

On the Integration of Objects.

This is sociological.

Every family unit operates within a sphere of itself. Especially when children are younger, they bend towards the opinions imposed on them by the elder members and the consensus of the unit is one and the same, most often, when it comes to politics, religion, which neighbor they hate the most, and who makes the best pancakes. These things are internalized, but, the objects the unit has and uses, these allow the amorphous unit to fluidly expand and contract, venture south or north, and keep members within itself, all while keeping within the bonds created by the objects. Here we are, on the outside, looking in.

When a member of the unit leaves, for a time neither temporary or permanent yet with a definite return - say, to go to college - that member returns, inevitably, with different views on the world than the generalized consensus everyone shared before departure. Altered perceptions towards truths, truths otherwise rejected by the family, the spell of the whole unit is broken.

It is not broken at departure, the unit here fills itself in, quickly, and unconsciously to mitigate the absence and quell the throbbing hearts, and it becomes whole again only in appearance. Objects migrate from countertop to countertop, clothes fill the closet, books slowly stack themselves upon empty shelves and suddenly, much more space is discovered with the absence, and the gaps are filled in. It is not departure, it is at arrival, (not a return), that the arrived must reintegrate themselves back into the family unit.

Remember that these truths have already been altered, and though we did not immediately gauge the shift in internalized politics/opinions, we do immediately gauge their extension; the objects that belong to the member. A unit shares beliefs, but it also shares most objects, which are totally communal. The objects that inform their identity, and these are many - the blanket on the rocking chair, given by nobody but always there, the plastic cutting board with the melted handle, the bathroom toothpaste that is simultaneously running out but never quite done - so when the member arrives, carrying with them their objects, more newly acquired, which have shifted to represent (loudly), their differences from the unit, this is unnerving. Even though it has filled itself in, the unit recognizes the member's arrival and begins a festering animosity towards the new objects, which maintain their individuality - as they belong to only 1 person, the member, and not the unity.

In the harried movements to welcome the arrived, hands are shaken, gloves are taken off, coats set carefully on chairs (not in the closet as of yet), suitcases taken and shoved graciously to the side, bags handed off yet the contents remain unseen, the hustling of taking out clothes from the

closet to make room, putting the books back on the floor, the unit reclaimed space is taken away and given back the unknown member. The murmurings of ‘where should we put this?’ when glancing awkwardly at the hairdryer and the massive bag of shampoo deposited to them to place somewhere echo in the bathroom against the wall of the unit shampoo. There is no place for these objects, and they are all placed in the general locations of where one would expect these things.

A bag with a bowl and matching green plate, a set of silverware, a packaged vegetable peeler, and a can opener, a bamboo cutting board, the hunting knife, are unpacked and spread throughout the kitchen counters. These objects, no longer contained in the membrane of the bag, are spread amongst the counters where they seem to radiate their ‘antibelonging’ to the unit objects around them. They are untouchable without permission to unit members, who do not know what the possible retaliation can be.

The objects are at cold war and salty silence with the others, members even taking a sweeping look around the kitchen can gauge exactly what is out of place. The can opener, for example, that lies in wait until a member requests to use it, because the other one has broken and using the hunting knife seems excessive, the spell of the strange object is broken. The can opener is taken out of its packaging, admired for its durability, comments made on the member’s excellent choice of product, washed and placed in the dishwasher, and then put in the drawer with all the other kitchen supplies.

Unit members come to know the objects and their nuances as they integrate back into the object landscape the unit belongs to, just as the newly arrived begins to soften and flow back into the dimple they left at departure. Slowly, almost lazily, the unit morphs, flows, and overtakes the member. The unit flows into the member, integrating it into itself just as the objects have been scattered and have found their places.

But the need for the individuality experienced when the member was not part of the unit remains and is impossible to shake. This is resented by the unit because their existence is one of integration. They do not see how keeping oneself contributes to a unit, and they fight to break the habitual loneliness instituted by the member; whose cues are as simple as washing one's clothes separately from the unit, keeping a suitcase in plain view because the closet has no space, the suitcase a reminder of the ability to leave; waking early to sit in the grease-flecked kitchen in a silent house to catch the last rays of the chilled morning sun through the busted blinds with a cup of coffee, to try to etch the sweetness of solitude once more on molars and then to assuredly finish before anyone comes down the stairs to say ‘Oh, I was just leaving.’

Another, a bowl of razors, floss, toothpaste, and toothbrush all stacked in the top right of the bathroom counter; and if the bowl is moved, one flies into a rage saying ‘don’t move my stuff’.

The message is clear but what rings loudest is 'my,' the reminder that integration has not been successful despite all the attempts of the unit to reconcile. And the unit knows this because the individual has exposed their failure to reintegrate, wanting 'my stuff' to be kept separate tattoos it on the unit.

Over time, the unit may reintegrate, but it is unlikely as nothing is quite so sweet as autonomy to those that have tasted it. The unit dissolves when people leave, and ultimately return, but the integration becomes more painful and less likely because the objects have always changed and the unit knows the member will leave again. This sets people on edge, makes them ask 'why bother?' Rather, they are left to their own ways, rubbing against each other, chafing, refusing to accept object-opinion differences, feeling absolved of guilt because it is different, and it will change, and prevention is impossible.

And that is all.