Assignment 8: textual portrait

Assignment:
Create a portrait of someone (possibly yourself) purely in the description of the person's room. The description can be quite factual, a list of items, or it can be editorialized, commenting on the meaning of things, or it can use the items as the basis for other narratives.

Think about how objects are used to depict identity. Are some more evocative than other? Is it a matter of their shape, their function, their history?

A textual portrait is free to focus on any aspect of the person: their appearance, their personality, their past. How are these aspects related? Are some easier to convey to others?

Response:
"9-11" Chomsky, Noam
A Void Perec, Georges
Acid Dreams Lee, Martin
Adaptation to Life Vaillant, George
Affective Computing Picard, Roz
Ain't i A Woman: black women and feminism hooks, bell
Alcoholics Anonymous AA World Services
All About Me Keel, Philipp
All Families are Psychotic Coupland, Douglas
All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity Berman, Marshall
Already Dead Johnson, Denis
American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control Musto, David
Andersen's Fairy Tales Howell, Troy
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Don't Sweat the Small Stuff - and it's all small stuff
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Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius
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Herland
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Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science
Hindu Religious Tradition
History of Private Life, A: Revelations of the Medieval World
History of Sexuality: An Introduction
Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy
Holidays on Ice
House of Leaves

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Danelewski, Mark
How Buildings Learn  Brand, Stewart
How the Mind Works  Pinker, Steven
How we Became Posthuman  Hayles, Katherine
Hypertext 2.0  Landow, George
Illuminatus Trilogy  Shea Robert, Robert Anton Shea
Illusion of Life, The  Thomas, Frank and Ollie Johnson
Illusions  Bach, Richard
Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary  American Heritage
In Praise of Krishna  Dimock, Edward, et.al.
Individual in a Social World, The  Milgram, Stanley
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Last Night in Paradise: Sex and Morals at the Century's End  Roiphe, Katie
Last Time I Wore a Dress  Scholinski, Daphne
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Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader  Abelove, Henry
Less than Zero  Ellis, Bret Easton
Lessons from Privilege: The American Prep School Tradition  Powell, Arthur
Leviathan  Auster, Paul
Life After God  Coupland, Douglas
Life on the Screen  Turkle, Sherry
Linear Algebra  Penney, Richard
Listening to Prozac  Kramer, Peter
Little Zen Companion  Schiller, David
Lolita  Nabokov, Vladimir
Long Days Journey into Night  O'Neill, Eugene
Long Quiet Highway  Goldberg, Natalie
Lord of the Rings 1: The Fellowship of the Ring  Tolkien, J.R.R.
Lords and the New Creatures  Morrison, Jim
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Maeda @ Media  Maeda, John
Man and His Symbols  Jung, Carl
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Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, The  Sacks, Oliver
Manufacturing Consent  Herman, Edward and Noam Chomsky
Masterpieces from the Peggy Guggenheim Collection  Guggenheim Museum
Masks of the Illuminati  Wilson, Robert Anton
McSweeney's (vol. 1-3)  Wallace, David Foster
Meaning of Things: Domestic symbols and the self  Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly
Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda  Chomsky, Noam
medium is the massage, the  McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore
Men and Women Learning Together: A Study of College Students in the Late 70s  Brown University
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Collections upon collections. Whenever I walk into someone's home, one of the first things I'm bound to do is seek out their book collection. What can I learn about them from what they read (or don't read)? What do the books look like - have they been moved lately? What type of order are they in? How read are they? We have so many notions behind books, an understanding of what they stand for, of what they are about, about who reads them and why.

Above is about 2/3 of my book collection. These are the books that sit in my room in Boston; they are the first thing you see when you walk in the door. On your right are the non-fiction books; on your left, the fiction. Unlike this list, they are clustered based on similarity in my mind, an eclectic ordering that I know by heart but everyone else is bound to mess up. On
top of the rows of books are new books that haven't yet found their home amongst the older books. At the bottom shelf of each are the books that i am currently reading, either for class or for pleasure. Yes, there are always at least 10 fiction books started at once. My books have character; that is half of my pleasure in them. Most of them were purchased used and have acquired even more wear & tear since then. There are a handful of books that i've gone out of my way to collect, spending obscene amounts of money on them. They are on top of the shelves, far away from the random items that get added to the shelves. There is a notice about my books that often adorns the bookshelves. Anyone may borrow any unsigned books; the signed books are not to leave the room. The shelves of my books also host the disarray of my life. The beat-generation fiction row hosts all of my daily medications and vitamins, to be taken on the way out the door. On the shelf below, there are all of the pocket items that get rotated between pockets each day. There are candles, half-eaten candies and drinks, fliers for events that i've promoted, bills that need to be managed, ticket stubs, random notes to self, cat treats, etc. Inside each book there are also plenty of treats - pieces of paper that got added during the process of reading each book, filled with historical markers of places i've been and people i've talked with.

My books have character. They host so much meaning in the perusal, in the markings, in the food stains and the water marks, in the bits of paper stuffed in them. Together, as a collection, they tell a story about their owner.