

## **My life in a sock drawer**

*Unworn jewellery and the construction and preservation of identity*

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### **Introduction**

This project examines the potential for designers to engage with the emotional significance of objects by focusing on the storage of sentimental jewellery. It traces the relationship between unworn jewellery and identity, and the means by which women use jewellery to access and evidence their life experiences. In light of this, the research proposes alternatives to conventional storage boxes. Primary information was gathered during interviews with a selection of women and this was used to guide practical design processes such as drawing and modelling. Consequently a series of object outcomes were produced. These new 'containers' are intended to reflect and augment certain types of interaction uncovered during the interviews. The project provides new insights into the psychology of storage and constitutes a fertile design strategy. It was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

### **Background**

Studies indicate that for women, sentimental possessions such as jewellery and photographs are at the very heart of their sense of past, present and future self.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it is suggested that the loss or theft of such items is so great as to be experienced as an erosion or reduction of the self.<sup>2</sup>

In 2003 Laura Potter and Lin Cheung collaborated on an exhibition entitled 'Treasure'. The concept was developed to explore sentimentality in jewellery and was inclusive of a range of perspectives: those who make, wear or simply enjoy owning jewellery. The evidence collated supported the established notions that material and aesthetic value, combined with a physical closeness to the body, contribute to jewellery's importance as 'possession'. Some women treasured items that they considered of little financial or aesthetic worth, and that were never worn. Consequently this research attempts to explore the mediatory role of jewellery that does not serve the owner within its primary context of use: that of being worn.

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<sup>1</sup> Dittmar, H. (1992) *The social psychology of material possessions: To have is to be*, St. Martin's Press: New York

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Research that touches upon contemporary jewellery and identity has dealt with ornamentation as fashion, which is subsequently connected to the public affirmation of personal identity: statements of belonging and difference.<sup>3</sup> There has been little investigation into how and why jewellery kept at home - treasured but not worn - is actually used, particularly in the act of reminiscence. Designers have become increasingly preoccupied with the means by which objects become emotionally valued and therefore less inclined to obsolescence.<sup>4</sup> This project explores the specific function of jewellery as contemplative artefact, but has wider implications for understanding the potential for all designed objects to acquire meaning.

The primary information was gathered during interviews with ten women.<sup>5</sup> The interviews were semi-structured and individuals were asked to talk about various aspects of the item(s) of jewellery they considered most personally significant. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were recorded and the piece(s) were photographed in their usual "home", i.e. wherever the owner generally kept them.

Based on the evidence collected during the interview phase a number of object outcomes were designed. The outcomes were developed through combining analyses of the interviews with texts related to the emerging themes. The new artefacts are chiefly concerned with alternative ways to store or house the items identified and are intended to reflect certain types of interaction uncovered during the interviews.

### **The attached object**

This project deals with 'emotional attachment' and the ways in which individuals experience and articulate their interactions with unworn items of jewellery. The literature on material possession attachment is substantive, and while it is not the intention here to deal with the breadth of research conducted, it is necessary to identify certain characteristics that define *attachment*, as opposed to other types of owner-artefact relationship.

Material possessions have been widely discussed within the fields of philosophy, sociology, psychology and consumer research as integral to an individual's conception of 'self', and the effects have been categorised according to discrete modes of function. Attachment to objects is not considered the same as a personal investment in material goods (materialism), not specific to a particular product or brand (product involvement), nor does it depend on whether the object is

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on how clothing and adornment are used to define contemporary cultural "tribes" see Polhemus, T. (1994) *Streetstyle*, Thames and Hudson: Great Britain

<sup>4</sup> van Hinte, E. (ed) (1997) *Eternally yours: Visions on product endurance*, Uitgeverij 010: Rotterdam

<sup>5</sup> The interviewees were selected from the responses to a questionnaire distributed as part of the exhibition 'Treasure – contemporary notions of Sentimentality in Jewellery' (Potter & Cheung, 2003).

'liked' (evaluative affect).<sup>6</sup> The following characteristics have been identified as portraying attachment;<sup>7</sup>

1. Attachment forms with specific material objects, not product categories or brands.
2. Attachment possessions must be psychologically appropriated.
3. Attachments are self-extensions.
4. Attachments are decommodified and singularised.
5. Attachment requires a personal history between person and possession.
6. Attachment has the property of strength.
7. Attachment is multi-faceted.
8. Attachment is emotionally complex.
9. Attachments evolve over time as the meaning of the self changes.

Further to this, different modes of significance may be discerned within possession attachment as a whole. The different types of significance indicate that "favourite" possessions may be symbolic of individual or networked identity, and when used to negotiate emotions they represent a means of control.<sup>8</sup> The jewellery items discussed here are located primarily within the realm of objects assigned the role of emotional repository, in as much as they have been invested with personal significance.

### **The decommodified object**

All of the pieces discussed in this project were given as gifts. In Baudrillard's writing on objects and the logic of signification, he describes the gift as having "...neither use value nor (economic) exchange value."<sup>9</sup> He goes on to suggest that the significance of the gift lies in "the transferral pact that it seals between two persons..."<sup>10</sup>, and that the material object itself is simultaneously irrelevant and specific; the object given could be anything, but because it *is* given it becomes a singular, unique thing. This is one way to account for a lack of material knowledge even if an object is considered particularly 'special'.

Respondent 3: *I don't know what the metal is, but it has very small diamonds in it.*

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<sup>6</sup> Kleine, S. Schultz & Menzel Baker, S. (2004) "An Integrative Review of Material Possession Attachment." *Academy of Marketing Science Review* [Online] <http://www.amsreview.org/articles/kleine01-2004.pdf> (accessed 10.06.07)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Rees Lewis, J. & Dittmar, H. (2004) "Planned purchases and personal amulets: representations of two material possessions in Japan, Canada and the UK." *Ongoing Themes in Psychology and Culture* [Online] [http://ebooks.iaccp.org/ongoing\\_themes/chapters/lewis/lewis.php?file=lewis&output=screen](http://ebooks.iaccp.org/ongoing_themes/chapters/lewis/lewis.php?file=lewis&output=screen) (accessed 10.06.07)

<sup>9</sup> Baudrillard, J. (1981) *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*, Teleos Press Ltd: USA, p.64

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

At the point of exchange, a small amount of information may have been passed on regarding the materials, techniques and place of origin. This is one aspect of the object's role in underpinning communication; it acts as a prop allowing one person to transmit stories to another. The new owner accepts and interprets information from the initial act of history-telling, but over time begins to fill in the ambiguous spaces between the known facts.

Respondent 2: *I'm just making this up but this is how I remember being told by my mum or my grandma...*

When asked presently to describe the jewellery in concrete terms the gaps begin to appear, and what emerges is a seam of tacit knowledge derived from vague anecdotal evidence. This builds a new history for the object, specific to its latest owner.

Respondent 1: *...I was always told it's quite valuable and I thought it was gold, but when I looked at it the other day I think it's some cheap... it's probably just any sort of metal and I'm not even sure that the surface of it is gold.*

The perception of economic value – and of preciousness – is important to the extent that, at some point in the past the piece was considered worthy of being passed on. Perhaps the easiest (and safest) way to impress upon a new owner the status of the object is to attribute preciousness. Esteem based on perceived financial value is immediate, whilst sentimental appreciation may take time to develop and is not guaranteed from another's point of view. Fiscal value is not the driving force behind an enduring attachment to such items, however it may act as a baited hook ensuring that things are kept safe long enough for the owner to develop a deeper, historically-driven attachment.

If the object's material value unravels, its genuineness and the reliability of the associated narrative become unstable. Rather than diminish the owner's respect these doubts only serve to strengthen the sensation of personal attachment.

Respondent 1: *The story goes that it was given to my mum's grandmother by an admirer, but now I think maybe she made everything up!*

Moreover, it may be argued that the level of decommmodification is inversely proportional to the emotional significance; the stronger the emotional bond becomes the less important it's status within an economic context. There may be an appreciation that this singularised status is a temporary period within the object's overall lifetime, and a concern that in the future it's materiality might relegate it to a less meaningful category of possession. The singularity generates

a profound sense of ownership that cannot be expected to endure and this manifests itself as a reluctance to envision the object's future lives.

Respondent 6: *...if I'd sort of looked after it all that time, for my own sake, then given it to someone who treated it as any other piece of jewellery, maybe I'd be a bit... funny about that.*

Perceptions of value are relative to a specific time, place and person. At some point in the past an object may have been appreciated materially (investment), aesthetically (ornament), culturally (souvenir) or functionally (device), and these potential values remain latently stored for future transactions.

### **The transitional object**

The emotional significance of the jewellery is attributed to the fact that, through contemplation, the owner is reminded of someone. This is usually, but not always, the person who gave them the piece. The description of this connection begins with the identification of an individual, and then extends through the nature of their relationship and the circumstances surrounding the exchange.

Respondent 8: *He [father] collects antiques, and has Antique stores so he does have quite a collection of these things and he would give jewellery out to his daughters as well... it's a big family...*

The reflection then proceeds across an extended network of people, places and events; drawing upon seemingly disconnected memories that stem from a single point of entry. The object effectively punctures a small hole in the mental fabric between the past and the present, and the more concentrated the focus of attention the bigger this hole becomes.

Respondent 4: *They [aunt and uncle] gave it to my parents when, well I wasn't christened but instead of a christening present they gave it to them 'cause it had my name on the back of it. They sort of gave it to my parents I suppose rather than to me, and then eventually my mum gave it to me. I was probably allowed it a bit too young to be honest. I remember wearing it to primary school, which probably wasn't the best idea. I was ten or something.*

In terms of their relationship to notions of 'self', these memories help to locate an individual's perception of who they are by placing them and their actions within the wider context of a family or peer group.

Respondent 4: *It's quite family oriented for me, so... It does make me think of being little, and looking at it and knowing I wasn't really supposed to wear it, and when I did wear it to school feeling a bit naughty. So it probably actually reminds me of my mum and my dad and my sister.*

The memories of exchange are expressed using recollections of speech, which is re-enacted by the second hand narrator. The giver's story is adapted and retold in the words of the new owner. The approximate words used at the point of exchange are, if recalled, somehow integral to the personal history of the object, even if they are not an exact or direct quotation.

Respondent 3: *We were in my bed-sitting room and he just produced it from his pocket, and he said "I thought it would be a good idea if you had one of these". We'd already decided that we were going to get married, and he said it seemed to be the right thing to do, as we were going to get married.*

Alongside this inter-subjective function the object's status is also derived from its temporal associations. The significance is discussed through reference to a past self and to a consciousness of change, in terms of physical or social maturity.

Respondent 2: *These are really hideous but I love them because my godfather gave them to me when I was little. I was ten or eight, you know, and I thought that [piece] was just the business.*

There are parallels between objects in adult life that help locate individuality through reference to 'otherness', and the emergence during childhood of transitional objects.<sup>11</sup> The first special possessions are the ones we single out during infancy to replace the security that is lost through separation from a parent. They connect back to something familiar that has become distant, and through them we begin to appreciate the world outside of our subjective experience. Possession attachment theories suggest that this phenomenon continues into adult life through our affection for material things, which are regarded similarly to transitional objects, as "...a representation of (although not a substitute for) the space between people."<sup>12</sup> Once again Baudrillard's theories of gift-value are pertinent. He posits the ambivalent nature of symbolically exchanged things, wherein "...the gift is a medium of relation and distance; it is always love and aggression."<sup>13</sup>

The memories that emerge incorporate connectedness through physical and verbal interaction, however the point here is that they are not literal connecting devices: not surrogates for actual communication. They are as symbolic of separation as they are of connection. They remind us that there are subjective realities outside of our own and that between these realities there are spaces. It is because these spaces exist that we need to communicate at all.

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<sup>11</sup> Winnicott, D. (1953) "Transitional objects and transitional phenomena." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34: 89-97

<sup>12</sup> Kearon, T. & Leach, R. (2000) "Invasion of the 'Body Snatchers': Burglary Reconsidered." *Theoretical Criminology*, 4: 451-472

<sup>13</sup> Baudrillard, J. (1981) p.65

### **The dormant object**

Jewellery itself may be categorised in different ways, according to its perceived role. Various described as “every day”, “costume” or “more expensive”<sup>14</sup>, some jewellery pieces play a part in the day-to-day presentation of the ‘self’ and are used to construct both internal and external personae within different social situations. These pieces are active in the sense that they are habitually worn as part of a personal routine or socio-cultural convention. This type of categorisation allows for a distinction between that of *active* jewellery (worn) and *dormant* jewellery (unworn).

As a result of shared typology, dormant and active pieces are stored together but clearly have different functions. Dormant jewellery does not settle with active jewellery because it is regarded in the same light, rather it has been instinctively situated according to type and only in this rudimentary sense does it remain jewellery.

Respondent 9: *...I think about wearing it, and once in a while I'll put it on, and then I think 'cause I don't wear it it feels a bit weird. Like that's not really it's function... which sounds a bit strange, but it's like no, that's not really what it's for.*

Respondent 5: *Even if I was going to a fancy dress party where I was all blinged up and I needed some extra bling I still wouldn't use that. No. Too strange.*

Disconnected from the body and its primary use-value, its function is closer to that of a personal relic; something that is kept because it is all that tangibly remains of a previous event, or in place of an absent ‘other’ or ‘self’. To all intents and purposes it has ceased to be jewellery, and practically it need not occupy the same object category or the same storage space as its more serviceable relatives.

Yet its proximity to active jewellery remains relevant in so far as it is discreetly to hand, in and around the dressing table or wardrobe where the “traditionally personal and solitary gestures of self-possession”<sup>15</sup> transpire. In the course of getting dressed (or ‘dressed up’) the sentimental piece or its container will be encountered, but not in a deliberate or premeditated sense. Contact is irregular and often incidental: the result of some other routine activity.

Respondent 1: *...I'm scouting for a piece of costume jewellery or something, and I'd have a look at it.*

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<sup>14</sup> These phrases were amongst those used by participants to differentiate between ‘categories’ of jewellery, which they regarded as having discrete contexts of use.

<sup>15</sup> Busch, A. (1999) *Geography of a Home: writings on where we live*, Princeton University Press: USA, p.130

Through time and exchange the value of the piece may fluctuate according to different “regimes of value”,<sup>16</sup> but in its present symbolic state it is preserved as historical evidence or remains. To have memories things must first be forgotten; these objects attest to moments in a personal history and exist as relics for prompting remembrance. These relics do not constitute the actual information but are the means by which memories are signposted within an imaginary landscape. The memories themselves would not be erased if the objects were not there, but without the material signage we might forget how and where to reach them.

### **The sheltered object**

As it is unworn, dormant jewellery does not acquire its significance through proximity to the body. It is not surprising to find that jewellery worn on a regular (even permanent) basis becomes inextricably linked to the body as experienced and observed, but this does not apply to pieces that are stored and seldom handled. They also do not function as amulets, in the sense that they might offer some positive (magical) benefit if carried around.<sup>17</sup> The owners are quite firm in their belief that these pieces should live at home.

In Western cultures domestic space is a fiercely guarded private realm; a “shelter for those things that make life meaningful”.<sup>18</sup> Our homes and belongings are psychologically and philosophically imagined as extensions of our bodily selves, and the idea that an individual sense of ‘being’ reaches beyond corporeal margins is explored through the notion of embodiment.<sup>19</sup> Embodied experience constitutes a smudging of the boundaries between people and things, where the things around us do not occupy space that is distinct from, or external to, the body itself. Research into the psychological impact of burglary suggests that the emotional investment in jewellery can be so intense that if stolen, the resulting feelings of ‘invasion’ or personal violation are extremely strong.<sup>20</sup>

Examining precisely where and how these pieces are stored in the home, reveals the nuances of such relationships. Whilst not always housed in a preconceived jewellery box, most of the pieces are kept in a place specifically designated for jewellery and all are to be found in the bedroom, conventionally the most private sanctuary within contemporary domestic space.

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<sup>16</sup> Appadurai, A. (1986) *The social life of things: Commodities in a cultural perspective*, Cambridge University Press: Great Britain, p.15

<sup>17</sup> None of the participants identified with the notion of carrying the piece around as a ‘lucky charm’, talisman or amulet.

<sup>18</sup> Csikszentmihali, M. & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981) *The Meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*, Cambridge University Press: USA

<sup>19</sup> Kearon, T. & Leach, R. (2000) “Invasion of the ‘Body Snatchers’: Burglary Reconsidered.” *Theoretical Criminology*, 4: 451-472

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Respondent 4: *It's varied over the years but at the moment it's in a little jewellery case in a drawer in my chest of drawers.*

Storage is typified by a multi-layered approach, where a piece will have its own box within a larger box or case, and this in turn may be inside a wardrobe or drawer. These layers of protection add to the sense that the piece is 'looked after'; it is not left to rattle around with less important trinkets. Of course, there is a practical aspect to this kind of protection, as an unruly assortment of jewellery can easily become damaged or tangled. However, boxes within boxes also allow for a brief ritual of unwrapping, where the expectation of encountering an emotionally charged piece may be extended and savoured. The layers of protection may simply build over time with little direction or rationale. Here perhaps, it is the object's significance that is sheltered, rather than the object itself.

Respondent 1: *I think it remains very precious because it is hidden to me. I know where it is but it's hidden to me. If I wore it, it would also form relationships with other people because they would comment on it and that would add to its value, or take from its value maybe, and if I just put it on the desk for example, I wouldn't respect it as much because it would just be part of the tatter and, you know, it would be different definitely. ...It's funny that I've been protecting the least [financially] valuable thing.*

The containers themselves could be considered remnants of a past self, because at one time they reflected the tastes of a current self or those of the previous owner. The person changes, becomes another version of who they were, and the container is fixed in the past. The contents become similarly frozen inside the 'not me' box, often with other objects symbolically connected to the same time or person.

Respondent 9: *They've always just kind of lived in there. I never wear any of them. I was given it for my birthday when I was pretty little, and it's hideous!*

The jewellery lives at home, and within the home it needs to be sheltered. These things are not meant to be visible like all of the ordinary 'stuff' in case their emotional value dissipates. Whilst souvenirs, ornaments and other sentimental knick-knacks inform the 'still life' of our familiar surroundings, these things are kept in the dark.

### **The unheimlich object**

The sentimental significance of unworn jewellery is revealed through generalised memories involving networks of family and friends. Upon inspection, these objects will trigger a collage of recollections, characterised by the remembrance of childhood and specific anecdotes involving

past experiences with close family members. When articulated these memories are depicted using complex emotional imagery.

Respondent 8: *... because I think, maybe, I moved many places, and that kind of reminds me of where I'm originally from, and is kind of the root in a way, because er... nothing else really reminds me as much.*

That things can evoke sadness as well as happiness is of course part of the reason they become personally valued. Their familiarity generates a sense of stability, of continuity, which in turn provides comfort within our most private spaces. These things are invested with our memories, which “often carry with them a melancholy in the very heart of comfort.”<sup>21</sup>

In order to provide this kind of domestic comfort some objects are situated to allow for regular, if infrequent, access. If such an object is exceptionally well hidden – locked away or disguised – this is chiefly explained as an attempt to afford extra protection from theft or accidental displacement. It may be months or even years between interactions; the owner does not happen across it or need regular reassurance that the piece is still safe. However, an enhanced disconnection from a sentimental item raises the question of what exactly is being protected, and from whom?

In the short story *Cares of a Family Man*, Franz Kafka conjures an object with an apparently disruptive agency. Unfamiliar and inexplicable, the semi-animate Odradek is a ramshackle assemblage of material fragments that periodically inhabits the narrator's home. “At first glance it looks like a flat star shaped spool for thread, and indeed it does seem to have thread wound upon it; to be sure they are only old broken-off bits of thread, knotted and tangled together, of the most varied sorts and colors.”<sup>22</sup> The enigmatic appearance and sporadic prowling of the strange, dilapidated creature unsettles the familiar status quo by literally invading the sheltered domestic environment. The peculiar entity “...lurks in turns in the garret, the stairway, the lobbies, the entrance hall. Often for months on end he is not to be seen; then he has presumably moved into other houses; but he always comes back faithfully to our house again.”

Odradek is unheimlich<sup>23</sup> in the Freudian sense of that which is unhomely rather than simply unknown. Through detailed semantic investigation Freud concludes that what is unfamiliar cannot be separated from what is familiar; “The Uncanny (das Unheimliche, ‘the unhomely’ is in

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<sup>21</sup> Schwenger, P. (2006) *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*, University of Minnesota Press: USA, p.3

<sup>22</sup> Kafka, F. (c.1914-1917) ‘The Cares of a Family Man’, taken from *The Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, edited by Glatzer, N.N. (2005) Vintage: Great Britain, p.428

<sup>23</sup> Freud, S. (1919) ‘The Uncanny’, taken from *The Uncanny*, edited by Philips, A. (2003) Penguin Books: Great Britain

some way a species of the familiar (das Heimliche, 'the homely')".<sup>24</sup> In reality, objects can simultaneously provide comfort and cause unease, and this tension opens up an ambivalent relationship between the owner and object.<sup>25</sup> Ambivalence is defined as the co-existence of contradictory desires (for example love and hate) stemming from a single point of origin. When an object's associations are both attractive and insufferable, it is natural to exert a measure of control over when and where these feelings may be allowed to surface. Melancholic contemplation of such objects can evoke sensitive thoughts connected to deeply personal issues.

Respondent 2: *...it's got all sorts of deep resonance to do with my family's history and my family's problems... So it's quite complex. It's kind of rife with all sorts of complicated and horrendous layers.*

By conscientiously hiding jewellery with sensitive associations the feelings are effectively suppressed, and the owner is partially shielded from the burden of negative significance. Thorough interment allows the thing to be forgotten almost completely, eliminating any consciousness of its connotations from daily routine. There is a sense that these small things are buried because they have the capacity to unleash deep-seated personal concerns, and consequently must not be permitted free reign or afforded the element of surprise.

Respondent 5: *...I've got hatred, and not understanding, and so it's all mixed up, so until I'm clearer in my own head about what I think about the relationship... then I think I need to keep them [rings].*

When the fabric of an object becomes inextricably tied to the ambivalence it triggers, this can also affect the owner's thoughts about the future of the piece. Returning to Kafka's Odradek, the narrator informs us "He does no harm to anyone that one can see; but the idea that he is likely to survive me I find almost painful."<sup>26</sup> So despite the fact that he does not actually engage in troublesome activity his presence is deeply disturbing. The inference here is that an object with negative connotations might somehow possess the means to instigate negative events; Odradek does nothing, but his continued existence is cause for concern. The narrator is unnerved by the prospect of his children inheriting so unhomely a thing, with its nonchalant aura of malevolence. When jewellery is symbolic of family tension or turbulence, there are concerns that the piece (and its significance) might survive through subsequent exchanges.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.134

<sup>25</sup> The term 'ambivalence' is used here to describe the feelings aroused by an object, which is slightly different to Baudrillard's use of the word with regard to the signification of both relationship and distance. In Baudrillard's sense all gifts are ambivalent, but they do not all stimulate an ambivalent response.

<sup>26</sup> Kafka, F. (c.1914-1917) 'The Cares of a Family Man', taken from *The Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, edited by Glatzer, N.N. (2005), p.428

Respondent 2: *No. I don't really want to give somebody else that... It would be inappropriate to give it to someone else bearing in mind the, sort of, meaning attached to it. It would be inappropriate to give it to someone else. And it would be inappropriate to sell it.*

Equally, when an object evokes difficult memories the expectation of distress caused by its loss is tempered by the prospect of relief.

Respondent 2: *...in a way, to lose it might, not magically make the history disappear, but it's got a burden attached to it: it's a heavy object.*

They are kept because their absence might prevent access to comforting significance. They are not worn because they are irrelevant to contemporary imaginings of identity. They are not displayed because they are not prized for their visual quality, and because they might lose some of their significance if allowed to disappear into the background of everyday surroundings. They are stored in small containers because they signify aspects of the self that occupy the recesses of consciousness, and then the containers are hidden to protect them against invasion by the outside world.

Yet through these measures we might also be protecting ourselves from the objects. They are safely tucked away, out of sight, and thus we avoid the terrifying prospect that when we look at them they might be looking back.

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### **Outcomes**

The information gathered for this project has been used to generate a series of alternative jewellery storage proposals. These are based on the potential for storage devices to reflect the status of objects contained within them, and serve as sympathetic tools for interaction. The design development involved combining an analysis of the interview responses with practical processes such as drawing and modelling. A project notebook was cultivated, which consisted of transcribed interview text and blank pages and this allowed notes and sketches to be made alongside, or directly on top of, the primary text. This notebook became the source of both the text-based and object-based project outcomes. From this, a series of sketch models were then produced which led to the following series of objects.

### **Now box**

*Everything grows up*

The sentimental bits and pieces we collect tend to be frozen in time. They sit in strange boxes that were lovely when we were younger, but now seem vaguely embarrassing. In its day the box attracted similar trinkets, then became full enough, and we are left with a random collection of flotsam and jetsam. The Now box can adapt to different situations, depending on who you are at any one point in time. When you're a kid it makes noise or spins. When you grow up a bit and leave home it helps you turn on the lights or open the doors. And when you get older it steadies you. It might be able to do other things as well. It never becomes 'not you anymore' because you can utilise it to suit who you have become.

### **Ubiquitous box**

*Treasure everywhere*

Our homes are full of things that make us who we are. There are things that we live with everyday, objects that are visible and familiar. Then there are our 'special' possessions, which we feel a closer bond with and keep safely tucked out of sight. But all of our possessions are part of our personal make-up, and the ones we see all the time may be just as important as the secret treasures; we just don't imagine them as special because we see them too often. The Ubiquitous box turns a drawer, or a cupboard, or a room, or the whole house into a jewellery box. It reminds us that everything might be treasure, if we didn't see it all the time.

### **Book of Remembrance**

*Blank page*

If memories are like books stored on the shelves of a mental library, this would be an ever-increasing resource to be perused every time we needed to remember something. To recall an event, we simply select the correct volume and read what happened. We would always remember the same things in the same ways. But does all the information come back, and in the same order, every time? The Book of Remembrance is a space to collect together different ways of remembering. When one recollection is transcribed on the surface, the trace is imprinted on the layer below. The surface memory is then erased (forgotten), and written anew the next time. The evidence of each rewritten memory is retained as a build up of carbon underneath a permanently blank page.

### **Periscopic boxes**

#### *Permission to gaze*

Perhaps our possessions look at us. It would be insensitive to lock them away just because we didn't want to feel them staring all the time. The Periscopic boxes are a pair, with an angled mirror in each. The jewellery perches high up in one box, which is fixed to a wall directly above a dressing table where the other box rests. When someone places themselves (their reflection) inside the resting box, a mutual gaze is established. The jewellery can see you only when you look at it, and if it's looking at you, you will see.

### **Roots box**

#### *Knitted together*

As unworn jewellery accumulates it gravitates towards itself and other jewellery. Things with personal historical meaning are jumbled up with other trinkets and baubles. By passing through The Roots box, all sentimental jewellery can be brought together and fixed in a state of symbolic value. The pieces are knitted into the box, and emerge on the other side as evidence of a continuous lineage. When the box is passed on so is the significance of its contents, because these are not individual things any more but part of a growing object. Its fabric is made in instalments by its past owners, to be continued...

### **The Un**

#### *Some thing and No thing*

Possessions bring with them attachments. They signify associations and because of these we feel obliged to keep hold of them. We might not even like them, but we can't get rid of them. The Un is a form of containment for the small things we can't domesticate or evict; it keeps them out of sight, but not out of mind. Unlike most storage it is awkward, messy and not inclined to be put away neatly in a drawer or a cupboard. It is a space for baggage.

### **Second Life**

#### *Unwearable wearable storage*

When jewellery isn't worn anymore its present associations with the body are removed. Wearing it seems wrong, not its purpose any more, and yet it is still kept with other wearable things. The Second Life box is especially for jewellery that has ceased to be thought of as wearable. It could be used as a necklace, but it probably won't. It is a reminder that things once valued in use, are still capable of being use-full in another way.

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### **Laura Potter**

Laura Potter is a practising jeweller and lecturer. She studied at the University of Central England and then at the Royal College of Art. Laura is currently a lecturer in Design at Goldsmiths College (London) and in the Department of GSM&J at the RCA (London). Her jewellery work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and she has been commissioned to work on larger scale projects aimed towards widening participation within the field of contemporary craft. Laura's jewellery is concerned with the personal (private) relationships that develop between people and their possessions. Early work incorporated ideas of health and well being, and these have gradually developed into an exploration of the emotional support provided by jewellery, particularly with regard to loss and remembrance. Her overall research interests include interdisciplinary subjects such as notions of identity, attachment, preciousness, beauty and object-longevity.

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