

**THE MEANING OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS
AT TIMES OF LIFE-TRANSITION**

**THE MEANING OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS
AT TIMES OF LIFE-TRANSITION**

By

JAMES B. GILLETT, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the degree
Master of Arts
McMaster University

(c) Copyright by James B. Gillett, September, 1992

MASTER OF ARTS (1992)
(Sociology)
Ontario

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton,

TITLE: THE MEANING OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS
AT TIMES OF LIFE-TRANSITION:
A STUDY OF EASTERN EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS

AUTHOR: James B. Gillett, B.A.

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Peter Donnelly

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 152

Abstract

This research uses the situation of immigration to illustrate the meaning of material possessions at times of life transition. Recent Eastern European immigrants were asked about the objects they brought with them, what they left behind, and the importance of these possessions. The analysis focused on the type and value of the objects, the loss felt from leaving possessions, and the ways in which these objects were a social and cultural resource. The possessions that immigrants selected were important because they represented significant life experiences. The value of these objects were expressed in terms of three categories of experiences: existential, social, and cultural. The predominant type of possession were collections of 'cultural objects'. Immigrants also brought memorabilia embodying memories of past experiences. The objects immigrants brought were a means of re-constructing a self-identity in accordance to their new status as an immigrant in Canada. Possessions were a also social resource, connecting immigrants to significant others in Eastern Europe. The permanence of the material possessions also enabled immigrants to import, maintain, and pass on objects that represented and contained a family or cultural heritage.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Peter Donnelly, Dr. Graham Knight, and Dr. John Eyles for participating in this research. Without their guidance and instructive comments this project would not have been possible. I am particularly indebted to Peter Donnelly for his patience, direction, and understanding, especially in developing a viable research strategy and during the final stages of writing the text. I would also like to recognize the contribution that Alison Douglas and Barbara Townsend made to the thesis. At times of doubt, and throughout the research process, their friendship and support provided insight, and was a great source of strength. Finally, I would like to thank the immigrants who agreed to participate in the study for sharing with me their personal objects and life experiences.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	8
Chapter Three: Analytical Framework	40
Chapter Four: Methods and Methodology	47
Chapter Five: Interpretation & Analysis	63
Chapter Six: Conclusions	121
Appendix A: Interview Guide	140
Bibliography	145

When ripe fruit falls
its sweetness distills and trickles away into the veins
of the earth.

When fulfilled people die
the essential oil of their experience enters
the veins of living space, and adds a glistening
to the atom, to the body of immortal chaos.

For the space is alive
and it stirs like a swan
whose feathers glisten
silky with oil of distilled experience.

(D.H. Lawrence, 1947)

Chapter One

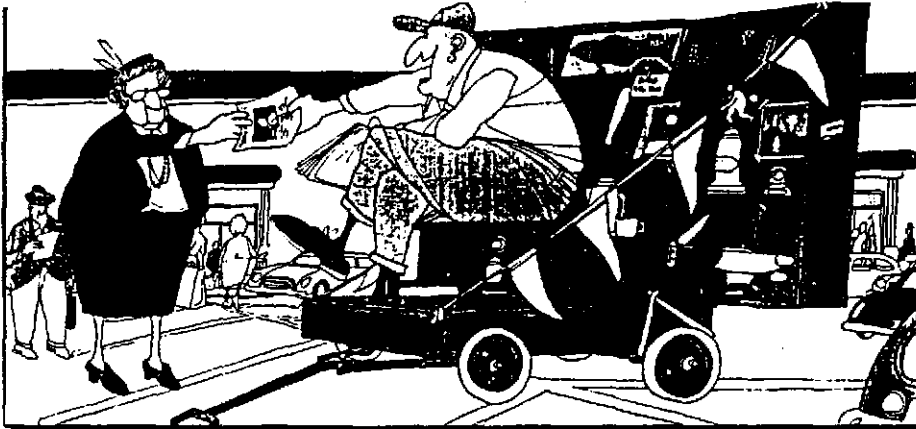
Introduction

The material and physical environments that people construct are often thought of as static, tacit, and silent. However, as Lawrence suggests, this space is alive, and impacts in many ways all aspects of everyday life. Our personal objects are the cultural material we use to define, cultivate and express ourselves. The material possessions we acquire, and accumulate throughout the life course also harbour our past experiences, and provide a material referent in which to recognize and organize these experiences. On a wider social scale, possessions mediate social relations; they are used to construct a personal physical environment, and situate people within a specific social and cultural position and locality. In addition, objects have a permanence which stretches across generations transcending the individuals who possess them, and are possessed by them. In short, material culture, in the form of possessions, has an important role in social relations and activities, as well as in the ways people structure and continually restructure their identities.

In academic discourse the study of person-object relations has received limited attention, especially within sociology. The inter-connection between people and material

possessions, however, has certainly become a topic of interest and investigation within a variety of public discourses. There is a popular television program, the 'Antiques Road Show', in which people bring a valued possession, talk briefly about it, and then have it evaluated by an expert, usually in relation to monetary value, but also often the object's social and cultural value as well. In the print media, The Globe and Mail (in the weekly Fashion section) includes a regular column entitled, 'My Favourite Object'. Each week a socially prominent person is profiled: the reader learns about an object that this person values, and the meanings they have attached to it. For instance, in a recent column Dave Nichol, the 'President's Choice' supermarket mogul, talks about how he treasures his pig roaster more than any other thing. In another, Gloria Rosenberg, the owner of a large craft store in Toronto, talks about her obsession with collecting quilts. Chatelaine, in a similar manner, recently published an article entitled, 'Our Possessions, Ourselves'. This piece speculated on 'what our favourite material possessions say about us?', and asked eight prominent Canadians to talk about their most important belongings. Even comic strips are exploring, albeit in an offbeat fashion, how we define

ourselves and are defined by our material possessions¹:



Once every month or so Norman Banks parks his personal enhancement kiosk at the local shopping center.

(Van Amerongen, 1988)

Of course, the idea of a 'personal enhancement kiosk' initially seems ridiculous. Nonetheless, people do carry some of their possessions with them, like clothes, pictures or books, and display these things to others in shopping malls, supermarkets and during many other everyday practices. People identify with, and are identified by these possessions. As Eco once claimed, "I speak through my clothes" (1973). Indeed, the logic of advertising plays off this inter-connection between people and their material possessions.

What all these various media attempt to illustrate is how objects have meaning, and the affinity between people's life experiences and their material possessions. This study has a similar objective: to illustrate and further our understanding of how people are inter-connected with their personal belongings. Part of this task involves considering the existing literature on person-object relations in sociology and other related disciplines in order to address

areas of research and issues which require further analysis. The focus of the study concerns the way in which the meanings of objects are amplified and prioritized at times of life transitions. The humour of the 'personal enhancement kiosk' lies in the fact that the meanings of personal objects and the places they have in our lives are not usually introduced into daily mundane activities. In fact, apart from the objects we actually use, our possessions are a backdrop to our everyday experiences, and their presence and meaning is largely taken for granted. Redfoot and Back (1988) argue, however, that at times of major life-transitions, the significance material possessions, as representations of one's life experiences, become more immediate and less taken for granted. At times of change, 'biographical' experiences, those relating to one's life history, and 'historical' experiences, those that extend beyond one's own life to future and past generations, tend to gain increased significance; as a result, people turn more to the what Levi-Strauss (1969) refers to as the 'material signifier' representing these life experiences.

The empirical focus of this research is on the relationship between individuals and their material possessions during the process of migrating from Eastern Europe to Canada. The design of the study is organized around this specific situation of life-transition; however, it is not intended to be an analysis of immigration, but rather the

relations between immigrants and their possessions when they migrated. When planning the study other similar situations of life transition were considered, such as people relocating or the loss of possessions as a result of fire or theft. Emigration, though, appeared to be a manageable and interesting cross cultural situation to study. When people migrate they must evaluate the meaning and importance of their possessions in light of the fact that they will be uprooted from their culture, family, and friends; furthermore, they also must adapt to another culture, and establish their lives anew. Other legal, financial, and practical factors restrict what can and cannot be brought. These factors limit the number of possessions and provides an opportunity to ask questions about meaningful objects left behind. Finally, studying the particular situation of immigration makes it possible to address key theoretical issues regarding the inter-connections between people and their material possessions at a time of life-transition. In addition, this research makes a valuable contribution to research on person-object relations on the issue of the meaning of objects during life-transitions. More specifically the situation of immigration has not been addressed previously in the literature on person-object relations.

The study begins with a review of the empirical and theoretical literature on person-object relations with particular attention to how this material might inform the

study of material possessions during times of life transition. The third chapter outlines the central research questions which shaped the analysis and discussion of the data collected. Chapter Four details the methodology of the study by discussing the research design, population sample, and the methods used to collect and analyze the data.

The interpretation and analysis chapter Five begins by describing the social context of migrating from Eastern Europe, and the general experiences of immigrants during their migration to North America. The remainder focuses specifically on the meaning of, and inter-connection between immigrants and their material possession, as well as how these objects acted as social and cultural resources.

The conclusion Chapter Six has four parts. The first summarizes the results of the study. The second examines the implications of this research to the study of person-object relations, and the meaning of material possessions at times of life transition. The third comments on some of the limitations of the methodology and analysis used the research. The last part briefly discusses the place of person-object relations in the field of Sociology.

Notes

1. This comic has been reproduced with the permission of Cowles Syndicate, Inc.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature on Person-Object Relations

Possession is a magical relation; I am these objects I possess, but outside, so to speak facing my self; I create them as independent of me; what I possess is mine outside of me, outside of all subjectivity, as an in-itself which escapes me at each instant and whose creation at each instant I perpetuate.

(Sartre, 1956)

Introduction

Research conducted in a specific area of study, like person-object relations, should be cumulative. The direction and shape of research on possessions should stem from the existing body of knowledge in this particular field of study. This way it is possible to build on our understanding of the various relationships and connections between people and their material possessions. An essential part of this research process is the review of previous empirical and theoretical literature. The survey and critique of past research provides the shape and context for the present study, and points to questions and directions for future research.

Generally speaking, the literature on person-object relations has taken place in various disciplines including Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Health Sciences,

Marketing, and others; each has attempted to understand, explain, and account for the relationships between people and their material belongings. But the research in each of these disciplines has been fairly limited, and generally not interdisciplinary in its approach. The wide range of approaches and little dialogue between disciplines make it difficult to characterize the literature in any systematic manner. The following review is intended to redress this gap by integrating the common themes about the inter-connection between people and their possessions which cut across social scientific disciplines.

This review of literature is divided into three parts. The first briefly outlines the main philosophical tradition from which person-object relations emerges. The second provides an overview and brief critique of the empirical studies conducted on this topic. Part of the discussion examines how this research informs the study of the meaning of material possessions during times of life-transition. The third part of the literature review focuses on the theoretical debates within research on person-object relations. This discussion of theoretical material shapes the central questions to be addressed in examining the value of possessions during life-transitions.

Throughout the review of empirical and theoretical literature, there are three central and recurrent themes on which the discussion is focused. The first is how personal

objects are an essential component and extension of the self, as well as meaningful representations of life experiences. The second is how personal objects combine to form an ordered and constructed environment which connects and situates a person within a specific social context, e.g., friends and family, community, cultural heritage. The third theme concerns how personal objects are utilized by people as a social and cultural resource. Discussing these general themes helps to link the wide range of research produced about people and possessions. In addition, this review is also instructive in terms of addressing questions relevant to analyzing the meaning of possessions to immigrants at times of life-transition.

Philosophical Tradition

The central premise underlying the study of object relations is that the material things we have are an extension of ourselves; that they are a material representation or signifier of who we are, in the sense of self-identity, sense of community, and cultural heritage (Belk, 1987; 1988; Feirstein, 1986; Rosenbaum, 1972 Tuan, 1980; 1984). Contemplating the connection between material culture and social life is not new to social theory and philosophy; however, the specific questions and debates regarding the place of personal objects in individual ontogeny stem from work in existential and pragmatist

philosophy. There are other philosophical traditions which have considered the relationship between subjects and objects; for example, the Hegelian-Marxist tradition in which objects are conceptualised products of human activity. However, in terms of the study of material possessions, the voice of the existentialist tradition has been predominant. For instance, Sartre, (1956) in an essay on having and being, goes so far as to argue that people's being exists solely in the things they possess. Earlier, William James (1890) made a similar claim, arguing that the self is comprised of the sum of a person's possessions, both in the sense of having a body and psychic powers, as well as material things like a house or a boat (see also Marcel, 1949; Heidegger, 1958; and Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

There is certainly much debate regarding the extent to which we are what we have; it is arguable that philosophers like Sartre and James place too much emphasis on 'having' as the foundation of one's 'being'. It is clear, though, that our possessions do contribute to a sense of self and identity, just as they are an important aspect of social life. The following outlines and discusses the social research, largely spurred by the writings of Sartre and James, which has addressed the inter-relationships between people and their material possessions.

Empirical Literature

I. Personal Objects and the Extended Self

A central focus in the empirical literature on person-object relations is the demonstration of how personal objects are meaningful extensions and symbols of the self. These works attempt to provide empirical evidence regarding how possessions contribute to the development, expression, and cultivation of individual identity and personality, and are also meaningful expressions of this sense of self. The work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton has been influential in this area research (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Rochberg Halton, 1979; 1984). The main empirical focus in their work is how the home is constructed through material possessions as a meaningful physical environment . Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton interviewed over 300 families, asking them questions about the possessions they have in their home and the importance of these things and the home environment in general to their lives (1981). The data from these interviews were used to examine a number of questions regarding to the relationship between people and objects e.g., how personal objects influence the development of the self, how the home is a symbolic environment for its inhabitants, and the ways in which this environment can have a positive and negative influence on social relations within the home and community. Prior to this larger study, Rochberg-Halton (1979) focused

more specifically on how possessions in the home, especially personal art objects, reflect and reinforce a sense of self, and act as means of cultivating the self.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's work has been very influential in marketing research. The empirical studies in marketing have focused on the loss felt when material possessions are involuntarily taken away. Belk, in his work on possessions as an extension of the self, uses research on burglary victims to support his claim that the grief people feel when their possessions are stolen is a result of a loss of self (Belk, 1982; 1988). For Belk, when people experience the loss of a possession they have the sense of being personally violated, a feeling that the part of their self-identity invested in the object is damaged and taken away with the possession.

This notion of the extended self has spurred a number of empirical studies in marketing, the majority of which have focused on a loss of self (Donner, 1985; Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson, 1976) La Branche has argued that there is less grief experienced in the voluntary loss of possessions than in a situation when they are taken away unexpectedly (1973). Others, have developed Belk's work and examined how the loss of objects also involves a loss of place and community as well as a loss of individual identity (Bakker and Bakker-Rabdau, 1973; Brown & Werner, 1985; Edney, 1975). McLeod reaches similar conclusions to Belk when examining people who

have lost their possessions as a result of natural disasters (Erikson, 1976; McLeod, 1984).

The empirical research which has emerged from the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (especially within marketing following Belk's studies) has shifted the emphasis away from the active role of objects in the construction of a self-identity. In this area of person-object relations the empirical focus is more on how objects are simply an extension of the self, rather than on how the self is cultivated through the possession of personal objects. Hence, the initial empirical studies focused on the construction of a home through objects, while subsequent research tends to examine the loss of possessions as an indication of their importance as a passive extension of the self.

In sociology there have been numerous empirical studies which attempt to demonstrate how material possessions are related to social status and social class. In this research material possessions are used as an effective means of measuring other variables. Part of the work in this area attempts to link the patterning of material possessions, for instance living room styles, with social attributes, such as social class and political affiliation (Davis, 1990; Lauman & House, 1970).

The work of Veblen (1983) and Goffman (1951) not only focuses on demonstrating how possessions are symbols of

social class and status, but also how these objects contribute to the reproduction and reinforcement of class divisions. This research moves closer to making the connection between personal objects not only as a measure of an individual's social class, but as an important part of that individual's identity. Gans (1974), and more recently Bourdieu (1984) have utilized an ethnographic approach and examined in more detail the importance of material culture in constructing a 'taste' for particular cultural objects and activities which stem from an individual's social location. Taste in certain material possessions, then, is conditioned by a person's social position; the consumption of these things enables the person to construct an identity and lifestyle which not only reflects this social position, but also reproduces it over time.

II. Personal Objects, Social Relations, and the Constructed Material Environment

There has been limited empirical literature on how objects mediate social relations, and connect people within a social community. The research on the home environment has identified how possessions often combine to form an entire personal material environment, a kind of gestalt, which stems from an individual's life-experience (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). By looking at personal objects in this way, it is possible to see how they connect a person to

a wider social context, such as family, community, and culture (Belk, 1982). Empirical analysis, however, has tended to focus more on the individual, rather than the impact of objects on social and cultural relations.

There are exceptions to this general trend. The study of gift-exchange in anthropology and the sociology of Erving Goffman are examples of research which takes into consideration social and political aspects of person-objects relations. With reference to gift exchange, Caplow (1985) examines the exchange of Christmas gifts in a small community. This study is based on Mauss' anthropological research on the gift. Mauss argues that the ritual exchange of objects is never innocent, and always involves some degree of social obligation. The bond that is created in exchange tends to reinforce existing power relations within a group or community. Caplow argues that the exchange of Christmas presents created and reinforced social bonds between people and families within this community. In addition, Caplow concludes that the exchange of gifts increased in number and value, in relationships that were more tenuous or at risk.

In a similar manner, Goffman's research on institutions illustrates how possessions can influence social and power relations between people (1961; 1971). In Asylums Goffman notes that when a person is admitted into an institution like a mental hospital or prison s/he is immediately stripped of all personal possessions. Not having

and being in control of your personal things, in some cases not even having your own name, debases the person of a coherent sense of self; it places the person at a disadvantage, putting the employees at the institution in a position of power and authority over those admitted. Snyder and Fromkin also examine this characteristic of institutions, focusing on the 'identity kits' that are reissued to people who are admitted which take away any unique sense of self (1981). Similarly, In The Presentation of Self in Everyday life, Goffman illustrates how physicians have control of social equipment within a certain social setting which reinforces a position of authority, while the patients' social 'props' are taken away, placing them in a vulnerable and subordinate position (1959). In other research, Belk examines how material objects in the home environment mediate and influence communication within the home and community (1985).

Gift exchange and the study of material possessions within institutional environments are refreshing examples of research that examines the power of personal objects in everyday social practices. In terms of applied research, large corporation and businesses have started seriously considering how personal objects in the working environment affect the productivity and work conditions of their employees.

These are certainly aspects of person-object

relations that require more empirical investigation. Too often research focuses on the impact of personal objects on individual development and cultivation. It is important that research in this area also examine how our material possessions influence social, cultural, and power relations in society.

III. Personal Objects as Social and Cultural Resource:

Research on the Elderly

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) in their study on the meaning of things found that as people get older their material possessions take on greater significance, especially those objects that represent the continuity and achievement of their life experiences. Similarly, Butler and Lewis (1977) argue that as people age they tend to invest more emotional energy into their material possessions. It is understandable, then, that a large number of empirical studies of person-objects relations have focused on the elderly.

It is useful in discussing this material to organize it according to three general themes in the literature identified by McCracken (1987) in his article on personal objects and the elderly. The first is the use of personal objects as an aid to memory. Disman, in her work on elderly immigrants, and others have noted that objects often act as personal artifacts for the elderly, storing memories of

people and past experiences (Belk, 1982; Disman, 1984; Sherman and Newman, 1977). These possessions trigger memories that may have been forgotten over time. Souvenirs from a trip or a previous experience, then, are literally intended to remind the person of this event. Other related research concludes that cherished possessions, like familiar places, often act as 'linking objects', connecting a person with a deceased partner or friend. Elderly persons find solace in talking to these objects or just having them close to them, as if the deceased person was still close to them and a part of their lives (Comstock, 1981; Rubinstein, 1987).

The second area McCracken considers is the use of possessions as a way for the elderly to negotiate transitions in status or self-definition. This research focuses on situations in which elderly persons must relocate to a smaller apartment or nursing home. The personal objects that are taken with them reinforce a sense of self and identity, making the transition to the new location less traumatic. Rubinstein, for instance, argues that cherished possessions act as a defense against serious change in lifestyle or identity that may result from having to relocate to a senior citizen home, or by the loss of friends and family (1987). Soloman also identifies how personal objects can be used as social props, enabling the elderly to learn and adapt to new situations, and the different social expectations that are placed on them (1983).

McCracken's last theme within the literature on objects and the elderly is the role material possessions play in interpersonal and cross-generational influence. In most of the studies on the elderly, the objects that were most cherished were associated with family or loved ones. These personal objects represent a connection to a family lineage, and also to a larger network of significant others. By having these possessions around, the person feels less isolated and lonely because they are surrounded by material representations of their connectedness to a larger social context (Butler & Lewis, 1973; McCracken, 1987). Furthermore, it is comforting for the elderly to have objects that have been passed down from generation to generation because it provides a sense of being connected to past and future generations (Furby, 1978; McCracken, 1987; Redfoot & Back, 1988). These three themes in the literature on the elderly are centred around how personal objects act as a cultural and social resource. Meaningful objects are an aid to memory, both of past experiences and relations with significant others; they maintain links between generations; and, among other things, they help transitions in location and self-definition for the elderly. This research demonstrates not only how important personal objects are to the elderly, but how this research may be applied in ways that may help improve people's everyday lives, and also during times of change or crisis.

IV. New Directions in the Study of Person-Object Relations

The study of person-object relations is a relatively new field. There are gaps in the literature which may begin to be filled through further empirical research in this area. The following section outlines a number of ways in which studying the meaning of possessions at times of life-transition will contribute to and broaden our present understanding of the inter-connections between people and their possessions.

The majority of, and arguably the most interesting research in this area has focused solely on the elderly. In addition, apart from the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, there has been little empirical study of the meaning of objects to groups other than the elderly, and the experience of aging. Although the importance of material possessions tends to increase with age, they play an important part in people's lives regardless of age. Studying the meaning and value of objects in situations of life-transition, specifically the experience of immigrating, introduces groups other than the elderly to the study of person-object relations. In addition, immigration presents a situation which is suited to exploring ideas which have emerged in the study of the elderly, such as the role of material possessions as a cultural and social resource, which have not been applied to other groups.

The experience of migrating also provides an opportunity to examine other aspects of the inter-connection between people and their possessions which have not yet been addressed in the literature. By uprooting from one's culture and social community it is necessary to deconstruct and evaluate the meaning and value of all the material possession acquired throughout the life-course. This is particularly the case when the change in place is voluntary, and people are provided the opportunity to sift through their possessions and reflect on their meaning and importance. It is interesting to examine the factors that influence the decision of which possessions to bring, and which to leave. Moreover, this period of transition when migrating presents an occasion to explore the cultural and social value of material possessions, how they connect people with a culture and a community, and the loss that is felt when these things are left, given away, or sold. These aspects of person-object relations are touched on in the literature, especially the literature on objects, social relations and the constructed personal environment discussed above; however, they have not been studied empirically, or in situations where these issues have to be evaluated by a person relocating to another culture.

There are few empirical studies on person-object relations focusing on the meaning and value of material possessions as representations of significant life

experiences. Since emigration requires to a large extent the evaluation and re-organization of life experiences, it provides a situation in which to study how objects impact the considerations of life-experiences. It is difficult to understand and access the values and meanings placed on material possessions which relate to life experiences without qualitative and ethnographic methods designed to explore these ideas and sentiments through interviews and data analysis. In any field of research it is wise to incorporate different types of methods, depending on the character and purpose of the research. It seems that, to this point the study of person-object relations has placed too much emphasis on examining the types of objects people value, rather than examining the meaning and value of these objects in relation to a person's self-definition and life-experiences.

Theoretical Literature

This section presents a brief review of the theoretical literature on person-object relations. The discussion is structured according to the three general themes outlined in the introduction. These themes provide an instructive conceptual framework in which to organize the wide range of work in this area. The review of this material is useful in terms of identifying theoretical questions and issues relevant to studying the meaning of objects at times of life-transition.

I. Material Possessions and Social Ontogeny

The predominant theme in the study of person-object relations is the place of objects as a meaningful part of an individual's identity. This relationship has been conceptualized in a number of different ways; nonetheless, there are two predominant and oppositional positions in the literature. The first privileges the meaning signified by the object in defining or constructing an individual's sense of self, or identity. The second focuses on the incorporation of objects as a meaningful extension of the self. What follows is an overview of these two positions, followed by an attempt to reconcile their apparent opposition.

Marx (1972) recognized that when people use their labour to make material culture they invest a part of themselves into these objects. When an object is conceived and made, it is a reflection of the identity and experiences of the person who created it. Consequently, people are continually creating and recreating themselves in the things that they produce. In contemporary society, however, our material possessions are more likely to be things we buy and consume or gifts received from family or friends rather than something directly produced. Miller (1987) argues that Simmel, in focusing on the consumption of material culture rather than its production, offers a more instructive conception of the inter-relationship between objective

culture, in the form of material possessions, and the subjective character of individuals.

Simmel (1950; 1984) distinguishes between a subjective spirit and the spirit embodied in objective cultural forms. The development of a subjective spirit depends on the presence of an objective culture; yet, this objective culture can also inhibit the development of a subjective spirit when it becomes too independent of people's subjective understanding and experiences. The ideal situation, Simmel argues, is the synthesis of these two forms of culture in the development of an individual's personality. The tragedy of modernity, for Simmel, though, is that objective forms of culture have become disconnected from people's subjective understandings. Objects as a part of a modern culture tend to define the subject, rather than the more ideal inter-relationship between the two. Simmel's (1978) essay 'Female Culture' provides an illustration of this trend in modern culture. For Simmel, as a result of the privileged position of power occupied by men in modernity, objectified cultural forms derive from, and lend themselves more towards men's understanding of social life. Female subjective culture, what now would be referred to as lived experience, then, is increasingly repressed and denied because it does not conform to the dominant culture forms within modern society.

This tragic element in Simmel's writing bears some

resemblance to Baudrillard's (1968; 1988; 1991) attempts to rework and critique marxist thought by focusing on the consumption rather than production of material culture as the basis of social order. For Baudrillard, consumer objects comprise a 'closed system of signs' which orders the behaviour and identity of individuals and groups. By consuming these objects people are determined by them because the meanings that they represent are transferred to the consumer. Though people have the illusion of being free and autonomous, they are in fact controlled through their desire to use consumption as a source of self-definition and expression (Poster, 1988). Baudrillard shifts the existentialist notion of being from 'having' to 'consuming': we are not what we have, instead, we are what we consume. This emphasis on the power of the cultural objects as source of self-realization is demonstrated in studies of postmodern consumer culture in which a coherent self-identity is marketed as a complete 'identity kit' which can be consumed at the local shopping mall (Angus, 1989). In a postmodern culture, then, anyone can be anybody as long as they frequent the 'proper' stores.

The work of Simmel and Baudrillard demonstrates how possessions are a part of material culture, signifying social and cultural meanings at least partially independent of the individuals who own them. There is a tendency in the social sciences to emphasize the subject, and ignore the impact of

material culture on individuals and social life. In opposition to this, Baudrillard's work has attempted to bracket the subject and focus exclusively on objects as a part of a system. The difficulty with this position is that it affords people little agency; identities are imposed on individuals through a distant consumer culture, increasingly independent of social experience. Nonetheless, the power of the object in producing meaning through consumption remains under-represented in person-object relations, and requires more attention in future theoretical and empirical writing.

The majority of the literature in this area takes the opposite position, examining how people are able to incorporate possessions as an extension of their self-definition. Although there is some interest in which objects people choose as meaningful, the emphasis theoretically is overwhelmingly on the ways people produce and assign meaning to material possessions. The lack of collusion between the theoretical work in person-object relations is most evident when outlining this material. Each theory tends to develop a similar explanation for the inter-relationship between the self and its material counterpart with little collaboration, dialogue, or recognition.

Belk's notion of the 'Extended Self' exemplifies this particular orientation to person-object relations. Drawing on the work of Sartre, Belk (1988) identifies three ways in which the self is extended to include material objects. The

first is the control of an object and the control of its use (Sartre, 1943; Solomon, 1986). This notion of control as the basis of possession is supported by the work of Furby (1978), who argues that people feel that they possess an object if they are able to have control over it (see also, McClelland, 1951). The second way of extending the self is by creating an object. In terms of consumption, both Sartre and Belk argue that consumption is a form of creation: a way of appropriating and assimilating new possessions as a part of an existing determining self. The final way people extend themselves is by knowing an object. For instance, by learning to use a computer or by reading a certain text, the knowledge held within these objects becomes internalized as a part of the self.

For Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, the psychic energy that people invest in an object when working towards some goal is the means by which people make an object a meaningful part of their sense of self or identity. This energy includes physical labour as well as other forms of energy such as the time spent on and attention that is paid to one's material things. The time taken reading a book or the energy spent by a child talking to a stuffed animal as a source of solace are examples of how objects are appropriated and integrated as a part of a self-definition.

George Herbert Mead (1934) in his theoretical work on the development of the self argues that the self is not only

composed of the attitudes of other selves within a social community, what he refers to as a generalized other, but the self is also influenced by inanimate and material objects. For Mead, material objects are implicated in the social act when people impose social attitudes and roles onto these objects, and although an object is not able to respond, the interaction is still meaningful (McCarthy, 1984). For instance, a person can have a meaningful conversation with a pet, even though the pet is not able to take the role of the owner when interacting. When talking to the animal, the owner is engaging in a type of internal dialogue (Cohen, 1989).

A less convoluted example of how material objects can be a part of the self is the importance of role models in the development of the self. The role models people have are often not only the people they know, but also fictional characters that exist only within books and films (Rochberg-Halton, 1984). Work in reader-response criticism supports this view in its examination of how consciousness is taken over by the voice of the text when engaging a piece of writing. Thus, especially in the case of fiction, reading becomes a way of engaging other selves or voices represented in the text (Rochberg-Halton, 1984). When people read, their consciousness is an interaction between their own voice and the voice embodied in the text. During this reading process, and afterwards, people selectively integrate the ideas and characters they have encountered into their own self-

definition.

The position outlined above illustrates a number of ways in which people are able to incorporate objects as a meaningful part of the self. Each theory, it seems, provides an adequate though partial explanation of how an individual's identity has a physical counterpart other than the body, whether it is having control over an object, or investing one's psychic energy into a particular possession. In social research, these theories are instructive in that they each provide a partial and potential understanding of one particular aspect of the inter-connection between people and their material possessions.

It is clear that in the study of person-object relations it would be ideal to develop a theoretical middle ground between the two positions which divide the literature in this area. As with most oppositions in social theory, though, it is difficult to develop a dialectic which can be effectively applied in social research. In his introduction to Baudrillard's work, Poster (1988) argues that the works of Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and de Certeau (1984) offer a less deterministic and more instructive view of the consumption of material culture. Both theorists argue that people are able to re-signify the objects they consume, and resist the meaning that is associated with the object and imposed on them. Certainly most possessions are consumed rather than made; however, it is unlikely that people are completely

determined by these objects. Fiske (1989a; 1989b) makes a similar argument to Bourdieu and de Certeau in arguing that people are able to resist the preferred meaning of cultural objects by reading and shaping dominant meaning in oppositional and alternative ways. Consumers, then, through their shopping patterns or by altering or personalizing objects they have bought are able to inscribe their own meanings onto the objects that become a part of their self-identity.

If people are able to re-signify objects, impose their own meanings on the objects they buy, then it is possible to see possessions as a meaningful part of a person, rather than simply situating that person within an alienating 'system of objects'; however, this is still no reason to disregard the impact of the meaning of objects themselves on the individual as a part of a material culture. In addition, it is difficult to locate the basis of individuals' abilities to re-signify objects - the basis of meaning in culture or agency continues to be a debate within the social science. In order to begin to bring these positions closer together, it is important in social research on person-object relations to be sensitive to this inter-relationship between both the power of the object as a part of material culture, and also people's ability to re-signify objects according to their particular life-experiences.¹ One way of breaking down this opposition is to conceive of the relationship between

individuals and material possessions as an interactive dialectic. In other words, it is more instructive to see the differences between the subject and object as a continuum, rather than polar opposites. In constructing a self identity, people interact with objects which represent past life experiences in use and reflection; hence, self-identity emerges out of a dialectic inter-relationship between subjectivity and objective personal, social, and cultural forms.

II. Personal Objects as a Constructed Social and Cultural Environment

To this point, the discussion has focused entirely on relations between material possessions and individual identity. The second theme, though related to the first, centres on how possessions mediate social relations and situate people within a social community and cultural context. The following section outlines the way this theme has been conceptualized in the theoretical literature.

Goffman's work is sensitive to the ways people use material possessions when presenting themselves to others in interaction. In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life he categorizes the material setting, what he refers to the 'front', that influences and assists people in performing their roles in interaction. Part of this setting is a personal front. The personal front consists of the social

props or 'items of expressive equipment' which are identified with a person acting out a certain social role or performance. Without this equipment it would be more difficult or impossible for a person to comfortably engage in social interaction.

The importance of Goffman's work is that it illustrates the ways possessions impact and mediate social relations. On one level, possessions comprise an entire constructed environment, a front and back stage, frames to social interaction. On a second level, objects as personal equipment are employed as expressive equipment in interaction.

The exchange of personal objects is another way in which personal objects mediate social relations and locate people within certain social groups and communities. The work of anthropologists like Mauss and Levi-Strauss demonstrate the strong social bonds that are a result of gift giving (Levi-Strauss, 1957; Mauss, 1967). The social obligation that is implicated when one gives something to another can be a strong force in holding a person within a certain social and cultural situation. Personal objects as gifts can represent one's connectedness and social obligation to others within a family or a social community.

Similarly, McCracken (1987; 1988a) argues that personal objects that are passed down from one generation to another are not only an important part of a person's self in

terms of a family heritage, but also represent an obligation to carry on the tradition and social position of the family. In some situations, the material things belonging to a family are a burden to the person who must carry on a family tradition. In other cases it is a source of strength, providing people within a stable foundation for social practices. In either case, material possessions are not only consumed, but are also passed down, and these things are strong symbols of family heritage and social obligation. An extreme case of this are the family mansions and estates of British aristocracy, on which death duties had to be paid, some having to be opened to the general public as 'stately homes'.

As McCracken suggests, in addition to the impact possessions have on social relations, they also situate people within a certain social community and cultural context. The various theories which view possessions as an extension of the self, (as outlined in the previous section), also consider how certain personal objects reflect the part of the self that stems from social sources, like community and family. For instance, Belk (1988a) argues that the self is comprised of four different levels, individual, family, community, and group. A person's possessions are an extension of one or many of these different levels. Jewellery, Belk argues, can be a reflection of an individual self, while family possessions like the objects within a household are

closer to the part of one's self that is connected to the family (see also Berg, 1975; Farmer, 1986). Veblen (1983) also provides an extensive analysis of how material possessions situate people within a certain social class, and also are used through consumption as a means of maintaining their class position.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton identify three levels of representation in person-object relations: objects relating to one self, to other selves, and to the universe (1981). This framework makes a similar point as Belk in that the meaning of objects to people can be personal, social, or relate to questions of existence. In addition, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton also claim that object relations at these three levels can either function to differentiate people, representing one's unique qualities, or they can symbolize similarities, representing how people share certain qualities.

The importance of this aspect of person-object relations is in conceptualizing how material possessions are both on one level an important part of the self and self-identity and at the same time on another level a meaningful part of an entire constructed environment - a social and cultural environment which carries the potential to be enabling and also limiting depending on the situational context in question. It seems as if more theoretical attention needs to spent on the various values and meanings

of possessions, and also the various social and cultural levels and contexts in which these possessions are meaningful.

III. Personal Objects as a Social and Cultural Resource

The third theme in person-object relations is the use of material possessions as a cultural resource. This final section outlines the limited theoretical work focusing on the different ways in which personal objects act as an empowering and beneficial force for people, and in social life in general.

The work of Csikszentmihalyi, and especially Rochberg-Halton stresses the way in which personal objects are source of personal cultivation. As noted previously, for these two sociologists the nature of the relationship between possession and one's self is the psychic energy invested in an object when working towards some goal. When that goal is achieved, then the object becomes a symbol of personal growth and accomplishment. The example they use is a farmer and his/her field. The more the farmer works the land the more it becomes a part of him/herself. A field that the farmer has spent a lot of time cultivating becomes a source of personal cultivation in itself because the farmer can see in the field the result of his/her hard work.

McCracken (1987), in his anthropological works on the consumption of culture, argues that the expressive qualities

of objects enable them to perform social and cultural work. For instance, personal possessions can act as a source of continuity, providing people with a stable environment in which to weather times of crisis or change. Furthermore, certain objects can be appropriated by people, especially the elderly, as a means of re-defining themselves as they grow older.

Related to his work on the elderly, McCracken also recognizes the use of personal objects as a material mnemonic device. Memories of past life-experience, or past generations are contained and passed on through material possessions. Similarly, Halbwach's (1980) writing on 'collective memory' explores the social nature of memory, and how it is available to people in the social environments that they construct, partially through their material possessions.

Research which views objects as a resource illustrate other aspects of material possessions, such as their mnemonic quality, which is at times lost in the theoretical work focusing primarily on the nature of the relationship between people and their possessions. These theoretical works on the useful qualities of personal objects also provide a focus for empirical and applied research on person-object relations. For instance, this material on the role of objects as resources for personal cultivation, and their potential for representing memories and in negotiating life-transitions or changes in self-definition is particularly relevant and

useful in studying the meaning of objects for people who have recently migrated from one culture to another.

In sum, the empirical and theoretical literature in person-object relations, though interdisciplinary, tends to focus on three areas. The first is the use of objects in the construction of self-identity. The second considers the ways in which objects combine to form an entire ordered environment and mediate social relations. The third area examines the social and cultural 'work' that material possessions perform. The organization of this research according to these three themes will hopefully make the material more accessible, and illustrate areas which require further study.

Notes

1. The theoretical literature on person-object relations has tended to exclude the body as an objectified part of the self, or as a meaningful cultural possession to be sculpted and disciplined. In the sociology of sport research has been conducted on the experience felt by athletes after serious injuries which offers insight into the connection between a self-identity and the body or parts of the body. In addition, there is increasing interest in the sociology of the body which focuses on the central role of the body in the constitution of a self-identity, and the increasing emphasis on the body in contemporary consumer culture. Literature on the body has focused on how the body is constituted as a cultural object, rather than simply a fixed biological entity. Although not specifically related to this research, the body is nonetheless an integral part of the self and how it adorned and constructed; as a result, this literature must be viewed as an instructive addition to the theoretical and empirical understanding of the inter-connection between people and their personal objects.

Chapter Three

Analytical Framework

The purpose of this section is to outline the issues which are central to this study. The research questions discussed in this section establish the central concerns which were addressed in the interviews with the participants, and are intended as a guideline for analyzing the data collected. There are three main areas which are addressed. The first focuses on the general experiences of immigrants during their migration and eventual settling in Canada. The second centres on issues relating to the material possessions immigrants brought with them, and those that were left behind; specifically the type of objects, the value of these objects, and the loss felt from leaving personal objects. The third area is concerned with how material possessions are a cultural and social resource for immigrants when moving from one culture to another. What follows is a brief discussion of these three research questions and main issues that arise from each.

-I-

The situation of immigration is important to this study in that individuals who emigrate must grapple with common issues. In particular, they have to evaluate which

material possessions are important and why. In focusing on migration as an example of a life-transition, it is important to provide a general description of the events and issues which accompany uprooting from one country and culture and relocating to another as expressed by the people participating in the study. The accounts made by immigrants about their move from Eastern Europe to Canada is valuable in itself; however, the intention of this initial section is to provide a context in which to understand the relationship between people and their material possessions at a time of life-transition. Descriptions of why people left, the legal and political restrictions associated with their move, and the circumstances and contingencies involved in their journey westward all provide insight into the issues people are forced to make in terms of evaluating which possessions are most valuable at this time of their life. Furthermore, these common experiences help to illustrate the more pragmatic limitations created by the move such as size of object or fear of confiscation which impacts what may or may not have been brought. Apart from concerns relating specifically to immigration itself, relating the experience of migrating places in perspective the subsequent theoretical issues relating more specifically to relations with material possessions raised in the subsequent areas.

-II-

Of all the possessions people accumulate there are only a certain few they will be able to bring when migrating. The second set of issues focuses on the possessions immigrants were able to bring, and the things they decided to leave behind. There are three inter-related questions which make up this second area. The first and most obvious, given the situation of migrating, is what were the common types of objects that immigrants felt were important to bring, and what were they actually able to bring and what did they have to leave behind. Apart from a general account of the objects brought and left, it is important to take into consideration the nature of these objects themselves.

The second question addresses the reasons why immigrants chose to bring the objects that they did. This issue is framed in terms of what value, or values, each possession has for the person who is emigrating. This question is designed to address the reasons why it was important for a person to bring a particular object, or group of objects - what significant meaning this object held for them when they were leaving Eastern Europe. One issue that is important to this question is to what extent the value of an object was based in characteristics of the object itself, or whether the importance of the object was in the life-experience that it represented. One of the main assumptions behind this study is that at times of life transition, such

as immigration, not only does the value of an object become more significant, but people tend to value objects which represent or embody significant life-experiences. Having these objects over others assist individuals in reorganizing and redressing their past life-experiences in preparation for the future changes (Redfoot & Back, 1988). An instructive way of addressing this issue is to locate the value of material possessions according to a range of values organized according either to some characteristic of the object itself, or meaningful life-experiences that the object represents. The following are analytical categories which represent a range of possible values of a material possession according to this opposition between object-characteristics and life-experiences.

Life Experiences:

i. **Existential:** an object is valued because it represents experiences relating to significant events in an individual's life history. These are objects, such as birthday gifts or possessions representing or connected to personal accomplishments, which relate specifically to biographical events and happenings.

ii. **Social:** an object is valued because it relates to, and/or connects an individual, to a social community such as family, friends, and significant others. A photograph, for instance,

is often valued because it is a material representation of a significant person.

iii. **Cultural:** an object is valued because it represents experiences which transcend an individual's life history, such as a family or cultural heritage. In this category a bible or a family cookbook would be an example of an object which is valued because it transcends the 'existential' or biographical experiences of an individual.

Characteristics of the Material Possessions:

i. **Functional:** an object is valued because of its intended use, such as having a car for no other reason than as a mode of transportation.

ii. **Aesthetic:** an object is valued because of its perceived beauty, or a unique quality. In the case of an art object, a painting, for instance, may be valued for no other reason than its particular colour.

iii. **Economic:** an object is valued the because of its monetary worth. With collections of objects, such as baseball cards, the value of the card may only be related to its value as a 'collectable'.

The organization of this analytical framework makes

it possible to address general issues relating to which is more important to the immigrant, the object itself or what it represents in terms of experience. However, each category itself provides a space in which to explore specific issues relating to the value of material possessions. For instance, the 'functional' 'aesthetic' and 'economic' categories all raise questions in relating to what extent each had implications for immigrants when they were deciding which possessions were most valuable to bring. This also applies to the categories relating to life-experience. It is interesting to see which life-experiences were most valued as represented in material possessions. The range of value also provides an opportunity to examine how certain types of possessions had a variety of values for the immigrant; hence, there may be some things that are not only 'functional' but also hold some memory of a past relative thus also having 'social' value. Part of this question of value is whether certain objects were selected on the basis that they held multiple values for the immigrant.

The third question relating specifically to material possessions is the loss that is felt by immigrants as a result of having to leave some 'valuables' behind. One of the interesting ways to illustrate how people are connected to their possessions is to ask them how they feel as a result of not having them. When emigrating not everything can be brought and the break with some valuable things may be fairly

permanent. This break provides the opportunity to ask people about what these things represented to them, what they did with them when they left, and how they are managing both practically and emotionally without the presence of these personal objects.

-III-

This discussion of loss and value leads into the third set of issues to be discussed in this section; the various ways the material possessionst that were brought were a social and cultural resource for immigrants. As McCracken (1988) argues, objects hold the potential to act as a source of memory, assist people to weather times of crisis, help to redress and redefine one's self identity, and other socially beneficial 'work'. This section is designed to identify and illustrate the various ways in which the types of objects immigrants brought with them were used as a resource in uprooting from one culture and moving and settling in another. In addition, this section provides an opportunity to examine how immigrants use particular objects, perhaps those representing specific life-experiences, to construct a self-identity within the context of moving from one political and cultural context, that of Eastern Europe, to the political and cultural climate of Canadian society.

Chapter Four

Methods and Methodology

Research Design

There are various situations of life transition, such as people relocating or the loss of possessions as a result of fire or theft. Immigration, though, appeared to be a manageable and interesting cross cultural situation to study. For the most part, when people emigrate they must evaluate the meaning and importance of their possessions in light of the fact that they will be uprooted from their culture, family, and friends; furthermore, they also must adapt to another culture, and establish their lives anew. Other legal, financial, and practical factors restrict what can and cannot be brought. These factors limit the number of possessions brought, and provides an opportunity to ask questions about meaningful objects left behind. Finally, studying the particular situation of immigration makes it possible to address key theoretical issues regarding the inter-connections between people and their material possessions at a time of life-transition. In addition, this research is a valuable contribution to research on person-object relations since issues relating to the meaning of objects during life-transitions and more specifically the situation of immigration have not previously been addressed.

Having decided to study immigration, the next question was which immigrants would be best to focus on. Eastern Europe was chosen for two reasons. First, there would be a sufficient population to sample as a result of the influx of immigrants to Canada from these countries. Second, recent immigrants from a number of these countries were available and willing to participate in the study.

It was necessary to establish certain boundaries to the scope of the study, especially in terms of the population of immigrants to be sampled. The decisions regarding these limits were made after a brief pilot study comprised of general interviews with recent immigrants from Poland. This pilot provided an initial understanding of the situation and experiences of immigrants, and the kind and number of objects they brought and left behind. These initial interviews also contributed to developing and choosing the specific methods used in the research.

The research is limited to people who planned to emigrate, rather than those who had to leave or felt they were forced to leave. The situation of emigrating and being a refugee both imply a certain "uprootedness"; however, they are seen to be two different experiences. Emigrating, for the most part, gives people more opportunity to consider which objects are most important to them, and which possessions to bring or leave behind. Refugees may not have had the time or opportunity to undertake the selection process, and the

circumstances of their relocation to Canada is much more a matter of necessity rather than choice.

The study is also limited to immigrants who have been in the country less than ten years. This decision was made because recent immigrants would more likely be able to recall their experiences of moving to Canada. Very recent immigrants were avoided as well because it was important to the researcher that the immigrants interviewed have a sufficient command of English. When there was a problem with language when talking to immigrants about their experiences, a third person was asked to translate. However, this situation only arose once with the people who participated in the study. It is arguable that, taking into consideration the political situation as it existed for most of the subjects in Eastern Europe, immigrants who have been in the country a number of years are more willing to talk openly about their experiences and the objects they brought and left behind.

There was an unexpected limitation to the study as a result of focusing on Eastern Europe. In most of these countries, especially Poland and Hungary, people are not allowed to take objects out of the country that were made before the Second World War. The cultural heritage of these nations suffered greatly during that time, and such objects are considered part of the culture that must remain as a means of preserving it. The impact of this national policy on the study was that more attention had to be focused on

objects left behind, as well as those things that were brought. For the most part, if an object was meaningful to the person, it was identified regardless of whether it was brought or left. However, participants were sensitive to the fact that their families and countries had not been allowed to establish a heritage as it was confiscated each time the country was invaded. The consequence of this was an initial denial of the material accumulation of possessions; however, as immigrants talked more about their possessions, the process of accumulation and the importance of objects as a connection to a family and national heritage did emerge in the dialogue.¹

Population

The study was conducted in two large Canadian cities: Hamilton Ontario, and Calgary Alberta. The sampling procedure began by contacting a number of different immigration services, and people active in local churches which sponsor immigrants from Eastern Europe. These sources provided a number of participants, and were contacted regularly in case they had more information about additional immigrants who were interested in the study. The majority of the people who participated, however, were referred from someone who had already been interviewed. This snowball type of sampling, though not random, was an effective and appropriate way of contacting and interviewing recent immigrants. The

participants seemed to feel more comfortable about the research and talking about their experiences knowing they were referred by a friend or relative. Having respondents referred, though, may have limited the range of different experiences of immigrants who were not contacted as a result of the sampling method.

A total of 25 people were interviewed, 16 of whom immigrated as a family or as a couple, while the other nine participants came to Canada by themselves. The number of people from each country in Eastern Europe are as follows:

Poland	9	(3-couples, 3-single)
Hungary	6	(1-couple, 4-single)
Ukraine	6	(2-couples, 2-single)
Czechoslovakia ...	4	(1-couple, 2-single)

The number of couples made the gender division almost equal: fourteen men and eleven women were involved in the study. Of the single participants, only three women, compared to six men, migrated alone. With the exception of one woman from the Ukraine who had been in the country for a year and a half, all of the participants had been in the country at least five years, and no longer than 10 years.

The education level and occupational status of the population in the study was relatively homogeneous. All of the participants had completed the equivalent of a high

school diploma, and all but four had some post-secondary education. As a result of the high education level, most of the people interviewed held professional positions in their home countries before migrating. Often the move required a drastic drop in socio-economic status as credentials achieved in Europe were not recognized in Canada. When interviewed, most of the participants were involved in some form of education as a means of making up the difference in their credentials so they could return to their previous occupation.

The age of the participants followed a similar pattern. The age ranged between twenty-five and fifty-five. The following chart, however, gives a better idea of the similar ages of the people in the study:

		<u>Number of Immigrants:</u>
<u>Age:</u>	25-29	3
	30-35	11
	36-40	8
	41-45	2
	46-50	0
	51-55	1
	<u>Total:</u>	25

Twenty two of the participants are between the ages of 25 and

40, three are over forty, and only three are below 30 years.

It may have been more beneficial to have a range of ages and socio-economic positions. The resources needed to emigrate, whether the individual was sponsored or not, at least partially explains the similarity of the people in the study. The unavailability of Eastern European immigrants from other social positions makes the similarity between participants a limitation of the study. However, this limitation also provides a specific homogeneous group of immigrants to focus on and discuss in the analysis of the data collected.

Methods

Person-object relations is an area of research that has great potential for the use of qualitative and ethnographic methods. Unfortunately, there have been few studies which have looked in detail at this relationship between people and their material possessions in this way. This research tends to be located in areas such as marketing or aging, and does not provide an in-depth analysis of the data collected. The emphasis is more on the applied focus of the research, rather than the experiences or relationships of the participants involved.

Most of the empirical studies on person-object relations have sampled a large number of people, and have made broad claims based on their research regarding the

connection between people and their objects (see Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988). There is also a tendency for more applied studies, especially of the elderly, to incorporate quantitative methods as means of establishing correlations between the personal objects and variables such as age, class and gender (see Dittmar, 1987; Prentice, 1987; Rubinstein, 1987).

The methodological approach of all this research does not provide the possibility for very detailed or in-depth analysis of various ways in which people relate to their possessions, and the significance these objects have to their lived experience and self-definition. For instance, rarely do studies include excerpts from the interview data. As a result, the reader is forced to consider only the researcher's interpretation of the data, without support from the data itself. In the discourse there is little description of significant objects, or examples of specific experiences and situations in which personal objects play an important role in a person's life.

As a result of this gap in studies of person-object relations, a qualitative methodology, relying primarily on interviews with recent immigrants, seemed to provide the most instructive approach to this research. A number of alternative qualitative methods were considered for this research. For instance, it would have been interesting to take a life history approach asking immigrants to review the

importance of their meaningful material possessions before migrating, during the migration, and after having settled in Canada. This approach, however, seem to place more emphasis on immigration rather than the meaning of material possessions. In addition, in talking about objects, more established Eastern European immigrants in Canada may have more difficulty remembering and reconstructing the meaning of their material possessions throughout the life course. Thus, considering the exploratory nature of research and the possible feelings of apprehension on the part of participants, it was decided that in-depth interviews, combined with field notes taken about the objects and how they are arranged, would be the best research strategy.²

The interview as a research method, as Lofland and Lofland (1984, p12) argue, is intended as "a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials which can be used in qualitative analysis (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). The interviews were designed to elicit general detailed information about the experiences of migrating, and the inter-relationship between immigrants and their material possessions. These data were coded, and interpreted according to the main theoretical interests of the study. Grounding the interpretation of the data in in-depth conversations enables the researcher to have better understanding of the material being collected and analyzed. Moreover, this approach provides the opportunity to

address the central themes within the research, and still allow space in the analysis for the experiences of the subjects being studied.

The structure of the interview was informed by McCracken's (1988b) text, The Long Interview. Participants were interviewed in their own homes, or in a home of a friend. Each interview lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, leaving the opportunity for additional information from casual conversation before and after the more formal interview questions. In the case of couples, both people were interviewed at the same time, and it was stressed that each person be given an equal opportunity to speak. For the most part, the experiences of couples blended together and were expressed as such, rather than each person expressing their own independent account.

All interviews were guided by a questionnaire developed out of the initial pilot study. However, in order to establish more of a balance between the researcher and the interviewee, the questionnaire was only used as a guide; the participants were encouraged to bring up and talk about issues which were not included in the questionnaire (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). If significant themes or patterns emerged out of the interviews, then they were included in the questionnaire and brought up in subsequent interviews.³

The questionnaire covered issues relating to the experience of migrating, and also the study's central

research questions outlined in the analytical framework (Chapter Three). Each person was asked to talk about the circumstances of their immigration, and their experiences of moving to Canada. Following this initial part of the interview, participants were asked general questions about the objects they brought and the value of these things, and then secondly about the objects they had left behind. When possible participants were asked to comment on how the objects they had brought were useful to them in their move from Eastern Europe to Canada. In addition, when immigrants talked about the material possessions left behind they were asked to comment on the loss felt as a result of having to leave something of value, and also what they did with the objects they were not able to bring.

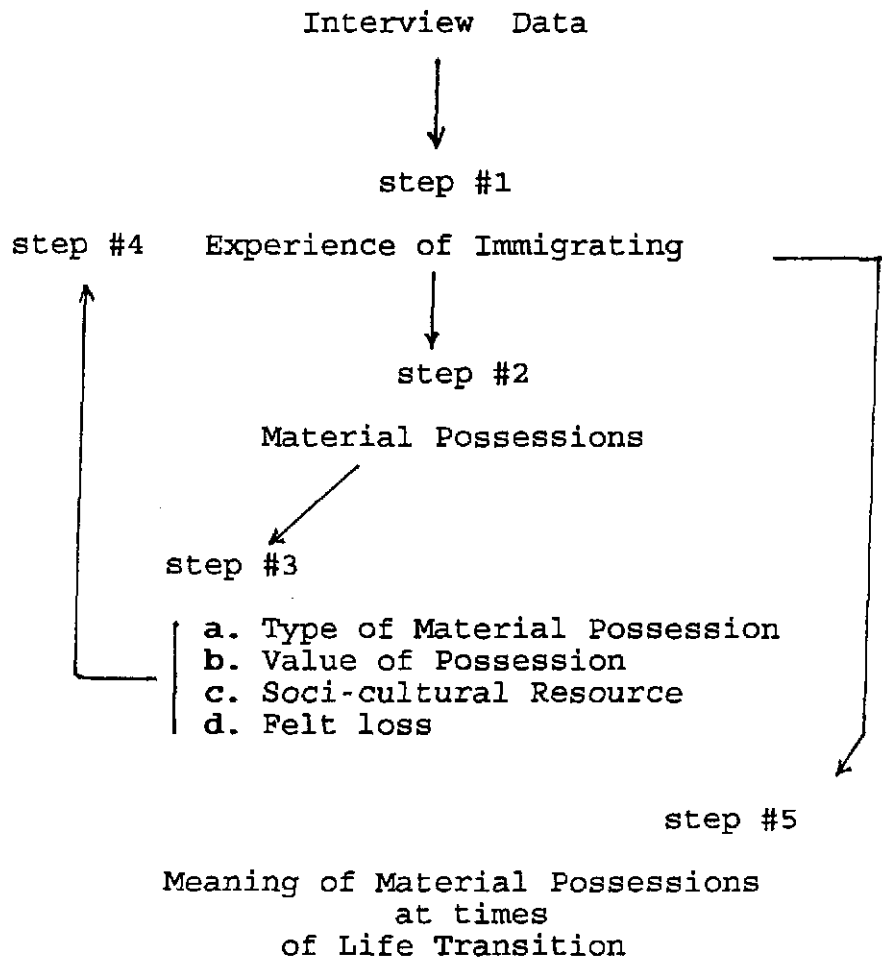
Interviews were taped when possible, however, eight participants asked not to be taped; in these instances, notes were taken on the content of the interview. A problem encountered in the research was that some of the participants were reluctant to disclose specific information about their possessions, such as the names of books they brought. This sense of suspicion amongst some immigrants calls into question the validity of the data collected in the interviews. It is possible that some information was withheld for fear of political repercussions considering that all of the immigrants had lived under relatively repressive regimes where suspicion was often a way of life, and were probably

feeling somewhat insecure about their new status in Canada. One of the assumptions in the methodology is that enough trust and rapport was established between the participant and researcher so that immigrants felt free to talk openly about their experiences. Most of the people interviewed did seem comfortable talking about their objects and experiences once they were convinced that the researcher was only interested in their material possessions and experience of migration. The rapport required between interviewee and researcher was established by having respondents referred to by friends, stressing the purpose of the study, and also assisted by the enjoyment people take when talking about the meaningfulness of their possessions. Once people began talking about their things and realized that the interviewer was interested in their objects and experiences, the distance between researcher and participant was greatly diminished.

Data from the interviews were transcribed and coded according to the following five step coding system. This coding system draws on ethnographic research methods, especially those outlined in Spradley's The Ethnographic Interview (1979), and also Hasselkus' research on the ethical dilemmas in family care giving (1991). The interview data was divided according to, first, talk about the experience of migrating, and second, talk about the material possessions brought and left behind. The third step was coding the grouped data about objects into the four following

categories: (i) **types** (which objects were brought and left behind, and the pattern of their distribution) (ii) **value** (the importance of the object according to the range of values typology outlined in the theoretical framework (iii) **resource** (how the object was beneficial for the immigrant) (iv) and **loss** (sentiments about having to leave valued objects in Eastern Europe). Each of these four categories were then related back to the experience of migration (step #4) as a means of exploring (step #5) the various meanings objects have for people when they are participating in a major life-transition from one culture to another.

Coding System



The coding system outlined is designed so that the interpretation of each level of analysis informs and builds on the next level (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). This cumulative approach to qualitative research allows the researcher to probe deeper into the same qualitative interview data, and build on emerging themes and patterns (Dobbert, 1982; Geertz, 1973; Miles, 1983; Hasselkus, 1991).

Notes

1. The final chapter of this thesis contains a more detailed analysis of the limitations of the methodology and interpretations incorporated in the study.
2. Initially, the use of photographs was planned to accompany the interviews and fields notes as an additional qualitative methodology. However, in the first few interviews, photographing material possessions seemed to inhibit the rapport between the researcher and the person being interviewed. Consequently, it was dropped in order to promote a safe and comfortable environment in which to conduct the interviews. The use of photography would be a beneficial method of data collection in this area of research, unfortunately it did not seem appropriate in this particular study.
3. The interview guide is included as Appendix A.

Chapter Five

Interpretation and Analysis

Introduction

This interpretation and discussion section is divided into three parts. The first outlines the common experiences of immigrants in their migration from their country of origin to Canada. The remaining two sections focus specifically on their material possessions. The second discusses the type and value of the personal objects immigrants brought with them, and the loss felt having to leave certain valued possessions behind. The final section discusses the ways in which the objects brought were a cultural and social resource.

The Experience of Migration

The following section outlines the common experiences of immigrants during their migration to Canada, and the implications of this experience to their decision regarding what material possessions to bring or leave behind. One of the most striking aspects of the experience of the immigrants interviewed is the tremendous amount of time, planning, and energy that was involved in arranging their migration. The decision to leave their country and migrate was made and planned years in advance, and often the actual relocation took even longer when carried out. However, the feeling of

uprootedness that accompanies permanently leaving a culture can be very traumatic for everyone involved regardless of the amount of forethought given to the decision. Many of the immigrants did talk about the difficulties of this process, and the initial problems of adapting to a new setting and culture. The events, circumstances and motivations involved in this migration process are important to outline because they illustrate the conditions specific to the situation of migration that influence the connections between people and their material possessions at this time of life-transition.

Rarely did the people interviewed plan to come directly from Eastern Europe to Canada. The journey was made up of a series of moves to different countries, and usually required two or more years to complete. The route most commonly taken was first to a major city in Western Europe, and then finally to Canada. For some the move Canada was generally a result of not being able to stay permanently in Western Europe. The following experience of one woman from the Ukraine was typical:

I first visited my aunt in England as a young girl. As I got older I decided to move with my sister to England. I lived in London with my sister for two years going to music school. I met a lot of interesting people and wanted to stay but after two years and not having been accepted in England I met a couple from Calgary who agreed to help me migrate to Canada. The church the couple belonged to sponsored me, and soon after I arrived in Calgary.

However, for some immigrants their original plan was to move to anywhere in North America, and the stop over in Western Europe was a matter of financial and practical necessity.

An interesting pattern emerged regarding this route taken by immigrants on their way to Canada. Immigrants from the same country chose a similar route through Western Europe and then through to Canada. Immigrants from Poland went first to Italy, usually to go to university and work part time. One woman went to Rome to complete her M.A. and then after she finished decided to leave for Canada rather than return to Poland. Another Polish immigrant went to study international relations in Italy but not being able to migrate to that country then decided with his wife to move Canada because they were able to obtain landed immigrant status.

We moved to Italy at the same time. I came first to go to school. It is good way to leave the country and a lot of people go to Italy with unresolved problems so it was also good for my degree in International Relations. We could not settle in Italy on a regular basis. We could either be political refugees in Italy or migrate to Canada.

For people from Poland the move to Italy for educational purposes with initial intentions of returning, was a way of leaving the country permanently and deferring political suspicion.

This strategy was not expressed by immigrants from other Eastern European countries; however, in each country there was a distinct route to Western Europe. The people

interviewed from Hungary and Czechoslovakia all went first to Austria through Vienna and then on to live in Germany. Immigrants from the Ukraine moved first usually to England, but also Greece and Asia. There was no clear logic expressed by immigrants as to these patterns. Literature on chain migration suggests that informal traditional connections between Eastern and Western European countries and connections from previous people moving back and forth across the continent, especially family and friends, might account for these established patterns. (Murray, 1987).

The routes and patterns of migration described above have implications for the material possessions immigrants were able to bring with them, and their relations with these objects. In terms of transportation, the initial move across the European continent provided more opportunity to bring objects because immigrants generally went either by car or train. For instance, one family coming from Hungary brought possessions in their car without looking suspicious and had other objects smuggled by family members through Yugoslavia and then to Germany.

Some things came after us. Some friends took records and other valuable things to Yugoslavia under the carpet of the car. Later we drove down and met them to pick these things up.

For other immigrants, such as those from Poland going to university in Italy, the political situation made it easier to make frequent trips back and forth by car.

The move across the Atlantic proved to be more difficult because it was necessary to travel by plane which limited even more which material possessions could be brought, and increased the number of objects that were left in Eastern and Western Europe. As one woman said:

There was little restriction because it was viewed as a legal immigration, but since we went on the plane there is only so much you can bring, What can you take, 40kg. a person by plane. But when you think about it what do you take? It is a hard decision because you would like to take so many things but you are limited by the plane.

The general process involved in deciding the importance of material possessions, then, can last many years and may include a number of locations in different countries. It begins in Eastern Europe and continues each time a person or family settles in a place, such as Western Europe, and then decides to relocate again, in this instance to Canada. Each relocation involves a re-accumulation and re-evaluation of possessions. When the final decision is made to move from Western Europe to Canada the evaluation process begins again, although to a lesser extent. Thus, at times the possessions that are valued by immigrants in Canada were acquired while migrating, rather than objects brought from Eastern Europe, because these possessions represented their experiences of migrating to Canada. At times the objects brought were of places immigrants lived while in Western Europe:

This picture - we brought it from Germany. It is of the place we lived there. We would walk by and look at it, but it was too expensive and we could not buy it until later. We also had special pictures of places in Hungary, but we couldn't bring them all of them. We do have some of them though.

With other people the objects they brought from Western Europe reminded them of friends that they had met while they lived there.

From England I brought a video tape of some friends there. A few of them made a video tape of all of us just before I left and I have it here. One friend made me a china plate with a painting on it. It's very beautiful and reminds me of the times I spent with them in England. I have it displayed in my room.

An additional dimension to this process of evaluating the importance of possessions that arose from this situation of migration is the personal objects that were sent or brought by others back and forth from Eastern Europe to Western Europe and to Canada. People may not have been able to take the possessions they wanted by train, car, or plane, but they were able to ask family and friends to bring things on trips or send things once they had settled permanently in one location. In some instances people left valued things with the intention of having them sent once they were settled. By the time the immigrants were interviewed, however, most of the things they had planned to have sent had arrived already and they were talked about as possessions

that they would have taken if they had had the resources to do so. In other instances, people still had plans to return to Eastern Europe to retrieve the things they had left with family or friends. These objects seemed still to be valued possessions that had to be left behind even though it was likely that they would be reclaimed at some point in the near future. In general, the immigrants' view of the objects brought included the things that they physically brought with them and had accumulated along their travels, as well as the things they had sent for immediately after settling in Canada.

When immigrants talked about their initial planning to leave their country, the prime motivation was a general dissatisfaction with the political climate of Eastern Europe. This issue was not explored in depth. However, it illustrated the long strategic planning that was necessary for this move. A family in Hungary spent years slowly preparing for the trip by gradually limiting their possessions and moving into smaller and smaller places so that no one would suspect that they planned to leave.

We sold the whole house. Expensive leather furniture. We moved to a smaller apartment. A year before we left I had nightmares. For a year and a half we planned this. No one could figure out why we were selling our house, moving to smaller place. We told everyone we needed the money. "Why do you sell the washing machine?" they would ask. We could not tell anyone.

Even the children within this family were not told of the

plans to leave until after they had passed over the border in fear that they might reveal the intentions of migration unknowingly to the border guards. Though not all the experiences of immigrants were couched in such secrecy, their move was not often made public knowledge and there certainly was a concern about political repercussion as a result of leaving the country.

This expressed concern also demonstrated the tension between people's connections to their ethnic background and a desire to live in a less restrictive environment. Often people felt torn between the limitations that they perceived were placed on them by the political system in place in Eastern Europe, and relations with friends and family and their rootedness in a certain place.

I felt locked in Poland. I was not able to realize all that I wanted to do in the system that exists in Poland. It is a life that requires a moral compromise. In Poland you are woven into within many relations, some of which you feel you really don't want to be involved in. We didn't ever think about going back because life in Poland was still very unstable. But we still wanted to keep our ties with Poland, our contacts, and our understanding of the situation and changes, we have a lot of family and friends there.

The immigrants interviewed expressed relief with the recent changes in the political climate of Eastern Europe. There was a certain distrust of the political system expressed, especially in light of the unrest which has emerged in some Eastern European countries. Part of this

distrust was voiced in terms of the history of political unrest that has been a part of their family and national traditions. Many people in talking about their possessions related stories of having all their family possessions taken away as a result of foreign invasions. It is difficult for many of them to imagine a time when their nations will have complete autonomy.

I think that the people in power are still in power. I still will not go back. Maybe in time but not yet. My family has lost so much over the generations, our farm, all our family things - there is really no point in returning any more. I have my home here now.

This unstable and unfortunate history of Eastern European countries, and the current social and political environment there has an impact on the objects people were able to bring, or had available to bring. One recurring theme expressed by immigrants is the inability for their families historically to keep valuable heirlooms because they were taken away during invasions. Many immigrants have stopped trying to recapture this lost past. One couple who had met when migrating, one from Hungary and another from Czechoslovakia, both originally came from farming backgrounds but their families were forced to give up their farms and start working in mines. Consequently, their heritage has both a bitter mixture of being affluent land owners, combined with a labour oriented, much less affluent mining background. For both of these people deciding what to bring was couched in

the resentment they felt from losing the things they felt they should have with them that were taken away, and still wanting to keep some connections and memories of their past.

We didn't have very much in our family, most of it was taken away. I wanted to have some things of my father's, he was a farmer and also made some recordings but they were all taken away and destroyed. Some times we only had hours to leave our homes before they came and destroyed or took everything. Sometimes I think it is better to try to forget these times and these things, but it's hard. At least I have a life here now.

The voice of the couples from Hungary and Czechoslovakia is more dramatic than most of the experiences of the immigrants interviewed; however, immigrants did talk about how the historical past of Eastern Europe limited the availability and number of material possessions that were meaningful in terms of a family tradition. Another immigrant expressed this situation in the following terms:

There is not much in Poland to have in terms of long term family heirlooms. When we were taken over our things were often plundered as well. Often you only had a few hours to prepare for an occupation. So, our ancestors found themselves in a similar situation as we are in now in relation to our belongings. A lot of national heritage was lost. Our museums destroyed and libraries were destroyed, plundered. Not too many things have been preserved, like a more stable society. It is much harder to pass things on.

Immigrants also generally tended to express bitterness at times about the possessions that they felt were stolen from them. This feeling of indignation was closely related, it

seemed, to the general dissatisfaction with the political system in their countries which initially motivated them to migrate. Though many of the family heirlooms would have been taken during invasions of prior generations, the immigrants still felt quite strongly about these events, and the repercussion of occupation to their families.

There were also legal limitations regarding the historical possessions that immigrants were able to take with them. The governments of most Eastern European countries have legislation which prevents objects that were made before or during the Second World War from leaving the country. These objects, although privately owned, are considered a part of the country's cultural heritage and are being kept in the country as a means of preserving this heritage through artifacts. A woman, talking about the objects she could not bring with her, expressed the frustration of these legal restrictions:

There were rings, and some other small things. All historical things that I could not bring because of government regulations. They want to keep things that are old and of historical value to the country. They will probably be put in a big box.

If people who are leaving the country wish to take one of these objects they must have a permit issued by the government. No one that I spoke to was able to obtain a permit, and most had owned few of these restricted objects. Some immigrants still hoped that at some point in the future

they would be able to re-claim these possessions and bring them to Canada, while others did not mind leaving them because they could understand why it was important for the country to keep and maintain a national heritage through cultural artifacts, especially after attaining political autonomy.

The experiences of immigrants, both in terms of the intricate process involved in their move to Canada and the social and political context of living in and leaving an Eastern European culture, placed unique limitations and conditions on how immigrants evaluated what possessions they were to bring with them and what they had to leave behind. This information is essential in analyzing and understanding the value and meaning of the material possessions to immigrants from Eastern Europe. This section has touched upon some of the issues involved in the evaluation process that are specifically related to the situation and experience of migrating out of Eastern Europe. In the subsequent parts the emphasis is more on the types of material possessions brought and left behind, and the specific values these objects have for immigrants coming to Canada. However, these sections should be read keeping in mind the social context of migrating from Eastern Europe outlined here.

Material Possessions

This section focuses on three issues relating to the

material possessions immigrants brought, and those they had to leave behind. First, the type and character of the material possessions immigrants brought with them. Second, the value of these objects to immigrants: why they felt that these things were important to bring with them. And third, the loss expressed by immigrants when they were not able to bring certain valued possessions with them. Each of these general issues will also address other specific questions and concerns regarding the importance of material possessions to immigrants, and the ways in which they are connected to these objects.

Each immigrant interviewed identified a unique collection of material possessions. Consequently, it is necessary for analytical purposes to group these possessions into categories that reflect the common issues of the people interviewed. The task in categorizing these possessions is to use them effectively in illustrating the structured similarities between immigrants, and still retain some sense of the variety and character of the objects that were valued by immigrants. This balance is important in illustrating the specific meanings of material possessions as expressed by individuals, and also the general structural similarities between the meanings of objects to all the immigrants interviewed.

It is also instructive to divide the material possessions immigrants talked about into those that were

brought, and objects that were left behind. Immigrants made a clear distinction between the material possessions that they felt were important to bring, which included the objects that they had sent over soon after arriving in Canada, and those possessions they would never be able to bring overseas. This division also addresses concerns and questions related to the type and value of the material possessions immigrants brought with them, as well as the connections between immigrants and the things they left behind.

I. Types of Material Possessions and their Value to Immigrants

This discussion begins by describing the different types of possessions brought, and the value of these objects as expressed by immigrants. It is important to recognize that the type and value of material possessions are very closely related. It is possible that the type of object can be by definition also its value to the immigrant. This was the case with a small number of objects which were brought specifically because of their use-value. This distinction between type and value, however, is still instructive in that it provides an opportunity to examine each issue separately, and helps to illustrate how the different types of objects brought have different and numerous values to immigrants, which was the case with most of the possessions identified. The section concludes with a discussion of the types of

possessions left, and the loss felt by immigrants as a result.

The entire sum of material possessions that each immigrant brought with them can be divided into three general categories. The most common type of material possession that immigrants identified as important to bring were cultural objects in the form of collections: things such as books, photographs and music. The second type can be described as memorabilia: small individual and unrelated objects having meaning in relation to a significant life experience. The third type includes a small number of objects which immigrants felt would be a practical necessity in the country, or more specifically the culture in which they were relocating. The following briefly describes the objects in each of these categories, and discusses how the character and nature of these different types of objects influenced why immigrants felt they were important to bring.

i. Collections of Cultural Objects

With only few exceptions, the first material possessions immigrants identified as important were collections of books, records, and photographs - most of the interviews centred around talk about these objects. The specific books, music, and photographs that people brought all varied. A number of people brought collections of children's books from their childhood, written in their

indigenous language. Others, as the following quotation illustrates, brought a variety of different books such as poetry, special interests, and texts relating to their occupation or academic studies.

Collecting books was one of my favourite activities. I have a really big collection. My collection reflects my various interests. For instance I have a great number of art albums in Polish, Italian, and Russian about art collections. A lot of scientific books from my field, but also sociology, sexology, medicine - all my different areas of interest.

Humorous books were also a favourite, especially humour written in a style unique to their indigenous culture, as well as genre novels associated with American popular culture such as romances and westerns.¹ When asked about specific banned comic books that were brought, one woman from Hungary responded:

When we read these books, even one or two pages, we feel really good. You can not speak this language you have to read it. The language is very special. When you read it you kill yourself laughing. I wanted my kids to learn this language and the humour. You have to read it a lot to be able to understand the humour.

The records collections immigrants brought tended to be a mixture of traditional music associated with their indigenous culture combined with music reflecting their own specific tastes. A small number of people collected classical music, while most had a variety of different forms of music, usually with an emphasis again on popular American music

similar to that which might be heard on a commercial radio station in Canada or the United States.

I brought quite a bit of music. Mostly tapes because they last longer than records. Also 45's and also some big 78's - even reel to reel ... It was square dancing music. I am not a gypsy, but I do have some gypsy in me and I like that. From my teens I brought a lot of dance music, some of which is Hungarian some American music too.

Though the woman quoted above preferred tapes, many immigrants were in the process of converting the music they have from the traditional records to compact discs, and enjoyed the variety and availability offered by North American consumer culture. Included in collections of music are the musical instruments that some immigrants felt were important to bring. As a cultural object, playing an instrument is a more direct way of accessing music than a record or tape. However, the musician also has a collection of music both written and memorized that accompanies the instrument and is available when s/he wants to play or hear a particular song. For instance, one person from Ukraine brought his instrument to Canada along with a set of written music.

I brought with me some records, and also books with Ukrainian songs. I also brought a small synthesizer. It helped me because I could make music for myself and friends in the community. It helped in community work, and also to keep some cultural values.

The photographs brought were generally of family and friends, as well as significant places, events, and experiences spanning an individual's entire life course and also across generations. The pictures taken during the years migrating to Canada were very common, especially in the case of a significant event as with one couple who were married in Italy just before they made the final move to Canada.

We brought all the photographs from our courtship time when we were in Italy. Our wedding photographs, and photographs from our honeymoon. They are our most precious memories. We do not go back and look at them that often, but sometimes when you have little to do when the weather is bad it is nice to go over them again.

As was the case with many of these objects, people often brought only a few photographs when they actually moved but had the rest of them sent soon after they arrived. In addition, these pictures arrived in disarray and then were subsequently categorized and organized into albums.

Yes we brought a lot of pictures - probably 1000 after the ones we left were sent over. Many of our slides had to be converted to the system people use here - it is taking a lot of time, I'm still doing it now. Especially the kids have special photographs. Last week I found some that I didn't know we had of the family and I was crying - I'm glad I found them.

What is significant about the type of material possessions described above is twofold. First, immigrants

only talked about cultural objects as collections rather than individually. Rarely did immigrants talk about the one book or one record that they felt was essential to bring with them. Instead, they expressed how it was important for them to have their collection of records, or at least a part of that collection. For instance, in the following segment an immigrant talks about the importance of his collection of books.

I used to have them all at hand, now I only have some of them. They are important because I collected them, they reflect my interests. Books are very valuable in Poland. The more effort you put into it the more valuable it becomes. Some books I traded, some I bought, and so forth.

Second, possessions such as books, music, and photographs are, to a greater or lesser extent, objectified forms of subjective understandings and experiences. The photograph is an excellent example of this type of cultural object. An individual can make a picture which is an objectified visual representation of what they wanted to capture through the lens. Whether it is a family member or the house they lived in as a child, that experience, or the individual's understanding of that experience, is represented in the photograph and becomes an object to keep, and most likely kept in an album organized along with other photographs taken of similar or related experiences.

The objectified structure of the book and the record

is less flexible than the photograph. Both objects are nonetheless still examples of objectified forms of a cultural understanding and experience. When an individual reads a book or listens to a record, as reader response and cultural theorists have argued, s/he constructs a subjective understandings of the meaning that is encoded in the text (see Tompkins, 1980; Fiske, 1987). As Morris Zapp, a literary theorist in David Lodge's Small World: An Academic Romance, repeatedly contended throughout the novel, "every decoding is another encoding" (1984). The musical instrument as this type of cultural object lies between the photograph and the book. Playing an instrument allows for more involvement and interpretation than the book. However, the music being played is not usually written by the person playing but someone else, so the text of the music is already objectified. If someone had the talent to write their own music and play it, then this would come closer to capturing lived experience in an objectified form as with the use of a camera.

It is arguable that cultural objects such as books, records, and photographs, as a result of their qualities outlined above, lend themselves to becoming more significant, especially when migrating from one place and culture to another. In the case of these objects as collections, Jean Baudrillard (1991), in his collection of essays entitled, Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny, argues that a collection

of possessions, and the collecting process itself, are ways in which people establish, reaffirm, and come to terms with their own subjectivity. For Baudrillard, the collection is a means of organizing perceived realities, experiences, and understandings: a way of continually locating and validating a sense of self-identity and completion (although never completely, because possessions always remain foreign and illusionary). The following segment is worth quoting as length as it illustrates this organizing, reassuring, and therapeutic function of the collection and the collecting process.

The collection, by itemising time into immutable terms which it can mobilise in reverse, represents the perpetual recurrence of a planned cycle, where man, departing from any of its terms in the certainty of returning to it, plays with infallibility the ceaseless games of birth and death. ... This is why the environment of private objects and their possession - the epitome is the collection - is a dimension of our lives as it is imaginary, as essential as dreams. It has been said that if someone were experimentally prevented from dreaming, then a severe psychic disturbance would rapidly ensue. It is certain that disorientation would be as immediate if someone were deprived of that regression or escapism in the game of possession, ... from inflecting his self through objects outside of time. We cannot live in absolute singularity, in an irreversibility whose sign is the moment of birth. It is this irreversible movement from birth to death that objects help us to resolve.

(Baudrillard, 1991 p51)

The possession of a collection of objects, then, as an objective and available form of the self, represented over a

number of years and generations, provide material in which people can strategically select and then use to escape, regress, and muse over life experiences, as in a dream, and use this time to re-organize and re-establish a self-identity anew during a time change or crisis.

The specific type of possession, as mentioned previously, is significant in this process as well. Baudrillard refers to all the possessions that a person has collected, or is actively collecting. It is important to define what the organizing principle within the selection and organization of this collection of objects. With someone who collects jazz music, searching for the pieces that are required to complete the collection is as important as the collection itself. With the case of immigrants there must be decision as to which possessions, within an entire organized system of possessions, would be most important to bring. The selection of objects at a time of life transition is another way of arranging and pursuing a collection of objects, organized according to the past life experiences and identity which immigrants want to remember, emphasize, and import to Canada. This choice of books, records and photographs, seems to be ideally suited for the reflective practice Baudrillard describes because these specific material possessions are all objective representations of the life experiences and understandings that are re-organized and re-established by the immigrants now wanting to settle in a new culture. This

use of the objects brought as a resource for immigrants is explored in more detail subsequently. The point being made at this juncture, though, is that the type and character of material possessions was influential in immigrants' decisions regarding what was important for them to bring.

ii. The Values of Collections

The value objects have for immigrants is central to the question of why they were important to bring when migrating. Certainly, as argued above, it was evident that in part the importance of collections was their status as objectified life experiences. An interesting aspect of these objects, however, was the range of value that they held for immigrants. This range was expressed in terms of objects representing different types of life experiences, as well as having a practical and functional value as well. It seemed that part of the general value of having a collection of cultural objects was in the various ways it could potentially be used by immigrants in their move to another culture. The remainder of this discussion examines the specific values of the cultural objects brought, and illustrates the importance of these things to immigrants.

Detailed description of the value of cultural objects tended to fall into three categories. In the first, cultural objects were associated with understandings and experiences relating specifically to the individual, such as significant

accomplishments, events, and places relating to his or her life history. This existential value of cultural objects was expressed usually in individual terms, but also at times as a couple's or family's experiences as well.

With objects like books and records immigrants talked about the importance of having something that they enjoyed reading or listening to: an object that contained some special meaning or understanding for them in terms of their own history or self-definition.

First of all my books were number one in importance. This is what I sent for because I knew I wouldn't be able to find them here. I am really into poetry, and I have my favourite poets. Whenever I am in a bad mood I always read the same poems over and over and over. I do, constantly! And it is the same with tapes, music. I think it is because everything I brought like that has a meaning as a part of my life. Books, tapes, music. Not useful things. If there is a hit this year and you're at an event, say with friends, then whenever I listen to it, it reminds me of that event. Each song reminds me of some event.

Books and records from childhood, often fairy tales or humorous books, were a point of reference for some immigrants; they wanted them in order to read a story that is familiar. Part of the appeal and value of these books and records, as well as other texts brought such as bibles, poetry, and fiction was that they were written in the immigrants' first language. When immigrants move to a place where very few people speak their language listening to this

music and reading these books was a way of returning to and talking in the language that they are most familiar and comfortable with.

When I came here I was so busy I was looking into the books. When there is hard times you know you go to the poems you are familiar with. Into those books which have maybe a spiritual connection with the home country, I can not forget about this reality. The bible, most of my books in Ukrainian language, very important. It is a type of spiritual language.

Some books and records, but especially photographs, were valued because of their association with some significant time, event, or place. Immigrants who attended university brought some records, but mostly books and photographs that they read or made during this period of their life.

I brought books generally from my university. If I see the book I connect it with a certain memory. It is the same with the university books. When I pick them up I know who taught the subject, what I learned. I do not remember the year, but I can see the face, who was in the class, how I was preparing for exams and things.

Other cultural objects that immigrants wanted to bring because of their association with significant events were photographs of things like weddings or of children at various times when they were growing up. In the following passage an immigrant from Hungary talks about the importance of the

photographs she brought.

We do not look at them that much. But it is nice to know that we have them and we can see them. When I look at the photograph I remember every moment of it, of that time. We do not look at it all the time, but just to remember. The part of the city that we lived in when in Germany. You can also see the children growing up from when they were in kindergarten, and at their birthdays.

Photographs, as the above segment illustrates, at times also represented places and locations that were important to a person, such as a city they lived in or the countryside around the area where they grew up. A number of immigrants mentioned how before leaving they went around to significant places in their life and photographed them so they would have it to remember and look back at in future years.

Before I left Poland I took a whole slew of Warsaw just to remember these places. Also so I could visually show them. They show the atmosphere, but nothing very sharp and distinctive. One day my daughter asked, 'Mom, didn't you have sunshine in Poland'. When looking at them we see how we change, our features, even our lifestyles changes so drastically. With photographs I can see how I looked a lot older than I do now. I do not want to put them completely away. It is part of our lives to show that something was happening.

Objects were also valued because they connected immigrants to significant others in their life, usually family and friends living in Europe. This social value of cultural objects, especially books, often came in the form of gifts. A book, for instance, would be important to an

immigrant not because of what is contained in the text, but because it was given as a gift from a significant person in their life. Often these gifts were important because they were given by a close member of the family at some time during their life history, or as a parting gift.

One particular song that a friend gave to me reminds me of the summer we spent together before I left. We received a number of gifts when we left for Hungary. I am attached to gifts it is difficult for me to part with them. Many times I know they are useless, but someone gave it to me and they liked it so I just have to keep it.

Bringing gifts from family, and friends giving gifts was a way for people to reinforce relationships that may weaken or were threatened as a result of the move to another country. The following reflection by a woman from Poland demonstrates how the power of the gift as a cultural object connects people over time.

I always enjoy reading my childhood fairy tales. They were given to me by my father. I can still remember the day he gave them to me. And I can almost hear the voice of my father who read them to me. This was his share in the family to read them to me. It is like smell, it is coded in my memory.

Though similar to the gift of the book described above, photographs and letters tended to have a more direct form of social value. Photographs of family and friends were very important for immigrants to bring because they felt it

connected them to these people. When people first arrived in the country it was common for them to use the photographs as a way of staying in contact with significant others that they missed at home, especially when they could not afford to talk to them on the phone or return for a visit.

In Canada we did not know anyone. I do not want to say we were lonely because we were fortunate to have each other. We provided the support to ourselves. It was easier than single people. Those kinds of things, the photographs, remind us that we have somebody who cares about us. It gives you some kind of comfort that you are not really alone, you do not have to do everything yourself - you have to struggle to do your best, but there are other people too.

Collections of letters had a similar type of social function. One woman from Poland would reread the letters that her family had sent her when she missed them, or was depressed or concerned about something in her life.

Some times you do not know why something is important. Like letters. When I came back home I was collecting old letters. I was collecting them because they were the beginning of our life and we were apart. I would never throw them away. I do not have much time to read them. but when you are mad at someone or miss them, when you do not see the whole picture, going back and reading them reminds me of the whole picture.

Objects were also valued by immigrants because they represented people and experiences that are a part of their cultural and family traditions, and they wanted to be able to pass these on to future generations. A collection of letters

for instance, while having a social value, in some cases also had a cultural value. A number of immigrants felt it was important to bring objects with cultural value, such as letters written by family members from past generations, so that they still remained connected to these people and were able to show them to their children. Old photographs had a similar value, especially immigrants from a culture which has very few things of historical value available to take out of the country.

I have a group of old historical photographs. One of my father and mother. One with my mother and father together at New Year's eve. There are others too. I really like these pictures. I plan to pass them on. I brought them so I could organize them and get them ready, show them to the kids. We did not have time when moving. When we get settled in this house, then I will get the photographs organized. I do not want to ship them around from apartment to apartment any more.

Books specifically written about the history of Eastern European countries and critical of the communist political establishment were greatly valued. Many immigrants viewed these books as an opportunity to still retain some sense of their cultural heritage, the history of their country's connection to the U.S.S.R., and to also inform their children about their ethnic background and instill in them the importance of knowing their heritage and learning and keeping the language of their ethnic origin. This emphasis on cultural value is illustrated in the following two accounts

by immigrants talking about the importance of having historical books.

It is very important to maintain our heritage here. I have always maintained that if we do not remember the history of what happened in the past, then we cannot build on the future. Not only for me but for my daughter. Some of these historical moments are not very well coded in our memory. We think we remember, but we don't really. That is why it is so important to have the historical book I brought. Not only for the sentimental value, but the facts as well. I keep collecting Polish books for my daughter, now she has a great library of Polish books for children.

The second immigrant, from Hungary, made similar comments, emphasizing the importance of these historical objects to children. In this case, the books were brought so that their children could also read the same books that their parents read when they were children in Hungary.

We used [the books] all the time, almost everyday when we were growing up. We wanted our kids to read them because here you cannot buy them. Every time we go back to Hungary we buy more books. We want our kids to read and speak Hungarian. We can borrow from the library but they are not very good. European history is not taught in school. They need this history. Our children have to read.

As illustrated above, the particular cultural objects brought, like certain books, records, and photographs were valued because they represented significant life experiences. The benefit of having these objects in a collection, however, was its ability to represent multiple values, and organize

life experiences. In some cases a collection of objects had a range of values for immigrants. For instance, an art collection for one man in Poland was important because it was a reflection of his personal taste and self-definition, and at the same time it also reminded him of the times he spent with his wife walking through galleries in various cities in Poland looking for certain works and artists.

Our small art collection is important. we are fond of modern painting. Polish painters are one of the most interesting phenomena in contemporary European art. My mother has a collection of classic paintings from the 19th century, but they are not valuable to me - I do not like it. She often say, 'All these will be yours', but I don't feel any connection to these things. With the collection we found them, they have value for us -they resemble us. We can enjoy these things right now. It represents a certain experience ... It reminds us of experiences in Poland, going to galleries, exhibitions, and other events.

In this situation the one collection of cultural objects had multiple existential values. In other cases the importance of a collection of cultural objects crossed over two or three categories so that they were valuable to immigrants because they represented existential, social, and cultural experiences and understandings. For instance, an album of photographs can contain pictures of significant places and events in an immigrants life, family and friends that s/he is close to and wants to feel connected to, and finally pictures of a grandfather or a historical site that is important to

show to future generations of children of Eastern European immigrants who live in Canada.

Another instance where the value of a collection of cultural objects crossed over categories was in the use of objects that were bought once immigrants arrived in Canada. Especially written music associated with a cultural tradition, in conjunction with a traditional instrument (or the ability to play an instrument), had both a social value in that it was used as a means of connecting with the ethnic community in Canada, and also a cultural value because it helped the community in Canada retain a sense of their ethnic background.

It is important to note that in a few instances these collections of cultural objects had multiple values other than those relating to life experiences. These objects were also brought because of their pragmatic and functional value as well. For instance, apart from their value as cultural objects, immigrants brought books relating to their occupation or academic interests because they felt these would be a necessity in order to continue their studies or secure a job.

Another example of this functional value of cultural objects is a collection of music for the piano that a woman brought from Ukraine. Some pieces of music, like the example of the photographs and academic books above, had existential, social, and cultural value.

I brought a lot of written music - mostly written music I needed to play and teach. When you move from one language to another certain pieces and types of music are hard to find. I did not know what I would be able to find here in Calgary. Without it I would have been lost. The music is mainly classical, I like to play Mozart whenever I feel lonely or depressed. My favourite is Moonlight Sonata. I really gives me an uplift. Lifts me from depression. Also religious music. I also have a lot of music that is specific to the Ukraine. A kind of folk music that I like very much. Music is my life. It is spiritual food, second nature to me. It is what encourages me to continue in what I'm doing.

In this account, some of the pieces of music this immigrant wanted to bring had value in terms of life experience, but they were important because she knew they would be an asset, or even required if she was going to be able to go to university and eventually secure a job as a music teacher in Canada.

ii. Memorabilia

The second type of material possession that immigrants brought with them were objects that reminded them of life experiences, but did not have the same qualities as the cultural objects discussed above, and immigrants generally talked about these things individually rather than as a part of a collection. These objects are referred to as memorabilia because their importance was the specific memory that was associated with them. These objects seemed to be of less consequence to immigrants than the collections of cultural objects they brought with them. In interviews, these

things were generally identified as an afterthought and immigrants did not spend a great amount of the time talking about their value or importance.

A wide range of different types of memorabilia were brought, depending on what things were important to each immigrant. Some of the more common examples of this type of material possessions were jewellery, religious items such as crosses and some clothes items that had some specific significance. There did not appear to be anything about the character of these objects that made them more or less valuable to immigrants other than their connection to past memories and life experiences. Consequently, rather than list the various objects in this category, which range from wallets to beer steins, it is more instructive to examine the various values of these objects in terms of the life experiences they represent, as well as the functional values they had for immigrants. The illustration of these values provides an indication of the types of memorabilia that immigrants brought with them.

When immigrants talked about the importance of the memorabilia that they brought as a representation of life experiences it was largely in terms of social and cultural values. For instance, when an immigrant talked about the religious items he/she had brought it was usually in terms of who gave it to them as a gift rather than any reference to spiritual guidance as a result of having the object with

them.

I brought some small religious items. I have one which is the image of the Virgin Mary which used to hang over my bed in my room. It is a form of family memorabilia. It was passed down to my mother by my grandmother and so on - for a couple of generations. It is a tradition, not anything of high importance. It is somewhere around the house.

If these objects held some existential value for immigrants it was generally expressed in terms of a place or event that they were reminded of by the object.

I am really attached to jewellery. Especially the ones that my husband has given to me. Usually what I am attached to has a meaning relating to a special event like when we met each other. I remember that I brought a set of tea towels, they were really nice, very different, and the ones that everybody from the wedding party signed their names on it. So that was one of the types of things I brought - things that remind me of significant events and people.

The social value of being connected to people through gifts, as the quotation above suggests, was often identified by immigrants as the importance of bringing various types of memorabilia with them.

The cultural value of the memorabilia immigrants brought with them seemed to be the most significant aspect of this type of material possession. Often immigrants brought single items that were of extreme importance because they represented something about past family generations or their

cultural heritage. The following description of a box owned by a woman from Ukraine is a good example of the cultural value of memorabilia.

There was a very nice old box that my grandfather had made while in a prison camp during the Second World War - 1942 in Italy. In it he kept a diary of his experiences. After the war he returned to England and died there before my mother was able to see him. When I was in England we just happened to run into a woman who was keeping the box. It was given to me to keep as the last memory our family has of my grandfather. Our family is very proud of him, and the box means a lot to me. Eventually, hopefully, I will be able to pass it on to future generations of our family so to remember my grandfather and his experiences of the war.

Another aspect of the cultural value of memorabilia is its representation of a 'collective memory'. Halbwach's notion of collective memory argues that the memories common to an entire culture are accessible to people in their physical environment (1980). Immigrants from the same country in Eastern Europe brought similar specific material possessions which had a cultural value for them. The objects signified this collective memory were specific to each country in Eastern Europe; hence, the objects that the Polish immigrants brought and valued were not brought by immigrants from the Ukraine or Hungary and vice versa.

For immigrants from Poland it was very common and important to bring cookbooks. These texts enabled them to recreate and maintain Polish customs and traditional meals

when living in Canada. Cookbooks were extremely important around festive occasions like Christmas or Easter when they would be of more use; however, many of the Polish immigrants did use their cookbooks on a day to day basis, especially if they found it difficult to adapt to Canadian cuisine.

In Poland everybody has their cookbook. It is very important to us. I have a collection of cookbooks that my mother sent to me to use here. It was difficult for us to get used to the food here. We still do not like things like hamburgers and stew. It is not too difficult to get Polish foods here and the cookbooks helps us keep things we had in Poland here.

Immigrants usually made a distinction between the cookbooks and their book collection, though in some instances Polish immigrants also had a collection of cookbooks apart from their other books.

For the immigrants from Ukraine it was important for each of the women to have a traditional embroidered shirt made by their mothers. This was something that all of the women from Ukraine brought with them and recognized as an object that connected them to their country and to past generations of women in their family.

I also have an embroidered shirt that is very valuable to me. It is something that every little girl in Ukraine dreams about. Your mother makes you a special shirt. My mother was not able to because she is blind. When she knew I was going to Canada she had a friend make me one. It is very beautiful. It is something that you cannot buy. It takes years of practice to learn the art. It has a

close attachment to home - to my family, friends, and the place I grew up. It symbolizes Ukraine to me.

For men and women in Ukraine it was customary to have a close connection to the land and to the soil. Many immigrants talked about this connection and all of them brought a jar of soil from their country, or a number of seeds that they planned to plant in a garden in Canada.

I brought a jar of soil from my garden in Ukraine. I hope to add it to my own garden when I get established here. I do not think I could live without having some kind of garden, even if it is really small. Most people in Ukraine seem to have animals at home. A pig, goats for milk, especially dogs. I wish I could have brought my dog.

The cultural value of the land was seen as a source of continuity from their past experiences in Ukraine to their new lives in Canada. One Ukrainian who did not have access to soil brought seeds that he had been keeping from childhood as well as the key to his grandmother's house even though the house had been torn down decades previously.

I brought some quite funny things. A key from my grandmother's home, and a cup of corn seeds. The corn seeds were on the land when I was a boy, so I took them here. It is like an invisible connection with the land. The people from Ukraine are very closely connected to the land.

Traditional beer steins, dishes, and other types of ornaments were common possessions brought by immigrants from Hungary. In almost all of the houses of people from Hungary

there was an assortment of these traditional ornaments on display usually in the kitchen or the living room.²

Everything in that glass behind you is from Hungary. That cabinet, everybody asks us why it is there not to be touched. It is all special stuff from Hungarian tradition. It is there untouched because it cannot be replaced. The Hungarian porcelain, wooden carvings, things from the family tree. Especially beer steins - it is a Hungarian custom to have beer steins. Those crystal glasses, the dishes are all special. Those little figurines, they are Hungarian. I brought them because I got them for a present, it was my name day celebration.

The cultural value of these memorabilia is demonstrated by the fact that they were part of the cultural heritage of Hungary and also that they had lost almost all functional value. Only at special occasions, similar to the Polish cookbooks, were some of these things used. Most of them were seen as too valuable to use in case they were accidentally broken or lost. Some Hungarian immigrants talked about how these were the special objects that they needed in order to "make where they were living a home," and the arrangement of them on display was a set pattern which was repeated in each different place of residence. Thus, what made the house a home was the construction of this structured display of specifically Hungarian material possessions.

iii. Material Possessions as Practical Necessities

The final type of material possessions that

immigrants identified were objects that did not have value as representations of life experiences, but were brought because they felt these would be things that would not be available where they were going to relocate. It must be noted that the material possessions that immigrants perceived as simple necessities, such as furniture, clothes, knives, forks, and other similar things, were generally given away, rarely sold, to friends and family in Eastern Europe. This was explained partially as a favour to people remaining in Eastern Europe as these types of material possessions are difficult to acquire there, and were also very expensive.

These types of material possessions were also viewed by immigrants as not very important; objects they could get anywhere regardless of where they were going. As one immigrant pointed out:

All the clothes we possessed are now out of fashion. Our stereo and T.V. we had again right now in Canada. Everything that has temporary value, things we simply need as use we have acquired here already. The things that were important were those things with everlasting value life art, books, memorabilia, stamps, collections.

It is interesting, however, to briefly examine the material possessions that immigrants did feel were important to bring as practical necessities. For instance, the person quoted above talking about 'everlasting value' also brought 100 slips, all 100% cotton. "A friend called" she explains, "and said that ladies underwear is too expensive in Canada. I

think it was a good investment". Other immigrants brought bottles of liquor, certain foods such as cheese and sausage that they thought, correctly, would not be available in Canada.

I made sure to bring some bottles of liquor and cheese: mozzarella. We were in Italy and really enjoyed these things. My brother had told us the food is much different in North America so we wanted to have this food.

A man from Poland, surprisingly, on his way to India by car before coming to Canada thought it would be essential to bring appliances with him for the trip. Consequently the objects that took the most space in his car when leaving Poland were an air conditioner and a refrigerator.

I took some kitchen things like a washer. Basic things to live there. A clothing washer, a little fridge. Appliances, a little air conditioner because it is very hot there you know. Before I left I sold all my things and bought a car. My most valuable things I brought, though were my books. They are the most valuable things I own.

The examples above are some of the more interesting functional necessities that immigrants brought. The significant aspect of these objects, however, is that their value as possession is the same as their function as an object. As a result, these things were of very little importance to people as valuable objects because they could be replaced. It seemed, then, that part of the importance of the highly valued material possessions brought was their

characteristics apart from their purely functional purpose. Thus, though an object may have a use value, it is the life experience that it represents, in its various forms, which makes it meaningful and important to the Eastern European when migrating from his or her culture into Canadian society.

II. Material Possessions Left in Eastern Europe and the Loss Expressed by Immigrants

The last issue to be explored in this section is the type of material possession that immigrants from Eastern Europe were not able to bring with them, and the loss they experienced as a result. The loss expressed by immigrants provides an indication of what they thought was important and valuable in the possessions that they had to leave behind. Throughout the interviews immigrants did not spend a lot of time talking about the objects they left behind. Once immigrants had made the decision to leave, and worked out their plans, most of their possessions were given away to friends and family or at times sold in preparation for the trip. Having made the decision regarding what they wanted and were able to bring, the things left seemed to be largely forgotten about. Only when they returned and visited people, or saw their previous possessions in videos or photographs did immigrants express some remaining emotional connections to these objects.

I gave away most of things to friends, books and some clothing. Also to relatives. The most valuable things I left for my mother, probably she sold them for money. The manuscripts and research I gave away to friends so they could use it for their work. I keep contact now with only one friend. But slowly these contacts with people and things are dying. I do not think of them hardly at all any more.

The importance of material possessions left behind tended to decrease over time. This is expressed by another immigrant from Hungary in the following.

I gave my canoe away to friends. Many of my tapes and books I gave to my other brothers so they can use them. I do miss them, but less and less. I gave things to my family. My brothers send me letters saying that they are using them, at least my two youngest brothers. Sometimes I would like to have more of my books, but here is my life now. I do not want to dwell on what is back there. I do not want to go back.

There were, however, instances where immigrants did identify certain material possessions that they had had to part with which caused them some anguish. These tended to be objects that they felt were important to bring and would have if they could, but were unable due to some external circumstance such as the size of the object, financial concerns, or government regulations. Two immigrants, one from Poland the other from Ukraine, who both greatly valued music, had pianos they wished they could have brought but understood that the circumstances would not allow. In reflecting on the

pianos they felt that their proper place was in Eastern Europe because the memories they represented were so closely connected to the places and homes where they grew up. The woman from Poland described her relationship with the piano in this way:

I have a very valuable old piano. It is over 100 years old. It will never be moved, though. It will stay in Poland because that is where it belongs - where it should be. Over 20 years you accumulate many things with meaning, other things you use and throw out.

The woman from Ukraine had similar reflections on her piano:

I did want to bring my piano. It was a special gift to me for my music. It is very expensive and hard to replace. It is made by a very famous piano manufacturer in the Ukraine. I could never sell it. In some ways I think it belongs at home and not with me. I cannot see it in another place than in the house where I grew up. I hope it stays there. I do have a certain attachment to it, but I think it has become more a part of the family than me personally.

In this case, it seemed that the object was more valuable in its absence because the immigrant knew the object was in a certain context that was meaningful to them. If they had the object in Canada it might seem to be displaced from its 'proper' place.

Valuing objects in their absence and a feeling of loss was expressed when immigrants could not bring material possessions because of government regulations. Often immigrants recognized that though the object had cultural

value for them, it was also tied to their country's national heritage and perhaps would have seemed out of place to them in Canada. In this sense the object the immigrant imagined in his or her homeland was more valuable in terms of the valuable memories that it represented than if they were able to bring the object with them.

In terms of feeling loss with the absence of material possessions, the objects that immigrants missed the most were those they had brought from their home in Eastern Europe and lost or misplaced before they settled in Canada. All of these objects tended to have cultural value, usually historical books or memorabilia connected to past generations of their country's cultural heritage.

We still have more things we wish we could have brought from Poland. My husband's work-his paintings. Also more of our photographs. When we came we did not bring that many pictures and this is important to have. We wanted these pictures for our daughter to have. So she can have the roots, pictures of her grandfather, great-grandfather, everything like that. My mother made up an album with all the family tree so she would have some roots, but we do not know where it is.

While some immigrants left objects with family to send at a later date so they would not be lost, others brought them and misplaced them before finally settling in Canada. Though this did not happen to all the immigrants interviewed, the loss felt by those that did seemed to focus on the fact that these

things were a part of their past heritage that is now lost. Part of their connections to past generations and cultural history is breached in the loss of the cultural objects they had intended to bring and keep.

The material possessions that people left, then, were distributed to family and friends or sold. Immigrants, when they moved and resettled in Western Europe and eventually Canada, began the slow process of replacing the things they had relinquished with new possessions reflecting their different needs, experiences, and identities. The only possessions that they did miss or long for were those objects relating to previous life experiences, usually their cultural heritage, that would have helped them bridge the two main components of their identities and lives: their previous history and relationships in Eastern Europe and their beginning life as Eastern European immigrants in Canada. The following segment illustrates the importance of these cultural objects to immigrants, and the difficulty and loss felt when they are lost because of the ephemeral nature of historical information; unless it is kept through books and passed on, it can be easily forgotten.

Two things were really important to me from my childhood, and my entire life in Poland. One is collection of old children's books from when I was young. The other is a collection of historical books - published books of our actual history at home. In Paris there is an institute that publishes very good books. Excellent books. So when I came to Rome, when I visited the veterans

association they gave me eighty from this institute for my collection and so people in Canada could learn about Polish history. Of the eighty there were three that were really well done. No matter what I wanted to keep them. I kept them in my room with my childhood books, always looked after them and never lent them out to anyone. Oh, plus one book I got from Santa in my father's workhouse. One day those books disappeared. I cannot figure out why anyone would pick up my childhood books. I was just broken, it still haunts me today. The worse thing is that I cannot remember the titles from Paris so I cannot reorder them. So in order to get them I have to remember.

Family and friends greatly appreciated receiving the objects left behind because of the general unavailability of luxury items in Eastern Europe. This tended to decrease the loss felt by immigrants knowing that their former possessions now belonged to people who wanted and valued them. In addition, there was less attachment to possession once immigrants had made the decision to take one object and leave another. The loss expressed by immigrants, as the previous account demonstrates, was directed at the objects they had decided to bring, but were lost or stolen while migrating.

**Conclusion: Material Possessions as a
Social and Cultural Resource**

There are two implicit themes which extend throughout this discussion of the relations between immigrants and their material possessions. The first centres around the criterion immigrants used when deciding what material possession were

important for them to bring. Focusing on this criteria made it possible to address questions regarding the type of objects immigrants brought, and the value of these things to them. The second theme focuses on how material possessions were a social and cultural resource for immigrants when travelling to Canada. To conclude, this section examines the general factors involved in immigrants' decisions regarding what to bring, and the ways in which the objects brought served as a resource for them at a time of life-transition.

There were certainly limitations placed on immigrants stemming from the situation of coming from Eastern Europe, moving to Western Europe, and then finally settling in Canada. The political environment of Eastern Europe, government regulations, as well as the circumstances and contingencies of the lengthy move all affected which material possessions immigrants would be able to bring with them. Nonetheless, through various strategies, such as having things sent by friends and making multiple trips while in Western Europe, immigrants were for the most part able to bring those material possessions which were most important to them, and their families.

The most notable feature of the material possessions that were brought was their connection to some aspect of immigrants' life-experiences. There were instances of immigrants bringing things purely for their use-value, such as appliances and clothes, but immigrants did not seem to

place much emphasis on the value of these objects, often stating that their functional possessions were probably easily replaceable with similar objects in Canada. The collections that immigrants brought, such as books or photographs, were brought partially for their functional value like academic books needed for further education. The functional value of these things, though, was always accompanied by and secondary to the significance of collections as a part of a person's life history. This raises questions concerning the nature of possession. Previous research in social psychology has considered control over an object as the basis of possession (Belk, 1987; Furby, 1978). In contrast, this study suggests that at times of life transition, objects were meaningful as possessions only when they had some connection to some past life experience.

As mentioned previously, collections of cultural objects like books, music, and photographs were the predominant type of possession that immigrants felt was important to bring. These cultural objects were beneficial and valued because they are an ordered series of objectified experiences and understandings. A second type of object, the memorabilia that immigrants brought with them, were also valued for the 'memorable' experiences that they represented. By taking these objects with them immigrants were able to transport a material expression of the significant experiences in their life.

In terms of how the objects brought ranked in value, the collections of cultural objects were predominant, followed by various memorabilia. Within the three main cultural objects, books were mentioned most frequently and often first, followed usually by photographs and then music. The predominant value of texts can be explained at least partially by the social status of the immigrants who participated in the study. The books brought held the capacity to have a range of value, only part of which is related specifically to past life experiences. Books also have a professional and economic value in that the immigrants would be able to use them in attaining their educational and professional credentials within Canada and work toward re-establishing their downward social position as a result of leaving Eastern Europe. Furthermore, as a sign of social status, the books also indicated to others, and to immigrants, their social status - regardless of whether their formal credentials were less valued by Canadian institutions, and by migrating to Canada they experienced a certain amount of downward mobility.

The professional value of objects and their status as signs of social class were an example of how the objects were social and cultural resources to immigrants. However, this use was less evident than the relationship between material possessions and life experiences. In the analysis, exploring the value of these objects as representations of life

experiences illustrated in more detail how they were meaningful to immigrants as a part of their lives. The use of photographs brought by immigrants demonstrated how these material possessions were a social and cultural resource. In the entire collection of photographs that an immigrant would have, some would be of family and friends, important historical places, or locations like the house they grew up in, or a town in which they lived for a short period of time. All of these objects are an objectified representation of these experiences. Some experiences are valuable in terms of the immigrant's own biography: the forces, social or otherwise, that influenced the development of a self-definition. In this instance objects were said to have existential value for the immigrant. Other photographs may have been of close friends or relatives in Eastern Europe. These objects have social value because by possessing them the immigrant still feels connected to the person represented in the picture even though they are in fact many kilometres away. At times of loneliness or homesickness immigrants often talked about the comforting affect of sifting through old photographs of family and friends.

Some photographs were taken of historical places, monuments that are meaningful as a part of a country's cultural heritage, and past generations of family members. These objects have cultural value for the immigrants because they connect them to a family, a place, and cultural

tradition. These objects were of particular value as a resource because they enabled immigrants to pass their cultural heritage, most importantly their language, to other Eastern Europeans living in Canada and also their children. In fact, the permanence of material possessions and their capacity to hold meaning was one of the most important ways they acted a resource; it enables immigrants to be able to pass part of their own life on to other people and future generations.

Redfoot and Back (1988) have argued, drawing on the work of Schutz, that at times of crisis individuals tend to focus on biographical and historical experiences, and neglect the conditions and experiences of everyday living. People draw on their past life experiences, existential, social, and cultural, as a means of constructing a self-identity. The significance of these experiences is that they enable people to re-organize their past life-experiences in order to manage and make sense of the recent changes in their life and self-definition. In the case of immigrants, in evaluating material possessions in preparation to migrate, they selected objects which represent aspects of their past that they wanted to emphasize, remember, and use to construct a self-identity in accordance to their new status as an Eastern European immigrant in Canada. Indeed, it was the capacity of material possessions to signify meaningful aspects of people's life histories that made them a social and cultural resource for

immigrants leaving Eastern Europe and re-settling in Canada.

The extent to which immigrants used the objects they brought provides an indication of the interaction between the construction and organization of identity and material possessions. One way in which the collection of photographs described above was a social and cultural resource was the way in which it enabled immigrants to reflect on their past experiences by looking at and organizing their pictures. A common practice with many immigrants having settled in Canada was to go through these photographs and order them according to their life history in various albums. This exercise seemed to help immigrants in re-organizing their own self-identity from their perceived position as a disenfranchised citizen of an occupied country to a recent immigrant in Canada. Other immigrants, in contrast, kept photographs away in the basement or a closet, occasionally going through them, but most of the time procrastinating about the inevitable task of sifting through and organizing them. Though the organization of these experiences was seen as something that must be done, it was delayed until the migration process had ended and the immigrant felt as if he/she were going to settle permanently in one place.

The example of photographs used above to illustrate the ways in which material possessions helped immigrants leave their country and adapt to another culture can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to the other types of

material possessions that were brought. The collections of cultural objects such as books and music were used in a similar way as the photographs. In terms of interaction and use, possessions such as books, music, a few photographs, and assorted memorabilia, were often organized and placed on display in frequently used parts of the house, like the living room or den. Often these objects would be arranged in a structured pattern and reproduced in the same manner regardless of how often immigrants moved, and where they were living.

The significance of these objects was in the range of value they held for immigrants. The fact that these objects were organized in a series extended their value to the immigrant as a resource; hence, the photographs (or music or books) represented significant life-experiences, but also provided a means for immigrants to order these experiences as well. The importance of memorabilia was similar to that of collections though these were individual objects. Often, though, as was the case with possessions which expressed the collective memory of a culture, these objects were signs of very meaningful experiences which immigrants wanted to remember, keep and pass on to future generations, because the immigrants interviewed recognized the importance of their history, (especially their own understanding of that history), and also how easily it can be forgotten or distorted without some material sign of its presence.

The selection, use, and organization of material possessions can be seen as a strategy in which immigrants re-construct an appropriate and desired self-identity when migrating to a new country. This use of material possessions is illustrated by immigrants' choices of objects that represent and emphasize their ethnic cultural roots. For instance, a Hungarian immigrant in Canada may want to retain part of his or her past heritage, or even become much more aware of this ethnic identity as a result of being in a foreign culture; hence, the material possessions brought helped immigrants realize and achieve this new identity, especially those of objects of cultural value that represented the collected memory of the immigrant's country. However, this relationship between identity and objects is not limited to objects with cultural value. Objects that represent existential experiences, or experiences that connect an immigrant to a significant other, are also examples of how the strategic selection of these objects over others demonstrates an attempt to emphasize and integrate certain aspects of their past and identity, while neglecting or attempting to forget others.³

There is a political element to this relationship as well. It is possible that the choice of archetypal material possessions by immigrants, such as those closely connected to their ethnic cultural heritage, may reflect a conscious or subconscious effort to re-negotiate an identity that

distances them from connections with the dominant political establishments that existed in Eastern Europe at the time of emancipation. In interviews, the issue was not explored in any detail; hence, it is difficult to make any extensive or conclusive statements on this matter. However, considering the social status of the immigrants who participated in the study, and their reasons for migrating, it is likely that the objects chosen, especially those with cultural and historical value, reflects a conscious political effort to distance themselves from their affiliations with the communist bloc, and emphasize and import their own version of their Eastern European cultural heritages.

The conclusions made concerning the ways in which objects act as social and cultural resource support the previous research on the elderly. This research expands on that work by focusing on an different situation and population, and more on a theoretically informed analysis of why objects, as representations of life experiences, have the potential to act as resources. In order to balance the work in this area, future research should examine how objects carry a certain responsibility, and have the potential to be a burden to people in various social situations.

Notes

1. Many immigrants brought with them books and other cultural objects that were banned in Eastern Europe. Often these would be different forms of American popular culture. The question of whether these texts, or the circulation of these texts provided some form of political resistance from people who planned to leave the country was not addressed or expressed in interviews with immigrants; however, it would be an interesting topic for future research.
2. The assortment of Hungarian memorabilia could also be considered a collection. The type of objects discussed in the memorabilia section were individual unrelated possessions. However, the case of memorabilia kept protected on book shelves or cabinets did seem to be organized systematically. Furthermore, Hungarian immigrants also talked about how they tended to reproduce the patterned arrangement of ornaments in each new home, it was part of what made it a home.
3. The use of objects to forget past life experiences, or to hide rather than signify meaning is also a possibility, though this relationship was, of course, not expressed by immigrants. The absence of this relationship in the data may also be a result of lack of depth due to the methodology employed, and also the initial suspicion on the part of immigrants as to the nature of the research. But it is most likely a consequence of the subject's determination not to reveal troubling information, or perhaps their success in constructing a new identity with a selective view of the past.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

Introduction

The results of social scientific research often seem obvious after the fact. This study is no exception. While it now seems obvious that immigrants would bring the type of objects that they did, for example mnemonic devices, initially these results were difficult to predict and the research had to first be completed in order to make these claims. There are a number of alternative possibilities which, though they too may seem obvious, were not present in the data. For instance, it was surprising the amount of material culture that immigrants had available to bring. It could have been equally possible that, given the dissatisfaction with nation of origin, immigrants would want to bring any possessions that remind them of their past life experiences. It was also surprising that immigrants did not emphasize more instrumental and professional type of material possessions that would have been a practical use to them in Canada. Therefore, the study was important because it did indicate, out a variety of possibilities, a particular patterning of significant material culture (significant in the sense that they were important enough to bring).

This final section ties together the study's main

findings, its limitations, and the concerns which are raised as a result of this research. It is comprised of three parts. The first summarizes the study and illustrates its contribution to research on person-object relations. The second discusses the limitations of the methods and interpretations incorporated in the analysis. The third concludes by commenting on the place of person-object relations within Sociology.

The Meaning of Material Possessions at Times of Life Transition

I.

It is important to re-emphasize that this is not a study of immigration. Immigration was chosen in order to examine the relationship between people and their material possessions at a time of life transition. The experiences of immigrants were addressed in the analysis, however the place of material possessions in this process was the primary focus.

This study evolved out of the empirical and theoretical literature on person-object relations within the social sciences. There are certain benefits and limitations to using an inter-disciplinary approach to social research. The advantage in an area like person-object relations is the range of work to draw upon. The difficulty, however, is bringing this diverse material together in a manner that is

constructive and coherent. The review of literature organized this research according to three recurring themes. These main areas were discussed in a way intended to inform the study of meaning of material possessions during times of life-transition. The themes are (a) the relationship between material possessions and the individual or self, (b) the construction of a personal environment and the social impact of material possessions, and (c) the place of material possessions as a social and cultural resource.

One of the objectives of the study was to explore areas which have been neglected in previous works. As a relatively new area of research there are a limited number of empirical studies. The majority of this material focuses either on the elderly, or on situations directed at marketing consumer goods. The empirical emphasis on immigration as an example of life transition represented a novel situation to examine the meaning of material possessions. In addition, the focus on immigrants was a way of shifting the study of person-object relations away from the elderly by demonstrating how objects are meaningful throughout the life-course, and not only in situations specific to the elderly.

In the analysis emphasis was placed on exploratory questions because of the lack of previous research on the meaning of material possessions at times of life transition. There were three inter-related issues addressed. The first was the types of possessions selected to accompany the

immigrants. The second was the value of these objects to immigrants. The third concern, which had a more specific focus, was how these material possessions served as a social and cultural resource.

Studies focusing on people's perception of the life course argue that at times of life transition more emphasis is placed on significant past experiences as a means of adapting to change (Redfoot & Back, 1988). Generally speaking, the importance of material possessions to immigrants was their ability to represent and organize past life experiences. This theme was present throughout the study, but was explored primarily in terms of the type of material possessions immigrants brought, and the value they placed on these objects.

The principal type of possession that immigrants brought were collections of cultural objects such as records, books, and photographs. The character of these objects enabled immigrants to objectify and organize significant life experiences. For instance, with a collection of photographs, immigrants are able to use a camera to record the events, people, and places that they would like to bring with them to and remember in Canada. The collection of these photographs in an album, combined with other pictures handed down by and of family or friends, enabled immigrants to review and organize these experiences once in Canada. It is interesting that the most important possessions for immigrants were

collections of objects that are particularly suited to representing life-experiences. This provides an indication of how people's experiences, and therefore their identities, are organized and integrated into a set or system of collections. As representation of life experiences, the choice of objects to bring becomes a strategy in which to determine the past life experiences to emphasize and remember, and those which would be best left and forgotten.

Most of the possessions brought were collections of cultural objects described above. There were, however, two residual categories. Immigrants also brought a small number of objects which could be considered memorabilia. These were objects that represented some life experience, but were not included as part of a collection. An example of this type of possession would be a key brought by a man from Ukraine which reminded him of a house he once lived in as a child. The last category of possessions were 'practical necessities'. These objects were brought because they had some functional use. For instance, one immigrant brought a winter jacket for no other reason than he thought Canada had a very cold climate.

The value of these material possessions was organized and discussed in terms of the life experiences they represented. The term value in this instance would be defined in terms of why immigrants felt an object was important enough to them, and important to bring when they migrated.

There were three main categories of life experience: 'existential experiences' which relate specifically to events in an individual's life history; 'social experiences' which connect an individual to significant others; and 'cultural experiences' which transcend an individual's life history. The value of the memorabilia brought could generally be located in one of these categories. For instance, two men brought keys: one key represented time spent in the man's childhood home; the second man's key represented his mother, the person who owned the house. The key for the first immigrant held an 'existential' value, while the second immigrant's key had more of a 'social' value.

In contrast, the collections of cultural objects tended to represent a combination of the three categories of life experiences. In the case of an assortment of photographs, some of the pictures would be of an immigrant's childhood. These photos represent significant 'existential' experiences of the immigrant's early life history. Other photographs of family and friends had a 'social' value because they connected the immigrant to these people, these objects literally embodied the significant others in the immigrant's life. Finally, some of the photographs, usually passed down within families, had a 'cultural' value because they connected the immigrant to distant relatives, ones they have not met, but felt close to and wanted the memory of the person passed on to future generations. Thus, one of the

important factors in immigrants emphasizing cultural objects is the range of values that they represent.¹ A photograph may hold social value, connecting an individual to a distant relative, and at the same time a cultural value because the photograph can be handed down as a part of a family heritage.

The final question addressed in the analysis concerned the ways in which these material possessions were a social and cultural resource. Again, this issue centred around the ability of material possessions, especially cultural objects, to act as a relatively permanent objective representation of meaningful life experiences. These objects are a resource in a number of ways because they make significant memories available to immigrants in a concrete form at a time of transition and change. The categories of experiences outlined in the analysis, existential, social, and cultural, can be combined strategically at any one time to construct an individual's desired self-identity. The collections of cultural objects, and the collection of various memorabilia brought by immigrants, are material representations of a particular self-definition. Having these possessions available as representations of experiences enabled immigrants to re-organize and re-negotiate their self-identity in response to moving from one culture to another. On a more pragmatic level, the material possession which had social value, objects which represented significant others, also helped immigrants adjust to the melancholy felt

as a result of leaving friends and family because they felt closer to these people by having such possessions. This reflection on objects with social value is an example of the way immigrants used objects to reflect upon, and reconstitute, their self-identity. In this case, considering the object with social value, immigrants are able to strategically integrate the significant other into the desired self definition they wish to construct in Canada.

The permanence or continuity of material possessions was also a resource for immigrants. Bringing objects which embody some aspect of a cultural or family heritage enabled immigrants to retain these experiences and memories, as well as pass them on to their children or to a community of Eastern Europeans in Canada. For instance, texts outlining the history of an Eastern European country, photographs of relatives from past generations, and objects which represent part of a national or ethnic tradition were all objects brought because they have the capacity to transcend individuals and keep valuable ideas, events, and people alive in the minds of the expatriates and their subsequent generations.

II.

The reason for focusing on the meaning of material possessions at a time of life-transition was to broaden the range of empirical research within the study of person-object relations. The results of this study, however, are

also significant in terms of the main theoretical issues within this field of research. The main contribution of the analysis centres around the value of material possessions as a representation of significant life experiences.

In terms of material objects and individual ontogeny, the theoretical literature tends to either emphasize the power of the object to define the individual as a part of a larger material and consumer culture, or the individual's ability to incorporate possessions as a part of a placid 'extended self'. The focus in this analysis on the value of certain material possessions (those described as cultural objects) that are an objective form of subjective experiences, provides more of a dialectical understanding of the relationship between subject and object, or the individual and a collection of material possessions. For an object such as a photograph, its meaning can be located in the inter-relationship between an individual's experiences and their objectification in the form of a photograph. This was illustrated in the importance immigrants placed on material possession which made available to them significant life experiences. By enabling immigrants to choose certain 'existential', 'social', and 'cultural' experiences, and to have access to these experiences in material form, these objects helped immigrants to negotiate a change in lifestyle, and identity.

There seems to be a tendency in the study of person-

objects relations to focus on personal agency and ignore structural aspects of the connection between people and their possessions. The dialectical perspective proposed here, which is best described as an integration of a phenomenological understanding of experience and Simmel's conception of cultural forms, only begins to reconcile the opposition between subject and object articulated in the theoretical literature. This approach also tends to privilege the ability of people to re-signify objects, to construct multiple meanings and understandings through their material possessions regardless of the place of these objects as a part of a material and consumer culture. However, the analysis attempts to account for these structural factors by recognizing and illustrating the 'social' and 'cultural' value of the material possessions immigrants brought, especially those cultural objects that bridge generations. It is important that further theoretical research attempt to develop a dialectical approach to studying the meaning of objects which effectively accounts for the power of the subject and object in the relationship between people and their material possessions.

The second theoretical issue identified in the review of literature was the social nature and impact of material possessions. In terms of this theoretical consideration, it was interesting in the analysis how the material possession identified as having social value were considered as the

embodiment of a significant other in the immigrant's life. This association between others and possessions illustrates how certain material possessions play an important social role in an individual's life. For immigrants, having objects with this social value made friends and family seem closer and helped them to make the transition to Canadian society.

In contrast to Mead's notion that all objects are social in nature and have a social function, it seemed that some material possession were charged with this type of social character while others, though still social in nature, had less of an obvious social function. There are numerous other areas which require further research into the social nature of objects, and the place of material possessions in the social life of individuals. For instance, it would be interesting to examine the place of material possessions in the workplace or within institutions/professions such as medicine, especially in terms of how these objects mediate social and power relations, and act as social and cultural resources, but also perhaps as liabilities.

Part of the theoretical discussion in the review of literature was devoted to how material possessions combine to form an entire constructed environment. This theoretical issue was not directly or effectively addressed in the analysis. However, the importance of collections provides an indication of how people's experiences and identities are captured and organized within a system of cultural objects,

or an organized collection. This is certainly an area which requires further research. One interesting topic for further study would be to examine whether the individual possesses or becomes possessed by this organized system of collections. The study of life transitions provides an interesting empirical situation in which to examine this aspect of person-object relations because people must employ various strategies (some of which may be successful and others which will be fatal) to deconstruct and then reconstruct these objects they have acquired and collected.

A final theoretical issue concerns the ways in which material possessions act as a social and cultural resource. The research focuses on objects as mnemonic devices, an aspect of personal objects that was a dominant theme throughout this analysis. The possessions immigrants brought with them were beneficial when migrating because they were an objective and enduring source of memory. An example of this was the objects which were brought because they represented some aspect of a national or ethnic tradition. These objects were a source of collective memory, enabling immigrants to bring a part of their homeland with them to Canada, and pass this on to future generations. Immigrants using these objects, and reflecting on the experiences and memories that these objects represent helped them to establish themselves within a community, and strategically construct an identity which reflects their new status as an Eastern European

immigrant within Canadian society. In short, these valued material possessions were a strategic part in immigrants constructing an hyphenated Canadian identity.

Where the analysis falls short in this regard is that it does not take into consideration how the material possessions that were brought could also be a liability. For instance, on a practical level, bringing cultural artifacts, which is illegal in many Eastern European countries, could have jeopardized an individual's successful migration. In addition, the question of just how effectively these cultural objects worked as a resource was not addressed, but could be an interesting topic to explore in further research. For instance, the photographs may simply sit hidden away, a burden to the immigrant, waiting to be organized, and possibly having the potential to bring back upsetting memories of a previous time that was forgotten.

The emphasis in the study tends to be on the positive aspects of material possessions, while neglecting how they could also be a detrimental to immigrants in their migration to Canada. In addition, the question of just how effectively these cultural objects worked as a resource was not addressed, but could be an interesting topic to explore in further research.

The objectification of memories in the form of material possessions is central to the study of how objects are a social and cultural resource. This is one area of

person-object relations which is particularly suited to applied research in a number of areas within sociology and other social sciences. It would be interesting to apply these theoretical conceptions to other populations with a variety of characteristics, and in social situations other than times of life transition. However it is important that this research take a comprehensive view of the value of material possessions, examining the positive and negative impact of possessing material culture.

Limitations of the Study:

A Discussions of Methods and Interpretations

There are a number of important points to make regarding the methods and interpretations incorporated in this research. To begin, it is important to comment on the limitations that arise from the scope of the study. The number of immigrants interviewed is fairly small, and it is questionable that these participants are representative of recent migration from Eastern Europe, or the situation of immigration in general. The referral and snowball sampling process, even though conducted in two different cities, tended to furnish participants of a similar age and socio-economic status.

This homogeneous population was advantageous in that all the participant expressed similar experiences which produced more explicit results than if the immigrants

interviewed had a wide range of social backgrounds. However, this study only represents a single portrait of the relationship between immigrants and their material possessions. It is important, then, to conduct further research addressing similar issues combined with social factors such as social class, gender, age, and ethnic background. In terms of the interviewing process, the exploratory nature of the study made it difficult to address more specific issues which emerged as the research progressed. Asking immigrants to comment on the objects they brought and the value of these possessions produced very selective data (only the objects that could be recalled were mentioned), and general (because many of the participants had not considered the value of their objects until the interview began). This difficulty was compounded by some immigrants' unfamiliarity with the English language, and occasional suspicion of participating in a taped interview about their activities when migrating. Considering the scope of the study, a more constructive approach may have been to interview a smaller number of immigrants several times. With this method, participants would have gradually felt more comfortable with the interviewing process, and also have had more time to reflect on their experiences when migrating and the possessions they brought. By conducting several interviews with each immigrant more specific issues could have been introduced and explored in the analysis as the

research developed.

One advantage of taking a general exploratory focus is that the analysis indicates further interesting areas of research. For instance, in studying the situation of life transition it would be interesting to look specifically at the role of material possessions in the reconstruction of self-identity - especially the use of material possessions as an objectification of significant memories and life experiences. A second area for further research is the study of how people organize and arrange their possession in structured patterns. The importance of collections in this research suggests that the meaning of material possessions is closely related to the way personal objects are combined, organized, and arranged.

Lastly, the emphasis on material possessions in the analysis may have veiled questions regarding political implications of the material possessions immigrants brought from Eastern Europe. There certainly seemed to be a lack of objects which had ties the political involvement of immigrants in the Eastern Bloc, and a lack of objects representing the tensions and frustrations with the political establishment which were often expressed as reasons for migrating. This may have been a conscious decision by immigrants to leave these memories behind. Bringing objects that were apparently apolitical, representing their life-experiences which did not involve their relations with the

communist establishment, may also have been 'paradoxically' a strategy to import an ethnic and cultural political identity through their material possessions which would have been more willingly accepted in Canada. Unfortunately, these questions reach beyond the scope of this study; however, they would be interesting to pursue in further research.

The Place of Object-Relations Research in Sociology

The study of person-objects relations is a marginal field of research in the social sciences. As the review of literature illustrates, many disciplines have made a limited attempt to examine the relationship between people and the material culture they acquire and call their own. This emerging field of research can be located within a trend towards more interdisciplinary studies, sometimes lumped into the general category of 'cultural studies', which are organized around topics of interest rather than social scientific disciplines.

This development has produced, it seems, a increased dialogue within the social sciences, and between the social sciences and humanities, and has offered a novel and instructive approach to social research. The increased interest in studies of the body, music, sport, literature, and health are examples of the emergence of an interdisciplinary approach to research. This is not to say that an interdisciplinary approach to cultural studies should

replace established substantive areas within sociology, or any of the social sciences. Instead, the theoretical conceptions and empirical illustrations produced by the study of person-object relations should be incorporated into research conducted in more established substantive areas within sociology.

Notes

1. In some cases the material possessions were also valued for reasons other than those relating to life experience. For instance one female immigrant brought a wallet that belonged to her father. The wallet was functional because she used it on a daily basis. At the same time, the object was also valued as a representation of the woman's father. In the case of cultural objects, some art collections represented the experiences of when or where they were bought; however, the art works were also valued in terms of their aesthetic quality and monetary worth. In each of these instances, though, the subjects emphasized that the objects were brought because of the experiences they represented rather than their functional, or monetary value.

Appendix A

Questionnaire Guide for Thesis Research Project

Date
Place
Time

How many years have you been here?

How did you get here?

When did you come?

Biographical Information

Name
Sex
Age
Birth place

Residence Pattern:

Where were you born & where have you lived and for
how long.
relative size of the place lived.

Marital Status

Occupation:
present and past history.

Education:

Children:
how many, ages.

Siblings:
Number of brothers and sisters.
Present residence.

Parents:
occupation, education, residence.

Immigration Information

Did you move directly to Canada, or were there others places you lived while waiting to immigrate, or before you can to Canada?

Where, and for how long?

Why did you decide to immigrate?

What were the circumstances behind the move?

When you came, did you plan to stay permanently in Canada?

Or, was this a decision you made after you arrived?

Do you ever plan to go back?

Would you go back if you could?

Has it been difficult to make the transition to life in Canada?

Do you feel comfortable now, did you think you have made this transition? NO - Why?

If yes, then, what has helped you feel comfortable?

Can I ask you some questions about some of the circumstances of your move? Beginning with the things you brought with you and left behind?

A. Things brought:

When you moved, did you bring a lot of your things with you?
Why?

-Did you want to leave things behind, or did you have to leave them behind?

I'd like to talk about the specific things you did bring with you.

Can you give some examples of the things you brought.
Do you have any that you could show me.

i. Questions about things mentioned:

-Why did you bring this thing with you?

-what did you value about it?

-useful to you in some way

-a reminder of home,

-Does represent something about your life experience.

Has the meaning/value or use of the thing changed at all since you have been in Canada.

-Do you remember where you got it from.

-was it given to you, did you make it, buy it.

-Was there anything you brought with you that you have sold, lost, had stolen, thrown out, etc.

Why did you get rid of it if sold or thrown out.

What value did it have for you.

Of the objects you brought, which the most valuable in terms of helping you adapt to life in Canada? In what way?

Which did you use the most;

Which object or group of objects made you feel the most

comfortable, or at home, when you came to Canada.

A. Things Left Behind:

-What did you do with the things you had to part with?

Did you sell them, give them to friends and family ,
put them in storage, a combination of all the above.
What type of things, disposed of in what ways.

-Do you think you will ever be able to retrieve the things
you left?

-Can you give me examples of the specific things you left
behind, what you did with them, and why?

-Is there anything you wish you could have brought, but
didn't or were not able to?

Why would you want to have this object?

What value does it, or did it, have for you?

Does it mean something special to you?

-perhaps a person, event/experience/time, or place in
your life.

Do you often think about the things you left behind?

Why do you think they come to mind, or why not?

Is there anything you really wished you brought that
would have been useful to you here?

Was there anything you left because you thought it would be
easy to buy in Canada?

-Do you feel a need to break with the things you had before?

-leaving or selling things as a way of breaking the
connection with your past, and starting again in a
new country?

ii. Questions about all objects

Is there any specific things that reminds you of your home country? Would it be difficult to part with these/this thing(s)?
Why?

Is there any thing or group of things which you think others would closely associate with you. ie. something that is an important or essential part of you (the way others see you and the way you see yourself.

In other words, are there any material possessions you would not or could not part with.

What is it about these objects that make them so important, How do you value them? What do they mean to you?

Is there anything else you want to add. Can you think of anything else you may have brought, or left behind?

Do you know any other people who immigrated from your country, or other countries in Eastern Europe? What kind of things did they bring with them?

Do you think they would be interested in participating in this the study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Bibliography

- Angus, I.
1989 "Circumscribing Postmodern Culture." Pp. 96-110,
in Angus, I. & Jhally, S. (ed.),
Cultural Politics in Contemporary America.
New York: Routledge.
- Austin, M., Honey, C.M., & Eagle, T.C.
1987 Human Geography. St. Paul: West Publications.
- Bakker, C.B. & Bakker-Rabdou, K.K.
1973 No Trespassing! Explorations in Human Territoriality.
San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp.
- Baudrillard, J.
1968 Le System des Objects. Paris: Gallimard.
1988 Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. Ed. M, Poster.
Stanford: Stanford University Press.
1991 Jean Baudrillard: Revenge of the Crystal: Selected
Writing on the Modern Object and its Destiny.
London: Pluto Press.
- Belk, R.
1982 "Acquiring, Possessing, and Collecting:
Fundamental Eds. Processes in Consumer Behaviour."
Pp. 70-73, in R, Bushard & P, Hunt (ed.),
Marketing Theory: Philosophy of Science Perspectives.
Chicago: American Marketing Association.
1985 "Materialism: Trait Aspects of Living in
the Material World." Journal of Consumer
Research. 13, December, pp. 265-280.
1987 "Possessions and Extended Sense of Self." Pp.
151-164, in J, Umiker-Sebeok (ed.), Marketing and
Semiotics: New Directions in the Study of
Signs for Sale. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
1988 "Possessions and the Extended Self." Journal
of Consumer Research. Vol. 15, September,
pp. 139-168.
- Berg, R.
1975 "Land: An Extension of the Peasant's Ego."
Anthropology Quarterly. 48, January, pp. 4-13.
- Bowlby, J.
1980 Attachment and Loss. New York: Basic Books.

- Bourdieu, P.
 1977 Outline of a Theory of Practice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
 1984 Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, M. & Werner, P.
 1985 "Social Cohesiveness, Territoriality, and Holiday Decorations: The Influence of Cul-de-sacs." *Environment and Behaviour*. 17, September, pp. 539-565.
- Butler, R.L. & Lewis, M.
 1977 Aging and Mental Health. St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Co.
- Brubaker, R.
 1985 "Rethinking Classical Sociological Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu." *Theory, Culture, and Society*. 14, pp. 723-744.
- Caplow, T.
 1982 "Christmas Gifts and Kin Networks" *American Sociological Review*. vol.47, June, pp. 383-392.
- Cohen, J.
 1989 "About Steaks Liking to be Eaten: the Conflicting Views of Symbolic Interactionists and Talcott Parsons Concerning the Nature of Relations between Persons and Nonhuman Objects". *Symbolic Interaction*. Vol.12, Num 2, pp. 191-213.
- Collins, R.
 1985 Three Sociological Traditions: Selected Readings. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Comstock, C.D.
 1981 "Inanimate Objects Attachments of Elderly Nursing Home Residents." *Smith-College-Studies-in-Social-Work*. 51, 3, June, pp. 192-215.
- Csikszentmihalyi, H. & Rochberg-Halton, E.
 1978 "People and Things: Reflections on Materialism". *The University of Chicago Magazine*. 70(3), pp. 6-15.
 1981 The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, J.
 1956 "Status Symbols and the Measurement of Status Perception". *Sociometry*. 19, Sept, pp. 154-165.
- de Certeau, M.
 1984 The Practice of Everyday Life. Steven Rendell. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Denzin, N.
1970 The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Disman, M.
1984 "Immigrant and Other Grieving People: Insights for Counselling Practices and Policy Issues." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*. 15, 3, pp. 106-118.
- Dittmar, H.
1989 "Gender Identity-Related Meaning of Personal Possessions. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. 28, pp. 159-171.
- Donner, D.
1985 "Bike Thieves Take More than Just Metal: they Steal a Big Part of Someone's Life." *Daily Utah Chronicle*. 94, October, 11.
- Eco, U.
1973 "Social Life as Sign System" Pp. 267-275, in D.Robey (ed.), Structuralism: The Wolfson College Lectures. London: Cape.
- Edney, J.
1972 "Property, Possession, and Performance: A Field Study of Human Territoriality." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. 2(3), pp. 275-282.
- Erikson, E.H.
1963 Childhood and Society. New York: Norton.
- Erikson, K.T.
1976 Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Farmer, V.
1986 "Broken Heartland." *Psychology Today*. 20, 4, pp. 54-63.
- Feirstein, B.
1986 "Me, My Things, and I." *New York Times Magazine*. (May 4), 18.
- Fiske, J.
1987 Television Culture. New York: Methuen.
1989a Understanding Popular Culture. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
1989b Reading the Popular. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

- Furby, L.
 1978 "Possessions: Toward a Theory of their Meaning and Function throughout the Life Cycle." Pp. 297-336, in Life Span Development and Behaviour. vol 1. New York: Academic Press.
- 1980 "Possessions in Humans: An Exploratory Study of its Meaning and Motivation." Social-Behaviour-and-Personality. 6, 1, pp. 49-65.
- Furby, L. & Wilke, M.
 1982 "Some Characteristics of Infants' Preferred Toys." Journal of Genetic Psychology. 140, June, pp. 207-219.
- Gans, H.
 1974 Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste. New York: Basic Books.
- Goetz, J.P. & LeCompte, M.D.
 1981 "Ethnographic Research and the Problem of Data Reduction." Anthropology and Education Quarterly. 12, pp. 51-70.
- Goffman, Erving
 1951 "Symbols of Class Status". British Journal of Sociology. 2, Dec, pp. 295-304.
- 1959 The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- 1961 Asylums. New York: Doubleday.
- 1971 Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order. New York: Basic Books.
- Hasselkus, B.R.
 1991 "Ethical Dilemmas in Family Caregiving for the Elderly: Implications for Occupational Therapy." The American Journal of Occupational Therapy. vol. 45, 3, pp. 206-212.
- Hawlbachs, M.
 1980 The Collective Memory. New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, G.H.
 1958 Question of Being. New York: Twayne.
- James, W.
 1890 The Principles of Psychology. vol.1 New York: Henry Holt.
- Kirby, S. & McKenna, K.
 1989 Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins. Toronto: Garamond Press.

- LaBranche, A.
1973 "Neglected and Unused Things: Narrative Encounter." Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry. 12 (2), pp. 162-168.
- Lauman, E. & J. House
1970 "Living Room Styles and Social Attributes: The Patterning of Material Artifacts in a Modern Urban Community". Sociology and Social Research 54, April, pp. 321-342.
- Lawrence, D.H.
1947 Selected Poems. New York: New Directions.
- Levi-Strauss, C.
1957 "The Principle of Reciprocity." Pp. 84-94, in Ed. Coser, L. & Rosenberg, B. (ed.), Sociological Readings. New York: Macmillan.
1969 Elementary Structures of Kinship. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
- Lodge, D.
1984 Small World: An Academic Romance. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Lofland, J. & Lofland, L.H.
1984 Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Marcel, B.
1965 Being and Having. London: Dacre Press.
- Marx, K.
1972 Karl Marx: Essential Writings. F. Bender, (ed.) New York: Harper Row.
- Mauss, Marcel
1967 The Gift. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- McCarthy, D. E.
1984 "Toward a Sociology of the Physical World: G.H. Mead on Physical Objects" Studies in Symbolic Interaction. vol. 5, pp. 105-122.
- McClland, G.
1951 Personality. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- McCracken, G.
1987 "Culture and Consumption among the Elderly: Three Research Objectives in an Emerging Field." Aging and Society. 7, pp. 203-224.
1988a The Long Interview. Newbury Park: Sage.

1988b Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

McLeod, B.

1984 "In the Wake of Disaster." *Psychology Today*. 18, October, pp. 54-57.

Mead, G.H.

1934 Mind Self and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M.

1962 Phenomenology of Perception. London: Routledge.

Miller, D.

1987 Material Culture & Mass Consumption. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Mueller, E.

1978 "(Toddlers + Toys) + (An Autonomous System)." Pp. 65-84, in M. Lewis & L. Rosenblum (ed.), The Social Network of the Developing Infant. New York: Plenum.

Oakes, G.

1978 "Translator's Introduction" Pp. 3-62, in G. Oakes (Ed.), Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality, and Love. New Haven: Yale University.

Poster, M.

1988 "Introduction." Pp. 5-17, in M. Poster (ed.), Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. Stanford: University of California Press.

Prentice, D.A.

1987 "Psychological Correspondence of Possessions, Attitudes, and Values." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 53, pp. 993-1003.

Proshansky, H.M., A.K. Fabian, & R. Kaminoff

1983 "Place, Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3, pp. 57-83.

Redfoot, D.L. & Back, K.W.

1988 "The Perceptual Presence of the Life Course." *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*. vol. 27(3), pp. 155-170.

Rochberg-Halton, E.

1979 "The Meaning of Personal Art Objects." Pp. 76-84, in J. Zuzanek (ed.), Social Research and Cultural Policy. Waterloo: Otium Publications.

1984 "Object Relations, Role Models, and Cultivation of the Self." Environment and Behaviour. vol. 16, 3, May, pp. 335-368.

Rosenbaum, J.

1972 Is Your Volkswagen a Sex Symbol? New York: Hawthorn.

Rosenblat, J, Walsh, P. & Jackson, D.

1976 "Grief and Mourning." Pp. 23-37. in Cross-Cultural Perspective. New Haven: Human Relations Area Files.

Rubinstein, R. L.

1987 "The Significance of Personal Objects to Older People" Journal of Aging Studies. vol.1 Num. 3, pp. 225-238.

Sarte, J.P.

1956 "The Meaning of 'to Make' and 'to Have': Possession." Pp. 16-32, in C, Moustakas (ed.), The Self. New York: Harper & Row.

Schon, D.A.

1983 The Reflective Practitioner. New York: Basic.

Sherman, E. & Newman, E.S.

1977 "The Meaning of Cherished Personal Possessions for the Elderly". International Journal of Aging and Human Development 8, pp. 181-192.

Simmel, G.

1950 The Sociology of Georg Simmel. R, Wolfe (ed.) New York: Free Press.

1978 On Women, Sexuality, and Love. New Haven: Yale University Press.

1984 The Philosophy of Money. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Snyder, C.R. & Fromkin, H.L.

1981 Uniqueness: Human Pursuit of Difference. New York: Plenum.

Soloman, M.

1986 "Deep Seated Materialism: The Case of Levi's 501 Jeans." Pp. 181-192, in R, Lutz (ed.) Advances in Consumer Research. vol. 13 Association for Consumer Research.

Spradley, J.P.

1979 The Ethnographic Interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Tompkins, J.

1981 Reader Response Criticism. New York: John Hopkins University Press.

Tuan, Y.

1978 Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1984 Dominance & Affection: The Making of Pets. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Van Amerongen, J.

1988 Sound Sleeping in the Neighbourhood. Kansas City: Andrews & McMeel.

Veblen, T

1983 The Theory of the Leisure Class. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

