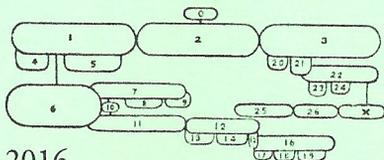


# An Arrangement for Objects

by Nora Mapp



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A Present Tense Pamphlet



1 On the floor are a few clusters of water bottles. Three or four sit at the base of a chair or circle a pillar. On a table, a fountain gurgles in a little grove of maple water bottles.

These groups of bottles are not sculptures but gardens.

The water is not Poland spring water or Fuji water, but maple water, “sap on tap”.

Outside the room or gallery, bottles are tied to stop signs, mailboxes and garden gates in a radius of a few blocks.

Back inside, along with these arrangements of bottles, there is a rug, a large group of NASA approved plants, a table with a lamp, a cigarette case, a journal, and a few bottles of water.

These gardens originated from long strolls, lost in Tokyo neighborhoods when I started noticing bottles of water lined up or grouped outside peoples’ homes. Many things changed as I walked, the architecture, the restaurants, the kinds of potted plants, but

about 30 percent of households had placed full bottles of water somewhere outside.

At first, I thought it must be the product of a popular water delivery service, instead of milk delivery, but some of the bottles looked shabby, as if forgotten outside, others were arranged in formations too complex for any pickup.

Eager to learn the truth, I asked friends in Tokyo and inquired of strangers in the countryside. People agreed (often with hands covering a small shameful smile) that there is a widespread superstition that bottles of water repel stray cats. People like cats in Japan but they don't like the smell of cat pee outside their homes.

2 In the middle of the room is a group of eighteen plants, one of every type from a list NASA posted in 1989 as the best for improving air quality. This NASA garden is in collaboration with my brother, Sam. We believe that these plants will clean the air and walls of trichloroethylene, formaldehyde, benzene, xylene, and ammonia. I hope being in a room with Devils Ivy, English Ivy, Variegated Snake Plant, Peace Lily, Florists Chrysanthemum will be particularly useful in refreshing my body from the city air and months of smoking. I haven't told my brother that I started smoking.

3 I haven't been able to write since I quit smoking. In New York, I miss my cat, so I'll make gardens that repel cats and remind me of Japan. Drinking diluted tree sap also doesn't make sense, except that it is delicious and makes me feel tall and strong, like a tree. I can feel the blood coursing through my veins, carrying oxygen to every cell. I don't believe maple water hydrates more than regular water but maybe better hydration will help me remember words.



1 Now that I am learning French there are a lot of things to remember. I'm learning French because of 18<sup>th</sup> century souvenir boxes that are engraved with the word "souvenir", the word for memory, as if the owner who used this tiny book (the box held small ivory tablets and pencil) might forget its purpose.

I'm learning French so that I can have the joy, as an adult, of looking down at a piece of paper and realizing that the sentences printed there mean something.

2 I've started labeling objects in my house, table, marked "table". Instead of Magritte labeling what something is not, I label what something is, replacing it with a copy of itself.

On the table, next to a few bottles of water, there is a cigarette case engraved with the word "Souvenir". Beside it sits a journal engraved with the word "Journal", inside are lists of French words: emotions, household items, and crude translations of poems. Like my grandfather, I might one day forget everything. The people at Whole Foods, where I buy the maple water, would say to drink maple water and eat blueberries. Instead, I will try to remember everything in the world twice and some words without translation I encounter for the first time. A new memory, a souvenir.

If I drink enough maple water I won't forget what maple trees are like, even in this city. I miss Japanese gardens. I miss my cat. I miss the Japanese words I never learned.

3 I don't want to repel cats. I believe in cats and maple water and gardens and NASA and words. Or I don't believe it, I don't believe in maple water either, but I'll drink it anyway.

1 Today, I dropped off a heart locket at the engraver. It will say "already" on one side and like a flashcard, "déjà" on the other. Maybe I have already sent you flowers or mail? Maybe I have already loved and have not yet forgotten how.



2 I wrote to the customer service of Remember Things yesterday to inquire about a heart locket on their website. They haven't responded yet.

I used to write music. Something happened a while ago and now I can't hear music. I've lost all sense of beat, which I think means that I no longer know how one thing follows another in an orderly way. Occasionally, I try to tap my foot, realizing that I'm moving my body in a room where the music has stopped playing. Other people continue to move, other people hear what plays, but I stand without knowing. Sometimes I watch their faces, and try to follow based on reactions to what they seem to hear, but their expressions are so abstract, I can't parade them, there's nothing to fall in line behind.

I don't speak to anyone about my loss of hearing. No one notices because I can hear other things, I've lost my ear for music. Sound is now like multicolored thread, it's ugly, too colorful, and I can't cut one color away from another, I don't know where tone begins, they never end.

I'm embarrassed. I don't want anyone to know why I stopped writing music. I can't let anyone know that the most embarrassing thing of all has happened: I've lost my soul. I've gone to ear specialists but everything is physically in order. I've had

other therapy, it must be psychological, but I'm no closer- to anything.

I'm sitting outside Wind Cave in South Dakota because one thing doesn't follow another. I'm not inside the cave but outside, near the wind. When the barometric pressure is at one level, air is sucked into the cave and when it shifts, air flows out with a quality like air-conditioning. On this stone bench in the sun, I think about what to do. I eat an orange. It's very comfortable here in this cool breeze. I can hear it hum or whistle, it sounds like a refrigerator in an empty room. A steady beat should be the definition for the word 'adumbrate', but it's not. This seems impossible to me, a token of everything that doesn't make sense. I've been here all day. I might need another orange soon but I don't have anymore and I've told myself not to leave until I figure out a plan to regain music. How did I become this way? What was the thing that happened? Can I even hear my own heart beating? No. I press my fingers to my throat, on my carotid and tap my foot in time. This isn't Mahler's 9<sup>th</sup>, there is no arrhythmia or leaky heart or whatever variable he was terrified of, I am also terrified, I want something steady.

This is all I need. I try not to get too excited, so the rhythm will remain paced. I move my fingers to plumb the loudest

source. If I can only remember that I have what I need, and it's easy.

The website at Things Remembered says that any question will be answered within twenty-four hours, but it's been almost a week. I email again, repeating my question about the heart locket and my inability to use their engraving software. I just want to use the locket as a flashcard but if the word doesn't have the proper accents, what use is it?

I ask, "Is this word possible?"

If customer service gets back to me, and I get the locket, what picture should be placed inside? Should I glue an image of a heart inside the heart locket, to hang over my heart? A heart over a heart over a heart makes a beat that is already hard to say as I keep saying it. I recognize it drumming in my head already.

They responded. Everything is possible. I just have to call the number instead of ordering online. The number is there in her email in blue.

I haven't responded yet. I don't know what's keeping me from acquiring this object that could help me to remember that I have everything that I need.

3 Another week has gone by. I haven't responded to Sarah Harvey at RememberThings.com, I'm embarrassed because I was rather curt in my second email when they hadn't responded to me, as if this heart was urgent. I'm worried that I haven't chosen the right words.

Mashinka Firunts & Danny Snelson, eds.  
The Block Museum | Northwestern University  
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