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My Room from the Eyes of a Familiar Stranger

Looking down onto the barely visible floor, my focus bounces around the room urgently, observing my current state of being. I am in my dorm room, and yesterday's late night furniture reorganization solidifies a place in my memory. Thinking back to yesterday, this messy room was neatly organized and in my memory- everything was correctly placed. "The present is indeed haunted by a memory and by what will soon become the ghost of a memory: the phantom of a phantom".¹ This room is once again a stranger to me. But just as the initial layout of this room familiarized itself with me, so will this new layout.

More floor space is available but in addition to the exposure of the biggest wall in the room being entirely bare. The only decoration across the ten-foot wall opposite the window is a makeshift wire glasses holder. Paired with my roommate's Kali Uchis poster beside the door. On my side of the room, there are no posters. I never saw the appeal of decorating a place I would call home for a contracted amount of time. I am a visitor in this space, and I will soon be gone as well. Looking down, I see the trivial yet permanent mark I have left on this place. On the floor, there now lay four donut shaped indents where my dresser was once positioned, along with multiple box cutter scratches from late nights working on projects without a cutting mat. Minimal time is spent within these four walls, however, anything and everything I have used since arriving in New York lies inside.

¹ Stamelman, Richard. "The 'Presence' of Memory." *L'Esprit Créateur* 36, no. 3 (1996): 65–79.

Poking out of the piles on the ground is a brown paper bag with black stripes from DSW where I purchased rain boots. Another bag is from Uniqlo. Although I returned that purchase days later, the bag stayed. Other scraps include every museum ticket of the last seven months, amazon boxes, and boarding passes. Every single one of these objects has already fulfilled its intended purpose; trash such as my boarding passes and museum tickets are rendered completely useless, but paper bags are reusable. Intended to counteract the negative impacts of plastic bags, paper bags are significantly better for the environment and in my opinion more suited for transportation and reuse ability. Unlike plastic bags, the rigid nature of paper forces the contents of a bag into its shape; however, the use of “an even greater technological masterpiece: the square- bottomed paper bag” results in a greater accommodation of items that require standing upright. Their ability to stand upright also encourages my organization and storage of things.² My room lacks enough surface area to effectively sort my belongings, but in these bags, I can conveniently transport and categorize clutters of junk.

My dresser, although less than a foot taller than me, almost touches the depressed area of the ceiling making it impossible to store boxes or suitcases. Left of my dresser, my desk sits perpendicular to the window, a perfect position for my left ear to overflow with the daily commotion of the hospital just across the street. Periodic siren noises and frequent car horns blaring penetrate the walls and flood the room with noise. The busy New York atmosphere has incorporated itself into the normalcy of the room. The windows are rarely locked closed, seeing that especially then, the hushed intimacy of the room without the city buzz made me uneasy with a tinge of paranoia.

² Petroski, Henry. “The Evolution of the Grocery Bag.” *The American Scholar* 72, no. 4 (2003): 99–111.

Along the backboard of the desk, sticky notes are scattered reminding me of everything ranging from wishing my brother a happy birthday, which was months ago, to taking a pencil to class. There is also a Polaroid of my mom from the “Blue Man Group” show back in August hanging by a strip of blue painter’s tape. The surface of my desk is completely covered with things. Although useless, most of the items on this desk stay for the sheer purpose of having sentimental value: a pug-shaped measuring tape that has never been used, a broken mechanical pencil from my brother’s all-state concert, and a call bell gifted by my younger cousin. Aside from mementos, a single notebook is placed on the left side and the illusion of space is gone. No work can be done in this space and although I never intended to do any real work in this room—some breathing room would be nice. Slanted on the right side of the desk is a binder with a white folder inside, practically empty, yet I keep it on my desk because of the shiny metallic dollar store stickers from back home; keeping the binder upright is a single strip of blue painters tape and a small 4 oz candle I’ve lit just once. The candle’s delicate citrus yuzu smell was overwhelmed by sweet undertones which only added to the stuffy and nauseating inhale created by an absurdly warm thermostat setting.

The small, constant reminders of this room being a shared space often overcrowd my headspace. My little moments of privacy in this not private space, rely on the makeshift fort underneath my bed. The opening is covered with a dark gray flat sheet so the inside is not entirely visible. Christmas lights are hung, unsurprisingly held up by what seems to be the only thing keeping this room together, blue painter's tape. The space underneath the bed is my favorite part of the room, as my skin touches the bare floor and the majority of the room is out of sight, my legs are cramped but the illusion of privacy is irreplaceable.

Bibliography

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