

Memory of the Prose Machine by Sandra Doller

"If we give objects the friendship they should have, we do not open a wardrobe without a slight start. Beneath its russet wood, a wardrobe is a very white almond. To open it, is to experience an event of whiteness.

...

An anthology devoted to small boxes, such as chests and caskets, would constitute an important chapter in psychology. These complex pieces that a craftsman creates are very evident witnesses of the *need for secrecy*, of an intuitive sense of hiding places. It is not merely a matter of keeping a possession well guarded. The lock doesn't exist that could resist absolute violence, and all locks are an invitation to thieves. A lock is a psychological threshold. And how it defies discretion when it is covered with ornaments!"

– Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

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Why do they still make fabric patterns that look like hair, is it because of the national hair museum, is it a way to remember each other by? There's an invitation for you. If only we could all talk about her one at a time. Why is it so consensus, so concentric, so committee. Why I must split it up with dagger. Why do you wear the worry chin out in public. Why do we call each other when we get home. Before. Why a town called Wooten. Woo woo. A girl named Woosie. She was a French dressmaker's daughter, in a little town in upper Quebec called Mont Joli. Why that GI take my bicycle? Why, that GI is stealing my bicycle. Chase him she did, I do, she do, Yoda. Catch him, catch the GI with the shiny hair and nose and epaulets. Why is he in the Canadian air force. Because he can't see so good. Is that to say the Canadian air force doesn't require the same eyes? It's to say something. Take that, superior salad melt. He could have climbed the gorge and gotten swallowed, instead of swilled at the VFW. How many DWI's does your grandpa have? Mine? Miney. Call me money. Once he was going down in the gorge but he checked the rope for rotten. That's how he was able to live and steal her bicycle and so the movie unfolds. Just looking at him made her pregnant, that's what they say. He had quarters in his eyes. Boxing gloves for hands. Meat. Get your meat hooks off me. Get your man hands, get your damn hands. Come get your fried hot dogs. Fried dogs. Ogs. You've got to try it. She learned English by the radio. That's quite a concert. Clumsy cloud. I'm the only one who speaks the language to tell her family she's dead. I'm 16. See? Everyone else is busy trying to learn the radio. Unlearn that spot on your face. Stand

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with your hands on your hips in a doorway in a handmade polka dot
dress sometime with the radio on and a drunk walking in the door
clicking your picture and a few arrests at a bar and a union card
and a union organizer and a seam up the back and three little
girls with fists for hands and meat for money. Do it. Call me.
Tell me that's not Joan Baez. It's Emmylou. It's Mimi. It's me.

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"Three Ways to Screw Up On Your Way to the Doings Three
Ways

(1)

I fell down

(2)

I got lost

(3)

I lost my bucket"

– *Shaking the Pumpkin*, Seneca versions by Jerome Rothenberg
& Richard Johnny John

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America is the grandmother of all nations. The one with Alzheimer's. Shortness of memory requires grandparents. Shortness of history, breath. Requires uncovering, unrocking the olders by the teeth. What mystery is hiding under your grandparents. What rock was forgotten on what shore, what is your inherited potato? When there is no time past, no immemorial breakfast, we lunge at the hidden donut. The arm in the shade we didn't see. A golden revolver, mine was an Annie Oakley from Baltimore says one, mine discovered uranium while working in a San Francisco laundry says another. Other others trying to nickel off the gray fuzz that will reveal the interesting in their blood. Like the lottery. Don't other others in other places know their people from parchment, know the crooked walk of their generations. Don't they. They. They who. They who know. They who know have no mystique. We. We. We make it up. We recollect and collage and forget it like the earliest formation of memory in the grooves.

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"What proves the wonderful singularity of the writer, is that during the holiday in question, which he takes alongside factory workers and shop assistants, he unlike them does not stop, if not actually working, at least producing. So that he is a false worker, and a false holiday-maker as well. One is writing his memoirs, another is correcting proofs, yet another is preparing his next book. And he who does nothing confesses it as truly paradoxical behaviour, an avant-garde exploit, which only someone of exceptional independence can afford to flaunt. One then realizes, thanks to this kind of boast, that it is quite 'natural' that the writer should write all the time and in all situations. First this treats literary production as a sort of involuntary secretion, which is taboo, since it escapes human determinations: to speak more decorously, the writer is the prey of an inner god who speaks at all times, without bothering, tyrant that he is, with the holidays of his medium. Writers are on holiday, but their Muse is awake, and gives birth non-stop."

— Roland Barthes, "The Writer on Holiday" in *Mythologies*

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That's how strong my young is—that's how strong. How did I used to get somewhere? How, before the map chip was knitted into my cheek, did I get to a place like Rockville Pike, like Echo Park, like the cove? I aced Physics once. Once I was a Physics ace. In Seattle. Especially electromagnetic forces. Answered every question aces on the exam—except the one where you make a fist and point your thumb down to find the current. Where did the current go? Down my thumb. A coil. Where is the current going? Towards the sea. Here's where I got confused. I forgot what side the sea was on. I remembered the sea to my right, the east. Now the sea was left, was west. The west coast both ruined and created my chance of star physicisism. Or the A+ exam. If you think too long about the cardinal directions, you lose. Like the word THING becomes itself. The metal towel rack inside my mother's sink cabinet. What is this thing? What are these metal sticks sticking for? The cutting board inside the countertop. May I sit here for a bit? May I have a bowl of coconut?

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"Dear S:

Are you atomically smooth?

I have been secretly investigating the technical viability of and devising methodologies for, in the true literal sense of poetics, *direct writing*, which is maskless therefore mask-related-error-free, sequential thus slow in throughout, and targeting only application-specific readers, who are numbered and whose reading patterns behave too erratically to justify the expense of mask production. I revised and revised my proposal and submitted and resubmitted it to NSF (National Science Foundation) and was rejected every time. One reason is dubious intention. Another reason is point contacts with technological and economic reality. Yet another unjustified spending budget with lack of adequate institutional support and a critical mass. Yet another too negligible a likelihood of success to merit support.

SHE: That's right."

– Shanxing Wang, *Mad Science in Imperial City*

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Bernadette wonders what she'll look like when she's old. I wonder if Bernadette wonders anymore. I wonder a lot about her wondering. But I don't worry about it. Everyone's mother is sick. Everyone's specific mother is getting sicker and older. Mine wears her mouth like a cigar. So there are sores inside her. So what. So I fly over the divided land to get to this place by the water. So I will drive down the coast tonight, past Soledad which Danzy says is a right name for a girl. I am with it. Solidarity with Soledad. Which way does Fanny's finger point now? When is Rae coming to town? How comforting that Sally is so Sally? I had three chances to pick a twenty out of the hat. I got stuck on the hat. You don't want to wear that hat he said, that's not the hat for you. That's my grandmother's hat. That LL Cool J hat? That hat. You'll be sorry in that hat, like a fuzzy nurse on a wrong shift. Oh. My mother was a nurse. How did she nurse it? Anorexics and suicides, veterans long home from the war. Alcoholics and junkies. Me. She nursed it like a step-mother, one step off, one foot on the throttle. Want me, they say, heal me nurse, make me young again.

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"In the late sixties it was still quite unusual for men to take women seriously. (In fact, dismissing women outright still seemed to have been intellectually acceptable. I took Mark Shorer's Modern British Novel class, and the only book by a woman we read was Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. I remember him telling the class that this was the best a woman could do and, clearly, it didn't quite measure up. I know this sounds incredible. I'm inclined to doubt my memory—but that's the way I remember it.)"

— Rae Armantrout, *True*

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Who split the land into those squares and circles? Someone had to do it. Not everything can be decided by committee. Oh no? Remember a time when basements molded, when "the cool club" was on the Styrofoam walls, when touching tongues, when seancing for Chester the dog. That was one time. It's all one year. Writing that first novel in the typewriter at ten, sounding out the "wagon" on the package, the phonograph in a suitcase. We shared that time. These could be anyone's photos. Anyone from a certain time. Anyone who still reads the paper, and could have a middle school kid. By now. By now you've caught onto the department store hook. The laps around the mall in search of new new things. When did that store appear, The White House? Everything's white, right? And then a few years later, The Black Market. Like an answer. How are these things equal? Related, even? It's a math problem you forgot how to solve. It's a letter that seems so smart and poignant—for a letter. It's a train going sideways. Not a device. Not connected. To anything.