THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THINGS:
A CASE STUDY OF THE WOODWARD'S DEPARTMENT STORE

By

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“Using the past is as natural a part of life as eating or breathing. It is a common human activity. What we have in common as human beings is that we employ the past to make sense of the present and to influence the future”

“The presence of the past saturates all of us”
ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to illustrate how the city came to have such a love affair with the Woodward’s Department Store, and how this love affair has led to the building occupying a position of importance in the city of Vancouver. This thesis critically endeavours to argue that Woodward’s has become important through the role of social memory, which is able to make and remake the idea of Woodward’s, and through the social life of Woodward’s objects. Here I use the term social memory to refer to the collective memory that people share about Woodward’s, and also to the ‘social’ way through which this memory is formed. Not only is people’s memory of the Woodward’s Department Store social, as they remember the ‘social’ness of what it meant to either work or shop there, but the objects associated with the building also have a social life, where their function, ownership and meaning have changed over time. Throughout this argument, I attempt to extract the meaning of the memories and memorabilia submitted to the Woodward’s Memories Project, in order to outline the reasons why the building holds importance in the city.

The story of how Woodward’s came to hold such a place of importance in the city can be revealed from the ‘social’ aspect of both social memory and the social life of objects. Through Woodward’s various functions and roles the meanings become entangled, representing the Woodward’s building as an object, a memory and an agent of nostalgia. Because Woodward’s was an integral part of Vancouver for generations, the store became rooted in the memory of the people and the city as a whole. This is evidenced not only by their memory of the department
store but also by the current revitalization efforts of the Downtown Eastside, to which the re-development of Woodward’s is key.

By outlining the social capital of the Woodward’s location as a heritage site, as well as of the Woodward’s objects and the memories associated with them, one can finally begin to understand the true importance of the Woodward’s Department Store to the City of Vancouver. This holds great importance for Vancouver, especially in this time of revitalization and redevelopment. Not only is the past brought to the forefront of a new project, but by tracing the social life of the building the new meanings and functions that the space served is revealed. This research represents a new part of the city’s history which is important to document and share with the public. Aiding in understanding the Woodward’s building, both in the past and present, the significance of this project extends beyond the scope of this thesis.
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The Woodward’s Memories Project

While taking Sociology 510, The Urban Field School, at the University of British Columbia, I undertook a project entitled the “Legend of the Woodward’s Department Store,” renamed the “Woodward’s Memories Project”. The aim of the endeavour was to look at the reasons why people were fighting to save the Woodward’s building in the name of heritage and the revitalization of the Downtown Eastside. Identifying Woodward’s as the now closed department store, the project intended to look at the so-called legend of Woodward’s and what it meant to Vancouverites. Understanding the legend of Woodward’s involved looking at the role of the building in Vancouver in the past, present and future.

When the store closed in 1993, newspapers, radio and TV programs carried many stories about what Woodward’s meant to Vancouverites. Callers phoned in to radio shows, people wrote to the newspapers and nostalgic tales of shopping and working at Woodward’s circulated in innumerable coffee shop and street corner conversations. Though triggered by closure, this was not a new phenomenon. Many newcomers to the city were struck by the fact that almost everyone who had been resident in the city for more than a few years had a Woodward’s story to tell. As a resident of the downtown eastside and long-time activist Jim Green had earmarked the Woodward’s building for redevelopment since before the closure of the store in 1993. Fighting for the preservation of its heritage, he began to wonder about the source and significance of such evident affection: “How could a city have such a love affair with a department store?” The Woodward’s Memories Project was inspired by this question and my purpose in this thesis is to document the nature of the sentimental attachment that many Vancouverites feel for Woodward’s. I sought to describe
and analyze the processes whereby the store has acquired such a place in the collective consciousness of local residents, and to explore the significance this has for the future development of the inner city. By collecting memories and memorabilia I hoped to better understand the meanings and values that Vancouverites associated with Woodward’s Department Store. Through people’s memories and their associations of memory with objects, I wanted to find out what the Woodward’s Department Store represented and meant to people by unlocking the role of social memory in relation to Woodward’s. I began my research by publicly appealing to former employees and customers for information. My project was featured in the Vancouver Sun, and I was interviewed by CBC radio. This publicity generated a lot of public interest and sparked an amazing flow of memories and memorabilia.

However, as I was carrying out this research there was much public discussion about the Woodward’s site in a very different way. It became more and more intimately linked to the struggle for affordable housing in a city where increasing numbers were homeless. To many activists in the political struggle over ‘social’ or low income housing, the site of the Woodward’s building since its 1993 closure had come to represent not happy recollections of consumption, work and diversion but rather “1) a struggle over land, community, shared meaning and power; 2) a loss of safety and security; 3) a beacon of neglect, disrepair, decay and loss” (Sommers and Blomley in Douglas, 2001:50-51). In order to develop an understanding of the meaning of the Woodward’s Department Store in Vancouver I examine the role of Woodward’s in relation to social memory, the social life of objects, and the act of collecting. Linking the social aspect of memory (interactions and networks through which memory is created and shared) to a wide variety of objects that
people sent or showed me led to a new awareness of what Appadurai (1995) had calls the
‘social life’ that they enjoyed. This formed a second strand of analysis. My enrolment in
the Museum Studies program in Anthropology, together with my unintentional role as
recipient of many documents and memorabilia – encouraged more sustained reflection on
the nature and role of collecting. This constituted my third strand of analysis.

The term social memory refers to the way that people create and re-create memory
through social interaction (Codd, 2000). Memory, as many recent studies have taught us
(Codd, 2000; Lowenthal, 1995 and others), is a profoundly social phenomenon. Its origins
lie in social actions and its recreation, editing and representation takes place in varied social
settings, organizations and forms of collective action. This is obvious when we think about
Woodward’s. It provided a locus for numerous and diverse forms of sociation- the relations
among the employer and employee, the relationships among employees, the relationship of
employees to customers and the social interactions that took place between customers
within the store (as it acted as a social space in which to gather). Woodward’s created and
fostered the forging of social memory. Once forged, these memories did not remain static;
they were adapted, edited and recreated over time in order to accommodate new and
changing viewpoints about the past.

As memory was created and re-created over time, this change was paralleled in the
shifting meanings of objects. People’s memories of Woodward’s were often associated
with specific Woodward’s related objects. For many people recalling Woodward’s
memories therefore led them to hang onto Woodward’s objects or even to deliberately
collect such memorabilia. Over time the object’s meaning changed, as did the object’s
function, and this led me to think about the social life of things. Memory is formed through
social interactions, but these involve all sorts of objects, onto which are projected varied and changeable meanings. Objects plainly have social lives—like people. Those with whom they are associated—humans and inanimate materials—may change. The settings in which they are kept, in which they appear or are displayed may alter. We can observe shifts in meaning and shifts in function. Some objects become memorabilia, vehicles for the storing and transmission of memory. In accepting so many gifts from my respondents I found myself becoming a custodian, a curator, a collector, and that led me to consider the lives of objects and the act of collecting. Associating social memory with the social life of objects lends understanding to the ways in which the memory becomes embedded in the object, therefore creating the object’s meaning. As the memory is altered over time so to is the meaning of the object. Subsequently, there is a reciprocal relationship between the object and memory. Both may alter independently, but each change impacts the other.

When I began collecting social memories I did not immediately expect to be collecting objects, but plainly, some memories can be sedimented in particular objects and when that happens objects take on the role of memorabilia. Layers of meaning and recollection are condensed within them and can be summoned by the owner/collector and by others with whom he/she has shared experiences. Unwittingly starting this personal collection, along with the collection of memorabilia by the people that submitted memories, led me to consider the motivations behind the act of collecting and how collecting relates back to creation of social memory.

Methodology

Being interviewed by Jim Green for a TV program (Fall, 2002) concerned with the Woodward’s Department Store gave this project a surprising amount of publicity. The
following Monday the topic of the legend of Woodward's was picked up by the Canadian Broadcasting Company in its 6:00 to 9:00am local radio show 'The Early Edition'. This sparked a good deal of listener response and many expressions of interest in my project, and the fact that I was collecting memories and memorabilia pertaining to the Department Store. As a result, the *Vancouver Sun* highlighted the story along with a few memories that I had received from the public in a series of three articles.

The *Woodward's Memories Project* is composed of over 300 donated objects, which I have termed 'memorabilia', and 200 letters, cards, and emails recording memories of the store. The objects that people submitted included both materials related to employment in the store and things that had simply been purchased in shopping trips to Woodward's. Employee-related objects included such items as employee nametags, credit cards, and business cards, employee photographs, work-related items, and employee recognition awards for years of service and outstanding achievement. These recognition pieces included cufflinks adorned with a "W", pocketknives with the Woodward's logo and silver platters marking 25 Years of Service. Objects that I have categorized as being related to shopping and consumerism included everyday objects and special event or seasonal products. Everyday objects included an array of Woodward's brand products, such as spice jars, baby clams, curry, mince meat, automotive liquids and women's stockings, as well as Woodward's toy trucks. Objects related to special events, on the other hand, were the 100th Anniversary teddy bear, "Breakfast with Santa" buttons, and other seasonal items.

Over the summer of 2002, with financial assistance from the UBC President’s Office Fund, I learned how to catalogue these objects and create a database of the materials. The letters, emails and objects, together with newspaper articles, books and academic
articles, constitute my primary sources from which to distil the main elements of the recollections of the store. The letters that people wrote and submitted to the project also served as the means whereby I could select a small number of people to interview and collect further, more detailed information. In reading and re-reading the letters I was able to pick 45 people to whom I wrote asking for an interview. The selection of 19 men and 26 women was guided by a simple analysis that led me to distinguish ‘shoppers’ from ‘workers’. I wanted to ensure that I had interview material from both, so that I could look at ways in which their recollections contributed distinctive elements to the shared memories of the store. The final interviews numbered 37, and consisted of 11 men, and 26 women. Some people from the original selection were unable to participate due to health reasons and scheduling difficulties. Among this group of interviewees there were 19 workers, and 16 shoppers. In order to generate more interview material I used a number of these interviewees to generate a ‘snowball’ group of 17 additional respondents, 12 female and 5 male. So there were 37 people from the initial group of interviews with 17 additional ‘snowballed’ interviewees, reaching a total of 54 respondents in all.

Plainly this was no random sample. The initial group of interviewees comes from a pool that is entirely self-selected, and those interviews obtained through the snowball method are likely to reinforce, rather than challenge their accounts and opinions. In these circumstances it becomes more than usually important to look closely for any counter-evidence, any indications that the overwhelmingly positive recollections may need some qualification. In the case of this particular research no such evidence was found. The workers and shoppers that submitted memories and memorabilia provided positive recollections of Woodward’s. This consistently positive response, I think, is due to the fact
that Woodward's had a good reputation and rapport with people. It is also due to the fact that people decided whether or not to take the time to submit material to this project, and no one who thought ill of the store responded. Also people tend to repress or forget less happy events, and may have remembered Woodward's in a selectively positive way. All of the people who donated their time, memories and objects to this project depicted Woodward's in an extremely favourable light.

The questions that guided the interviews were designed to further my understanding of the role that Woodward's has played in the social memory and the history of Vancouver. Respondents were asked where they now lived and had lived in the city, and how long they had resided here. They were also asked what role they thought Woodward's played in the city. In regards to people’s relation to the department store, respondents were asked what role, if any, the store played in their lives? This question set was aimed at placing the person’s answers in the context of their relation to the city, but also in relation to Woodward’s. Other questions that were directly related to Woodward’s included how they remembered the store. If they worked at Woodward’s what was their position and for how long? What were their memories and experiences working for the store? I was particularly interested in what we might call the culture of the store- the way it operated, the kinds of values and meanings it sought to embody and express. The final set of questions in the interviews focused on the memorabilia that people had collected or sent in to the project. These included, but were not limited to whether they collected Woodward's memorabilia on purpose. "Why do you collect and keep these objects?" "What do they mean to you?" and "Do you know other people who collect Woodward’s memorabilia? “If so, what is your relation to them?” Once establishing their motivations for collecting, my objective was to
understand the meaning that the collection held for them, questioning whether they felt connected to the objects, and by what means. Once this part of Vancouver's history is documented, the building can be examined as a historic landmark and as a vehicle for creating identity (through social memory). These questions lead to the understanding of how people draw upon the past to construct and promote individual and social identities.

It should be noted that during the period in which interviews were held, there was mounting political tensions surrounding the fight to gain social housing in the redevelopment of the Woodward's building. Although this was taking place concurrently in the media, my respondents were not asked any specific questions in this regard. Nor did they comment on the future or potential uses of the building. This may be in part due to non-specific questioning surrounding the role of the building in relation to the political contestation. Also, I think that this may be due to the ages of the respondents, all being senior citizens, and their focus on their memories of Woodward's as a department store, and the role it played in their past. Though the revitalization of the building was a topic that was beginning to heat up in the public domain, this may not have been a part of what they deemed as their memory. The only comments that were made in relation to the future were that they wanted to see the information and material that they were submitting to this project made part of the city's historical record, and given back to the public in a variety of ways. So my primary purpose was to focus on memories of the store as a social and economic organization. However, since its closure, more and more public attention has been focussed on the building- to what it represents not only in terms of history and heritage, but its potential in the provision of housing (especially affordable housing) and, indeed, the redevelopment of the whole Downtown Eastside.
The ethical concerns that were considered in relation to this research included the consideration of the identity of people who submitted material and were interviewed. Although they were given the option of remaining anonymous, all of the respondents were happy to be identified and signed forms of release for the use of their material, interviews, memories and photographs of objects in this thesis, and any publications or exhibitions that I may write or create in the future.

Theoretical Framework

Stuart Hall stated that, “Theory is always a (necessary) detour on the way to something more important” (Hall in Henry and Tator, 2002: 1). When looking at the memories that were submitted to the Woodward’s Memories Project it is important to address 1) the theoretical framework surrounding social memory, 2) the literature pertaining to the social life of objects, and 3) the theoretical motivations and rules regarding the act of collecting.

Defined as a collective memory which people share, social memory is not only the memory of the past and the place, but also the social process of memory formation. Collective memory, Halbwachs (1992) asserts, is always selective; various groups of people have different collective memories, which in turn give rise to different modes of behavior. Halbwachs further argues that memory derives from the social arena, which people inhabit when they remember. He therefore introduced the term 'collective memory' (mémoire collective). Halbwachs stressed how strongly social processes influence not only people's personal memories of their own lifetimes, but also a community's shared memories of the past. It is these shared memories that can take shape within the meaning of a group; “this in turn helps shape the group’s identity; and informs how individuals see the relevance of
experiences” (Fentress and Wickham, 1992). The shared memories surrounding the Woodward’s Department Store contribute to the formation of the identity of a community. As the sense of community developed these memories and meanings they were deployed into sets of symbols. The very word ‘Woodward’s’ came to represent a complex of values and practices. The huge store building also became of symbol of what the word meant, and the objects – bags, clothing, teddy bears, food etc. - from Woodward’s became metonyms for the store itself (Tallentire, 2000). For many Vancouverites Woodward’s became an important part of the city’s, the community’s and their own identity, and its physical location a ‘lieux de memoire’ (Nora, 1989). Collectively remembered through social processes the Woodward’s building became part of Vancouver’s history and community identity. Through social actions, whether it was meeting someone for lunch, making a day out of shopping, or attending an employee picnic, the memories surrounding the Woodward’s Department Store became significant elements in the imagining of a community.

A great deal of remembering is place-related. We recall people and events in situ and those places may even earn, over time, widespread recognition, public acknowledgement and protection and celebration. These ‘places of memory’ sometimes become sites of historic importance – heritage sites and sites of historical commemoration. As Lowenthal states, “people flock to historic sites to share recall of the familiar, communal recollection enhancing personal reminiscence. What pleases the nostalgist is not just the relic but his own recognition of it, not so much the past itself as its supposed aspirations, less the memory of what actually was than of what was once thought possible” (1995: 8). Sites of memory are also places that carry and convey aspirations and hopes for what might
be: a fairer world, a more civilized society, a community that cares enough to house its members decently. This is evident in the way that some of my informants remember Woodward’s in relation to what is missing today. They spoke of the memories of “what was once thought possible” and their aspirations of what might be possible. (Grant, Rowland, et al. Personal Communication, 2005).

When looking at the past in terms of memory it is also important to acknowledge that the past is integral to individual and collective identity and the “ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence, meaning, purpose, and value” (Lowenthal, 1995: 41). As people create and re-create memory in conjunction with historic sites, this not only gives people a view of the future, coloured by nostalgia, but it also aids in the creation of who they are. Identifying oneself with Woodward’s forms memories of the past, and this is important because it was part of history, for the city and for the individual. And also because it represents valued attributes, the familiar, and a hope for the future (Lowenthal, 1995). It is significant to note then, that the past is created in the present and rearticulated due to present forces. The reasons for creating memory include preservation, restoration, nostalgia, defense or restoration of values, enrichment, guidance, identity, reaffirmation and validation and familiarity. This links to Codd’s statement that the past is a product of the present (2000: 88), which supports Lowenthal’s explanation that memory and therefore the past, are created in the present. Craving evidence that the past endures in some recoverable form (Lowenthal, 1995: 14), helps explain the surge of interest in heritage and historic sites but also explains the cherishing of multitudes of ‘collectable’ objects.
Within this field of social memory studies, there is a sub-field in which the focus is on the politics of memory. Fentress and Wickham (1992) alerted us to this in their discussion of class and memory, and so did Eric Hobsbawm and T. Ranger in their 1983 book The Invention of Tradition. Stating that memories and recollections are a product of the present means that we need to interrogate the specific conditions under which such memory is constructed as well as the personal and social implications of memories held. The study of the Woodward’s building illustrates how material objects – in this case a building – can be used by different groups in the making of very different memories and the shaping of different aspirations. Thea Berreta (2004) and others (Blomley, Nick; 2001 in Berretta) shows how Woodward’s has been linked, for twenty years now, to a radical project- the development of affordable housing in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. The take-over of the building in September 2000 by a small group of activists and the subsequent much-publicized squat put Woodward’s at the centre of a political struggle over homelessness. Thus, the old store comes to have an important recent role in both city and provincial politics as different parties and groups argue over quite different uses of the building and its site in strikingly different notions of how urban revitalization might be managed. There is plainly a considerable difference between the memories constructed and used by groups involved in these struggles and those ‘sweet’ memories collected for this study.

Looking at processes through which social memory is created and re-created leads to a similarly dynamic interpretation of the relationships between social memory and objects. The link between memory and memorabilia is suggested by an idea found in Arjun Appadurai’s introductory essay to the collection of papers he edited in 1986 The Social Life
of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective. Here, I am less interested in Appadurai’s central theme – “the links between exchange and value” (1986:3) than in what he calls “the conceit that commodities, like persons, have social lives” (ibid). Drawing on a variety of other authors, he shows how commodities have ‘life histories’ and ‘careers’, how things have social histories and cultural and social biographies. The Woodward’s building and the Woodward’s memorabilia are analyzed through illustrating the social life of the objects and the subsequent meanings that are attached to them. By looking at the social life of objects, Appadurai contributes some excellent ideas in relation to the theme of material memory.

Appadurai concludes that things aren’t immutable, but instead go through phases and may move in and out of the commodity state. Such is the case with many Woodward’s objects, purchased for their use value or perhaps because they conferred status; many items that have been kept for several years acquire new kinds of value. The closure of the store, at a stroke, gave objects with the Woodward’s label a certain scarcity value, invested them with a new historical and cultural significance. Mundane objects moved into a new phase of their lives; they became memorabilia, joining other objects that already attained that special status from their “intercalibration of the biographies of persons and things” (Appadurai, 1986:6). By putting out the call for Woodward’s memories and memorabilia I undoubtedly contributed to the process in which things acquired new meaning.

Connecting the social memory that people develop with the social life of the objects that they kept (in relation to Woodward’s) leads me to consider some of the theory surrounding the collecting of objects. When outlining basic rules that govern this act (Alsop, 1981) I draw on the similarities and differences between public (i.e., museum or institution) and private collecting. By outlining the various foundations of these two forms
of collecting, the motivations and regulations controlling the formation of a collection become apparent. Analyzing the reasons prompting Woodward’s collectors, I draw on the work of Herbert Gans (1974) and the notion of the ‘taste culture’ to distinguish a specific group of people interested in the same type of object— in this case Woodward’s memorabilia. The notion of a Woodward’s taste culture, provides a means of linking the social memory, social life of objects and the act of collecting Woodward’s memorabilia. A similarity can be found in both public and private collectors, as they both view themselves as rescuers¹ (defined loosely as those who save or preserve) and owners of objects. In both situations, “once rescued, objects are made to conform to contexts which are either personally contrived, or, in the case of museums, configured through the imposition of academic, theoretical, or aesthetic purposes” (Kremer, 1992: 146).

Although both public and the private collectors re-contextualize objects through their collecting, this is manifested in different ways, because the emotions associated with the act of personal collecting do not exist within public institutions. Affection, passion, sentiment and personal attachment all play a role in the collecting process, but this role is much greater in the private collector. This distinguishes between the meanings forced upon objects in private versus public collecting. Although it should be noted that emotions of the public collector are repressed by the institutional mandate that must be followed. For example, “the meaning of a collection shifts…as it loses its single owner—an owner who does not need to justify to anyone the objects value or existence. In this transference can be seen as one of the primary differences between the private collection and the curator—

¹ This point could be argued as inaccurate in some cases. For public collectors, such as museum curators, the old ‘salvage ethnography’ paradigm is out of date. Cultures are no longer viewed as becoming extinct, and therefore objects do not need to be ‘rescued’. In this case they would state that they collect objects in the name of preservation. This parallel was loosely drawn to show a connection between public and private collectors, in that they both aim to preserve objects.
collector—which is continuity” (Kremer, 1992: 40). The museum represents a state of permanence, while private collections typically have an end and are generally dispersed after the death of the collector. The private collector, therefore, encapsulates love and passion for collecting, while the curator is guided more by institutional mandates.

Site History

Charles Woodward opened the Woodward’s Department Store in 1892. It sold a array of goods—everything from thread bobbins to mining picks. Selling something for everyone and at bargain prices proved to be a wildly successful endeavour. This can be seen in the fact that Woodward’s was open for over 100 years in the City of Vancouver, and went through over seven expansions to the 1903 building. After first expanding its original downtown location, the Woodward’s Department Store opened branches (24 in all) across Western Canada, from Vancouver to Edmonton, Calgary and as far east as Lethbridge. Woodward’s quickly found a fond place in the hearts of Canadians. It was a place where you could buy anything and everything, from homemade peanut butter, to shoes perfectly fitted by X-ray machines, to a set of fancy china just like the Queen’s. Charles Woodward had the kind of grit and foresight that helped build Vancouver into a metropolis. His faith in the small city helped ensure its eventual role as a major hub for the province. Woodward believed that the city would grow away from the waterfront, so he positioned his store further inland for optimal benefit from future growth. Indeed, for a long time the area prospered, and Woodward’s was surrounded by other successful businesses. The store’s role as an anchor that brought shoppers into the neighbourhood made the success of other businesses possible. When the Depression of 1913 hit Vancouver hard, the service-oriented Woodward’s survived and fought for every bit of business. The store’s main policy was to
sell things as efficiently as possible and to pass the savings to the customer. The employees and shoppers who spent their time at Woodward’s helped create the legend as surely as Charles Woodward himself.

Woodward’s owed as much of its success to the enthusiasm and customer service skills of its employees and the loyalty of its customers as it did to Charles’ Woodward’s vision. However, like so many other department stores—Towers, Simpsons and Eaton’s—the Woodward’s store came under enormous financial pressures in the 1980s and eventually collapsed. The demise of Woodward’s can be seen in relation to the collapse of other department stores across the continent. With the growth of major suburban shopping malls, the nature of retailing and of shopping changed. Shoppers no longer went to the grand old stores in the central city by train or bus. They drove to the mall. And there they sought ‘distinction’ in the clothes and other goods they purchased by patronising small boutiques. Thus, while big department stores – like Eatons, The Bay, Sears and Woodward’s - provided the visible anchors for the new suburban and later new, central city malls, the numerous small stores inside the mall created the illusion of diversity, and distinctiveness. In reality, most of the small shops were parts of large chains and those chains, in turn, were owned by – the very biggest of the old retailers – like Woolworths – or big department stores or their holding companies. Woodward’s was not big enough to play in this league, nor was it able to match the kind of “shoppertainment” as Hannigan (1994) describes the leisure opportunities and diversions on offer in ‘mega-malls’ like the one in Edmonton. It was not that Woodward’s did not appreciate the benefit of linking shopping with entertainment. In the early years of the department store they were in the vanguard of this trend as the x-ray machines, peanut butter and donut makers reveal.
Woodward’s entertaining consumer experience created a new type of shopping. Of course, entertainment had always been a part of the shopping experience— from Medieval markets to the Victorian and Edwardian department stores—and Charles W. Woodward understood this well. Woodward’s offered diversion as well as value. As John Hannigan states “as far back as the 1890s, the great metropolitan department stores set out to attract downtown customers by providing free entertainment” (1998: 90). This also echoes parts of the ‘festive market’ concept that Reekie (170:1992) draws on to illustrate a shopping experience that is entertaining, educational, pleasurable and also leisurely. Evidence of this in the Woodward’s Department Store would include the elaborate Christmas displays, the x-ray machines in the shoe department, watching mini donuts being made, and the neon signage. After WWII, suburban malls displaced downtown shopping districts as popular consumer destinations due to easy automobile accessibility and free parking. But as Hannigan points out, by the mid 1950s mall developers rediscovered the appeal of entertaining department stores (1998: 90). This appeal, however, was reinvented in relation to the shift in consumerism to niche marketing. As Hannigan outlines the turn towards the niche shopper, the department store’s demise was at least in part due to the development of the suburban mall.

The store was owned and operated by the Woodward’s family until the 1980’s, when the company sold the food floor to Safeway Canada to help the business stay afloat. That is when ownership began to change. This change in ownership marks the changing values and feel of the store, this is evident in both the food floor ownership and changing management. When the flagship store in downtown Vancouver closed in 1993, Kip Woodward, Charles Woodward’s great-great-grandson held a private ceremony for the
employees of Woodward's, quietly turned off the "W" sign and locked the doors of the store that had been a prominent feature of Vancouver's skyline for over a hundred years. Although in the eighties ownership of the food floor changed, the Woodward's Department Store was still mainly family-owned, and the customer service and values that were entrenched in the store were the family's legacy. It is clear through the memories collected in this project that Woodward's would always be known as a family-run store, and it was the change in ownership coupled with the rapid shifts in the character of retailing that led to its demise. Today, the Woodward's Department Store is a historic site, classified as a class "C" heritage building by the City of Vancouver ("Vancouver Heritage Registry", 2005). This historic building has played multiple roles throughout its history—as a leading department store, a social space in the city, and a representation of people's values and a hope for the future. Woodward's was more than just one of the largest and best retailers in the city.

Site Location

The Woodward's Department Store is located at 101 West Hastings Street, on the corner of West Hastings Street and Abbott Street, in a rundown business and commercial district that was formerly the core of Vancouver's downtown. This location is adjacent to the popular historical tourist district of Gastown: a city 'place' deliberately preserved and re-modelled to create the kind of ambiance attractive to tourists and to the kinds of businesses that serve them. Over time, the commercial centre of the city has shifted, and although Gastown has seen renovation and restoration, the Woodward's neighbourhood (for the last 20-30 years) has been largely ignored. The building occupies almost an entire city block and is surrounded by a number of other businesses in buildings dating back to the
early 1900s, that are in various stages of dilapidation. All of these surrounding buildings are a minimum of two stories in height and are built of stone and brick. Many of these buildings are abandoned or vacant. The “W” sign is an actual physical presence in the city of Vancouver. Standing high in the city skyline the famous “W” is a neon sign that was a ‘beacon’ in the city for years. When the store closed the sign went out. The loss saddened many. However, in 2002, a ceremony was held with a good deal of fanfare, to relight the refurbished sign. It was a deliberate ritual, intended to signify the rebirth if not of the store - then of hope for the revitalization of the Downtown Eastside. This ceremony of the light being turned on again is clear evidence of Woodward’s importance in both the past and the present. Before the closure of Woodward’s in 1993, the building, though surrounded by clear evidence of urban decline, remained an imposing structure and the illuminated “W” marked it out as the very center of a once thriving commercial core. The illumination of the “W” once more was a signal to the whole city that life was being rekindled in the old downtown area.

While it operated Woodward’s also guided the establishment of other, smaller businesses in the neighbourhood and inspired area residents and business owners to maintain the same high values and codes of conduct\(^2\). Since 1993, the Woodward’s building has deteriorated in physical appearance. It has been gutted, its elevator shafts removed, its windows and doors boarded up. But despite this it retains, for many Vancouverites, symbolic importance and those who have campaigned for the retention of some of its ‘heritage’ features and the redevelopment of its site have skillfully used this to build support. The building’s neighbourhood is heavily populated by low-income earners, unemployed, and the homeless (Community Directions, 2001: 4). According to the 1996

census conducted by the City of Vancouver, 80.9% of the Downtown Eastside residents lived in low-income households, with 86.9% of these households populated by a single person ("City of Vancouver", 2004).

Adding to the decline of the Downtown Eastside has been its increasing association with drug addiction, drug dealing, and crime. According to the City of Vancouver’s Web site (www.city.vancouver.bc.ca), the Downtown Eastside took another step towards its downturn in the 1980s, when the drug of choice changed from injection-based heroin to crack cocaine, which was cheaper and more addictive. The easy availability of drugs, the provision of a ‘clean needle’ programme, the safe injection site and a variety of support services for users of illegal drugs attracts addicts to the community. Partly for this reason the area has a high rate of (mainly) petty crime.

Since its closure in 1993 the Woodward’s site and building have come to play a pivotal role in the current political history of the city. Since 1985, when the department store was still open for business, Jim Green has been trying to find a way to purchase the building in an effort to revitalize the Downtown Eastside (Green, 2003). Green is a long time social activist for the Downtown Eastside and was the former head of DERA (Downtown Eastside Resident Association). He was then recruited to the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers (CDCV) under the New Democratic party (NDP) provincial government. Later he ran (successfully) for the Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) in the City of Vancouver elections of 2002 and has been a key figure in city government for the past three years. The struggle to save the Woodward’s building and use it as a source of economic regeneration actually began a considerable time before the store closed. Jim Green and others began planning and
lobbying and soliciting various groups and organizations for support, enduring as they did so moments of occasional euphoria but also many other moments in which their hopes seemed to be dashed.

In 1995 Fama Holdings bought the building for $5 million, while the city bought the adjacent parking lot for $11 million dollars\(^3\). The building and the parking lot sold for $14 million short of its $30 million dollar original asking price. John Mackie, a *Vancouver Sun* news journalist, reported the following details, “Then-premier Mike Harcourt announced that the province would ante up funds for social housing in the old store, and Green thought he had a deal with Fama’s Kassem Aghtai to buy one third of the building and develop 200 units of low income housing”\(^4\). But the deal fell apart in 1997. After this Fama was granted approval by the city for a new development. The City of Vancouver approved a plan that called for 419 units of social housing (low-income assisted rent), but following this the Vancouver housing market slowed. This shift in the market caused Fama to re-evaluate their intentions of developing the Woodward’s site, resulting in the sale of the building in 2001 by Fama to the Province of British Columbia (Andruff, 2004: 59-60).

In 2001, two months before the provincial election, the NDP government bought the building from Fama for $22 million dollars, with the expressed aim of creating 220 co-op housing units. In June 2001 the NDP government was defeated in the election. Gordon Campbell, and the Liberal Party now had a majority and formed the government. They were the new owners of the Woodward’s building, and quickly put a hold on Vancouver’s plan to include 200 units of social housing in the redevelopment. Through the summer of 2001 the “Woodward’s plan” was in limbo but in September a group of activists, frustrated

\(^3\) McInnes, Thursday, January 30, 2003 in Andruff, 2004: 5
\(^4\) Friday, September 20, 2002; A4 in Andruff, 2004: 59
by the numerous delays in the Woodward's project, broke into the old store and claimed possession of it on behalf of Vancouver's homeless. The numbers of squatters grew and when some 56 people were ejected by the police, a larger, more visible squat took shape around three sides of the building. In the middle of a municipal election campaign, with no certainty that it would be re-elected, the NPA (Non-Partisan Alliance) was not eager to take any aggressive action against the 200 or so squatters. For the left-wing COPE, the squat was a development that they could turn into political capital. In December 2001 COPE was elected and moved fast to defuse the squatters' anger and address, in at least temporary ways, the needs of some of those who were homeless. In April 2002 the Liberals cancelled the Woodward's social housing project.

The tensions surrounding the political aspect of the social life of the building, and the way the building acts as an object that is viewed as being integral to the redevelopment of the DTES, came to a head in the fall of 2002. A culmination of tensions resulted in the creation of a squat from September 14 until December 14, 2002. During what has now been termed as the "Woodsquat", "the Woodward's building became a site of political and social resistance forged by homeless people, political activists and campaigners for affordable housing" (Andruff, 2004: 5). The squat represents another layer of meaning that the Woodward's building encapsulates, and as the object acts as a vehicle for revitalization another social life has been formed through a social movement. This was by no means the first occasion on which the old department store had been incorporated into or used for a political struggle. It had been the site for Artropolis (a politically charged art exhibition in 1995) and its boarded-up windows had been plastered frequently with handbills and sprayed on slogans carrying political messages. But the squat drew the building more
deeply into the politics of place and the politics of memory than any previous event. It added a new and distinctive layer of meaning— the association of the store with radical politics. Henceforth it could be recalled as the site of direct action by protestors, of police action (the eviction of the original squatters in September 2002), and as a locus of a ‘tent-city’ that endured for several weeks.

In 2004, the City of Vancouver held a design competition for the redevelopment of the Woodward’s building, which includes social housing units. In September 2004, City Council chose Westbank Projects/Peterson Investment Group. During the selection process, social capital and cultural preservation were seen as key, and the developer was chosen for its “architecture of community” approach, which entailed the “preservation of the memory of an important part of Vancouver’s story, the Woodward’s building” through design (The Woodward’s Redevelopment Group Proposal, June 30, 2004). The heritage building component of the project will restore the 1903 portion of the building to its original condition, while retaining, restoring and reconstructing approximately 66% of the existing brick façade on Hastings Street, 86% of the façade on Abbott and 60% of the façade on Cordova Street. The bricks from the dismantled portion of the building will be used to pave the public galleria and atrium. The famous Woodward’s “W” sign and its supporting steel tower will either be retained, restored and relocated within the newly developed building or some other means of projecting the giant “W” into the sky will be found. The heritage retention portion of this plan also includes the sidewalk tiles with the Woodward’s name on Cordova. Moreover, a heritage signage concept will be used to recall the original painted letters and words that once adorned the building. Some of what is being planned recalls the widespread fashion for the creation of ‘festive markets’ in the
refurbishing of inner city sites (and some of these included old department stores, like Woodward’s). Gail Reekie describes just such a development of an old store in Brisbane, Australia outlining the leisure and entertainment form of shopping as well as the unique aspect of a focal point in the shopping experience, such as the festive markets located in redeveloped heritage buildings which, “tend to serve as focal points for a collective memory, or community history of a local place” (Reekie, 1992:181).

**The Social Life of the Building; Building as an Object**

“Woodward’s”- when you look at it closely- is not one structure, a single object, but rather a series of buildings linked together. It reflects the various phases of the life of the business- a physical record of organic growth. In this way it is easy to apply Appadurai’s notions of the life history or biography of an object, for the timbers and the bricks and concrete record changes in the economic, social and cultural life of the city over a period of 100 years. Built in 1903, it has played, and even now continues to play, multiple roles in the life of the city and in people’s memories. Having served generations of Vancouverites, the building has enjoyed a complex social life of its own. The building’s resonance is wide and imprinted on the thousands of people who have used it over the years. This is evidenced by the high number of memories that were submitted to my research project and by the array of locations where people affected by Woodward’s have lived. For example, Lil Crosson, a Woodward’s customer, grew up in Telegraph Creek and relied on Woodward’s for food mail order deliveries; later, when visiting Vancouver, she experienced the department store in a completely different way (Crosson, Personal communication, March 3, 2001). Playing multiple roles in the city’s history and encapsulating many people’s memories, the Woodward’s building meanings are entangled
in the many lives it has lived as a physical object. As the social life of the building has significantly altered, from a department store to a site of contestation and political struggle for the revitalization of the Downtown Eastside, it is important to follow the life that this object has led in order to untangle its entangled meanings. Within the social life of Woodward's there were distinctive economic, social and cultural features that were related to historical contexts and periods that included the social, political and economic processes at work during the various stages of the building's growth and development. These processes were at work outside the building, where they could be seen in the changing streetscape, and inside where they were apparent in the evolution of advertising, display and marketing techniques used to promote changing genres of product.

**Woodward's as a Historic Site**

One layer of social meaning can be found in the Woodward's building's role as a historic site. The City of Vancouver has a set of specific guidelines for classifying heritage buildings in the city's heritage register. Woodward's is listed as a class “C” building, which acknowledges its “heritage character” (Vancouver Heritage Registry, City of Vancouver Website, www.city.vancouver.bc.ca). To properly examine this particular social meaning, one must address the ways in which people think about historic sites, as ideas about the past are formed through historic sites (Codd, 2000: 14-22).

History is often defined as "political issues, battles and people, that is, things that happened," while heritage often "refers to the way people lived" (McCrone, Morris and Kiely, 1995: 162). Woodward's combines both history and heritage. Often, Vancouverites nostalgically remember the history of Woodward's—the people, politics and events that surrounded the store. What events took place, however, are also linked to the ways in which
people lived. Recalling the history of the store, within the history of the city, therefore involves both the history of what took place and the heritage of the time in which the event happened. Diane Butterfield, a former customer, remembers that Woodward’s was “unlike the Bay” (Diane Butterfield, Personal communication, March 18, 2001), while another customer, Jeannette Golden, talks about the Woodward’s policy “that the customer was always right,” which “was strongly upheld” by the department store (Golden, Personal communication, March 14, 2001). By remembering Woodward’s, people who contributed to the project remember Vancouver’s history—the War, the Great Depression, the “trolley cars” and “the wooden sidewalks” (Barbara Neilsen, personal communication, April 1, 2001). This demonstrates that people in their memories inextricably combine what happened and how they lived. Remembering the store thus relates to a time in history, sometimes in conjunction with a specific event and sometimes on its own. Because specific events can be seen as a representation of the past, which is static, the appeal of heritage is that it evokes key social and cultural processes “which help embed people in that time” (McCrone, Morris and Kiely, 1995: 206). Illustrated by the memories submitted to the project is the fact that Woodward’s memories not only encapsulate history, but also present the way in which people lived. A good example of this is Alice Dewar’s (a Woodward’s employee) memory of Woodward’s:

Woodward’s was a real lifesaver for our family. In 1947 my family and I came to Canada from Chile, South America, because the financial situation on Chile was not all that good when we returned there from Britain after the war. We arrived with two young children, no job, in the middle of winter and knew nobody. However, the Lord was good to us because my husband got a job right away. To help with the income, I went to Woodward’s to offer to knit for them. The Assistant Manager, Miss Koop, gave me orders to knit children’s jackets for display, paying me 4.50 per jacket. This money, although small, helped us put bread on the table and many, many times arrived in the nick of time. Happy memories of Woodward’s, our lifesaver.
Constructing Ideas and Memory

The "most powerful meanings of the past [come] from the dialogue between past and present" (Rosenzweig, 1998: 178). As an historic site Woodward's creates a cultural need to construct heritage (McCrone, 1995: 206; Codd, 2000: 14-18). This involves reconstructing notions of the way that people lived throughout the various times that the building has stood and is linked to the construction of social memory. As people remember their experiences, they are constantly revisiting and re-interpreting these experiences to address their changing needs and desires (Rosenzweig, 1998: 38). Many former Woodward's customers participating in the project stated that as they got older, and as the department store began to decline, their memories of Woodward's became focused around what the store used to be. Through this re-interpretation of their experiences they demonstrate that their memory is re-created in order to address what is missing in the present. Because people create and re-create memories, remembering can be seen as a product of the present (Codd, 2000: 10-25). Like in the past, today people’s memories of the store, create personal and community identity.

A Woodward’s customer, Peter Hiebert, names Christmas as his most memorable time at Woodward’s. He remembers the decorated window displays and Toyland; he also remembers the excitement of shopping at Woodward’s when he was a kid. Years later, he says:

We made a point of bringing our own kids to Woodward’s every year, and they now have their own memories of a trip to town, Santa at Woodward’s Toyland, lunch downtown and the excitement of all the animated decorated windows. There’s no doubt in my mind that Woodward’s has provided, or at least greatly enhanced, the Christmas spirit for me and my family for about half a century.

(Hiebert, Personal communication, March 25, 2001)
By playing his memories of Woodward's over in his mind, Peter Hiebert's memories began to hold a more powerful meaning in the dialogue between the past and the present. Because of his fond childhood memories of Christmas time at Woodward's, Hiebert wanted to create similar memories for his children. This added meaning to his memories and created a dialogue between past and present. Hiebert's fond Christmas memories of Woodward's in the past translated into his present and now, with his children's memories, to the future. This social process of heritage creation establishes transgenerational memories and understandings, as well as formulating the personal notion of that time.

Because people constantly engage their memories of Woodward's in a dialogue between the past and present, the past will be engaged; memory will, therefore, always be a product of the present (Codd, 2000; Lowenthal, 1995; Rosenzweig, 1998). The creation and recreation of "memory is life... in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting ...periodically revived" (Nora, 1989: 8). While people have "nothing but wonderful memories of Woodward's" (Gloria Lodge, Personal communication, March 12, 2001), they selectively remember different things. From how Woodward's pioneered the return policy and highest standards of customer service (Golden, Personal communication, March 14, 2001), to the way that staff felt like an extended family (Grant, Personal communication, June, 2001), to the Christmas displays (Chiavario, Personal communication, April 2, 2001), to the upholding of family values (Dewar, Personal communication, February 21, 2001) and fresh baked goods (Crawford, Personal communication, February 19, 2001), people remember different things about Woodward's. In other words, as people collectively remember Woodward's, their personal memories are also specific to each individual. For example Lunda M. Acedillo's, a
Woodward’s customer, most vivid memory of Woodward’s is the ordering of her wedding cake by mail. She lived on the Queen Charlotte Islands, and the Woodward’s mail order catalogue seemed to be the perfect way to buy the perfect cake. Deciding to also order her flowers and bouquet through Woodward’s, Acedillo remembers being confident that everything would arrive on time for her wedding. As she recalls,

The flowers arrived on June 27. They were absolutely beautiful, but there was no cake! I began to panic, so I phoned Woodward’s immediately and demanded to know what in the world was going on. Evidently, someone got mixed up on the date, but I was assured that it would definitely be on the plane the following day. The cake arrived all right, but it was ruined. Most of the decorations were off, the top and second layers tilted. The cake looked like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. My heart sank, and I cried uncontrollably. Everything was going so well until then. I was so sure my wedding wouldn’t be complete without the cake. My matron of honour wasted no time and phoned Woodward’s for me. They asked to speak to me and apologized for what happened. Whoever shipped it failed to put “fragile” on the box, so it was put in the cargo section of the plane. “Young lady” said the woman on the phone, “we don’t want your wedding to be ruined, so we’ll send you the cake with no charge.” “What about the other cake?” I asked. “Keep it,” she replied, “and good luck on your wedding.” The morning of my wedding, a handful of my friends went with me to the airport to meet the plane. We were all anxious to see if the plane arrived. This time, the captain carried the cake to the terminal himself and presented it to me. He smiled and told me that he had brought it in the cockpit. Everyone cheered as we opened the box. The cake was indeed intact this time. To my surprise, I got a call from the supervisor the day after the wedding asking if the cake came in safely. So you can understand why to this day I still remember the kindness of the Woodward’s staff. Surely, they were trained well to look after their customers. There will never be a department store as good as the Woodward’s.

(Luna M. Acedillo, Personal communication, April 16, 2001)

This unique and personal experience illustrates something much broader, a feature of the store and its practices that provide a link between the many individual experiences and recollections. It is these private recollections that create ‘collective memory’, because although the memory is individual, the fact that it represents the broader value of the store links many individual recollections into a collective. Through the social process of shopping at Woodward’s, and experiencing what it was like to be a Woodward’s customer,
people’s individual memories represent broader and collectively remembered themes—such as the values that the store embodied. With respect to memories, Lowenthal states “life back then seems brighter not because things were better but because we lived more vividly when we were young” (1995: 8). This may be true in part, but the nostalgic ties of former customers to Woodward’s surpass the mere memories of ‘life back then.’ The Woodward’s Department Store is remembered for the goods that were purchased there—how they changed over the years, the way that products were made in-house which combined the production and distribution, and even exhibiting this process as entertainment—and for the services (the intangible goods such as the credit department) that the store provided and how these services grew. They also remember the way in which the store was run by the Woodward family themselves, and infused a sense of family both in its employees and customers. A family-run organization, in this case, was seen in the values of the store and also through the Woodward ‘family’—use of the term ‘family’ to describe all who worked there. The evidence for the attempt to create quasi-familial relationships and loyalties comes not only from letters but also from the employee documents and photos.

In later years, people flocked to the store not only because it was so functional, but also because the building itself represented a connection with the past. This is illustrated by the way that people viewed the physicality of the Woodward’s building and its “W” sign as a representation of the store and by the way the way in which each customer and employee remembers Woodward’s. This duality demonstrates not only the layered social life of the building, but its function as a physical anchor of Downtown Eastside. The social life of the building also reflects the multiple roles that the Woodward’s Department Store has played for the city. The building acts as an historic site, a catalyst for the construction of memory,
a reason to collectively gather, a representation of what the present lacks and a beacon that
inspires a hopeful future. These functions of the building can be viewed in relation to an
inside and outside relationship: the function of the department store and the values that
were instilled in the store took place inside the building, while the physical building and the
“W” came to be symbolic to the outside world.

These varying functions carry with them the values that the store also represented,
namely family values and excellent customer service. As a memory then, Woodward’s
plays a role not only as a department store, but also as a social space in which people
gathered, shopped, and worked. This is echoed in the memories collected by the project, for
example the tight employee family or the traditional Sunday Woodward’s toasted shrimp
sandwiches. As people create their memories of and about Woodward’s, they form their
own ideas of this historic site. These ideas relate not only to the location, but they are also
communicated in and through the building. The Woodward’s building communicates these
ideas initially through its physicality. The original downtown Woodward’s building, located
on Abbott and Hastings, and its “W” sign became Vancouver landmarks with positive
connotations. Today, its boarded up windows, locked and barred doors are expressive of
recent conflict, while the congratulatory phrases painted on the boards herald rebirth and
revitalization. Historic buildings “have the obvious merit of time literally being inscribed
on the surface” (Rowlands, 2002: 110). For Woodward’s, this merit is expressed through
conjuring and communicating people’s memories of the building and the store.

Playing multiple roles in the city’s history and encapsulating many people’s
memories, the building’s meaning is entangled in its many lives as a physical object. These
lives translate into layers of meaning related not only to the passing of time, but also to the
building's function. Whether people viewed the building as a landmark of the skyline, the cornerstone of their career, a great place to shop, the social centre of the neighbourhood or the major factor in the revitalization of the Downtown Eastside, the building combines these various meanings into a whole. The social life of the object, in this case the way the building functioned in relation to people's lives, is impinging upon the meaning of the object. This can be seen clearly through the distinction between work and consumption. In other words, people who worked at the store would see it differently from people who shopped there. Because the social life of objects refers both to the interactions between objects and people and to the meanings attributed to these it can be concluded that the layers of meanings are not only expressed through the uses of the object, but the hands through which the object has passed. Woodward's building left a different imprint on people's lives, and the meaning of this imprint varies according to the social life of the building and its perception by different people.

Woodward's Memorabilia

In this chapter I examine the role of objects and memorabilia in the construction of memory. Many people who remember Woodward's have kept objects related to the building and the store. Whether kept on purpose or by chance, these objects "appear...to have the power to confer identity, and act as vehicles for bringing the past into the present" (Lowenthal, 1995: 181). Products with the Woodward's label or price tag, anniversary edition toys and items, Christmas decorations and employee recognition awards all act as markers that echo the past and therefore serve to connect people to their memories. As objects change function and meaning through their social life, it can be stated that the objects' value is not intrinsic but added. Even if an object is not valuable itself, it has a
resonance that links people to the past. Its value lies in its “potential of connecting people and events over time” (Herle, 2003: 194).

By applying Appadurai’s concept of the social life of objects, one can conclude that objects change their meaning and their function substantially through time. As time goes on the function or use of the object is altered, from commodity to memorabilia, perhaps back to commodity again as the market for a particular memento grow, and the meaning of the object therefore shifts in the mind of the owner. As Appadurai speaks of the social life of objects, object’s lives are revealed through their function, ownership, and subsequent meaning. As these factors are changed, as an object’s function, owner or meaning is altered, the object can be seen as entering into a new ‘social’ life. Woodward’s employees kept employee recognition objects because they reminded them of their career, relationships with others and the Woodward’s community. Customers of the department store may have kept Woodward’s objects because they reminded them of a certain time in their life or the role that Woodward’s has played in their lives as a shopping institution and a social space. Some objects were kept because they were still being used or because they were forgotten about. The changing meaning of objects can be traced through the analysis of the social lives of certain memorabilia.

**The Role of Objects in Memory**

The social life of objects entails both the function of the object and the hands through which the object has passed. Subsequently, with the changes in ownership the function of the object can be changed, and a new layer of meaning can be added. A third element that affects the objects meaning is the object’s relationship to other objects and the company that they keep. The meaning of these objects is therefore not fixed, but is
attributed to the social contexts through which the object passes as well as the object's ability to link people with the past. Thus, the objects have layers of meaning, not only embodying information and recollection, but also acting as agents in the relationships that are developed (Herle, 2003: 204). This can clearly be seen in the division of objects into memorabilia related to employee recognition and awards, and objects originally serving as commodities, such as store products. Mrs. Grant, a former Woodward's employee, for example, was given a silver tray to commemorate her 25 years of service to the store. This tray encapsulates and conjures her memories of what it meant to work for Woodward's (Grant, Personal communication, June, 2001). The tray also has intrinsic value that can be measured in money.

Objects can act as vehicles to the past, because as we investigate the functions they perform and the meanings people gave them, they convey to us new levels of understanding of the past- to both history and heritage. As we consider the meanings and uses of objects we come to realize that this "conceit that commodities have social lives" (Appadurai, 1989) enables us to appreciate that there exists 'social' relations among and between things. The display of objects among others (items in a store display or a mantelpiece at home) or the uses of say, the same object in different production processes, change its meaning. Its biography illustrates and outlines the different functions and meanings, which become layered upon the object. When a commodity eventually loses its usefulness as an everyday object, it may be kept as a souvenir. During this transition, a social life is revealed "as a means of illuminating complex social interactions and systems of value, meaning and exchange" (Appadurai in Herle, 2003: 194). As these layers of meaning develop through the social life of an object, the object becomes entangled. This entanglement refers not only
to the layers of meaning that the object acquired, but also the object’s movement through these meanings. For example, an object passing in and out of a commodity state transforms its value and meaning. The role of objects is therefore two-fold. One role is to function in its original intended use - like a mop to clean floors. The other is to record its social life and act as a vehicle to the past.

_object analysis: mail order catalogue_

Carmelita Camozzi owns a Woodward’s Mail Order Catalogue from the 1950s.

When asked why she kept it, she shares her memory of Woodward’s and of what the catalogue meant to her:

In the spring of 1951, Alice Gordon Chiko and I were preparing for our first year of teaching in the remote village of Telegraph Creek, BC. It was suggested to us that, because we would be up there for a year, we bring in a year’s supply of food. We sat in my brother Walter’s living room contemplating this suggestion, when his bright eyes turned on their high beams and he said, “Why don’t you write to Edith Adams of the Vancouver Sun and present her with the challenge of compiling a grocery list for you? She is a dietician and ought to have some thoughts on what you would need.” We took him up on the idea, and Edith Adams in turn facilitated a luncheon and a food order with Woodward’s.

The up-shot of the adventure was that we had enough toilet paper for a roll every second day and too much mushroom soup. Neither of us was experienced enough to know what variations you could achieve using mushroom soup. We sold and traded other goods to fellows at the Department of Transport, the Police and to the people of Telegraph Creek. The circle of orange cheese was daunting. The fresh eggs had to be turned upside down every week. During our final days in the north, the powdered eggs sold like hot cakes and went into hot cakes as well, no doubt.  

(Carmelita Camozzi, Personal communication, February, 2005)

It can be stated then, that for Carmelita Camozzi the Woodward’s catalogue represented her wild adventure. It really does act as a vehicle transporting her not only back to the Woodward’s food orders that she had placed many years ago but to an exciting experience and stage in her life. Not only did the catalogue act functionally as a mail order catalogue, but as it outgrew this function it became an object of resonance, that linked her to the past.
This new function and new meaning represents another social life of the object (Appadurai, 1986). Recalling these memories today, Lita talks about the “spirit of the place, which was more-than-a-building to many who walked its aisles, met for their famous pumpkin pie with whipped cream and stood at the windows on December days, enraptured by the Christmas displays” (Lita Camozzi, Personal communication, April 9, 2001). As this narrative illustrates, the mail order catalogue has long lost its utilitarian function to become an object of resonance in the present, where it connects Lita to the past and releases her memories of Woodward’s as a whole.

But the object still has its social function—connecting the person to others in the store. These seemingly utilitarian relations were sometimes much more. The mail order catalogue is analogous to today’s web-based shopping. Both are means of establishing and conducting social as well as purely economic relations. Today the catalogue takes Lita not to the store but to relationships and experiences called up in memory. The various meanings of an object, as they become layered over time through the social life of the object, become entangled. To some a mail order catalogue would mean just its functionality, but to people like Lita the meaning goes beyond the function. The meaning of the object is the association of the object to the adventure; the way the ‘social’ memory of Woodward’s was created through the ‘social’ process of the adventure and teaching.

Object Analysis: Advertising Layouts

Wally Rowland worked for Woodward’s for 27 years, starting in 1951, handling the store’s food account through his own company W. A. Rowland & Associates Ltd. Through the years, Rowland kept many Woodward’s food advertising layouts dating up to the time when Woodward’s was sold to Safeway in 1986. When asked why he kept this material,
Rowland revealed the social life of these objects. Originally, he was required to keep many of the original layouts for a certain period of time. This was the layouts' original function. However, today the layouts serve to remind Rowland of his career. He says:

I started at Woodward’s as a layout artist/copywriter. As an advertising assistant manager, I took on the job of food advertising in 1955 and became the manager of that department in 1965. I became the Advertising/Promotion Manager for the entire company. My mandate was to produce and/or direct all Food Advertising and Promotion for all 24 Woodward’s stores. I also wrote all the editorial material pertaining to the opening of each Woodward’s store, particularly to do with the history of Woodward’s

(Wally Rowland, Personal Communication, February, 2001)

To Rowland, the advertising layouts went from serving their original function to acting as a vehicle for memory. Originally the advertising layouts had a functional purpose of designing and writing the ads for the store; years later, after living in Wally’s garage, the layouts became objects that linked him to his past employment and the Woodward’s Department Store. As we trace the social lives of the ad layouts as objects, it is revealed that over time their function and therefore meaning changed. After outliving the functionality of an actual advertising layout, these objects entered into a new life. They linked Mr. Rowland to Woodward’s, reminded him of advertising awards that he received and made him re-visit the feelings associated with being a part of the Woodward’s ‘family’. Linking Mr. Rowland to his career at Woodward’s, these objects convey the ‘social’ interactions through which his memories are constructed. His career, the awards he has won, the progress he made, and the relationships that were created all become another layer of meaning inscribed in the social life of an object. These advertising layouts represent the entire biography of the objects’ social life and their subsequent meanings, revealing the layers of meaning and the many ‘social’ lives that the object has lived.
Many people responding to the call for Woodward’s objects put out by the project sent in Christmas objects. These included letters from Santa (Woodward’s responded to all letters to Santa dropped off at the Toyland), “Breakfast with Santa” buttons and pictures of Christmas display windows. Not only did these objects represent the spirit of the holidays, but they also connected people with various memories about Christmas at Woodward’s.

Nancy Chiavario recalls:

Every year at Christmas time, Woodward’s staff were treated to a breakfast with Santa. Cindy, being the kid, was always the centre of attention. We have numerous photos, even after we’d all grown up, of us with Santa Claus, including one on a button. We also have a couple of old Woodward’s Christmas colouring booklets and hats. Our family’s favourite breakfast with Santa story was the rare time that my Uncle Peter also came with us. Well, one of the dressed up characters was a woman with a beard (something that would likely be politically incorrect today), and this woman sat down next to Uncle Peter and started talking to him like they were the best of friends. Turned out she worked with him at American Can.

(Nancy Chiavario, Personal communication, April 2, 2001)

Woodward’s Christmas memorabilia touched not only Woodward’s staff, but also their family members. For both employees and customers, Christmas memorabilia links them to memories of their family, friends and the spirit of Christmas created by their favourite family-run store. Not only are the events and social relationships recalled, but the smell and taste of Christmas are also present. As Chiavario spoke of Christmas at Woodward’s she recalled the smell of the store bakery, the hint of gingerbread and the feel of Santa’s beard. Drawing on Appadurai’s thoughts on the social life of objects, the Christmas memorabilia can be analyzed by tracing out their social life as well. Initially as a Christmas display, seasonal commodity, or seasonal gift, the Woodward’s Department Store released a number of Christmas memorabilia into the community. These objects not only performed their original intended function, but also came to function as souvenirs of the season and the
store, as links to the holiday time, the people that they went to Woodward’s with and the meaning of the holiday in general. Beginning as a commodity these objects shifted function over time and became memorabilia.

**Woodward’s Memorabilia Collectors**

My collection of Woodward’s memorabilia began with the launch of the *Woodward’s Memories Project*. After receiving and carefully examining over 300 items, I began to wonder why people had kept these items. Upon further research into the act of collecting, I questioned whether these people were collectors at all. Through outlining similarities and differences between private and public collectors, I came to realize that people who kept Woodward’s memorabilia formed a new category of collecting or, in the very least, created a blended “taste culture” (Gans, 1974:10). Taste culture is a term used to describe a group of people who share an interest in the same thing. In Gan’s theory of culture he states that the different types of culture exist “because they satisfy the needs and wishes of some people, even if they dissatisfy those of other people” (1974: 91). Any given object can belong, be appropriated by, to any taste culture, depending on how it is evaluated. A ‘taste culture’ then is a common aesthetic set of values or standards of taste, but not a cohesive value system (Gans, 1974: 90-95). In this case, the collectors and people who submitted memorabilia constituted a taste culture interested in the Woodward’s Department Store. These similar choices are indicative of shared values and meanings of a common cultural element—certainly shared, collective, and social memory. This Woodward’s ‘taste culture’, could also be termed a taste public⁵, where the people within it make similar choices, often for similar reasons, among and within the taste culture. As people remember Woodward’s through social memory, and this is not only through social

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⁵ The terms taste culture and taste public are almost used by Gans in an interchangeable manner.
processes but social in terms of collective, they generally remember similar qualities or events related to the store and have chosen to keep or collect memorabilia for similar reasons. The factors determining who belongs to this taste culture, however, have to do with the choices that people make, the memories in which they shared, and their geographic orientation. In this case even though people may not see themselves as part of the group, these factors place them within this group. Increasingly people from different taste publics participate in more than one taste culture.

Some of the people who contributed to the project were not collectors at all, but people who participated in the social memory and who had coincidentally (or not so coincidentally) kept Woodward’s related objects. People who did not purposefully seek to acquire Woodward’s related objects, had kept them for various reasons whether it was still due to their consumer function or not (Grant, Personal communication, 2005). The people who just had objects, although not fitting into the classification of private collectors (Alsop, 1981), nevertheless keep objects for a certain reason. At the same time, the presence of a reason does not make them collectors. The objects contributed to the project by the non-purposeful collectors still possessed a social life and meaning of their own. Even if a person re-invented their object’s meaning as a result of the project, the object still gained a new layer of meaning and, in some cases, began to serve a new function, tying the person to the history and heritage of the building and store.

As in the case of private and public (salvage) collecting, the people who submitted memorabilia to this project felt a profound sense of responsibility (McCracken, 1988: 46) to contribute to the creation of this collection, which they perceive to be a part of Vancouver’s history. In this sense, the desire of the donors parallels the motivations behind institutional
collecting in that the memorabilia acts as objects of resonance that links people with their history. Greenblatt defines resonance as "a sense of the cultural and historically contingent construction of art objects, the negotiations, exchanges, swerves, and exclusions by which certain representational practices come to be set apart from other representational practices that they partially resemble" (1991, 46). Resonance in regards to Woodward’s memorabilia would then emphasize the multiple historical, geographical, or cultural connections that not only contextualize the object but also lend insight into its social life (Greenblatt, 1991).

However, in the case of Woodward’s memorabilia, the collector (the person who submitted memorabilia) aimed not only at preservation, but also at making these objects part of the public domain (and hence reflecting the mandate of institutional museums). Thus, it appears that there are hints of institutional motivations backing Woodward’s memorabilia donations. However, it also seems that passion and sentimentality are instrumental to private collecting persist. This contradiction can be viewed as a blending of the categories defining private and public collecting. According to Lee (1999), private collectors can be created by chance. This is definitely true for the Woodward’s collectors. The question remains, however, whether some of these people are even collectors at all.

Some donors to the collection do not fit the definition of private collectors because they simply had relevant materials in their possession and submitted them to the collection after receiving a request for such materials. In other words, they did not actively seek out the acquisition of Woodward’s-related objects for collecting purposes. Yet, some of the people who had contributed Woodward’s memorabilia probably became collectors by chance after hearing about my attempt to put together a collection. This statement is supported by Lee and by the general ‘laws’ of collecting outlined by Alsop (1981) in his
work entitled The Rare Art Traditions. These laws outline how a collector sets up various criteria for creating his or her collection. They include criteria for choosing objects for the collection, measuring and defining authenticity in their own terms and placing value upon objects in the collection. Since collectors create their own categories, Alsop’s first law applies to the holders of Woodward’s memorabilia. They could be claimed to have created their own personal category for this memorabilia after it was defined as valuable or, in Alsop’s terms, “rare” (1981: 75) by the project. This sense of value was helped by the media’s coverage of the Woodward’s Memories Project as well as subsequent calls for Woodward’s memories and memorabilia.

Having examined the different types of Woodward’s collectors, I was still faced with the problem of defining the type of collecting that resulted in my own personal collection of Woodward’s memorabilia. Whether through collecting or keeping objects by chance, people donated Woodward’s objects to the project. This does not qualify all of the donors as collectors. It is important to qualify the contributors of Woodward’s memorabilia because this lends insight into the meanings that people place on objects. This, in turn, aids in looking at the social lives of collected objects. In some cases, people simply read about the project, realize that they have had something that they could contribute, and thus become contributors. Other donors seem to have kept Woodward’s memorabilia as souvenirs. In the case of the souvenir collector, it is the experience and subsequent saturation and embodiment of the experience that constitutes the object’s meaning. The souvenir is re-contextualized to authenticate the experience of the collector. Events are also authenticated through the objects, because they act as storehouses for the narrative. Woodward’s memorabilia commemorating the 100th anniversary of the store, the opening
of a new store, the birth or death of someone famous, or even seasonal objects (such as Christmas paraphernalia) can all be seen as souvenirs of experiences and events. The souvenir is revealed to serve a double function by not only authenticating the past (or past event/experience), but also acting as an object of resonance whereby it releases the memory that it authenticates.

In other words, because people are connected to the past through their objects and because they remember the past nostalgically, their view of the present is not as fulfilling as that of the past. This discrediting can also be viewed as a way in which people nostalgically look back at the past in relation to what they think is missing from the present. Nostalgic remembering is thus another factor motivating the collection of Woodward’s memorabilia. Other items collected, such as advertisements, employee recognition awards and so on, can also be interpreted as souvenirs, since they serve to authenticate a past experience. More importantly, though, these objects act as objects of resonance that release the narrative of the past. Objects can then be viewed as not having “a single past but an unbroken sequence,” with “past times leading backward from the present moment” (Crew and Sims, unknown: 160). Thus, the importance of the object is in the context in which it is presented and the authenticity or narrative that it releases.

While Woodward’s memorabilia are labelled as either souvenirs or objects of resonance, it should be noted that some of the objects were collected by chance. In this case, people had purchased them for utilitarian use, and eventually each object came to encapsulate a narrative that linked people to the past. This is also evident in people’s saving of Woodward’s products after the closing of the store. This reflects an urge not only to salvage the object, but also to retain a link to the store that represents a particular part of
Vancouver's history. The *Woodward's Memories Project* fostered an urge for people to retain their Woodward's objects, thus sparking the creation of personal collections. For example, the *Woodpens*, a group of past Woodward's employees, renewed their efforts to collect store memorabilia when they found out that I was in the process of creating and building my own collection. Threatened by this new 'urgency', they felt as though their efforts to collect objects should be renewed, before I could collect more of what they wanted. This new effort was not only sparked by the threat of losing objects to my project, but in my opinion, the effort was also induced through my definition of these objects and the value that the project placed on them. This meaning was defined through the *Woodward's Memories Project* by the use of media, the public interest for submissions, and the fact that I was arguing for the importance of the building in the city and the city's history. The process of re-valuing objects was felt during the course of my project. As materials became increasingly harder to come by, their value seemed to increase, and other collectors sought to acquire objects in a more competitive manner. Another example of such definition of value acting as a catalyst is the recent attempt by a Vancouver would-be collector to begin his own collection of Woodward's memorabilia. The fact that this made the newspaper is testimony to the increasing value of Woodward's memorabilia (*The Vancouver Sun*, Feb., 2004). Because my project stimulated a flurry of collecting, this collecting can be seen as a consequence or an outcome of the *Woodward's Memories Project*. Once I had placed a certain value on Woodward’s memorabilia by publicly collecting it, other people began to re-evaluate the meaning that they placed on Woodward’s related objects. This catalyst not only sparked a re-valuation of objects and their meanings, but created of new collectors and collections as well.
By symbolizing the past (Crew and Sims, n.d., Cruikshank, 1992), Woodward's objects blend the borders separating the memory from the object. Acting simultaneously as an authentication of the past, a release of the narrative of the past and an acquisition, these objects take neither the label of a souvenir nor of an object. For some objects, classification under one category is not appropriate, while for others their value as an object is acquired only through being re-contextualized within my private collection. Woodward's memorabilia can then be viewed as objects and souvenirs that release the narrative and link people to the past. In other words, people donated objects that didn't necessarily hold meaning for them until they were re-contextualized within the collection. By becoming part of the collection the objects defined and established their value. It was this new value that inspired the collector's donations, created new collectors and urged people to rethink the value of the objects already in their homes.

While collecting has historically been divided between the realms of public and private, the collection of Woodward's memorabilia seems to fall between the two categories. Some donors do not fit the category of a collector at all, while others appear to be driven by motivations similar to those of institutional collecting. Although private collectors feel the need to preserve and rescue objects, the people who donated to this project also felt the need to find for their objects an audience of institutional standards and mandate. The Woodward's memorabilia that people have donated to this research is made up of a wide variety of material culture sprinkled with employee awards. These objects appear to be drenched in historical meaning, because people have affixed value to them. Thus, these material things offer visible and tangible evidence of intangible memories, values and routines of a bygone era. As objects outgrow their everyday usefulness, they not
only maintain the value of linking people to the past, but they also attest to the temporality of daily life. When people nostalgically long for the way things used to be, these everyday objects serve as a reminder of the past. The afterlife of objects, post commodity, can then be recognized as their value as a historical object, or an object of resonance.

Conclusion

Through the formation of social memory, the subsequent social life of objects and the collection of memorabilia, Woodward’s has come to bear much meaning in the city of Vancouver. Constructed through social processes—whether it was meeting for a famous toasted shrimp sandwich in Woodward’s restaurant, taking the kids shopping in town for the day, attending an employee picnic, or squatting in political protest—the memories of Woodward’s are multiple and important. And the objects, both the Woodward’s building and the memorabilia, have social lives that encapsulate these memories along with their numerous uses, functions, and owners. The Woodward’s Department Store is a historic site around which ideas and memories have been formed and communicated for over a century. Playing multiple roles throughout its history—as a major department store, a social space, and a representation of people’s values and a hope for the future—Woodward’s is an important part of the Vancouver’s history and social memory. Woodward’s was an integral part of Vancouver for generations, and as such the store became rooted in the memory of the people and of the city as a whole. This is evidenced by its use as a site for political contestation and the current revitalization efforts of the Downtown Eastside, to which the redevelopment of Woodward’s is key. Anchoring the neighbourhood in the past, this building is seen to have the capability to do the same in future years. Looking to redevelop Woodward’s in an attempt to revitalize the entire area, the concept of the “festive market”
is utilized in the architectural and functional design of this new space. Maintaining the façade and integrity of this heritage building through incorporating other aspects of the original structure, this redevelopment will unite the building’s past with its present and future. Acting as a focal point for the social memory of Woodward’s the re-invisioning of this space will introduce modern design aspects and shopping functions as well as reminding people of what Woodward’s - as a department store - once was.

Woodward’s is not just as space. It lives in popular consciousness as a very definite and loved place. Likewise its objects – the objects, letters and interviews collected for this project have been carefully catalogued and are accessible to other researchers. Some will find their way into museum displays and into permanent presentations in the new Woodward’s complex, but all will be accessible to other researchers who wish to make their own interpretations of the vitality of memories and objects – especially at moments when the old store is recalled and as the promise of something new appears more imminent.
Works Cited


