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| Keeper of Things |

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## KEEPER OF THINGS

To keep things is to distance ontological loneliness. Thereby, I am a Keeper of Things, so as to thicken the irretrievably finite fabric of my life, right smack up against the dolorous face of my own death. Consider it this way: as a gift to those who trod behind me, progeny at large, just as I have been enriched by those who left things for me.

And that is the backstory of the human journey. Herein lies the spiritual and pedagogical importance of the reverential preservation of the past. So, eat your experiences while you can and keep your things safe from Texas turkey cultures and the noxious purveyors of obsolescence. In short, all that you leave is but a mere trace; that is, if you have left your things. Otherwise, as they say, what happened to Malone? Nothing, not even a trace.

**Key words:** *past, present, sacred, cultural danger, obsolescence*

### Хранитель вещей

Хранить вещи значит отдалять онтологическое одиночество. Поэтому я Хранитель вещей, тем самым стремящийся уплотнить непоправимо тленную материю моей жизни, посмаковать ее перед лицом собственной смерти. Это мой дар идущим за мной, следующему поколению; я тоже получил наследство в свое время.

В этом состоит секрет человеческого пути. В этом заключается духовная важность и воспитательное значение благоговейного хранения прошлого. Итак, наслаждайтесь своим опытом, пока есть возможность, и охраняйте свои вещи от стервятников и охотников за модой. Иными словами, то, что останется от вас, — это след, который образуют оставленные вами вещи. В противном случае, что останется? Ничего, никакого следа.

**Ключевые слова:** *прошлое, настоящее, сакральное, угроза культуре, устаревание*

I am a Keeper of 'things'. Not a Master of things, as is Joseph Cornell<sup>1</sup>. Me — simply a Keeper of things, one who seeks neither

<sup>1</sup> Simic Ch. Dime Store Alchemy - The Art of Joseph Cornell / Ch. Simic / New York: New York Review of Books, 1992. P. 14. From "Where Chance Meets Necessity," "Somewhere in the city of New York there are four of five still-unknown objects that belong together. Once together they'll make a work of art. That's Cornell's premise, his metaphysics, and his religion, which I wish to understand. He sets out from his home on Utopia Parkway without knowing what he is looking for or what he will find. Today it could be something as ordinary and interesting as an old thimble. Years may pass before it has company."

and p. 35: "Matchbox with a Fly in it,"

Shadow box

Music box

Pill box

A box which contains a puzzle

A box with tiny drawers,

Navigation box

Jewelry box

Sailor's box

Butterfly box

Box stuffed with souvenirs of a sea voyage

immortality nor salvation but does reach for the salvific, a healing. The Keeper of things, in gratitude for the bequest given to him by previous keepers, in turn bequeaths things to his progeny and, who knows, to the world at large.<sup>2</sup>

As with things, I am here on loan. Although we prefer to think of ourselves on a journey, that is but a deceiving euphemism for passing through, for being on loan.

When given the choice, will you opt for burial or for cremation? If the latter, no things remain in the urn, even if there be one. In burial, we find one of the richest and most revealing deposits in the

Magic prison

An empty box

<sup>2</sup> Hoffmann E., Cole P. Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found world of the Cairo Geniza / E. Hoffmann and P. Cole / New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2011. A reporting of the materials found in the storeroom of an old Cairo synagogue. Representing 900 years of medieval Jewish life, the cache of documents revealed medieval manuscripts, letters and poems, wills and marriage contracts, Bibles, money orders, fiery dissenting tracts, fashion-conscious trousseaux lists, prescriptions, petitions and mysterious magical charms. In sum, centuries of 'life on life's terms.'



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history of human culture. Rich as in detail, as in surprise. Revealing, as in lost languages, customs, beliefs and inventions. Suggestion, study Egyptology.

Spiritual programs, as found in the Wisdom literature, stress the fact that it is the trivial which is most often the cause of our demise. Someone dies — we handle it. Two flat tires in a week — we lose it. Why is this so?

Contrary to the nomenclature of the spiritual programs, we should refer to the allegedly trivial. For me, nothing is trivial. Everything is an event, compete with fringes, fore and aft, beneath, above, around, pulsating, languid, even silent, damaged, hortatory, sullen, promising and reviving. In short, everything, following William James, is ringed by a more, by a penumbra, by a halo of relations. Etymologically, this is obvious, for thing, in fact is an affair.

By now, I trust that you have noted the persistent play here on the word thing, as in nothing, no thing, another thing, something, everything, anything. I can't seem to do anything. Nothing here. Some things just don't work even though some hold that everything will work out. None of this use of 'thing' is intentional. Rather it is a binding strand, linguistically on how we report what is happening. We do not have the word thinging in our lexicon, but thing is not a noun. As an affair, thing is a covert gerund, a mute present participle.

If we reverse the spiritual maxim concerning the trivial, read here things, we can say that the allegedly trivial is that which feed us, diurnally. Things provide a bedding, a separation, a continuity, a memory jack, an occasion for worrying, reflection, guilt and celebration, retrospectively. A post-it-note, a ticket to the World Series, a letter (most especially, a letter), a monogrammed handkerchief, a scarf (bought in Alaska) a string of pearls, now faded but memorably iridescent. (I forbear speaking of pictorials, drawing and painting, from the caves to the photograph. The latter, photos, free-standing, are often emotionally explosive.)

By this time, I trust that you have detected my predilection for the keeping, preserving and the nurturing of things, not only of my things but, as well, the things of others, who and that have danced with me, for example, letters and gifts. Please do not confuse a Keeper of things with 'hoarding,' often a bad name, a slur, given to the keepers of things. Hoarding is bereft of the care necessary for preservation. As the hapless victim of hoarding, things are buried in a jumble and although exponentially surrounded by other things, each thing is historically and autobiographically lonely. Moderately animist, though I be, I cannot as yet get old newspapers and a broken bicycle wheel into consanguinity.

Still another critique of the Keeper of things is that he/she is in a state of advanced self-deception, for failing to face-up to finitude. After all, as Aunt Rosalie was fond of saying, 'nothing lasts forever.' (I do not want to be unpleasant, nonetheless, this jeremiad applies to you as well, things or no things.) Given this truism, that nothing lasts forever, the existential fact is that as of now, I am on the 'going' side of oblivion. Finitude is not a noun. Finitude is a process. The 'along the way events' are the happenings, the things which I ride this side of oblivion. My things are the markers which sustain my self-awareness, namely, that I exist. If I had no things,

I doubt that I could provide this sustenance. The Keeper of things celebrates that process, even if it yields profound emotional pain as in the photographs of the holocaust victims, the skulls kept from the 'killing fields' of Cambodia, or locally, of dead children. None of this has anything to do with happiness, although counter clockwise, a photograph of one of my children at the age of three can yield the presence of benignity and innocence, once enjoyed and now again, in tranquility.

To keep things is to distance ontological loneliness. Certainly, if the intention as a Keeper of things, is to generate surrogate immortality, obviously then, I am guilty of self-deception, wallowing in bad-faith. Such is not my way. Rather, I am a Keeper of things so as to thicken the irretrievably finite fabric of my life, right smack up against the dolorous face of my own death. Consider it this way, a gift to those who trod behind me, progeny at large, just as I have been enriched by those who left things for me. Think here of Maria Montessori and her children at 'work.'

One thing, among millions of things left for me is, mirable dictu, a non-thing, that is its thingness is an anti-thing. And that too, is a message! I refer here to the onion, yellow, pearl, wild, Vidalia, white, Spanish and the Walla-Walla onion. My onion is the Bermuda Red. In the 1930's, when food was hard to come by, eating an onion by itself, was often the thing to do. The Bermuda Red was succulent, sassy, and filling. Also, as we shall see, being an onion, it left no trace. I now offer you a poetic testament to this thing as anti-thing, the onion. This is a gift to me and now to you, from the past, courtesy of the Polish Nobel Laureate, Wislawa Szymborska, who, alas, just died at the tender age of eighty-eight.

## The Onion

*The onion, now that's something else.*

*Its innards don't exist.*

*Nothing but pure onionhood  
fills this devout onionist.*

*Oniony on the inside,  
onionesque it appears.*

*It follows its own daimonion  
without our human tears.*

*Our skin is just a coverup  
for the land where none dare go,  
an internal inferno,  
the anathema of anatomy.  
In an onion there's only onion  
from its top to its toe,  
onionymous monomania,  
unanimous omninudity*

*At peace, of a piece,  
internally at rest.*

*Inside it, there's a smaller one  
of undiminished worth.*

*The second holds a third one,  
the third contains a fourth.*

*A centripetal fugue.*

*Polyphony compressed.*



## ГРАНИЦЫ СУБЪЕКТИВНОСТИ / THE LIMITS OF SUBJECTIVITY

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Nature's rotundest tummy,  
 its greatest success story,  
 the onion drapes itself in its  
 own areoles of glory.  
 We hold veins, nerves, and fat,  
 secretions' secret sections.  
 Not for us such idiotic  
 onionoid perfections.<sup>3</sup>

I now invoke temerity and add the following to the poem:

Therefore  
 The Onion

<sup>3</sup> Szyborska W. "The Onion," *View with a Grain of Sand — Selected Poems* / W. Szyborska / New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1976, 1995. P 120–121.

## Locus Classicus

of  
 Finitude  
 For it is a thing  
 whose thingness  
 is to be  
 No-thing

And that is the backstory of the human journey. Eat your experiences while you can and keep your things safe from Texas turkey vultures and the noxious purveyors of obsolescence. In short, all that you leave is a trace, that is, if you have left your things. Otherwise, as they say, what happened to Malone?<sup>4</sup> Nothing, not even a trace.

<sup>4</sup> Beckett S. concludes *Malone Dies*. New York: Grove Press, 1956. P. 120 as follows:  
 "Never there will he never  
 never anything  
 there  
 any more."

