

Done by Inheritance

A Phenomenological Approach to Affect and Material Culture

Jonas Frykman

Doreen's fondest memories were of those rainy afternoons, sitting with her mother in mother's bedroom. Mom would take down the wooden jewelry cases from the top shelf of her bedroom closet, and they would spread out Grandma's bracelets, rings, necklaces, and pins on the bedspread. Doreen and her Mom would hold the pieces up to the light and Mom would tell Doreen about how Grandma loved to wear this necklace or that ring. Mom would talk about the family gatherings where she herself wore the pieces that Grandma had handed down to her. Mom would often tell Doreen that the treasured family jewelry, with all of its history, would be in Doreen's hands one day.

After both parents died, the jewelry was made the part of the estate. Her two brothers made her go to the lawyer's office to discuss its economic value, and then they explained to her that 'the law is the law'. The rings, necklaces and bracelets were all sold and the money shared. 'In order to get her share she had to sign a release document. She signed it, as her brothers asked, but at the bottom of the release she wrote, 'I'll never forget what you did to me and I will always remember your words, "the law is the law," but the law can't force me to ever speak to you again'. (Fish and Kotzer 2009: 59)

Two Canadian solicitors, Barry Fish and Les Kotzer, quote this example from their practice in the book *Where There is an Inheritance ...* (2009). In the preface to a collection of around 80 similar cases, they write, ‘We have constantly found that death and inheritance unleash a vast range of emotions which embrace bitter mean-spiritedness on one end of the spectrum, and the deepest imaginable wellsprings of goodwill and love on the other’ (Fish and Kotzer 2009:12). Objects can often release very deep conflicts, the repercussions of which are deeply felt in the inheritors’ lives. Things bequeathed are given an ‘affective value’, in that the inheritors find themselves in a liminal state and thus become open to a wide array of influences that are often difficult to name and grasp. The void that is created when parents die is manifested in how the order and loyalties that once defined objects within the family are lost. Things that were once integral parts of a family’s everyday life – the familiar bed, the everydayness of the cutlery – are suddenly transformed into mementoes and symbols that allow entry into a world gone by. However, what cannot be passed on is the sensual, affective dimension of the family that we intuitively learn to recognise from early childhood. The well-known wrangling over an estate has some of its roots in this fluid state and in the knowledge of the permanent loss of what was once home.

Perspectives

In order to understand the intensity with which affect is evoked by material objects, the relation between the body and the environment needs to be further explored. To that end, the following analysis will delve into some of the concepts and perspectives that are most poignantly formulated within the phenomenological tradition in anthropology and ethnology, where the ‘ability to grasp the world cognitively only supplements the ability to grasp it practically and physically’ (Jackson 2014: 10).

To get a better picture of the way affects work in this relation, it is first and foremost crucial to focus on the very situation in which material objects are animated. By using Martin Heidegger’s concepts of *worlding* and *gathering* (further discussed below) it will be possible to understand something about the unspoken processes that occur at the moment of experiencing an object. Objects as worlding are not to be understood as discrete entities that stand apart from the context that gives them significance. Instead, they ‘open up’ the entirety to which they belong for a

particular subject. Heidegger's use of worlding implies that a set of events and relations is gathered in the things themselves; he also uses the term *Umwelt* in a way that refers to the English environment.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1977), affects are a result of how the body's senses are organised. When dwelling on habitus, Bourdieu (2001) focuses on the embodiment of a set of dispositions such as feelings, thoughts, tastes, and bodily postures (Reed-Danahay 2005: 107). Habitus, then, is made up of dispositions formed in relation to the objects that people handle and the tasks they perform.

Hannah Arendt's notion (1958) of space of appearance is to a great extent concerned with affective atmospheres by describing how material culture is brought to life in a certain situation and how affects are welded with objects, history, and narration. Jean-Paul Sartre's notions of the imaginary and the real also stand out as important tools for the analysis attempted in this chapter.

The application of these theoretical perspectives will be discussed in relation to examples of estates being broken up in two different settings: peasant society and contemporary conditions. The examples that have been chosen indicate that the analysis is not taking a set of empirical material as its point of departure. Rather, two types of material are discussed: texts from newspapers, magazines, and literature; and statements from lawyers, counsellors, therapists, and researchers. Fish and Kotzer's book, mentioned above, is one of many in which solicitors, therapists, and counsellors talk about cases and clients they have come across. In addition, the analysis utilises a collection of answers to a questionnaire about estates being partitioned (LUF 242) sent out in 2015 by Lund University's Folk Life Archives. Informants from southern Sweden were asked to describe what happened in their own families when their parents' property was to be divided among siblings.¹ This material mostly serves as a background for the analysis. Out of the 75 answers received only a few mentioned conflict, and then mostly in relation to holiday homes.

There are methodological issues of considerable importance that surface when faced with these sources. Judging from the informants' answers, families seemed to follow rational principles when the estate was to be divided. The procedure was described either as collecting the objects that were to be inherited into equally valuable heaps and dividing them fairly among members of the family, or receiving them from their parents' 'warm hands' while they were still alive. It is highly plausible

that there is a pattern where the givers and recipients already knew one another's preferences so well that the objects were transferred before the death of the giver. Such a pattern reveals family relations based on a recognition of individual preferences. Conflicts are abundantly described in the other types of material mentioned above, however, since they refer to situations where people were seeking legal or personal advice.

This absence or presence of conflict indicates some of the many pitfalls we meet when dealing with affects. In the case of life histories, it is possible to discern how memory, narration, and written texts can capture of affective atmosphere. As far as legal or therapeutic cases are concerned, however, single situations are often presented in relation to the material objects that are causing the crisis. Any life history will meet difficulties in capturing the affective atmosphere – the smug smiles, the envious glances, the not-so-well-hidden triumphs, and bodily reactions such as tear-filled eyes and the lump in the throat. Even if awkward moments are not easily forgotten, the way affects appear is evasive and hard to put into words. This discrepancy between the two kinds of source materials points to an analysis in which the understanding of affects, experience, and material culture takes us one step further.

In the example above, most readers will probably understand Doreen's frustration and disappointment and sympathise with her. She was deprived of what she believed should be bequeathed to her on the grounds that it was part of her life with her mother. Asking *why* affects runs high on such an occasion is like inquiring into a humdrum truism; the challenge lies in describing *how* the affects works and the cultural processes by which such attachments develop.

It is obvious that if the gems and rings had been found in a jeweller's shop they would have been valued for their aesthetic qualities or financial value, similar to the way in which the brothers saw them, even if the jewellery was also ingrained with a familiar significance for the brothers. To have affective value for the inheritor, items have more than such symbolic importance; they can, as Doreen's example illustrates, be conjoined with childhood events where the present is fused with the past and the future in a shared intimacy.

The questionnaire mentioned above can be used in a cultural analysis to describe how inherited objects are made the props of a narrated family history. The genre of life histories presents a very special dilemma in understanding the relation between people and objects. Any such

history tends to follow the intentions of the narrator (Tigerstedt et al. 1992). To paraphrase Jean-Paul Sartre (1995), not only does the narrator have a sense of the plot that, from the very beginning, makes the whole story end-oriented, but he/she is also limited by what Sartre calls the 'imaginary'. In this context, Sartre contrasts the imaginary with objects of perception, i.e. the 'real'. Any representation can only contain what is more or less consciously put into it (Sartre 2004; Detmer 2008). A narrator, who already knows the outcome of the story, fuels the representation with intentions and linguistic proficiency, and thus keeps it, in Sartre's words, imaginary. Furthermore, such stories work with a double chronology – the past is portrayed through contemporary experiences, and objects fit into the present experiences of the narrator rather than the subject at the moment of perception (Burnett 1984). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 in this volume, however, stories about difficult experiences have a capacity to create affects in the narrator that were neither intentional nor linguistically aligned. Later in this chapter the opposition between the imaginary and the real is again questioned.

Objections of this kind are beyond the essence of what Sartre is after, however. When he talks about the 'real', he is primarily trying to describe the experiential dimension, the many contingencies and junctures, the realm of the pre-reflective and the nonverbal; but above all, he is talking about seeing things as part of an environment and, in practical terms, in contact with everyday events. It is when this multitude is looked at under the pretence of our interests and projects that it might escape our attention (Sartre 1965; Detmer 2008) and thereby also our multilayered relation to objects.

In peasant society

The reactions that arise when property is bequeathed are bound by time and milieu. In literary fiction, the parting of an estate is often portrayed as the instance where people's true state of mind is displayed. Greed, vindictiveness, callousness, mendacity, and pure mischief are frequently found in dramas and novels, from Shakespeare's *King Lear* to contemporary detective stories, and the inheritance trope has remained as one of the favourite means by which to bring pitiful human imperfections into the open. But what is presented as the most basic of emotions and personal shortcomings is something that, upon closer inspection, is a

connection between people and objects that is mostly non-verbal and pre-reflexive, and is closely connected to the social and material context.

The author Gustav Hellström portrays a scene from a traditional setting in his novel *Storm över Tjurö* ('Storm över Tjurö', 1935), and takes every opportunity to dwell upon the mentality of the islanders. The novel, set at the beginning of the last century, depicts a local clergyman who marvels at the readiness of farmers and fishermen on Tjurö to fight over heirlooms long before the body was cold. When reading the local newspaper,

he saw how sibling rose against sibling, child against father, or mother, father and mother against the children. The most sacred of blood relations was torn like cobwebs in the autumn air. For a couple of thousand kronor, or even the simplest piece of furniture could suddenly acquire value, as was it about bare life. The very drudgery of human existence presented itself in the fine print of the notices in the papers. (Hellström 1935; translated by Jonas Frykman)

For the islanders, access to a farm and land was essential for their very existence. The economy was autarchic – no wages could be expected at the end of the month, no hand-outs from the state, no holidays abroad. Status and recognition within the community were based on ownership of land, and property was mostly in short supply and almost always inherited. Identity for the islanders was constituted in relation to the world as it was experienced, both materially and socially, but always in relation to the community. The habitus of one farmer mirrored that of his neighbour.

These people's habitus took shape in the handling of farm equipment, the tilling of the soil, and the sowing of the grain. They had learned how to understand and *feel with* their land, which was a more thorough and assertive process than what they *thought of* (Frykman and Gilje 2003). They probed every piece of their farm; as they walked behind their horses, ploughing and harrowing, the stones and rugged outcrops had by and by become as familiar as their arms and shoulders. At sea the islanders either pulled up nets full of herring or had to return empty-handed. In their boats they learned to read the skies and gauge the swell. They knew where the shallows were and how far down the sea bed was. Land-

marks helped them to navigate. Each glance at the sky was followed by the implicit question of whether rising early and casting out more lines was worthwhile.

Inside the house, the furniture, such as the chest of drawers, the writing desk, or the clock, was mostly singled out to be scrutinized only when questions of inheritance made it visible. The chiming of the clock indicated the hour when the different chores should be carried out, the men were due home, the cows were to be brought in, and when the food had to be on the table. At the writing desk the daughters of the family learned how to put a shopping list together, while the chest of drawers housed the dowry and the children's baptismal gifts. The interior of one house mirrored that of the next.

All in all, things were not so much seen as singular objects from a certain period in life that people found reasons to bicker about or go to court for. They were rather things that made sense through their uses, chunks of ongoing life, objects through which people knew how to lead a life and survive on the island of Tjurö. The fact that people fought over heirlooms was only partially due to their family history and their mental and emotional dispositions. The heirlooms became real to the extent that the material culture was part of the medium through which the world was disclosed. This was precisely what Heidegger meant by 'worlding'.

Atmosphere

Affects in contemporary societies are not as obviously community-related as on Tjurö, but appear more as a consequence of individual rights being violated, agreements broken, and love betrayed. When she was dispossessed of the jewellery, Doreen was deeply affected, since something she and her mother had cherished had been lost. The two Canadian solicitors recount another incident in which personal relations were gathered interobjectively – between people and a material object. Two sisters were fighting over a treasured crystal vase. Their mother had received it as birthday gift from one of the two. When their mother passed away it was made part of the estate which had to be divided equally between the daughters. The one who had originally purchased the vase saw her chance to reclaim the treasured piece, even though it was equally dear to them both. She took it to the building in which the solicitor's office was

housed. Outraged, she called them down to the parking area to make them witness the breakdown of a troubled sisterhood:

Her face was turned red and she was shaking with anger as she turned to open the door. She reached into the front seat and held the crystal vase over her head. She shrieked at us, 'IF I CAN'T HAVE THE VASE, THEN NO ONE CAN!!!' With those words, she shattered the vase on the pavement of the parking lot, jumped into her car, and took off. (Fish and Kotzer 2009: 34)

As the editors of the book *The Affect Theory Reader*, Seigworth and Gregg claim that it is unnecessary to emphasise the difference between inter-objective, in between people and things, and intersubjective, between people. Things and the environment are included in 'ongoing impingements and pressures from intersubjective and interobjective systems of social desiring' (2010: 7). Above it was stated that affects relate to the pre-reflexive and the lower and proximal senses, such as touch, taste, smell, rhythm, and other types of everyday phenomena and can just as well be the outcome of an interobjective encounter.

'Atmospheric affects' on the other hand are frequently described as intersubjective communication which implies the body and the senses. When Spinoza uses the notion of *affectio*, he is referring to 'the force of an affecting body and the impact it leaves on the one affected' (Watkins 2010: 269; see also Gilje, Chapter 2 in this volume). Affects then denote influence and change. To affect a person is to act upon his or her bodily state as well as state of mind. In the way it is used by Spinoza, it refers to the potential to act; the simultaneous power to affect the world and to be affected by it (Massumi 2002; Clough and Halley 2007; Autumn White 2007). What makes affects hard to pin down in neat definitions is that they belong to that bodily realm of the pre-reflective that Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers to as 'that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematisation is an abstract and derivate sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is' (ibid. viii, ix). The pre-reflexive is what one comprehends before even starting to deliberate.

Affects, then, are set apart from emotions that are more easily defined since they have found their way into words. Emotions are, in Sartre's

(1962/94) famous definition, always directed towards an object: you are angry, in love, frustrated, or mad with someone; you are frustrated, enchanted, or bored with something. Emotions are 'culturalised', put into frames of reference, recognised by others and narrated.²

The psychologist Theresa Brennan, in her book *The Transmission of Affects* (2004), compares affects to the atmosphere that can be felt when, for instance, one enters a room and notices that the air is 'so thick you could cut it with a knife'. Affects communicate important messages non-verbally, passing below the radar. Building on Spinoza, Brennan points out how affects are 'also responsible for bodily changes, some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room's atmosphere, some longer lasting' (ibid. 1).

This affective atmosphere – the transmission of affect – if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The social environment literally gets into the individual. Physically, something is present that was not there before, but it was not intended nor even generated solely or in part by the individual organism or its genes (ibid.).

As characterised by the philosopher Eirin Manning (2007: 17), affects are found in between people, through touch or by simply being moved, 'of reaching towards one another', and exceed linguistic signification. In Kathleen Stewart's definition (2007: 5), they are 'complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us'.

For an anthropologist or ethnologist, the notion of affective atmospheres becomes problematic or decontextualised when the related histories or narratives existing in the field are not taken into consideration (cf. Jansen, Chapter 3 in this volume). In her ethnography of divided Cyprus where ethnic Turks took over the buildings and olive groves left by the expelled Greek farmers, the anthropologist Navaro-Yashin (2007) shows how melancholy radiated from deserted or half-ruined properties, but was also reflected in tales and narratives.

The solicitors mentioned above give almost an ethnographic description of how affective atmospheres are constantly interwoven with narration. For example, they describe an event concerning two cousins and the frosty atmosphere between them after the division of an estate. The son of a deceased client had been involved in a bitter fight with his cousin over the will. The business his father had run unexpectedly went to the cousin, which meant that the son was dispossessed while his cousin triumphed. After this the two men could hardly stand being together

in the same room, to say nothing of turning up at the same wedding party, where the relatives and wedding guests immediately experienced the icy coldness between the two antagonists. Was the other smearing his adversary's reputation when seen whispering in the ear of the person sitting next to him? Was this whisper the prelude to him blaming his cousin in front of all the others? He was quoted as saying:

You don't know how it feels to look at every person at the table as a buffer between you and the person you fought with. You don't know how nervous you might get meeting your enemy while the two of you are alone in the washroom. There is a stress that words can't describe. (Fish and Kotzer 2009: 37)

Simply being aware of the man moving around other people caused affective changes that were bodily. The man's bearing, thoughts, emotions, actions, and understanding of his surroundings were all affected. The anger, excitement, or diffuse discomfort he felt had, of course, a long prehistory that had been clearly narrated.

Worlding

Worlding is a concept where objects, experiences, and use/practice are in focus, where history is taken for granted rather than made the object of investigation. When writing about objects as filled with *dormant energies*, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney gives a good picture of how material objects are worlding. He takes the reader into the 'world which precedes knowledge' (Merleau-Ponty 1962):

The rooms where we come to consciousness, the cupboards we open as toddlers, the shelves we climb up to, the boxes and albums we explore in reserved places in the house, the secret spots we come upon in our earliest solitudes out of doors, the haunts of our first explorations in outbuildings and fields at the verge of our security – it is in such places and at such moments that 'the reality of the world' awakens in us. These are archetypal moments, occurring in every life irrespective of intellectual, social or economic differences. And it is at such moments that we have our first inkling of past-ness and find our physical surroundings invested with a

wider and deeper dimension than we can, just then, account for. This is an unconscious process at the time. It is neither sentimental nor literary, since it happens during the pre-reflective stage of our existence. It has to do with an almost biological need to situate ourselves in our instinctual lives as creatures of the race and of the planet, a need to learn the relationship between what is self and what is not self. It has to do with exploring, sniffing out, settling in and shaping up. And just as the smell of the rubber sheet in a pram or the feel of boards in the bottom of a cot or the scrape of the nappy pin as the child creeps on a tiled floor or the slippiness as he creeps over linoleum, just as these sensations teach the child about the realm of the present, so in every life there are sensations which inaugurate contact with the large and inviting reality of the past. (Heaney 1993)

When Heidegger (1962: 116/84) introduces the concept of worlding, his intention is to describe the state where things are familiar and used as tools – implements that help to link individuals to a certain environment and make that environment of concern for the user.³ The philosopher Richard Polt explains Heidegger's concept as 'a system of purposes and meanings that organizes our activities and our identity and within which entities can make sense to us' (Polt 1999: 54), and he explains that the potentials are there 'before we formulate propositions about them' and are thus filled with possibilities (ibid. 68). The objects are *zuhanden* – ready-to-hand – which implies that it is unnecessary to think about them because they are already there, ready to grasp and put into use. They influence the user pre-reflexively, as with a hammer or a pen, which dictate different possible operations, can be interpreted in different ways, and are to be used in order to follow an intention and create a totality of material and social relations – a world. Worlding conjures up what Heaney affectively discloses as the 'world' of his childhood home. Worlding implies that things assemble a human condition in terms of time and space. In his biography of Heidegger, the German philosopher Rüdiger Safranski (1998) uses Proust's famous cake to explain worlding: 'Proust dunks his madeleine in his tea – and the universe of Combray unfolds. The madeleine, that sweet shell-shaped cake "is worlding"' (ibid. 96).

Death and the inevitable inventory that follows disconnect the objects from this familiarity, their *zuhanden* state, and they become *vorhanden*

– present-at-hand – and perceived as symbols or representations. When they stop worlding it is like when a person dies and her clothes and objects are left behind, saturated with a void that, one eventually realises, is forever. The loss that is felt is proportionate to the complexity of the world that the object was once a part of and an opening into, while it is now reduced to something that can be sold or valued for a market price.

Gathering

Not all inherited objects are invested with what is usually called ‘affective value’. When fights broke out in peasant society they were mostly over property that would make its owner the rightful heir of the farm or the family domain. Conflicts in contemporary milieus often take place over things that bring to mind significant family events: Christmas celebrations, baptisms, weddings, or similar gatherings. Heidegger’s notion (1971) of gathering consequently does not describe family festivities or even how things are remembered per se, but how singular objects are endowed with the ability to bring a certain material surrounding and its web of relationships to life. Or, to put it differently, when things are gathering they summon both the people involved and the activities they perform. Heidegger’s classic examples are bridges, farming implements, and a family meal at which the social and culinary skills of the participants around the table are to the fore. In the example that introduced this chapter, instead of seeing them as broaches, rings, or bracelets, Doreen perceived the jewellery as holding together something that now contained both the objects and her mother. Or, to put it differently by using Heidegger’s term, they were gathering a set of events and relations – an *Umwelt* (environment) – that had become sensitive since her mother’s death.

To gather, then, is not an outcome of the process of bringing together objects that are random or statistically present properties, ‘but a matter of how the thing itself ‘works’ – how it ‘things’, as the Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas puts it (2006: 234; see Polt 1999:58). With the word ‘thinging’ he refers to objects as not just symbolic, i.e. present-at-hand, or even useful, i.e. ready-to-hand, but as evoking interwoven contexts through the perceiver’s personal experience.⁴

In the book *The Perception of the Environment*, Tim Ingold (2000) takes Pieter Breughel the Elder’s well-known picture *The Harvesters* (1565) to illustrate the usefulness of the concept of gathering. He describes how

the artist lets an entire picture of a landscape reverberate with how he paints the central motif of a tree. ‘This is not *any* tree’, Ingold writes:

Rising from the spot where people are gathered for their repast is an old and gnarled pear-tree, which provides them with both shade from the sun, a back-rest and a prop for utensils. Being the month of August, the tree is in full leaf, and fruit is ripening on its branches. For one thing, it draws the entire landscape around it into unique focus; in other words by its presence it constitutes a particular place. The place was not there before the tree, but came into being with it ... In its present form, the tree embodies the entire history of its development from the moment it first took root. And that history consists in the unfolding of its relations with the manifold components of its environment, including the people who have nurtured it, tilled the soil around it, pruned its branches, picked its fruit, and, as at present use it as something to lean against. The people, in other words, are as much bound up in the life of the tree as the tree in the lives of the people. (Ingold 2000: 204)

The picture is not just a demonstration of how Breughel dreamed up the many riches in the lives of Dutch peasants in the sixteenth century. It also shows the homogeneity of its population and how closely people were integrated with fields, crops, and landscapes. People and nature were as one. Here, the process of gathering was released by the hand and imagination of the painter.

Until it mysteriously disappeared when moving a couple of years ago, I had in my possession my father’s bedside table. It was inconspicuous, but to me it gathered in itself my father’s profession as a doctor, his life history, the family that was his, our relationship, and my conceivable future. It belonged to the category of objects that emanated such strong affects among all of us five children; with great difficulties, it was made a part of my inheritance when father died. The world that gathered in it was dear to me, but also problematic because, among other reasons, I never fulfilled his dream of choosing the medical profession. This indeed was an object that became ‘sticky’ as Sarah Ahmed (2010) put it, close to the Heideggerian concept, of gathering filled with a surplus of

affects, emotions, and meanings. In other words, it was attractive and disturbing at the same time.

That bedside table stood in his room, a screened-off territory with a separate entrance and a restroom. The table's design revealed the 1950's fascination with teak and mobile furniture, and was acquired when father decided to move back home after having lived on his own for some years. It had two levels. The surface of the lower level, which was hardly visible, had bleached spots in the polish from diluted alcohol and ether. There he kept the constantly leaking circular steel container for sterilising syringes. Some of the small metal files for cutting the tops off of glass ampoules were stuck in the cracks in the woodwork. He suffered from an illness that eventually took his life and that needed regular, self-administered treatment. The upper level was the table's public space and was littered with poetry books, cigarette packets, a overflowing ashtray, and a black Bakelite telephone with a direct line to the surgery. The surface also had several circular stains from the pots of yoghurt that father downed when he arrived home, there being little time to eat at work. This surface told the story of a cultured, busy, and devoted doctor of his time, while the lower part had more sombre connotations and murmured of personal shortcomings, spells of anxiety, and crumbling health.

Sitting on the other side of that table at night, I listened to father, inhaling the smoke from his unfiltered Philip Morris cigarettes, while he talked. The smoke that drifted towards the ceiling blended with the chemical smells from his medical practice. In our nocturnal sojourns, when his last patient had gone and I had sneaked away from my homework, I learned about diseases, cures, remedies, and heard stories about his own childhood and his family's material and emotional poverty, hardships that obviously made him follow a vocation that allowed him to help people in need. Hovering over the table was an equally thick yet invisible ambience made up of his professional knowledge, my filial affection and admiration, and my deepest compassion for his many crises, which as a youth I found difficult to fully comprehend. The fact that something is worlding makes it come alive with its connotations and many uses. The phenomenon of gathering lays bare the object's particular context of activities, in this case the setting of the world of patients, relatives, and friends that surrounded us in the 1950s, their stories and characteristics, all filtered through the relation between father and son, and powerfully

gathered in a piece of furniture made out of teak and standing on four wheels. In other words, this object had a very special affective value.

Space of appearance

We have now seen how affects can be stirred up at the parting of an estate due to the special power objects become endowed with, here described by the notions of worlding and gathering. The pain following the realisation that some of this magic is jeopardised when the things are taken out of their original *Umwelt*, however, only partially explains the turbulence that define this event. The agitated atmosphere that surrounds the loss of parents presents the objects with new connotations, bestowing them with a new meaning.⁵ Breaking the objects off from their original setting is often felt as a trauma, yet it is also the beginning of another momentum. As referred to above, when a person's clothes or objects become saturated with a vacancy after he/she has departed, it can also be the beginning of a new phase. To start with, however, such objects evoke a sense of vagueness and uncertainty among the bereaved. Some of the objects from home will be integrated into the homes of the children, some will be sold, and others given away. And sometimes they become part of an arsenal by which the inheritors attack one another. The affective backdrop for such a transition is often precarious, writes the professor of social psychology Bertil Törestad; respect for the ageing parents might have stopped the children – the inheritors – from showing their irritation and feelings of long-lasting injustice, but

[r]eality has to be renegotiated when the parents are gone. The bereaved have to deal with inheritance at the time when they are mentally most unfit to deal with it ... Many children regress and end up in what could be described as trench-warfare, where both sides adjust their arsenal in order to injure their counterpart most severely. Old violations are brought up and now finally have my revenge and settle the old scores! (*Uppsala Nya Tidning* 11/5/2011)

The lawyer Carola Erixon describes the ambivalent situation when emotions and affects that have been kept at bay are brought out into the open: 'We usually take a lot [of crap] from family members, and have a kind

of 'wild card' on being mean' (*Svenska Dagbladet* 16 Nov. 2006), which we are able to brandish at this moment of emotional crisis.

At the inventory of the estate, what has been private and held within the family must, to some extent, become public. The dissolution of what was once a household is a legal process by which the familiar attains publicity – at the risk of dirty linen being hung out for all to see. Hannah Arendt (1958) has coined the concept of space of appearance to capture the fact that at such and similarly highly affective occasions, people, objects, and material culture form a tightly interlaced unit; furthermore, it is a unit that is political to the extent that it facilitates a specific kind of future.

Originally Arendt used the concept to describe the role played by the public sphere – *agora* – in the city-states of ancient Greece. There, citizens met in dire contexts to discuss and decide on upcoming matters. The term denotes how seemingly spontaneous flares of political action are deeply anchored in what appears around the actors: the history of previous decisions, the existence of ingrained habits, and the anticipation of a reachable future. Arendt persistently points to the role played by the environment in the shaping and recharging of culture and politics. The things that surrounded the ancient Greeks at the *agora*, such as buildings, monuments, statues, art, and all those objects that carry the offprint of history, memory, or common efforts, are all activated in such a space of appearance.⁶ Arendt (1958: 95) claims that continuity without objects is not continuity in the real sense, for 'The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and will remember, and second, on the transformation of the intangible into tangibility of things'. Thus, Arendt's use of 'space of appearance' becomes the spot where something new is created against the backdrop of something tangible that already exists. Through this reciprocity, the space of appearance becomes invested by the power of the past in projecting possible futures on the present.

The summer house

The home, the neighbourhood, the village, the town square, or even a TV programme might create a space of appearance. On the island of Tjurö, it was the family farm that was the immediate space of appearance, which extended to the community of which it was a part. The inheritors on Tjurö were surrounded by furniture, houses, and land that were to

be passed on to them without very many alternatives. The objects had been incorporated and were worlding due to their daily use; any loss was likely to cause deep despair. The physical *Umwelt* that once made them could just as well undo them.

A very special space of appearance stands out in contemporary material under the name of the summer house. Books and articles with titles like *Saving the Family Cottage: A Guide to Succession Planning for Your Cottage, Cabin, Camp or Vacation Home* (Hollander et al. 2013) flood the market, mostly written from a legal point of view as a kind of first aid kit for families trying to steer clear of inheritance conflicts. In the answers to the questionnaire LUF 242 about inheritance, the holiday home on some occasions was described as the scene where nasty conflicts between siblings could be played out.

This underlines deep emotional attachments to the place and the precautions taken to retain happy memories. Or, as the American professor of English Ken Huggins writes in the essay 'Passing It On: The Inheritance, Ownership and Use of Summer Houses' (2003: 87):

Going to a summer home each year may be the most treasured of childhood memories. If you were fortunate enough to have done this when you were young, you may have stronger, clearer and fonder memories of your times at 'your summer' house than from your year-round house. And as you married and had kids of your own, you may have wanted to give them the opportunity for the memorable and treasured times you had.

The holiday home symbolises days away from school and obligations, of staying together as an extended family with grandparents, aunts and distant cousins, of rummaging through the woods and meadows, of getting mosquito bites, of building huts and claiming places of your own. The holiday home often turns out to be the place where the happy family life *happened* that you later keep looking back at. As with all important places, belonging becomes a stronger link than nostalgia. Michael Jackson (2014: 87) describes this attachment as 'a haunting presence, an afterimage, a ghost' that lingers since this is the place from which one once drew sustenance.

Counsellors and solicitors interviewed about inheritance matters in Swedish newspapers tell stories about how deeply inheritors are affected

when the holiday home must be split up or sold. Heirs line up to seek legal and personal advice as to how to settle conflicts and injustices. It is as if the place makes them revive not only the happy days but also the troubled relations: who was the most privileged, who was given the most attention by the parents, who was there when the ageing parents needed help and care, and who never turned up. In short, who had received the most of that affective substance that used to be the heart and soul of the family? What solicitors call 'family relations' are more at stake than objects of economic value. A person involved in many estate inventories concludes that 'it is mostly about love lost when disagreement turns up. If I did not get enough love, at least I want money or things' (*Svenska Dagbladet* 12 Nov. 2008). The worst scenes take place, he says, when siblings are involved in a conflict, whereas more distant relatives seem to have a more rational attitude.

Fights over the elusive, affective family substance stand out as a recurrent theme in stories about holiday homes. In one story, two sisters told of their disgust at their brother for monopolising not only most of the parents' affection, but also metaphorically claiming the emotional essence of the summer house. When it could no longer be kept it was put on the market, and the sisters were unduly blamed for having violated the spirit of togetherness and affection:

We are three children, one brother and two sisters. We were given the summer house to share, provided that our parents were allowed to construct a separate building. When our parents passed away our brother insisted that he should take over the big house while we sisters shared the small one. My sister and I did not agree, mostly because we found out that our brother had been favoured in so many ways that we had not known about – and eventually the entire property was sold. There was no longer a place where memories could appear. This very sad story means that we can no longer meet. Our brother's children talk about us as the 'mean aunts' and what our sister-in-law says cannot be repeated. (*Svenska Dagbladet* 30 Nov. 2008)

In another unhappy fight over who was getting the most love from the parents, a sister and brother inherited the holiday home that had been in the family's ownership for a long time. The sister, who was the apple

of her parents' eye, wanted to keep it and buy her brother out for below the market price. The situation made him aware of years of neglect and a constant lack of moral support. When as a young man he went to sea he was scolded by the parents, and when he later started to study he was again told to find a proper job. 'Nothing I did was good enough. Finally, I decided that I would have as much a say as my sister and not succumb to being yet another victim of parental authority' (*Dagens Nyheter* 17 Aug. 2004).

The holiday home became a space of appearance where much of the affective atmosphere was gathered in its very *Umwelt*, its things and activities, and where the imbalance in family relations became visible when the summer house's future had to be decided.

On the formation of affects

Heidegger's concepts of worlding and gathering can be combined with chronological perspectives such as history, narration, socialisation, and what Sartre, as noted above, called 'the imaginary'. When stories are told about how family-owned objects, like a cut-glass chandelier, the collected works of Selma Lagerlöf, a necklace, or the summer house, cause so much trouble, 'it really turns out to be about something else', claims the psychologist Madeleine Gauffin Rahme. As a therapist she specialises in clients who have ended up in the middle of a family feud against their will. The root of the feuds could be anything from a father not providing enough of love or attention to a daughter whose efforts to take care of ageing parents had not being recognised (*Svenska Dagbladet* 12 Nov. 2008).

When material objects surface as symbols and become 'imaginary', they are in every sense of the word also 'real' and usually founded on childhood experiences. A closer look at the difference between the upbringing in peasant society and the contemporary world makes this point clear. In premodern society, the farmstead, with its fields and animals, was a home that one only left through marriage or death. The days were defined by a seasonal rhythm of work and children were engaged in tasks and production according to their strength and ability from a young age. Toys were rare and the potential for expanding the self into a world designed to stimulate the imagination, for example by playing with dolls, did not exist more than was necessary. Inside the house the rooms looked very

much the same as they did in the houses in the neighbouring village; they might be poorer or richer but were all variations on the same theme. This existing *Umwelt* was incorporated into a person's habitus from an early age, with little room for an individualized subject to expand.

Nowadays, family members only live under the same roof and share material experiences for twenty or so years. Primary as well as secondary socialisation takes place within this time span. During these years children are preparing for a professional trajectory that requires considerably more flexibility than the old model that was built upon imitation. Regardless of whether the children end up as dockers, entrepreneurs, doctors, artists, or scholars, during childhood they are surrounded with a wide range of objects and imaginary rooms that they learn to master, love – and transcend. Childhood then becomes that cherished foreign land where life was lived at its fullest and moments of happiness and betrayal are never to be forgotten. This was the heart where affects were experienced, named, and dealt with as emotions. To the Heideggerian approach we must then add what is brought up in the space of appearance where education of the senses happens.

The training ground *par préférence* for this childhood learning process was the holiday home – at least in middle-class families (Frykman and Löfgren 1987). In every phase of the family cycle it was the place that conjured the old and young back to the days of childhood, where innocence in the children was expected and eccentric behaviour among the grown-ups was allowed. The emotional and affective disposition acquired here remains the ideal of what holiday homes are all about, and are the answer to why the loss of such an estate brings up such strong affects.

In one family described by Fish and Kotzer (2009), the father bequeathed the summer residence to his two children. His dream was that they would share it equally and keep it as it was. Here they were supposed to enjoy the lightness of life, cooking dinners and being at the very heart of real family life, 'swimming in the pool, playing cards around the kitchen table, and laughing hysterically as his children told their children the funny stories they shared when growing up' (ibid. 157 ff.) Now, however, they were no longer children and had developed new tastes and habits. Nevertheless, the summer place transported them back to a time of irresponsibility, where parents stood ready to move in and preclude any misunderstanding or rivalry, but now they had to sort out every grievance themselves. In the end they decided to time-share the place. When the

son arrived, he found to his dismay that his sister and her family had left the house in a mess: 'rotting food in the fridge, crumbs on the floor, beds unmade, pots still on the kitchen counter, dirty dishes in the sink' and obvious traces of teenagers having used the place for partying. Clothes were not properly hung in the wardrobes and swimwear, sandals, and tennis racquets were not in their proper places (*ibid.* 157 ff.).

What had once been part of the expectedly unbothered behaviour at holiday time stood out as slothful, and the darker sides of what was supposed to be a fairyland were brought out into the open. The holiday homewas turned into a material rebuke of the fundamental qualities the sister and brother had accumulated when growing up. Again, as in many other cases, the property had to be sold and the bonds between siblings were severed. Something that is so deeply ingrained is difficult to put into words. The only remedy seemed to be to fight over the possessions when what was really lost was the heart and soul that once gave life to the material objects.

Conclusion

This chapter on affects and material culture took as its point of departure the division of an estate. It was inspired by theories of affect combined with a phenomenological approach based on the works of Heidegger, Sartre, Bourdieu, and Arendt. The ways in which affective atmospheres work help to describe how objects are to be approached through their uses and show how affects are an 'in-between' phenomenon, passed on between people inter-subjectively, but also between people and objects inter-objectively. When a daughter, for instance, is denied her mothers' jewellery, it becomes clear how the bonds to her mother were contained in and transmitted through the physical experience of the objects. The jewellery truly was worlding to the extent that it brought to life a world shared and known to her and her mother. But this relation is hard to verbalise and thus difficult to 'prove' to her brothers, since they had not shared the same intimate relation with the mother that the jewellery gathers.

Through the case of peasant society, the question of the sedimentation of affects was addressed. The peasantry were allegedly prone to fighting over property, and the parting of an estate was an occasion for the basest of affects and emotions to be displayed. In interpreting such milieus,

the analytical tools of worlding and gathering make perfect sense. What was at stake was not individual or personal dispositions, but rather the objects they were bickering about had become a part of their habitus and the very medium through which the world was disclosed. Affective responses arose when this self-evident connection was jeopardised.

The breaking up of a home comes at the worst of times: when the people concerned are grieving. Here again the phenomenological approach to material culture has proven helpful. Through Arendt's concept of space of appearance, it became possible to see the part played by material culture in palpably trying to create something new out of a harrowing situation. The recharging of objects that is more seldom brought to attention 'before we formulate propositions about them' turned out to be graspable though such an approach.

The analysis of the holiday homebrought to the fore the matter of formation of affects through the combination of material culture and socialisation – in a way similar to Bourdieu's analysis of habitus. The difference to peasant society was clearly demonstrated with regard to the individuality and the development of self that has become such a critical part of growing up. The holiday home turned out to be a place where formation of the self is most poignant since it is there children are given free rein to find their own way. What happens there on holiday are important affective events, often mulled over on winter evenings while leafing through photo albums and repeating stories.

Finally, this chapter showed that catching this formation of the senses, the affiliation to objects and milieus that had been important in the process of growing up, was only partially reachable with the phenomenological toolbox. The analysis has to reach out for life histories and other types of narratives, and consider the wider question on how the socialisation of members of a culture is done in everyday practice.

Notes

- 1 Since the questions explicitly asked about events in the informant's own family, almost all of the answers turned out to fall within the genre of life stories.
- 2 Raymond Williams uses the notion of the structure of feelings to describe how a certain time or epoch could be characterised by a set – a structure – of thinking, emotions, and affects 'which is indeed social and material, but each in embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange' (Williams 1977: 131).
- 3 This kind of worlding is described by Arendt in *The Life of the Mind* (1971: 20): 'Living beings,

- men and animals, are not just in the world; they are of the world and this precisely because they are subjects and objects – perceiving and being perceived – at the same time’.
- 4 For Heidegger, the use of gathering is part of an epistemology where the ‘fourfold’ (earth, sky, gods, and mortals) are brought together. Elaborating on this is beyond the scope of this chapter.
 - 5 Heidegger uses the general term *assertive* to describe the transition of things as they lose the uses to which they were once put in a certain context.
 - 6 Arendt’s concept has common traits with Heidegger’s view of how worlding works: the environment is taken for granted to the point that it becomes innate.

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