

BRONKA NOWICKA

Terra Memoria

TRANSLATED BY KATARZYNA SZUSTER

The eldest in the language say that a long time ago, each picture of the thing existing in memory could be exchanged for its body, because memories buried in the mind were simultaneously deposited in the ground and achieved the concreteness of matter. Whatever sank into a person's memory was immediately developed in the undersoil: it was filled with the manifestations of objects, phenomena, animals and people.

All the living once had land in Memoria, which was a plain and bore nothing aside from the realization of the past. This area started outside the borders of the kingdom and stretched until the place where space unharnessed itself from time, depriving wanderers of a chance to reckon with time. If one managed to reach Infantia, the land of child's memory, he lost track of hours going by and inhabited the forever here and now—just like he did when he was small. That is why old people wandered around there talking to resurrected dolls, riding dead rocking horses, dragging limp kites and their legs behind them. Before Infantia, there was Insania of the deranged, spewing on the surface such convoluted hybrids of objects and people that only the logic of the mad could unravel them into their original shapes. North of Insania stretched Penuria—a memory poor in object and subject, which belonged to those who avoided internal life and even reflection exported elsewhere.

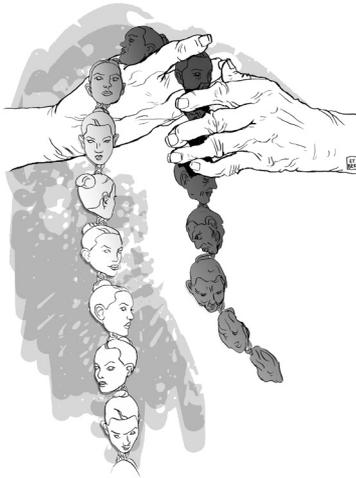
Memoria had its diggers and priests, and both functions merged in the persons of sepulchlers. They were said to be the descendants of moles, they had spatulate hands and feet and did not need air to breathe. No one inquired into the genealogy of these creatures, also referred to as confessors or tombers, because memory, both inside a person and inside the lands

of Memoria, was considered an endless tumulus. *We are descending into memory, the deepest kind of grave*—wrote Grammatian, a chronicler of that era. For the pilgrims of the memorial territory, sepulchers remained human puzzles, cryptograms, a walking enigma. They were feared, as most mysteries are, but they were still asked to dig, because they were the only ones who could scour the earth and recover from it the real shapes of things, which were merely pictures of the past in the mind.

Sepulchlers were believed to be able to descend into the strata hiding the primal evocation, echoes of the babbling of the senses about the shape of the nearest world. They could unearth amorphous beings not bigger than a hand, in which only the private morphology of the reminiscer was able to recognize the grip of a rattle, a doll's trunk or a woman's breast. *The sepulchler placed an embryo of the thing in his hand*—the annalist recounted. *And he who had peregrinated into the past recognized a memory of his infantia: a planed sailing-ship. An object with a continuously knotting form, with lines as nebulous as a child's memory. And the pilgrim wept, although he was a king, next to a sobbing beggar. This was when memory unfolded in the ground.*

The Grammatian, who was inquiring into the essence of commemoration in embryos, discovered the fundamental principle of the memory architecture. It was the language. The chronicler argued that only he who could name aptly, could remember well. Hence, the earth memory of a person mute inside was filled with crude block-like forms. From such soils sepulchlers would retrieve effigies of objects and people of unhewn detail. The chronicler also described instances of excavations from the territories of those fluent in a language: (...) *and they saw the bodies of metaphors expelled from the pits, of inconceivable physiognomies, behind which stood the mason of memory. They watched the confessors hoist the exhumed oxymoron: they spread out a sheet of dry rain until it caught wind and began to float above the fields like a sail. When rain became vertical, it fell without getting anyone wet. The poets who came for their memories saw how the linguistic work had imprinted in their structures.*

The Grammarian provided proof that recalling the name of the thing multiple times replicated the pictures in memory, which in turn bred similar solids in the ground: *Give me the face of this woman*—said Senilis to the sepulchers—*I remember her, but not her body, because I'm old.* They dug out not one, but a whole string of faces, each one a copy of the first. The tombers were pulling out these soft pearls all the way to the horizon. When Senilis got what he asked for, he basked in the joy of people to whom old age offered still more years, demanding their wits in return. He tossed the faces up, lulled them, put them on his own, sang something to them in a language that confused its own vernacular with another. When the faces, at first similar to animated masks, had wilted and then withered—as does any incarnate reflection removed from the soil—Senilis dragged himself to Insania and never left its borders.



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Why did people pilgrimage to Memoria? Did they waste their time to stand on the outermost corners of their own remembrance? They traveled for touch, the only revered sense of that world.

*For the fact that we step in the same river twice,
we will laud you, sepulchral, with an inept copy
of our own art, and we shall call this ersatz archeology.*

Antiphons on Memoria, an excerpt