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Diaspora memory-objects

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Abstract:

Objects are not just 'objects' but are connected to people and memory. My paper asks: how can objects help authors write from diverse experiences? I answer this question through a diasporic lens. Objects of ritual have strong importance in Judaism and cultural objects are often passed down throughout the generations. I analyse examples from writers, theorists, and curators, including Mark Baker and his memoir *Thirty Days* (2017); object theorist Bill Brown; Mireille Juchau and her essay 'The Most Holy Object in the House'; postmemory theorists Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer; curator Alla Sokolova; Marie Kondo and her use of the Japanese term 'mono no aware' (the pathos of things), and my own poetry collection *Amnesia Findings* (2019). Through this research, I arrive at a closer understanding of how objects can help writers respond to complex and hybrid experiences using memory-objects, and by writing through Things.

Biographical note:

Anna Jacobson is a poet and artist from Brisbane. *Amnesia Findings* (UQP, 2019), her first full-length poetry collection, won the 2018 Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. In 2020 Anna won the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing (Open Creative Nonfiction), was awarded a Queensland Writers Fellowship, and was shortlisted in the Spark Prize. In 2018, she won the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. Anna is currently a PhD candidate at QUT.

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Diaspora memory-objects

I grew up surrounded by cultural objects used by my family and passed down through generations. Every Friday night, my mother and I light the candles, with candlesticks passed down from my great grandmother. There is a dresser (also passed down from my great grandmother) that holds multiple challah (bread) covers. Open the dresser drawers and the scent of these special objects including the prayer books, engulfs me; or perhaps it is the scent of the polished wood itself. I connect the objects and my memories, to the women in my family: sewing boxes; a plait of my Nana's auburn hair woven into a comb, my great grandmother's string grocery bag; my nana's paint box and brooch, and my grandma's pineapple plant. My mother inherited many of the objects from her mother, grandmother, and great grandmother that fill our house including an egg pot used only once a year for boiling eggs for the Passover Seder. My mother carefully drops the eggs into the pot with a metal spoon and after they have boiled, I peel them over the sink under running water. This is a ritual that falls to the women in the family.

> **Passing Down the Egg Pot**
>
> Nana used the pot once
> a year, cooking Passover
> eggs for Seder night: enamel
> black with lid the colour of Danish
> china. Hard-boiled eggs chopped
> in salt water – slaves' tears.
> Now my mother uses the pot, boiling
> eggs I peel over the sink
> under running water. Hot
> brittle shell giving way to cool
> smoothness in my hands.
> Some years I peel fifteen
> in one go. Some years twenty.
> The pot returns
> to its shelf to wrestle
> dust. Empty,
> until another year. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 73)

Mark Baker writes about the ritual of his wife cooking with a special chicken soup pot each Passover in the prologue to his memoir *Thirty Days*. In November 2017, I travelled from Brisbane to Geelong for the Word for Word National Non-Fiction Festival, where Baker gave a talk about *Thirty Days*, written in the Shloshim (thirty days of mourning) of his wife's death. Baker writes:

> I know she would think I've gone mad with bereavement, but this morning I turned the pages of this book to ash by setting them alight in the pot she used each Passover to make chicken soup. I drove along the highway to the cemetery with smoke swirling

> around my head – that little boy again, tempting magic with fire. At the traffic lights, people stared at me, as if my car was about to explode. *I must see you again. I must see you again. I must see you again.* The embers were still hot as I poured them over the earth above her forehead. (Baker, 2017, p. 4)

Kerryn Baker's chicken soup pot was special in that she used it only once a year for Passover and Mark Baker found it so strongly connected to her memory that he knew it was an important vessel to fill with a paper copy of his manuscript. Baker spoke of how he tried to burn the manuscript, but the paper took a while to catch fire and he ended up throwing in Jewish memorial candles, turning it into a kind of hybrid witch's brew. Then, he drove to the graveside of his wife's grave and rubbed the ashes into the dirt to share his story with her and seek her approval. Barker explained this in a talk at the Geelong Word for Word National Nonfiction Festival in 2018 and says how grief often does something crazy to you.

Thirty Days is about remembering, memory, and loss through a Jewish lens. Baker spoke about how all cultures have rituals for mourning – and in the Jewish culture; a person who dies is buried immediately. The Shiva lasts one week and is the Jewish wake. The Shloshim is thirty days, the next passage of mourning. Baker says that he does not remember writing the 90,000 words of his memoir during the thirty days. However, he does know that he finished writing it on the thirtieth day and that was when he was compelled to burn a physical copy of his manuscript in his wife's soup pot. He then edited the manuscript over the year as a way of holding on to memory. Therefore, objects are not just 'objects' but connected to people and memory.

Another example of how objects are connected to people and memory is in Mireille Juchau's essay 'The Most Holy Object in the House'. Juchau writes of the butter wrapped in foil that her grandmother had kept in hospital:

> Inside the nightstand drawer I found a mound of butter pats, all pristine in their dead-folded foil envelopes. What, I wondered, what would she have eaten this with? There was no other food in the drawer – no crackers, no matzo, or bread. But I soon realized that butter was talismanic. (Juchau, 2016)

Juchau writes how her Jewish grandmother had fled Nazi Germany. The lack of butter that travelled with her through the diaspora was as important as the objects that survived her displacement. Butter had been rationed in Berlin and now, in Australia where she was trying to make a new life, she 'vowed never to go without it' again (Juchau, 2016). After her grandmother died, Juchau writes how she went through the ephemera kept in the archive boxes because 'each item invoked particular emotions' (Juchau, 2016). This demonstrates how objects have emotions and memories attached. Juchau writes that she has 'come to associate making bread with my grandmother's secreted hospital butter, with the lost generations; with what can be made from all that you have left' (Juchau, 2016). Just as Juchau associates objects with past generations and her grandmother, I too associate objects with my family. Therefore, while the object of butter does not have an immediate connection

to Judaism, with the knowledge attached to Juchau's grandmother's story, the butter demonstrates how intrinsically bound it is to her Jewish identity.

I link these subsequent generational-connections-to-objects in Juchau's article, to Marianne Hirsch's term 'postmemory'. Marianne Hirsch first invented the term 'postmemory' in the 1990s when considering Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*. Within *Maus*, Spiegelman drew scenes to represent the overlap and liminal space between memory and historical evidence. Hirsch writes that

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (Hirsch, 2017)

For instance, when I come across several yahrzeit memorial lamps of my great grandparents, I see that one is unwrapped—a wire filament star encased in a thin glass cylinder. The attached light fitting is ancient and does not fit into modern light fittings. I used the prompt of the yahrzeit memorial lamps as inspiration for my poem 'Yahrzeit' that appears in *Amnesia Findings*. Using imaginative investment, I picture what kind of light the lamp would bring and where my great grandparents once saw it.

> I imagine what light
> the lamp would bring. Wire, poker-bright
> inside glass, star-shadows travelling
> across rooms, keeping vigil
> as we sleep. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 81)

This wondering and imaginative investment is one that propels many to journey to their parents or grandparents' homelands. For instance, in Marianne Hirsch's and Leo Spitzer's article 'The Tile Stove', Hirsch and Spitzer accompany their parents and parents-in-law to Chernivtsi, Ukraine in 1998, where they return to their parents' home and discover their mother's memories of the tile stove, where cakes were once baked. Hirsch and Spitzer again travel to Chernivtsi in 2000, but this time with two other second-generation travellers. They pose the question:

> what rewards do journeys and narratives of "return" – physical contact with places and objects with which they have had no previous tangible connection – promise those, like us, in the second or subsequent generations? (Hirsch and Spitzer, 2008, p. 145)

Hirsch and Spitzer write of becoming 'engaged in a kind of detective work using flimsy clues' (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2008, p. 145). They speak of the strong mediating role that objects

can have for these generations and state that 'here again objects, specifically tile stoves, came to play a powerful mediating role – but this time in a postmemorial dimension' (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2008, p.145-146). Heirlooms such as the tile stove in Hirsch and Spitzer's family, and other objects are, therefore, of great importance to Jewish identities.

Sokolova corroborates Hirsch and Spitzer's statement and writes that 'embodying the past, heirlooms facilitate memorization and remembrance of its important moments and serve as a mediator of family memory' (Sokolova, 2013, p. 10). Interestingly, it is the objects that 'have their own 'places at home' that are the most suitable for embodiment of family memory' (Sokolova, 2013, p. 10). Hirsch and Spitzer confirm that:

> for the descendants of refugees and emigrants who had been able to bring only very few objects along with them to their new homes, the discovery of solid, deeply resonant, and long-enduring objects such as tile stoves in the very places where they presumed their families to have lived had potentially tremendous reparative value. (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2008, p. 146)

Sokolova gives another example of old photographs that are also objects and states that: 'faded and shabby photographs that vividly reflected the vicissitudes of their former owners were prized by descendants more than a similar photograph that did not bear the scars of time' (Sokolova, 2013, p. 13). Expanding on Hirsch's definition of postmemory, there is more 'imaginative investment, projection, and creation' that can take place with these creased and worn photographs. For example, did a woman keep the photograph of her husband and children buried in the ground in a box during the war to keep safe? Is this why one side is stained with dirt? This would make the photograph as object all the more precious, because of this imaginative investment and connected story. The same could be said of passports. For example, in my poem 'Danish Pastry Passport', I use the memory-object of a passport as a pathway for storytelling. In this poem, I juxtapose my child's memory of a passport hidden within a secret Danish pastry, with the reality: a fake passport of Danish nationality.

Danish Pastry Passport

I am nine years old – we share
family histories in class. I stand
to tell my tale, recount
word for word – during the war,
my grandfather escaped,
finding a man selling Danish pastries,
passport hidden under icing and custard.

Years later, I ask my parents
what happened to the baker, discover
he never existed – the fake passport
was simply Danish. My child-mind
had leapt to pastries.

That image stays –
my grandfather meeting the baker
in a toasted-almond-scented street,
tucking the warm paper bag
under one arm,
and walking on. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 66)

Objects of ritual are also important to families with Jewish ancestors, in the context of seeking meaning and clues to their past. For instance, Sokolova defines 'heirloom' as an 'object stored as a sacred thing which keeps the memory of the past' (Sokolova, 2013, p. 5). In the exhibition 'Jewish Family Heirlooms', which Sokolova curated for the State Museum for the History of Religion in St Petersburg, almost all participants who donated their Jewish objects, 'demonstrated a special relationship to the Jewish ritual items that belonged to members of preceding family generations', even those who did not consider themselves to be 'religiously observant' (Sokolova, 2013, p. 11). She continues that 'ritual items, therefore, have high potential to become heirlooms because they can be directly identified with their past function, which thus forms the basis for a sacralisation of these objects within the family myth' (Sokolova, 2013, p. 11). Sokolova states that 'the project has shown that items of ritual use have the highest potential for their recognition as Jewish family heirlooms' (Sokolova, 2013, p. 25). Some of the ritual objects in the exhibition included spice boxes, tallit (prayer shawls), and tefillin (small black boxes containing biblical verses that men attach to the head and arm by long leather straps).

I asked my mother if there was a spice box in the family. Spices are part of the Havdalah prayer (Separation Ceremony), which has associative connections with family and ritual, and I remember being shown a spice box in Cheder (Sunday School) as a child: as intricate as a filigree castle turret with silver swirls circles and bells. Filled inside with cinnamon, cloves, and myrtle twigs to signify the end of the Sabbath, Havdalah. My mother told me that she thought her elder brother had their grandfather's spice box. I visited to see it and take photographs and could still smell the scent of spices – a mixture of cinnamon and cloves, through the silver. That the spice box still retained its scent across four generations was thrilling to me. I documented this object until I had captured everything from its miniature door that swung open on a hinge, to the tiny silver flags welded to the top. It was only after documenting the spice box, of holding it and smelling it, that I was prompted to write the poem 'Separation Ceremony'. This led me to juxtapose the details of the spice box, with a poem about the separation of 'my self from myself', and psychosis (Jacobson, 2019, p. 30).

Separation Ceremony

In this separation ceremony
we are not separating
the Sabbath from the rest
of the week.

> We are separating my self
> from myself. I am not aware
> of the spice box on my head
> letting voices in. Though I can smell
> its scent from generations ago –
> cinnamon, cloves, myrtle twigs.
>
> After six weeks, the spice box retracts
> like a mechanical spider, curls
> up in my mind. Silver filigree
> imprints my skin like a pillow creasing
> a face after coma. These marks fade
> over months.
>
> The spice box in my mind
> has a locked door. No spices
> can come in or out. If or when it opens
> I do not know if the memories
> will come or if new ones
> will be created or retained.
>
> But I know I will recognise its smell.
> Cinnamon, cloves, myrtle twigs,
> the scent of old silver. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 30)

Hirsch and Spitzer describe how some objects and not others trigger strong connections, again making reference to the tile stove:

> unlike many other such objects of habitual use, the white tile stove in which 'when the bad times came … cakes were baked' is overdetermined. It possesses historical, as well as memorial and post-memorial, dimensions. And it carries powerful symbolic associations. (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2008, p. 143)

Hirsch and Spitzer describe these 'powerful symbolic associations', as invoking the 'primal associations with home, comfort, and security – with a childhood world of familial warmth and safety, of privacy and interiority' (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2008, p. 144). 'Allspice' and 'Button Collection' are two such poems that evoke this meaning of familial warmth and domesticity, through the use of simple language and imagery. 'Allspice' is about a green tin that holds the scent of my nana's cakes and the memory of Nana herself. 'Button Collection' details the different painted buttons, their 'lolly colours' and 'etched enamel treasure' (Jacobson, 2019). This demonstrates how objects that have familial meaning store memory and can be used as writing prompts for poems.

Allspice

Mum discovers the green tin,
'Allspice' written down its side.
She lifts the lid, brings it to my nose.
It smells of Nana's cakes. She keeps
it in the spare room cupboard. I steal
into the room, breathe the scent on days
when memory isn't enough. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 79)

Button Collection

A square sewing box lined with apricot
satin gathers wooden buttons fish
buttons silvery anchor buttons translucent red
buttons flower buttons hand painted edged
in gold.

I want to wear them all at once.

When a button falls from my indigo cardigan,
I unpick the rest. Replace them with Nana's buttons,
each one different.

I don't want to take too many. Don't want to change
their arrangement, their array of lolly colours.
I thread knot stitch; take only those with doubles.

Etched enamel treasure from a box
that will only
just close. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 80)

*

My creative writing and my poems are informed by object theory, particularly the work of theorist Bill Brown. Brown writes in his chapter 'The Secret Life of Things' that 'objects mediate human relations, including the self's relation to itself' (Brown, 2016, p. 66). I unconsciously connect most of my object poems to female relatives such as my mother, nana, great grandmother, grandma, and great aunt. Many of these poems featuring the women in my family appear within my poetry collection *Amnesia Findings* (2019), for example: 'Nana's Hair', 'Today I Feel Like Remembering', and 'The Pineapple'. My grandma's pineapple plant is special in becoming a hybrid vessel for Jewish mourning. The pineapple plant is another collected object, a living object, and a trace left by its owner for my family to

look after and remember my grandma by. Brown affirms that ‘interiors are legible in the traces left by their occupants, and where collected objects contain for the collector elaborate narratives of their collection’ (2016, p. 66). Such narratives include the story behind the pineapple plant, in ‘The Pineapple’.

> *Plant the top of this pineapple and another will grow.*
> — Grandma
>
> **The Pineapple**
>
> It’s three years since Grandma
> gave us the pineapple top. Three years
> since Dad asked a nurse if the woman
> on the hospital bed was his mother.
> Her strong-self, dragon-fruit-fierce –
> so changed.
>
> Today, a miniature pineapple appeared.
> Perfect as thumbprint whorls. Each time
> I’ve passed the plant, I’ve subconsciously
> checked for pineapples. We wait
> for it to ripen. After months,
> my brother picks it, cuts
> it in four.
> The pineapple is the best I’ve ever tasted,
> saves its sourness for my father –
> we keep the top to plant
> another day. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 70)

The eating and ceremony of cutting the pineapple into four pieces in my poem is important as each family member experiences the trace left by my grandmother. The continuation of keeping the pineapple top to plant so that it will fruit again is vital in keeping this memory alive. Poetry is another form that helps in keeping this memory. Brown affirms that it is this:

> compressed temporality – the emergency of the present becoming the past before it ever seems fully present – that might begin to suggest that this memorialising passion for the real had, and has, no more to do with remembering ‘them’ than it has to do with the longing for someone, somewhere, to remember us. (Brown, 2015, p. 289)

Perhaps this is why it is so hard for me to part with objects: I want to respect this memorialisation. This is why these family objects are so precious to me – they are woven in narrative and memorial acts. Because the strength of my connection to the object varies, some objects work successfully as memory mediators, whereas others do not. This usually becomes apparent during the writing process. However, by documenting family and personal objects

both through poetry and photography, in the process I have become even closer to these inherited things. The object's symbolic associations through generations is imbued with my own stories and memory.

Brown's *Other Things* (2016) is also important because it draws attention to the way we interact with objects and things; in a review of Brown's text, Mark Goble observes

> "things" disclose their actual significance for Brown less in the language we can use to talk about them, and more in how we catch ourselves attending to them – bodily, intuitively, performatively – before we know that they are there, or pause to justify their hold on us. (Goble, 2016, p. 684)

What Goble highlights here is significant because it shows how interacting with objects lead to the object's hold on the individual and memory. For example, Bill Brown analyses Shawn Wong's novel *Homebase* (1979) and writes how Wong's 'mother's dark green jade bracelet' commands a talismanic potency in the boy's memory: 'I can hear her working around the house when she has it on because it knocks against everything she touches. I've felt it touching my skin many times' (Wong, 1979, p. 93). The memory of the (whole) object comes to substitute for the fragmenting memory of the mother herself (Brown, 1998, pp. 940-941). As a result, it is clear that objects and memory and people can be linked; that objects, however obscure, like the jade bracelet in Shawn Wong's *Homebase*, can act as talismans for memories connected to people.

Memory-objects can even become conduits for other memories as prompts in poems and allow the writer to demonstrate their hybrid identities. In my poems 'Amnesia Findings' and 'Until I am Home', worry dolls transform and become metaphors as conduits for memories. Worry Dolls are tiny handmade dolls, placed under the pillow of children or adults to absorb fears and worries throughout the night. They originated in Guatemala. While the Worry Dolls themselves did not spark my memories, they operate metaphorically as memory conduits for me, signifying my desire for objects to be able to relay memories to me. Hirsch states that even though for second and subsequent generations the 'touch' of the objects cannot spark memory (Hirsch, 2008, p.148), objects can spark memory through other means, such as 'narrative, affect, or behaviour, transmitted to them as they were growing up' (2008, p. 149). The process of writing the Worry Doll poems was meditative and came out through vignettes of memory that I then gave to the Worry Dolls to speak back to the poet. I found it interesting that I turned to the cultural object of the Guatemalan worry dolls as a metaphor in this instance, rather than my family cultural objects, creating a more hybrid identity. However, as Marks affirms

> cultural transformation in diaspora is usually neither a full-blown assimilation nor an utterly random 'hybrid' though of course both those patterns occur. More often, cultural practices pass through a selection process that, like the baggage scales at international airports, determines what is jettisoned and what is kept in the passage (Marks, 1999, p. 90).

The worry dolls survived the journey; they were not jettisoned but kept through the transition.

Amnesia Findings

Maps are for memory. I see
palm trees by the forest. Their shadows
form an X at noon. I dig
using hands feet mouth, bite
against treasure – not gold –
worry dolls – spat
like multicoloured teeth into my palm.
They once absorbed night-fears
beneath my pillow as I slept;
now tell me I buried
them here when I wasn't
myself. I tell them my predicament –
of finding out who I am again by knowing
what troubles I gave them. They relinquish
my worries one by one. (Jacobson, 2019)

In Brown's essay, 'Commodity, Nationalism, and the Lost Object', Brown references Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia*, 'Immigrant Souvenirs' where she describes Boston and New York Soviet immigrants' decorating habits, that are similar to my own with the Worry Solls (Brown, 2015, p. 272). For instance, Boym gives the examples of 'matryoshka dolls and clay bowls, but also treasures from American yard sales and Thai lions and Chinese ducks and disposable objects rescued from a hyperconsumerist culture' (Brown, 2015, p. 273). Boym writes that although the homes of these immigrants are 'memory museums', 'the collections are not meant to compensate for some original (aboriginal) loss', but rather, 'the collections metonymically narrate the Russian-America life as the émigré, the political refugee whose hybrid identity and multicultural milieu are expressed by the objects themselves' (Boym in Brown, 2015, pp. 272-273). These hybrid identities through objects assembled and collected are what I am interested in. For instance, my own hybrid identity can be seen in the objects passed down from my family through diaspora: a Seder plate and spice boxes while also mixed in with Worry Dolls.

Different cultures have different ways of dealing with worry. For example, Cromby states that 'experiences of both sadness and worry show clear evidence of historical and cross-cultural variation' and how 'everyone's experience of sadness and worry is different' (Cromby, 2013, pp. 198-199). For instance, the dream catcher originated in the Ojibwe Native American tribe and protects the owner against bad dreams, as the nightmares get tangled in the web and the good dreams are let through (Benjamin et al., 2001). In the Catholic faith, there are prayer beads. Across different cultures, there are diverse ways to attempt to contain 'worry'. This demonstrates the power of objects and their use as writing prompts.

I am also drawn to reclaiming the objects used in rituals themselves. In my poem, 'Passover Seder Plate, 2011', I draw on aspects of the Seder. I structure my poem with five different sub-headings that relate to the five symbolic components of the Seder plate. Each of the symbolic foods on the Seder plate becomes the starting reference in my poem, which then takes off in different directions. I reference maror when I say the 'cocktail of medications has cancelled/ out my bitterness' because maror is known as a bitter herb. When I was unwell in hospital, the mixture of side effects from medications and ECT made me unable to experience the emotion of bitterness at my situation. The next element on the plate is charoset (sweet cement-like mixture to represent mortar used by slaves). I use this cement as a metaphor for the wall that 'appears in my mind without / my permission'. When I lick the wall in the poem, I taste each of the ingredients in the charoset: 'a hint of kosher wine, almond meal, / grated apple'.

For the karpas (dipping of a vegetable into salt water to represent tears of slaves), I write 'All I need is a sprig of green parsley to hold / to my cheek and I will have fulfilled / part of the Passover Seder'. This is in reference to my tears when I realise I've forgotten to fast for my round of ECT in hospital. The next item: z'roa (lamb shankbone representing the Passover sacrifice) links in my poem to when I choose a meal from the two plates of food in hospital 'One is pork. / I drop the lid swiftly, choose / another. It shines dark. Either beef / or lamb'. Being kosher is part of my sense of self. That I am now aware of the meats being served shows that my consciousness and identity has started returning after the abyss of complete disconnection and unawareness.

The final item is beitzah (roasted hard-boiled egg – representing the festival sacrifice). I make reference to the egg sandwiches on 'tri-coloured bread' I was supposedly served in hospital. Because of the unreality of psychosis and the memory loss I experienced, I write in a way that makes the reader unsure of what is true or not. This puts the reader in my shoes and lets the reader experience the feeling of being unsure of memory; of having to rely on notes made at the time. This is important in providing the understanding that people's identity can disappear.

> For lunch in hospital we are served a treat –
> egg sandwiches on tri-coloured bread.
> I have noted this in my visual diary,
> it must be true. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 37)

Diasporic objects used in ritual and culture are evocative for use as writing prompts. But what about objects that do not have significant cultural meaning, which are hoarded? For instance, it took me years to throw out my collection of fading bus ticket receipts, and years to recycle my collection of cardboard that might one day be useful for craft projects. This included everything from toilet rolls to empty alfoil or gladwrap rolls; the cardboard contents filled cupboard shelf upon cupboard shelf. Was I hoarding these things because I was from a culture that had almost lost everything along the way? I believe the answer was yes, and I turned to Marie Kondo for a better understanding of why we keep things and the power of memories that attach themselves to objects.

Marie Kondo is the founder of the KonMari Method, 'a new approach to decluttering based on Japanese values in order to surround yourself with items that spark joy' (Kondo, 2017). *Spark Joy* is Kondo's guide on how to declutter, organise, and get rid of objects that may not 'spark joy'. I resonated with a chapter towards the end of the book called 'Things that spark joy soak up precious memories'. Kondo describes an outing with her mother to see cherry blossoms in Japan. She writes of the 'small pink glasses with a cherry blossom pattern. When filled with the pink amazake, it looked like cherry blossoms were blooming in our glasses' (Kondo, 2016, p. 267). To Kondo, these glasses became 'an expression of my mother's love and affection'. (Kondo, 2016, p. 267). Kondo had an epiphany on coming back to her tidy, minimalist apartment, and realised she wanted to live her life 'in such a way that it colours my things with memories' (Kondo, 2016, p. 267). She writes that some things 'can't compete with things that have been steeped in memories of the people I love' (Kondo, 2016, p. 268). She continues, 'objects that have been steeped in memories carry a much clearer imprint of special times' and that 'objects that bring us joy have even greater capacity to soak up our memories' (Kondo, 2016, p. 268). Kondo also speaks of the

> spirit that dwells in material things: the spirit of the materials from which the things are made, the spirit of the person who made them, and the spirit of the person who uses them. The spirit of the maker has an especially powerful impact on the object's personality. (Kondo, 2016, p. 277)

And yet, she writes 'in the end, it is the feelings of the person who uses an object, the way in which he or she treats it, that will determine what kind of aura it has' (Kondo, 2016, p. 278). Kondo speaks of the Japanese term 'mono no aware' (the pathos of things) and 'the essence of things and our ability to feel that essence' (Kondo, 2016, p. 278). The fact that a book about decluttering can still recognise the power of objects and that they contain memory is important. It shows that something is missing if your home does not have anything to connect to family or memories. Inheriting objects from loved ones and objects that are passed down are therefore important to a sense of self.

My mother is tidying and de-cluttering the house using Marie Kondo's 'spark joy' technique, while I help from the sidelines. We have gone through the easier bags but are now coming to the much harder ones.

'Does that spark joy?' I ask.

She has unwrapped what looks like an old chicken – the feathers are everywhere. She tells me it is not an old chicken but rather, a hairpiece made of feathers.

'Yes, I'm keeping it,' she says, wrapping it back up and placing it in a bag at the back of the cupboard. She says she has memories of Nana B wearing the headpiece in her hair on special occasions and to Synagogue. This scene containing the hairpiece object now features in my poem, 'Why Can't We Just Keep Everything'.

***Why Can't We Just Keep Everything*?**

Mum and I sort through bags of clothing
in the spare room to make space.

We unwrap what looks like an old chicken hat –
feathers everywhere. Mum remembers
her grandmother wearing the hairpiece
on special occasions. She wraps it back up.

From another bag I watch her lift out a nightie
that could feature in a museum. She reaches for the next
item of clothing, puts it down again, makes
a noise at the back of her throat.

I recognise the shirt, a favourite pattern Nana
used to wear – white top with black zigzags,
glittery sequins. The shirt doesn't make sense
without her.

Mum holds up a blue beaded shirt of Nana's
that doesn't have a living memory attached. Tugging
at the iron-on-label feels wrong, she says.
She'd feel weird giving it away with her mother's name.
Feel even weirder crossing her name out.

'It's hard,' she says.
I agree. (Jacobson, 2019, p. 82)

My paper has questioned: how do memory-objects and heirlooms allow writers to speak from their experiences? My research has shown this is a personal paper as much as it is about ritual and cultural objects, as the objects are inseparable from their cultural and familial overlap. Diasporic objects and other objects that contribute towards hybrid identities are valuable for children or grandchildren of immigrants in sharing their experiences. Objects inherited from loved ones have strong memories attached, as Kondo elaborates about the pathos of things and her mother's cherry blossom glasses, and as I have shown throughout my poetry from *Amnesia Findings*. By using these memory-objects – particularly diasporic memory-objects – as writing prompts and by 'Writing through Things', I have demonstrated that rich, evocative poems and stories are created and can continue to be created by writers for years to come. As a result, tapestries of memory are woven and seen anew through the eyes of future generations by using memory-objects as writing prompts.

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