

THE SILENCE OF SLEEPING ARMIES

Copyright © Hideo Kuze 2009

The ways in which people utilize memory are as diverse as people are themselves. In my case, I tend to overclock, overwork, and generally overindulge in memory to a greater extent than the average person. As is the case with others who eschew a life unexamined, I endeavour to be conscious of my memory's idiosyncrasies almost as if it were an entity unto itself.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate that my daily reality is shot through with iridescent threads of absolute beauty, and punctuated by moments when I am transfixed with the electricity of feeling truly alive. However, for much of the time, my present moment is fraught with difficulties, work-related pressure and the raw materials for an almost insurmountable accumulation of random stress. This was not always the case, and I hope one day I will return to a comparably halcyon state of existence.

One way or the other, thanks to a conscientiously exercised memory and the division of consciousness (which is a subject for a later recording), I can choose to multiply those fragments of perfection, savor and enjoy them repeatedly, discover new things about them as if watching a favorite film yet again. I don't mind admitting there is a strong element of escapism in this, although I would like to think of it also as a celebration of the positive events that have, in many cases, played pivotal roles in my life.

There are times when I am aware of my entire consciousness being indelibly transposed into long-term memory at a near-lossless rate. It's an unusual sensation, especially in light of the fact I am typically processing information at the limit of my abilities when this takes place, so my capacity for unrelated mental functions is close to nil. To give you one example, when I received a lesson about an aircraft's instrument panel, with explanations of the flight instruments, engine gauges, avionics and so forth, I could draw it again from memory thereafter with little or no error. The image of my instructor's whiteboard persists in my mind to this day with complete detail and clarity.

But it was extremely irritating when I had to interrupt the flow of memory creation because I was being asked questions, for example about hypothetical problems with the pitot-static system. It was not part of the sensory transcription process, so to disengage one activity to accommodate the other was akin to how a surgeon might feel about having to go answer a telemarketing phone call while the patient is still in theatre with innumerable stainless devices hanging out of them, and the rest of the surgical team is standing by impatiently.

An unpleasant side effect of having a keen memory is the fact all my questionable decisions, all my shortcomings and indiscretions, are forever gathered at the frontier of my sensorium. They are kept from overrunning me with a tsunami of sorrow and remorse by little more than the flimsy equivalent of a peace treaty; I have no weapon against those veterans of my history, so I am at the mercy of their bitter collective conscience.

That army does lob a mortar over the threshold of my awareness now and again, or it will fire off a volley of missiles at random and blast fiery craters into the intricate structures of my consciousness. Thankfully, the damage is usually isolated and serves to help me avoid further mistakes that cause individual memories to defect to this nation.

And then there is nostalgia to consider. Some joys are irretrievably lost, others are blackened around the edges by associated betrayals, or perhaps there is a whole period of

happiness that has been subsequently overshadowed by retrospective sadness. For one reason or another, there are innumerable memories of happy events that cause grief, possibly regret, made all the more incisive by its contrast with the joy I remember feeling when those experiences were taking place.

For me at least, this has the unfortunate effect of closing off huge expanses of my memory from regular review, simply with the aim of avoiding unnecessary suffering. But from time to time, a random envoy will materialize from that quarantine zone, and present a perfectly formed recollection. Out of courteous acknowledgement of the courage necessitated by such a treacherous journey, I will indulge the memory and accept the remarkable clarity and detail it brings.

In some ways, this can be more painful than the memories of the harm I have wilfully done. But I offer these recollections my warmest hospitality because they are the representatives of all the armies of moments that lie hibernating, latent, marked by the insignia of sorrow. They fought alongside the chattering crowds of memories that do not disturb me, and they were instrumental in conquering the territories where I have built my empire of self.

And perhaps more importantly, I can't help but care about them because they so closely resemble their brothers and sisters: the perfect memories which fill me with joy and which I rely on to brighten the sunlight of my daily reality.

Thank you for listening, and I hope there is a star shining brightly over your world right now.