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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

This Research Project is exploring the topic of material culture, specifically the cultural relevance and importance of personal possessions. It will focus on the material culture of the banal and the ordinary - and particularly the personal stories of objects and their owners.

The questions this research project aims to answer are: what makes an object irreplaceable? Can this special quality be found in the physical description of the object? Is it found in the biography of the object? It also investigates pricelessness. Can the value of an object be evidenced in the object itself, or is it contained in something else?

This research project is limited to the exploration of one object. This limitation aims to allow for as much depth as possible, and proves a challenge to the existing literature in the research of material culture where reviewing a breadth of objects is seemingly the norm. The object in question is called *the Clown Mug*. *The Clown Mug* is a personal object that belongs to me. I use it as a coffee mug, and, in many ways, as a muse. In the last year, I have built a relationship with this object, it has been in my space almost constantly, and has witnessed many events and developments alongside me. I find *the Clown Mug* to be almost human in my mind, I can empathise with it, and personify it. Throughout this text, the object of study will be referred to either by its title '*the Clown Mug*' or as 'the object'. This is for clarity's sake, as well as because of future questions as to the functional definition of the word 'mug'.

The topic of material culture has been widely researched.

Since the mid 1970s disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences have experienced a real surge in interest in material culture, which is sometimes referred to as 'the material turn'. This proliferation of work on the material world has inspired many historians, working across a wide range of subjects and periods of time. As a consequence, there is now a substantial scholarship on the value of material objects for historical research, which often appears on the form of edited collections (Hannan et al., 2017, p.2)

While the topic of contemporary personal objects is less prevalent in material culture research, it has been considered by Turkle, in the 2011 text *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*. This text deals with a large number and variety of personal objects that their respective owners consider evocative of thought and or emotion. The text puts an emphasis on the thought provoked by the objects. This makes the text more about the evocative, and less about the object. In this research, I aim to centre the object in the discussion rather than the emotion of the object.

The theories and concepts that are most important to this research project are object analysis, object biographies, commodities and value.

Object analysis is a process of observation and recording that aims to give information about an object (Hannan, 2017, p.12)

An object biography is an exploration of the 'complete trajectory' of an object's life, from coming into existence up to its eventual consumption (Dannhel, 2009, p.123). In the case of *the Clown Mug*, this will be limited to the time from the object's making, up to the start of this research project.

A commodity is an object that 'can be seen to circulate through the economic system as they are being exchanged for other things, usually in exchange for money' (Kopytoff, 1986, p.64)

Value is to do with monetary value. I will not attempt to attach an exact monetary value to the object, but rather decide if it can be described as valuable, or valueless. According to Prown,

There are different kinds of value. One, intrinsic in the fabric of an object itself, is established by the rarity of the materials used. Such value will inhere in the object for as long as the material continues to be valuable. With gold or silver or precious stones, this kind of value is quite persistent. More transient or variable are those values that have been attached by the people who originally made or used the object, by us today, or by people at any intervening moment. (1982, p.3)

Therefore, it is important to evaluate both the physical and social aspects of *the Clown Mug* in order to ascertain whether or not it is valuable.

A primary research method I have chosen to employ in my research project is object analysis. I have analysed one object, *the Clown Mug*, by studying the object and contextualising this object by drawing on a range of secondary texts in the area of material culture and object analysis which I have gathered using books and journal articles. I have also researched other aspects of material culture that I found to be relevant using books and journal articles, and I have researched the definitions of terms using dictionaries.

This research is broken down into two chapters. The first chapter will explore the physical form of *the Clown Mug*. It will be primarily making use of two popular frameworks for object analysis. These are: Prown's framework of Description, Deduction and Speculation from the 1994 text *Mind in Matter: An introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method* and Fleming's 1974 framework of Identification, Evaluation, Cultural Analysis and Interpretation. It will aim to find out what, if any, the definable characteristics of *the Clown Mug* make it unique, irreplaceable, or valuable.

The second chapter will explore the biography of *the Clown Mug*. This will be structured using Kopytoff's ideas around object biographies and commodities in the 1984 text 'The Social Life of Things'. It will aim to build upon the findings of the previous chapter, and additionally explore whether the life of *the Clown Mug* makes it valuable, and if *the Clown Mug* is a commodity, or if it has transcended beyond the realm of the commodity.

Chapter 1: *The Clown Mug* as an Object

The goal of this Chapter is to discuss the physical evidence of *the Clown Mug* within the framework of an object analysis, and will aim to determine if the value and irreplaceability of the object can be explained by its physical form alone. In order to focus on the physical form of *the Clown Mug*, this chapter will primarily use the description and deduction phases of Prown's framework (1994, p.7-9) and the Identification and Evaluation phases of Flemming's framework (1974, p.156-157). The later phases of "Speculation", in the case of Prown, and "Cultural analysis and Interpretation" in the case of Fleming, will be explored in Chapter 2. Fleming's properties of an object will also be used in the analysis. 'These properties of an artefact are its history, material, construction, design, and function' (1974, p.156). Since the history of *the Clown Mug* is not internally evidenced, it will not be discussed in this chapter. Material 'involves what the object is made of', Construction 'has to do with the techniques of manufacture employed, workmanship, and the way parts are organised to bring about the object's function', Design 'includes the structure, form, style, ornament, and iconography of the object' and function 'embraces both the uses (intended functions) and the roles (unintended functions) of the object in its culture, including utility, delight, and communication' (Fleming, 1974, p.156).

Identification and Description.

To start an object analysis, Prown would advise to give a physical description of the object (1994, p.7). Description is 'restricted to what can be observed in the

object itself, that is, to internal evidence' (Prown, 1994, p.7). Fleming would advise to begin with Identification. 'Identification should begin with the question, What is it? The answer is classification-specification of the general class to which the particular object under consideration belongs' (1974, p.156). These two approaches differ, in that Prown would take the object as alien, and restrain from classifying it as to remain as objective as possible, whereas Fleming seeks to assign the object to a distinct group of objects so that it can be understood as compared to other similar objects. Since the goal is to ascertain the value of *the Clown Mug* as an object I believe that a blend of these approaches is appropriate. As describing the object can be important in order to identify what it is, I will begin with describing the object, and then identify it.

Taking the various approaches to describing an object in mind, I believe it is important to begin with the physical dimension of *the Clown Mug*, in order to get a sense of its presence in the physical world. *The Clown mug* weighs 230 grams, is 12 centimetres tall, and has a lip with a diameter of 9 centimetres. It holds a volume of approximately 200 millilitres. Prown would describe this as substantial analysis, which is the first step of description in his framework. 'Substantial analysis is a descriptive physical inventory of the object' (Prown, 1994, p.7). It should be noted that describing the dimensions and specifications of the object is also recommended by Fleming, but as part of establishing the authenticity of the object as a part of its identification (1974, p.156). Fleming assumes that the object must be something that could be faked, and that we would want to know whether or not it is genuine (1974, p.156). This is an example of how Fleming can assume that the object being analysed must be prestigious, which the Clown Mug is not. In terms of this method of

identification, the base of the object is white and unmarked in any way as seen in Fig.1. There is no maker's mark to indicate its origins.



Fig. 1: Base Of the Clown Mug, 2023

Now that the measurements of *the Clown Mug* are known, it is important to investigate what the mug is made of. *The Clown Mug* is made of ceramic and is painted with a ceramic glaze. The body of the mug is coloured with a streaky application of yellow, with a red stripe around the lip of the mug and an off-white interior. Prown would class this as a part of substantial analysis (1994, p.7). The material of the mug is also one of the 5 properties of the object, and may speak to the value of the object (Flemming, 1974, p.156). Fleming would add that the material condition must be noted, as this can speak further to the analysis of the object. There are a few chips in the glaze along the lip of the mug, along with cracks in the

internal glaze. The chips in the lip of the mug are stained by coffee, showing that *the Clown Mug* is primarily used as a coffee mug. Prown may expect information on the condition of the object to be included in the substantial analysis, but it is not explicitly stated. Nevertheless, it may help to identify the value of *the Clown Mug* to note that it is made of a low cost material, and is damaged.



Fig 2: The Clown Mug, Front view, 2023

Moving to the next stage of Prown's instructions for description, the content of *the Clown Mug* must be described - that being the decoration of the object and the imagery it displays - without interpreting it at this stage (Prown, 1994, p.8). When describing the decoration of an object, it speaks to the overall design of the object.

Design is one of the key properties of an object, and 'includes the structure, form, style, ornament, and iconography of the object' (Fleming, 1974, p.156).

The ornament and iconography of *the Clown Mug*, as the name suggests and as seen in Fig. 2, consists of imagery of clowns. The decoration of the object is where *the Clown Mug* really departs from the standard form, and becomes more unique. There is one Clown, referred to as the Music Clown, painted on the front of the mug, who is depicted sitting on a brown box or barrel wearing a blue jacket, a yellow top with a chequered pattern of black lines, red trousers, yellow shoes and a green hat with red stripes. The face of the Music Clown is made up with a red clown nose, an exaggerated white outline of the mouth, and red lips. This clown is playing a yellow music box. All of this is outlined using black glaze, with the colour added over the outline. The Music Clown is surrounded by several black music notes.

There is a three-dimensional figure of a clown on the side of *the Clown Mug*. This functions as a handle. The handle clown has one elbow resting on the lip of the mug, and the other hand on his chin. His face is similarly made up to that of the Music Clown. The handle mug wears a red hat with bow on the top, which is white with red polka dots. He also wears a red and white striped top with a white ruff collar with red polka dots, striking acid green trousers and red shoes, which connect to the main body of the object.



Fig 3: The Clown Mug, Back view, 2023

When considered as a three dimensional object, *the Clown Mug* can be described as having a front side and a reverse. The front side is the most heavily decorated, with the image of the Music Clown and the music notes concentrated on this side, as well as the front side of the Handle Clown. The back side of *the Clown Mug* shows only the yellow glaze on the main body of the object, the red lip and the back side of the handle clown. The main body of the object is gently curved.

With this physical description of *the Clown Mug*, it should now be possible to identify it. I believe that *the Clown Mug* is a coffee mug. This is a functional definition that has been ascribed by the common use for *the Clown Mug*, as it is most commonly used to drink coffee. It is interesting to note that, while *the Clown Mug* is

functionally a coffee mug, it does not meet the definition of a coffee mug. A coffee mug is defined by The Collins English Dictionary as a 'large deep cup with straight sides and a handle, used for hot drinks' (2021). Given that *the Clown Mug* is not large, deep or straight sided, this poses an issue for the identification of *the Clown Mug*.

Furthermore, the earlier discussion of measurements shows that *the Clown Mug* would be quite a small mug. According to pens.com, 'The standard size mug size is still listed as 240–350 ml. However, one might conclude from coffee culture and Starbucks speak that the average mug size range could easily be updated to more like 350–590 ml.' (2021). Therefore, while *the Clown Mug* is functionally a coffee mug, it is not definitionally a coffee mug. This may be because of the unusual nature of the object, or because the definition of 'coffee mug' is too narrow. I believe that it is a mixture of both.

Deduction and Evaluation

Now that there is a detailed physical description of *the Clown Mug*, it is appropriate to deduce more information about the object that is not immediately visible. According to Prown the next step should be deduction. Deduction in the context of object analysis involves moving from a description of the object in its physical form, to investigating the interaction between the object and its perceiver (1994, pg.8). The deduction will focus on sensory engagement and emotional engagement rather than on intellectual engagement, as Fleming would say that the next step is evaluation which I feel is more valuable. Evaluation aims to give a value to the object (1974, p.157). This is an important step, and will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Sensory engagement

Prown advises to begin the deduction stage of analysis by engaging with the sensory experience of the object (1994, p.9). This will be linked to Fleming's framework, by focusing on the object property of function, materials and design(1974, p.?).

When taking the materials and design of *the Clown Mug* under consideration, there are some interesting points to note. The most striking point of contact when interacting with the object is its handle. The three-dimensional clown may seem to be an impractical shape, but the clunky, clown shaped handle is surprisingly comfortable to use and fits the hand well. The head of the clown sits above the line of the lip, which is unusual, and means that when using *the Clown Mug* to drink from the head may bump into the face of the user which is an interesting sensory experience, but it is not so intrusive as to make the object too uncomfortable to use as a mug.

Emotional response

Prown says of the emotional response to an object 'these subjective reactions, difficult but by no means impossible to articulate, tend to be significant to the extent that they are generally shared' (1994, p.9). My personal emotional response to *the Clown Mug* is particularly strong, because of my entanglement with the biography of the object. This life story is too speculative for the stage of deduction, so I will temper my response to only the physical aspects of the object.

There is a strong emotional response evoked by *the Clown mug*. The imagery of the clowns are oddly proportioned, the colour palette is garish and clashing. The

overall shape is unusual, somewhat off putting and striking. The combination of these aspects could make *the Clown Mug* ugly, but a much better descriptor is kitsch. 'To qualify as kitsch and not simply bad taste, there has to be a real sense of the ridiculous present' (Ward, 1991, p.18). While the attributes of the mug may be considered unattractive, the garishness of *the Clown Mug* are so ridiculous that they come across as honest and heartfelt. The bold use of colour is happy and playful and the wacky proportions are endearing and childlike. I feel that *the Clown mug* is a joyful object.

Coming back to Flemming's need for evaluation, There are two kinds of evaluation.

One has to do with judgments of aesthetic quality and workmanship, i.e. appropriateness of material and texture, skill and taste of craftsmanship, effectiveness of overall design (proportion, balance, unity), and expressiveness of form, style, and ornament. ... The other kind of evaluation consists of factual comparisons of one object with others of its kind in quantifiable terms such as relative size, cost, rarity, or temporal primacy as determined through objective research (Flemming, 1974, p.157)

For the purposes of this analysis, both forms of evaluation can bring insight into the possible value of *the Clown Mug*. The lack of concrete identification makes ascribing value to *the Clown Mug* more difficult. If the goal is to determine the value and the irreplaceability of *the Clown Mug*, this could be achieved by comparing *the Clown Mug* to coffee mugs as a class of object, as Flemming suggests (1974. p.157).

Through this comparison we can identify the objective abnormality of *the Clown Mug*. It seems reasonable to assume that functionality of a mug should be enough to identify *the Clown Mug* as a mug. As a coffee mug, the small size may affect the value of *the Clown Mug* either positively or negatively, but given that the mug is smaller than even the lowest estimates of popular mug sizes, the 200 ml capacity is likely a drawback in terms of the desirability, and therefore the value of *the clown*

mug. However, because the capacity of *the clown mug* is not standard, it would make it more difficult to replace, adding to the value. This non standard size may also add credibility to the idea that the mug was handmade. In some cases, a handmade mug may have a higher value than a mass produced one, but given the damage it is likely valueless.

Having conducted the research stages of description, deduction, identification and evaluation, and having discussed and analysed the physical form of *the Clown Mug* in detail, I can conclude that the object is indeed unusual, and has several unique features, particularly the handle. This, combined with the unusual size and the rest of the decoration makes *the Clown Mug* most likely irreplaceable. However, given the low cost of the materials, it lacks intrinsic value, and thus based on the internal evidence alone is not a valuable object.

Chapter 2: *The Clown Mug* as a story

This chapter will look into the life of *the Clown Mug*, in order to judge if *the Clown Mug* can be described as a valuable object, and if it is fair to describe it as a commodity at all. It will use Prown's ideas of "speculation" (1994, p.10), and Fleming's ideas of "cultural analysis" and "interpretation" (1974, p.157-161). Speculation has the aim of developing theories and hypotheses about why the object has the effects that it does (Prown, 1994, p.11). This will focus on theorising about my personal relationship with *the Clown Mug* and, as well as speculating on the history of the object. Cultural analysis 'examines the various interrelationships of an artefact and its contemporary culture' (Fleming, 1974, p.156). Here, that will apply to the relationship between *the Clown Mug* and I, and the relationship between the object and the world around it. This will be highly speculative. Interpretation 'suggests the meaning and significance of the artefact in relation to aspects of our own culture' (Fleming, 1974, p.156). Given that *the Clown Mug* is a contemporary object this will inform the speculation of how the object, and objects like it interact with the wider culture and with the future.

This chapter will also make use of the idea of object biographies from Kopytoff's 1986 text *The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process*. This text explores the object as a commodity, and how the status of commodity or non-commodity can speak to the social significance of the object, and thus also tell us something about the society the object belongs to (p.64). In order to gain such information, Kopytoff recommends compiling a biography of the object.

In doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realised? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal

career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? (Kopytoff, 1986, p.66-67)

To what extent is a biography of *the Clown Mug* possible? It is an almost untraceable object. There are few clues to be found in the analysis of the object itself as to where it came from or who made it. Through the earlier stages of object analysis, it was concluded that *the Clown Mug* was likely handmade and that it is an unusual size and shape compared to other mugs. This is not a very substantial amount of information on the history of *the Clown Mug* to form an object biography. At this stage then, I will employ Prown's suggestion for speculation. 'What is desired is as much creative imagining as possible, the free association of ideas and perceptions tempered only, and then not too quickly, by the analyst's common sense and judgement as to what is even vaguely plausible' (1994, p.10). This biography will be, somewhat out of necessity, highly speculative.

Of course, *the Clown Mug* has a history, as all objects do. However, since the history of *the Clown Mug* as an object is so opaque, as is the case for many ordinary objects, it is appropriate to piece together an approximate history. One way to aid this speculation is by looking at the average career for a coffee mug in the contemporary world. This is a use of the life cycle model of biography (Dannehl, 2009, p.124).

Its Definition from the Oxford English Dictionary Online first relates to the biological life cycle, a 'series of developments that an organism undergoes in the course of its progress from the egg to the adult state'. It also covers the account of such development, and is applied to 'the course of human, cultural, .. existence from birth or beginning through development and productivity to decay and death or ending'. (Dannehl, 19.. p.124)

With the general life cycle of a coffee mug, which can be summarised as: creation, use, and then discarding, we can add to this with the few additional clues that are

available from the object itself. This will then give the fullest possible picture of the life of *the Clown Mug*.

The early life of *the Clown Mug*: What does this Say?

To begin the biography of *the Clown Mug*, it is important to consider how it was made. Undoubtedly, the mug was made, as all objects must be in order to exist. As evidenced previously, *the Clown Mug* appears to be handmade. Socially speaking, a handmade object has a certain amount of emotional capital, as opposed to a mass produced object. It then must have been owned by someone, most likely either by the person who made it, or it may have been purchased, or given as a gift to someone else. In order to keep this succinct, I will limit the speculation around ownership to just one previous owner. Because *the Clown Mug* is so unusual, whoever owned it must have had a strong, if uncommon, sense of personal taste. Perhaps they were interested in clowns, or kitsch homeware, or maybe it was a joke gift and they hated it. Whatever the case may be, they brought *the Clown Mug* to Hochschule Trier's small campus in Idar Oberstein, Germany. Given the size and isolation of the town, and my personal knowledge of the retailers in the area, it is not particularly believable to speculate that the object was purchased in the town. In contrast to the town, the college in Idar Oberstein is an extremely international campus, with a majority of students coming from outside of Germany.

If we assume that *the Clown Mug* was taken from home by a travelling student (which given the demographics of the college is not unlikely), then to take a ceramic object like *the Clown Mug* on a journey also implies that it has a sentimental or emotional value. There, *the Clown Mug* was used in the Student Kitchen for a

period of time. It was then left there for common use by the community, for at least a few years. At the time when I first crossed paths with the mug the original owner, and thus the origin story of the object, was unknown by the student body and thus can be assumed to be long gone. It is not a high point in the life of any object to be left behind in a student kitchen. If the mug is assumed to have been a handmade gift, this abandonment is almost poignant.

Whether *the Clown Mug* was a gift or not, it most certainly has the air of an object with a sentimental value. The poignancy comes from the abandonment of what was perhaps a gift, as 'having and holding, looking at or touching, a once given thing can overcome the separation of persons over any distance; it can connect the living and the dead' (Purbrick, 2014, p.14). Given my own attachment to the object, it is hard to imagine it as unloved. If it was a gift, or a personal object to someone else, then to leave some piece of connection or memory behind in a student kitchen is quite sad, if not for the person who owned it, then at least it was sad for *the Clown Mug*.

Meeting *The Clown Mug*

The student kitchen in Idar Oberstein is where I found *the Clown Mug*, while I was on Erasmus there, from October 2021 - August 2022. At this time, *the Clown Mug* was not a popular object within the student body. It was regarded as creepy, impractical, and often described as 'cursed'. When I saw *the Clown Mug*, I thought it was a funny little object. I enjoyed its eccentricity, and so I used the mug for my coffee almost every day. And although I was very attached to the mug, it is safe to say that *the Clown Mug* was mostly insignificant to the world. However, it was during this time

that *the Clown Mug* became a muse for creativity and expression for me. I started to use it in my *Instagram Stories*, as seen in fig. 4. In order to break down the barrier to posting about my practice publicly, I began to use *the Clown Mug* as a prop, and as a way of projecting my voice through the object.



Fig. 4, *Instagram Story*, 19 March 2022, Katherine Mc Namara

Here I must make reference to *the Clown Mug* as an evocative object. The idea of evocative objects comes from Turkle's 2011 text *Evocative objects : things we think with*. This text encapsulated the relationship between *the Clown Mug* and

myself. The *Clown Mug* became a vessel, not just for coffee but also for thoughts, ideas and a vehicle for communication with others.

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocative to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with. (Turtle, 2011, p.5)

The process of the function of *the Clown Mug* changing from being a coffee mug to becoming what might be described as a muse, or an evocative object (to use Turtle's words), may be considered as a process of singularisation. Singularisation is when a commodity becomes a non-commodity (Kopytoff, 1986, p.73). The intensity of feeling contained within *the Clown Mug* means that it is not easily exchangeable for any other object. While I could technically drink my coffee from any mug, the experience would be lacking the emotional attachment I feel for *the Clown Mug*. Purbick would agree that an emotional object evades the arena of the commodity.

To consider material forms as repositories of affection, not just desire, of longing as opposed to preference, of love of all kinds, demands some rethinking of the status of objects in capitalist consumer culture. Such feelings show the limits of commodity worlds. If a thing can create affection, then the illusion of human fulfilment falsely promised by the marketplace might actually be real: a fairytale come true. (Purbick, 2014, p.11)

If *the Clown Mug* can now be said to act outside of the realm of the commodity, and as such is a singular object in the wider world, it must then be asked if the object can be said to be sacred. 'If sacralization can be achieved by singularity, singularity does not guarantee sacralization. Being a non-commodity does not by itself assure high regard, and many singular things (that is, non-exchangeable things) may be worth very little' (Kopytoff, 1986, p.74). Although it is on a relatively small scale, the fact that the expression of *the Clown Mug* was public pushes the

scale towards the validity of it as a sacred object. However, it is also important to note that 'what to me is an heirloom is, of course, a commodity to the jeweller, and the fact that I am not divorced from the jeweller's culture is apparent in my willingness to price my priceless heirloom' (Kopytoff, 1986, p.80). Therefore, I believe that *the Clown Mug* occupies a space of valuable valuelessness.

The Clown Mug's survival

At this point in the biography of *the Clown Mug*, the object has become personified to me, and in a way, has a life of its own. *The Clown Mug* then had another force outside of itself acting upon it. Then there was a fire. On the 18th of July 2022, the department of Jewellery and Gemstones in Idar Oberstein was destroyed in a fire. The fire was started by an electrical fault, and it spread through much of the building. Many items of significant monetary value were destroyed by the flames, the toxic ash and the vast amount of water it took to put out the fire. I personally lost all of my tools, which was a significant financial blow. But *the Clown Mug*, which was also in the building at the time, survived. It bore witness to the destruction, but remained as a kitsch, banal, strange little mug, with a smile on its faces.

In this time of great upheaval, I believe I clung on to *the Clown Mug* as a sign that things would be okay. This is what psychologist D.W. Winnicott called a transitional object (Woodward, 1985, p.143). 'The teddy bear that is carried around all day and night by a toddler is typically referred to as the prime example of a transitional object' (Woodward, 1985, p.143). It brings comfort, and is something familiar in any environment no matter how strange. Moving back to Ireland after this

disaster was difficult. But, in the way a child has a teddy bear, I had *the Clown Mug*. It came to symbolise survival and perseverance for me.

To summarise the life of this object, it is fair to say that it has fluctuated in value throughout its time. It began life in an ambiguous state of value, possibly loved, possibly hated. Was then left in the student kitchen in Idar Oberstein, where it was disliked, and had a low value. When I found the mug, it became personally valuable, but not a valuable commodity. When *the Clown Mug* was featured on my *Instagram* it may have increased in value, but probably not by much. By its presence in and survival of the 2022 fire, it may have increased in value for the people who know of and are supporters of the school that was affected, but it had a greater increase in personal value to me, as it became a comfort item and transitional object during a difficult time.

Conclusion

In order to conclude this research project, I will circle back to my original questions. What makes an object irreplaceable? Can this special quality be found in the physical description of the object? Is it found in the biography of the object? Can the value of an object be evidenced in the object itself, or is it contained in something else?

Based on my research and analysis, I can conclude that an object is made irreplaceable by a mixture of its physical properties and the emotional attachment that one may have to it.

In chapter 1, focusing on the physical properties of an object, I found that an object can be valuable if the materials are valuable. An object is made irreplaceable if its properties are unique and not likely to be replicated in other objects.

In chapter 2, focusing on the biographical properties of an object, I found that an object is considered valuable if it is considered sacralised or belonged to a famous person.

In the case of *the Clown Mug*, this research has shown that the unique physical properties such as its size, shape and design would make it difficult if not impossible to replace for an identical object, although almost any other mug could do an equal if not superior job of being a coffee mug. This alone makes the object a low value commodity. However, the biographical elements and the emotional attachment I have to *the Clown Mug* makes it completely irreplaceable to me.

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