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Against Amnesia

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There are moments when life seems entirely impossible. All the crazy dreams of rebellion disappear. The desire to revolt against the society of the civilized is lost to futility, the open but empty hand. All of the late-night laughter filled conversations, the meanderings and wanderings of those intoxicated with thoughts of adventure, begin to seem naive and empty. One comes to the conclusion that one is accomplishing nothing: destruction and creation seem equally without attraction. One abandons one's own imagination and returns to the old trap of fear. The existential idiot occupies one's head.

Here is the point where the misery of this society completes itself. This society strengthens itself by continually forcing the individual to disappear: the individual disappears when the individual gives in to the misery of this society. One begins to accept the limitations imposed by this society as one's own. To experience comes to mean to repeat oneself. One begins to feel one has nothing to offer in defiance, nothing to give: every gesture becomes a blank stare. Passion is pacified. Desire is rationalized away. The forbidden remain forbidden.

This supreme moment of misery marks nothing less than the triumph of amnesia. Such complete abandonment of life's adventure is the surrender of one who has forgotten all previous rebellion and all previous desire to revolt. Memory has ceased to be a pleasure: the misery of the moment stretches backwards forever. Amnesia is essential to civilizing human beings: when one forgets the possibilities (the richness of past, present, and future) one is domesticated, one disappears.

Amnesia is the colonization of memory. One is forced to forget everything rebellious about one's life. The colonized mind is less likely to imagine a total revolt against this society if all traces of earlier revolts are suppressed. Everything from simple negative gestures to the hand in the cookie jar to late night crimes make memory precious to the individual; as soon as these breaches are forgotten the present becomes less and less pregnant: the stem of the flower is cut before the flower blooms. One is in despair over the absence of past freedom simply because the residue of past freedoms have been purged from one's memory.

When asked how one knows that freedom is possible the rebel responds with examples of past freedoms. The rebel remembers the events, movements, and moments of one's past that mark breaks with the dominant order. One knows that freedom is possible because everybody has experienced freedom: the taste of paradise is in all our mouths. To forget this is fatal. Amnesia can be combated by constantly digging back into our memories, by constantly becoming more and more aware of our mistakes and victories. No, we must not dwell in the past, we must be cruel with our pasts (and those who would keep us there), and yet we must be greedy with our pasts (and wary of those who would paint those pasts with the blackness of misery and impossibilities). Rebels must return to their own past with a bouquet of flowers in one hand and a knife in the other.

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