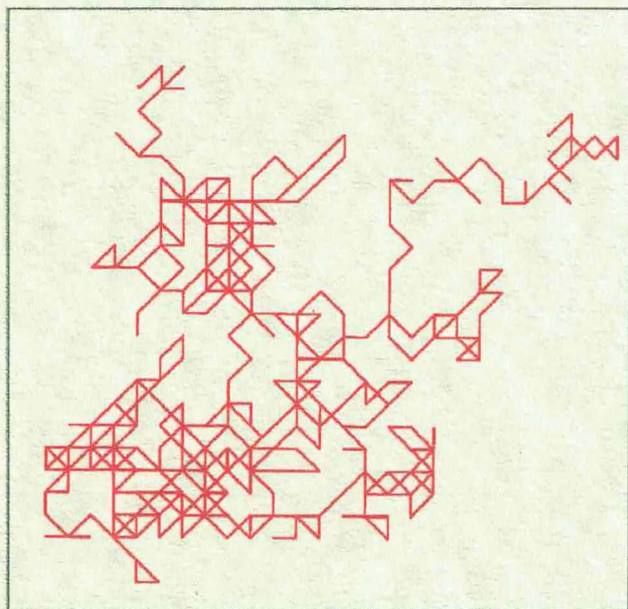


# Memnoir



Joan Retallack



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Wild Honey Press

Published by

Wild Honey Press  
16a Ballyman Road  
Bray County Wicklow  
Ireland

<http://www.wildhoneypress.com>

January 2002

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Cover illustration: Venn's visual representation of  
randomness generated from the first 707 decimal digit of  $\pi$   
(1888)

ISBN 1 903090 33 4

*For Tina Darragh*



# MEMNOIR

**Mem:** What's our relation to the past?

**Noir:** Same as to the future.

**Mem:** Then what's our relation to the future?

**Noir:** You don't want to know.

**Mem:** In other words the jig is up.

**Noir:** In other words the jig is up.





## Curiosity and the Claim to Happiness

Studies have shown that the brain  
prefers unpredictable pleasures.

### Present Tense

it's said that it happens even in nature e.g.  
during the childhood the mother might have (had) a taste  
for film noir and take(n) the child along

my machine is  
hooked up to (my machine) things inaccessible to the  
precise methods of e.g. a Brazilian bookmobile being  
hijacked in a dark underground garage fiction is precisely  
what they now call non-fiction too get a bit too personal i.e.  
Eurydice my dark darling don't worry I can bear your not  
looking at me she cri(ed) out i.e. hoping it (was) true

(now)  
(here) together in the mix of the modern metropolis Rio  
Vienna Paris Tokyo Moscow Lagos New York Bombay  
London Mumbai he and she both feel close to the idealized  
neuron in the book

some of the diffuse sensations of early childhood may still surprise us as we consider their names e.g. joy frustration shame anxiety love honor rage fear anger wonder curiosity disgust surprise longing humor pride self-respect fear but not terror fear but not horror

the mother might not like surprises e.g. wanting to know for how many generations a Negro in the bloodlines can produce a "throwback" the child later recoils this use of memory does not know what to say for a very long time The soul is inwardness, as soon as and insofar as it is no longer outwardness; it is *memoria*, insofar as it does not lose itself in *curiositas*.

otherwise one could ask at any moment e.g. in what story does an uninvited goddess walk in and roll a golden ball down the hall or why not enjoy the story of lovers in the same vein from different centuries but in the same story from different worlds but in the same story I write down my dreams this was not one of them i.e. for a very long time the child want(ed) more than she could say to not want more than she could say i.e. impossible according to any simple formula for mirroring formulas

if

but for the accidental clause the swerve of curiosity on the  
monkey bars the flash-bulb memory the wall of fire outside  
the window and or of something as vague as living in time  
for a time near what seem to be others near things swept  
into the stream of self-translation in the coincidental flow of  
events near disregarded syllables suddenly audible vol up  
sudden outburst of song Ha it's too funny how funny it is to  
feel sometimes and not others how to remotely sense the  
beautiful violence in the brevity of the spilt second glance

without yards of shimmering adjectives  
description: is description possible can a sunrise be  
described by yards of shimmering adjectives

While the curate was saying this, the lass in boy's clothing  
stood as if spellbound, looking first at one and then at  
another, without moving her lips or saying a word, like a  
rustic villager who is suddenly shown some curious thing  
that he has never seen before...she gave a deep sigh and  
broke her silence at last....Doing her best to restrain her  
tears, she began the story of her life, in a calm, clear voice.

without the carefully constructed container  
story: is story possible can even a portion of a life be  
contained in a story wouldn't songs be better to repair  
the brain

if it's curiosity that draws one's attention to curiosity even  
the other animals like us even in nature if for only the  
space of time at the watering hole during those times when  
it's too wide or too narrow for ambiguity so that the range  
of genres will now include horror (there)

this voltage  
through the body is brought on by the senses strictly  
speaking in logic nothing is accidental the world divides us  
into seekers after facts seekers after gold dig up much  
earth and find little or less than a port royal stain it's super  
being natural not wishing to symbolize the wish to return  
to feel as much at home in a fortunate sentence as an  
unfortunate century

this may yet be seen by some as the  
necessity to invent a game in which it is necessary to  
replace all vowels with x mxgxcxllly txrxnxng prxmxtxrx  
txrrxr xntx pxlxtxblx pxst-pxst xrxny xtc

or that it is not  
an idle game to forgive that they or we in the slit second of  
a single space to reveal the tear the tears in all their  
ambiguity tearing through the photo album knowing and  
not knowing all that is is not there with only a few clues to  
go by fake cheetah fur fake cowboy hat a small page of  
notes a book that can be open and closed at the same time  
with the ontological thickness of a scratch and win sheet

look see the blue and yellow and green space at the  
watering hole the animals slurping the animals rolling in  
the mud the archeological trace of some thing less visible  
than a zoological park the curiosity of the child the timing  
the timing is all that is off

it is that that is the problem  
with the timing that it is always off while it cannot be off at  
all

that is the he the father to be sure that the she does  
not choose the wrong thing and vice versa for the she and  
or the he again

and so to not choose the wrong thing can  
she choose nothing nothing and all given the diversity of  
forms that even a soap film or any other minimal surface  
can at this time at or on this point that is not an  
Archimedean point

or to consider the mother Archimedeia  
on point to point out to all in punching out the holes  
according to the instructions that could have (been) the  
point

that point will surely eject the wild idea to try to say  
that I have (had) a wild idea just as a hummingbird flies by  
just as I think that's a fine deluxe model bumble bee engine  
with mechanical wings beating the sky in a wild idea I once  
(had) in another hot majestic interlude containing  
profanity violence and graphic photos of murder victims  
before the clouds part and the sun turns into a coffee mug  
or a doughnut

and but though over the years mathematicians have (been) able to prove that every noninteresting closed curve is spanned by at least one smooth minimal surface or surface reflecting the twisting of the sun into someone's bird's eye view or the limits of any horizon always being a point of view just like the one unflooding here

and then  
the first question on the examination turns out to be  
drymouth #2 pencil poised What license does the program  
of curiosity as the motor of progress of the sciences give  
itself and or us? not to say them

and then the child may  
or may not find that to find one's position on the graph  
using xy coordinates one must reconfigure the geometry of  
attention in order to comb the snakes from her hair

## Present Tense

they  
would go often to the movies a hot majestic interlude  
containing profanity violence graphic photos of murder  
victims in black and white and bitter irony of if

in this the  
context of the extreme sport of everyday life it is necessary  
to put it all in the context of the extreme sport of everyday  
life

or the most extreme object of medical curiosity that  
one could hope to hit upon here the clarification of the  
connections between the way the body moves and feels the  
way the mind thinks and feels if one dares to seek these  
bonds in the brain of a living animal or one in which cell  
death has been detected only after kicking the subaltern in  
the crotch

to zoom in on the scene in the darkened room  
on the screen the shadow of the murderous aunt is moving  
across the screen along the far wall of the screen one can  
tell it is the murderous aunt from the feather in the hat  
and the dagger in the hand of the silhouette of the shadow  
on the wall



or the scene in the neighborhood playground the boy falling back the boy falling back and back after being shot about to take another bite of his Mars Bar or any other chocolate treat with a paper or plastic wrapper in the country where many fear(ed) God & AIDS & Weirdos & Elephants & Castles & Car Windows & pop goes the weasel on the way home from school

is it too trivial to ask if it is more tragic or more poignant that the child had hoped to finish the candy bar before he was shot can the tragic be poignant and vice versa and verso and recto and the pant cuff gets caught in the spokes and the altern falls off the bike and the optics of the horizon is questioned on the spot by the Mennonite German Italian who feels his father watch(ed) to many Sinatra movies and put too much ham in his omelets

catastrophe theorists say that if we back track along the previous path there will be no catastrophe this time

coming out of the movie theater the world the world  
is bright too bright gnomonic present tense tensile everything  
happening at once the world is full of its own mute history  
the fatality of reflection the fatality of nature and culture  
the fatality of the German sciences of Kultur the fatality of  
the mute history the fatality of of the preposition reaching  
out to its object even as it (they) slip away

the preceding is  
much too sentimental to accommodate the experience of  
the child is fatally wounded the house is a mess the streets  
are littered with trash the lawns are littered with trash the  
grass is dying shrubs are pruned to look like gum drops  
grass is mown to look like an indoor outdoor carpet  
replaces the grass up the stairs of the stoop onto the porch  
into the house the noise is incessant the grass is broken the  
broken glass is littered with people

what a pleasure to  
dissolve at the spot on the graph where the logic of what  
people are supposed to know don't want to know don't know  
enough to have any opinion on the outcome of the beer  
belly bakeoff intersects with the logic of what people are  
not supposed to know before or after the crime scene (has  
been) cleared washed down scoured repaired reconstructed  
renovated restored rejuvenated retrofitted revenged  
resettled unrecalled

also memory as in trying to get  
to the fire the way to the big light the photon points the  
way to itself

## Present Tense

start with a yellow pad a  
yellow #2 pencil a summer song an orange rabbit a rare  
breeze a yellow song a summer rabbit a zebra finch etc  
bring books next time what is it that you're expecting these  
circular semantics to say to run in circles the word  
exceedingly is interesting here in these circular ruins this  
offset press offset print this sagittal section this dorsal fin  
this anterior view widening circumference this widening  
cross-reference will this inference make me eligible for  
parole

do you want to say something about that do you  
want to say something about that that makes you look  
smart in your smart outfit your Nehru jacket your horny  
glasses your upper crust Englicks your queer subaltern  
view that is as good as words words words make me a rose

ergo to stop fooling around in the middle you must locate  
three coordinates from which only employees allowed  
beyond this point when unexpectedly a wind might come up  
and might go unexpectedly away but not before bringing  
certain things and taking certain things away

quiet little  
engine beating a pulse across the sky pick up your #2  
pencil write on your yellow pad getting to the bottom of pot  
luck there are limits limits to everything but to refrain  
from forced propositions is still brave

another example of  
the way in which a form might not reflect a purported fact  
or facts I drop(ped) the tendency to begin sentences with I  
long ago she claims anything that beautiful has got to be  
evil failure to find an Archimedean point defined again  
with nothing larger than a phonebook found in the debris

this  
is a method unavailable to the more discursive humanities  
gee whiz pop gimme a break the book is call(ed) *Toward  
Civilization in America* the story goes that we in America  
get the fuck out of my space motherfucker can all divide a  
square into two other squares given the average city block  
we don't have to look or sound like the neighborhood or the  
country we grew up in the people we grew up with for more  
than one generation or so this is no Goldbach's conjecture  
this is no Goldberg variation this is no gold bug this is the  
story of the good life the end

they call(ed) it a brutal  
dehumanizing crime once again a true and tragic story the  
movie version is rated for language sexual situations  
several decapitations cruelty to animals the memories of  
former surroundings are the scenes of the most heinous  
crimes

ok this is the vocabulary in which you will be locked  
up for the next ten years there is no good behavior clause  
the study of memory tells us that a person is a place after  
all

one thing I try not to understand she said is how gravitation works or where the force of attraction comes from but just to feel that a body can make its presence felt instantaneously throughout one universe or another her foot swings out off the curb as she looks back exploding into another dimension as the letters move across the line

she look(ed) back over her shoulder to say persist and what can happen will I live by this and yet I hardly (knew) her at all and yet there is the consolation that early mathematicians were more interested in examples than proofs

#### Present Tense

loaded with blanks bruise blue skies rash sunset eyes elide  
gun and index finger bomb and rose burst into bloom how  
to tell a story without telling lies leave it unfinished either  
or complicate it beyond belief

now during one of those  
periods when life seems superficially friendly the more you  
know the less indigenous aquiline twilight of the sort that  
divides movieland from

to love every visceral dichotomy  
like the mountains we walk(ed) and talk(ed) while we they  
(were) roasting wild boars with tusks removed on another  
continent that did not come to mind that may not seem to  
be but is the love of definition insert here almost any  
definition will do for the purposes of this kind of love one  
just wants to see anything at all and then to couch it  
otherwise

is to slide more easily off the hook start with a  
yellow pad a yellow #2 pencil a summer song an orange  
rabbit a rare breeze a yellow song a gold finch a summer  
rabbit a fresh breeze etc bring books next time what is it  
that you're expecting in these circular semantics these  
circular ruins this offset sagittal section this widening  
circumference of this widening cross reference this  
crowding of inferences will anything make me eligible for  
parole

just that  
a body can make its presence felt instantaneously through  
out one universe or another (his) foot swings out off curb as  
(he) looks back (she) looks back as the realization occurs  
scenes like these can contain profanity violent car chases  
minor sexual situations glimpses of nude supermodels  
strewn entrails rape

it's one of the things I live(d) by  
along with something a woman (was) about to say in a  
London cab we (were) sharing a cab I kiss(ed) her she (had)  
a woman's eyes in the made for TV movie of the movie that  
contains relatively tasteful vampire assaults this may seem  
to be a story but isn't

even if she (didn't) like stories maybe  
but could this case be different could you know it is a case  
at all like the ones the great European artists and thinkers  
abandoned on trains why refuse entertaining irony wry  
humor display of imaginative aeronautics acrobatics  
surprising and illuminating implications drawn out of line  
drawing of



let's exorcise the crime in the coincidence by turning the coincidence into a fact (fact) the fact into a symbol (transcendent fact) the symbol into a moral tale (transcendent symbol) the moral tale into a conjecture in which every whole number is factored into imaginary numbers thus avoiding the problem of primes (transcendent moral tale)

the box contained but the squirming matrix of habitual value-laden self-perpetuating practice (aka can-o-worms) all but invisible until something dramatic but goes awry is in fact but the continuous present of and or but either or experience of history

she  
(said) this (was) her favorite line in the movie before it was cut fast food to the quick not to worry warning contains profanity S&M candy galore and or difficult subject matter for children under thirteen

the unnoticed actual condition  
of the life the erasure of coincidence the prevention of the  
crime the irruption of the coincidence the complete service  
for eight the rise of the participles the unpredicted fall of  
the prepositions the fully rationalized forms the gummy  
bear erasure the formal containment of popcorn and coke  
the sweeping of the aisles between shows the warnings the  
contains trapped children brutal surgery savage war scenes  
sexual assaults profanity violence graphic photos of murder  
victims wounds of race and class excruciating paper cuts

one thing's for sure one thing's for certain one thing is  
standing for the thing it's standing for just (sped) over the  
horizon spewing technicolor exhaust long (gone) they stand  
in line and watch(ed) it's vertical phase fall into and out of  
ruin in this symbolic logic is the abstract(ed) multivariable  
calculus of a story that perpetuates itself only by means of  
Kummer's unique factorization or Sophie Germain's primes  
or Brownian motion or Cantor dust e.g. poet you are a  
maker *poietes* = maker all pure and simple not pure and  
simple at all head to toe stem to stern dark root in (un)  
expurgated version another Chevy going down by the levee  
hi five cheery pi

## SOURCES

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Note: All "contains" warnings are or are not from *The Washington Post* movie listings





Wild Honey Press