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## **Transatlantic Tea**

Addressing issues of immigration, hoarding and inheritance, my paper entitled “Transatlantic Tea” incorporates a spatial span between countries, a linear span between time and generations, and a psychological span between sentimentality and practicality. The work researches the role a particular tea set has played in my family and reflects the disjointed results of memory and familial relationships caused by immigration.

In my attempt to cleanse my home of unneeded and unused objects, I became curious as to my resistance to both keeping the tea set (which once belonged to my Dutch grandmother) and getting rid of it. Waffling between desperately trying to conjure up meaning toward a seemingly vapid possession or rashly returning the set to my European relatives, I was led to research my feelings of obligation towards sentimentality and heritage via inherited items. I’m trying to infuse the set with sentiment, nostalgia or even a memory, but it remains a rather indifferent heirloom (although ironically increasingly less so the more I write about it).

Can one elicit sentiment from an object that evokes no memories? I envision the tea set’s future by imagining a fictitious past, one colored by remembering things I never experienced, idealizing through nostalgia and distorting the past by overlooking or misconstruing any actual events.

Through this chasm between countries, time, generations and personal history, a threshold has been created rather than overcome.

This project compiled telephone interviews from family members who live in different parts of the world (Italy, Holland, England, and America), but who all share a common memory of a tea set belonging to my grandmother. The audio is played in a room that contains a table, two chairs, a teapot and two tea cups. I will invite one audience member at a time into the room, serve her/him a cup of tea, and ask them to stay and listen with me through the duration of time it takes to drink her/his cup of tea. The entirety of the piece can range from 2-4 hours and can be performed on more than one day. The piece reflects issues of obligation to inherited objects, hoarding items that are never used, nostalgia, immigration, and even jealousy. The edited interviews of my aunts, uncles, cousins, sister and father highlight the disparity in memories of objects we were all exposed to in varying degrees. A cohesive memory of family is attempted to be reached through and with the tea set by patching together memories, or lack of memories, about the set. It is my intention to conjure meaning through experience. For me, this meaning exists within my reflection about the tea set, my disjointed extended family, and creating a context for objects that are meaningless, but somehow still carry emotional weight. For the audience members, the meaning could bring forth reflections of their

relationship to unused “precious” items, the role sentimentality plays in creating their surroundings, and reliability of perspective.

The technical requirements include a quality CD player and speakers.

Over the last 15 years, my work has consisted primarily of live performance, music, video, sound recordings, and installation. Performing often in unexpected environments, my work often relies upon interactive exchanges with the public, either through the act of handouts, food consumption, gathering of information, or the exchanging of stories, often combining humor with political and personal issues. Additionally, my stage act and persona “Wilhelmina Baker” concentrates on manipulating established genres of music and theatre, changing the execution of a formal piece of work through modern commentary and reinvention of traditional format.