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"Seeing the Unnoticed"
Towards A Study of the Banal

by

Deirdre Brown, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts
School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ont.

May 1994

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TOWARDS A STUDY OF THE BANAL**

**submitted by Deirdre Brown, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, School of Journalism and Communication

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Abstract

Everyday objects come from a world of mass production and enter a world of private communication. They exist as both public and private objects, not personally produced but bearing personal meanings, alive in the private space of the home, but available to the public gaze of visitors. Everyday objects within the home are experienced by individuals in every day of their life and, as such, have an important relationship with the communication our society conducts through the symbolic meanings invested into our consumer objects. In this way, everyday objects can be used to set up a type of context in which individuals understand themselves and the culture in which they live. Everyday, banal, objects could be argued therefore, to create a type of contextual world in which objects below an individual's conscious attention are used in interaction in the process of social communication.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank two groups of people who each in their own way were instrumental in helping me to complete this project. Firstly, I would like to thank my family for all of their support and endless belief in my ability to do what ever it was I set my mind to. Their support and love was always there for me and made my 'journey through academia' an experience they all had an important role in. To my Mom and Dad, I say thank you for your never-ending support. Your investment has not simply been one of time and money, but of patience and love. I hope I have 'done you proud' because you deserve the best. I also would like to extend my gratitude and thanks to Andrea Ellison for all of her support, and for being my family away from home while in the big bad East.

I would also like to give an enormous 'thanks' to my sister and best friend, Lynda. Your optimism inspired me to finish this paper and stay with it when I really didn't think I would be able to. Although we were separated by thousands of miles, I felt your support and love throughout this project. I only hope I can be as supportive when you enter into the life of a grad student.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the teachers and professors I have encountered who's lack of support and narrow-mindedness drove me to prove them wrong. I thank these people for putting hurdles in my way, and making me believe more strongly in the importance of equal opportunity and respect for all people and ideas in academia. You have made the completion of this project all the more special and meaningful for me.

Table of Contents

Acceptance Sheet	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
 INTRODUCTION	 1
 CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW	 8
A Review of Literature	10
Structures Inside and Outside the Self	13
Culture and Consumption	19
Striking A Balance	22
Symbolic Interactionsim	24
G.H. Mead	27
Herbert Blumer	32
Ethnomethodology	34
Harold Garfinkel	37
Erving Goffman	39
Research Directions	44
 CHAPTER TWO: HOUSE AND HOME	 47
History, Social Communication, and Objects	48
The Home	60
Home and Identity	64
"Home is Where the Heart Is"	65
Interiors and Exteriors	66
The Self and Space	69
Introducing the Individual	73
Mining the Everyday	79
Macro vs. Micro Perspectives	80
Exploring the Everyday	85
 CHAPTER THREE: A PLACE OF HER OWN	 86
Feminist Concerns	88
The Home: Historical Aspects	95
The Home: Spatial Issues	100
Objects/Decoration	103
Decoration	108

Table of Contents
(continued)

CHAPTER FOUR: IMAGINING THE PERFORMANCE	111
Towards a Framework	112
Broadening the Banal	114
Chia: Pet or Plant?	115
Fridge Magnets: Friend or Foe?	124
Knick-Knacks and Knowable Meanings	134
CONCLUSION	148
BIBLIOGRAPHY	156

Introduction

*While the contextual world of objects may be the last and most overlooked component of the mechanisms of social interaction, it may very well prove, when finally excavated from its embedded relationship to the unconscious, to be the most significant factor of all.
(Miller, 1987, 102)*

This thesis uses an approach drawn from symbolic interactionism (SI) to study the world of everyday, banal objects. All too often, everyday objects such as utensils and doormats, whose existence is confined largely to the private realm, are overlooked in favour of more spectacular, and presumably more important objects which embody principles of art and design and which exist more visibly in the public realm.

Style, especially when embodied in public monuments, architecture, or any sphere of high social visibility is considered to be socially significant, and hence, worthy of commentary. Everyday objects, however, tend to be denied even modest claims to style. They are kitsch, the debris of modern mass culture best forgotten in the present, and perhaps oblivious in the future.

This thesis argues that everyday objects are important elements in the process of social interaction. Not only do they convey complex sets of meanings but they also contribute to the formation of individual identity.

Everyday objects are, by definition, much closer to us than objects existing in the realm of high visibility. The modern style of architecture may

capture our *Zeitgeist* , but our personal mementos and private objects capture us. We live with them and they with us in a relationship of intimacy and familiarity. Indeed, our familiarity with them even affords us the luxury of contempt and the opportunity to place inestimable value upon them.

My interest in this topic originates from a more general interest in the nature and importance of the symbolic role and function of objects in society. I have often wondered why it is that banal and apparently useless everyday objects are used and sought out by individuals. This curiosity has led me to consider why it is that so many differentiations of style, color, and form exist in the design of our simple and often overlooked domestic objects. The vast number of objects that people have in their homes also interests me. I have long been interested in seeking a explanation for why our homes have so many objects which, on the surface, have no apparent use or value. What is it about people that allows them to be so motivated? Why do people have doormats with geese as opposed to ducks? Why would anyone feel the need to purchase a cheese knife with a flamingo head as its handle? It is these mundane, and sometimes ridiculous, questions that I seek to answer in this study of the meaning of everyday objects in the home.

Everyday objects come from a world of mass production and enter a world of private communication. As such, they are not only the index of our general level of material production, but also elements within privatized meaning systems. Their existence as both public and private objects, not personally produced but bearing personal meanings, alive in the private space of the home, but available to the public gaze of visitors, also signals something about the formation of identity.

Everyday objects always contain a theory of their use. They come to us, encoded as it were, with notions of who should use them and where they

should be used. Hence, a lava lamp should not be purchased by a professional, unless as an ironic commentary, and should not be displayed in the living room, unless as an ironic commentary. A man should not buy pink-colored oven mitts but a woman can safely buy them in any hue. However, neither may use the oven mitts at the office. A doormat should not be found in a bedroom; a Ginsu knife has no place in the basement; and ceramic figurines, as much as possible, should be confined to the living room.

The owners of everyday objects may or may not act upon the theories of their use. They may or may not place and use them as the objects themselves may prescribe. But whether they do or not, their owners are also, voluntarily or involuntarily, speaking about themselves to themselves, and to others. Our objects speak volumes about us. And in the process of conforming or not conforming to their use, their owners shape and express aspects of their identities. But clearly, our identities are bound up with the public face of these objects. Our identities, like the objects themselves, live in both the public and private worlds. They are mixtures of public and private.

This thesis attempts to study the way in which everyday objects express both public and private meanings and contribute to the shaping of individual identity, itself also understood as a mixture of both public and private. It is organized in the following way.

The first chapter of this thesis is a brief review of the relevant literature in the discussion of everyday objects and meaning. In this chapter, discussions of meaning and objects will be reviewed from various disciplines including sociology, anthropology, consumer studies, and psychology. This literature will be reviewed in terms of its merit in discussing the interactional nature of the process of meaning and everyday objects. In this chapter, the shortcomings of some contemporary literature will be evaluated as either

overly focussed upon objective or subjective examinations of the process of meaning and everyday objects.

This critique of contemporary literature will provide a basis upon which to evaluate the theoretical propositions of SI, ethnomethodology, and dramaturgy. All three theoretical groupings will be discussed as they relate to the study of meaning and objects as an interactive process of meaning-creation and individual identity which takes place in the process of balancing the public and private meanings of everyday objects.

This chapter will also examine the reasons behind using theories of SI and ethnomethodology to study everyday objects and meanings. In this chapter, SI will be evaluated as a set of propositions initially developed by G.H. Mead, which sought to understand the intentions behind individual behavior in their social environment. Although Mead himself did not undertake a study of everyday objects, his theories of the individual and the social world created a basis upon which further theorists could explore the notion that; meaning for individuals was a mix of public and private symbolic meanings, and formed in interaction with the individual and the 'generalized other.'

Working from Mead's initial work, Herbert Blumer coined the term symbolic interactionism, and sought to expand Mead's investigations into the motivations and attitudes of individuals towards the world and their objects. Through the work of Blumer, the notion of the interactive process between public and private, personal and social, in the meaning-creation process was developed. In his various works, Blumer expanded on Mead's work to examine more closely the role of the individual actor in this process of meaning-creation.

Working from this understanding of meaning as a processual interaction between public and private, theories of ethnomethodology such as those of Harold Garfinkel, sought to examine the everyday world and the individual actor's actual lived experiences. In ethnomethodology, the daily life of the individual actor was seen as an important site in which meanings were created and the two faces (public and private) of personal identity were in constant interaction.

Working on the theories offered by SI, Erving Goffman developed his ideas of front and back stage behavior and the constant daily performances of individual and social actors, to discuss meaning and identity. Like SI, and ethnomethodology, Goffman also offers a way in which to study the public and the private, the personal and the social. In the theories of Goffman and the others, it is possible to discuss the importance of using theories of interaction and interpretation in the study of everyday objects. For the purposes of this thesis, theories of SI will be used because, beginning with Mead, SI offers a way in which to study the interactional attitude of individuals towards objects. The theories of Blumer, Garfinkel, and Goffman expand Mead's original ideas and make it possible to attempt to develop a strategy for thinking about the two faces (public and private) of personal identity and meaning and everyday objects.

Chapter Two, "House and Home" will begin with a historical discussion of the institution of the home. Theories of the study of history and objects will be presented by Siegfried Giedion, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Baudrillard. These theories and accounts of history and everyday objects will be used to expand upon a discussion of the nature of the modern home. Working from these historical accounts, the second part of this chapter will

briefly discuss the major changes in the home over the last 200 years in Western society.

The remainder of Chapter Two will examine the unique nature of the modern home as both a physical structure and a symbolic environment and container of meanings for individuals and society. In this section, the home will be examined as an institution which not only provides physical shelter, but also contains our objects and a wealth of symbolic meanings used in social and individual communication patterns.

In Chapter Three, "A Place of Her Own" the interactive process of meaning-creation and everyday objects within the home will be examined in reference to public and private meanings of gender. In this chapter, both the space of the home itself and the everyday objects within its walls will be discussed in relation to their role in the process of creating meaning. This chapter will attempt to understand the way in which gender is introduced into the mix between public and private in the meaning-creation process and the development of individual identity.

Building upon the preceding chapters, Chapter Four will offer a four-step framework in which to study the interaction between public and private meanings and everyday objects. In this chapter, three everyday objects (the Chia Pet, fridge magnets, and knick-knacks) will be examined and discussed in relation to each of these four proposed steps. It is the aim of this chapter to suggest a framework in which the meaning of everyday objects can be examined as the interaction between private and public meanings, and as influential in the process of creating one's identity.

It is the aim of this thesis to use these areas of research in an attempt to draw conclusions concerning the contention that the symbolic nature of objects allows objects to act as a projective medium for communication. It is

my interest to attempt to discover whether objects are used as such a medium by society and individuals, to transfer an intricate set of personal and social interactions along the cultural continuum throughout their lifetimes. In this way, it is my intention to conclude whether or not everyday objects can be studied as 'communicators,' as objects which are both created and understood as meaningful in the complex interaction between individual personal needs, and broader social context of understanding and communication.

It is my aim with this thesis to fully explore the interactive nature of the meanings of everyday objects in the home using theories of SI to explain more fully the often overlooked, and highly complex, nature of these objects in our social communication and individual identities. It is the aim of this work to attempt to prove that objects exert their presence both as material/physical form and as symbols for larger and broader meanings and social interactions.

It is this dual function and characteristic of everyday objects that often renders them invisible to consciousness. It is hoped that this thesis will be able to argue that the ability of objects to exist in both the unconscious and conscious worlds of meaning-creation allows objects the potential to deliver complex sets of associations and meanings. However, it is this complexity that is often overlooked in contemporary literature. Yet it is exactly in the nature of this complexity that my study of meaning and everyday objects in the home will aim to examine and use to explain some of the complex articulations of social relationships and communication within modern society.

Chapter One: Literature Review

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something - because it is always before one's eyes) The real foundations of his [sic] enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him. - And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (Wittgenstein, 1951, 50)

The modern study of material culture, i.e., of the goods and objects which daily surround us, is broadly divided into two tendencies: (a) the study of objects¹ themselves, their materiality and physical properties, as indices both of the general level of production and also of the dominant belief systems and practices; and (b) the study of how objects fit into patterns of individual use, as evidence of powerful forces beyond both individuals and objects, structuring attitudes and beliefs, and, eventually, as evidence of the potentially pathological relationship of modern individuals to the mass produced environment.

On both sides of this divide, one finds sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and design historians. On the first side, theorists hold that the meaning of objects is inherent in the objects themselves. On the second

¹ For the remainder of this thesis I shall use the term 'objects' to refer to the actual things or items of the everyday domestic environment. I have chosen to use this term instead of the more common use of 'goods' to avoid any ideological or pre-established meanings that the term 'good' may bring to this discussion.

side, theorists describe the role of objects in more abstract, cultural terms, and posit that the meanings of goods are wholly social and related to individual attitudes and deep structures rather than to the objects or goods themselves.

Both these approaches attempt to coordinate objects and meanings. They quarrel firstly over the location of the meaning: in the objects, in the user, or elsewhere. In quarrelling over the location of meaning, they mobilize different views of human subjectivity and of social organization and functioning. However, each approach fails to recognize the interactional and interpretive process that occurs every time a person sees, uses, or consumes an object. It is the aim of this thesis to study how individuals construct meaning and therefore engage in social communication. Social communication is the process that occurs between members of any given social group as they construct, exchange, discover, posit, form, and transform meaning. As such, it is the process by which a social group, and the individuals who make it up, construct their identity.

Specifically, this thesis will examine the parameters of social communication as it involves human interactions with everyday objects within the domestic environment. This will itself require a two-fold discussion of everyday objects, involving examination of (a) the process by which domestic objects acquire meaning and (b) the implications of the meaning acquisition process for the study of communication and the objects which surround us on a daily basis. Inherent in this approach will be the understanding of the individual as an agent capable of autonomy who, as such, is both part of the processes of culture but also able to act independently of them.

In choosing domestic objects in the home, it is the aim of this thesis to elaborate on the crucial role that the interior environment plays in the

development of one's social and individual identity. The objects and spaces which occupy our homes provide perceptual schemes for the way in which individuals understand not only the social role of objects but also the social practice of using the symbolic meanings attached to objects in order to communicate with, and engage in, a larger cultural discourse. Indeed, it is within the home that people invest a large amount of their time and energy. The home is an environment in which people interact on a daily basis, and it is also the site which accumulates the greatest quantity of any individual's private and consumer objects or goods.

A Review of Literature:

In The Meaning of Things (1981), Rochberg-Halton, et al., undertake a study of the *cherished* domestic possessions of 80 Chicago families. They present an anthropological study of consumption and use the concept of cultivation as their theoretical framework.² The authors claim that as individuals actively cultivate a world of meanings, the significance of objects for the development of the 'self' becomes increasingly clear.

Although the primary research undertaken by Rochberg-Halton, et al., is both vast and unique, their theoretical approach remains available to criticism. As with many anthropological studies of objects and meaning, Rochberg-Halton, et al., move on the basis of what Daniel Miller calls "unbalanced subjectivism." (Miller, 1987, 178) On this basis, the 'self' tends to be highly personalized and subjective, and to exist outside of, or prior to,

² The authors define cultivation as " an application of philosophical pragmatism to a theory of culture [meant] to emphasize how the meaning evolves as an active process of interpretation oriented toward goals. In the context of this study, the concept accounts for the vast differences in the range of meanings that people derived from the objects with which they interacted." (Rochberg-Halton, et al., 1981, xi) The authors use this framework to demonstrate how individuals at every stage of their lives use the fact of possessing objects as well as the meanings of those objects in the psychological development of identity.

the social world.³ For Miller, the consequences of this subjectivism, and the shortcomings of the author's approach are captured by examining more carefully their objects of study.

Why did the authors choose to concentrate on the *cherished* possessions of families and individuals? Indeed, does not the insistence upon cherished possessions lead their respondents to offer highly personalized and idiosyncratic reasons for loving some objects? Does it not become difficult, therefore, to apply the reasons offered to other objects or categories of objects?

Miller argues that the focus upon highly subjective objects and patterns of meaning-creation inevitably leads Rochberg-Halton, *et al.*, to theorize the 'self' as a highly individualistic and subjective entity. Hence, their theory of meaning springs from a psychological and essentialist conception of the individual self which views meaning-creation (i.e., the meanings of objects) as the result of preexisting and essential psychic needs.

In Rochberg-Halton *et al.*, this subjective theory of meaning-creation or cultivation, results in a lack of concrete analysis of the contradictions of industrial society. The authors' decision to use a study of the cherished goods of individuals in apparently 'happy homes' appears to be removed from the wider realms of both social action and power relations. As a result, the authors fail to account for the broad range of interaction which occurs between individuals, objects, and the social world in the process of creating-meaning. They also extract the cherished possessions from their relation to the built environment and the social context in which they were created, purchased, etc.

³ Indeed, at the basis of many anthropological studies of objects and meaning, one finds notions of the essential self and of inherent psychic needs and activities.

In the past, academic discussions of industrial objects have tended to identify the realm of production as the critical area for the examination of social relations and meaning and to relegate consumption to a distinctively secondary role. In this view, consumption and consumptive practices seem to be highly individualistic, actually only mirroring production, thereby showing that production mapped consumption and that the individual was a by-product of the social, and that individual belief patterns were merely 'false consciousness.' Working from a Marxist commentary on capitalism, these discussions have consequently viewed consumption as essentially a reaction to alienating and hegemonic forces of capitalist production. Consumption is not an autonomous site of meaning, but rather the reinforcement of productive capacities and outputs.

Work in the realm of material culture, however, has suffered a more serious setback than economically determined theories of consumption. Until recently, the study of material goods has either been neglected as a serious academic pursuit or relegated to the realm of purely fetishistic⁴ relations between people and goods. In this frame of mind, torn between lack of seriousness and fetishism, the growth of material culture has been studied only narrowly as the study of goods *per se* rather than as the site of an interaction between individuals and goods.

⁴ This term refers to a Marxian analysis of consumer objects which claims that "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race...[so] it is in the world of commodities or goods with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities." (Leiss *et al.*, 1986, 272) In this view, as the industrial market grows "more and more elements of both the natural environment and human qualities are drawn into the orbit of exchanged things, into the realm of commodities." (Leiss *et al.*, 1986, 273) This intermingling of nature and humanity produces a fetishistic relationship between people and their goods in which things begin to appear to the individual as "objectified forms" and no longer easily distinguishable from an individual's personal identity. In this relationship, "fewer and fewer aspects of our environment and ourselves remain 'outside' the domain of buying and selling." (Leiss *et al.*, 1986, 273) In this view, goods and identity become inextricably linked and exist purely in the realm of economic trade and production.

The nature, form, and forces of production of goods have been analyzed at the expense of a more complete study of the actual interactions between people and goods. However, it is possible to examine consumption in relation to the social world of meaning without falling into a fetishistic trap of equating the use and purchase of goods with a direct indication of self-development and individual identity. It is possible to view consumption partly as a personal process by which individuals negotiate with capitalism or impart idiosyncratic and private meanings to objects which they own. However, in order to do so, it is necessary to adopt a view of the individual as capable of greater autonomy than the fetishistic model allows.

A study limited either to objects or to people will neglect the relationship of both in the process of creating meaning. For the purposes of this thesis, consumption of goods and the existence of material culture will be evaluated as the relationship of objects and subjects, through which objects are constituted as social forms.

Structures Inside and Outside the Self:

In studies of the self, theorists have attempted to prove that the meanings of goods and individuals' relationships with goods are based upon an essentialist self which has pre-determined and pre-existent psychic needs and reactions. For such essentialist theorists, the inner self is equated with the "ingredients for our fulfillment" and the belief that it contains "the solutions to dilemmas of choice and decision by which we define identity."

(Baumeister, 1986, 263) In this view, the individual in modern industrialized society is constantly confronted by a variety of goods, all of which are supposed to have some relation to his/her particular needs and desires. In this context, the individual is faced with the dilemma of continually

reinterpreting his/her needs in the face of a rapidly changing array of goods. This constant need for transformation and interpretation has lead many psychological theorists to view the modern individual as 'alienated' or in some way constantly dissatisfied with both his/her identity and individual characteristics.

Critiques of this essentialist view of the individual in both psychology and sociology originate in a disagreement with the premise that the 'self' is somehow an objective entity unaffected by the larger social and cultural context in which it exists. Critics working within the discipline of non-essentialist psychology, propose instead that "individual behavior may vary a great deal from situation to situation and is, therefore, a product of the interaction between a person's personality and the immediate situation." (Krasner, 1980, 27) In this second view, the immediate environmental or social situation is seen as the more important and useful determinant in the construction and behavior of the individual and the individual is not understood as possessing only innate needs but also an adaptive capacity.

Sociological accounts of the individual not only reject the autonomous nature of the essentialist view, but propose instead that personal identity is defined by, and dependent upon, the context of society and its institutions. In these views of the individual, identity is seen as a set of external roles and statuses whose arrangement is socially determined. An example of these roles would be behavior created on the basis of factors such as class, age, gender, socio-economic status, etc.

It would appear that neither the essentialist nor sociological view of the individual treats the actual human person as a complex set of interactions, potentially independent of and inter-related with a larger social context and institutions. These dichotomous views of the individual as possessing

separate realms of the 'personal' and the 'social,' will be of little use in a full discussion of the role of the individual in the consumption and interpretation of meanings. Instead, for the purposes of this thesis, it will be more useful to discuss concepts of the individual in terms of an interpretive or pragmatic approach.

The area of consumption and consumer practices has also attempted to study objects and meanings. Studies in this area encompass a wide range of questions and approaches in considering the relationship between people and mass-produced goods. Economic theories concerned with consumption often use purely quantitative research to demonstrate the existence of taste patterns and preferences. Hence, although attention is focussed on objects and their number, the sheer fact of this consumption is interpreted not as proof of alienation or manipulation, but as evidence of somewhat autonomous, though aggregated individual behavior.

However, even this research can be criticized for its narrow approach to the multi-dimensional nature of both the individual and larger societal practices and influences. This kind of economically inspired material culture study can be criticized for its focus upon objects over people which can lead to theories of fetishism and can result in a situation in which "people are superseded as the subject of investigation by objects, and become essentially labels for their movement or pattern." (Miller, 1987, 143) In short, these studies can veer all too easily into another denunciation of the fetishistic or unhealthy relationship between people and objects.

In their landmark work The World of Goods (1978), Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, using theories drawn from economics and anthropology, analyze the complexities of goods and material culture and set out to examine goods in terms of the expressive and symbolic functions they

perform in modern consumer culture. In this way, they view objects as crucial components in the process of creating cultural meanings and social practices. For them, objects in consumer culture "are used to make 'visible' and stable the categories of culture." (Douglas, 1978, 59) In this way, individuals use objects as a means of communicating with each other and communicating socially-shared meaning about themselves with others.

The importance of this approach to the role and function of objects in consumer culture is that Douglas and Isherwood offer a way in which to study objects from a more than purely use value or utility standpoint; they suspend the idea of goods as "primarily needed for subsistence plus competitive display." (Douglas, 1978, 59) Instead, they encourage us "to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators." (Douglas, 1978, 59)

In this view, goods or objects can be studied as important in the process of meaning-creation by emphasizing the dual nature of objects as fulfilling both utilitarian and material needs while simultaneously acting as symbols of social meanings and relationships. For Douglas and Isherwood, any approach to objects in this dual manner will be able to:

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, 1978, 62)

Hence, Douglas and Isherwood approach objects as an essential means by which to analyze consumer culture, and attempt to clarify the process of creating-meaning and individual identity. The dual nature of objects as both physical entities and symbolic markers allows the theorist to focus upon the interpretive procedures mobilized by individuals, on an everyday basis, to make sense and meaning of their world.

A view of objects as symbols of social and cultural meanings demonstrates the idea that meaning is embedded in the interaction between object and individual and that this meaning cannot simply be extracted from either the object itself or from the individual. This view of the object as symbol demonstrates that meaning is located deep within the interactive process of communication which occurs daily between an individual and his/her various domestic, everyday objects.

A second important discussion in The World of Goods comes from the authors' critique of the overly-individualistic approach that many material culture studies use. For Douglas and Isherwood, research based solely upon a study of individual needs, wants, and desires acts to separate the integral role that goods play within a larger social context of meaning creation and cultural classification:

To name one more familiar grief with economic theorizing: the idea of the rational individual is an impossible abstraction from social life. It is clearly absurd to aggregate millions of individuals buying and using goods without reckoning with the transformations they affect by sharing consumption together... Man [*sic*] is a social being. We can never explain demand by looking at the physical properties of goods. Man needs goods for communicating 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. (Douglas and Isherwood, 1978, 5 & 95)

For the purposes of this thesis, a narrow focus upon objects will be of little use. Despite the above criticism of studies in the area of consumption, studies of consumer culture can be useful. In my research, discussions in the area of consumption will be directed toward answering the question of how consumption fulfills the twin purposes of satisfying needs as well as conveying meanings. In this way, consumption will be approached in terms

of its usefulness as an interactive process of meaning creation between people, the goods they own and purchase, and the social factors that may influence their relationship.

Perhaps the best known body of research in the study of material culture and consumption has been carried out within a Marxist approach to the individual and society. In this approach, the consumption of goods is examined in terms of the use-value and exchange-value of goods. For Marxists, the act of consumption of modern goods by an individual is a search for need fulfillment. In this perspective, these 'needs' can only be accounted for "in terms of the search by capital for greater profits [such that consumption] is always subservient to production interests." (Miller, 1987. 144)

This view of the roles and needs in consumption leads to a conservative view of the 'proper places' in which meaning creation and individual self-creation may occur. It can occur in production, not in consumption. Consumption, is, therefore, ignored as a potential site from which to examine social relations and cultural expression. In this Marxist area of study, an examination of power and economic forces is undertaken at the expense of a wider study of the individual, society, and the process of meaning creation and everyday industrial goods.

Culture and Consumption:

In his work Culture as Consumption (1988), Grant McCracken explores the idea that the meaning of objects is in their use "to express cultural categories and principles, cultivate ideals, create and sustain lifestyles, construct notions of the self, and create (and survive) social change." (McCracken, 1988, 1) In this definition of meanings and

symbolism, objects are viewed as cultural maps, undetectable records of what he terms 'cultural principles' and 'cultural categories.' This cultural function of goods can act to disarm or encourage changes and developments in cultural meanings. McCracken uses a discussion of "object-codes" to illustrate the potential of goods to act as cultural regulators of meanings.

Originally introduced by Sahlins, object-codes are explained by McCracken as cultural devices which allow individuals to take existing cultural meanings and recontextualize them into new formations. These codes are ways in which society can be informed in knowable terms about new ideas and transformations. These codes also give groups such as subcultures or political activists a medium other than language in which to communicate their ideas and platforms. These codes, however, can also 'disarm' certain innovations by assimilating them to established thought patterns. In this way, codes can act to diminish the dynamic potentiality of new ideas by transforming them into often simplistic terms which all of society can understand and thus re-appropriate into its specific realities.

The function of object-codes can be illustrated through so-called 'hippie aesthetics'⁵ such as the VW van or the peace sign. These were initially 'coded' to represent a certain set of ideas concerning society and individuals. In more recent years, however, many of these objects have become 're-coded.' The peace sign is now a popular fashion item for teenagers and is used to advertise the particular fashion sense of the

⁵ "What Sahlins calls the "object-code" incorporates innovations such as "hippie" aesthetics and principles and makes them a harmless part of the mainstream. [Objects] are a kind of language of invention with which radical groups can think about, refine, and ultimately advertise their ideologies. Goods then are instruments of innovation and conservation and in both capacities they serve us in our modern quest for order in a disorderly world. (McCracken, 1988, xv)

individual wearer rather than a set of ideological beliefs concerning peace and society.

For McCracken, these object-codes are critical ways in which stability is maintained and individuals can initiate acts of self and collective definition. Embedding meanings in objects also performs an innovative function for material culture: "[objects] are one of the most powerful engines of change in our society" and serve as "a kind of language of invention with which radical groups can think about, refine and ultimately advertise their ideologies." (McCracken, 1988, xi)

In this view of the role of goods as object-codes, McCracken suggests that object-codes embedded in objects facilitate the process of making cultural meanings visible and allow objects to be used as agents of change and continuity in the cultural realm. In the process of the creation of object-codes, objects remain flexible and open to interpretation from all social groups. As well, the existence of object-codes allows consumer objects simultaneously to preserve cultural meanings and provide common meanings for individuals throughout society:

For instance, it is surely in part because of the thoroughness with which this society has inscribed the cultural categories and principles of "maleness" and "femaleness" in the object-code and material world, that it is so difficult to contend with the problem of sexism.

If sexism persists and indeed even continues to flourish it must be to some extent because as Goffman has so brilliantly noted, sexist stereotypes are thoroughly grounded in even the subtlest details of everyday life and the object-code.

(McCracken, 1988,132)

McCracken also implies the relative autonomy of individual actors who are overwhelmed neither by the goods themselves, their object-codes, or their processes of production. Quite the contrary, in McCracken's account

there is a wide margin of human agency, as the very notion of 'radical groups' suggests. For the purposes of this thesis, this dual feature of consumer objects (their ability both to conserve and radically change cultural meanings) gives our everyday goods a special significance in the process of meaning creation and communication. An understanding of the symbolic characteristics of objects is a way in which to begin to understand the potential of objects to act as an essential part of social communication and consumer culture. The symbolic character of objects which surround us on a daily basis offers the hypothesis that objects can be used by individuals in interaction with each other to embody particular cultural meanings and understandings.

In this way, objects facilitate a constant and dynamic interaction in which individuals create and sustain meaning and aim ultimately to understand and place themselves in the cultural practices and meanings of their time. For McCracken, it is the ability of objects to facilitate cultural meaning and changes in these meanings that should occupy theorists concerned with material culture and consumption:

Goods serve as an instrument of change in two capacities...In one of these capacities, they serve as an opportunity to fashion a new cultural concept through the selective use, novel combination, and premediated innovation of existing cultural meanings. In this case, goods are a creative medium in which invention can take place through experimentation with existing cultural meanings. In the other, goods serve as an opportunity for a group to engage in an internal and external dialogue in which changes are contemplated, debated, and then announced...Goods, then are two media of communication: both bulletin boards for internal messages and billboards for external ones. (McCracken, 1988, 135-36)

In his work, Material Culture and Mass Consumption (1987), Daniel Miller provides an excellent account of the various traditions in the field of anthropological and sociological studies of the material world. The following draws upon Miller's discussion of these traditions as well as his attempt to discuss many of the critical issues surrounding any study of material objects and cultural meaning.

Miller discusses in detail a critical split within anthropological studies in privileging either the individual or the social as the object of study in culture and meaning creation. For Miller, this dualism is symptomatic of a stronger dualism within anthropology between subjectivist and objectivist studies. Historically, anthropological examinations have been concerned primarily with the study of the collective creation of culture rather than the individual's development and self-creation.

In such objectivist studies, society is privileged as an *a priori* to culture, and "it is social relations and categories which are given form in cultural classifications." (Miller, 1987, 64) In these studies, the individual is not involved in the process of meaning creation except as a vehicle for the expression of the prior values and beliefs of social groupings and structures.

Contrary to such traditional approaches is the view offered by Berger and Luckmann in their work The Social Construction of Reality. (1966) According to Miller, Berger and Luckmann break away from traditional approaches to the individual and meaning in their study of "the creative subjectivity of the agent [which] is always social in form but with society understood as a constraint." (Miller, 1987, 64) In this approach, emphasis upon the historical and structural nature of culture is rejected in favour of emphasis upon the subject and subjective experience.

In his analysis of the various anthropological theories concerning the subject/object debate, Miller is able to put forth a coherent framework for the study and conceptualization of the individual in material culture. For Miller, culture can be understood in a more complete manner than that posited by either the subjectivist or objectivist anthropological approaches. In Miller's view, the integral relationship between the individual and culture can be explained as follows:

Culture [is] derived as a historical force prior to the existence of any individual subject, but is only realizable through agency. It is, therefore, the means by which the individual is socialized as a member of a given society and is, in turn, the form of all individual and social creativity. (Miller, 1987, 81)

This view of the individual as both part of the process of culture and as an independent force of culture, goes some way to resolving the dichotomy between essentialist and structuralist conceptualizations of the individual and culture.

Another common criticism of anthropological approaches to meaning is the lack of emphasis upon, and recognition of, the wider realm or context of social action that individuals experience in the process of meaning creation and interpretation. As a result of this failure, anthropological studies of meaning can extract the personal from the social, while simultaneously overlooking the very real and persuasive forces of power and economic structure of modern capitalist society. However, an interpretive approach which balances social and personal, public and private meanings partially addresses and resolves these criticisms. In the interpretive tradition, researchers have aimed to find a way in which to study meaning from the

point of view of the social actors themselves, even as they are caught up in their interactions and, therefore, conditioned by their contexts.

Studies in symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology seek to find a balance between the roles of the individual and the social in the realm of objects and meaning construction. As will be discussed in the following section, symbolic interactionists interested in the actual 'lived experiences' of social actors use the idea of interaction to balance the study of personal/private, social/public meanings against each other.

For the purposes of this thesis, an interpretive theoretical approach allows one to study meaning-creation as both an individual and social construction, and to examine the real, everyday surroundings of the social actor. In using concepts and ideas drawn from SI, the meaning within and around domestic objects may be removed from the purely subjective or the purely objective social realm. Indeed, it is hoped that SI will allow us to strike a balance between the social and personal forces at work in meaning construction and interpretation.

Symbolic Interactionism:

George Herbert Mead and Harold Blumer have contributed significantly to the study of meaning-creation and social communication. For the interests of this thesis, Mead's identification of meaning-creation as a social process will be of greatest use. Herbert Blumer's work in symbolic interactionism extends Mead's notion of meaning-creation as processual. Blumer expands upon many of Mead's original propositions to create a theory of symbolic interactionism which examines meaning, the individual, and social communication. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach, growing out of symbolic interactionism, will also be applied to the study of

meaning and everyday domestic goods. Although Mead and Blumer did not undertake a specific study of meaning and everyday household objects, each in his own way has a number of valuable propositions and ideas concerning the nature and construction of meaning in society.

The use of an interpretative framework, such as SI, allows the theorist to view the human individual as a being who is continually produced within a social context. Hence, both the individual and the social context are produced in relation to each other, and neither entity is static in its development.

Of fundamental importance to any theorist of SI is the understanding of the individual within society as an actively constructed agent. This agent is constructed by perception and the process of interaction between the individual and the various social objects and meanings in a given environment. In this view, "the self is...not an entity, finished and finalized and merely reacting to a world in response to various provocations in a predetermined way." (Perinbanayagam, 1985, 84) For the student of SI, it is of fundamental importance to view the self as a constantly emerging entity that relates, attends to, and interprets the world around it.

Unlike psychologically-based research on the self and social meaning, SI takes its notion of the individual one step further to argue that the emerging individual exists and interacts in already existing social frameworks of social meaning and interpretation. However, these frameworks "exist as a limited and limiting resource from which the self can draw its support and sustenance." (Perinbanayagam, 1985, 85) In this way, it could be argued that the SI notion of the self balances the useful components of psychological research into the self and individual meaning construction with an awareness

of research on structural paradigms⁶ of social meaning. Although this does appear to be a delicate balance, SI has the potential in its core notion of the self and the construction of meaning to avoid privileging either deterministic essentialist theories or deterministic social theories of meaning construction in society.

A second useful component of SI theories is the emphasis upon the role of interaction and process in the development of meaning and individual identity. Within an SI approach, the central object to be negotiated in the interaction between self and society is one's own identity. In this way, work within the SI perspective "require[s] constant attention to the study of a process - the process of interaction." (Lindesmith, 1991, 6) This emphasis on process sets SI apart from other points of view that stress the fixed, static, structural, or essential properties of persons and their actions.

For the purposes of this thesis, this emphasis upon the study of the process of meaning creation is useful as it allows a dynamic approach to the study of meaning and everyday domestic objects. Hence, it will be possible to study the process of meaning creation without also having to study the specific meanings of individual objects themselves. A study of the meaning creation process will avoid the problem of placing too much emphasis upon the nature and characteristics of the material objects themselves.

A third useful component of the SI approach lies in the interpretive and descriptive methodology SI theorists propose for a study of social meaning and interaction. Interactionist theorists seek to study the natural settings of the everyday world. This methodology requires that the SI approach study

⁶ This term refers to a movement within various disciplines of the Social Sciences characterized by a "preoccupation not simply with structures but with such structures as can be held to underlie and generate the phenomena that come under observation or... with deep structures rather than with surface structures." (Bullock *et al.*, 1988, 821)

the meanings, actions, language, etc., of ordinary people in their everyday surroundings and contexts. In such a study of the everyday practices and meanings of individuals, the SI approach seeks to examine the 'lived experiences' of the everyday world and to study these experiences as they occur in the process of meaning creation and social interaction.

For the purposes of this thesis, the most useful component of the SI emphasis upon the everyday lived experiences of the individual is the theory's demand that "the study of human group life be grounded in the everyday natural world of interacting individuals." (Lindesmith, 1991, 8) Hence, an interactionist approach will ensure that a study of meaning and interaction with everyday objects is not overlooked. Instead, it will allow the thesis to put aside causal explanations in "favour of processual interpretations" (Lindesmith, 1991, 8) of meaning creation and social interaction and everyday domestic objects.

G.H. Mead:

Often called the 'father of SI,' George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) proposed sociological theories that have been interpreted and used within many schools both of sociology and social psychology. One of the most important aspects of Mead's work is his discussion of what he terms the "two forms/levels of social interaction." For Mead, social interaction within human groups can be labelled as either a 'conversation of gestures' or as the use of significant symbols. In his extensive study of Mead, Herbert Blumer re-terms these two levels non-symbolic and symbolic interaction in societal practices.⁷

⁷ The term 'symbolic interactionism' was not created by Mead himself. Herbert Blumer created the term six years after Mead's death. Blumer coined the term primarily on the basis of Mead's ideas and writings. For Blumer, SI was created to represent an attempt to develop a methodology in which to study "human group life and human conduct" which was lacking in

Interaction for Mead in the realm on the non-symbolic takes place "when one responds directly to the action of another without interpretation." (Blumer, 1969, 8) Examples of such non-symbolic interaction include reflex responses and direct and immediate responses to stimuli. Mead gives the example of animals in the wild to illustrate this type of interaction.

The second and more crucial level of interaction within society and meaning creation is in the symbolic realm of action. Here, an individual is confronted with a 'presentation of gestures' and consequently acts in response to the socially-given or perceived meaning of those gestures. For Mead, it is through this process of presentation and response, interaction and meaning-creation, that people come to fit their activities to one another and to form their own individual conduct:

The person who responds organizes [his] response on the basis of what the gestures mean. The person who presents the gestures advances them as indications or signs of what he [sic] is planning to do as well as what he wants the respondent to do or understand. Thus the gesture has meaning for both the person who makes it and for the person to whom it is directed. Human group life is a vast process of such defining to others what to do and of interpreting their definitions. (Blumer, 1969, 9)

For Mead, it is the interpretation of these definitions by individuals in society that constructs and results in symbolic acts within social interaction. As well, it is the process of interpretation and definition that serves as 'raw material' for the development of the individual in the larger social context.

A second useful area of discussion in Mead concerns the 'nature of objects.' For theorists of SI the "worlds that exist for human beings and for

any of Mead's writings. Within the body of this text, references to Mead's ideas will be represented mostly through secondary terms and citations.

their groups are composed of 'objects' and these objects are the product of symbolic interaction." (Blumer, 1969, 10) For Mead, human activities are formed around objects and these objects are human constructs which do not exist *a priori*, or as self-perpetuating entities with intrinsic natures. Instead, the 'nature of objects' is dependent upon the orientation and action of people towards them.

Mead explains his use of the term 'object' as "anything that can be designated or referred to." (Blumer, 1969, 11) For Mead, because an object is designated or referred to, individuals organize their action and meaning-creation towards objects interactively, instead of responding immediately to them and to their pre-established meanings. In this interactive process, the individual is allowed the choice to either respond to, or ignore the object; and action towards an 'un-referrec' object is not required of the individual.

In this way it would appear that Mead's theory of the object allows the individual to be free from a coercive-type response (for example, a purely psychological or physical reaction) to an object. In this view of both the object and levels of social interaction, Mead posits the belief that humans live "in a world of meaningful objects, that is socially produced through the process of social and individual interaction." (Blumer, 1969, 12) Within this notion of interaction, the project of the theorist should be to identify and understand the life of a society or group through "an identification of its world of objects." (Blumer, 1969, 12)

Mead's ideas of social interaction and form, as well as his theories of the object, are useful for this study of domestic objects and meaning due to Mead's vision of a society which is able and willing to take action towards objects. In this view, objects and social interaction are forever in a state of flux. This dynamic quality of interpretation allows an individual within a

society to work and re-work lines of meaning, and therefore create new lines of social action towards objects and meanings.

A third important component of Mead's work concerns his contributions to the construction of a 'micro-sociology.' Long before the work of Herbert Blumer and other SI theorists, Mead himself proposed that the most useful way for a sociologist to approach the study of society was from a study of the "central issues of socialization, identity and role-taking."

(Hamilton, 1986, 1) Peter Hamilton in his work, George Herbert Mead: A Critical Assessment (1986), outlines the specific contributions Mead made to sociology and the development of Pragmatism within the discipline:

Whereas Marx or Durkheim or Weber provide a set of central questions about and concepts for an understanding of the social structural scaffolding of modernity, Mead's perspective is firmly focussed on the modern individual qua individual, and on the processes by which he or she becomes a social being. This emphasis on the individual has led to Mead being seen as the progenitor of social psychology. (Hamilton, 1986, 1)

Mead's insight into the nature of the social world and the individual set the foundation for further studies into the actual process by which the individual and society interact and construct the social world. In this way, Mead provided the framework in which to study the actual phenomena of the social world and the social actors.

A fourth and final component of Mead's work which has importance for a study of the process of meaning and everyday goods is contained within Mead's notion of the 'generalized other:'

The "other" is conceived in the work of Mead as an active and attitude-bearing entity which directly influences the self, and in fact the relationship between the one and the other is best described as a dialectical or a syntactical one... The self "takes" the attitude of the generalized other toward itself, interprets it,

understands it, and then incorporates it into his [sic] own self conceptions and universes of meaning.
(Perinbanayagam in Hamilton, 1986, 133-34)

Hence, the generalized other is the feeling that each of us bears of being subject to scrutiny, as our awareness of the existence and necessity of rules. It refers to the process by which the attitudes and construction of the 'self' are exposed to the attitudes of the larger social community either directly or indirectly.

Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, the importance of Mead's generalized other is two-fold. Firstly, Mead's view of the interaction between the self and the social in terms of the influence of the generalized other reflects the processual nature of Mead's study and future sociological studies within the SI framework. Secondly, the action of the generalized other affects the interaction between individual and society on a daily basis. For Mead, the process of the generalized other manifests itself in a symbolic system of the social community. In this symbolic system, interpersonal or individual situations and experiences "are addressed as motives and attitudes by the participants in a social transaction." (Perinbanayagam in Hamilton, 1986, 134)

In the creation and maintenance of this system of shared or common symbols between the individual and the generalized other, attitudes, experiences, and interactions based upon the generalized other are used in everyday interactions. This interactive process of individual identity and social interaction is, for Mead, expressed in the acts, speeches, and motives of everyday life. Hence, the interaction and creation of meaning between the individual self and the social cannot "be divorced from the normal processes

[or everyday events] by which a society or community came into being, sustains itself, and, in the event ceases to do so." (Perinbanayagam in Hamilton, 1986, 142)

Although the majority of Mead's work was completed within the disciplines of philosophy and sociology, his ideas still benefit a study of meaning and everyday objects. In particular, a discussion of everyday objects and meaning is aided by Mead's introduction of a processual view of sociology and social interaction, and his focus upon the importance of the everyday as a site of both social and individual interaction. In Mead's various propositions, one can find useful tools with which to study meaning and household objects as a dynamic process and as an interaction between the social and the self. In this way, the meaning of everyday objects can be studied within the realm of the everyday without having to cast it into functional and structural categories of social reality. Mead's theories allow a framework to be created in which the phenomenon of meaning and everyday objects itself is of paramount importance.

Herbert Blumer:

More than any other SI scholar, Herbert Blumer has managed to interpret and add to the work of George Herbert Mead, as well as more contemporary theorists. Important in Blumer's discussion of SI is his three part division of SI principles and premises.

1. Humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's 'fellows.'
3. Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters. (Blumer, 1969, 2-4)

The usefulness of this division is that it highlights the study of meanings themselves as a fundamental approach to the study of culture and society. For Blumer, psychological and other social science research has tended to take meanings for granted and has viewed meanings as simple, neutral links between "factors responsible for human behavior, [such as emotions, psychological responses, social position etc.]" (Blumer, 1969, 3) However, in contrast to studies concerned with physical and emotional responses, SI argues that the meaning of things for individuals is central in its own right, not a result, or factor of any *a priori* set of behaviors or social constructs. (Blumer, 1969, 4) In this view, SI acknowledges the contributions of pragmatist approaches to meaning which have studied human action as the site of meaning-creation and individual identity. However, where SI diverges from these approaches, lies in SI's acknowledgement of the importance of locating and understanding human action and communication in their social and/or personal context.

Blumer's second premise posits that meaning is a social product that is formed in, and through, the activities of people as they interact with each other and themselves. In this view, meaning is not inherent in the very materiality and physicality of an object, but derives from the realm of social interaction and negotiation.

Blumer's third and final premise concerns the use of meanings by an individual as part of that person's action in an interpretive process. In this view, interpretation is not simply an automatic application of established meanings (such as good/bad taste); rather, interpretation is a formative process in which "meanings are used and revised as both instruments and guides for the formation of individual and collective action." (Blumer, 1969, 5)

For Blumer, meanings are used and reconstructed for the goal of achieving individual personality, as well as being a social arena in which separate individuals can communicate and symbolically interrelate and interact. This notion of interaction has its central importance in

"the fact that social interaction is a process that forms human conduct instead of being merely a means or a setting for the expression or release of human conduct." (Blumer, 1969, 7)

Ethnomethodology:

With ethnomethodology, a concrete methodology for the study of everyday life and practices was developed within the tradition of American sociology. Building on the propositions and ideas of both Mead and Blumer, ethnomethodologists such as Harold Garfinkel offered those who studied the social a way in which they could endeavour to surpass their own assumptions in order to accurately study everyday phenomena. For Garfinkel, the task of the ethnomethodologist is to uncover pre-conceived assumptions about social reality. The theorist should aim to become an observer who "attempts to discover the methods that people use when they formulate definitions of a situation." (Lindesmith, 1991, 13)

For Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists, sociological investigations of the everyday should follow the three steps listed below:

- 1.) The observers suspend the assumption that social situations are governed by sets of rules; that is they withhold judgment on the functions that roles, norms, rules or culture may have in any particular setting.
- 2.) They observe how laypersons and sociologists alike describe and explain what it is they do.
- 3.) They treat these explanations as appearances produced so as to project the image that rules have been followed. The ethnomethodologist assumes that individuals explain their

behavior in ways that fit everyday conceptions of what that behavior was all about. (Lindesmith, 1991, 13)

For ethnomethodologists, the ultimate aim of proceeding with these three steps is to discover the formal properties of everyday or commonplace activities from within the actual lived situations. In this way, ethnomethodologists aim to treat everyday phenomena as objects of sociological attention in their own right. In an ethnomethodological approach, the world and meanings of everyday life are *the* scene of sociological practice and assumptions, and cannot be taken for granted.

A second important ethnomethodological concept is the notion of the interrelated nature of everyday actions and larger social structures. For the ethnomethodologist, the importance of conducting research exclusively in the realm of the everyday is related to the concern that the study of actions at the local level cannot, and must not, be separated from the existence of actions at the wider social level:

Ethnographers' inquiries are exclusively concerned with the ways in which actions are interrelated to produce and reproduce a recognizable order of everyday affairs, with the way in which from within the local setting the presence of an environing and constraining social world may be made manifest, with the ways in which the dependence on events in the here-and-now can be discovered to be consequentially dependent upon things happening far away, long ago, in the world at large, etc. (Sharrock et al., 1986, 103-4)

In this way, the ethnomethodologist approaches all studies of the social world as inseparable from the 'face-to-face' situations of the everyday. The ethnomethodological approach to any study of a social phenomenon or practice has a view of the social actor similar to that of Mead, Blumer, and other SI theorists in its attempt to explain the tension between human agency and institutional constraint in the creation of meaning.

For the ethnomethodologist, the social actor is active and social reality, while constraining and sedimented, is also malleable and dynamic. For the purposes of this thesis, the ethnomethodological decision to study the social actor and the social as existing in tension with each other avoids the pitfalls of overly psychological or sociological views of both the individual and his/her relationship to society. In studying 'face-to-face' situations and regarding social reality as a subjective phenomenon, the ethnomethodologist manages not to over-privilege either the notion of an independent, essentialist self, or an overly formal and determining set of social structures.

Hence, ethnomethodology is valuable because it offers the researcher a method by which to find some of the ways in which social and everyday practices are produced and reproduced. It allows the researcher to view the everyday as a crucial arena for the discovery and description of the practices and meanings that ordinary people experience and create. In this way, ethnomethodology (unlike past studies of objects and the everyday) allows us to study the meaning process of domestic everyday objects in the larger context of how these meanings and goods describe and affect the communication and social reality that confront current society.

Ethnomethodology allows the researcher to treat banal and everyday activities and environments as important sites of meaning creation and social communication. The importance of ethnomethodological propositions and approaches lies in the fact that they encourage the researcher's attempts to find meaning in the everyday and to discover "how people characterize, and display the unremarkable orderliness that the world of daily life exhibits." (Sharrock *et al.*, 1986, 113)

Unlike many ethnomethodological research projects, this thesis will not attempt to provide a body of research which inquires into the actual,

concrete meanings of specific everyday domestic goods. It is not within its scope to carry out participant observation, or thick descriptive accounts of the actual everyday objects in people's homes. Instead, ethnomethodology will be used primarily as a set of propositions which illuminates the importance and validity of the study of the common and everyday practices and meaning creations within the domestic environment.

Harold Garfinkel:

In the work Studies in Ethnomethodology (1967), Harold Garfinkel offers one of the most important attempts to define and characterize an often disparate body of sociological thought grouped under the term ethnomethodology. He provides a definition of both the aims and methodology of ethnomethodological studies. For Garfinkel, ethnomethodology refers to "the study of common sense knowledge and common sense activities [and] consists of treating as problematic phenomena the actual methods whereby members of society, doing sociology, lay or professional, make the social structures of everyday activities observable." (Garfinkel, 1967, 75)

For Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists, a study of everyday practices allows the researcher to examine "the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs [as identical with] members' procedures for making those settings 'account-able'." (Garfinkel, 1967, 1)

It is the examination of the reflexive relationship between action and description of action that constitutes a unique object of study within the field of ethnomethodology. Garfinkel was amongst the first theorists to propose that behaviors and their descriptions were "not independent of the socially

organized occasions of their use." (Garfinkel, 1967, 3) Instead, Garfinkel proposed that the accounts people create and the actions they take in everyday life are to be studied as important components and features of the social system.

Garfinkel's definition of ethnomethodology offers two useful methods of study for a discussion of meaning and everyday domestic goods. Firstly, Garfinkel's account of ethnomethodology emphasizes the importance of studying the commonplace or everyday activity above all other social interactions. In this way, Garfinkel suggests that the researcher examine the often overlooked practices of daily action and communication as the basis from which to work towards examining and explaining larger social relations and activities.

A second contribution comes from Garfinkel's notion of the reflexivity of common or everyday practice and situation. As with Blumer and symbolic interactionism, Garfinkel also emphasizes the importance and necessity of studying the process of communication and meaning which is developed in the actions and contexts of the everyday world. For Garfinkel, the reflexive nature of these interactions is a key way in which to apply ethnomethodological concepts to the process by which action and behavior occur and are continued in social patterns and settings. For Garfinkel, when studying this reflexive or interactive process, the researcher must be:

...directed to the tasks of learning how members' actual, ordinary activities consist of methods to make practical actions, practical circumstances, common sense knowledge of social structures, and practical sociological reasoning analyzable; and of discovering the formal properties of commonplace, practical common sense actions, 'from within' actual settings, as ongoing accomplishments of those settings. The formal properties obtain their guarantees from no other source, and in no other way." (Garfinkel, 1967, vii-viii)

For the purposes of this thesis, the meaning-creation process will be discussed in conformity with Garfinkel's approach, *from within*,⁸ as a reflexive situation which is to be understood and made sense of as a microcosm of social patterns and structures.

Erving Goffman:

With his work The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), Erving Goffman introduced the dramaturgical approach to the study of identity, social interaction, and everyday life. For Goffman, "everyday life is like the stage: Persons attempt to create impressions for others, play roles, assume characters, manage information, engage in collusion, keep secrets, think in terms of backstage and frontstage, treat others like audience members and so on." (Lindesmith, 1991, 19) For Goffman, the usefulness of the dramaturgical approach is that it allows the theorist to study 'performances' given by individuals in differing situations as performances in the larger play that represents all human interaction:

For the purpose of this report, interaction (that is, face-to-face interaction) may be roughly defined as the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence...A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. (Goffman, 1959, 15)

⁸ Garfinkel's method of studying the social from within the situation or context being observed is elaborated upon in the following passage from Paul Attewell's work, "Ethnomethodology Since Garfinkel" (Attewell, 1974, 185)

In this [non positivist] school of symbolic interaction, actors derive meaning from the situations in which they interact. From now on, we shall use the words *situation* and *context* in their widest sense. The participating individuals, the physical surroundings, the interaction itself, all constitute the situation and context of any social setting. One of the central features of any sociology of meaning then becomes the study of the ways in which meanings emerge from interactions within a particular situation, or, to put it another way, the methods by which actors interpret their surroundings in a meaningful way. (Attewell, 1974, 185)

As with Mead, Blumer, and Garfinkel, Goffman also approaches the study of meaning from an interactionist perspective. Goffman uses the dramaturgical method to examine the motivating forces behind actors' social performances and audiences' 'impressions' of the performances in order to identify the framework he claims to be "characteristic of much social interaction as it occurs in natural settings in our Anglo-American society." (Goffman, 1959, 239)

For the purposes of this thesis, Goffman's dramaturgical approach to the study of social interaction will be used to further highlight the importance of studying meaning and goods as an interactive process which takes place throughout the behaviors and situations of everyday life. As well, Goffman's dramaturgical approach will be used to help demonstrate the importance of studying the interactions and meanings developed between people and objects as crucial areas of study in and of themselves.

Goffman's work in the study of interactive processes of social life will be useful for the purposes of this study in that his approach rejects more traditional studies of meaning and social interactions that have been used to illuminate other things. For Goffman, a dramaturgical study of social interaction allows the process of everyday interactions no longer to be treated "as though they did not need to be defined or were not worth defining." (Goffman, 1971, ix) Instead, Goffman's approach allows the theorist to recognize that "the nicest use for these events [social interactions] is the explication of their own generic character." (Goffman, 1971, ix)

Perhaps the most famous and useful of Goffman's theoretical concepts is his division of social interaction and 'performances' into front and backstage. For Goffman, each social setting (whether it be the home, the office, or the great outdoors) can be divided into front and back regions of

behavior. Goffman defines a region as any place "that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception." (Goffman, 1959, 106) These barriers can refer to such physical constraints as walls, doors or separate rooms, or barriers of standards and rules of behavior that affect an actor's performance.

Goffman defines the front region or stage as that place where "the performance is given." (Goffman, 1959, 107) In this front region the actor is 'playing' more to the standards of the front region than to the particular audience at hand. Goffman explains this direction of performance as "an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards." (Goffman, 1959, 107) Goffman groups these standards into two broad categories. The first of these categories he describes as those physical and verbal gestures the performer uses "while engaged in talk with [the audience] or in gestural interchanges that are a substitute for talk." (Goffman, 1959, 107) These gestures can be understood more simply as the standards of politeness which are expected in a given situation.

The second broad category Goffman uses to discuss the action of the actor in the front region is a category he refers to as decorum. Using decorum the actor is concerned with how s/he performs while in "visual or aural range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in talk with them." (Goffman, 1959, 107) To demonstrate this area of decorum, Goffman uses the example of 'on the job' behavior or performance, i.e., the way in which people make a concerted effort to appear busy in the workplace even if no work is taking place at the moment. Goffman uses examples of how actors use differing physical and verbal behaviors to communicate to managers, supervisors, etc., the appearance of work and production.

Goffman also offers an explanation of what he terms the back region. This "back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course." (Goffman, 1959,112) In this region, the actor can consciously prepare for the performance to be given in the front region. The backstage has a number of differing characteristics and does not necessarily refer to one particular physical setting or moment in time. Goffman explains this diversity of the backstage in the following description of the actors' use of the back region before the 'performance' is given to the audience:

A back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course....it is here that illusions and impressions are openly conducted. Here stage props and items of personal front can be stored in a kind of compact collapsing of whole repertoires of actions and characters...Here the performer can relax; he can drop his [sic] front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character. (Goffman, 1959, 112)

For Goffman, the backstage is often a room or area physically separated from the front region. Often backstage areas are separate from, but still physically accessible to the front stage so that the actors can exchange information and adapt performances if need be.

Although Goffman does differentiate between front and back regions, he does not claim that these areas will remain separate and unrelated at all times during the performance or social interaction. For Goffman, there are many locations in which both front and backstage performances can be given by actors. Goffman uses the example of a man's business office to show the blurring of front and back region stage:

Thus the private office of an executive is certainly the front region where his status in the organization is intensively expressed by means of the quality of his office furnishings. And yet it is here that he can take his jacket off, loosen his tie, keep a bottle of liquor handy, and act in a chummy and even boisterous way with fellow executives of his own rank.
(Goffman, 1959, 126)

For Goffman, the differentiation of front and backstage regions refers more to the communicative 'style' an actor is presenting than an actual physical location. In any physical area an actor can perform with a backstage approach (such as carrying on casual conversations, off-handed remarks and informal behavior) or the actor can perform in accordance with the standards expected of a front stage performance. This differentiation of the regions of performance and interaction must be understood as a way in which to create a "reference point of a particular performance" and a way in which to "speak of the function that the place happens to serve at that time for the given performance." (Goffman, 1959, 127-28)

For the purposes of this thesis, Goffman's discussions of front and back regions offer a way in which to study the home and its spatial relations. Goffman's refusal to rigidly differentiate between the performances and interactions given in the front and back regions offers a way in which to study the unique public and private nature of the home. Goffman's discussion of interaction in these spheres allows one to study the home as a place in which both public and private, back and front region behavior occur simultaneously. The study of the domestic environment will be carried out as a study of the very unique function the home performs as both a public display of the occupants within, and a private domain in which the actors live their daily lives.

Research Directions:

Based on the arguments and theories offered above, I have chosen three specific research directions corresponding to three chapters, in an attempt to engage in a discussion of meaning and domestic objects. Each of these areas will be examined with specific reference to Interpretive theories of interaction, interpretation, individual identity, and social interaction. These research directions will perform a two-fold function. The first function of these specific areas of discussion will be to provide information on the specific topic areas. The second function of these research directions will be to offer an exemplary account of the process of meaning creation as an interaction between everyday goods and individuals within society.

The first of these research directions I have termed "House and Home." In this chapter I will use four approaches to enter into a critical discussion of the physical and symbolic qualities that the term 'home' implies in academic literature. The first of these approaches will be to examine objects and the domestic environment in a historical discussion of the last 200 years of Western social history. In this approach I will use various theories concerning historical study and objects from Sigfried Giedion, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Baudrillard.

The second approach in the "House and Home" research direction will be a discussion of the home as a site for the interaction of personal (private) and social (public) meanings. In this approach, the home will be examined as both a physical structure and a symbolic space in which public and private meanings surrounding objects are both presented. In this approach, the home will be discussed as both a physical shelter and a symbolic storehouse of meanings for the individual household members.

The third approach I will undertake will examine the importance of studying the everyday environment in a study of meaning-creation. In this approach, the everyday world of the home will be discussed as an important site in which individuals interact on a daily basis with their objects and the home itself.

The fourth and final approach in the "House and Home" research will be a theoretical discussion of the notion of identity and the meaning-creation process. In this approach, various theories from SI and Erving Goffman will be used to illustrate the process of identity creation that is a result of the interaction between the individual and the generalized other in the daily communications and experiences of the everyday domestic environment. In this approach, the process of interaction between public and private meanings and domestic objects in the home, will be used to also discuss the process by which individuals may use both public and private meanings to construct notions of the 'self.'

The second research direction in this work falls under the chapter entitled "A Place of Her Own." In this research direction I will use a study of gender to examine the interactive process that takes place between public and private influences in the meaning-creation process. In this research direction, individual identity and meaning-creation will be approached as a process which is very much affected by and related to the ideas and interactions with the 'generalized other.' In this approach, the 'generalized other' will also be discussed in terms of its gender expectations and influences. In using this approach, it is my aim to further examine the interactive process by which both private and public meanings are engaged by individuals to understand their everyday objects and form their individual identities.

The third and final research direction I will use is labelled "Imagining the Performance." In this chapter, I will approach the interaction between public and private meanings by proposing a four-step framework for studying the banal objects of the home. Using this four-step framework, I will discuss three everyday objects and the potential private and public meanings these objects may possess. In this research, I will use the theories of SI, ethnomethodology, and Erving Goffman, to explore the idea that common everyday objects possess meaning as a result of the attempt by individuals and society to balance private and public meanings concerning the objects in question and an individual's notion of their own identity.

Using theories from Mead, Blumer, Garfinkel, and Goffman, this four-step framework is an attempt to enter into a discussion that seeks to understand meaning as a process. As well, the theories of SI and ethnomethodology will be used throughout this thesis to highlight the necessity of studying the realm of the home and the everyday as a crucial site in the process of meaning-creation and individual identity in modern consumer culture.

Chapter Two: House and Home

*An age that has lost its
consciousness of the things that
shape its life will know
neither where it stands nor, even
less, at what it aims. A civilization
that has lost its memory and
stumbles from day to day, from
happening to happening, lives more
irresponsibly than the cattle, who
at least have their instincts to fall
back upon. (Giedion, 1948, 2)*

From the first experiences of the settlers to the rites of passage of the urban home owner, society's relationship to space and built environments has existed in a state of flexibility and dynamism. What has appeared to remain constant has been the existence of, and constant desire for, decorative and functional household objects. Furniture, rugs, cooking utensils, art, knick- knacks, etc., have all travelled through time and space with their human owners. From the earliest periods of history to the modern age of mass consumerism and status symbols, objects have always both served some utilitarian purpose and held some symbolic meaning for their human owners.

The complexity of a study of meaning in, and around, objects of any kind stems from the fact that objects have always served dual purposes: they provide utilitarian services while simultaneously acting as nonverbal or invisible meaning systems and communicators. Objects constitute a complex and interconnected web of symbol systems through which people are able to communicate and engage in social communication and meaning creation. This discourse of possessions speaks a language which has significant

cultural implications and reveals the existence of both the personal and social meanings over time and through various cultures.

It is the aim of this discussion to explore the idea of household objects as meaning systems in the wider historical context of the modern development of the 'home.' In order to pursue the topic of meaning, household objects and the history of social communication, this discussion will be divided into two parts. The first part will briefly review relevant theories concerning history, social communication, and objects. It will include a description and evaluation of the theories of Siegfried Giedion, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Baudrillard.

The second part will critically examine the modern institution of the 'home' and the changing conceptions of private and public space in Western culture. As well, the second part will also examine how shifting spatial arrangements have had an impact upon the structure and meaning of household objects in contemporary society. In this way, it is my intention to study both objects and space. In this context, objects will be studied in terms of their spatial relations within the home setting.

History, Social Communication, and Objects:

Any study of meaning and objects is bound to encompass a wide range of theoretical disciplines and methodological approaches. The disparate disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and environmental studies all contain critical discussions of meaning and objects, yet each appears to lack a coherent notion of history and social communication. Modern studies of consumption often refer to the meaning of the 'sign' or the 'symbol,' yet lack a truly critical and useful notion of how changes and developments in meanings have developed through time in

Western culture. Some types of historical inquiry into consumer goods become too narrowly focused upon the various ways in which mechanical and technological forces have changed and/or harmed the development of society. In the following, I will discuss three theorists from three separate academic disciplines who broaden the realm of study of social communication and meaning. Although all three theorists come from varied academic backgrounds and interests, each is useful in the way in which he discusses meaning and its relation to the larger context of the history and development of social communication. Viewed separately, these authors appear to offer different pieces to the puzzle of critically analyzing both the historical and contemporary questions of meanings, objects, and their interrelationships.

In his monumental works Mechanization Takes Command (1948) and Space, Time, and Architecture (1949), Siegfried Giedion offers a fascinating glimpse into the various technological changes in objects since the Middle Ages, while simultaneously acknowledging and discussing the wider social and cultural issues of meaning creation and change in Western society. For Giedion, the history of objects which passes through the process of mechanization¹, must be approached from a viewpoint of history as a living and dynamic continuum of technological, cultural, and societal change.

¹ Giedion uses the term 'mechanization' to refer to the process by which traditional craft activities, which united a specific creative sensibility with a broader cultural context, are replaced by various technical and industrial processes, which depersonalize and decontextualize both production and consumption. It is for this reason that Giedion identifies a split between thought and feeling. For Giedion, in the past thought and feeling were united because each good, no matter how banal or ordinary, was unique. These goods, processes, etc., were unique because they were created by the hand and were created for a distinct purpose. In the past, inventions were created and produced by an individual or specific group of craftspeople. These inventions were embedded within a socio-historical context and were invented to address a problem or need specific to the time and culture. In the modern era of industrialization, the process of mechanization of goods and inventions has created a type of anonymous production, removed from culture and individual needs and contexts. Giedion endeavours to study the fundamental ideas and causes behind various mechanized inventions to explore how thought and feeling, became disrupted. In this way, Giedion

Giedion criticizes historians of the 19th century who viewed history as a simple repository of unchanging facts. Instead of a study of simple categorizations of changes in technologies, Giedion urges the student of history to study the past as a process of living, a process of everchanging patterns of attitudes and interpretations of cultural and technological events and transformations. In this view of history, Giedion advises the theorist of any subject matter to place historical changes and developments in a wider context, and to realize that the present is simply a point on a continuum of constant change and innovation. (Giedion, 1948)

In addition to this genealogical view of history as a continuum of change and development, Giedion also urges those studying the past to realize that each journey into history causes a change in the very nature of history itself. Any historical study causes a change in the historical past, and inevitably acts to change the previous knowledge and understanding of history. This effect of changing history while studying history is inevitable, and leads theorists to a broader recognition that any study of change, whether historical or not, must overcome a concern with the 'everyday' and look to establish 'the present as "happenings that are simply the most conspicuous sections of a continuum."' (Giedion, 1949, 23)

A second important feature of Giedion's work lies in his discussion of mechanization and what he terms the 'schism between thought and feeling.' According to Giedion, this 'schism' occurred in the 19th century and caused the "magnificent power of the nineteenth century" (Giedion, 1948, 23) to be struck down and never recaptured.

proposes to undertake a study of the 'anonymous history' of our modern period to trace our modes of life as affected by mechanization. In such a study of the inventions, processes, etc., of mechanization, it is Giedion's aim to examine modern times as "the coming period [that] must bring order to our minds, our production, our feeling, our economic and social development. It has to bridge the gap that since the onset of mechanization, has split our modes of thinking from our modes of feeling." (Giedion, 1948, v)

This break originated in the age of mass production and mechanization in which people were able to produce and mass produce objects and symbols. Giedion argues that the new technologies and processes of mechanization did not directly cause this break but rather provided the opportunity for people to mass reproduce ancient symbols and forms. Mass reproduction or mechanization meant that objects were no longer unique and no longer tied intimately to their contexts of production or consumption. As such, they lost their symbolic value. Hence, mechanization permits the mass reproduction of forms without simultaneously reproducing within the forms any new or substantive meanings. In this way, symbols of the past became devalued, and new cultural symbols were never created to fill the void or to re-balance the break between thought and feeling in cultural productions.

Modern architects such as LeCorbusier held, according to Giedion, the potential to reintegrate thought and feeling. In the following passage Giedion describes LeCorbusier's Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau that was created for the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs. This pavilion was an example of a two-storey cell that could be part of a large apartment building:

Throughout was the search for a pure, more direct form wherever it might be found: in nature, in laboratories, in Bedouin carpets, in industrial manufacture purified by serial production. This union of seemingly unaltered elements did away with the idea that all objects of an interior should be designed by one hand. A room is not an incubator to be sterilized of all foreign germs. The forms of life, past and present, shall be given an opportunity to interact.
(Giedion, 1948, 499)

This new architecture would reunite 'house' and home'. In this new architecture Giedion found the enactment of his belief in history as a continuum, and viewed the modern age as containing the potential to

integrate ancient symbols and values with technological advance and the mass production of goods. These new architects, Giedion claimed, were moving toward reintegrating thought and feeling, and once again treating the interior space of the human environment as a system, not as separate stylized parts.

A third and final useful thought lies in Giedion's discussion of history as composed of both transitory and constituent facts. For Giedion, each historical time period can be seen and understood as being dominated by either of these two facts. Transitory facts of any age would be such characteristics as stylistic changes in goods, or color differentiations and permutations in designs. Historians of the 19th century were overly concerned with locating these transitory facts in each era, and concentrated too heavily on differentiating historical periods based on the characteristics and elements of stylistic changes and developments. Although these facts are important for any historical study, Giedion warns that "transitory facts often succeed in taking over the stage" (Giedion, 1949, 18) of a given historical period, and the larger continuum of history itself.

However, it was the constituent facts of history that were most important and most difficult to define. Constituent facts were those that acted as links between historical periods, and helped explain larger cultural shifts in the historical continuum. Unlike the self-enclosed entities of style and transitory facts, constituent facts allow the historian to view the historical process as multi-dimensional. The search for constituent facts prevents the historian from viewing history from a single point of view. Instead, a search for the constituent facts of an era or period allows the historian to see history as containing no direct causality, no determination, and to disregard the view

that identical causes lead to identical historical and cultural outcomes.

(Giedion, 1949)

One such example of a constituent fact examined by Giedion is the study of space. For Giedion, an examination of the objects within the domestic space of societies can be conducted in any era in an attempt to understand where thought and feeling became separated. Despite the changing nature of the styles, constructions, etc., of the physical space in the domestic dwelling over the last 400 years, the constituent 'fact' of space can offer a way in which to link and understand differing historical periods and their respective objects.

In each of these three theoretical concepts, Giedion provides a framework for history which seeks to encompass a wider understanding of contemporary practices in a complex and crucial relationship with events of the past. A contemporary attempt to understand the present world of cultural meanings and goods is of little use if it fails to realize the significance of years of actions and historical contexts which act upon, and shape a cultural product or idea. Hence, a history of objects must be more than simply an elaborate study and categorization of stylistic and technological development.

Theorists interested in understanding meaning and goods in the modern context must search for ideas, facts, and processes that link the development of the past to realities of the present and future cultural environments and history. In this view, the concept of the 'home' is a constituent fact which has been carried down through history and which provides a conceptual link in understanding the existence of and changes in, the meaning systems of household objects as well as the objects themselves.

In his never-finished work of the "Arcades Project", Walter Benjamin, like Giedion, sought to understand his contemporary culture in terms of a study of the past. Benjamin undertook a lengthy and detailed study of the discarded objects and goods of the 'Arcades' of Paris at the turn of the Century.² Also similar to Giedion's theoretical framework, Benjamin endorsed the idea of history as a continuum which has a profound implication for a study of the present. In this study of the 'Arcades' and his other projects, it was Benjamin's aim to "take seriously the debris of mass culture as the source of philosophical truth." (Buck-Morss, 1989, xi)

Also like Giedion, Benjamin sought to avoid a teleological study similar to those of past historians and cultural theorists, which approached the present as the end point of historical progress and development. For Benjamin, the study and comprehension of his, or any other society, should aim to "destroy the mythic immediacy of the present [by] not inserting it into a cultural continuum that affirms the present as its culmination." (Buck-Morss, 1989, x) Instead, Benjamin argued that an inquiry into the historical origins of an object or good had "the power to explode history's continuum" (Buck-Morss, 1989, x) and, therefore, liberate the object for utopian goals and purposes.

Where Benjamin and Giedion begin to differ, and where Benjamin becomes more sophisticated, is in the idea of what each author posits as the end purpose or goal of historical studies of goods and meanings. For Giedion, a detailed study of the past's goods and objects is a way in which the historian can conduct more useful research than was accomplished in the

² Although Benjamin was concerned with the 'Arcades' or promenades of shops and kiosks of Paris, he also incorporated many other notes on objects he found to be of interest. Primarily, he was concerned with studying goods in the marketplace, on the street, etc., that were of little or no utilitarian use, and appeared to serve goals other than pure use or decoration.

academic history of the 19th and 20th centuries. The search for constituent facts in historical material is the search for links between the past and present so as to both understand contemporary society, and place this society in its appropriate position on the historical continuum of thought and feeling.

For Benjamin, the 'Arcades' project had as its ultimate goal the attempt to construct a "materialist history that disenchant[s] the new nature [of goods] in order to free it from the spell of capitalism, and yet rescue all the power of enchantment for the purpose of social transformation." (Buck-Morss, 1989, 275) Hence, the study of the 'Arcades' was based on the assumption that everyday objects of industrial culture could 'tell' society as much, or more, about its culture than the traditional study of cultural treasures (such as art and music.) For Benjamin, the commodities of the 'Arcades' and those forgotten, useless, industrial objects of the past were "historical clues with an objective meaning." (Buck-Morss, 1989, 66)

For the purposes of this thesis what is of most use in Benjamin's project is his argument that discarded industrial objects which serve no apparent function and/or decorative purpose, are in fact crucial for a full understanding of contemporary society. The purpose of the 'Arcades' project was to interpret out of these discarded and understudied goods, the "dream images of mass culture [and therefore, lead to] a politically empowering knowledge of the collective's unconscious past." (Buck-Morss, 1989, 273)

Benjamin viewed these discarded industrially produced goods as the collective unconscious of the past, able to communicate cultural ideas across generations. These goods that had been so overlooked were representative of both the inventions and the ideals of those who, in the past, had made physical efforts to produce them and endow them with symbolic and cultural

meaning. Benjamin describes the nature and importance of this process of communication across generations as follows:

New inventions, conceived out of the fantasy of one generation, are received within the childhood experience of another ... this discovery reinvests the objects with symbolic meaning and thus rescues for the collective memory their utopian signification. Slumbering within objects, the utopian wish is awakened by a new generation that rescues it by bringing the old world of symbols back to life. (Buck-Morss, 1989, 273-74)

Benjamin, like Giedion, provides a framework in which to study goods and household objects as more than the sum of their stylistic developments and/or technological advances. However, Benjamin also urges the theorist to examine everyday goods in a larger context of both social and political influences on communication and culture. Although both Giedion and Benjamin approach history and its potential in different ways, each acknowledges and seeks to understand cultural practices and social communications on a historical continuum. Both authors also argue that this historical continuum, if studied in a critical manner, has the potential to add significant insight into contemporary studies of material culture and communication.

A final theorist is Jean Baudrillard. In his 1968 work Le Systeme des Objets, Baudrillard attempts to address and discuss goods and meanings in the industrial age of rapid production and mass consumption. Using semiology, Baudrillard describes the ways in which individuals in contemporary society dominate, or are dominated by, a 'system of objects' and signs which reflects and constitutes a modern individual's everyday life.

For Baudrillard, individuals in all societies "have always organized their everyday life through the production, arrangement and use of objects."

(Kellner, 1989, 9) Due to the prevalence of goods in everyday life, Baudrillard seeks to discuss the very structures of organization of objects which individuals enact and use in their everyday lives. Baudrillard begins this discussion of the structure or system of objects in contemporary society with a historical discussion of interior/home environments.

Traditional societies tended to use furniture in a personalized way; home furnishings were used by individuals to express familial history, taste, and tradition. In contrast, modern furniture has been stripped of such expressive meaning. Instead, modern home furnishing has come to be used for more functional purposes and "is more mobile, flexible and stripped of depth, symbolism and personal style." (Kellner, 1989, 9) The new modern interiors of the home allow objects to become free of their past aesthetic functions, and it is now possible to arrange objects in a number of functional and expressive styles.

This shift in the organization of objects in the home interior means that "objects are no longer as subjective, expressive, familial, traditional and decorative as they once were." (Kellner, 1989, 10) In this new, contemporary structure of the home interior, objects have become more functional and lack the depth and authenticity of traditional times.

For Baudrillard, these new arrangements and structures have facilitated the development of a new type of individual. Indeed, the new world of objects now requires a person who is a functional self, aware of public presentation and who arranges objects in varying combinations and permutations. Baudrillard also argues that the systems into which individuals arrange goods replicate larger social models and systems of representation and values. Hence, objects are now arranged and ordered on the basis of prescribed systems of order and values illustrated in the discourses of

fashion magazines, home decorating manuals, technical discourses, architectural professions, etc.

Douglas Kellner describes the ideas and implications of Baudrillard's theory as follows:

Baudrillard provides a multidimensional analysis of this new world, and attempts to elucidate the ways in which objects and individuals are 'liberated' from traditional systems and usages, yet constrained by the technical imperatives of the new environment. Baudrillard's study is distinguished [from others] by a critical scrutiny of the structure of the system of objects and the ways in which it differs from the traditional object worlds.
(Kellner, 1989,10-11)

The utility of Baudrillard's system of objects theory is that it allows the theorist concerned with meaning to address the subjective responses projected by individuals onto objects and their arrangement. In this way, explanations of meanings in terms of a simple study and discussion of stylistic changes or taste preferences is avoided.³ Instead, Baudrillard provides a critical definition of the meaning and communicative functions that objects have in society. As well, Baudrillard's study of object systems through time allows meaning to be illustrated as both part of a dynamic

³ By rejecting the idea that individuals relate to and arrange their goods based upon traditional ideas and 'aesthetic' patterns, Baudrillard offers a way in which to simultaneously study individuals' relationship to their goods and their relationship to social norms and systems in relation to those goods. Baudrillard offers an explanation of individuals and their goods as a 'system of objects' in which individuals are free to arrange their goods as they wish. However, these individuals also work within a set of social patterns or systems which have resulted from the modern creation of 'technical imperatives' of the modern consumer culture. For Baudrillard, an individual may only have the choice of his/her goods from a relatively closed system of objects offered by the mass market, but the individual does have the freedom and ability to arrange these goods in any way that s/her pleases. In this way, modern consumers are no longer bound to traditional notions of the 'correct aesthetic' when arranging and understanding their goods. For Baudrillard, today's individual is freed from traditional notions and aesthetics to arrange his/her objects in purely functional and/or socially normative patterns of placement.

historical continuum and as a set of concrete terms that explain many of the motivations and causes behind consumption practices.

All three authors have at least one fundamental similarity: the attempt to understand history and cultural practices as events occurring on an everchanging continuum of social practice and reality. For Giedion, a study of meaning and objects will benefit greatly from the examination of history as a series of constituent facts which act to link disparate historical eras and practices. In this way, Giedion argues that history can be used to understand and underscore contemporary technological developments and social practices.

The utility of Benjamin's theory lies in the realization that industrially-produced, consumer objects are crucial factors for a critical understanding of both past and present cultural and political practices. For Benjamin, a study of the banal, useless objects is rich in detail and can help the scholar to find "traces of prior life [and] historical clues with an objective meaning." (Buck-Morss, 1989, 66)

The theory of objects and meaning provided by Baudrillard, moves the scholar concerned with meaning into the modern world of advanced capitalism and consumerism. For Baudrillard, a historical study of objects and object systems illuminates many of the interactions involved in the use, reinterpretation, and creation of 'signs' and meanings in contemporary consumer society. A historical study of the systems of objects is a way to attempt to study the increasingly complex "new world of objects bound up with: the explosive proliferation of a brave new world of consumer goods and services." (Kellner, 1989, 8)

The Home:

It is not within the scope of this discussion to attempt a full historical study of the domestic environment or all of its many changes and developments. Rather, the institution of the home will be briefly discussed in the period from the 1800s to the present. In this way, it is my aim to address briefly the question of whether or not spatial and social changes in the notion of the home can be used to help explain and contextualize both the role and meaning of objects within the home today.

Within the history of Western society there can be no doubt that the institution of the home and its cultural meaning have changed significantly within the last 200 years. Despite these changes, a general meaning of the 'home' as institution is the ability of all human beings to live in physical environments while simultaneously constructing cultural environments within the limitations of their physical environments. In this sense, the home is more than purely shelter against the elements and challenges of the natural world. Instead, the home is a space in which individuals can create both material and symbolic environments which may embody significant social and personal goals and expectations.

One of the most important elements in the history of this cultural institution is the division between public and private spheres that began to develop in the early 1800s. In their work A History of Private Life (1987), A. Prost and G. Vincent present a thorough discussion of this fundamental shift in spatial relations both within the home and in society as a whole. For these authors, private life and the home are viewed as far from inherent characteristics of nature which have existed from the beginning of history. Indeed, the private sphere can be more critically appreciated as a

historical reality which different societies have constructed in different ways throughout history.

Throughout the 1800s in Western Europe and the United States, the division of private (home) life and public (work) life became increasingly polarized. As developments in mechanization and production technologies increased, the home slowly ceased to be a workplace. During these years, the construction of the house itself began to change and to reflect the growing trend to separate private home activities from the increasingly public sphere of work and production. The home now became a set of rooms with specific functions and characteristics. Houses were built with parlors or front rooms at the entrances to greet visitors from the public world and keep the private activities of the home out of sight. Kitchens and bathrooms also began to appear as separated rooms, often relegated to the rear of the house and well out of sight of any strangers or guests.

With the growth of the industrial revolution, virtually all forms of production left the home. Rooms that had been filled with work tools and had served as sites of production eventually became empty. With production transferred to the public sphere, even the poorest persons could afford to have at least one separate living space in their built environment. The house of the 1880s and onwards became primarily a sphere of private familial activity, and a place in which the new industrial workers could safely spend their leisure time.

At the turn of the 19th century the home's new role as a private sphere facilitated the growth of the notions of home as 'haven,' and of the home as the 'woman's place.' With the separation of workplace from living quarters, turn of the century society saw the dissolution of the notion of the 'whole house' in which household members both lived and worked in the same

space. Rooms emptied of their productive work role, now became sites of decoration and areas in which families could, for the first time, develop autonomous tastes in furniture and household objects to fill their private spaces. As different decorative schemes and practices for the various rooms of the home emerged, the home became partitioned into autonomous parts with specific functions.

It was at the turn of the 19th century that a distinct domestic ideology began to take shape as an integral part of the 'home'. This ideology identified the home as the female sphere and defined the family primarily as the nuclear unit comprised of parents and children. As men went to work outside the home, women were left in the home to care for the family and the house. To the woman's domestic duties was now the added responsibility for home furnishing and decoration. The house was now seen as the symbol of the man who earned it. The interior of the home on the other hand - the mood, the taste, the activities that took place there - stood for the woman who ran the house. It was "a man's house but a woman's home." (Prost et al., 1987, 23)

This fundamental division between private sphere (home) and public sphere (work) appears to have important implications for the meanings and existence of household objects. Houses had existed in the past, and so too had the house with furniture and objects. However, the strict separation of the realm of production and the new private or consumptive realm, was an innovation of this era. The home was no longer an integrated working and living space. The home was now primarily the domain of the domestic wife and a space in which she sought to create a haven from the ills and stresses of the newly formed industrial sphere. The home now became an institution in itself, in which objects were to be used not only to perform instrumental

tasks but also to decorate, to make the private sphere representative of private ideals and identities. The home itself now became further fragmented into private and public rooms and the objects/furnishings became pieces of the ensemble known as the 'home'. (Prost et al., 1987, 112)

The increasing growth of the suburban home throughout the 20th century further divided the public and private realms. Single-family dwellings during the 1940s - 60s proliferated, and set the standard for the next 40 years of housing design and ideals. (Hine, 1987, 43) This new single-family home, separated from the world on its own lot or piece of land, also had important implications for the development and changes of furnishing/objects. With the rapid growth of consumerism and disposable income, the home and everything in it became a sign not only of consumer culture but also of the role and importance which the home played in the social and personal identity formation of modern individual consumers.

Home and Identity

We may be under the impression that our houses are designed and put together logically, but they are logical only because we have internalized a multitude of cultural Judgments about, among other things, the proper function of a house and its parts; the relationship among the inhabitants of the house; and what the relationship between the inhabitants and outsiders should be. Each culture in its time has made judgments on these matters and the judgments are reflected in the homes which they build.
(Scott, 1971, 356)

We are surrounded by our homes from our first moments of existence to our last days of memory. The home and the objects contained within it serve as much more than shelter. The home has become a type of 'storehouse' of signs and objects that communicate the values, positions, and aspirations of the residents within. We use the home in a number of instrumental ways to facilitate and expand upon communication. Consciously or unconsciously, the home owner and home residents often use houses and their contents as symbolic environments, "which become part of the language that individuals use to communicate with each other." (Sadalla, 1987, 572) This can be seen most concretely in the desire of home owners to express status, character, taste, or wealth in both the exterior and interior of the built environment.

"Home is Where the Heart Is"

Before embarking on a discussion of home, identity, and social communication, it is relevant to explain how the term 'home' will be used in the remainder of this work. For the purposes of the discussion at hand, the term 'home' will refer specifically to a symbolic environment created and sustained by the individual(s) who inhabit it. Consequently, home will be used to describe the emotional and symbolic qualities that people infer and create within these built structures, that is to say their houses, apartments, etc. This intangible nature of the term 'home' will permit a more sophisticated discussion of the modern domestic environment. The term 'house' will be used to refer to the built structure itself rather than to the values and meanings attached to it. The term 'household' refers to the individual inhabitants of the house/home and the possessions that surround them on a daily basis.

In order to study adequately the complex and processual nature of communication between individuals and objects, the domestic dwelling will be analyzed as containing two distinct, yet crucial aspects. The first of these is the physical construct of the house itself. My discussion of the house will refer to the exterior physical and material qualities of the built structure. The second aspect is the creation and maintenance of the idea of 'home' by the members occupying the physical space, whether it be a house, apartment or converted VW van.

By examining the house and the home as separate, yet interrelated, we can gain some understanding of the nature and process of social communication and cultural experience in modern consumer culture. It also becomes possible to broaden a discussion of meaning, identity, and the

household into a larger discussion of the interior and exterior cultural spaces we create within our built environments.

Interiors and Exteriors:

The modern house is constructed for both material and cultural purposes. On the one hand, a house represents a physical shelter which protects its inhabitants from the natural environment. In this role, the house can also be viewed by non-habitants in two ways: (a) as a purely functional structure which accomplishes its sheltering function more or less well and (b) as an exterior display of the behaviors, values, and personalities of the occupants within. Hence, different architectural styles can be used to express various aspects of the individual homeowner's tastes, and house style also reflects the general state of the material development of society. For example, in our society the suburbs reflect construction techniques rather than any particular public face offered by individual inhabitants.

The modern house is also a "demarcated space, to express feelings, ways of thinking, and social processes and to provide arenas for culturally defined activity." (Rakoff, 1977, 85) In this way, the house cannot be defined simply as a physical entity or as another commodity in the owner's array of goods. Rather, the house is a cultural artifact used by its occupants to express and create culturally determined meanings⁴ crucial for the inhabitants' individual identity and cultural participation. It is within the interior space of the house that individuals can express their identity by

⁴ I use this term to refer to the fact that individuals do not necessarily express themselves directly through the house itself. Instead, individuals use the house as a context to express or mediate culturally determined values, meanings, or practices. In this way, individuals use the house, as they use many other consumer objects, to put a personal imprint on a publicly produced good or item. Hence, the term 'culturally defined meanings' refers to the mixture of private (personal) and public (social) meanings that is created and communicated within the domestic environment.

moving furniture, decorating walls, displaying objects, etc. In this way, the house acts as a type of container for the cultural and symbolic practices in which inhabitants participate to make meaning of their immediate environment, individual identity, and culture.

The home is a unique cultural space in which individuals can express their tastes, feelings, etc., through their individual arrangement and choice of objects. Hence, the home is an interior and private space in which individual members can interact with their objects in the process of creating and understanding aspects of individual identity such as taste, meaning, etc. However, the home is also an interior realm in which individuals express and are subject to social and cultural ideas and processes.

Unless a house is completely idiosyncratic and follows no known rules or ideas of construction or architecture, each house reflects and incorporates, to a certain degree, larger cultural notions of design, architecture, structure, etc. The interior of the house is also based upon cultural ideas of space, (for example, that the house must have separate room for differing activities) decoration, etc. It is in the home as a *mixture* of the individual expression of identity, and as a reflection of broader social and cultural norms, that the ideas of interactive meaning-creation process becomes most useful.

The modern home is neither a pure expression of the identities of the individual household members, nor a pure expression of cultural norms concerning aesthetics, decorative norms, etc. The home is an institution which, at its core, is a constant site for this mixture and interaction of private and public meanings, between individuals and their objects, individuals and the spaces of their home, individuals and guests to the home, and individuals and the culture in which they live and seek to define and develop.

The term 'home' allows one to combine both the exterior and interior, material and symbolic, aspects of the house for a broader discussion of meanings, identity, and everyday objects. The interior of the house is "the central aspect of human experience and provides a unique opportunity for understanding the experience of "dwelling." or a person's intimate interaction with objects, spaces, and persons in the home." (Rullo, 1987, 250)

The home represents the world in which we experience public norms, cultural values, private meaning, and identity. The arrangement, decoration, etc., of a person's home allows the physical setting of the house to reinforce notions of the self and communicate this notion to others who inhabit the space or are invited into it. It is within the very private space of the home that an individual can offer a 'presentation of his/her self,' a presentation of the personality aspects which an individual feels represent his/her personal experiences and meanings.

Often, spaces such as the 'living room' or 'front room' are assigned as important regions within the home allowing the individual or family to display their personalities to visitors. In this way, rooms such as the living room act simultaneously as both a private space created by an individual to express identity, and as a public space into which non-inhabitants are invited to sample the meanings and values created by the arrangements of goods, decoration, etc.

In research which examines the home and individual identity, it is often the living room that is looked to as one of the most important places for finding a rich source of data "for examining the ways in which individuals express their actual (or desired) social identities in their homes." (Laumann *et al.*, 1970, 323) One theorist who has studied the importance of the physical and cultural space of the living room is Erving Goffman. In the

following passage, Laumann describes Goffman's approach and conclusions regarding the living room:

Goffman makes the distinction between the front (public) and rear (private) regions of behavior in impression management. The living room is the area where "performances" for guests are most given, and hence, the "setting" of it must be appropriate to the performance. Thus we expect more than any other part of the home, the living room reflects the individual's conscious and unconscious attempts to express a social identity. (Laumann *et al.*, 1970, 323)

While the living room will not be studied specifically, it is important to understand the notion that this space acts to help create individual identity while simultaneously displaying this very private identity to the outside world. Studies of the living room highlight that the arrangements of objects and spaces within the home act to communicate the inhabitants' social identity. In this way, living room research examines the process by which one uses the "arrangement of the social area in the home, that is, the space available to outsiders" (Rullo, 1987, 257) to symbolize the personality aspects that a person wishes to display and communicate to others.

The Self and Space

Underlying this approach to a discussion of the various characteristics and existence of interior/exterior spaces is a dramaturgical model of the self based upon the theories of Goffman and symbolic interactionism. In the article "Identity Symbolism in Housing," (1987) Sadalla *et al.*, use the dramaturgical approach to examine the crucial and symbolic role of the home in a person's identity creation and cultural participation. For Sadalla *et al.*, as well as Goffman, and SI theorists generally, individuals are understood as acting in response to each other within the process of social interaction and communication. In this view, an individual's self-identity is created primarily

as a function of the "acknowledgements of others" (Sadalla et al., 1988, 571) and his/her interaction with the 'generalized other'⁵ in any given cultural environment.

G.H. Mead defines this relationship between the individual and 'generalized others' as a 'conversation of gestures,' in which people "may make use of objects as well as linguistic symbols" (Sadalla et al., 1987, 572) to form meanings for each other. For Mead:

A conversation of gestures consists simply in the continued readjustment of one individual to another. The acts which have been started have to be checked and started again... We have a situation in which the beginning of an act of one individual must be interpreted in terms of our responses to it. But the situation is constantly changing, so we have to be continually on the outlook. We have to adjust ourselves first of all to the changes. (Miller, 1987, 43 & 45)

In order for this 'conversation of gestures' to facilitate the creation of an individual's self-concept, participants in this exchange must understand and share a common "symbol system." (Sadalla et al., 1987, 572) In order for this symbol system to exist and make sense for the participants, individuals must share "points of view regarding the meaning of actions, gestures and objects." (Sadalla et al., 1987, 572) Individuals use this shared system of beliefs, values, points of view, etc., to engage in acts of self-presentation that aim ultimately at "establishing, maintaining, or refining a particular identity or image in the minds of others." (Sadalla et al., 1987, 572) It is through this collection of self-presentational acts that an individual, in interaction with 'others,' either reinforces or modifies his/her individual identity.

⁵ This term refers to the aforementioned idea presented by G.H. Mead. For Mead, the 'generalized other' refers to the process by which the attitudes and construction of the 'self' are exposed, and develop in interaction with, the attitudes of the broader social community.

This interactive notion of the process of individual identity creation is useful for the study of the home in two ways.⁶ Firstly, the dramaturgical approach allows houses and the objects contained within them to be viewed as more than purely material objects. Indeed, the objects in the house and the house itself can be seen as symbols "that are part of the language of gestures that individuals use to communicate with each other." (Sadalla *et al.*, 1987, 572) In this view, the house and its contents represent not only the larger ideas, values, etc., of the individuals living within it but also the cultural meanings that help to create a common understanding between the inhabitants and the outside world.

For this very reason the house and its objects can not be understood as purely individual or subjective expressions emanating from a single person. The very process of identity creation, as much as it is intersubjective, i.e., in as much as it depends upon interaction with others and with 'the generalized others,' demands that individuals use symbols and objects that are at least partly comprehensible, accessible, and familiar to others. A totally subjective expression would more likely alienate, repel, or bore other individuals who would find in it no point of entry, no invitation to mutual understanding. Hence, identity-creation is always a mixture of elements, attitudes, beliefs, and symbols drawn from the public and pre-existing world of shared (social and socialized) meanings and private beliefs and attitudes tempered by the wish to be publicly acceptable.

This dramaturgical view of individual identity-creation also allows the home to be viewed as a type of 'prop' that is essential in guaranteeing social behavior. In this view of identity construction, the home acts as a very

⁶ The following discussion is based upon a framework originally offered by Sadalla *et al.* (1987)

important "tool employed in the performances of its users." (Sadalla et al., 1987, 572) Consequently, the home is manipulated, decorated, arranged, etc., by its occupants in order to create a symbolic setting that communicates vital information to both the inhabitants and those who visit its interior space. Unlike any other physical structure in modern society, the home is used and chosen by individuals to actively assist in the creation of symbolic environments and performances in an effort to participate in the interactive process of meaning creation and identity formation every day of their lives.

In The Meaning of Things (1981), Rochberg-Halton et al., pursue the notion of the home as a symbolic environment. They argue that the home is "an empirical and normative entity, constituted through time by the objective patterns of psychic activity that people invest in different areas of the house, in different objects, and in different activities." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 138) In this view, the home is the key symbolic arena for the creation of both individual identity and meaning. The importance of both the exterior and interior dimensions of the home is that they facilitate an area for action and communicative interaction between individuals and their objects, and therefore, between individuals and their concepts of self.

For Rochberg-Halton et al., one of the most important features of the home and its spaces lies in its role as a container or storehouse for people's personal objects and artifacts. They argue that, both the location and existence of an individual's personal objects are part of an interactive process of meaning in which objects come "to form part of a gestalt for the people who live with them - a gestalt that both communicates a sense of "home" and indicates the type of activities that are appropriate for different parts of the home." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 184) In this same way, the organization of space in the home can be examined as part of a "pattern of

attention and intention made concrete in the artifacts and the ambience they [the objects] create." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 184) This pattern of intention and attention works reciprocally to reflect and promote the process of identity in the individual inhabitants.

In this view of the home as a symbolic environment for individual identity and meaning, the home comes to represent an individual in terms of what objects have been invested with meaning and energy and what spatial arrangements individuals have created to reflect their relationships with the 'generalized others' in the social environment.

Although a study of the home itself is important, its relevance lies in the fact that it offers a context in which to examine in greater detail the role of objects in the interactive process of individual identity formation and cultural meanings. In the following section, the interior space of the home will be examined to attempt to illuminate some of the stages in this process of meaning creation and identity formation. Often studies which have focused upon meaning and the home have not included a detailed analysis of the role and meaning of common objects. The arrangement and decoration of interior spaces of the home are often examined while the objects which fill these spaces are neglected.

Introducing The Individual:

At this point, I wish briefly to re-state the relevance of discussing theories of history and the home. Giedion, Benjamin, and Baudrillard succeed in presenting interesting theories for the study of objects, the home, and history. All three authors present theories for studying the history of the material world as a dynamic continuum of social and cultural practices. For Giedion, a historical study of material objects is an attempt to understand and

study the objects of the modern world. In this view, changes and developments in material objects must be studied as evidence of the links our society has with cultures and societies of the past. For Giedion, a simple historical study of the stylistic changes and permutations of objects, will not provide the theorist with an integrated account of history which attempts to understand the present by examining and understanding the past.

In the context of this thesis, Giedion makes two important contributions to the study of the home, meaning, and the everyday object. Firstly, Giedion offers a way in which to understand the object and the history of the object as more than a simple set of mechanical or technical developments and changes. Secondly, Giedion offers a historical study of the institution of the home. For Giedion, the home is a constituent fact of history. As a constituent fact, the home may therefore be studied as a linking factor between historical periods in an attempt to study modern phenomenon and developments at hand in the modern industrialized world.

Benjamin also offers a way in which to study history as a dynamic continuum of change and cultural development. For the purposes of this thesis, the utility of Benjamin's theories arises from his discussion of the 'useless' object. For Benjamin, useless objects were one of the most important sites for the cultural communication of any society. In this view, useless objects could be studied as indicators of the cultural history and communication of generations of the past. Indeed, useless objects had the unique capacity to carry cultural meanings from one generation to the next and allow the theorist to examine the nature of the cultural communications through time. For the purposes of this thesis, Benjamin's discussion of the useless object lends validity to the notion that these banal objects of the

industrialized world do play an important role in communication and the development of culture and cultural meanings.

In his work, Baudrillard presents a theory in which one can study industrialized objects in a broader examination of the structures of the organization and arrangements of goods by individuals in modern society. Baudrillard, like Giedion, also presents a historical examination of the home. However, Baudrillard's discussion of the home is a way to understand individuals as they exist within pre-determined structures and schemes for the arrangements and placement of objects. Baudrillard argues that in the realm of industrialized society a new type of individual has developed. Unlike individuals of the past, this new individual is unique in his/her ability to arrange and interact with objects on the basis of pre-described schemes offered by the technical imperatives and developments of industrialized consumer society.

All three authors, in their own way, neglect a study of the individual in the relationship between people and their objects. Although the three authors offer useful ways to locate the institution of the home in a historical context, the authors do not discuss the actual interactive process that is carried out when people and their objects interact on a daily basis in our society. For Giedion, the interaction between individual and object, or society and individual, has little relation to the broader study at hand. Giedion's attempt to understand the present by studying the anonymous history of the past, does not propose any place or relationship for the individual actor in the process of creating meaning and interacting with objects, regardless of what historical time period they inhabit.

Benjamin also does not address the role and/or relationship of the individual actor in relation to a discussion of objects. In Benjamin's theories

one can see an emphasis on the object's role as a cultural communicator, but little discussion of the individuals' interactive relationship with this cultural communicator. Benjamin, like Giedion, also does not offer any theories towards finding an explanation of the existence or importance of the mixture of private and public meanings that interact when any individual encounters, sees, purchases, etc., a useless object.

This lack of attention to the individual actor and his/her role in the interaction with objects can also be found in Baudrillard. For Baudrillard, the individual is viewed as only important in his/her interaction with structured systems of pre-determined social norms and ideals in the arrangement of objects. The individual actor appears to play no autonomous role in this interaction with mass-produced goods. Like Benjamin, Baudrillard is too focussed upon the object *per se* for any useful discussion of individual identity, meaning, and the object.

Having explained the limits of the theories offered by Giedion, Benjamin, and Baudrillard, it is now useful to discuss how SI theories in general can better add to the discussion at hand. In the sections, "The Self and Space" and "Introducing The Individual," Goffman and the theories of dramaturgy are examined in order to specifically address the interactive nature of individual identity within the home environment. In these theories, the home is both a private and public space in which individuals construct and give his/her performance in the process of creating individual identity and meanings.

A dramaturgical approach to the study of the home recognizes the very crucial role that the home plays in the process of creating both meaning and identity. Within this approach, an individual is in constant interaction with the generalized other of the outside world, and through a conversation of

gestures, is constantly arranging and re-arranging his/her attitudes, beliefs, performances, etc., to engage in identity-creation and social communication. For this constant interaction between the individual and the generalized other to occur, there also must be a shared or common set of symbols that can convey meanings that all participants in the interaction will comprehend. Without this common symbolic vocabulary, individuals would not be able to understand the gestures given by each other and the process of creating meaning and communication will be obscured.

The home is one such shared or common symbol that can be used in the interactions between individuals and the generalized other. It is within this shared set of symbols that each individual attempts both to interact with the generalized other and to take meanings from these interactions to create his/her notions of individual identity.

Consequently, according to Goffman and theories of SI, the home can be used as a type of prop which an individual can use in his/her performances and interaction with other individuals. As a result, the home becomes a place in which a balance is sought between the private (personal) meanings and performances given by an individual and the public (social) meanings that arise in interaction with the generalized other. In this context, the home becomes a place in which there occurs a constant mixture of public and private meanings and performances. Hence, the home exists as a crucial symbol in the common or shared symbols needed for coherent communications and meaning-creation between the individual and the other, and the individual and his/her 'self.'

In the following section, "Mining The Everyday," this notion of the home as a mixture or balance of private and public meanings and interactions will be discussed in further detail. It will also examine the home and its objects

with a focus upon the role and interactions of the individual actor in the process of giving performances and communicating with the generalized other.

In this way, it is my aim to avoid an overly structural approach to the study of both the home and the object. Similar to Giedion, Benjamin, and Baudrillard, it is my aim to accept that social structures and imperatives do affect the individual actor and his/her relations with objects. However, unlike these authors, it is also my intention to seek to understand the nature/form of social structures in the interaction that takes place in the home, between the individual and the other, the individual and the object, and the private and public meanings developed in social communication.

Mining the Everyday:

There can be no doubt that human life - meaningful or meaningless en gros - is a meaningful enterprise en detail. In fact, it may be said that human life is daily reconstituted by 'ordinary' meanings, regardless of the degree to which individuals and societies endow individual, collective and cosmic existence with overarching significance.
(Thomas Luckmann, 1987)

Our daily lives may not be as boring and banal as we would like to think. Everyday we engage in seemingly routine and inconsequential acts of communication that are often neglected by serious study. The daily routines and interactions that occur behind the closed doors of our domestic dwellings offer a rich source of material for the study of meanings and objects. For the purposes of this work I use the term 'everyday' to refer to the realm of activity and communication that individuals carry out routinely within their home environments and without much thought or deliberation.

I have chosen to discuss the everyday world within the confines of the domestic dwelling because it is within the home that individuals spend the majority of their time and interact with the majority of their consumer objects. From the actual built structure of the house itself to the constant interaction with cutlery, furnishings, decorative objects, etc., it is in the home that modern individuals experience a constant interaction with objects as both material entities and symbolic markers.

This section will argue that the realm of the everyday is one of the most crucial areas in which meaning is produced and it is where consumption occurs. Indeed, a study of the everyday allows the theorist concerned with meaning and objects to examine the everyday and apply these findings to a

broader understanding of larger social practices and meanings. Secondly, a study in the realm of the everyday domestic environment must be recognized as a crucial object of study in itself. In this way, the everyday will be approached as a phenomenon which can aid a discussion of meaning and communication in its own inherent characteristics and actions.

Macro vs. Micro Perspectives:

The serious study of the phenomenon of the everyday environment is a recent sociological development. For years, the actions and communication that took place in the everyday environment were used simply as empirical evidence to support existing theories concerning social practices and ideas. With the growth in popularity of Interactionist theories and approaches, the realm of the everyday was given a second chance. For the Interactionists, it was the interaction that took place in the banal routines and practices of the everyday world that could offer a less deterministic approach to the study of social meaning and behavior. For the Interactionists (such as Mead and Blumer), the theorist could no longer presume to somehow step aside or outside of the everyday realm of activity. For these theorists, it was essential to recognize that the theorists themselves were very much affected by, and participants in, the social interaction.

An Interactionist approach to the study of the social also rejects the 'macro' approach to society which assumes the human actor to be a "*tabula rasa*, internalizing the norms and values of society out of a desire for group membership, or as a *homo economicus*, developing social, political, and ideological characteristics as a result of his/her class membership." (Adler *et al.*, 1989, 218) Instead, an interactionist or 'micro' study of society, views the actor as a development from the interactions, attitudes, and behaviors of

people's everyday environments. In this way, to a certain extent, "the relationship between consciousness and interaction is seen as reflexive: people are shaped or socialized by interaction as well as instrumental in shaping the character of interaction." (Adler et al., 1989, 219)

This view of the reflexive actor is essential in a the study of the everyday. It presumes the importance and crucial role that interaction, on an everyday basis, has in the development of an individual's identity. In this way, interaction in the everyday realm (whether domestic or not) is a crucial tool for the development of self-concept and larger social participation. Macro studies of the social life which overlooked this notion of the reflexive individual, also overlooked the complexity of everyday life and treated the individual subject as an overdetermined entity, inevitably structured by forces outside of itself and its environment.

The micro approach to the study of social practices and behaviors has developed primarily out of the theories of Goffman and Garfinkel. Both have developed ideas concerning the individual actor, the social context, and social structure, in order to propose a type of 'sociology of everyday life' which offers a new perspective for studying social interaction.

According to Goffman, the everyday is the site where actors give their 'performances' and attempt to manage the impressions given to the other individuals with whom they come in contact. For Goffman, any analysis of the social world must begin with a study of the individual in society and in interaction with other social beings. In studying the individual in this manner, Goffman proposed that people do not simply give performances or 'take roles' to align their behavior with pre-established norms and the actions of others.

Rather:

Goffman's actors intentionally and manipulatively role-play for the purpose of managing others' impressions of them. This occurs through the interaction rituals of everyday life - rituals that shape the individual's inner self by externally imprinting their rules on him or her at the same time they ensure the self-regulatory character of society. (Adler *et al.*, 1989, 220)

It is, therefore, within the site of the everyday 'rituals' and routines that the most fundamental interactions take place between social actors to communicate meanings and create an individual's self-concept. In this way, Goffman approaches the everyday as an important site of social meaning and behavior in, and of, itself. It is in the realm of the everyday that the individual actor is actively constructed through his/her performances and interactions with the audience.

Goffman's theories of the individual and the everyday are useful because they allow us to view the realm of the everyday as yet another level of interaction that is part of the complex process of meaning and communication that takes place between people and their ordinary objects within the home environment.

Using Goffman, one can argue that everyday objects in the home are used as more than symbols of larger, shared, or public symbolic meanings. Indeed, we can see that the objects that surround surround us on a daily basis are used in the continuous 'performance' given by actors in the attempt to 'manage impressions' and in order to allow actors to perform their coherent roles in the aim of self creation.

A second important contribution from Goffman is his notion of everyday life as the context of social construction and personal performances. For Goffman, the performances given by individual actors can be defined as symbolic 'rituals' or ceremonies which lie at the heart of creating social unity

and common understanding. In this view, everyday or naturally occurring interaction between individuals is the foundation for all understanding in society. In this view, "describing and analyzing the character and implications of everyday life interaction should thus serve as both the beginning and the end point of sociology." (Adler et al., 1989, 219)

Theorists such as Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists extend Goffman's notion of the 'performance' to study the reflexive nature of everyday life. For ethnomethodologists, meaning in the everyday world is established by the actors themselves. In this view, actors use interpretive schemes and actions such as interests, norms, and behaviors in the realm of the everyday to establish what is relevant in their daily activities. Unlike past sociological approaches, ethnomethodology views interpretive schemes as more than simply motivations for individual actions. Instead, interpretive schemes, created and maintained in the everyday realm, are strategies in which "actors use to justify their own actions *a posteriori*." (Bovone, 1987, 48)

For ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel, the overarching concern with the study of the everyday is the relationship between everyday or taken-for-granted meanings, and the organization of these meanings by individuals into ordinary and routine patterns of interaction with other individuals and their social environment. Hence, in this view the focus is upon individuals and their orientations, rather than on structures, ideologies, or meaning systems. Ethnomethodological studies seek to find the nature of the link between the individual and the larger social structure. For theorists such as Garfinkel, this link between the personal and the social, or the private and public realms, "rests on the role of symbols and common meanings." (Denzin in Douglas, 1970, 260) In this way, ethnomethodological theorists share the approaches of Goffman and symbolic interactionists which locate

their unit of analysis in the individual and interaction. Unlike past 'macro' sociological theories, or the structural theories offered by Benjamin and Baudrillard, SI and the ethnomethodological approach seek to explain meaning-creation through social interaction and with a focus upon the individual actor.

For the purposes of this thesis, the location of analysis at the level of the individual and the individual in interaction provides a way in which to uncover the existence and implications of meanings that surround the everyday object within the home. By realizing that in the everyday world the actor can be understood as both independent and interactive, one can now study the complexity of the interaction process itself. Both ethnomethodologists and Interactionists develop the idea that individuals continually manipulate symbols and "orient their own actions toward other objects." (Denzin in Douglas, 1970, 61)

It is the concern of the sociologist of the everyday to describe and study this continual directing of actions that takes place in the very ordinary activities of people's lives. In this way, it is possible to avoid the problems of past research which have investigated "any type of social order [as if it] existed above and beyond the way it is made up in common everyday life." (Bovone, 1987, 55) Instead, a study of the everyday practices and interactions attempts to recognize and demarcate the ways in which, in interaction with others, their everyday environment, and themselves, individuals create private meanings out of their everyday lives in order to attempt to "prove to one another that the commonly perceived social order [public meaning] does in fact exist." (Bovone, 1987, 55)

Exploring the Everyday:

In conclusion, it is important at this point to discuss briefly how these theories of the everyday and the individual can be used in a study of everyday objects, the home, and the individual. Whether studies of the everyday are undertaken to study the processes of interaction in common life (Interactionist sociology) or to examine the interpretive schemes or rules which individuals use to find meaning (ethnomethodologists), each in its own way works towards a theory concerned with the concept of identity and/or personal/private meanings.

Both these views converge on the importance of a search into the elusive process which results in individual identity. These two approaches to the everyday allow the theorist concerned with meaning to realize that identity is produced *within* interaction, and that it is only through the process of interaction that the individual is able to realize their own self while simultaneously realizing how this self is different from others in the social world.

In this view, it is the everyday world which serves as the context in which meaning of both the private self and the public social realm is both created and understood. Therefore, a study of seemingly useless objects that exist in the home environment and with which individuals interact on a daily basis, is a crucial part of this context for both private and public meaning creation and communication. The following passage illuminates the nature of the complexity and importance of this often overlooked and ignored realm of behavior and meaning creation:

The everyday world is a world of stories and tricks, wit, conceits, proverbs, fragments, memories, the articulate, the inarticulate, the ephemeral, the persistent, the indexical, the private, the profane, the playful - both predictable and unpredictable, conscious and unconscious. (Silverstone, 1989, 85)

Chapter Three: A Place of Her Own

For our house is our corner of the world. It is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. (Gaston Bachelard)

Since the time of Victorian society, women and the home have often been examined and understood as one entity - each dependent on the other for their survival. The statement that "a woman's place is in the home" carries a number of meanings in modern industrial Western societies. It reveals a larger cultural agenda dominated by patriarchal values, in which the woman is expected and cultivated to be an ideal homemaker, professional mother, and creator of the private 'haven' for the working man.

Perhaps one of the most important and overlooked consequences of this statement for the lives of women in modern society, is the neglect of woman's 'space' within the 'home' and the house itself. Few theorists have sought to provide answers to such questions as how the woman herself relates to the 'space' within her ascribed 'place' of the home. Women's actual spatial relations and interactions with objects in the home have often been overlooked in favor of the analysis of other issues concerning woman's unpaid labor, housework, and the problems of private segregation of the home from the public sphere of production. Although these are worthwhile and much needed areas of discussion in terms of women and their life experiences, further work would still appear to be needed in the actual study of the home, objects, and the dynamic interaction that take place in this context to produce and reproduce cultural meaning and practices.

What research has been undertaken into the study of the home and meaning production has largely been within the realm of architecture and

design professions. In these professions, research which seeks to address house design and/or the woman's environment has tended to concentrate on the changing nature of styles and to study which styles are the most popular and attractive to women in light of purchasing decisions. Although this research does address the 'woman,' it apparently fails to critically assess its implicit positioning of women as simply the purchasers of a variety of spatial designs, while simultaneously ignoring the lack of access women themselves have to the creation and deployment of these spatial arrangements and decoration changes in their own lives.

In this discussion, it is the aim of this chapter to study the home and the objects within it in terms of their social and personal meanings for women. I intend to examine this question by undertaking a larger study of the home, objects in the home, and their relationships to the dialectic and inter-relational process of meaning in relation to the issue of gender.

In order to develop this discussion of the role and place of personal and social meaning for women in the home and in the objects within the home, this chapter will undertake a two part approach. The first part of this discussion will concern the actual physical and spatial construction of the house itself. The second part will be concerned with the objects and/or decoration of these spaces within the home.

Gender and its construction are fruitful areas for research when examining the way in which everyday household objects may embody power and power relationships. In this sense, we shall critically examine the possibility of using gender as a way to broach a discussion of power relations that are often ignored, or poorly addressed, in many theoretical discussions of meaning, household objects, and social communication.

Feminist Concerns:

Before beginning this analysis of women, the home, and meaning, it is valuable to undertake a brief review of some relevant feminist literature which seeks to address the problems of women, space, and the home. In her work "What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?" (1980), Dolores Hayden offers a critical discussion of many of the shortcomings that literature of the past and present has faced in the study of gender and the home.

The first set of problems for Hayden concerns the way in which the spatial construction and layout of the conventional home fails to serve the employed woman and her family, "whether it is in a suburban, exurban, or inner-city neighborhood, whether it is a split-level ranch house, a modern masterpiece of concrete and glass, or an old brick tenement." (Hayden, 1980, 172) The interests of women are not met adequately due to the fact that "the house or apartment is almost invariably organized around the same set of spaces: kitchen, dining room, living room, bedrooms, garage or parking area. These spaces require someone to undertake private cooking, cleaning, child care, and usually private transportation if adults and children are to exist within it." (Hayden, 1980, 172)

In addition to a need to study such spatial questions, Hayden also argues that material feminists¹ must be concerned with the private spaces of women's dwelling in the home. For Hayden, modern material culture effectively works against the concerns and interests of women, and causes

¹ This term is used by Hayden to refer to "the first feminists in the United States to identify the economic exploitation of women's domestic labour by men as the most basic cause of women's inequality." (Hayden, 1981, 1) These feminists' also set forth proposals for addressing the spatial designs and "material culture of American homes, neighborhoods, and cities" in an effort to reach equality by transforming "spatial issues and the basis of material life" (Hayden, 1981, 1) Hayden concentrates primarily on the movements and arguments of American material feminists between the years of 1865-1930. However, Hayden's use of this term does not exclude more contemporary schools of feminist thought which continue to discuss and address questions of domestic labour and spatial design in an effort to balance power and economic relations between the sexes.

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the home to become "a box to be filled with commodities." (Hayden, 1980, 174) In this view of the home, Hayden argues that the typical home is often poorly designed and cluttered with appliances and domestic technologies which are energy-consuming, and often "lined up in a room where the domestic work is done in isolation from the rest of the family." (Hayden, 1980, 174)

Hayden, as a material feminist herself, invites and encourages other concerned scholars to develop a new paradigm of the home, the neighborhood, and the city. For Hayden, feminist literature must acknowledge that homes and their interior dwellings are designed in such a way that women are constrained physically, socially, and economically. Hayden argues that in the future feminists must aim to describe the "physical, social, and economic design of a human settlement that would support rather than restrict, the activities of employed women and their families." (Hayden, 1980, 179)

Hayden also offers advice to those women who are the focus of such a discussion: homemakers, working mothers, and wives. For Hayden, attacking the conventional division between public and private space should not only become an important mandate for feminists, but homemakers themselves must also recognize "that they are struggling against both gender stereotypes and wage discrimination [and that] social, economic, and environmental changes are necessary to overcome these conditions." (Hayden, 1980, 187) Hayden urges all women to no longer tolerate poorly designed cities, neighborhoods, and dwellings, and instead demand from designers and architects, new plans which do not "proclaim a woman's place is in the home." (Hayden, 1980, 189)

In her work The Grand Domestic Revolution (1981), Hayden names a second area of concern. Here, Hayden provides a historical study of the American domestic environment of the last one hundred years and also sets out to address critically many of the material feminist concerns and approaches to the study of gender and the domestic environment. For our present purposes, it is useful to consider Hayden's critique of contemporary feminisms concerned with built environments and gender.

For Hayden, the break between material feminists and contemporary feminists of the 1950s and later, occurred when feminists turned their attention away from spatial concerns, and chose instead to focus upon issues of work, housework, and unpaid domestic labor. For Hayden, the Feminine Mystique and other writings, almost totally ignored issues of household space and design, and took for granted the existence of the single-family, isolated home environments. These feminists would "have been taken aback to hear their houses described [by material feminists] as perfect symbols of Victorian rather than modern womanhood, requiring a paradoxical combination of self-sacrifice and economic consumption." (Hayden, 1981, 295)

This move away from spatial concerns to an interest in women's oppression, overshadowed the work and potential theoretical use of material feminism that had developed throughout the last century. According to Hayden, the material feminist tradition offers at least two insights into the question of women and oppression in the home. The first of these insights is a study and spatial critique of the home as an isolated, domestic workplace. The second insight concerns the economic critique of unpaid household work.

In order to rebalance these two concerns of women and the home, Hayden argues that contemporary feminists must realize that they have lost sight of the first area of spatial critique argued for by the material feminists of the past. Indeed, Hayden argues that contemporary feminists "have overlooked the private home as a spatial component of their economic oppression in the same way that material feminists overlooked the sexual division of labor as a social component." (Hayden, 1981, 295) For Hayden, one way to deal seriously with these two divergent streams of study is to "attack the exploitation of women's unpaid household labor" by removing both the idea of the 'woman's' sphere as well as its spatial embodiment, "the isolated home." (Hayden, 1981, 295) In more concrete terms of praxis, Hayden argues that concerns about the organization of space in the home must turn to a demand for the redesign of physical structures.

A third area of concern within feminist literature revolves around what Peter Somerville in his work, "A Critical Comment..." (1989), terms the inability of those in the field of environmental research to "appreciate the concept of home as an ideological construct." (Somerville, 1989, 110) In this work, Somerville criticizes those who attempt to understand power relations within the home by studying only the physical and design features of the built environments. For Somerville, these approaches to the study of the home "miss the point that gender division of labor within the home is based on functional [and ideological] stereotypes rather than physical regularities [of the spaces within the home]." (Somerville, 1989, 113)

Somerville urges theorists interested in the home and gender to draw attention both to the relevance of those parts of the home which are private as well as to the ways in which the status of the private domain is socially constructed in the modern context. As well, Somerville argues for scholars to

understand the 'home' as a social ideal whose character and existence can, and must, be explained in a larger social context of dominant institutions and patriarchal ideologies. In this way, Somerville offers a framework for theorists to study the physical, spatial components of the home, while simultaneously acknowledging and addressing larger social problems of power and hegemonic influences that act to perpetuate gender inequalities and patriarchal meanings.

A fourth area of concern within housing studies concerns the role of the individual in both the construction of the home and its meaning. Unlike Somerville's request to acknowledge and study the social forces behind the conceptions and meanings of the home, Peter Dickens in his work "Architecture, The Individual, and Social Change," (1988) urges the theorist concerned with the built environment and meaning, to acknowledge the relationship between physical space, individual behavior, and social life. For Dickens, much contemporary urban research has been largely dedicated "to a systematic denial of the significance of individual behavior, or of physical space, on the larger processes of social change." (Dickens, 1988, 259)

For Dickens, this type of housing research has assumed that people and their activities in, and around, the built environment can be understood only in terms of broad social relations, or only in relation to physical space as simply serving the role of a backdrop against which social processes play themselves out. In this view, space is observed as a neutral area for meaning creation, and links can therefore not be established between small scale activities of individuals in the home, and larger social processes and ideologies. This is especially crucial for gender, in that links between women's lived experiences and gender ideology are rarely addressed and critically studied in relation to the space of the home.

Ultimately, Dickens suggests that further research undertake the task of studying both social psychology and sociobiology², to create a full and useful examination of how individuals, and women in particular, interact with both their built environments and larger social processes.

A fifth, and final area of research into women and the built environment useful for a study of meaning creation is presented by Ruth Madigan *et al.* in their work, "Gender, and the Meaning of the Home." (1990) In this work, the authors present what is possibly the most crucial aspect of study in any attempt to examine women and the built environment; the agendas and training of individual architects, designers, and feminist researchers themselves. For the authors, within the last decade researchers and designer/architects in the fields of housing studies have paid increasing attention to "the effects on housing consumers of the current restructuring of the economy and the welfare state." (Madigan *et al.*, 1990, 625) This concentration of research has failed according to the authors, to acknowledge the changing nature of gender relations in accounts and studies of the changing nature of the actual production and consumption of housing in modern society.

The authors further argue that a study which focuses upon housing in terms of its economic issues uses a "gender neutral framework" which has more critical concern for the built structure of the house itself than for the actual individuals who occupy the structures. The authors also criticize architects/ designers for their lack of discussion of the social implications of

² Dickens uses this term to explain the studies done within the discipline of biology into the relationships between people and their spatial environments. In these studies, biologists seeks to understand "biological imperatives acting on individual behavior as forming the limits within which a vast array of different social processes can take place." (Dickens, 1988, 261) In these studies, biologists seek to unite studies of human biological behavior with an understanding of the social and political processes of human life.

housing beyond the purely aesthetic realm. The authors criticize those in the design professions who seek only to maximize the amount of housing structures for the minimum cost, while also concentrating solely on the exterior appearance of these units to further increase marketability. For Madigan et al., and other theorists concerned with the feminine environment, architects/designers are poorly trained in the wider, social aspects of housing design and construction, and instead educated primarily for the building and design of the public sphere, and business buildings. Architectural and design concerns with the fine art tradition rather than with social policy has allowed these professionals to continue their impractical and undesirable construction and design of spaces for women and their families.

Despite this lack of 'feminine' concerns within the architectural and design professions, Madigan et al., argue against a simple mass addition of female planners to rebalance this situation. Instead, the authors encourage theorists of the built environment to find a balance between the "pragmatic needs of women in their existing circumstances and the political ideals to which feminism aspires." (Madigan et al., 1990, 632) In the following passage, the authors use the example of kitchen design and planning to illustrate a useful form of praxis for the future improvement of housing designs and women's lived experiences:

If we discuss kitchen design on the assumption that women are the main users of kitchens, are we recognizing the inequality of domestic labor or reinforcing stereotypes of women in the kitchen. At the very least we need to be sure that physical design does not trap people in existing roles even if we recognize that physical design cannot itself change social relations. Housing design, if it is to be responsive to the needs of the occupants is in many ways a matter of politics rather than aesthetics...

it is necessary to find ways of organizing and exercising political power so that women do not lose out by the establishment of a hierarchy when men take over positions of authority. (Madigan et al., 1990, 641)

Despite the varied approaches and opinions of the authors discussed above, all address in their own way some of the various problems that face any theorist concerned with meaning, gender, and the home. Of central importance to this study, is the concern in all of these works with the problematization of gender and the role of the social and personal in any meaning creation within the home environment. Each of these criticisms and concerns regarding housing studies and gender addresses the crucial problem of how and why a study of the home and its objects must balance larger social developments and processes with everchanging choices of aesthetics and styles within the built environments under study.

In the final two sections of this discussion, I will take up these concerns by examining both the idea and actual physical and spatial construction of the house, while also studying the interior dimensions of the private spaces within the home. In this way, I will critically examine many of the concerns of feminist research in housing and meaning, while simultaneously conducting a larger discussion of the nature of the interaction between the individual, the home, and the creation and recreation of social and personal meanings in social communication.

The Home: Historical Aspects:

Of fundamental importance to any discussion of the concept of home and the creation of meaning is a discussion of the historical construction and normalization of the notion of 'home' itself. The 'home' as an institution is a relatively new phenomenon in the continuum of historical development. With

the development of increased mechanization and technological developments, Western society at the end of the 18th century experienced a fundamental spatial shift between the public and private spheres. As men left the houses and farms to work in the cities and factories, the home became a private sphere of interaction that was no longer a singular privilege of the wealthy upper classes. With production removed from the actual site of the house, the family dwelling began to adopt new characteristics of social interaction.

Houses increasingly became segregated as 'havens' away from the city, where weary industrialized male factory workers could escape. The realms of the public (productive sites) and the private (home) became distinctly delineated and cultivated to perfection. In his work Objects of Desire, (1986) Adrian Forty examines the notion of the home throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. For Forty, as soon as work left to go to the factories, the house became the 'home,' and was now exclusively a place for eating, sleeping, raising children, and enjoying new-found leisure time. (Forty, 1986, 100) The home soon acquired a Victorian character in which the oppressive conditions of the new factory workplace were combatted to excess in a concentration of decoration and comfort in both the design and content of the home environment.

Throughout the late 1800s, the concept of the home as haven grew in popularity and practice, and increasingly the home became a "world of unreality and illusions, which were the responsibility and feminine duty to create and maintain." (Forty, 1986, 102) Women were encouraged by society, the media, and industrial corporations to cultivate the virtues of a 'homemaker' and role as a mistress of developing happy homes and raising disciplined and useful future citizens and workers. Moving into the 20th

century, this notion of the private haven or home, remained physically and emotionally separated from the places of work, and the male-dominated public sphere. With the rapid growth of mechanization and technological capabilities, the 19th century view of the home as a stronghold of beauty and spiritual social value was replaced by the idea that the home's main function was as a source of physical welfare and health for its occupants. (Forty, 1986, 113)

This new concern with health and welfare as well as with home as private sanctuary, was reflected in concrete spatial practices within the house. This was most demonstrably indicated by the practice in the early 1900s of reversing the roles of the drawing room and the kitchen to the core of the house. The front room or parlor used for greeting outside guests of the public realm was no longer the focal point for the homemaker's energies. Instead, the homemaker became increasingly concerned and pressured to make her kitchen the most productive, healthy, and friendly room in the home. With this reversal, the majority of a woman's time was now spent within the walls of the kitchen, which was most likely to be placed at the rear of the house or within the shelter of sliding doors and/or hidden corridors.

During the early years of the 20th century, the space of the home was also divided into sections which the homemaker was required to keep hygienic and 'germ free' at all times. During the 1920s - 40s, the media and society as a whole strongly advocated the view that the quality, design, and arrangement of objects within the domestic environment had a major influence upon the physical well-being and health of the entire nation. This can be demonstrated most forcibly with the hygiene scare of the 1940s in which dust, darkness, and dirt were seen to be the 'evil enemies' of the home and the very nation itself. Women were instructed that a dirty home could

strike the children with sickness or even death, and as a result threaten the very prosperity and functioning of the consumer and capitalist economy.

With the rapid growth of prosperity and disposable income in the postwar years, the home became a part of mass produced goods, color schemes, styles, and fashion trends. In his work Populuxe, (1986) Thomas Hine explores the years of the 1950s to 1960s and the relationship of home interiors to developments in industrial society, and advertising's rise in power and popularity. In his discussion of the various trends and fashions of kitchen appliances and decoration, Hine documents the rise in popularity of 'earth tones' amongst homemakers of the 1960s. Appliances in such colors as 'harvest gold' sold exceptionally well amongst homemakers due to the fact that women saw these goods less as instrumental domestic technologies and more as a part of an overall decorating scheme. (Hine, 1986, 64)

These 'overall schemes' were facilitated by the growth in mass production technologies, increases in disposable income, and the media's role as advisor and guide to women in these new domestic environments. With the separation of the home from the public sphere, women since the turn of the century had come to adopt roles as home decorators and arrangers of goods. These new responsibilities of decoration and arrangement were confusing to many homemakers. Advertisers and producers soon filled the role of teacher by instructing women in the correct usage, deployment, and stylistic characteristics of both home interiors and the goods which were required to fill the new private spaces.

In Redesigning The American Dream (1984), Dolores Hayden approaches the history of the American home from the perspective of material feminism. Architects and designers of the last century have incorrectly claimed that their domestic designs are made with 'women in

mind.' One such example of this mistaken view is the idea created by developers and architects of the 'dream house.' The 'dream house' ideal was a product of the postwar years in America, in which large amounts of disposable income and returning soldiers could be accommodated and capitalized upon by ingenious developers. For Hayden, the dream house was marketed to women as a direct response to their needs and wishes for an ideal environment. Many of the designs for dream houses claimed to meet a woman's inherent desire for "elaborate stairways and formal entrances where they can greet their guests in style...romantic master bedrooms, where they can enjoy large closets, expansive dressing rooms and large bathroom areas... and gourmet kitchens where women can practice cooking as an art or as a science." (Hayden, 1984, 17)

Such plans for a 'dream house' continue to this day, and for Hayden, demonstrates an inherent "architecture of gender" on the part of the building profession. In this gendered architecture, houses, whether dreamlike or not, provide a setting for women and girls to be effective social status achievers, desirable sex objects, and skillful domestic servants. In the spatial designs and cultural assumptions of designers and architects, men are excluded from the home as simple breadwinners, handy men and/or regular car mechanics. The home constructed around dream notions of kitchens, bedrooms, and bathrooms, effectively sets up a gender division of labor within the home, but, even more importantly for material feminism, these types of designs celebrate an architecture of the home that maintains 19th century ideals of separate spheres for women and men (the public vs. the private.)

The Home: Spatial Issues:

The spatial division and separation of the house can also be discussed in more specific terms with an examination of the actual arrangements and designs of home interiors that women of the past and present have come to live with and accept as normal. In her recent work Make Room for TV (1992), Lynn Spigel offers a critical discussion of the effects the television set and its programming had on American society and families.

As stated above, the postwar years in American society promoted and understood the home as a private sphere to be filled with modern commodities which would act in unison to provide a comfortable place to spend leisure time, and a safe world in which to raise children. The homemaker's tasks during these years included wife, mother, household engineer, and decorator 'extraordinaire'. Women sought advice and help from the media, especially women's magazines which "discussed family life in the language organized around spatial imagery of proximity, distance, isolation and integration." (Spigel, 1992, 37) In this way, the spatial organization of the home was presented as a set of scientific laws through which family relationships could be calculated, and to some degree controlled by the homemaker.

With the introduction of the TV set into the home, the balance of these carefully constructed spatial arrangements was fundamentally disturbed. Women were now required to re-arrange the home in a manner that was conducive to TV watching and the enjoyment of leisure time for her husband and children. For women, traditional gendered divisions of labor within the home continued as before, yet were affected by the new modern experience of watching television. The woman in the home equipped with a television

set was still required to carry out her many domestic duties, but was now also required to become a 'modern' citizen and watch and listen to the TV and its programming at pace with the rest of society.

This dual imposition upon women's time led to many ingenious and ridiculous inventions. Spigel gives an example of the stove equipped for the modern woman, with a miniature TV set built right into the appliance itself. At last the woman could cook and clean, while simultaneously partaking in the public discussions and cultural developments of the 'real world' outside the home. The introduction of the TV set, acted not to liberate women from the time spent in domestic labor, but instead imposed upon women the necessity of incorporating into the spatial arrangement of her home, yet another feature of mass industrial society without upsetting the existent gender spaces and roles within the home itself.

A second example of the very real and physical spatial concerns of women in the home can be illustrated by Ann Oakley's The Sociology of Housework (1985). In this massive undertaking to study women in Britain and their everyday experience in the home, Oakley has documented women's view of the spatial construction and design of the home in their own words. In the following passages women express some of the inherent architectural problems and misconceptions that hinder their enjoyment and equal participation in the home environment:

I hate cooking more than housework. I'm bored with food. I think it's partly because of my kitchen actually - it's down those little stairs, it's with the bathroom and it's away from the living room. It's not the sort of room that anyone wants to come and chat to you in. I couldn't have the baby in there, for example."

Washing is a drag. I've got nowhere to dry it...these heating cabinets don't work...I have to put it in the bathroom. At my mother's I could dry it in the garden.
(Oakley, 1985, 97)

What both the examples given by Spigel and Oakley point to is the actual spatial problems and experiences that women within the privatized sphere of the home have come to interpret as common experiences and reality. Although the study of the division between public and private, home and work, is essential for any discussion of meaning and the home, a study of the actual physical arrangements and construction of a 'woman's place' perhaps also allows the theorist to move beyond a simple critique of material culture and unequal economic practices.

It has been the aim of this discussion of the home and its spatial relations to address the complexity and inter-relational nature of the actions within the home and in society in general. Perhaps most important in any spatial study of the home, is the recognition that distinct spaces within the home act to socialize the family and the woman into a conception of social interaction that influences their economic, public, and personal actions outside the home.

Also crucial to this discussion of the home and its implications for personal and social meaning creation, is the role played by architects and designers in perpetuating and changing women's positioning in the home and society. Future work in home research and meaning, if it is to be critical, must recognize that the 'home' has become more than just a place to sleep or a haven from society. Instead, the modern home is now a place in which people's cultural identities are shared and created, and ultimately taken out of the home and into the public world. The theorist interested in gender

would benefit from the realization that the home and its spatial construction have become more than simply a woman's space: they are the place where gender and notions of domesticity are created, interpreted, and perfected as essential and 'real' components of a woman's personal and social identity

Objects/Decoration:

Many theorists in many fields have commented on the importance of studying the material artefacts with which individuals and families surround themselves, in order to gain insight into the ways in which people express their personalities, pursue their social goals, and symbolize their status in society. This literature has ranged from anthropological studies of goods as aesthetic expressions, to sociological studies such as those of Thorstein Veblen, which discuss the non-utilitarian uses of objects as encouraging individual comparisons and status aspirations. It is the aim of the present section to consider the possibility that the different objects, styles, and decors in the home may serve expressive functions for a woman's personality, as well as symbolizing her social positioning and location.

In their work The Meaning of Things (1981), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton attempt to study both the personal and social processes of meaning creation in relation to cherished household objects. In this study the authors use the term "cultivation" to explain the symbolic meanings that are produced in the interaction between people and their most cherished household objects. For the authors, this process of cultivating social and personal meaning through objects occurs in a context of broader social and cultural meanings that help individuals interpret the object in question. In this way, it is possible to view interaction and meaning creation with household objects themselves as ultimately resulting in a broader

socialization process. In this view of the relation of meaning and household objects, the actual creation of meaning in and around objects, reveals a socializing process on both an individual and a cultural level, each of which is dependent upon and in direct relation with the other.

As a result of this interaction and meaning creation, objects are used in "a culturally appropriate manner as a means by which the individual comes to experience the culture directly - becoming part of the medium of signs that constitute the culture." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 50) For the authors, if socialization is successful, the child in the home environment will grow up and internalize societal expectations, as well as simultaneously create his/her own 'individual' self or identity. George Herbert Mead discusses this socialization process and its implications for meaning in the following quotation, in which he states that inanimate objects can serve as elements of the 'generalized other.'

anything - any object or set of objects, whether animate or inanimate, human or animal, or merely physical - towards which [he] acts, or to which he responds, socially is an element in what for him, is the generalized other; by taking the attitudes of which toward himself he becomes conscious of himself as an object or individual and thus develops a self or personality."
(Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 51)

When the authors explored the reality of the symbolic meanings of the home that different individuals construct, their research demonstrated that different interpretations and uses of the notion of home were apparently based on the sexual differences of the respondents. For the authors, in line with instrumental roles adult males play in society, fathers extensively talked about work that they themselves had put into the home, as a description of what the term 'home' meant. In this sense, the house or home for men

became an embodiment of all the 'psychic' energy that they had invested in it, both directly through labor and indirectly through money and ownership. (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981 122) For the men being studied, the meanings of the home were very closely aligned with the accomplishments of the owner's 'self.'

When women were asked about the meaning of their home, the authors claim that women responded in terms of descriptions of the moods and feelings that their home had for them. The women expressed meaning as pertaining to the emotional harmony in the home (usually based on reference to color use and description.) For these women, the meanings of the home were located in a need for a friendly atmosphere where the children could grow up properly and where people from the outside, would feel comfortable. (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 132) More importantly in this study of the differences in the meaning of the home, was the discovery by the authors that "the women, unlike the men, claimed that through their home they learned about their selves from the feedback the home provided with relations to husbands, children, and the outside view of their home." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981,135)

Also unlike the men, women's concern with the work they had put into the home was often less "structural" in nature. The women appeared more concerned with questions of decoration, affect, and mood, than with material comfort and use. This research illustrates that differences in meanings not only exist amongst individuals, but also that differences in the meanings of the same homes vary radically as a function of the sex of the respondent. In this way, the home as symbolic environment appears as both a physical structure and a normative entity that is created throughout social history, and throughout what Rochberg-Halton et al., terms the 'psychic activity' that

people invest in different areas, different objects, and different activities within the home.

For the authors, these differences in the meanings of a home simply demonstrate the theory that the home can be viewed as a type of craft, cultivated by all its members. In this way, "certain artefacts, rooms and activities are preferentially selected by various family members to embody different patterns of meaning, [therefore] different family members can be seen as inhabiting different symbolic environments even though in the same household." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 138)

The authors do acknowledge the role of culture in these patterns created by the household members in their individual meaning creation. The symbolic environment of the home is based upon patterns of meaning that rely themselves on 'cultural blueprints' or programs. In this way, the home can be viewed as a type of storehouse of signs that "acts to shelter us physically while simultaneously acting as a shelter for those objects and ideas that make life meaningful." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 140)

Although the notion of home as a symbolic arena for the creation of meaning is a useful concept, the authors fall short of using this information in a critical way to address unequal power relations within the home and within a woman's lived experiences. The authors argue that the importance of the home stems from the fact that it provides a space for action and interaction in which one can develop, maintain, and change one's identity. The authors believe that in the privacy of the home, an individual is able to cultivate his/her goals without the fear of "ostracism or ridicule." (Rochberg-Halton et al., 1981, 144) In discussing the home as a symbolic environment, the authors posit that the home is a shelter for those persons and objects that

define the 'self,' and thus the home becomes for most people, an indispensable symbolic environment.

This symbolic environment, however, is by no means equal. Spatial restrictions and cultural constructions keep women from establishing and experiencing each room and activity within the home on an equal basis with men. The amount of time an average woman spends in her home is greater than that of the man, and as a result, can not be overlooked when discussing the creation of a symbolic meaning environment. The authors also fail to acknowledge that a constant concern for a homemaker is that she decorate and 'put on' the correct look for the home. To decorate a home badly, or out of relation with your family and its values, often is a source of ridicule and ostracism for women in the home. Decorating manuals, fashion magazines, and other media messages all advise women to present the most attractive, well arranged home possible. The home itself may be isolated from the public sphere, but it is by no means in private from the public gaze of other women, media standards of aesthetics, and members of women's own families.

A second area of criticism of the work by Rochberg-Halton *et al.*, is the idea that the home as symbolic environment can be removed or separated from the social identity of the woman's 'self.' The meaning a woman gives to her home is inextricably linked to the meaning she gives her 'self' as mother, wife, and homemaker. This self determined within, and by, the symbolic environment of the home is based on larger, often unseen, cultural blueprints. For the authors, these blueprints have changed little over the last 100 years, and still define the woman and her place in the home on the basis of ideal cultural notions of domesticity, stereotypes, and Victorian attitudes towards women and the usefulness of their role in social interactions.

Decoration:

Unfortunately it is not within the scope of this thesis to undertake a detailed examination of the various changes in style and decoration that individual periods have undergone. Although such a detailed study would be of interest, it would not critically address the social act of decoration and meaning construction for women in the home. In her work, Home Psych (1977), Joan Kron attempts to address what she views as an inherent compulsion for women to decorate, whether they are married, single, or even own a home of their own. Although most people believe that they act independently when they select objects, decoration is in fact not a private matter. Decoration, like dressing, is a social act that responds to human needs to communicate social class, sex roles, and values through, and in, built environments.

For Kron, personalizing or decorating is the way in which human beings adapt to their environments, making the environments fit the individual physically, psychologically, and socially to the surrounding cultural world. In this view, decoration serves two important and crucial functions in terms of gender and meaning creation. The first of these functions is using decoration to "regulate the social system of the house." (Kron, 1977, 45) This regulation is undertaken in the plan or architectural construction of the house itself. The second crucial function that decoration serves for Kron, lies in its role as an expression of identity or scheme, "to tell the world and ourselves - who we are." (Kron, 1977, 45) Both the plan and the scheme of a home's decoration its layout and content, work together to reinforce each other, and to create a process of social and individual personalization for the decorators involved.

For Kron, this distinction between the plan and the scheme of home decoration explains to some degree the differences in decoration and its meaning for women and men. These proper notions of what a home's plan and scheme should be, are carried down from one generation of women to another. This transference for Kron is a powerful force which when instigated in relation to media messages and other cultural variables predisposes women to reconstruct over and over, traditional and patriarchal notions of how space in the home should be used and displayed so as to accurately represent the personal character of the woman and her role as decorator, mother, wife, and homemaker.

In this way, the home experience and division of space for women becomes culturally ingrained and "the sexual division of space is one of those cultural definitions enshrined in myth, taught to children, repeated by friends and confirmed by experience." (Bonnie Loyd in Kron, 1977,126) This transference of cultural blueprints is a fundamental cause of the different experiences with, and meanings of, decoration between men and women within the home. Due to years of experience, women often decorate their homes for interaction with other people, "based on preexisting cultural blueprints that closely link a woman's identity with her intimate, interior surroundings." (Kron, 1977, 137)

Despite the many various areas of study that feminist scholars have completed in the realm of housing research and gender, there still remain many more avenues to be explored. Whether one chooses to privilege spatial relations or decorative functions as prime causes and initiators of meaning creation, each is extremely relevant in its own manner. As a symbolic environment, the home is both designed and decorated space, and filled with the potential to communicate social, cultural, and gendered ideas

of personal identity. The home in modern society serves a dual function of constructing in its practice and existence both personal and social meanings, which ultimately act in relation to each other to produce an individual's notion of identity.

It is impossible not to speak with one's home possessions and arrangements. In every home there exists tremendous communicative potential in the spatial design and decoration of the home. Whether this design and decoration exist on the basis of pre-established stereotypes, or newer more equal notions of women's identities, for the inhabitant of the home the objects and the home itself are both changed and affected by their use.

Perhaps for any woman, whether she owns her home, is a mother, wife, or daughter, the key to surviving the arcane system of the 'home' itself is to make the realization that home, spatial arrangements, decoration, and objects within the home all act to communicate social realities and form individual identities. It may be that true enjoyment of a woman's place in the home entails a recognition that identity is closely tied to the objects which she has in her home, the spatial construction of the home, and the years of cultural blueprints she may have so often, and naturally used, to decorate her space. For future environmental studies and studies of the communicative components of meanings and objects, it may be necessary to address both issues of spatial design and home decoration and their objects, in larger social contexts of power relations and gender socialization.

Chapter Four: Imagining the Performance

The preceding chapters have illustrated several key arguments concerning the study of domestic everyday objects, the individual, and social communication. It is my intention in this chapter to illustrate these arguments by (a) describing the framework I have developed in order to study the processual nature of the interaction between people and objects in the domestic environment, and (b) describing and analyzing three 'banal' objects within the terms of this framework. The three objects I have chosen for my analysis are the Chia Pet, kitchen magnets, and items that fall under the broad heading of 'knick-knacks.' In this way, it is my aim to examine whether or not my proposed framework can be useful in further studies concerned with everyday objects, individuals, and meanings.

This chapter, however, is not intended to be an empirical study or thick descriptive account of the actual meanings of the everyday objects I have chosen to examine. This chapter is not meant as an ethnographic study of *real* meanings, but rather, an attempt to develop further the notion that the most useful way to study the everyday object, the individual, and social communication is through a study of the object in interaction with both the personal (private) and social (public) meanings that exist with the consumptive realm.

It is also my aim in this analysis to examine the notion that there is a high degree of ambiguity existent in the meanings which are developed between the individual and the everyday object within the domestic environment. It is my intention to 'draw out' the often unconscious and overlooked process of interaction that occurs on a daily basis between an individual and his/her use and consumption of so-called 'banal' objects. In

this way, it is my aim to locate the individual actor as the focus of attention in the study of the process of interaction between private and public, personal and social meanings, that we develop within our homes and with our banal objects.

Towards A Framework:

The novelty of the framework proposed thus far lies in that it offers an opportunity for studying and recognizing the very important and very relevant issues for communication and meaning in everyday situations and ordinary objects. The model draws upon concepts from SI, ethnomethodology, dramaturgical studies, etc., to formulate a plan for the overlooked and understudied arena of the everyday object within the domestic environment. If successful, this model will demonstrate that the everyday object is most useful and most relevant for issues of social communication when studied within the context of the process of the objects interaction with private and public meanings created by individuals in society.

For reasons of clarity, the following section will briefly describe the model as it can be understood at present:

1. Everyday objects in the home environment have two values. They have use values based primarily on their material structure, function and form. They also, simultaneously, can be recognized as having symbolic value.

2. The symbolic meanings or values of these objects develop within social relations/interaction which takes place between the individual actor and the 'generalized other' encountered in all social situations. This process of interaction between the individual actor and the social 'other' can also be understood as an interaction between the public (social) meanings

and the individuals own personal (private) meanings concerning any event or encounter with an everyday object. This interaction can be understood more accurately as a type of sliding continuum which has the social (public) and the personal (private) meanings at opposite ends. Both private and public meanings are created and sustained on this continuum, often simultaneously. It is often the private meanings on this continuum that are overlooked in studies of meaning and objects and, therefore, this is the point of the continuum in which I am most interested.

3. This continuum of interaction can also be examined as having yet another dimension or split within the private meaning of an everyday object. The private world of meaning can be split once again into categories such as gender.

4. It is within the splits between public and private, and again within the private (gender), that the manufacture of meaning of everyday objects is developed. These splits illustrate that the individual actor him/herself is an entity comprised of a mixture of both public and private social interactions and meanings. It is in these splits between public and private that one needs to examine the process by which individual identity and meaning are developed.

5. In order to study this process of interaction between the private identity of the individual actor and his/her social relations one must use a theory of both the individual and society which understands meaning as occurring as a process of representation, comprehension, and interpretation of the symbols in our communication in both the personal or private and social or public realms.

6. The model offers a way in which to study and examine the most private aspect of this interactive continuum of meaning and social

communication: the everyday domestic environment and its ordinary objects. It is the overlooked, banal objects of our domestic environment that are often below our conscious attention. As such, these objects are symbols with perhaps the most ambiguous, yet routinely experienced, meanings in our daily communication and existence. It is because these objects are so ambiguous that they can be understood as having a strong potential for containing highly subjective and idiosyncratic meanings. Because these ordinary objects can be so unique and ambiguous, they can be seen as close to an individual actors' identity and therefore, process of communication.

Broadening the Banal:

I have chosen three ordinary objects to examine within this proposed framework. These objects were picked for study because they can all be found in the home, are relatively inexpensive, are mass produced, and characterized by ambiguous meanings, divorced from their use and utility. The three objects I have chosen are the Chia Pet, the common fridge magnet, and the various items that can be found on the 'knick-knack shelf.'

All of these objects serve little or no utilitarian purpose in the home environment and, as such, appear to have idiosyncratic and subjective meanings for those who purchase and interact with them on an everyday basis. All three of these objects are easily accessible in the marketplace, small in size, and made of relatively common materials. As such, these objects are most likely found in a great number of homes. Homes may contain more than one of any given item, and may replace these items on a fairly routine basis.

Most likely these objects could be found in the private or 'backstage' areas of the home. These objects also do not appear on the surface to be targeted towards a particular age or group. Because of this, it could be argued that these objects represent a broad spectrum of society, instead of a pre-determined market segment or buying group.

Despite these generalities concerning the public meaning of these objects, the actual or real meanings must also be inferred without adequate empirical data and analysis of individual owners and consumers. However, what follows is an attempt to understand each of these objects in relation to the framework of interaction I have offered, rather than a quest to find real meanings in real lived situations. The analysis is an attempt to 'imagine the performance' in both the private and public realm that individuals 'give' when they interact and communicate with these banal objects.

Chia: Pet or Plant?

The Chia Pet is a small, clay figurine shaped in a variety of animal forms which, when taken care of properly, can produce a green coat of alfalfa sprouts on its back. The Chia pet is relatively inexpensive (approx. \$16.99) and comes with its own instructions and supply of seeds. In order for the pet to produce foliage it needs approximately the same care as a common house plant. However, the figurine can also be a simple clay animal that does not grow sprouts. The name 'Chia' is not defined for the consumer, but the object is advertised as a "Handmade Decorative Planter" and suggests that perhaps this object originated in Mexico or other Spanish speaking cultures, as a hand crafted figurine.

The Chia pet has had several lives in the mass market arena. It appears to have been originally introduced in the early 1980s on television

advertisements and special direct-order offers. Much like the mass marketing of K-Tel merchandise and Ginsu knives, the Chia Pet was offered only through special 'TV offers' and 'not sold in stores.' In recent years, the Chia pet has experienced a new and broader advertising and marketing campaign. Now this plant/pet is available in select stores and in many different figurine styles.

Like Sea Monkeys and other mass marketing phenomena, the Chia pet is a living entity that individuals can watch grow day by day. The Chia Pet is mass-produced, inexpensive, disposable, and aimed at a wide market of consumers. The pet can be fun for all ages and is simple enough to be used and loved by children without parental supervision. Because of its wider market appeal the Chia pet can be many things to many people. The Chia pet might be a toy to children, a plant to adults, and a charming figurine to older people. Although the producers of this object suggest ways in which the pet can be used as a living organism, they encourage the consumer to use the pet for whatever enjoyment they may have in mind.

When one purchases the pet a host of material comes with the figurine. The Chia Pet package contains one pet, one package of seeds, and a lengthy guide to the eight other Chia figurines available on the market. On the packaging of the pet itself, is the assurance that the Chia is 'Easy To Do ..Fun to Grow!' Inside the package an order form is included for speedy delivery of the other pets and the consumer is urged to "Complete Your Collection" and to "Collect the entire Chia family!" An idea of what these objects mean to the producers is given in the constant reminder on the packaging that there are other figurines available to 'collect' and that the pet is "fun, educational and perfect for gift giving or decorating any room in your home."

It is important to note at this time that the very existence of the Chia Pet itself is due in part to prior decisions and experiences its producers have considered. For the producers of the pet, Chia is a way in which consumers can 'watch' their purchase grow, while simultaneously watching a clay figurine of a bull or rabbit, or kitten, etc., grow sprouts which look like wool/fur on its back. Chia is very much marketed as a novelty item that would add fun to any home and perform the function of growing alfalfa sprouts at the same time. The relatively inexpensive cost of the pet appears to encourage consumers to buy more than one or replace their pets when growth has ceased.

It would appear producers of the Chia pet, like producers of Sea Monkeys and K-Tel gadgets, wish the consumer to partake in the enjoyment, accessibility, and constant supply of mass-produced goods modern industrial society can offer. It is my argument that it is in discussing the location of the Chia Pet within the context of mass-produced goods and consumer culture, that one can begin to examine the two values that this object possesses in our culture. Firstly, the Chia pet does have a use value, that of a small site for the growth of alfalfa sprouts. More importantly, however, the Chia pet appears to have very public and symbolic meanings as a representative of the wonder, innovation, and availability of mass-produced and disposable consumer goods our culture has access to everyday. The symbolic meaning of the Chia pet in our consumer culture may be that it represents our consumer culture to ourselves, our society, and to all others who come in contact with it. The Chia pet may have symbolic meaning in terms of its existence as a symbol of the availability any individual in our culture has to such inexpensive, yet wondrous, objects. The pet might also be said to symbolize the idea that our domestic environment is the appropriate place in

which to bring such objects, experience them, and welcome other objects of its kind.

Following the second step in my proposed framework in which to study an object, it is now relevant to consider the place of the Chia pet on the sliding continuum of private and public meaning that exists in the everyday world of the domestic environment. The public meanings that surround the Chia pet may well be meanings that are based upon an understanding and acceptance of the consumer culture in which we live. These public meanings of the Chia pet as a mass produced, disposable, and quirky object may indeed be shared by all individuals who come in contact with it.

However, the Chia pet can also be argued to carry and convey more personal or private meanings. Not everyone in our society owns a Chia pet; many people may not even be aware of what it is. Even more people may be shocked or repulsed or dubious about the value of bringing such an object into his/her domestic environment. If we assume that for one reason or another, an individual does bring the pet into his/her home, what meaning does it have for that person? Does everyone who has a Chia pet believe and subscribe to the public meaning that is developed by the producers of the object? If one has a Chia pet at home, does it also mean that one will also have various K-Tel items and other mass-produced objects of little use and high symbolic value?

The attempt to answer these questions accurately must be undertaken within the context of analyzing the process by which personal or private meanings are developed in interaction with the public meanings that have already been addressed. It is in this interaction or mixture of private and public, personal and social, that the theorist can begin to understand the role

of the individual actor in his/her encounters with such objects in everyday domestic environments.

In order to adequately study this personal realm of meaning and communication, my framework also proposes to examine how gender is involved in the process of creating meaning with everyday objects. One may argue that males and females will have different experiences and meanings for the Chia pet when they interact with the object in the home. The small size of the pet and its need for sunlight, watering, etc., may require that the pet be placed on the kitchen windowsill or in a safe place where it will not be knocked over. The fact that the pet is also a living, growing plant may also have some impact on where it is placed in the home. A Chia pet located on the mantle in the living room might appear to be out of place or an inappropriate place to be growing alfalfa sprouts.

Wherever the Chia pet comes to be placed will have a significant impact on its personal meaning for both males and females. A Chia pet that is in the kitchen might be understood by a woman as another part of her responsibilities. Like household plants, the Chia pet may be understood by both women and men as another item which must be watered, displayed, taken care of, etc. A member of the household who does not participate in chores or the maintenance of the home may not even know of the pet's existence. On the other hand, a member of the household who interacts regularly with the upkeep of the objects of the home may have much more of a relationship with the pet. This member of the household may resent the constant care they must give the object. On the other hand an individual might grow attached to the pet and look forward to its next spurt of growth.

If one understands women as the primary decorators, arrangers, managers, etc., of the home environment, the Chia pet could be examined as

having very different personal meanings for the males and females of the household. A woman may view the Chia pet as a part of her decorating scheme, or as one of the objects that displays her green thumb. Men or any other members of the household not involved with the purchase and arrangement of objects within the home, may view the Chia pet with a very different set of personal meanings. For men, the Chia pet may be understood and have meaning as a 'comical' mix between a plant and figurine that defies explanation. On the other hand, members of the household may understand the meaning of the pet as a symbol of the household's love of innovation or ability to 'keep up with' the plethora of mass produced objects.

It is this stage of the model (the analysis of gender) that is the most important for an understanding of meaning and its production in interaction between the private (personal) world and the public (social) arena. It is in the sub-division of the private into categories of gender and their impact on meaning and objects that the manufacture of meaning can be understood. The idea that the private realm of meanings can be further divided along lines of gender demonstrates that the creation of meaning in relation to everyday objects is in no way simply relegated to individual and completely subjective personal meaning formations.

The individual can more accurately be studied as a mixture of both public and private meanings, a mixture which becomes obvious in interaction with everyday objects in the home. It is in this mixture of the private and the public that an individual's identity is negotiated, formed, and conveyed to the 'generalized other.' This view of meaning as a mixture of the personal and the social suggests that the individual and individual meanings are formed and changed in the context of interactions with social and public meanings,

as well as in interactions with objects the individual experiences on a highly personal and subjective basis.

The recognition of this 'mixture' between public and private, in the meaning creation process, provides a useful way to study the individual actor in his/her interactions with actual objects. The model provides for a study of the most private and subjective of meanings because it attempts to study those objects with the highest degree of ambiguity in our environment. In studying the everyday objects of the home that appear to have highly ambiguous and subjective meanings (such as the Chia pet) I have endeavored to address the broader question of individual identity and its connection to social communication in our consumer culture.

Returning to the Chia pet, it seems reasonable that the reasons for the placement of the pet in an individual's home environment stem from the mixture of messages delivered both by the social realm of meanings (such as those found in the advertising for the pet), and by the individuals own ideas and understanding of the meanings possessed by such an object.

Although one could assume that at the time of purchase the pet was introduced into the home with a fair amount of attention and purpose, in time, the object may become 'ordinary' or fall below the level of conscious attention of the members of the household. If pressed to describe and account for the meaning of the pet, individuals within the home may be influenced by public meanings which communicate the potentially disposable and temporary nature of the pet. With these public meanings in mind, individuals in the home may respond that the pet has long since been devoid of any special meaning and has become one more piece in the ensemble of objects that occupy the domestic space.

On the other hand, one could also imagine individuals responding to the question of meaning and the pet with more personal or private meanings. For some, the Chia pet may have ordinary or assumed meaning as an object that has become part of the ensemble of objects in the home, but in doing so has not lost its potential for meaning. An individual could understand the meaning and existence of the pet as an expression of his/her desire to have 'greenery' or a 'neat gadget' in the domestic space. Individuals might understand the meaning of the pet in more sentimental terms and understand the pet as a gift giving exchange, or as a reminder of a pleasant shopping experience.

However, the meaning of the Chia pet could also be a mixture of these two realms of meaning. Individuals might explain that although the Chia pet was not displayed prominently in the home's space (for example, on the living room mantle), it still had a role in the home environment. Perhaps in this context, the Chia pet could be understood as simply another 'piece' of the ensemble of objects that together, hold highly subjective meanings for the individual who arranges and interacts with these objects on an daily basis. Perhaps an individual's understanding of the meanings of the pet is exactly that it has an ambiguous set of meanings, dependent upon who is viewing the object, at which time, and in what context.

Unconsciously, the individual who owns a Chia pet and places it in his/her home is perhaps communicating to all who view the pet, that his/her possessions are open to interpretation and demonstrate that the owner of the pet is simply interested in owning the pet for the sake of owning the pet. Perhaps the meaning of such an ordinary, disposable object is intelligible only to individuals who occupy that particular home. It may be that the owner

of the Chia pet understands its meaning only in terms of the private meaning that it has for the owner.

A final interpretation of the pet may well be that its meaning for the individuals of the household only becomes apparent when they engage in interaction with themselves or with 'others' visiting the home. The Chia pet, like dozens of other everyday objects, may simply exist without a significant meaning until an individual or group begins to discuss, examine, touch, see, etc., the object in question. In this view, the Chia pet is made meaningful in the interaction that occurs between individuals and the generalized others as well as the interaction that occurs on a daily basis between the individual his/herself and the pet. This interactive view of the meaning creation process and the Chia pet allows one to view meaning as processual, dynamic, and not simply determined by either purely social or purely personal experiences and communication.

However elusive, the 'real' meaning of this clay figurine is not the focus of the discussion at hand. What is relevant in examining the Chia pet is that it demonstrates the complex interaction that takes place between the personal and the social when meaning creation is involved. The examination of the ambiguous nature of the pet may be the best evidence that individual identity cannot be adequately understood as simply a result of pre-determined categories of social and psychological factors applied to the individual actor as an explanation for behavior and communication.

Instead, this ambiguity points to the interactive nature of our meaning creation and its existence in the often-overlooked realm of the everyday, home environment. This ambiguity demonstrates the existence of highly subjective and personal meanings that can be found in our daily lives, tempered by the knowledge that these meanings make little sense to other

members of society without a shared set of public or social meanings around the symbolic meanings of the everyday objects.

I have attempted in this section to 'imagine' the performances that individuals could construct and communicate in their interactions with a banal object such as the Chia pet. In this way, it is the aim of my model to attempt to understand how it is these ordinary objects allow us to construct an account or explanation to better understand the processes of interaction that occur to produce social communication in our culture.

Fridge Magnets: Friend or Foe?

The kitchen is perhaps one of the most fascinating entities of the modern home. In general, kitchens, no matter how small, always seem to be the place in which all good parties end up and space is at a premium. The kitchen also appears to be one of the select areas of the home where the most consumer objects can be found. There never seems to be enough cupboard space to hold the variety of utensils, dinnerware, and cooking instruments necessary for the preparation of food. The kitchen is also a space that has evolved over the last 50 years as a fairly social and public arena of the home. Modern homeowners often desire houses with plans for an 'open kitchen' that can also accommodate a space in which the members of the household can gather for informal meals.

Generally speaking, the kitchen is often the place in which children's artwork, knick-knacks, and other 'useless' objects are placed. I have personally visited many homes in which the kitchen window sill was jammed with plants, keys, odd nails, cards, figurines, etc., all of which seemed to have no real order or arrangement. What better place to study banality than in the room of the house that often encompasses such a broad array of objects.

Before proceeding with an examination of the fridge magnet, it is useful to once again briefly summarize the four most important steps in the model. The model can be understood as having four steps each of which follows from the one before, and leads to the one that follows. The steps of the model are as follows:

Step One: An identification of the object as having both utilitarian and symbolic values.

Step Two: The identification and examination of an object's symbolic value(s). This step is initiated by attempting to locate the interaction between the private (personal) and public (social) meanings of an object on a sliding continuum of meaning-creation in the interaction between individual and object, and individual and the 'other.'

Step Three: Analyzing the personal or private potential meanings of an object in an examination of one aspect of private meaning-creation: gender. This step also requires an analysis of gender as a publicly constructed notion of norms, behaviors, attitudes, etc., perpetuated by both men and women in our culture.

Step Four: Following from an analysis of gender and the object in question, analyzing the potential meanings of an object as occurring in an interaction between the public and private. It is at this stage of the model that the manufacture of meaning may be best understood as a mixture of both personal and social attitudes, influences, tastes, beliefs, etc.

The fridge magnet is one such object that vies for a space in the kitchen environment. By fridge magnet, I refer to any magnet that has some sort of decoration or crafted design attached to it. In this way, I am predominantly concerned with magnets that are not simply magnetic strips, but rather, are also minimally crafted and possibly mass-produced objects small enough to occupy the front of the refrigerator door.

It would appear that the magnet that is sold and designed specifically for the 'fridge' is a fairly recent development in consumer culture. Within the last 20-30 years magnets have increasingly become decorated, ranging in styles from magnets shaped like letters of the alphabet to magnets attached

to ceramic representations of dogs and the heads of common farm animals. Magnets for the kitchen and specifically the refrigerator, are relatively inexpensive. However, speciality kitchen and house stores often offer an array of magnets which have a higher price and a more complex degree of artistry in the design of the object itself.

The styles and designs of the fridge magnet appear to be as diverse as the individuals who purchase them. There are magnets that have uplifting or spiritual thoughts printed on small plaques attached to a magnetic strip. There are also magnets which represent every possible breed of dog and/or cat that an individual may wish to display. Magnets with humorous messages are also available. The list of magnets available appears to be endless. Although the style of fridge magnets varies, they all possess a common meaning: that the magnet's appropriate place is on the door of the refrigerator.

Unlike the Chia pet, the fridge magnet does have a blatant utilitarian function. No doubt producers of magnets simultaneously market the magnet's ability to hold items to the fridge with its ability to convey artistic, individual, etc., meanings to all who encounter it. The fridge magnet may be used regularly by members of the household to post notices, display artwork, and transform the refrigerator door into a type of bulletin board for the household's communications.

However, more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the fridge magnet can also be argued to have symbolic meaning. One such symbolic meaning may be that the magnet is to be used as part of a complex system of communication that takes place between the members of a given household. Homes with children often use alphabetic magnets to help children learn their letters while also providing a colorful way in which to use the fridge door

the fridge door as a space on which to display artwork, memos, notes, messages, etc. Producers of the alphabetic magnet no doubt have created their product as an educational but fun set of objects that can be inexpensively and easily incorporated into the child's environment. However, as the children learn the alphabet these magnets may remain on the refrigerator door for years to come and develop a whole new set of meanings for all those who come into contact with the colorful magnets. It is not rare to see these alphabetic magnets in the homes of adults, who have long since learned their alphabet, and are using them for non-educational, perhaps sentimental reasons.

Another set of symbolic meanings surrounding the fridge magnet is its role as part and parcel of the decorative pattern and design of the kitchen environment. Certainly the producers of the cow-shaped magnet created with 'folk art' materials must realize that these magnets are a simple and fairly inexpensive way for the kitchen and the fridge to be 'decorated' in a predetermined country style. 'Designed' magnets are often tiny replicas of particular styles and aesthetics in the art and design of the time. Producers of these 'designed' magnets appear to have found an ingenious way for the kitchen decorator to 'cover up' or 'add to' an industrial and potentially unattractive appliance such as the refrigerator.

A third set of potential symbolic meanings is the magnet's role as representative of the individual identities and tastes of the occupants of the home. Magnets which represent various breeds of dog are one such example. A magnet of a German shepherd appears to have no real relation to common aesthetics of modern interior decoration. However, the individual who purchases and maintains a German Shepherd magnet may symbolize to him/herself and to others who come in contact with it, that s/he owns, likes,

breeds, admires the qualities of German Shepherds, etc. Similarly, magnets that display humorous sayings or anecdotes may be a way in which the individual is able to convey his/her particular sense of humor or view of life.

A fourth and final set of potential symbolic meanings for these magnets may be in their use as symbols of memories or sentiments of the individual household members. A fridge magnet that was given as a gift, or carried down from a previous generation, may carry important symbolic meanings for the household members. In this view, the magnet may represent, in symbolic form, a pleasant experience or sentimental feeling towards another individual or time for an individual in the home. These magnets may have no other meaning than as symbolic representation of a better time, a relative's passing, or a gift giving exchange.

Perhaps the proliferation of differing magnet designs and styles may allude to the fact that the use and meaning of fridge magnets as individual symbols of identity, may be becoming more common. In this role, the fridge magnet symbolizes not only the actual choice of magnet the individual has purchased but also the ability and desire of an individual or individuals to express identity and taste symbolically through this very common and mass-produced object. Perhaps in producing 'designed' or artistic magnets, producers are simply looking for another way in which to make an object that will appeal to a broad market and reap a healthy profit.

The proliferation and existence of 'designed' and 'highly creative and unique magnets may also be a way in which producers are aiming to have the magnet 'symbolize' to the consumer the legitimacy of purchasing and using such an object in the decoration of an attractive kitchen environment. Perhaps another potential public symbolic meaning offered by the producers of these objects is an understanding of the 'designed' magnet as a symbolic

reminder of the never-ending process of consuming and displaying of objects that make the house a home and the kitchen a well-organized and beautifully decorated space.

It is at the step where one examines the further differentiation of private (personal) meaning and such banal objects as the fridge magnet that the process of interaction and communication between the public and private, social and personal meanings of an object is most apparent. When one examines the private meanings that may be created and sustained by constructions of gender, the fridge magnet offers an interesting paradox that women must negotiate in relationships with this object and the environment of the kitchen itself.

This paradox can be understood as the interaction which women in particular sustain with the kitchen environment. Despite the growing number of women who are leaving the home to join the workforce, the kitchen is still a place in which a woman may spend a considerable amount of time and effort. Working mothers and wives still continue to prepare the majority of a household's meals and still assume most of the cleaning responsibilities required in the kitchen. The amount of time and effort spent in the kitchen does not, however, segregate the kitchen environment into a completely private space for the woman. In modern homes the kitchen is often used for much more than simple meal preparation.

As a very 'public' space for the household members, the kitchen is often the space in which meals are shared and eaten, snacks are found, and in which the refrigerator is regularly raided to see if there is 'anything to eat.' As the primary container of food items, refrigerators are very prominent in the kitchen environment. Often refrigerators can be found at the center of a kitchen or located in a way to guarantee easy access by all. The constant

use of the fridge by the members of the household has often led to the development of the fridge as the primary message center of the home, a place where all members will at one time be present during the course of their day.

This very public role of both the refrigerator and the kitchen environment has special significance when discussing the fridge magnet. Any object placed on such a public space as the refrigerator will no doubt be recognized and given attention by all members of the household. But because the fridge is also in the space of the home in which one could argue that women spend a fair deal of time and energy, any item placed on such a public item as the refrigerator will no doubt, at one time, have been brought to a woman's attention.

One could argue that the majority of fridge magnets brought into the home may have been purchased by the women in the household. As has been discussed in Chapter Three, women are under a great deal of pressure from society and themselves to be the primary decorators of the home. Special attention and skill are often expected of the woman when she organizes and decorates the kitchen. Qualities of cleanliness, organization, and 'coziness' are often demanded of the ideal kitchen.

On the other hand, it may also be the responsibility of the woman to determine and purchase the appropriate magnet(s) to convey these qualities within the decoration scheme and layout of the kitchen. It would appear that an ordinary object such as a magnet might be indicative of a larger mixture of public and personal meanings that must be interpreted and 'sorted out' by the woman. In this view, the magnet does not simply have meaning as a symbol of social values and expectations, or simply as an object whose meanings can only be understood in the purely private and idiosyncratic

realm of the woman's personal set of meanings. Instead, the magnet represents the attempt by a woman to negotiate between her expected role and her individual identity and set of personal meanings.

If one studied in detail the particular meanings of fridge magnets for various women, perhaps the common magnet might be an exemplary site in which the interaction between private and public meanings is constructed and used in a process of interaction to make sense of an individual's home environment and personal relationship to that home environment. Because of the very public nature of the space of the fridge in the home, the magnet might represent an overlooked item that in actuality 'speaks volumes' about how individuals choose and understand the objects in their homes. The choice of a highly unique magnet or a magnet that illustrates a particular dimension of a woman's identity, has a complicated and interactive relationship with the very public place on which it is displayed in the home.

The fridge magnet permits interaction on a number of levels between the individual members of the household, and between the household and the larger public or social realm. The very public space which the magnet occupies could be argued to interact simultaneously with the individuals in the home who encounter the fridge, as well as with the consumer and primary decorator of the kitchen environment. Perhaps a study of the mixture of meaning surrounding the magnet will give researchers some clues into how women, in particular, use and understand private meanings of common objects while simultaneously using these same objects to express and meet public expectations for the appropriate meanings, style, design, etc, of the common kitchen environment.

Following the fourth step in my proposed framework, one may now be able to better project the potential link that could occur between this mixture

of public and private meanings, and the creation of an individual's identity in relation to everyday objects such as the fridge magnet. It may be possible to hypothesize that for a woman who takes on the primary responsibility for decorating the home and specifically the kitchen, the meaning of the fridge magnet may be that it is an everyday object that can be brought into the kitchen environment to meet and express public symbolic meanings.

More importantly, however, the meaning of the fridge magnet may also be that for the woman in the home, it is a way both to satisfy the demands of public meanings based upon ideals of decoration, as well as a way in which to express individual choice, meaning, etc., in one of the most public spaces within the home. It may be possible that women who understand themselves as the primary caretakers and decorators of the kitchen environment, use and understand the meanings of these magnets as a way in which a simple, and relatively inexpensive common object can be used to symbolize a woman's own understanding of her identity within her own mind, and within the minds of the other members of the household and the 'generalized others' of the social world.

However, it would be a gross over simplification to attempt to find meanings of the fridge magnet only in a discussion of the female household member. For the men and boys in the household, the fridge magnet that displays stereotypical female aesthetics (such as a magnet shaped as a bouquet of flowers, or a magnet made of lace and quilted material) may have meaning in that it does not accurately represent any aspect of the men's individual identities. Magnets that were not purchased, chosen, etc. by the males in the home may also have far too idiosyncratic or ambiguous meanings to possess any real relation to the constructions and comprehension of the identities of the male members of the household.

It is not outside the realm of reality that men also purchase and display magnets on the fridge. Like women, men may also use the very public space of the fridge to express their individual identity. However, one could argue that men who are not the primary decorators and occupants of the kitchen, may not use or understand the fridge magnet in the same manner as women.

In this view, men may only use and understand the meaning of the magnet as an expression of their individual likes/dislikes, hobbies, aesthetic preferences, etc. Unlike women, men may not understand the meaning of the magnet as a mixture of public and private meanings. For men, the meaning of the magnet may only be in purely instrumental terms, in terms of how the magnet can be used and how it can express individual identity. One may argue that men, unlike women, *do not face* the same expectations and set of pre-established public meanings that women do in regards to such a common object as the magnet. A male's choice of fridge magnet may not be understood by the man and/or other members of the household as a display of his competence for understanding and sharing public meanings of appropriate aesthetic design and/or decoration in the kitchen environment.

The very interconnected and historical relationship of women to the kitchen plays a very important part in the process by which women understand and attempt to display just the right 'mix' of public meanings surrounding the magnet as decoration, and private meanings of the magnet as an object which has the potential to express a woman's individual identity or place of her own in the very public space of the kitchen.

Knick-Knacks and Knowable Meanings:

There are mysteries in our world that modern science may never answer. The Bermuda Triangle, the existence of the Loch Ness monster, the common cold, and knick-knacks. The Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary (1991) defines the knick-knack as "a useless and usually worthless ornament; a trinket." For the purposes of this thesis I will use the term to refer to a variety of objects which can be found in the home, located primarily in the living room, and often designated to a specific shelf or surface.

Knick-Knacks are objects which appear to serve no utilitarian purpose, are highly ornamental and decorative in nature, mass-produced, and readily available in the consumer marketplace. This term does not refer to hand-crafted objects created either by members of the household or by skilled craftspeople. By knick-knacks I am referring to objects such as ceramic figurines of dogs, cats, ceramic representations of 18th century costumed women dancing, ashtrays from Hawaii made from shells, etc.

Producers of these objects appear to vary in motivation and production to the same extent as the objects they create. The utility of these objects appears to be almost completely absent in such items as the ceramic figurine of a Schnauzer or beer stein in the shape of a sailor's head. Perhaps for the producers of such objects their utilitarian function lies in their ability to be used by consumers for decoration of home spaces. These objects are often inexpensive models of priceless artwork (such as the Venus de Milo) and act as miniature examples of established aesthetic traditions. The sheer number and varied styles of these objects must be assumed to be a way in which producers are aiming to capture the broadest decorating tastes and ideals of modern consumers. These objects may be produced with the mass market in mind, and may be created simply to capitalize on a recent trend in aesthetic

(Art Nouveau or Santa Fe) or a social/political event (such as the marriage of Charles and Diana pictured on commemorative plates.)

If we apply the first step of the framework to various knick-knacks, as mentioned above, their utilitarian value may be in their role as ornamental pieces that are a relatively inexpensive way for people to decorate their home environment. The symbolic value of these objects, however, is much more complex and multi-dimensional. For those who purchase, display, or use these objects, the symbolic meaning of the knick-knack may be that it represents the owner's ability to demonstrate a particular decorative style or use an object in conjunction with the other everyday objects of the home.

Due to the almost total uselessness of knick-knacks, they could be argued to have meaning only as a symbol for something else. These knick-knacks may symbolize to all who come in contact with them (whether they are members of the household or not) the socioeconomic status of the home's members. Knick-knacks such as a bone china figurine of a ballet dancer may symbolize the ability of the home's occupants to purchase expensive and 'crafted' items in the decoration of the home. A ceramic copy of this same figurine may symbolize a household's attempt to capture the aesthetic value of the figurine while sacrificing fewer economic resources to bring the object into the home.

The placement of the knick-knack is also important. A knick-knack that is found at the center of the living room may symbolize to all those who view it, the importance that the household places upon it. Similarly, a knick-knack tucked away in the corner of a living room or other part of the home may lose some of its symbolic potency as an important part of the ensemble of objects found throughout the home. However, knick-knacks that are found in less public spaces of the home may also represent the zeal of the decorator to

'decorate' each inch of the home and attempt to add ornamentation to all spaces one may encounter.

If we further divide the symbolic meanings of these objects into public and private meanings, we see once again the process individuals must undertake to 'mix' the personal and the social, the private and the public, in the interaction between themselves and their everyday objects. One might assume that the public meaning of knick-knacks lies in their use as decoration in the larger scheme of the home environment. The display and existence of knick-knacks is often encouraged by interior decoration magazines and interior decorators themselves. Often, the existence and meaning of knick-knacks is publicly understood as a way in which those who decorate the home can use seemingly banal objects to add a unique touch or novelty to a home's overall decoration scheme.

The display of knick-knacks may be promoted as a way in which a household can display to itself and others the ability to use the appropriate aesthetic judgement to display the household's individuality or taste preferences. The public meanings of these objects might hinge upon the notion that knick-knacks, if displayed and arranged correctly, can be used by the home's occupants to decorate the home properly while simultaneously choosing just the 'right' objects to convey the household's values, socioeconomic status, hobbies, achievements, travels, aesthetics, etc.

I speak from experience when I state that it is the personal meanings of these objects that are perhaps the most ambiguous of all objects in the home environment. In the course of writing this thesis, I have asked myself many times why I have the useless, decorative knick-knacks that I do and what these objects mean to me. For a complete understanding of the personal meanings of these objects one would have to conduct a lengthy

and large study of actual individuals and their actual knick-knacks. Such a study, however, is not within the scope of this thesis. What is in the scope of this thesis is to outline a framework for an analysis of these personal/private meanings and the reason for their ambiguity.

One potential cause of the ambiguous private meanings these objects have for individuals may be that knick-knacks are highly subjective symbols of an individual's notion of his/her own identity. We can use the ceramic figurine of a Siamese cat to illustrate this idea. The private meanings of the individual household members may be influenced depending upon which member purchased the object, which member made the decision to display the object, etc. For the individual who purchased the ceramic Siamese cat, it may symbolize an aesthetic ideal or fit into a larger decoration scheme already established for the home. The individual who purchased the figurine may also be demonstrating his/her ideals concerning appropriate aesthetic styles and materials for the decoration of the home environment. For this individual, the color, shape, texture, etc, of the figurine might carry larger private meanings concerning taste or style. This individual might also understand the meaning of the figurine as a representation of his/her knowledge of artwork, taste in animals, or available economic resources.

An individual who has had no choice in either the purchase or display of this figurine might have differing private meanings for the object. A member of the household who was not involved in the purchase of the cat figurine may only have meaning for the knick-knack as part of another household member's decoration scheme or aesthetic choice. This individual, although not responsible for bringing the cat into the home, may give meaning to the figurine as simply part of the decorating scheme of the room. The meaning of the figurine for this individual may also be that it displays to

the household and others who visit the home, that cats are welcomed or enjoyed by the household and that the Siamese breed is especially appreciated and welcomed.

It is important to note at this point that whether or not an individual purchases or makes the decision to display the knick-knack, there can be a variety of differing private meanings of the cat figurine for that individual. The individual who purchased the figurine may have bought the figure because it appealed to him/her on an aesthetic level; as well, it may have symbolized a particular memory or experience with a Siamese cat in the past. Whatever the relationship of the individual to the object, highly subjective and ambiguous meanings appear to exist. A Siamese figurine may have meaning for an individual as a representation of 'good taste,' while a figurine of a Persian cat may be considered to have no meaning at all, or have meaning as a symbol of 'bad taste' and tacky aesthetics.

A third set of personal symbolic meanings these knick-knacks may have for an individual may be based more on public expectations and reaction than upon an individual's own expression of taste, style, aesthetics, etc. An individual who places various knick-knacks in a prominent place in the living room or on a separate 'shelf' or table may understand them as objects that will provoke interest and conversation from individuals visiting the home who are not members of the household. Hence, these objects could act as an invitation to social interaction between the individual and the generalized other.

An individual might understand the meaning of his/her various knick-knacks as objects that are quirky, unique, and perhaps not even aesthetically pleasing. However, it is possible that an individual will place such objects in the home to display his/her desire to provoke a reaction from all those who

view the object. The individual who owns or arranges the knick-knacks might understand the meaning of his/her objects as an easy way to display his/her idiosyncratic identity or desire to provoke a reaction from those both in and outside of the home who view the object.

The existence and display of this individual's knick-knacks might also have meaning as a way to reject the idea that even these objects can 'fit in' thereby highlighting a larger decorating plan for the rest of the home. The meaning of these useless knick-knacks might be that they do not reflect any easily identifiable public meanings, and, as such, remain highly idiosyncratic and open to interpretation. It may be that an individual has no pre-established set of meanings for a knick-knack and that these objects only have meaning for the individual when they are discussed, observed, etc., with other members of the household and individuals from outside of the home.

A final set of symbolic meanings for these knick-knacks might be that these objects, like magnets, are symbols of sentimental value or experience. Unlike magnets however, we may be able to assume that the sentimental value of knick-knacks may have stronger symbolic meanings for the individuals in the household. Knick-knacks are often handed down through families and generations and, in time, may have symbolic meaning as a cherished object of the family history, or a useless ornamental piece that has now become a treasured antique. Knick-knacks could also have symbolic meanings as representations of a gift giving experience. This set of symbolic meanings can be seen with people's interactions with wedding gifts. Often, knick-knacks that are given as gifts at important occasions in a household's history will be displayed in a public space of the home and have meaning as representations of celebrations, reunions, etc.

If one examines the private meanings of knick-knacks from the point of view of gender the mixture of private and public meanings becomes even more apparent. If we begin by examining the potential meanings these objects could have for the women of the household one must keep in mind the prior analysis of fridge magnets in which a very public space of the home could be used for the display and construction of very personal meanings. As discussed in Chapter Three, women remain responsible for the majority of housekeeping and decoration of the home environment.

Spaces in the home such as the living room have historically been the most important room in the home in which the woman is expected to display her good taste, skill at decorating, artistic flair, etc. Because the living room is often the first room a guest of the home will enter, it is often considered to be of the most importance in terms of its correct decoration, furniture, etc. Within the last 40 years much of the formality of the living room has faded and now this room is often a combination of a place in which to welcome visitors and a place in which the household members can relax and go about their daily activities. Despite this change, it is the living room where one can often find the most 'decoration' and it is the place where most of the home's knick-knacks are displayed.

If one assumes that the women of the household are the individuals with the most responsibility for the decoration and maintenance of the home, then it would seem to follow that the objects placed in the living room were primarily chosen by these same women. As a result, these knick-knacks may have meaning for both the women and the men in the home as displaying the woman's taste, decorating skill, and choice in a decorating approach. Arguably, many of these knick-knacks may also represent stereotypical notions of femininity to the household such as the use of pastel shades or soft

edges in the very design and construction of the object itself. These feminine qualities may have meaning for other members of the household precisely as representations of 'feminine' qualities.

To illustrate this differing meaning for the women and men of the household, it is useful to discuss briefly the potential meanings of two specific knick-knacks with overtly stereotypical qualities and design: a ceramic figurine of a ballet dancer and a brass miniature replica of a ship's anchor. If we assume that these two objects do represent two sets of stereotypical meanings and forms for men and women, then we can examine what the meaning of these objects might be in a home's living room. The figurine of the dancer will be discussed as representing stereotypical 'feminine' characteristics, and as such, representing a type of object that a woman might choose and display on the 'knick-knack' shelf or space in the living room. The miniature of the ship's anchor will be discussed as reflecting stereotypical male attributes of strength, knowledge, and mastery of the environment, etc.

Let us begin with the ballet figurine. For the women of the household, this object may have meaning as an elegant representation of the qualities of grace and beauty commonly associated with the ballet. The colors, form, etc., of this object may be instrumental in representing a 'fit' with the rest of the objects and decoration of the living room. For the women of the household, this object may be an appropriate object to display in the living room which demonstrates to other members of the household and outside visitors, that the living room is well-decorated and that the members of this household appreciate and understands the symbols of grace, beauty, etc., that are represented by this figurine.

For the men of the household, this figurine may possibly have two or more private/personal meanings. Firstly, the meaning of the figurine may be that it is only one part of the ensemble of decorative items in the living room that was primarily chosen and created by the woman of the household. Secondly, the figurine's stereotypical feminine qualities might have meaning for the males of the household as a representation of the 'feminization' of the space of a home's living room. Finally, it might just be a reminder of a wife/mother/woman and have sentimental value for that reason alone.

A living room filled with such knick-knacks may represent to household members that this room is primarily the concern and responsibility of the women of the household. A knick-knack such as the figurine may have no meaning for other members of the household if it is in any other space than the living room, or as part of a decorating plan. Members of the household who do not understand or like the decorative scheme of the living room, may even dislike the figurine and understand it only as something else that collects dust or as yet another silly ceramic creation one has to be careful not to drop.

A knick-knack such as a miniature ship's anchor may have a very different set of private meanings for the members of the household depending upon whether they are male or female. For the women of the home who may be primarily responsible for the decoration and care of the knick-knacks in the living room, such an object as the anchor may be completely inappropriate for the living room space. This anchor may not 'fit in' with the other components of the decoration or the other knick-knacks in the living room space. As well, this anchor may not have been purchased, chosen, etc., by the woman and as such may only have meaning as an object belonging to someone else that has been placed in her decorated space. If

we assume that this anchor was chosen and brought into the living room by a male member of the household, this knick-knack's meaning for a woman in the home may be that it represents an object that acts to disrupt and obscure the meanings of the living room the woman has constructed. Like the ballet figurine, the miniature anchor might also have meaning as simply a representation or sentimental reminder of a male in the household or within the family.

On the other hand, such a knick-knack as the anchor in the living room might be understood by a woman as an object that represents a certain set of experiences or qualities about one of the male members of the household that is worth displaying to outside guests and the household members themselves. The anchor may also possibly 'fit in' with the decorative scheme of the living room and coordinate with the other objects in the space.

If we accept that this anchor was chosen and brought into the living room by a male member of the household, it may be that for this individual the private meaning of the anchor lies in the fact that it represents his success in displaying one of his objects in the very public space of the living room. Perhaps the anchor's place in the living room has meaning to the males of the household as a small representation of stereotypical male qualities and constructions. It is also very possible that the private meaning of this object for the males of the household is that it demonstrates to outside visitors the ability of some members of the household to sail a ship or their interest in nautical history, etc.

Whether knick-knacks in the living room are assumed to represent male/female stereotypical qualities or meanings, the argument can be made that such apparently 'meaningless' and banal objects can have private meaning for the members of the household in terms of their gendered

constructions. It may be that the ballet figurine and the ship's anchor are understood in interaction with these public notions and expectations of gender and act upon each other to create the individual meanings that are created in the everyday home environment. Individual household members may use these knick-knacks to symbolize their private beliefs about their own individual identity. An individual who believes and participates in the gendered understanding of humans, may use the ballet figurine to display the 'feminine' qualities of her understanding of her identity.

With this interaction between gender and individual meaning construction in mind, it is now useful to observe the knick-knack in the final stage of my proposed framework. It would be deterministic to argue that objects such as knick-knacks have private meanings for individuals only in terms of gender. It would be more useful to argue that the meanings of these banal objects are formed and understood in interaction between private and public meanings an individual experiences in the everyday world. However, it is equally important to realize when analyzing such objects, that they are primarily placed and displayed in the very public space of the living room. Unlike men, women still maintain the primary responsibility for the decoration and maintenance of this room in the home. As such, the women of the household have a more 'mixed' relationship to these objects than do the men. A woman who takes on the responsibility of decorating this space with knick-knacks may offer two performances with these objects.

Firstly, the woman may understand the use and display of these knick-knacks in terms of the public meanings these objects have as items for the decoration of the living room space. In this way, the woman understands, and has meaning, for these objects as representatives of the decoration plan

or vision she has for the space where guests are invited and household members interact.

Secondly, if a woman understands the meaning of these knick-knacks as an expression of her individual identity, likes/dislikes, etc., then it follows that she would also understand the very public nature of these objects because of their location in the public space of the living room. A woman who decides to display a knick-knack with individual or idiosyncratic meanings may also have to consider whether this object 'fits in' with the decorating scheme of the room or with the ensemble of other objects on the 'knick-knack shelf.' Unlike other members of the household, women who undertake the responsibility of decorating the living room may also have to undertake the responsibility of the success or failure of this decoration in terms of how outside guests interpret the space. A badly decorated or highly idiosyncratic living room may be viewed unfavorably by outside guests and the members of the household.

Presumably, this display of 'bad taste' and judgment concerning these knick-knacks may be understood to reflect by those outside the home on the individual qualities of the living room's prime decorator, the woman. In this way, it would appear that the living room and the knick-knacks within it are not a 'space' in which a woman can freely understand and have meanings for these objects as neutral expressions of her individual identity. The modern home often has less public spaces for men to display (if they choose) their knick-knacks or objects with highly individualistic meanings.

Such an example would be the garage or den. These spaces are most often outside of the public space of the home and are often closed off or hidden from the other rooms of the home. Unlike the living room, the garage is rarely visited by outside visitors or the members of the household. As a

result, there appears not to be the same pressure upon the objects in these spaces to reflect the right 'mix' of individual taste and identity with common and public perceptions of a successful decorating scheme or arrangement.

This discussion of gender and 'gendered spaces' in the home environment does not presume that each woman in each home participates in this attempt to find the most successful decorating scheme, ensemble of objects, etc. I wish only to use the discussions of the kitchen and the living room as the most blatant examples of the ways in which many women are confronted with balancing both public meanings of decorating and taste, with their individual needs for the expression and creation of identity. I am also not proposing that women in modern society can only define their individual identity through such interactions with decoration and objects of the home environment. Instead, what I am proposing is a recognition that within the home environment there can exist societal norms and expectations of the kitchen and living room as 'gendered spaces' that are the prime responsibility of the women in the household.

This analysis of the role of gender in the creation of meanings surrounding such everyday objects demonstrates the high level of ambiguity that exists in such an examination of the banal. The high level of ambiguity in the meanings of the knick-knack offers it as an object that may only be ever truly understood by the individual his/her self. The importance of examining such objects as knick-knacks is that they offer an exemplary way in which to study the existence of the interaction that takes place between the private and the public, the personal and the social, the male and female, in the daily development of personal meanings with everyday objects and how these meanings may contribute to the process of individual identity creation in modern consumer culture.

This interaction takes place on many levels and in many different areas and practices of the everyday home environment. In the case of knick-knacks, interaction between the private and public meaning of an object takes place in the decisions to display these objects in the public space of the living room. In this interaction, decisions may be made based upon what meanings these objects have for the individual. Which knick-knacks get displayed and incorporated into the decorating scheme of the room is in itself a process of balancing the meanings of the 'other' in the public worlds with the potential private meanings of the individual in question. Which knick-knacks can have both an appropriate public meaning while simultaneously reflecting meaning for the individual members of the household are played out in this process of interaction.

The question which warrants more study is the why and how certain knick-knacks are incorporated and have meaning in the back stage of the everyday home environment, while simultaneously possessing meanings that can be used in the front stage performances given by the individual actors in their constant interactions with the generalized others of the social world outside the walls of the home environment.

Conclusion:

The focus of this thesis has been to demonstrate how seemingly banal objects are an important part of the process of social communication and contribute to individual identity formation. Engaging in such a discussion of everyday objects and meanings has not been without some struggle. Reactions to this line of examination have ranged from amusement to scorn at discussing anything so banal and ridiculous as the everyday world of our useless objects. However, it is precisely because of these types of responses that this project was undertaken in the first instance. Academic literature in anthropology, sociology, communication, economics, etc., appears to lack a significant degree of seriousness and creative thought concerning the question of banal objects and the creation of meaning and communication in our culture.

Literature that has been undertaken in the area of consumption and the everyday has been discussed in this thesis as being located in either one of two areas of thought. Firstly, research into meaning and objects can be argued to have been conducted within a subjective logic of study in which the individual actor is approached as a highly subjective entity, with pre-given psychic needs and highly idiosyncratic responses based upon the behavior and needs of an essential self. This is exemplified in studies of consumption and the material world. In these studies, the actor's 'ego' has been privileged, and as a result, these studies have not adequately dealt with questions of social constraints and structures in relation to meaning-creation and individual identity.

A second body of research that has attempted to study the object and the actor could be argued to have an overly objective logic which focuses upon consumption and the individual from economically based theories of

the object or good itself. In these studies, the individual and his/her consumption are examined in terms of an unhealthy fetishistic relationship, in which false consciousness and unmet desires for goods are the end result of capitalism and the consumptive experience. In this line of thought, the study of the object and its materiality is undertaken at the expense of studying the role and result of the individual actor in the consumptive act.

As a result of these shortcomings in existent theory, this thesis has proposed a framework for studying everyday objects in the home within a context of recognizing the processual nature of the interaction between private and public, personal and social meanings, in an individuals' experience with his/her everyday objects. Using the theories of SI, ethnomethodology, and dramaturgy, this thesis has proposed a framework in which the manufacture of meaning between people and objects can be located in the interaction between an individual's personal meanings and the social or public meanings created in communication with the generalized other.

In this framework, the everyday object of the home possesses unique characteristics due to its highly ambiguous meanings for both the individual and the theorist interested in such a study. This high level of ambiguity allows one to study the very personal meanings of the individual actor in the process of interacting with these banal objects. Unlike past studies of consumption which have examined the impact of social/public structures on the meaning-creation process (such as taste or aesthetics), this thesis has attempted to focus upon the identification of the private meanings for individuals in relation with these objects.

This thesis has approached the creation of meaning in consumption as a process; a process that could be viewed on a continuum ranging from

public/social meaning and influences at one end, to personal/private meanings at the other. It has been the aim of this thesis to propose a framework for studying everyday objects that would 'strike a balance' and examine the meaning of these objects for individuals as an everchanging mixture of public and private performances and communication.

In examining these objects and the creation of meaning as a process of interaction, the question of gender has also been broached. Gender was chosen as an object of study because it is in gender constructions that we can see both the public and private meanings that are developed in social interactions. By using a study of gender, it was the aim of this thesis to explore the idea that private meanings are often the result of gender roles and expectations. Hence, even in the most private aspect of ourselves, one can find the existence of a very non-private or public element; the social construction of gender.

Gender has also been discussed as an aspect of the private meanings that has an important influence upon how individuals understand their 'self' and how individuals perform daily in an attempt to strike the appropriate balance between private and public meanings for shared social communication. It is in an examination of gender and the home/objects that the presence of this constant interaction between public and private can be seen most clearly.

For women, in particular, the home and the objects within it carry years of historically established meanings and expectations. Any study of everyday objects and the home must acknowledge that the very public notions and manufacture of gender have important implications in the interaction between individual and the generalized other that produces meaning and individual identity. It may be argued that for the woman, the home is not a 'place of her

own,' but rather a public space in which objects and decoration are expected to be and are understood as tools used to construct gendered performances in which a balance is sought between public meanings and individual identity.

Unlike the men of the household, a woman may be argued to have little space in the home in which an object can be placed or displayed, free of its relations to the socially appropriate meanings of taste, aesthetics, etc. For the woman in the home, her home and the objects in it, may be used as sophisticated props in an attempt to enact the appropriate performance which will allow her to communicate with the generalized other and develop meaning for her notion of 'self.' Unlike men, women in the home appear to have the added pressure in their performances to use everyday objects to decorate properly and create the 'happy home' while simultaneously balancing their personal needs to use objects to communicate notions of their individual identity, needs, tastes, etc.

It would therefore, seem worthwhile to study constructions of gender in any further study of everyday objects. In the future, a theorist interested in this topic might seek to differentiate further the idea of gender in the interaction between the public and private meanings, to examine whether certain everyday objects are initially produced as a result of pre-existing expectations, i.e. if gender is designed into objects. Such research might examine the possibility of the existence of gendered designs in everyday objects and the reasons for them. This research might ask the question of why women purchase and display the everyday objects they do. Using empirical data, it would also appear fruitful to interview women in an attempt to understand the degree to which they are conscious of the constraints/influences of gender expectations in their home environment and

their everyday objects. A researcher might examine such questions as why women chose the decoration scheme they did, or whether women displayed a predisposition towards stereotypical gendered designs in these banal goods.

This future research might explain more fully the idea that the home, in reality, offers little 'space' for the female household members. This research might further examine the notion that the often unconscious and unnoticed everyday object may be used and understood as a way in which women either embrace, perpetuate, or reject constructions of gendered meanings and practices in the home.

This call for future research, however, is not meant to obscure the work at hand. The framework for the study of everyday objects, meaning, and the home has proven to be of use. Within the proposed framework, a model has been created in which one can study both the interactive process by which the potential meaning in these objects is created and some of the ways in which individuals understand this meaning in relation to their personal notions of identity.

In using such an interactive model, several key discoveries have been illuminated. Firstly, when this framework was applied to an examination of three everyday objects (the Chia Pet, fridge magnets, and knick-knacks) it became apparent that the highly ambiguous nature of these objects called for a theoretical approach based on interaction and a study of the balance between the public and private performances and meanings of individual actors. A framework which concentrates solely on social structures, or individual psychic needs, would not be able to capture the nature of this dynamic mix between personal and social, public and private, that individuals experience in their homes on an everyday basis.

The examination of these objects proposed that perhaps it was in the actual daily interaction between individuals and individuals, and individuals and generalized other that the meaning of these objects could be understood. The meaning of the Chia Pet for an individual may only be discernible in the conversation and interaction between individual household members and guests who may visit the home. The pet may only be understood by the individual actor in relation to the specific situation at hand. When interacting with a family member, the Chia Pet might have meaning for the owner as part of the ensemble of objects that make up the decoration scheme or 'cozy environment' of the home.

On the other hand, if one assumes that meaning is created in a process of interaction between the individual and the social, or the individual and the other, perhaps the meaning of the Chia Pet, for its owner, is that it displays the individuals green thumb or desire to grow living entities. The meaning of this pet may change for the individual owner on a daily basis, depending upon who s/he comes in contact with. It is this notion of the dynamic nature of interaction that occurs in the meaning-creation process that my framework has attempted to illustrate.

A second key conclusion that can be taken from the examination of these objects in the proposed framework is that it is in the site of the everyday that individuals construct numerous performances in the attempt to communicate with others and construct intelligible meanings. The dual nature of consumer objects (utility and symbolic value) requires that any study of these goods recognize they are used in a complex symbolic system in which individuals and society try to communicate with each other and make sense of the world around them.

The home itself can be seen as one of the most important symbols used throughout the last 200 years of history by our society to communicate ideas, beliefs, etc.. The everyday objects within the home are experienced by individuals every day of their life and, as such, have an important relationship with the communication our society conducts through the symbolic meanings invested into our consumer objects. It is within the home that the greatest number and variety of consumer objects can be found. It is in this space that individuals use and interact with these objects in the attempt to communicate with the generalized other and construct both the front and back stage performances enacted in social communication.

Both the home and the objects of daily life have been shown to be crucial and integral 'props' in the construction of these performances. In this way, everyday objects can be argued to set up a type of context in which individuals understand themselves and the culture in which they live. In this way, everyday objects could be argued to create a type of contextual world in which objects below an individuals' conscious attention are used in interaction in the process of social communication.

In this world, no object is 'useless' or without meaning. In this view, it is the objects with the highest degree of ambiguous meaning that may in fact be amongst the most intriguing and elusive components of communication in modern consumer culture. A framework that recognizes the interactional or processual nature of communication that takes place when individuals encounter these objects on a daily basis, might be able in the future to examine the potential these objects have for creating perceptual schemes for individuals in which they can understand the world around them and successfully communicate notions of their individual identity to themselves and the other members of the social world.

Using a framework such as the one proposed in this thesis, the banality of the everyday object may be examined as a crucial site in which symbolic meanings are created and understood, and individuals are able to create strategies to understand their 'self,' their social world, and the everchanging nature of modern consumer society.

Such a study of the everyday domestic dwelling and the objects within it, may better enable the communication theorist to understand how it is we, as a culture are able to understand each other and ourselves and survive the constant change that characterizes modern consumer society. Perhaps in examining the banal object of the home, the theorist and the individual can come to *see the unnoticed* aspect of our material world and begin to understand the reasons that compel each of us at one time to buy a Chia Pet or pass our knick-knacks onto the next generation.

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