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On Nostalgia

Each passing moment blinks past me, remaining only a hazy memory. Even the most memorable events. Their clarity gone forever, seemingly erased. Months pass; the memories dissolve into nothing. The process, whatever it is, seems unstoppable, and my memories to it helpless.

This is often told as an inevitability of life, bound to happen and useless to bemoan over. There is no way in which we will be able to keep our experiences resistant to time, leaving only the present to give us guidance. I fear the loss of my past, worried that I will forget what I have learned or the lessons I learned from my mistakes. I worry that I will be doomed to lose forever the thoughts I had distilled in the past, the knowledge I had gained. Forced by these worries, the only path would then be to

There is an unsurpassed clarity in the present, yet it inexplicably fades into an inkling of an event some time later. Even worse, the memory bugs you with the knowledge that, at time closer to the formation of the memory, you still had your associated thoughts intact, and safe within me. It really did feel like they would go nowhere, and that there would be no way in which I would lose them. Despite their initial clarity, they slowly slide away, with nothing to stop them. Details grow hazy, thoughts no longer remembered. Soon, the memory fades to an "it". Only the memorable stuff remains. Then, almost nothing persists. All is gone, but the name.

My trip to Washington, DC, in the summer of 2017 had a similar effect. While there, I visited the national mall, witnessing the representation of many spectacular feats in the vast museums. I internalized the examples of perseverance and bravery of the many astronauts, engineering, activists. Yet, a year later, when all that was left of the trip was a vague idea of the ideas I had seen, and the lessons I had internalized were long forgotten. My memory of the trip was a metaphorical Ship of Theseus to me, similar in name and foreign in every other aspect.

I still wanted to retain the "original" parts of my memory, the authentic experiences associated with the past that I found useful at a time. My corrupt, pale copy provided little satisfaction in the way of my ache to relive the trip. With little way to relieve myself of my I am driven to seek out representations of the past, despite their bias. This desire has a poisonous relationship with me, yet it is surprisingly fondly labeled nostalgia by society. The nostalgia isn't simply constrained to me, however, and is exploited through something as innocent as a science-fiction shows set in the 90's (*Stranger Things*) to deliver sinister, greedy, consumerist messages.

The fading memory of my D.C trip freaked me out. I began hurrying to save everything that was with me.

Convinced of the importance of everything I have ever done, I set out to archive all of my documents, my schoolwork and my photos, all to be stored away in the safe grasp of my external hard drive. I watched the hours tick by and my mouse move from one folder to the next, creating a clean system for some future where it would actually be used. An intense boredom had come over me, but I continued with my mechanical, unthinking actions for an overarching fear of loss.

I finished organizing my folders and backing them up in a few hours, and told my friends of what I did. The reaction was overwhelmingly negative.

Some asked how I could bear through the boredom. Others, more importantly asked "Why did you do it?" I had been expecting a confused reaction, but the last question, despite its simplicity, stuck with me.

After some self-reflection, I understood my archival had no meaning, as I would never really look back through my archives. Rather, I undertook the procedure out of a loving desire for my past, with little in the way of my excuse of wanting to retain the lessons I learned. Even as a way to preserve my memories, nostalgia had admittedly overcome me, creeping into my brain and subtly pressuring me to grasp on to everything I can call my own, and driven me to irrational extents. Rather than being an innocent fondness of the past, Nostalgia is a potent, poisonous way to subvert the process of rationality, and instead fill its place with a wrenching sense of misguided loyalty to the past.

Given the human tendency to be vaguely acquainted with their past, more youthful years, humans tend to seek out representations of their past, and are quite susceptible to being ensnared in a false, deceiving imitation. Television ads, for one, are a prime medium of this unique exploitation, commonly known as "gas-lighting", as they are able to clearly nail any roughly cohesive view of the past into the viewer's brain, whether true or not. While the recipient of the targeted nostalgia may have an ache to keep their view of the past alive in themselves, the better choice would be to stoically let go of any claim to know the past, as any other route relieve the past would surely lead to manipulation and misguided decisions. It would be better to know little than to be comforted with false premises, especially in scenarios where a demographic is being targeted, as openly rejecting a claim to know would automatically nullify the impact of the false view of the past.

This is not to say that nostalgia is utterly useless to seek out; while it is a potent weapon for manipulation and a tool to cause overriding desire, nostalgia can, when

constrained to only to the lessons that tell us about humanity, prevent us from making tragically misguided decisions that echo blatant mistakes in the past. Keeping our past with ourselves, additionally, would allow us to see our own growth, and act upon beneficially. Generally, I review my past work, which in turns improves the work that I do in the future. This forms the greatest irony of nostalgia; being content with only the little, firm lessons we do know yields more historically accurate, proper decisions than does seeking out a comprehensive view of the past.