keeping items (72). While there will always be waste, the current culture is wasteful in its waste. In her introduction, Harold describes several artists and unsettling art exhibits that have brought awareness to the

gluttony of garbage and how when one puts her trash out to be hauled away the next morning, much of that garbage never truly goes away; it continues to exist, and in existence, there are effects.

Harold offers what she presents as a “practical way” to think through the entanglement of humans and materiality “as an opening up of the life cycle of objects” (17). While Harold does not address heirlooms directly, she advises that within an object’s “life cycle,” there are many ways to consider and reconsider the position and path of the object, such as the movement from “inception, production, use, disposal, and all points in between,” further arguing, “These moments each offer opportunities for new connections, new configurations, and perhaps new choices” (13). Objects involved in practices and shaped by narrative avoid becoming refuse. Douglas and Isherwood explain that goods in relation to other goods are a part of a communication system. Harold dedicates a chapter in her book, “The Value of Story: Extending the Value of Objects” to discuss how to develop powerful stories to maintain attachment. Determining if an object sparks joy in an instant is an efficient form of disposal. Joy is not fleeting like happiness; joy is an emotion that is cultivated, not contrived through consumption. Harold explains, “In a consumerist culture, wants and needs collapse into both being essential to “the good life.” However, ‘consumerism’s ability to satisfy people’s quest for happiness, has failed to deliver” (3). As Becker speculates, “Psychotherapy is such a growing vogue today because people want to know why they are unhappy in hedonism and look for the faults within themselves” (268).

The translation of the Greek word for happiness, *eudaimonia*, naturally has various definitions that are not necessarily synonymous with a contemporary English understanding of *happiness*. Arendt that for the Greeks freedom (found in the polis) was “...felicity, *eudaimonia*,

which was an objective status depending first of all upon wealth and health” (31). Today parents might (foolishly) say, “I just want my kids to be happy.” There is no guarantee of happiness and no way to cultivate happiness. Happiness has never been a virtue. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.22). In their study, “Joy as a Virtue: The Means and Ends of Joy,” Pamela Ebstynne King and Federic Defoy, authors for Thrive Center for Human Development, Fuller Theological Seminary write: “In order to promote scholarship on joy and to elucidate its transformative nature, we discuss joy in light of discipleship, vocation, suffering, justice, and eschatology and identify issues for research” (308). In antiquity, ancient philosophers theorized over an understanding of ideas, including virtue and the virtues, happiness, and the soul. As MacIntyre argues in his chapter, “Some Consequences of the Failure of the Enlightenment Project:”

The problems of modern moral theory emerge clearly as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment project. On the one hand the individual moral agent, freed from hierarchy and teleology, conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in his moral authority. (62)

Because modern moralists eliminated the traditional morality and the nature of teleology as well as “ancient categorical character” with the authority of “divine law,” the inheritance of individualism finds its basis in Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism followed by Kant’s practical reason. Kondo’s method is largely utilitarian: “attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain” reformulated by Bentham to appear as though providing a *telos* with only two motives (MacIntyre 60-61). Here is an example of the inheritance of Descartes’ bifurcation, separating the misconceived world into oppositions and developing morality from psychology— “a pseudo-concept” (MacIntyre 63, 64). Interestingly, as MacIntyre conveys, John Stuart Mill, who had been a devout follower of Bentham, experienced a “nervous breakdown” that resulted in Mill’s

recognition “that it was Bentham’s concept of happiness that needed reforming” (61). Despite Mill’s attempts at reformulating happiness, MacIntyre writes “that the notion of human happiness is not a unitary, simple notion and cannot provide us with a criterion for making our key choices” (61). Thus, happiness cannot be so simply, easily, neatly divided into happy versus *the* alternative not happy. As MacIntyre inquires, the question becomes ““But which pleasure, which happiness ought to guide me?”” (62). To follow MacIntyre’s examples, it stands to reason that drinking a beer produces another pleasure than swimming at a beach. One is seemingly at an impasse just as Aristotle found himself on use-value in relation to exchange-value. There is no conversion rate for quantity to quality and vice versa. To hold an heirloom in one’s hands and determine if it provides “joy” is a “conceptual fiction” (MacIntyre 64), deluded by the impropriety of what MacIntyre calls “emotivism.”

Aristotle’s description of the good is rhetorical. MacIntyre states that “the good” for Aristotle “is at once local and particular...” (148). For Aristotle, the good is *eudaimonia*, which as MacIntyre states is translatable as “blessedness, happiness, prosperity” (148). MacIntyre continues, “It is the state of being well and doing well and being well, of a man’s being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine” (148). While Aristotle does not make his explanation objective, he does make clear that the virtues lead one toward human *telos*, which is the ultimate aim, comprising as MacIntyre suggests “a complete human life lived at its best” (149). The example of the United States *Declaration of Independence*, and its most well-known sentence compiled by America’s forefathers and authored and penned by Thomas Jefferson: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness.” Seemingly a slight confusion of the reading of the Preamble holds enormous

consequences: Americans are not guaranteed happiness; instead, they should all have the chance, the opportunity, the possibility to gain happiness if they can. Happiness is an emotion or state of mind; it is a choice. Therefore, one may choose to be happy or not to be happy. In Aristotelian framework, happiness is not pursued for itself. Common today is something like the phrase, “I just want my kids to be happy.” Thus, one may see the problem of quitting something because one is not happy. There is no standard to which one might align. The idea is similar to Aristotle’s in that happiness is not defined and laid out in objective steps toward its actualization; rather, happiness is enjoyment and for Aristotle that associates with “the achievement of excellence in activity” (MacIntyre 160). Activities will vary, but there is a certain understanding of excellence within particular activities. However, the enjoyment of the activity is not excellence, but rather the performance. For example, one does not prone to enjoy arithmetic if one’s performance suffers. The concept of happiness does not behold “a criterion for making our key choices” (MacIntyre 63).

This chapter continues to argue for an ethic of responsibility for heirlooms that consists in their possible inclusion in practices not only if they maintain use-value; however, if heirlooms no longer have a utilitarian function, they, along with kin, benefit through display rather than disposal. In addition, while some heirlooms may also benefit from rejuvenation and preservation, renovating or modifying an heirloom for one’s personal taste or pleasure defies ethical practice and defaces an heirloom, causing disruption to a family’s narrative.

Meikle writes that there is a “*nomos-phasis* gap which divides use value and exchange value” (187). The current market operates on utility, not use-value (Meikle 190). Marx relayed that “[u]nder capitalism, objects garner their power not as a result of their use value but from their exchange-value—that is, the place they hold in a larger economy” (Harold 21). His ultimate

concern was that people commodified themselves in their labor to the capitalist, and unlike the craftsman, proletariats became alienated from the processes and products, which increased under Fordism and Taylorism, and today results in many manufacturers never experiencing the final products of their labor. Harold writes, “For Marx, this alienation from the things we make amounts to a fundamental separation from our very humanity” (22). Thames explains, “A product's use-value is natural and given; its exchange-value is conventional and problematic because different products and the labors producing them are incommensurable,” thus, as Thames adds, “Exchange-value therefore varies, subject to persuasion” (584). Heirlooms often obscure use-value though they may retain exchange-value. Heirlooms are old things or marked to live to become old things one day. An episode of *Antiques Road Show* always conveys anticipation for the art historian or auction-house expert to reveal the worth in the current market. When episodes are reruns, the worth is often updated to reveal the latest worth in the open market, which will have risen, fallen, or held.

Because most viewers are laypeople who may be amateur collectors or just enjoy seeing the interesting objects shown and discussed, there is a sense of consternation as to the worth of some items, and the audience is surprised with the object's owner or disappointed along with her if her object turns out to be worthless. However, oftentimes, at least to save face, the owner claims the monetary worth is irrelevant because the object has been in the family for generations or because of the object's sentimental value. Typically, there is nothing efficient about heirlooms. Many heirlooms might be direct indications of the false modern narrative of “progress.” In other words, there is something in their form or function is better than what an individual might purchase in today's marketplace. For example, spade, knife

Douglas and Isherwood explain how consumption creates patterns that construct meaning and that networks develop through the processes and customs of giving and sharing. These customs are a form of practice and tradition that define and enable culture. Cultures communicate through shared language and through a patterned system of meanings that uses goods. All objects are consumed in some way. All goods are used for thinking. Goods help people to make sense of their world (Woodward, Lévi-Strauss, Douglas and Isherwood). Douglas and Isherwood challenge and dismantle the “Cartesian dichotomy” that made a fictitious distinction between types of goods or commodities. In their work, Türe and Ger argue that heirlooms are not only anchors of continuity but also products of change (1).

While heirlooms alter as practices and stories change, Türe and Ger emphasize purposeful and often permanent alterations to heirlooms so that descendants more readily connect with older objects. Their work is compelling and argues that heirlooms must be renewed and brought up-to-date in order for them to be meaningful to contemporary inheritors. While objects are not static and heirlooms are more than ornamental, Türe’s and Ger’s view promoted a pronounced individualism that disregards tradition and moves object out of the realm of respect through continuation and preservation into the realm of consumption. While many scholars, particularly researchers in consumer research and anthropology, tend to broaden the usage of consumption to include any engagement of an object, consumption still aligns most closely with economics and the marketplace. While objects age, which may show through patina or wear, essentially, it remains the same object; it is the people who live and die and the practices that alter as well as certain meanings. Hahn and Weiss explain that “[c]ultural artifacts never stand still, are never inert. Their existence is always embedded in a multitude of contexts, with tensions surrounding their roles, usages and meanings.”

In her research on medieval heirlooms, Gilchrist describes *coming of age* occasions or what are understood as *rites of passage* as “practices of embodiment that created personhood” as events curating heirloom customs (174). Significant life-changing events and their ceremonies continue into the twenty-first century. Heirlooms mark momentous celebrations and occasions in a person’s life from the forming of a dowry chest given to a bride to the medals awarded to soldiers. These items symbolize poignant experiences in the journey of life. Heirlooms are a way to physically preserve relationships when bodily proximity is no longer possible; an heirloom maintains connections across space and time and provides continuity with the past and with those who were actors and communicators of a family narrative. It is a form of immortality or at least a tangible reminder of who and what came before the present that allows for identity and stability in a postmodern era.

In *Death and Personal History: Strategies of Identity Preservation*, David R. Unruh explains how the allocation and distribution of objects is one way a person looks to secure and communicate her identity (344). In his study, Unruh found that people create identity in the formation of items, followed by the accumulation of items, and finally in the distribution of those items. These artifacts were distributed to persons who were believed to be willing to care for them, and in so doing, honor and remember the donor. This distribution was accomplished through pre-death gifts, wills, and testaments. There is little differentiation in scholarship between “gifting” and what has been called “pre-death gifting” (e.g. Belk; Unruh; Holmes).

Unruh’s research posed the complication of an heir not receiving an anticipated heirloom, claiming that disinheritance also preserves identity (345). Belk claims that Jean-Paul Sartre believed “giving possessions to others as a means of extending self—[are] a special form of control” (150) an area that might warrant further research and consideration. Knowing how one

is situated within the family narrative allows a person to recognize how the self is always embedded with others.

Perhaps as Bitzer positioned it, death is beyond the rhetorical situation. Other scholars have arrived at similar conclusions (Caws; Smith). Smith views death as a space of silence, stating, “There are some silences within our culture which defy even description, and some spaces of which we do not – or cannot – speak” (79). Within these spaces of silence, one might offer condolence by simply being there, being physically present, and offering a shoulder or arms for comfort—in forms of the nonverbal or extra-verbal and in ritual practices through the funerary and burial traditions and rituals that cultures have enacted throughout history. Still, as Joseph simply states, “The function of language is threefold: to communicate thought, volition, and emotion” (12); therefore, with language, human beings search for the words to convey their feelings because “death cannot constitute itself as an object of thought outside discourse” (Carpentier & Van Brussel 99). Words express the meaning of our ideas and of our thoughts, and though meaning is assigned to signs, a sign also symbolizes human reality, “having meaning imposed on it by convention” (Joseph 13).

Human beings deal with death through rituals and ceremonies to allow those still living to mourn and to attempt to prepare those who have died for the unknown. In *The Hour of Our Death* Philippe notes, “Practices and attitudes overlap from one era to the next, undergo change, and migrate among connected societies” (qtd. in Staudt 4). Even in pre-history, Neanderthals, who had “some form of communication,” engaged in the act of ceremonial burial (Roberts and Westad 20). The colossal pyramids of Egypt reflect some of the curious customs and extravagant rituals of death traditions as the Egyptians filled the pyramids with both practical objects and artifacts of beauty from this world for the afterlife. The Egyptians believed life was meant for the

“preparation for death” (87). These were ancient “time[s] when prescribed, ritualized roles controlled the conduct of the dying and their surrounding community” (Staudt 4).

In the Middle Ages, death was accepted; it was considered “a familiar part of life” because “both life and death were tamed since identities were largely pre-programmed and remained stable throughout life” (Carpentier and Van Brussel 105). During this time, “The practice of creating written wills spread from a small powerful elite in the Middle Ages to the growing merchant class that would become Europe’s bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century” (Staudt 5). Before cemeteries, bodies were piled up in graves. Then in the Middle Ages, bodies were abandoned to the Church “where they were forgotten” (Ariès xv). In the late eighteenth century, a different outlook dominated in regard to the virtue of death. During the Romantic era, “death [was considered] a beautiful experience for the family as well as the dying person” since both would meet again in the next life (Staudt 5). Death certificates became instituted “as a discursive symbol of the new visibility of death and dying, with the removal of death from the private to the public sphere” (Carpentier and Van Brussel 106). A public death was where “the dying and the dead were present among the living” (Staudt 5). In the mid-nineteenth century, dying people were moved to sterile, sanitized hospitals under the care of professional medical providers rather than surrounded by family in their homes. Becker observes that a modern shift toward the denial of death paralleled the rise of individualism (105). Instead of calling it “death denial,” Carpentier and Van Brussel suggest that modernity should be characterized “as an epoch when death was constructed in a medical-rationalist way” with the idea of medical progress where death became a technicality, an inconvenience for medical practitioners (106).

MacIntyre poses two questions about human authorship of one’s own narrative: “What am I to do?” and “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?” (216). Becker asks: “[H]ow

conscious is he of what he is doing to earn his feeling of heroism?" (5). Heroism has become a problem in modernity. Neurosis is today a widespread problem because of the disappearance of convincing dramas of heroic apotheosis of man, where rather than performing social practices, humans have become fixated with personal fulfillment and pleasures (190, 199). This stems from a lack of traditions, as Becker explains, "Modern man became psychological because he became isolated from protective collective ideologies" (191). Pearson states, "In early times story-telling was the chief method of imparting knowledge to the young. Stories were used to teach codes of honor and standards of conduct, to teach religious truths, to impart morality, to give instruction in law and custom—in short to educate" (544). Jones and Jones suggests that the glory won on the battlefield in Homer is paralleled to that won on the sports' field in modern day (xiv). Mifsud contends that remnants of the heroic culture still resides in the present—no matter how much some people may resist. In a culture of entertainment, greatness equates with fame (Postman 47). As Becker states:

Commercial industrialism promised Western man a paradise on earth, described in great detail by the Hollywood myth, that replaced the paradise in heaven of the Christian myth. And now psychology must replace them both with the myth of paradise through self-knowledge. (271)

New materialism is another indication that humankind is still unable to come to terms with the truth about reality, about her body, about the existential dilemma of having both "an inner symbolic self, which signifies a certain freedom, and that [s]he is bound by a finite body, which limits that freedom" (Becker 75). She is neither total animal nor total angel – "[She] cannot live heedless of [her] fate, nor can [she] take sure control over that fate and triumph over it by being outside of the human condition" (Becker 69). Becker points to Kierkegaard, who wrote that

because man is not a god and therefore does not possess omniscience, he preoccupies himself with more petty matters. Kierkegaard referred to these men as Philistines, who “tranquelize themselves with the trivial” in order to cope with and manage life (as qtd. in Becker 178).

Referencing Rank, Becker states “that neurosis is also historical to a large extent, because all the traditional ideologies that disguised and absorbed it [neurosis] have fallen away and modern ideologies are just too thin to contain it” (177). Becker’s assertion is akin to that of MacIntyre’s. The traditions or standards once held no longer apply, leaving confusion and ambiguity, ultimately leading to reliance on a therapeutic culture.

In order to continually escape not just talking about death but even thinking about it, life is filled with busy-ness, crammed schedules, appointments, and endless commitments, where one convinces himself that he is in control and too busy to be bothered with old objects or people who are no longer physically present. As Arnett et al. insist, “One finds energy from unreflective doing, a habitual meeting of daily patterns” (123). Becker could not have imagined how the world would be inundated by the proliferation of information when he stated in 1973:

“...knowledge is in a state of useless overproduction...strewn all over the place, spoken in a thousand competing voices” (x). In her article, “It Should Have Been a Wedding: Metaphors of Life and Death at a Funeral,” Rushing acknowledges:

And in this postmodern age of exponentially proliferating technology and consumerism in which we live for speed, efficiency, and profit, it is hard to find time for sacred space or space for sacred time. Afflicted with a nationality disorder of ‘bored and hyper,’ we are not tied to a world navel but, like Neo in *The Matrix*, to the umbilical cord of the machine. (209)

As Becker observes: “Modern man started looking inward in the nineteenth century because he

hoped to find immortality in a new and secure way” (194). The *causa-sui* project of becoming one’s own god, begun by Spinoza (36) was cycled through by self-esteem movement. What continues to happen is, “We try to get metaphysical answers out of the body that the body—as a material thing—cannot possibly give” (Becker 44). This is not to discount all therapy but rather to point to the limitation of psychologism and the therapeutic culture. “From a psychological perspective, the self as an independent agent is also a failed experiment in modernity” (Arnett et al. 123).

Domestic and homemaking practices often go unnoticed in life’s normal routines, and the interactions with the objects engaged in these communicative practices are usually overlooked unless a material object breaks or malfunctions. In a culture of hyperconsumption and hyper-disposal, few material objects gain prominence in a home as keepsakes or cherished possessions, and even fewer achieve heirloom status. Heirlooms assist in conveying the human condition and familial identity across time and space.

Heirlooms as objects not found in nature are viewed here as “consumed” in the sense that they are made by humans for human use. This use of *consumption* is from Grant McCracken’s book, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*. McCracken writes that his book is about “the relationship between culture and consumption”; therefore, he orients these terms, indicating, “By ‘culture’ I mean the ideas and activities with which we construe and construct our world. By ‘consumption’ I broaden the conventional definition to include the processes by which consumer goods and services are created, bought, and used” (xi). Object-person relations shape identity, offering a particular way to make meaning, finding a sense of belonging, and constituting an individual’s situatedness within a family’s culture and tradition. Approaching the interplay of object-person relations as a

horizon as understood by Gadamer provides a textured interpretation within a historical moment ever attentive to the past and prejudices. Interpretation cannot go beyond an heirloom's narrative. One cannot alter its past but can shape its present, adding another story to the narrative. Heirlooms compel respect, appreciation, and preservation as familial objects that act as communicators of family identity and carriers of family narrative. Family identity emerges from traditions and rituals that often engage heirlooms.

In their research, Epp and Price (2008) explain their "framework of family identity enactment" (51). Enactment is engaged here in the way that Epp and Price explain the term. They explain: "We define enactments as communicative performances, that is, rituals, narratives, everyday practices, and other forms in which families constitute and manage identity" (Epp and Price, 2008, 51). Interestingly, in 2008, Epp and Price wrote that current research on family consumption focused on the individual and how it negotiated identity and not on collective identity practices. In their article, "Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices," they argue that consumer research needs a relational and familial approach to understanding family identity practices (51). One question Epp and Price (2008) ask in their study is: "How do families and relational units sustain identity across time and space?" (51). This project advances the theoretical framework of communicative practices with heirlooms as one such way to sustain family identity across time and space.

In their study, Epp and Price show that "agency granted by a network of overlapping identity practices and complementary object biographies, for example, can rescue an object from displacement through reincorporation attempts" (832). Epp and Price show that "Object agency again emerges as important between processes of reincorporation and reengagement" (832).

Epp and Price argue it is not enough “to reinforce, share, and ritualize the indexical associations that make an object irreplaceable to underscore its sacred status” (832). Epp and Price, “The central idea is that, as people and objects gather time, movement, and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other (Gosden and Marshall qtd. in Epp and Price). in Epp and Price 821).

Consumer research has regarded singularizing an object as a form of “purposive identity work” (Epp and Price 821). Research on liminal spaces within the home show how members enact an object to communicate certain moods and convey a presence (Epp and Price 821). For example, families transform living rooms into welcome spaces using warm objects while attics and basements are meant to cool objects that do not convey the message or produce the mood of a family space.

In their study, Epp and Price point to the work of Andrew Pickering and his 1995 publication, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* to grapple with the notion of object agency. Pickering refers to the interaction and transformation of person and object in their engagement as “the dance of agency” (21). This metaphor is compelling for new materialists. New materialism often employs that metaphor of entanglement to describe person-object relations. Their argument has much to do with agency. Epp and Price present a statement on object agency that resonates with this project: that objects do not “demonstrate purposeful intention but rather that objects are active, or mobilized as part of a network and nested in a set of practices that may be intentional or embedded in the habitus of everyday life” (2009, 822). It is this interplay, relationship, dance, entanglement, network that is here examined.

“The conception of the modern individual who is actively involved in attributing meanings to things accentuates this dichotomy. To the extent that modernist thought uses the

agency of the individual as an indicator of whether or not specific objects have significance, meaningfulness is no longer an attribute of a thing or a substance as such, but rather becomes a consequence of the abilities of the acting individual” (Hahn and Soentgen 23).

Through extant literature, this project explores what heirlooms and kinship do together and how they are reciprocally affected through communicative acts. In order for human beings to discuss materiality, they must go through language. Material culture studies stresses how objects affect people and how people affect objects in the forming and shaping of society “and giving symbolic meaning to human activity” (Woodward 2). Emotions are ethical, emerging from language; thus, as Harold writes: “Affect is the general term for the judgmental system” (94). The verb *affect* is courted in the scholarship of new materialism philosophies, promoting materiality as vital actants (Harold; Bennett; Coole and Frost; Katz). According to new materialists, “matter becomes” rather than “matter is” (Coole and Frost 10).

‘Ethical turn’ Bennett (xi-xii). “The ethical turn encouraged political theorists to pay more attention... ‘ethics’ could no longer refer primarily to a set of doctrines...if a set of moral principles is actually to be lived out, the right mood or landscape of affect has to be in place” (xii). Because heirlooms exist in a flux of time and space, the mood or landscape should not matter. Mood is not an argument. At this juncture, Bennett moves into emotivism. (xii).

In 2016, in celebration of twenty years of publication, three editorial board members of the *Journal of Material Culture* announced the confines of a dialectical model between object-subject relations while supporting the new relational framework for studying material culture, which “draws on concepts of *materialism, ontology, vibrancy, affect, and valency* in order to describe the multilayered ways in which persons and things might be drawn into relations with one another” (Geismar, Kuchler, Carroll 3-4).

In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, philosopher Jane Bennett advocates for “material agency,” “vital materialism” (or “vital materiality”), and “material vibrancy” (or “vibrant materiality” or “impersonal affect”), which she positions as inherent or intrinsic to materiality. As she explains: “I equate affect with materiality, rather than posit a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body,” such as a spirit (xiii). are inherent to objects as part of their ontology and which she promotes for more sustainable relationships with materiality, aiming for something of an ethic of responsibility toward objects though Bennett does not employ that phrase; however, she does advance a “call for attentiveness, or even ‘respect’ (provided that term be stretched beyond its Kantian sense” (ix).

“Identity has to do with the stories we tell about things; DNA suggests something inherent to the thing itself” (Harold 37). However, Türe and Ger’s research suggests that heirlooms may also be objects of evolving and shifting individual identities. Through heterogeneous time and ubiquitous space, both concepts are arguable and understandable, within the theories of new materialism, quantum physics, and posthumanism. Furthermore, space. Stormer: “What Haraway does not stress is that to articulate bodies and language is also to spatialize the world to accommodate them. That is, bodies and language necessarily occupy space, working on it, in it, and with it...Further, I argue that what constitutes rhetoric will vary historically with the articulation of bodies and language in abstract orders” (“Articulation” 263). “Barad argues...agency...one implication of this sense of agency [Barad’s] is that past and future are themselves entangled—neither past nor future is ever completely settled, and what counts as ‘past’ versus ‘future’ emerges from a differential process that includes and concatenates elements of both” (Bost 341). Page 324 of Keeling is rather beautiful for responding to a linear understanding of space and time for how we might come to understand

heirlooms. Advancing such pathways, memory is not stable. Zelizer describes how “memories confront each other, intermingle, fuse, or erase each other” (double-check 218). Memory is not a linear gathering of experiences and thoughts. Instead, Zelizer explains that “collective memory is predicated upon a dissociation between the act of remembering and the linear sequencing of time” (217).

Family members decide what objects to bring into the home and through the kinship network, they determine how to engage objects and where to store them. However, materiality holds features and capacities of its own through an “intricate network of communications” (Harold 20). Exploring the interconnections between “the nature and language of attachment,” Harold writes that objects “carry within them a dialect and an accent composed of feel and footprint, form factor and function” (20). Harold argues that objects exist through an “intricate network of communications” (20). Writing about rituals and aesthetics of materiality, Harold believes: “Emotion is the conscious experience of affect...Importantly affect is about our physical interaction with material things” (94). Heirlooms may elicit certain affects due to exquisite form or feature, but an “affective state” is often attached to commonplace objects (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 244). “Aura explains why rituals allow us to invest objects with meaning...Affect comes about because of material manipulations, but the meaning of those manipulations is determined by the rituals in which we insert them” (Harold 94).

While almost everyone prefers a fictional story that ends well or the novel or movie, where everything works out in the end, that is often not the lived human experience. Arnett et al. reference Fisher’s narrative paradigm, where he argues for awareness and articulation of the good that drives action... “...a persuasive account of the good has narrative fidelity” in the hope people hold for life experiences but with recognition that the reality of human life is imperfect

(*Communication Ethics Literacy* 16-17). The rhetorical nature of narrative situates interpretation and meaning through “historical happening,” revisiting past understandings, present realities, and future potentials of the “hermeneutical perspective” (Hyde and Smith 356, 361). Within narrative, people often create “complex bundling,” drawing together the dimensions of time and life trajectories (Price et al. 185). The present is really “multi-temporal” (Olivier 205). Narratives are constituted systems of interpretation and meaning that cannot occur apart from context. Indeed, as Kent indicates, “We interpret our world through the hermeneutical stories we tell...” (135-136). As objects “shift in a wide range of modes,” their meanings shift and adjust as well (21). A hermeneutical entry into heirlooms is a leap into an unknown that opens to pasts, to haunts and heralds, and to unfamiliar people and practices to which one is bound.

In their article on consumer research and heirloom rejuvenation, professors of marketing, Türe and Ger, describe practices as integral to ongoing identity formation (8). Hurdley positions the home as a site of “social processes” rather than an abstract symbol (719) while considering what display objects “are accomplishing in the home” (721). She writes, “It could be said, then, that prescribed public cultural values are rewritten by individuals at home, where they transform artefacts by telling stories about them, and thus themselves” (Hurdley 723-724). Belk honors this overlap. Belk explains that possessions assist in defining one’s sense of self and that some objects are more central; concentric layers...” (see 152). Turkle found this to be true with technology. For example, Belk writes that a person might consider the Statue of Liberty to be of the extended self (140). Heirloom displays are elements of narrative ethics. In her article, “Dismantling Mantelpieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home,” Hurdley questions the meaning behind the peculiar placement of empty photograph frames on several mantels from her study and suggests that not only does the empty frame produce a

strange sensation of collapsed time, but the lack of photograph represents absence and indicates a space for “accomplishing identity” (727-728). As Hurdley writes about the focal areas of her informants’ homes, she states, “These were not just display spaces, but also sites where family and individual stories were constructed around individual objects and assemblages of photographs and collections of artefacts” (720). Curated and displayed objects also become “narrative props,” reminders and evidence that a certain event or experience occurred.

When Greenblatt discusses “wonder,” he exemplifies various effects display and curation might add to the experience of evoking wonder, such as placement and lighting (28). While there are parallels to museum experiences with heirloom experience, heirloom often encourages touching and use (something absent in most museums though sometimes encouraged in exhibits). The most prominent similarity, however, is that of *ownership*. Curasi et al. argue a key difference between a personally cherished object and one that becomes an heirloom: While an individual may possess *and* own an object, an heirloom may be possessed by an individual but *not* owned (“How Individuals’ Cherished Possessions” 610). In part, this distinction is what establishes the call for an ethic of responsibility that includes servitude toward and stewardship for family heirlooms as “intergenerationally contaminated objects” (Belk).

Cherished possessions that are curated and displayed are more likely to become heirlooms and sustain family rituals (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 260). When younger kin witness and participate in maintenance activities for heirloom preservation, they become aware of the ongoing commitment to conservation. Display includes “participation in preservation activities,” where the younger generation is witness to practices (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 252), from the polishing of silver for family dinner gatherings to the family sitting around an heirloom table. Accessible heirlooms invite conversation and promote continuity. These are staging rituals that

are more than aesthetic embellishment. These interaction groom future candidates to become heirloom recipients. As Curasi et al. explain, “Too-careful preservation threatens the evocative, narrative potential of cherished objects because an item locked away cannot trigger the spontaneous, ritual retelling of the family tradition that the object represents” (254). While there is risk involved in display and using heirlooms as there is to any object in-use, if heirlooms are displaced, they often lose their place within living conversations, severing important connections to others. The curation, for example of wedding or baptism photographs adorning a living room wall and objects related to “transfer occasions” signify the event’s significance to others (Heisley and Cours; Hurdley). Also called “rites of passage,” “rites of progressions,” “calendrical rituals,” and as Douglas and Isherwood refer to the process, “life-cycle events;” these are marked occasions during which heirlooms are given, received, and engaged (Curasi et al. 250-251; Price et al.). Smith explains, “Only death sees an end to the effort to signify, and even then...death is not a certainty. It is not meaning that is missing, but the tools with which to represent/construct it” (77).

Heirloom displays are indicators of family ethics. The curation, for example, of wedding or baptism photographs adorning a living room wall or objects related to “transfer occasions” (Heisley and Cours) signify the event’s significance to others. Also called rites of passage, rites of progression, calendrical rituals, or as Douglas and Isherwood refer to such ceremonies as “life-cycle events,” these are marked occasions during which heirlooms are received, given, and engaged (Curasi et al. 250-251; Price et al.). While there is risk involved in displaying and using heirlooms as there is to any object, if focal things are not in view nor part of living conversations, both objects and stories are forgotten, severing important ritual links. As Curasi et al. explain, “Too-careful preservation threatens the evocative, narrative potential of cherished objects

because an item locked away cannot trigger the spontaneous, ritual retelling of the family tradition that the object represents” (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 254). Displayed objects may become heirlooms and incorporated into storytelling and “imbued with meanings particular to a family” (Curasi and Price, “Ritual,” 260).

Epp and Price argue that contextual shifts and object agency determine whether a family heirloom is retained. When warm objects are curated for display, they are placed in areas to create a comfortable aura; others are retained but placed in an area to cool, such as a basement or attic, where an objects becomes “displaced” and “inactive” (824). As cherished objects, heirlooms should be placed where they can be a part of a warm atmosphere, such as living rooms, dining rooms, and kitchens, whereas disregarded objects are sent to cold spaces, such as attics and basements, or storage to cool (Epp and Price 821). While the focus of Price and Epp’s research is concentrated on the family table, it is not just the table that matters. What really is of interest is how the practices are disrupted when the table is replaced and relocated to a cold environment.

Heirlooms are curated, displayed, or stored. Cherished possessions that are curated and displayed are more likely to become heirlooms and sustain family rituals (Curasi et al. “Ritual”). Displaying and curating heirlooms are in themselves ritual acts (Curasi et al. “Ritual” 260) that infer meaning transfer. Curated and displayed objects demonstrate family values and socialize younger kin through retellings of experiences and “possession stories” (Curasi et al. 250; Grayson and Shulman 21; Curasi 84). A prominently displayed object indicates importance within the home. Display includes “participation in preservation activities,” where the younger generation is witness to practices (252), from the polishing of silver for family dinner parties to the family sitting around an heirloom table, gathering together for Thanksgiving dinner. When

younger kin witness and participate in maintenance activities for heirloom preservation, they become aware of the on-going responsibility of conservation (Curasi et al. "Ritual" 252). Making heirlooms accessible invites conversations that promote continuity. These are staging rituals that are more than aesthetic decoration. These interactions are also how kinkeepers groom future candidates to become heirloom recipients. Heirlooms demonstrate family values and socialize younger kin through retellings of experiences or "possession stories" (Curasi et al. "Ritual" 250; Grayson and Shulman 21; Curasi 84), such as explaining the object's origins and the event surrounding its acquisition.

In her research, Lipman finds a "belief in the continuing presence of the past" displayed within homes (83). Her work stresses the private sphere for "the making and meaning of the past," where she suggests a perspective that views "the home as a site of historical imagination, knowledge, and practice" (84). Homes are intersections. The home, as the primary heirloom site, is value-laden ground, indicated through the curation and display of cherished objects. Heirloom discourse aligns with communication ethics creating a conviction for the "understanding of what matters between and among persons" (Arnett "Communication Ethics" 31). Within this project, "what matters" is explored between and among family relations, collectively gathered within the home. As Price et al. explain, "Cherished possessions are like integrating stimuli whose value lies in communion, linking the self to compelling (narrative) images and cultural values" (189).

Chapter Five: Family Narrative Formation Engaging Heirlooms

“We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constraints the others” (MacIntyre 213).

Chapter Five Overview

When it comes to inheriting intergenerational transfers, some kin have no problem discussing what they want, even going so far as to put their name on tape on the back or bottom of objects as this present writer’s mother did in her parents’ home. Other families resist transfer conversations because ritual dispositions are indicators of death. This chapter explores storytelling and the on-going, cooperative and collective construction of narratives and heirloom practices within family networks. Family communication research illuminates the importance of family narratives and coupled with consumption and consumer research on objects and narrative as constructors and navigators of identity, memory, and time while scholarship suggests individuals and families benefit in many ways from engaging heirlooms in family narratives (Belk; “Family Ties” Koenig Kellas). Both narratives and heirlooms mediate roles in identity and memory and other forms of lived experience through “symbolic action” (Burke). The intention for this chapter is to encourage petit récit family narratives shaped with and around heirlooms in an effort to extend historically situated domestic traditions in a postmodern era. Primary background scholars for this chapter are Alasdair MacIntyre and *After Virtue*; Calvin O. Schrag and *The Gift*; and Kenneth Burke’s *The Philosophy of Literary Form, Language as Symbolic Action* as well as several other references to his works.

Ties to family, home, practice, and materiality are interwoven (McCracken 46). Belk stresses that “a family is most apt to use distinct family possessions to define a family self for its members. The key consumption object in this case is the home—both dwelling and furnishings” (152). The home is a development and extension of self and family. As Rachel Hurdley describes, “Each object on display contains many interwoven narratives, which are under constant revision, and are dependent on the teller and listener for particular momentary orientations” (725). The Cambodian folktale expresses what happens when stories are not retold. Researcher Kendyl A. Barney and communication studies professor Christina G. Yoshimur position the home as “...a dynamic space imbedded in moments of memory, metaphors, performance, emotions and experiences of family life, and thus a site of profound family communication” (257). Phenomenological understanding arises within the context of the home and its collaborative construction. As Lipman acknowledges, “Objects of personal value or memory are often galvanized as part of the homemaking project, reflecting or reinforcing senses of belonging and familiarity to enhance feelings of being ‘at home’” (84). Heirlooms are often mundane objects located and engaged in the home that constitute daily, family life. Schrag confirms: “Our holistic notion of the space of communicative praxis calls attention to this contextuality of interplay of thought, language, and action in the comportment of everyday life” (*Communicative Praxis* 6). Because object engagement is common and routine, appreciation for integrated practices and the regular, corporeal processes with materiality compel “a conceptual shift” for detecting meaning (Coole and Frost 38 this is in one of the essays in the book). Practices and their meanings often escape notice in the duties and upkeep of the home. Not only interactions but the actual home itself is often obscured as the typical site for initiating performance.

Chapter Five Introduction

A home as the primary space and place for heirloom communication provides a sense of location as a place for learning through listening. In “Response: Dialogic Listening as Attentiveness to Place and Space,” Arnett responds to a volume of articles on listening and the work of Gadamer published in the *International Journal of Listening*. Engaging philosophy of hermeneutics in his opening, Arnett writes: “As we listen, we are both situated and responsive to the architecture of place and imaginative spaces, which shape our listening to ourselves and to the Other. Our attentiveness, our sense of place, and our imaginative engagement with the sociality of space move listening from mere acquisition of information to the enlargement of the human condition” (181). It is not just the practices that communicate. The eloquence of listening extends the materiality of the practice and the place and space of performance.

Communication does not occur if no one is listening; likewise, communication does not begin with the self (Arnett et al. “The Rhetorical Turn” 115). If the *praxis* of heirloom is not effectively communicated, and no one is listening, practices wither and heirlooms become reified objects. As Schrag writes, “...Gadamer has identified as the fault of misunderstanding residing not in the impropriety of speaking but rather in the inability to listen” (“Communication and Philosophy” 340). In a world filled with a cacophony of voices vying for attention, listening to artifacts becomes an art form. Attending to family heirlooms or “inheritance practices identified in the experience of kinship” (Holmes; Finch and Mason—see Holmes 175) speaks to the heart of what constitutes a family and a home. Pausing to listen to what is occurring within the place of the home and within the space of practices attends to the human condition.

Considering “speech community” on a global scale, anthropologist Miyako Inoue accepts economic geographer David Harvey’s postmodern understanding of place and space, which is

significant to distinguish here as a home is recognized as place. Douglas and Isherwood announce space as “a medium for discriminating values” (p#). They explain how space is part of “the cultural process,” and that demarcations “are heavy with meaning” (p#). A section of a community described as the “wrong side of the tracks” or elite housing plans within gated communities communicate laden concepts of space. Inoue writes, “Following Harvey, ‘place’ can be understood as a surface to which people have subjective ties commonly called lived experience. Memories, hopes, despair, emotions, and identities are both literally and figuratively inscribed on place. It is a surface that is ‘meaning-full’ for people” (132). The “lived experience” includes heirlooms displayed and engaged in a home. Meaning is made, navigated, and contingent on the interactions among people, objects, and context (Hurdley 719).

Within the place of home, one learns and demonstrates the art of living. Much of the kinship processes and practices involving heirlooms occur within the home. A home is a rich, domestic site, where everyday habits, routines, and customs are involved in the realization of material culture as communicative practices (Hurdley). In MacIntyre’s philosophical account of the virtues of character, a practice is the initial stage in the realization of the concept of virtue (186-187), and the manner in which the virtues are exercised in supporting the institution (for this project, the family institution) will, in turn, affect how a practice is upheld (195). Practices are on-going in the domestic acts of “doing family” (Holmes; Epp and Price “Family Identity”; Türe and Ger), where relationships are crafted and conveyed (Lipman; Holmes). A family is no longer a clearly demarcated structure with definite form and function; in a postmodern condition, all institutions are understood as diverse and fluid (Finch).

While this is also true concerning kinship, there must exist some common ground that brings family members together at regular intervals throughout their lives. Arnett and Holba

attest: “Common sense is cultivated through experiential practices within our social and personal lives” (214). For MacIntyre, a practice void of virtue is void of internal goods and, thus, only recognizes external goods, which lead solely to competition, a society described most distinctively by Thomas Hobbes (196). MacIntyre paraphrases Aristotle’s appreciation of practices, stating, “As Aristotle says, the enjoyment of the activity and the enjoyment of achievement are not the ends at which the agent aims, but the enjoyment supervenes upon the successful activity in such a way that the activity achieved and the activity enjoyed are one and the same state” (197). Means and ends are internalized (184). As MacIntyre explains, “I call a means internal to a given end when the end cannot be adequately characterized independently of a characterization of the means. So it is with the virtues and the *telos*, which is the good life for man on Aristotle’s account” (184). However loosely defined a family is, a family is identifiable and relatable through shared internal practices. This is essential to heirlooming because an heirloom does not need to be fine china and sterling flatware, which are, unfortunately, often shunned by current generations.

Holmes describes a range of commonplace objects from her research that are “passed on:” “They are spades, bread knives, and patched up dungarees, found in wardrobes, kitchens and sheds; items which are mundane, ordinary and everyday, but still nonetheless significant to the making and doing of kinship. Thus, material affinities emerge because of the material and sensory qualities of everyday objects and objects in use” (175). One respondent told Holmes, “I have kitchen baking items, tablespoons, screwdrivers and other tools, tape measures, etc. and have probably held on to them more for sentimental reasons than money-saving purposes” (179). A screwdriver hardly qualifies as an heirloom if one thinks in terms of market value, and though Holmes asserts that a primary aspect of her article is that objects are retained for “...the actual

materiality of objects,” she adds that both “sentiment and symbolism” may result through practices (175).

Practices are not busyness; they are meaningful, family-centered forms of communication necessary to maintain the human condition and sustain the private sphere. In their research, Türe and Ger explore heirloom purpose and develop a dynamic description of family practices, claiming: “Moreover, as practices entail interactions among the triad of ideas/meanings, ways of doing/competences, and the material, they are structured by dynamic sociohistorical discursive systems...” (8). Even ordinary objects are rich with meaning when placed within narrative; the presence of materiality invites narrative elements within a context (Hurdley 723). One of the most essential ways to make matter and materiality meaningful is through narrative (Harold; Epp and Price “The Storied Life”). Stories are “evoked” by heirloom “presence” (Hahn and Weiss 3), and through story-telling, families become “active producers of meaning” (Hurdley 718-719).

As MacIntyre establishes, one has no sense of internal goods unless one is a participant in the practice (188-189); furthermore, not everyone achieves excellence in the virtues, but excellence is not synonymous with external goods; to do something well is to enjoy it, and to find something enjoyable is most likely to do it well (see MacIntyre 197). A family may possess the virtues and thus internal goods but not necessarily lay claim to external goods (196). In other words, as practical extension of one of MacIntyre’s examples, a family that participates in sustaining practices, upholds tradition, and exercises virtues, experiences the good life as *telos*; however, this family may not necessarily demonstrate the possession of external goods, such as material affluence, the admiration of neighbors, or public influence (196). Nonetheless, the achievements of excellence, though recognized as internal goods, also reverberate throughout the community, extending to all participants in the practice (191). These impacts are not only

immediate; they are extended as part of a heritage to descendants. Even when emphasizing the family as a social construction with social actors, which is “subject to change over time” (Finch), it is clear that people find meaning in embedded relationships and seek out features of family life even when such families do not include biological relations (Curasi et al. “Ritual”).

Historically situated implications are evident when one considers and compares, for example, a nineteenth century farm home of nine children and two parents with a twenty-first century urban home, consisting of two children and a single parent. There are certain similarities between their domestic practices: both are homes; they need to be maintained; family members live inside them; these family members need to eat; both families instill values into their children (actively or inactively), and so forth. The contrast of each situation embedded in its particular time and place, however, affords many differences as to sustaining particular practices. Perhaps the suburban parent grew up on a farm; however, he must adjust his practices accordingly. Both sets of parents bring past practices from their upbringing into the nurturing of their children, and these must be navigated and negotiated; there exists a multiplicity of practices and a multiplicity of goods, and neither are static, for as MacIntyre indicates, “Practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time...” (194). In fact, MacIntyre insists that “goods which will often be contingently incompatible and will therefore make rival claims upon our allegiance” are not the fault of individual kin (196-197).

Heirlooms allow kin to grieve. Mourning is its own ritual that should be recognized and respected and while there are typical patterns, there are also atypical forms. Kin who are unable to converse about death prior to the loss of a loved one may become more likely to suffer long-term grief. Extensive discussion on mourning and grief are beyond the bounds of this project; however, Chapter Five addresses family communication and heirlooms, which considers

heirloom presence and corporeal absence. Grant McCracken examines the elaborate role of kinkeepers and heirloom curation in his chapter... The chapter is largely based on in-depth interviews with “Lois”, writes concerning Lois, “She is concerned to see that her own memory and that of her family will be preserved in death... They [her children] wish to have the mother’s memory and that of the family preserved in life,” leading to tension and avoidance surrounding heirloom conversations (*Culture* 47).

Within the sustenance of the family, it is understandable how *justice*, *courage*, and *honesty* are virtues involved in this and every practice, as MacIntyre maintains (191). The transformation that occurs between heirlooms and kin happens within *praxis*. For example, a piece of furniture, such as a bookcase, though old and worn, is transformed into an heirloom through a mother’s personal story, including her reminiscence and experience of her grandfather and great grandfather crafting the bookcase together (Heisley and Cours p. #). Through narrative and use, the family engages the heirloom, where both mother and daughter gain an appreciation of their ancestor’s achievement, of the physical bookcase itself, and of the accomplishment of craftsmanship (Heisley and Cours). Even though the descendants did not make the bookcase, their identity with the crafters extends, and the bookcase becomes an indexical and inalienable heirloom (Heisley and Cours; Grayson and Shulman). An intergenerational transfer that marks or indexes achievements has strong potential for inalienability (Curasi et al. “Ritual”; Heisley and Cours 432). Arnett writes, “A narrative is a temporal home of ethical goods that yield identity and direction. Narrative ethics transforms the notion of trust, moving the focus from the person to a value-laden story that situates a person” (“Communication Ethics” 43-44). In similar parlance to Arnett’s description of communication ethics, the hermeneutic center for this chapter is the home, a place of guidance, where “communicative commitments” are performed (31).

Glorianna Davenport's anecdote included in Turkle's book describes the devastated remains of her grandparents' house built in the 1930s, which held family documents and heirlooms from the early 1800s onward that were lost in a house fire. All that remained were a few charred objects and photographs, but even the remnants brought reminders of stories and memories. Davenport writes that "photographs are particularly valuable to later generations of a family, allowing them evidence to better reconstruct the tale of their past" (222).

In his section entitled, "Rhetorical Radiance of the 'Divine,'" in the final pages of Kenneth Burke's *Rhetoric of Motives*, are several passages from Henry James book, *The Spoils of Poynton*, published within the *fin de siècle* of the nineteenth century. James describes a contentious "context of situation" that he once overheard between a mother and son over intergenerational transfers, which sparked the plot for James' narrative, where the now deceased father's heirlooms are the elements of discussion (Burke 294). Burke highlights James' vivid description of the "power" of "things" illustrated as "household gods" and "brazen idols" in "...the general glittering presence" ... "of some arching place of worship..." (as qtd. in Burke 295). The powers of objects are part of "the principle of 'mystification'" as explained by Burke. James makes clear that as Burke writes, "these household Things are also Spirits; or they are charismatic vessels of some sort" (296). These are several of many "god-terms," which Burke describes in more detail in *The Rhetoric of Grammar* as that which human beings rhetorically organize to make sense of their world. Special objects that attain inalienable status are said to invite "psychic energy" with accumulated layers of meaning (Grayson and Shulman 23; Belk). Burke includes several passages toward the end of *The Rhetoric of Motives*, where he explains the "deity of 'things'" as a literary motive in "recording the fullness of a world hierarchally endowed" (305), noting that the word "hierarchy," initially meant "priest-rule," thus the assigned

spiritual and religious connotations (306). Hierarchy is natural; it exists within nature. Burke refers to this as “the hierarchic principle” (305). Where hierarchy is socially constructed, it is often critiqued and criticized, particularly by those from ever-evolving Marxist traditions, where there is the victim and the villain in an attempt to move one group above another in an endless game of Tower of Babel that will never reach the heavens. Even the angels of the Christian Bible are described as part of a hierarchical arrangement. This confusion over misunderstanding equality as synonymous with sameness plays out in fictional dramatic performances as representations of true life. Arguably, no writer previous or subsequent to Burke elucidates hierarchy and critiques the realm of power better and much before critical theory became a scholarly practice toward the end of the twentieth century. As Burke explains, “Even in naturalism or imagism, regardless of what the writer thinks he is getting, he is really recording the fullness of a world hierarchically endowed” (305). All of these motives acts (writing, arguing, critiquing, performing, etc.) are all manners of organization, and each one involves materiality.

Douglas and Isherwood exclaim that goods are integral to organization; human beings communicate and make sense of their world through arranging and ordering materiality. To exemplify this, Douglas and Isherwood also appeal to a narrative of Henry James’ in the Preface of their book, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. They write, “The great novelists have never doubted just how far removed this function of creating meanings is from the uses of goods for welfare to display” (ix). They include a section of James’ *The Ambassadors*, where a visitor quickly scans two rooms full of objects, crammed with things and immediately constructs “private” assumptions regarding the lady who inhabits the place, including “the occupant’s life and personality, and place in society” (ix). Within Burke’s pentad,

heirlooms are a necessary part of the scene, framing the context and creating a family's reality (*Grammar*). As Burke explains, when the context changes, so does the scene, thus, so would the manner and meaning of the heirloom.

In Burke's section, which includes various other writers, such as Coleridge, Kierkegaard, and Veblen, Burke captures the previous pages:

In sum: Insofar as things and situations are identified with various stages of social privilege, both 'practical' and 'esthetic' objects are infused with the spirit of government and business, taxes and price, through identification with the bureaucratic judgments that go with such order. (*Rhetoric* 305)

Burke shows his concept of "symbolic action" as rhetorical, social, political, ethical, and so on (see 307 of *Rhetoric*), and his many illustrations borrowed from literature are essential to his rhetoric, to his persuasion. Burke's "philosophy of form" explains why good literature endures and is repeatedly read even when the reader knows what happens next, including the ending. Narrative as a rhetorical act interprets, questions, and represents human life. As nature makes things, humans imitate nature through *mimesis*, as always a becoming, implicating human creations through performance (Aristotle *Poetics*; Belk 146). Just as nature goes through its seasons and cycles, so is the experience of human life. MacIntyre agrees that narratives are reflections of life, where novelists, such as Jane Austen are also moralists (243). Likewise, as Douglas and Isherwood indicate, the visitor to the lady's quarters does not make his judgments by analyzing every object; instead, his awareness is that "[t]he secret is the total pattern" (xiii). Naturally, as Douglas and Isherwood state, James was aware of this gestalt, where the rooms must be read as a whole; each thing being a part of the whole; the same judgments could not be

cast if the objects were removed from their context or reduced to individual objects; meaning is made holistically.

Child development is shaped through family stories (Fiese and Sameroff; Koenig Kellas). Family members learn kinship stories that instill important values and perspectives and teach how to best navigate through life (Koenig Kellas 1). Hurdley claims, “By constructing narratives around visual productions in the apparently private space of the home, people participate in the ongoing accomplishment of social, moral identities” (718). MacIntyre argues that stories convey virtues.

The question, “Can virtue be taught?” becomes a dominant philosophical enquiry in ancient Greece. Rhetoric, as Jeffrey Walker explains in *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*, emerged as a process that evolved from the oral, poetic tradition—epideictic, panegyric. Walker unorthodox argument is of an enlarged rhetoric that positions rhetoric and poetics as logical and emerging in Hesiod’s oral world of the eighth century BC, where lyric poems were a form of argument as a speech act. This was even before words such as rhetoric, poetry, and philosophy existed. By Aristotle’s appearance in the fifth century, there was great discussion in Greece over education and what it should entail (Bizzell and Herzberg). Unfortunately, as Cicero exclaims, Plato (using Socrates as his mouthpiece) was the source of the split between rhetoric and philosophy. Cicero exclaims, “This is the source from which has sprung the undoubtedly absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain” (*De oratore*). Despite such insistence, the division would echo across epochs.

Though Aristotle shows that rhetoric is already associated with virtue through the modes and means of persuasion (Rhetoric), the split between rhetoric and philosophy would resound to the present day. It is worth situating Aristotle’s argument for this current project, which is

attentive to virtue, narrative, and memory in this chapter. For Aristotle, rhetoric is not a type of literature; it is a faculty, a power that is a counterpart to dialectic and ethical (political) studies. What Aristotle means is that rhetoric is *epistēmē*: a combination of science of logic and the ethical branch of politics, partly dialectical and partly sophistic reasoning. Rhetoric falls into three divisions determined by audience: political, forensic, and epideictic (ceremonial). Rhetorical persuasion is affected not only by demonstrative argument—such as the rhetoric of ceremony that brings people together—but also by ethical argument. Aristotle views rhetoric as a practical art of process, a way of doing or acting, of arguing persuasively, yet it is not just about persuasion but the means of persuasion for understanding truth as reality.

Rhetoric argues there is no fixed or universal truth to which the human mind has certain access; instead, one has logos, which allows for judgement of probabilities through sensory engagement (Walker; Hauser). Aristotle's three means of persuasion are to reason logically; understand human character and goodness in their various forms; understand emotions. Rhetoric's art resides in its artistic proofs: *logos, pathos, ethos* (*Rhetoric*). Teaching is a grounded, human practice and virtue is about finding and living "the good life," which is partly recognized as the ability to define a good thing as that which is chosen for its own sake. Aristotle's ideas are for deliberative assemblies whose discourse can approach the condition of dialectic (Walker 38). However, Aristotle is enough of a realist to recognize that rhetoric and dialectic are not and cannot be identical. He helps one to understand how to begin to work with contingent human discourse having to do with character and thought. Thus, the answer is, yes, virtue can be taught, and it can still be taught through the stories shared within families. MacIntyre explains: "Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources.

Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of these things” (216).

Caws suggests that all of one’s life is middle—as though “a being without beginning or end” (10). He adds, “Events happen around me; time passes, but this passage belongs to it, not to me – I remain immobile at the center of my world” (10). Of course, as he further explains, humans must learn that they are the ones who move through a world that was before them and will be after them. MacIntyre emphasizes that we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives” (213). As he broadens his metaphor, he declares: “We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others” (213). This lack of control over one’s own story became problematic with the rise of individualism and the apotheosizing of mortals. MacIntyre places a different view on the adage of being doomed to repeat history if we do not know it. Instead, he problematizes not knowing one’s history—the traditions and rituals from heritage—leaving one unsituated, unembedded, and, therefore, without a sense of self; the inability of humans to recognize embeddedness leads to a fruitless search.

For children, almost everything is alive and full of possibility; their imaginations are open unlimited unlike most grownups who have left their imaginations behind. The awe or wonder a child depressed by actual life like in most adults. Many scholars suggest a return to a childhood outlook might remind one of how to view something inert as vital (Bennett vii). As MacIntyre maintains, “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutters in their actions and in their words” (216). Children learn from stories and tend to have wonderful imaginations, creating scenarios, retelling stories, role-playing, and talking with and to their toys. Children espouse an attachment to objects worth emulating for heirlooms. The attention and

affection a child bestows on her favorite toy or teddy indicate a relationship that might be silly or even deemed irrational if enacted by an adult. However, while children often view toys as alive... Harold considers the attachment of objects, Nevertheless, there are different distinctions and understanding based on description and adjectives as well as depending on person and place. Scholars in various fields and disciplines have different approaches and terminology when discussing material culture, such as the *affect* of objects (Woodward), the *attachment* to objects (Harold), “evocative objects” (Turkle), the social ontology of objects (Marcoulatos), “evidentiary function” of objects (Curasi et al.), and “material agency” (Bennett) all of which have a place in the discussion of material heirloom discourse. Woodward writes that the term “material culture” stresses how objects *affect* people and how people *affect* objects in the forming and shaping of society “and giving symbolic meaning to human activity” (2). The dialectical model is considered limited while the new relational framework for studying material culture “rather draws on concepts of *materialism, ontology, vibrancy, affect, and valency*” (Geismar et al. author’s italics 3-4).

Sometimes, a family member might talk to an heirloom because it is the physical reminder of someone deeply loved. On the other hand, a family member may yell at or seemingly become angry with an object because of its connection to a relative and, perhaps, a contentious relationship. Reminiscent of a stereotypical scenario when a young couple experiences an initial sweetheart relationship. When that relationship sours, youthful women are sometimes adamant that everything must be returned—every gift, any memorabilia, the class ring, the Letterman jacket—anything that signifies their previous attachment and commitment. While one cannot return an heirloom, stories can alter perspective.

An heirloom may present complications; heirlooms do not always conjure positive or welcome feelings, and they do not always communicate good memories. Nonetheless, family members have an ethical responsibility to maintain heirloom continuity of ancestral ties through the “unending conversation” of life (Burke *Phil of Form*) that unites them prior to birth and following death. In his landmark article, “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” Walter R. Fisher writes: “Any ethic, whether social, political, legal or otherwise, involves narrative” (in reference to the work of Stanley Hauerwas 3). Ethics deals with issues of narrative (MacIntyre). Just as public institutions are flawed, families are flawed. This does not permit the destruction of an institution any more than it would a family; rather when the flaws and problems are communicatively attended, practices may be adjusted, resulting in positive change.

An examination and communication of the practices that attended to a negative veil negotiates understanding. Even when background practices, as in the past, cannot be changed, foreground practices as current and practices might afford adjustment, leading to transformation. Lenz explains that family narratives are embedded in public narratives and ultimately national narratives (321). As Lenz writes, “In these embedments or re-embedments, generational affiliations are influenced and subjected to change over time” (322). Family narratives can be noble or “shrouded in shame-tainted silence” and can even become a “counter-narrative” to the national narrative. Lenz uses examples of historical narratives as interpreted in film. An example of a counter-narrative that comes to mind is the framed discharge papers of an ancestor who went AWOL and deserted his Civil War Union unit. In the article, “Possessions and the Extended Self,” Belk explains that, understandably, “possessions associated with pleasant memories” are most cherished (149). Like a museum, Belk writes that “the decisions to retain the object rather

than reject it determines the picture of our cultural past that is available to future generations” (149). In the article, “Continuity through Change: Navigating Temporalities through Heirloom Rejuvenation” Meltem Türe and Güliz Ger suggest that altering an heirloom allows one to reconcile with a contested past (3). In this way, the authors propose that an altered heirloom empowers an heir, allowing her to negotiate the tension between past and present while the heirloom maintains its authenticity; however, they admit such a practice contests previous studies, such as those by Grant McCracken and Curasi et al. Here it is argued that rather than a physical alteration, which may be permanent, a narrative adaptation is a more acceptable and temporal process. Coming together, individual kin offer details and insight into experiences that shape the potential of intergenerational communication and narrative formation as enlivening relations between heirlooms and kin.

Families need stories to navigate life. Family studies and development scholars Barbara H. Fiese and Arnold J. Sameroff write, “Family narratives move beyond the individual and deal with how the family makes sense of its world” (3). Communication does not begin with the individual (Arnett, Fritz, Holba, “The Rhetorical Turn to Otherness”). Family communication scholar Jody Koenig Kellas explains that “research consistently demonstrates that stories and storytelling are one of the primary ways that families and family members make sense of everyday, as well as difficult events, create a sense of individual and group identity, remember, connect generations, and establish guidelines for family behavior (1). Individual family members bring their experiences into the family network to shape multivocal heirloom narratives. Arnett and Holba explain, “A narrative is a story composed of practices agreed upon by a group of people; it is this collective sense of agreement that separates a story from a narrative” (38). Koenig Kellas and Trees agree that there are different elements contained in a narrative as

opposed to a story. In 2015, Koenig Kellas and Kranstuber Horstman developed the theory of Communicated Narrative Sense-Making (CNSM) to understand the power and process of family stories, including the practices and methods to study family narrative, and positive ways to implement narrative efforts during trying times. They point to research that indicates the holistic benefits of a narrative model following difficulty (50).

According to CNSM, there are three forms of sense-making behaviors for family members in narrative understanding: “*family-unit sense-making*”; “*individual family member sense-making*”; and “*incomplete sense-making*” (49 emphases in the original). In the first form, individual family members tell a story together and come to a certain consensus of meaning; in the second form, individual family members tell different versions of a story arriving at individual conclusions and meaning; and in the third form, not all individual family members share in the telling, and there is no individual or collective conclusion or joint meaning achieved. CNSM theory suggests that a story’s content reveals familial meanings, values, beliefs, and well-being (Koenig).

Listening to a narrative is as important as telling it; there is no conversation if there are no listeners. Arnett et al. explain that “[l]istening is a direct requirement for a tradition to prosper” (120). They point to Levinas’ ethical call, which is attentive to “the saying” that transforms one into her brother’s keeper, an allusion to the death of Abel at the hands of Cain in the Christian Bible’s Old Testament. If one is to “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” as Jesus proclaimed, then life becomes a sacrifice, where one does not live for herself. The Bible states: A person’s life is not her own. Arnett et al. maintain, “The notion of the ‘saying’ speaks and listens simultaneously, but the notion of ‘said’ imposes and tells” (Arnett et al. 122). Family narratives must be continually heard in a manner akin to the oral culture, prior to its displacement by the

written word. Prior to the written word, people lived through orality; following literacy, the word was no longer engaged through hearing but through sight. According to Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy*, the move away from the spoken word toward script signaled the beginning of the modern world with the spread of print a world of silent reading and secluded study formed that ultimately weakened the sense of community (45). Ong explains that as words became fixed and situated, language became analyzed, shaping abstract thought and formal logic (45). In effect, in literacy words became still as objects (Anton xi). The embodied, oral tradition was preserved through poetry, *mimesis*, and mnemonic devices to aid memory. Literacy broke with this tradition and emphasized the object, which made philosophy possible (Havelock). This change brought about a revolution of the mind. In the article “How Individuals’ Cherished Possessions Become Families’ Inalienable Wealth,” Curasi, Price, and Arnould explain that prior to their study, inalienable wealth theory focused on indigenous cultures as a theory developed out of Mauss’s work by Weiner; however, their research of multigenerational middle-class North American families indicates similarities in how kin commit special objects to heirloom status by aligning them with confined roles in kin membership (609). They describe a story offered by an elderly informant of an object that contrasted with her family narrative (615).

As the family matriarch, the informant describes the context surrounding the purchase of a painting of the seashore—a story the family did not know and said they were surprised to learn. The matriarch details that she and her husband purchased the painting (describing it as “frivolous”) many years ago instead of a new dryer, which they needed. The story does not fit within the conservative narrative of economic prudence she upholds. Nonetheless, it is a wonderful story and one that the family did not know. It is unclear from the recount if the family decided they would retain the painting after the matriarch’s death, but this is a fine example of an

object that has acquired layers through the recounting of origin and an attentive audience that went unknown for many years. Storytelling is a practice that protects inalienability (Türe and Ger 3).

Heirlooms are material “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin), where storied layers are continually added to the object and interpreted within a narrative whole. In the article, “Hermeneutical Terror and the Myth of Interpretive Consensus,” Kent explains that in postmodernity “...consensus as an agreement about meaning never exists; if consensus exists at all, it is only a temporary state of discourse, a momentary pause, a taking in of one’s breath” (129). Thus, interpretations of heirlooms among kin are unlikely to meet consensus; to believe interpretations are consensual or to force conformity to a single interpretation is akin to Kent’s “hermeneutical terror,” by silencing other voices. Attuning to dissident voices, acknowledges multivocal reality. Kent’s hermeneutic description of “paralogic” as an unconventional acceptance of multiplicity provides communicative texture for negotiating an heirloom’s narrative. Narratives are continually negotiated across time. One cannot change the past, and even within a family network, experiences differ. To offer a concrete example, consider an inherited heirloom immediately interpreted as an object of disdain due to association. Perhaps an heir receives a crystal decanter, acknowledged as a family heirloom.

This decanter might have been used by an alcoholic family member—and for the inheritor, the object relays a negative narrative. However, one must not attend exclusively to a singular story and as such does not permit an heir to destroy or divest of the object. Monologue is included but cannot exist on its own. Instead, an heirloom is textured by another storied layer that negotiates and navigates the narrative to a different opening of practices instead of a closing with disposal. Through communication, misgivings about the heirloom and its sanctions cannot

be erased but addressed within an object's biography. "How an object is interpreted can be dependent then upon how its past is perceived and an object can undergo a series of transformations of meaning, or jumps... (Heisley and Cours). For instance, the decanter becomes a water carafe for family dinners. Because an heirloom does not belong to one person as discussed in Chapter One, each caretaker accepts an heirloom with hope as a "fitting response" as Schrag describes, recognizing such an object as greater than one self. This is the "space of *ethos*" Schrag suggests, understood as "the context of decision for the performance of that which is fitting or proper in the ethical response..." (204). Within the presence of a new caretaker, the heirloom and family become open to new possibilities and potentialities in a place of *praxis*. In their reading of Schrag, Arnett and Holba write: "He (Schrag) reminds us that we are situated beings and that others, both known and unknown, and existence, both near and far, make the human condition and human identity possible" (236).

Possessions hold different meanings for people at different stages of their lives (Belk 146). Possessions function in different roles in human development and are involved in self-extension through various processes (139-140). In the example of the decanter, the next generation will not have the same experience as the kin who initially regarded it with disdain; the heirloom does not shed its past but invites further and future texture. As Burke suggests, there are conversations across the ages to which we attempt to contribute some small part (Philosophy 110-111 1978). The current kin are possessors, not owners; an heirloom arrives with a past and deserves a future. "For instance, the preservation of the 'social life' of the object is dependent on how, when, and to whom its stories are told. As objects are passed through time and often survive long after any one person, the stories (or versions of the stories) are passed with them" (Epp and Price 62).

Barbie Zelizer describes current memory studies “as a social activity” (216), where memory is no longer considered “retrieval” but “reconfiguration” (217). What was once thought of as “authentic, credible recounting of events of the past” are now recognized for their human bias and limitations (217). Material objects approached in a postmodern era include the tension between change and continuity and the continuous flux of time and space (Hahn and Weiss; Anton; Harold; Türe and Ger; Lenz). Families engage in interdependent practices to understand their ancestral past, the nature of the present, and possible direction for the future (Kellas and Trees; Hurdley). Not only can the past be as unpredictable as the future, our past is very much alive, present in our memories and in our very bodies.

Heirlooms are communicators of memory and signifiers of experience that represent the past, present, and future of the human condition. Helen Holmes describes in her study on the “doing” or making of family through the practice of bestowing objects that “objects and their associated practices operate as receptacles for memories, reminders of family traditions and imaginaries of family past, present, and future” (175). Heirlooms as objects of collective memory represent the past, present, and future (Lenz; Zelizer; Belk; Curasi et al.). Heirlooms are a way to physically preserve relationships when bodily proximity is no longer possible; an heirloom assumes connections across space and time and provides continuity with the past and with those who were performers and communicators of a family narrative. It is a form of immortality or at least a tangible reminder of who and what came before the present that allows for identity and stability in a postmodern era. Phenomenological reality is the embeddedness of human communication, which began before one was thrust into existence and continues after one exits.

Through indexicality, objects offer evidence of connections to a human experience (Curasi et al.). Claudia Lenz explains in her article, “Genealogy and Archaeology: Analyzing

Generational Positioning in Historical Narratives,” that “in representational systems and narratives, the past can become an object and point of reference of inter-subjective communication. It is only through this process that past events become a ‘past’ or even ‘history’ that is invested with sense and meaning” (320). Meaning-making may be negotiated through collective memory as “the shared dimension of remembering” (Zelizer 214).

One must have an understanding of past, present, and future to partake in meaning-making through memory and the communication of stories (Lenz). Maurice Halbwaches (a student of Henri Bergson and Émile Durkheim) developed the concept of *mémoire collective* in the 1920s that is still significant to current memory studies (Erl 303). Astri Erl explains that later memory studies of the 1980s and 1990s were focused more on larger, collective memories, such as national memory or public memory, but they can be narrowed for smaller, collective family memories (303).

Heirlooms function as reminders of past experiences that can lead to future thought (Curasi et. al; Turkle). For example, as a woman is reminded of her grandmother when wearing her jewelry, the woman’s thoughts may wander into the future and envision passing the jewelry on to her own granddaughter. In the anecdote, “The Rolling Pin,” published in Turkle’s book, Susan Pollak alludes to Marcel Proust’s masterpiece *Remembrance of Things* on memory and loss and his awakened sensory experience with a small bit of cake soaked in tea. Proust is suddenly taken back to another time and place with the taste of the tea-soaked pastry. Proust describes how after everything material is gone, senses remain. He writes, “But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone...remain poised a long time...the vast structure of recollection” (qtd. in Pollak). After her grandmother is gone, Dasté, the author of a short piece included in

Turkle's *Evocative Objects*, writes that her grandmother's scent, her perfume, lingered on her the cardigan after she passed. Dasté concedes she will forever be hesitant to open the suitcase that holds her grandmother's cardigan as that scent will likely dissipate. Like memorable scents, Corey Anton, professor of communication studies, writes about the lingering effects of antiques as more than just material objects: "We come to see the object in terms of what is no longer here; the item itself hints and alludes to a mysterious otherworldliness" (369). Anton clarifies that the age of the object is not what makes it antique—there is no "antiqueness;" rather, antiqueness points to how the world around the object has been altered. Objects are carriers of meaning that depict or behold a memory of a particular person, event, or experience.

A "community of memory," (15) is the 'saying' not the 'said' of a dead tradition" (17). Stories are memories, and eulogies and funeral orations are epideictic rhetoric that engage listeners in the memory of past lives. Memory is the fourth canon of rhetoric as pronounced by the Greek rhetorician Hermagoras in the second century BC. Hermagoras formalized what became the traditional division of rhetoric into its five canons: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery, which was adopted by Cicero and Quintilian (Walker 47). Memory also considers order as in how events combine to create a story. However, memory is not linear no matter how much one might try to remember chronologically. Olivier explains that "archaeology seen as the study of material memory" cannot assume a view of conventional time, where time is the continuous accumulation of moments and events (211) but rather that "[h]istory as inscribed in archaeological materials is neither unilinear or unidirectional" (212). Olivier's explanations assist in a postmodern texture for understanding time.

Traditionally speaking, one's preconceived idea might be that archaeological studies analyze artifacts unearthed from the past to contextualize and shape that past as history.

However, Olivier insists, “Archaeology in fact studies material culture that exists in the present; it deals with memory recorded in matter and not with events or moments from the past” (204; also see p. 209). In his article, Olivier attempts to disrupt homogenous time, emphasizing that every era or time period “is extremely heterogeneous” that is to say, made up of fragments of different pasts (212). Not just heirlooms, but most of the objects that circulate around everyday life are from the past. While the physical world is “multi-temporal,” what exists mostly consists of the past (Olivier 205). Olivier offers insight into the approach of archaeology and its study of objects in time compared to a modern perspective of history as time under control (208). An object can only be accessed within one’s historical moment, thus shaping present memory and identity. “Material things embed themselves in all subsequent presents; long after they have ceased to be of use or to exist, they continue to be” (206). These conditions resulted in “a movement which concerns the representation of the world,” from discoveries of land, at sea, and in the sky during the sixteenth century that opened up a different perspective. The study of such conditions and differences is likewise a rhetorical initiative (207). Discoveries by Europeans shifted their perspective of time and space. Imagine the revelation that entire civilizations had once existed and no longer did. Olivier explains that the world became “open, that is to say largely unknown, unexplored and heterogeneous” (207).

Successful transfer of heirlooms requires the articulation of heirloom narratives (Curasi et al. 2004). When heirloom narratives are not translated, meaning is lost. When meaning is lost, identity is lost. A disconnected life leads to disorientation and fragmentation. MacIntyre explains that when a person feels detached to the point of being suicidal, “he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them...” (217). The meaning of heirlooms is neither fixed nor static. Meaning is made,

navigated, and contingent on the interactions of family, heirloom, and context (Hurdley). Hurdley describes how engagement with objects creates “a narrative pathway” (721), which offers continuity through time. Family is embedded within narrative that is communicated in the verbal and non-verbal of collective performance that transmit the meaning of values, [norms and mores] morals, and the relation of individual family members to the whole of kinship as a network of relations (“Family Ties” Kellas; Curasi et al.). In the *Journal of Family Communication*, Kellas writes that “research consistently demonstrates that stories and storytelling are one of the primary ways that families and family members make sense of everyday, as well as difficult events, create a sense of individual and group identity, remember, connect generations, and establish guidelines for family behavior” (“Narrating Family” 1).

As reflections of family culture, research shows that family narratives lead to a sense of well-being and contentment (“Family Ties” Kellas). As Fiese and Sameroff write, “A focus on narratives necessitates a focus on experience and meaning” (2). Writing in 1999, the authors notice an increase in research on narrative from the previous ten years—an indication of the ‘linguistic turn.’ “One of the primary ways they do so is in the act of telling stories to others. In close relationships, like families, telling stories serves a number of important functions such as socialization, reminiscing, making sense, and connecting” (Koenig Kellas et al.; they site Koenig and Trees 2013)

Meaning goes beyond the author just as beyond the teller or conveyor of a story. One stands upon ideas, tradition, culture, and narrative. Envisaging a mythological horizon begins with an object and a practice. Stories are the heart of the family—the conversations around the dinner table, during family gatherings like weddings, holidays, and wakes. In their research on... “By connecting new events to preceding ones, heirloom rituals are incorporated into a stream of

precedents so they are recognized as growing out of tradition and experience” (Curasi, Arnould, and Price 204, 248). Epp and Price conducted a longitudinal study of a family and the practices around their heirloom table. In the anecdote, “The Rolling Pin,” published in Turkle’s edited book, Dr. Susan Pollak alludes to Marcel Proust’s masterpiece, *Remembrance of Things*, composed on memory and loss and his awakened sensory experience with a small bit of cake soaked in tea. Proust is suddenly taken back to another time and place with the taste of the tea-soaked pastry. He describes how after everything material is gone, senses remain. As Proust writes, “But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone...remain poised a long time...the vast structure of recollection” (qtd. in Pollak). Heirlooms like time are phenomenological, not chronological.

In her research on medieval heirlooms, Gilchrist describes *coming of age* occasions or what are understood as *rites of passage* as “practices of embodiment that created personhood” as events curating heirloom customs (174). Significant life-changing events and their ceremonies continue into the twenty-first century. Heirlooms mark momentous celebrations and occasions in a person’s life from the forming of a dowry chest given to a bride to the medals awarded to soldiers. These items symbolize poignant experiences in the journey of life. They also become a part of identity. Belk writes that the things one owns will form, develop, and support identity throughout life, and identity is likewise developed and defined by the “passive receipt of objects” (150).

In *Death and Personal History: Strategies of Identity Preservation*, David R. Unruh explains how the allocation and distribution of objects is one way a person looks to secure and communicate her identity (344). In his study, Unruh found that people create identity in the

formation of items, followed by the accumulation of items, and finally in the distribution of those items. These artifacts were distributed to persons who were believed to be willing to care for them, and in so doing, honor and remember the donor. This distribution was accomplished through pre-death gifts, wills, and testaments. There is little differentiation in scholarship between “gifting” and what has been called “pre-death gifting” (e.g. Belk; Unruh; Holmes). In Turkle’s edited book, Olivia Dasté describes in her anecdote, “Suitcase,” how she formed her own heirloom of her grandmother, carefully and quickly gathering particular items of meaning from her grandmother’s small apartment in Bordeaux as Dasté’s mother hurriedly tossed things into the trash. Dasté’s grandmother passed rather suddenly, and so Dasté is forced to create and shape her own makeshift heirloom from the items that remind her of her grandmother. The objects are of little monetary or market value, but they are reminiscent of her grandmother and of special times spent together, and another illustration of how heirlooms may form.

Unruh’s research posed the complication of an heir not receiving an anticipated heirloom, claiming that disinheritance also preserves identity (345). Belk claims that Jean-Paul Sartre believed “giving possessions to others as a means of extending self—[are] a special form of control” (150) an area that might warrant further research and consideration. Objects help people to identify themselves, situate themselves, and understand their embedded nature in relation to others. As Belk writes, “Through heirlooms...individual family members [are able] to gain a sense of permanence and place in the world that extends beyond their own lives and accomplishments” (159). A narrative perspective connects behavior to action that includes the reality of guilt attentive to behavior. Not every narrative is good but negative or bad narratives can be combatted and transformed. If you get rid of guilt, you can make narratives unimportant.

Guilt holds narratives together. Otherwise, why would you attend to a behavior. As you veer off from a given narrative, you feel guilt and move back to that.

The death of a family member is one of the most significant events kin experience. What impacts one family member may significantly affect the lives of the entire family. In their work on the social significance of death, Janet Finch and Lorraine Wallis describe the impact of significant events on interwoven lives (54). The permanent loss or absence of a family member may have “profound implications for those who survive” and can create a transition that is difficult to anticipate (54). Naturally, a family narrative shifts when a loved one dies.

Family communication scholarship is a more recent study as a division of communication studies with noticeable development early this century; in fact, the *Journal of Family Communication* began in 2001 (Droser 89). What would remain of a family without communication? MacIntyre writes: “Conversation is so all-pervasive a feature of the human world that it tends to escape philosophical attention. Yet remove conversation from human life and what would be left?” (210). A lack of family communication or a break-down of communication are clear indications that a family is not functioning properly and must attend to its practices in order to flourish. How a family uses language shapes their *habitus* (Bourdieu). The purpose of “conversation orientation” is to determine meaning together; whereas, in a “conformity orientation,” meaning is told.

Gendered heirlooms offer a space for exploring the meanings behind an object and the gendered skills tied to an object’s use. For example, textiles like quilts, embroidered linens, or hand sewn doilies have been passed down among matriarchs. Most of these items, deemed “women’s work” shape a unique narrative (See D&I on Lévi-Strauss) In the edited book, *Women Speak: The Eloquence of Women’s Lives*, Tamara Louise Burk explains that women’s

storytelling is often not chronological and may be about more common womanly experiences. Burk has written that she “is fascinated by the collaborative nature of women’s stories and by how they unfold through the joint participation of the women” (Burk et al. 90). In the essay written by Burk and two of her family members, the reader enters into an intimate conversation among female family members. This is the heart of the family—the conversations around the dinner table, during family gatherings like weddings, holidays, and wakes. MacIntyre writes: “Conversation is so all-pervasive a feature of the human world that it tends to escape philosophical attention. Yet remove conversation from human life and what would be left?” (210). The same may be asked of families and the relationships formed through communication: What would remain of a family without communication? Burk et al.’s essay is a glimpse into identity-formation. Family communication also includes gendered communication at the family level in the dialogic act of passing down gendered stories tied to gendered heirlooms. Cixous in *Mifsud* is like the book Arneson recommended: in women writing... “There is waste in what we say. We need that waste. To write is always to make allowances for super-abundance and uselessness while slashing the exchange value that keeps the spoken work on its track” (92-93; qtd in *Mifsud* 103).

Recipes and the mundane kitchen objects used to make and bake them are both heirlooms. Several research articles describe the memories people have of being in the kitchen with older family members. Objects such as rolling pins and knives allow a person to tangibly connect with the same utensil used for many years to provide food and celebrations. People describe the potency of aromas to take them back in time to a holiday or a grandmother’s kitchen. Such practices often deemed women’s work has been disparaged or demeaned with connections that kept women tethered to the home. It is easy to imagine the difference between

the experience of cooking together and sitting down to a family meal to recognize its objective value for the body and mind compared to the fast food or vending machine lunches many are accustomed to eating on the go in this historical moment. Americans' health has suffered. Dr. Mary Rose Williams communicates through baking cheesecakes. Tamara Louise Burk explains that women's storytelling is different than what has been deemed a "good story" that "meet[s] the male-defined criteria (90). She explains that women's storytelling is often not chronological and may be about more common womanly experiences. Burk has written that she "is fascinated by the collaborative nature of women's stories and by how they unfold through the joint participation of the women" (Burk, Nickless, and Sutherland 90).

As Burke suggests, one might assume "*equipments for living*" the various genres of art, whereby an heirloom enacts a story of tragedy, or comedy, or satire (304). In such a way, the object as an active art form is categorized with the narrative, the life experience. The heirloom opens a "narrative pathway" (Hurley), it invites creativity, the "ingredients" Burke recommends, and a certain grounding of "attitudes" just as well-known works of literature, such as Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (tragedy), George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (comedy), and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (satire). Each of these brilliant works are generally (genre) categorized, yet just as life, they are not a singular category. Categories allow humans to organize; however, they are a mental shortcut, not comprehensive or holistic. Any other genre is intertwined, weaved into the whole. Furthermore, Burke's discussion of synecdoche positions an heirloom as a synecdoche of the family (see *Philosophy* 25-30); an heirloom may represent various people, places, and events; an heirloom is one object representing kinship across time; furthermore, an heirloom's presence is revealing of absence. While an heirloom could be considered a scapegoat (see Burke 39-46), the hope and argument is that this attitude must be

avoided and released through narrative as a sort of purging rather than as casting disdain onto the heirloom and then releasing it as through destruction or disposal.

Their work hopes to offer narrative as a way to grieve and heal as family members discuss the surrounding spaces and objects left behind by loved ones. Following death, there are “instrumental tasks” and “logistical tasks” that require living kin to organize and sort materiality, which offers “an important opportunity to make sense of their family member’s permanent physical and relational absence in their lives” (255). Individuals commit their personal stories of the deceased to an object that opens an heirloom to a glimpse of a former life with continued presence. Philosophy of communication presents a frame that assists in the interpretation of multiple stories forming a narrative through heterogeneous time, where “[h]uman history is given birth in a narrational living space shaped through the communicative lives of both the seen and the unseen. This communicative dwelling is a space of association that is a result of communicative reminiscing and reflecting within a life-world, keeping communicative meaning clear, yet dynamic and open” (Arnett and Holba 41). In order to sustain a presence, family must communicate together. Hurdley writes, “In a hermeneutic circle of narrative a material content, each augments and benefits from the other’s meaning” (718-719). Individuals share personal memories and experiences surrounding an heirloom that contour various versions, nuances, and stories into a heuristic whole (Hurdley). In the article, “Dismantling Mantelpieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home,” Rachel Hurdley examines how “[e]ach object on display contains many interwoven narratives, which are under constant revision, and are dependent on the teller and listener for particular momentary orientations” (725).

In Michael W. Pratt and Barbara H. Fiese’s edited book, *Family Stories and the Life Course: Across Time and Generations*, scholars take a systems perspective to consider how

narratives are an important part of family relationships and identity development. For example, intergenerational interactions in storytelling between grandparents and grandchildren provide a heritage of values and traditions (356).

According to Mandy P. Hendry and Andrew M. Ledbetter in their article, “Narrating the Past, Enhancing the Present: The Associations Among Genealogical Communication, Family Communication Patterns, and Family Satisfaction,” most research on family communication is limited to parent-child communication and communication between parents (117). “Rarer still are studies that consider how the extended family network extends across time and history,” write the authors (117). They explain that there is a rise in genealogical information most likely due to convenient Internet services, offering virtual connections and DNA testing to unite relatives, as well as television shows geared toward “those searching for their roots” (117). This increase is perhaps a renewed or continued interest in finding meaning and identity by making familial connections—a search for bonding and interacting through past traditions.

In their article, “Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices,” marketing professors, Amber M. Epp and Linda L. Price announce: “We contend that ‘being a family’ is a collective enterprise that is central to many consumption experiences and replete with challenges in contemporary society” (50). Family Communications Patterns Theory (FCPT) considers two communicative behaviors, “conversation orientation” and “conformity orientation,” where families “create shared reality” (Koerner and Schrodts 384). Realizing the ethic of responsibility required for heirloom preservation involves both orientations with the recognition that narratives and objects are not static phenomena.

The notion of “discourse dependence” has more recently become a familial quality within the field of family communication (Droser 91; Suter 1). For example, in *Critical Family Studies*

(CFC), power in kinship relations is accorded in discourse (Suter 2). CFC does not view the family as distinct or disconnected from external, public practices and investigates the reciprocal influences and effects of private and public communication, where traditional understandings are disrupted, challenged, and/or transformed (Suter). “Thus, families are built through talk, which means that information from health professionals, conversations with other family members, and other kinds of communication shape how parents manage and understand family relationships and transitions” (Suter 2). Heirlooms source conversations to begin healing for family who are hurting; to initiate difficult discussions; to work through emotions; and to invite the making of more memories.

Arnett et al. call for a phenomenological turn toward “life as a journey” (124) while “...all pointing to life outside the self, constituting the rhetorical turn to Otherness, to a phenomenological reality of embeddedness, to situated life with all its uncertainty, error, and fragility” (130). As MacIntyre so aptly states: “And to someone who says that in life there are no endings, or that final partings take place only in stories, one is tempted to reply, ‘But have you never heard of death?’” (212). Communicative *praxis* shapes family narratives and accompanying heirlooms. Any trinket, any mundane item may hold a memory that offers a place for dialogue.

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