



Thoughts of Sorts

Georges Perec

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Thoughts of Sorts, one of Georges Perec's final works, was published posthumously in France in 1985. With this translation, David Bellos, Perec's preeminent translator, has completed the Godine list of Perec's great works translated into English and has provided an introduction to this master of "systematic versatility." Thoughts of Sorts is a compilation of musings and essays attempting to circumscribe, in Perec's words, "my experience of the world not in terms of the reflections it casts in distant places, but at its actual point of breaking surface." Perec investigates the ways by which we define our place in the world, reveling in listmaking, orientating, classifying. This book employs all of the modes of questioning explored by his previous books, and at the same time breaks new ground of its own, ending with a question mark in typical/atypical Perec fashion.

Thoughts of Sorts Details

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Author : Georges Perec

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From Reader Review Thoughts of Sorts for online ebook

Amy says

I could especially relate to Perec's essay about book collecting and categorizing. (Quite embarrassing, actually).

David R. Godine says

"*Thoughts of Sorts* is a very enjoyable collection, from the useful 'Statement of Intent' to its consideration of the physical act of reading and Perec's 'Thoughts of Sorts / Sorts of Thoughts' . . . yet another must-read for any Perec-fan."

— M.A. Orthofer, The Complete Review

Katie says

This was an enjoyable little book of essays on, well, "Thoughts of Sorts/Sorts of Thoughts". Worthwhile for the essay on his desk alone, but the rest of it is also enjoyable and thought-provoking. They're all nice reflections on the things we do without reflection - the things we leave on our desks (except when we have parties), the gestures that only the bespectacled possess, the way we arrange our reading materials and the ways we read.

Aslihan says

Fortunately this is not the first book of Perec that I have read. Rather fragmented and eclectic compared to his other books, and definitely difficult to sort as to which intent of writing Perec holds ;)

Derek says

our thoughts of sorts on his Thoughts of Sorts: <http://www.5cense.com/15/425.htm>

Melissa says

I really liked a few of these essays ("Brief Notes on the Art and Craft of Sorting Books," "Reading," "Thoughts of Sorts/Sorts of Thoughts," "Notes from the Objects to Be Found on My Desk"), others not so much. Some of them are more like notes for future essays, and while that was charming, sometimes I wished I could just read the actual essay that was never written.

Annabelle says

Perec, mon écrivain préféré, n'est jamais aussi chiant que lorsqu'il fait trop dans l'analytique. Qqs listes suffisent à elles seules à assurer plus sûrement poésie et réalisme qu'un exposé pontifiant.

Emma Roulette says

Any item on a list belongs there because of what it shares with the other items on that list. But when you read a list you become aware of the items' differences. Similarities and differences aside, there are certain joys, secret pleasures, diverse satisfactions that come from making lists. I have enumerated them here:

- Coming up with things to put on the list
 - Over long periods of time (e.g. movies I'd like to watch, my Goodreads To Read list, all the people I've ever kissed)
 - In one sitting (e.g. a grocery list, this list, a list for brainstorming ideas)
 - The thought processes involved with generating items to put on the list.
 - Where does an individual thought come from?
 - How does one thought relate to another?
 - "When I think, how do I think?
 - How do I think when I am not thinking?
 - In this precise instant, how do I think when I am thinking about how I think when I do think?" (p. 136)
- Leaving some things out of the list
- Seeing what gestalts emerge from what is included in the list
 - Functional apparatuses used to include/exclude items
 - The new image that arises when all the items on the list are viewed next to each other (probably my favorite out of all the things on this list)
- Ordering the list (i.e. sorting)
 - Alphabetical
 - Chronological
 - Importance
 - Theme
 - As they occur to you
- Naming the list

Heather Shaw says

"Every book collection corresponds to two needs that are often also obsessions: the need to hang on to things (books), and the need to keep them in some order."

Born in Paris in 1936 to Polish-Jewish immigrants; his father was killed at the front in 1940 and his mother died either on the way or in Auschwitz. Georges Perec himself was in the south of France, in a French boarding school. He studied sociology at the Sorbonne and his first novel, **Things: A Story of the Sixties** was published in 1965 and immediately became a success both in France and abroad.

Each of Perec's books is quite different from the other. Perec describes *Things* as a "sociology of the quotidian." **A Void** (1969) is a 300-page detective novel in which the letter E goes missing. *Life a User's Manual* (1978) runs 700 pages and makes monumental the minutia in a Paris apartment building.

Our Book Club selection for this week comes from **Thoughts of Sorts**, a collection of essays composed during the last years of Perec's life; he died of cancer at the age of 45 in 1982. They're a quirky bunch, to say the least, but they're also brilliant, often funny, always deeply probing into how we do what we do--like arrange the things on our desks, read, write, or teach someone to cook—or why—like prescribe hierarchies to only some things and make lists in general.

"Brief Notes on the Art and Craft of Sporting Books" falls into the "how" category and is simultaneously hilarious and appalling. That is if you, like this reader, happen to have a book collection. An organized book collection. Do you?

Thoughts of Sorts (978-1-56792362-9) and **Life a User's Manual** (978-1-56792-373-5) will both be published in softcover by David R. Godine on 5 November, 2009. David Bellos is the translator of both volumes.

The entire essay is available for free download at ForeWord's Book Club.

Carolyn says

The work of a genius/maniac! Makes me want to read everything this strange French man ever has written, which is unfortunately not too much.

If you think an essay on 81 different ways to make sweetbread, rabbit, and sole could amuse you and would make you think why exactly he chose a combination of those three, then go for it. The most creative way of working with words I probably ever have seen!

Annabelle says

"Les pages qui suivent ne sauraient être autre chose que des notes : un rassemblement, plus intuitif qu'organisé, de faits dispersés ne renvoyant qu'exceptionnellement à des savoirs constitués ; ils

appartiendraient plutôt à ces domaines mal partagés, ces terres en friche de l'ethnologie descriptives que Marcel Mauss évoque dans son "introduction aux techniques des corps" (...) et qui, rangés sous la rubrique "divers", constituent des zones d'urgence dont on sait seulement qu'on ne sait pas grand chose, mais dont on pressent qu'on pourrait y trouver beaucoup si l'on s'avisait d'y prêter quelque attention : faits banals, passés sous silence, non pris en charge, allant d'eux-mêmes : ils nous décrivent pourtant autant, même si nous croyons pouvoir nous dispenser de les décrire ; ils renvoient, avec beaucoup plus d'acuité et de présence que la plupart des institutions et des idéologies dont les sociologues font habituellement leur nourriture, (...)." (p.111)

Jim Elkins says

Reading my way through Perec, because how is it possible to stop? This collection of short pieces has some models for prose experiments:[return][return]1. "Thoughts of Sorts / Sorts of Thoughts" is fragmentary in an uninteresting way: it could be much more intensively executed, more fictionally complete, more obsessively classificatory. But it makes up for that unaccountable lightness (it seems that it's the product of a waning interest, or a lack of energy) by some wonderful passages, like this:[return][return]"THOUGHTS / SORTS[return]What does the forward slash mean?[return]What exactly is the question? Whether I think before I sort? Whether I sort before I think?"[return][return]And so on. The problem is that there isn't much so on, and there is no clear reason why there isn't.[return][return]2. "I Remember Malet & Isaac" is an inventory of one of Perec's school books, a history of France. He inventories the table of contents, then all the words in italics, then just one picture's caption, then everything in boldface. It's also incomplete in a strangely unaccountable way, but it has a great cumulative effect: it makes me share in Perec's impatience with the old cobwebby history texts that we've all had to read.[return][return]3. "Backtracking" is a prose piece about his years in analysis, which manages to sound almost completely decathected by avoiding all talk about substance. Almost.[return][return]The problem with these pieces, for me, is that knowing "A Void," "W," and "Life: A User's Guide," I know he was capable of much more protracted concentration, which is not at all to say real exhaustiveness or actual classificatory rigor, but rather to say that I know he was capable of more interesting irrationalism.

Tosh says

A read-through for the second time. I have decided to re-read some titles from my library at home. "Thoughts of Sorts" is the ultimate writer's book, in that Georges Perec is a writer who writes about the every-day in the sense what is around us on a daily basis. His chapter on glasses and how one wears glasses, or how one can arrange their library of books, and hysterically his cooking receipes which are basically all the same except adding a different sauce to the dish. In the end of the read, Perec is really about being a writer and how one captures the world around them in details that most wouldn't notice or bother even to write about. Perec captures those moments - usually in a hysterical mode.

A book of loose ends. A collection of Perec's writings that were published in small publications in France. So for sure not a major work, yet Perec is a major 20th Century writer. And a very charming one at that. If the avant-garde has any charm, then Georges Perec is a good gateway to that world.

Obsessed with lists, puzzles, knowledge of things not important -is the glue or magnet that attracts Perec's attention. The short piece on what is on his work desk is worth the price of the book alone.

Adam Floridia says

While reading more than a few of the essays in this collection, I was struck by the feeling that I've read them before. I haven't checked, so that may be true, or it may not. The mere fact that I don't remember actually made reading this very work resonate all the more. In addition to examining categorization and classification, a staple of Perec is the investigation of memory. Nabokov: consciousness::Perec is to memory; Wallace: solipsism::Perec is to memory; Vonnegut:humanism::Perec is to memory. You get it--I just liked writing that because it allowed me to think about all of my favorite authors. Then I got to imagining what it would be like for those four to sit around and shoot the shit for while. Boy would I love to hear that.

But I digress.

I would argue that digression is another of Perec's "modes" of writing. This lies in his ability to look/think beyond the obvious. For example, in "Three Bedrooms Remembered," he writes about three bedrooms he remembers. YET it is amazing how much we can learn about him simply from so utterly simple a concept; he includes the *memories* associated with each physical locale. This begs readers--or at least it begged me--to follow the same thought process: "Hmmm...where have I slept? What memories immediately spring to mind when I recall that place?" It's really a fun little game of introspection. That, by the way, is why I categorized this as fitting on me "being-a-human" shelf.

One of the many things I love about Perec is that his writing (much like DFW's) is really a window into the workings of his mind. A glimpse into those windows often reveals the same concerns/insecurities/questions that we all--or I at least--have (albeit much more cogent and nicely worded).

Favorite Quotations:

-"...[a new book] would be one more attempt at defining my place, a somewhat oblique approach to daily lie as I live it in practice, a way of talking about my work, my own history and my preoccupations, *an effort to pinpoint something which is a part of my experience of the world not in terms of the reflection it casts in distant places, but at the point where it actually breaks surface*" (16 my italics).

-"For the plain and obvious facts that we don't bother about or acknowledge, the kinds of things that 'go without saying' -- these facts, though we may like to think that we don't have to describe them, describe us nonetheless" (87).

Glenn Russell says

Do you enjoy making lists? Perhaps lists on books and reading - lists of books you've read, lists of books you want to read, lists of your favorite authors, lists of books you intend reading, lists of books you've reviewed, lists of books you've discussed in book groups or with friends, lists of books you've studied in detail?

Do you enjoyed the way words look and sound by themselves and in combination with other words? Do you like to see words that start with the same letter, words that are synonyms, words that are antonyms, monosyllabic words, compound words (among my personal favorite), obscure words or colorful words?

If your answer is "yes" to more than one of the above, you just might be a prime candidate to fall in love with the writing of Georges Perec, ink slinger in the widest sense of the sentence.

And speaking of sentences, here is my favorite sentence from the back cover of this book, *Thoughts of Sorts*: "This playful and inventive master of classification and wordplay investigates the ways in which we define our place in the world, reveling in list-making, orientating and classifying."

One couldn't come up with a more apt one-sentence amplification or description, exact explication or pithy portrayal of this splendiferous batch of nifty essays.

Playful and Inventive - Here's a quote from the essay *Reading* under the section on public transport: "The place for reading is the metro. That could almost be a definition. I continue to be amazed that neither the Minister of Culture nor the Secretary of State for Higher Education has ever exclaimed: "Honourable members should cease forthwith their demands for more money for libraries. The people's true library is the underground!"

Master of classification and wordplay - When speaking on the alphabet in *Thoughts of Sorts/Sorts of Thoughts*, we read, "The quality code of alphabetical order is not very rich; in fact, it has only three elements: A for excellent, B for less good and Z for rock bottom (in French, really rotten films can be called "Z movies)."

The ways in which we define our place in the world - From *Notes on the Objects to Be Found on My Desk*: "I do still work now quite often in cafes; but at home it is only once in a blue moon that I work (write) anywhere else than at my desk (for instance, I don't ever really write in bed), and my desk is never used for anything other than my work (once again, as I write these words down I realize that they are not quite correct: two or three times a year; when I give a party, I clear my desk completely, cover it with a paper tablecloth and - like the plank on which I pile my dictionaries - turn it into a serving table)."

Reveling in list-making, orientating and classifying - In *Brief Notes on the Art and Craft of Sorting Books*, the author has four sub-sections: *Ways of sorting books*, *Books which are very easy to sort*, *Books which are not too hard to sort* and *Books which are well-nigh unsortable*.

I included the above quotes and snips as a way highlighting several Georges gumdrops. If you wish to explore the writings of Georges Perec, *Thoughts of Sorts* is a perfect place to start before moving on to his longer books such as *A Void* (an entire novel without using the letter "e"), *Life: A User's Manual* or *Species of Spaces*.
