

## The secret life of the things we keep

We crawl, feet in the air, into our own world.

Come, let's play.

I feel myself extending to slowly become threads that get stacked in a ball again. Here I can experience what I want.

This pouch is infinite, I have time.

The head above the crown of the trees, they listen to my stories carefully.

Nothing else matters more than the present time, without even paying attention to it because of how natural it is.

We should live like this, the head above the crown of the trees.

In half a second my feet disappear. I become fluid and drip through the net of my tangled hair. The landing is soft, I am in a warm place.

I become friends with the ants.

I am the one who collects the acorns and who builds the house.

They agreed.

I am losing myself in the very small thinking it is immense. Because after all we never really know things.

I kept the acorns in a box that became bigger than myself.

Come, I will show you how to play.

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## Opening of the pouch

The stories you are about to discover, discuss the relationship between people, or as I like to call them; Keepers, and their objects. They represent these things with no big interest at first sight and follow us wherever we go. What we don't necessarily show, but what rounds ourselves off.

I always disliked having a clear-out- this moment of tens decision where everything that matters lies on the table of the judge. I know I cannot keep everything, it is unnecessary. But the moment they entered my room, these things gently found a place for themselves in the family of objects that constituted my space. They became the carriers for my stories, doubts, affections, and fears—a tangible expression of my inner world.

I am wondering what physical and emotional relationships people can develop with the "things" that surround them. Would it be possible for objects to care about us as much as we care about them?

My interest lies in what follows you. I love almost as much as you do, what you will never throw away, because I am part of these people who keep and say «We never know ». Not knowing is the possibility, the openness for something un hoped for, even something magic. The space to keep for the simple pleasure of possessing something we care for.

Through these stories, care can be expressed emotionally as something that catches one's heart, something to fall in love with no reason or need. I believe care materializes itself through the relationship between the keeper and the object. It builds itself on the frequency of the interactions - physical or mental, on how one watches it, how one keeps it. Having it close, in a pocket, or a bag, being able to touch and feel it whenever needed. Some might as well have the mind release of knowing that the object of their love is safely kept in a box in their homes, put aside from others. The idea of containing something that I cherish brings me comfort. I care for them because they care for me. They are my safe space; the physical trace of the dreams I want to remember.

« It can be regarded as a kind of text, a silent form of writing and discourse; a channel of reified and objectified expression. »  
Tilley. C .(1994). « Interpreting material culture »(p67)

Distinguishing the conceptual tension between objects and things in the field of material culture studies is essential to travel through the following stories mindfully. As Brückne.M (2019) analyzed in his research article «The Place of Objects and Things in the Age of Materiality »:

« Things stand for more than an object, for something categorically broader and more essential. The "thing" differs from the object because it is inherently more autonomous, and self-supportive. (..) They are cited for having unique agency and a life force of their own. (...) "Objects" are passive, easy to know, operative foils that lack in meaning and significance. » (p495)

However, not all theorists are content with the passive object status. «Things become part of the object definition because they effectively inhabit a world where the object, whether a thing, tool, commodity, thought, phenomenon or living creature, has regained its rights, freed from the subject's determining mind, body and gaze". (p495).

These stories might help to add clarity to the concept of objects merging into « things ».

## Little worlds encapsulated

It's 8:30 in the morning, the call just started.

She apologizes for her poor clothes while I introduce my questions.

She wants to have the conversation in French and her English accent makes every word sound warmer, she speaks very properly.

At a steady pace, she chooses her words methodically- her objects teasing my curiosity.

She takes her time; the time to dive into that which she might have ignored, like these things you know are there but that, through time, start to fade in your surroundings because of habit.

I ask another question, and she starts coughing, confusing herself with excuses. It is too personal, her cough is emotional, she says.

I glimpse at the view inside the screen; a varnished wooden table that exists in harmony with the glass objects placed on top.

She turns the screen forgetting to switch the camera, which reveals a patio door with a view of the ocean. I am amazed by the beautiful light it brings to her house and can't help but think how lucky these objects are to lay there every day, how well they must know her, almost like an extension of herself.

That is probably why they deserve the ocean view.

Keeper

*On the edge of the world, « It's such a special place ».*

My paperweights are the most personal objects I own, they retrace my life, who I am, and who I was. It's very private to talk about it; each one has its own story. They are linked to the circumstances I was in when I bought them, where I was in the world and in my head, who I was with, it's a reminder of moments that were special to me, almost like a photo album.

Since I live in this house they are all displayed on a wooden table in my living room; in that manner, they are very present. I pass next to them every morning on my way to the kitchen, I have a moment where I look at them. It makes me feel safe, they somehow bring me a sense of solidity and belonging in this life.

The first paperweight I bought is this yellow and white one, it has pieces of mimosa in it. Do you know this flower?

I remember it very well, I was 20 years old in Paris and I stopped at this small shop near the Luxembourg Gardens; it happened to be women's day and the owner of the store told me that this paperweight would bring me luck. It did bring me luck and most of all happiness. Each time I look at it I have a thought for all the women in the world and for who I was on the day when I decided to get this bright glass object.

Look at this red one, it's an old piece that was made in the 1920s.

I found all the pieces I have by chance, this is the beauty in them, I did not search for them, they came by on my route.

I have been collecting them for 50 years now, and this yellow one, the first I got, followed me for almost my entire life. It keeps bringing me back to my 20s, that's why I remember this time so well.

I find them all magnificent, they are like little worlds encapsulated. They all have their particularities and at the same time respond to each other.

I talk to them in the morning, I say: « Give me strength to face the circumstances of life ».

I never lost my paperweights, I look after them too well for that to happen, but one day a cleaning lady made one fall, you see, this one was a little split in the glass.

Each time I moved I packed them meticulously and they followed me in my travels, through my life, they saw everything.

They take care of me when I feel weak and I talk to them a lot, we take care of each other. I clean them with a tissue every one or two weeks, to make sure they are shining.

Seeing them all together represents a sort of small family to me, a group that says: « Hello Anne ! » in the mornings.

When I go too much in my head, they ground me and I feel a sense of belonging to this family.

It touches me to talk about them like that, they hold a special place in my heart.



The phone call ends. I have in mind the vivid images of the different designs inside the paper-weights. Reds fading into pinks, and yellows mimicking flowers.

The act of keeping is often guided by a story, something personal like a memory of someone or something that is linked to the keeper.

In this case, it also implies the security of having something tangible to ensure to remember. It can serve as something to hold onto when one loses their sense of self, possibly a medium to create one's narrative or fiction.

This collection made me think of these little objects we hast to buy at the end of vacations, to enclose the moment we spent here and there, to have something to bring back home to keep the cherished moments with us. This drew my attention to Pearce. S.M's (1994) analysis in her text « Objects as meaning, or narrating the past » :

«Its connotations and historical context are extremely personal, giving it the value and emotional tone of a souvenir: nostalgic, backward-looking, and bitter-sweet. It is intensely romantic, in that, for its owner in later life, who was the first person to cherish it, it probably represented a time when life seemed more exciting and more meaningful than the dull present of middle age. (...) Finally, it acts as the validation of a personal narrative. » (p20).

As the Keeper calls them; these « little worlds encapsulated » created a physical memory holder. I like how steadily she added pieces to her collection throughout her life and how cherishing something over a lifetime requires constant care.

In that sense, I got intrigued by the idea of habit in her relationship to these objects, and how much this sense of habit can convey the feeling of safety. These paper-weights embody memories, but seeing how she rediscovered each piece during the flow of conversation, further than memories, the interactions she has with them are settled in her routine.

A gesture, a thought or a moment someone takes for something every day can evolve into an automatic response that; like she said; « grounds » you in your space and your idea of self.

Spaces that make one feel safe are part of a subjective, personal narrative, but I believe they can materialize in easy tangible things around us. The pace of habit offers something comforting and simple, which can be as reliable as, or even more reliable than, your memories.

### **Shit I forgot my Labello**

Keeper

*Somewhere between Belgium and the Netherlands. We are moving at 300km per hour.*

The first thing that comes to my mind is my Labello.

( He bends down to the bottom of his seat and searches in his bag, opens the little foldable table in front of him, and displays on it 3 Labello, all the same looking )

It's what I carry around at all times. I don't remember when it began, but this unconscious behavior became something more present in my life since I moved abroad. I find it very practical.

Look, if I am going somewhere without it, my day is ruined. I know in advance it will be bad.

I like them for what they are. I touch them constantly, the entire day I do this and this.

(He grabs one of the Labello on the table and starts to open and close the lid to make a satisfying « click » sound).

See this one, I must have had it for a while already, his color is fading. But this one is brand new I probably never used it and have it in my bag as a backup, just in case.

I have a lot of backups actually, probably around 10 pieces.

I keep them constantly with me in my jeans or coat pockets. When I come home I place them at the entrance of my house in a big bowl. They lay in the same place as the leftover things I find in my pockets, pieces of paper I am keeping or a 2 euro coin.

I never change brands or flavors. It is always the classic Labello that I buy, blue and white. The original. Everything about it is attractive to me, the typography of the logo, the shape, the division of the colors, it's iconic.

It is a cheap thing to have. Only 2 euros and it is not something with limited access. The value in them is almost sentimental to me.

I feel like I don't take enough good care of them if I am being honest with you.

I keep forgetting them, but when they are not with me, I know I am missing something. I feel it as if I am naked without them.

When I leave my house in the morning I say «Okay key, phone, etc, shit I forgot my Labello ».

Well if I am late it's okay, I will buy one on the way to work, and if I know I have some spare time, I go back to my house to fetch one.

It happens a lot, and because I am usually late I keep buying new ones.

They all have the same value to me and then on the other hand I know ( he points the used Labello to me on the table and opens the lid again, probably as an automatic gesture, I hear I nice « click » ) if I am going out to see some people I will take out of my jacket a new one, who looks beautiful, I leave the tired one at home. And if I feel moody I will take the ugly one with me.

Even the very used ones stay. You know in theory the empty ones you throw away, but with me the ones that are almost done, close to agony, I still see some potential in them, it's never really finished. In that case, I am placing them in a jacket I am not using so frequently and I say «For one day, I'll be happy to find it ».

I try to make sure there is at least one inside each of my coats. I love it when I find some jackets back in my closet because I automatically also rediscover some old Labello that stayed there.

It's incredible.

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Functional objects were always intriguing things to me. Somehow I find them less attractive and unromantic even, because the magic in them is gone if I know in advance what their purpose is. There is less to discover and to invent perhaps.

A part of me wished his response was less common than Labello's. But I have realized that the relationship he has with these objects has nothing common and nothing that I have expected.

Functionality and habit are quite easy partners but I never imagined them being part of the realm of magic; as Leach.E. (1994) said in his text « A view of functionalism »: « 'Magic' is not a strange mystery which can only be encountered in travelers' tales and medieval romances. Everyone who shows above-average competence at producing a cup of coffee or growing tomatoes achieves his results by 'magic' ( or, as we usually say 'art') rather than by strict adherence to scientific principles. In other words, the fieldworker must recognize that what the observer finds strange and mysterious the actor may regard as entirely obvious. » (p 41).

I know these interactions are obvious to the keeper and deeply rooted in his habit. But further than the design of the object, it is the gesture, the frequency of the touch that brings him comfort. Analyzing the language and uses of ordinary objects to become intriguing and almost exceptional items is what Ponge.F. (1998) does with his poems in his book « Soap » :

« The more the magic stone cooperates with water and air, the more explosive tend to grow the perfumed grapes...

Soap has a lot to say. Let it say what it has to say with vigor and passion.

This stone is unnatural – vulnerable, susceptible, complicated, and of a particular dignity for it doesn't just take pleasure slipping between my fingers — avoiding external force: soap disappears in my hands. » (p12).

Ponge emphasizes how a simple object like the soap or in the case of the keeper a Labello can become a poetic and almost magical item that unfolds in the eye of its viewer through the analysis of its usage.

It is fascinating that the keeper probably did not realize his behavior was enchanting to me. There is almost something comparable to a power dynamic between the Labello and him. It has a word to say about his well-being, and he completely relies on them for that.

There is something not entirely graspable in his choice of committing to such a close relationship with these things that share most of his daily life intimately, yet are so commercial. Probably that is the part I like, the ungraspable, that leaves space for imagination even for something I might have seen as simple as a Labello.

As Le Guin. U.K. (1986) explains through her fictional text, « The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction », the simple gesture of carrying something in your bag, pebbles you will put in your pockets, can open a universe for its keeper that speaks about himself.

It's this personal aspect that triggers my curiosity because you can never fully understand what someone sees in something else. It is part of what I find magical, that an object can expand within its smallness in the imagination of its owner. The Labello might be an « imperturbably functioning chronometer telling the time on another world ». (p7-8)

## Now think of a person

Keeper

*« You are moving to New York, it's crazy! » We are both laughing. She is emotional, just enough for me to see, well balanced she tries to stay contained. I cannot tell if she is confident or insecure. The atmosphere is relaxed, it's a trendy place. There is some soft disco music playing in the background.*

This picture of my grandparents is something I carry with me for a long time now. Most things I have are from my mom's parents, especially from my grandmother, Maria. I have a special connection with them.

Their love was so out of this world for me.

My grandfather died when I was one year old but we had the same birthday. I never had a conversation with him but I got to know who he was through his diary.

I found pictures of them traveling in Europe and also in Amsterdam. They were both creative and I think they kind of sacrificed their creativity for them to have a job. They both became doctors and so did my mom.

But we are in this generation of expressing ourselves and focusing more on what we want out of this world, I somehow feel like I am the bridge to express what they want to say.

I don't know if you have ever done this, but you have these guided spiritual meditations on Youtube, and each time I go through the video and it comes to the moment when the guide says: « Now think of a person » they appear.

My grandparents. Together, holding hands. I feel like I can talk to them, not in a weird way, but I feel their presence.

This is why this little box is important to me because it contains all my grandmother's jewelry. She is with me all the time.

The box is always in my bag.

Sometimes I wear them, but for me, it is more about them being with me than me wearing them. It is a strange thing to experience but I feel like I don't need to wear them for them to have a purpose, they already have one in my life.

I got them in 2018 when my grandmother passed away. We were dividing things and I chose them.

I don't open the box often.

It's very funny because even if I go to the gym they stay with me in my bag.

I never lost the box, but maybe this is why I also don't wear them. It is not so much about their aesthetic, they wouldn't match my style so for me they are more like the memory of someone than jewelry.

This, I love this. It's too big on me, but I love them.

I feel closer to my grandmother this way, she was a crazy lady.

She had a lot of affairs when she was a student and fell in love with her professor. I find her so elegant in the pictures.

I feel protected as if they chose me rather than I chose them. It was such a natural process of me having them and taking care of them as if my grandmother had arranged it for us.



*She carries them everywhere with her?*

*Imagine, you go out, I would be stressed to have this precious Jewelry with me in a club.*

*Even the emotional value, I would feel pressured to lose my grandmother's belongings in a random place.*

*It is more risky but I can imagine it's like a secret treasure that no one knows about, quite exciting.*

I am scanning my room, questioning my decision for the placement of the objects in the space.

Why do I put some in a box or a drawer, some are only put on top of my chest of drawers as a decoration I guess, and some others hidden in a pocket of a bag ?

Keeping something in a bag you use every day together with a lipstick, your phone, and your notebook, is a different gesture than keeping something next to your bedside table in your room. Both are private areas but loaded with a different meaning.

A handbag fully belongs to the everyday routine, which makes every item in it part of someone's day as well. It can be seen as a more banal carrying medium, yet encapsulates a world of small things one cannot function without.

From that perspective, a handbag is something less sacred than something placed with attention in a room, but maybe it says more about how much someone might need this object daily.

« The bag is one of the central objects of desire with only one function: to contain something we don't know. (..) it is about places in which to gather what is necessary » Mazza.S.(1996). « Contenitorio » (p6-9).

I am wondering to what extent these expensive jewelry pieces actually differ from the Labello, which differently are as meaningful, and get carried around everywhere as well in some sort of bag.

This story draws a perfect tension between the practicality of keeping the jewelry box in her handbag with some other utilitarian items, and the unpracticality of carrying something at all times that she never opens or barely wears. The idea only of it being there is of enough use to her.

This behavior could be regarded as not making sense. Why would someone want to carry something they never use?

Maybe it is about envisioning utility as something variable that can take a personal twist. The function here might reside only in the subjective meaning of the object, like the paper-weights, who never got used for what they were produced for -preventing paper from getting blown away- but found utility as passive companions, only because the Keeper decided so.

I guess it shows that once you become the owner of something the function of it is left entirely up to you, their primary social function does not or less matter anymore.

Channeling the memory of someone into a physical object creates a sense of permanence, but only the object remains tangible.

I find it intriguing that objects can break the boundaries of their physicality, to embody subjective emotional meanings.

The keeper sees the memory of a grandmother or the love she shared through a box filled with jewelry which could be associated with anything else in another context. This gap between the produced item -which only has a material meaning- to the personal and unique piece, is covered by the value someone attributes to it, and the trust in that object to consistently convey that feeling.

This is maybe why she keeps a picture of her grandparents with the box. The picture is a clear, static representation of a memory, whereas the jewelry pieces are linked to her grandmother but express something more physical. It lives, gets worn, and grows old by her side.

Viewing objects in their physicality holds some importance as well in the act of keeping. As mentioned above, something is intriguing in the acquisition or inheritance of an object, how it changes meaning before and after someone owns it, and how and why someone chooses it.

Most Keepers believe that the objects they own choose them rather than the other way around, guided by some sort of supernatural force of attraction between them. I believe in that force, whether it is driven by the subconscious or actual supernatural powers. However, I cannot deny the rational physicality of things; how something interacts with the world and its social context might be relevant in the owner's mind when it comes to adopting a new object. In that matter, I got intrigued by Appadurai.A.'s (1994) analysis of « The Social Life of Things: Commodities and the Politics of Value». He draws the argument that « objects have social lives of their own » (p76), focusing on the political aspects of objects, materialized in goods to be exchanged and carrying value.

Objects are political items if placed in a social context. What one desires to possess, what one chooses to have, or what was chosen for someone is placing them somewhere in the realm of value.

« Even if our approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meaning apart from those that human transactions and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For

that, we have to follow the things themselves, for their meaning is inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transaction and calculations that enliven things.» (p77).

As Appadurai explains, objects have inherent meanings that manifest through their shapes, environments and uses, influencing how they evolve through various human transactions. In the case of these jewelry pieces, they transitioned from fashionable items that were used and worn to becoming sacred objects, released from their previous purpose through changes in ownership. Yet, they remained within the same social realm, becoming part of inherited items. However, this realm in which objects transact and evolve is not solely dependent on the meaning of the object itself but is also dictated by the Keeper's social environment.

I have come to realize that collecting statements about what people keep reveals personal stories that can mirror specific social environments. My mind is drawn to the book I am currently reading, "La Place," by Ernaux.A. (1983). I noticed a paragraph where, in the storytelling of her upbringing in a farmer's social environment, she mentions her father's inability to make choices about the decor in his bedroom. This highlights how laborious the transaction of things can become if aesthetics related to ownership and possession of objects were never part of one's social reality.

« But desire for the sake of desire, because deep down you don't know what is beautiful, what you should love. My father always relied on the advice of the painter, and the carpenter, for colors and shapes, which is what is done. Ignoring even the idea that we can surround ourselves with objects chosen one by one. » (p58-59).

This quote drew my attention because it illustrates the tension between social environments and the transaction of things, showing how objects are a powerful tool to communicate how someone showcases himself to the world.

Not knowing what you should love is an interesting statement because it puts the attraction towards an object in a social perspective, having nothing to do with taste or an individual's desire to possess something but rather with what society finds acceptable for one's social space, what conforms to current customs. It shows that keeping things and surrounding oneself with objects is an actual choice, so intuitive to me that I was not aware I committed to it.

## They belong to my other world

Keeper

*It is 4 pm. A warm kitchen and the smell of recently burned coffee beans. She is in her comfort zone, a moment she takes for herself.*

I care for multiple objects that I display here and there in the space. The kitchen is the soul of the house. If I take a closer look, I have so many things that are special to me. This blackboard, all my books, my little lamp over there that creates a nice ambiance, this doll I got for years now on the shelf... It is difficult to choose, they are all important to me because they also belong to my other world. But I think I want to focus on this porcelain tableware.

I found them back, after they broke, by chance in an antique store in Vienna, exactly this set. Because I moved to France I couldn't take my tableware with me and asked my friend Andréa to look after them like a babysitter when I came back to fetch them, over the six cups I had, only two were left. I did not dare to ask her to get them back, she used them all the time and I had the feeling I would rip something off her, that became a little bit hers. Afterwards, I made peace with that, grieved these cups in my mind, and suddenly in October, I bumped next to this antique dealer who sold these exact six cups! Das Lilien Portzellan. I was speechless.

The first time I got them I was 22 years old. I have had them for about 35 years now. They come from my grandmother, die Ribish Oma, and are originally from the 50s. Das Lilien Porzellan was the big trend at that time. 1956.

I haven't spoken about it for years. It is quite a dramatic story.

The last time I was in Vienna while having a conversation with my sister regarding our family, we had an argument about our grandmother whom I had a complex relationship. I kept only one thing from her: this tableware. My sister replied being offensive: «Yes, but you realize it's you who got this tableware, it is unfair » etc. You see, it was this kind of silly story.

But when my grandmother passed away I was the only one who came to help clean her apartment. My mother wanted to give all her belongings away and when I saw this porcelain set of cups, I directly wanted to have it.

To be honest I just loved how they looked like, everything about them was beautiful, aesthetic.

They have some sort of simplicity, everything is clear and at the same time, it is very joyful.

The 50s and 60s have a special place in my heart. I was born in 1965, and I already felt something when I was young about this enthusiasm for life that started to rise again after the second war.

Objects also became more important at that time and it was a new start for cultural life as well. You know you invite the neighbor; these cups were only taken out when we had guests, of course, absolutely not everyday tableware. They stayed in a glass cupboard, exposed. It was reserved for special occasions and special people.

We were never allowed to touch them.

For me, these cups belong to a story that is deeply rooted in me. Even from a more mystical point of view, I have the feeling they were the ones searching back for me. Somehow there was only one guy who still had six non-touched cups in Vienna, and I bumped into him.

Seven actually, I got richer by one cup.

I keep them on the shelf underneath my kitchen block, to be able to look at them all the time.

It is funny because even now I still hesitate before taking them. Even if I could, I am still afraid they will break.

It is silly but is written in me: « Careful you are going to break them ».

So I say: « I will look at them only, it is already fabulous I can do that ».

Maybe the feeling of them being fully mine is already enough.

I am convinced these cups came back to me because they like me, and at the same time they are symbolic in link to the relationship I had with my grandmother, who did not like me.

She was a very complex person. She used to buy things for me, and a few days later would cut, and rip them apart. Like with this little flower blouse I loved, I never understood her behavior.

I always carried a huge contempt feeling towards her, we were from two different worlds but she played a very big role in mine.

This porcelain tableware also played its role somehow.

Never being able to touch these porcelain cups was almost like never being able to touch your grandmother. You are in admiration but you never have access. And now that they are in my kitchen I have access but I have so much respect for them, I am so scared of breaking them, as if I would break this new relationship I built in my head with my grandmother.

In this space that is fully my world, she is, through these cups, softly integrated. It is important to make peace.

I clean this shelf one time a week. I find myself being very precocious and delicate in my movements. It is some sort of ritual because I touch this tableware and she is here, the Oma, with her headscarf and her strict look.

These cups keep reminding me that it is important to find the good in things and people. Nothing is ever too old, these cups and these topics are current.

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I did not dare to touch the cups. The tension between the hardness and the fragility is leading this story. Someone being experienced as so strict yet taking so good care of these cups, more than her grandchildren is very intriguing. Maybe objects are easier to love than people sometimes.

Considering her hardness, I find it unexpected that she decided to care for a set of beautifully refined cups. I would assume this grandmother to be detached from anything material, anything being there almost only for its beauty.

But I guess everyone has a soft place for something. An area that flows between projection and reality, where you have the time to care for anything that somehow decided to enter your heart.

The fact that this set of cups is not the « original » but conveys the same feeling is very new to me. In comparison to the argument, I drew with the jewelry box, where no similar items are comparable to the pieces she owns because of the memory attached to it, here the set of cups has the same meaning as the one she took out in her grandmother's apartment.

Maybe it is because in this case, aesthetics matter. She did not mean to embody a memory through these cups, she simply found them beautiful. The meaning arrived in a later stage because of reflection, probably even because she found another set, the meaning was amplified.

This story gave an insight into her upbringing as a person, but the difficulty she had at the beginning in choosing something she would like to talk about because she was surrounded by too many things she cared for, is relevant as well in the understanding of herself as a keeper.

Without calling herself so, maybe in the same way as I did, without noticing that she committed to the choice of keeping things around her, she modulated her environment to create a space that is completely personal to her, that she can fully rely upon.

The possibility for objects to convey the feeling of safety in your private space, in the same way you trust your diary not to spread your thoughts to the world, is what was created in this kitchen.

Every item has something to tell about herself, but she stays there silently, waiting for her to give them the right to talk to me.

She integrated these cups, in between all her other objects, as a medium to create and frame her intimate space.

Wanting to possess something, to own, gather, and keep objects might be seen as a capitalistic consequence of our times. Whereas I believe that when the outside feels restless, the urge to create a space fully curated by the things that you care for, as said previously, a space where you can physically rely upon, is a response to security.



Humans surround themselves with meaningful things to make sense of the world, their memories, stories, and relationships with people. In her case, safety is physically translated to her house, which in turn becomes her world.

### **There is still room to gather inside the « Belly of the universe »**

The stories unfolded through this text demonstrate the ability of people; keepers, to project emotional value onto their material surroundings which leads to different ways of caring for it.

This idea can be enlarged by the analogy made in the last story where the house of the Keeper becomes her world. Objects are used as a physical translation of a metaphorical safe space. To do so, the idea of the container; whether it is translated by a pocket, a bag, a box, or a house; is necessary to ensure this feeling of safety. I started this text by acknowledging my natural temptation to gather things I care for in an enclosed space. I find the idea of containing something that I cherish comforting, and as Le Guinn explores through her text, it might be an instinctive human behavior to carry things to keep them, store them, and expose them to make a space yours.

« If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solid container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again--if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. » . Le Guin.U.K. (1986) « The carrier Bag Theory of Fiction ». (p9).

Observing what seems to be a natural and simple behavior, is a way to link people together, intertwining their stories to realize most of them are keepers in their own way.

For the Labello as well as the jewellery box there is a « mise en abyme » of containers. Having something in a box, placed in a pocket in a bag. Going back to the very small, realizing it is immense.

A varnished wooden table or a kitchen shelf works similarly, taking into consideration that the house can be seen as a larger kind of bag for oneself. A large space, that contains smaller spaces, inside rooms, that are filled with shelves, that are busy with boxes, that contain things that say something small about yourself.

The bag can be viewed as the carrier of the conceptual safe space that objects represent. If the bag can extend to one's house, it can be the carrier for someone's world.

A bag in this context is a multilayered meaning item, and has various « trajectories ». « The social life of things » Appadurai (1994 ) (p76). Designed to be the carrier for things, it evolved into being an autonomous object, a fashion accessory, leading to monetary exchanges and multiple transactions. It is by social inheritance, an object that triggers desire and is commonly seen as valuable. « There is no object that could be subjected to puns, calembours, or semantic substitutions like the bag. (...) the central object of desire (...) Inside the bag I put a mystery, which are the things I will bring with me, but those things I will use in a place I don't know. ».Mazza,S. (1996), « Contenitorio ». (p3).

This analysis is trying to frame the bag within its duality as a conceptually mysterious object as well as a fashionable item.

Once an object is associated with Fashion, it is tempted to lose its meaning to only become an item.

There is a tension between bags as framing a sacred place and bags as commercialized goods. This tension can be applied to objects in general, as in the case of the Labello which is a produced product, yet becomes someone's most valuable belonging.

I am wondering why the process of caring for objects is applied differently to items belonging to the realm of Fashion.

In all the stories examined above, objects traveled through time with their owners. This idea of time in the process of caring for something material isn't that evident for items that belong to Fashion, as Woodward.S and Fisher, T. explain in their study « Fashioning through materials: Material culture, materiality and processes of materialization» (2014) :

« Given the temporality of fashion, there is a disjuncture between the material life of an object, which is longer, and its fashionable life (...) The material life of the object before and after being fashionable, The dynamic ways in which things may move in and out of being fashionable over time. » (p23).

This can be quite directly applied to the cases of the jewelry pieces which, as of right now, « don't match her style » because their fashionable life expired, yet are still very much cared for in a different spectrum. Woodward and Fisher argued that it is essential to acknowledge that « fashion is always material » (p24), and that, it is this materialization, that « confirms the agency and intentionality of consumers » (p24).

Bringing things back to their materiality is allowing to trace the line between the study of objects and the study of Fashion items.

Envisioning people, not as consumers, but as Keepers might also be of relevance in reconsidering how one views, treats, and consumes « things ».

If, as explored through these stories; objects can be the embodiment of memories, personal narratives, doors to other worlds, intimate companions, and care, I believe that consumers can become keepers, and probably Fashion items can become objects and even « things ». If so, the bag slowly opens and expands within the private space of the keeper, opening secret pockets to make sure to carry his home safely into « the belly of the universe ». Le Guin.U.K. (1986). « The Carrier Bag theory of fiction ». (p10).

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## Appendix

The stories stated above are extracts of interviews conducted between January 2024 and March 2024 in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and South Africa.

This is the list of questions used during the interviews:

What is/ are your most private or personal objects ?

Why, where and for how long are you keeping them ?

How do you keep it ?

Have you ever lost this object ?

Do you think this object likes you ?

How does this object care for you ?

How do you interact with this objet ? How often do you interact with it ?

How would you describe your relationship with this object ?

How do you care for this object ?

What do all of your special objects, taken together as a whole, mean to you?