

How to Resist A State of Forgetfulness

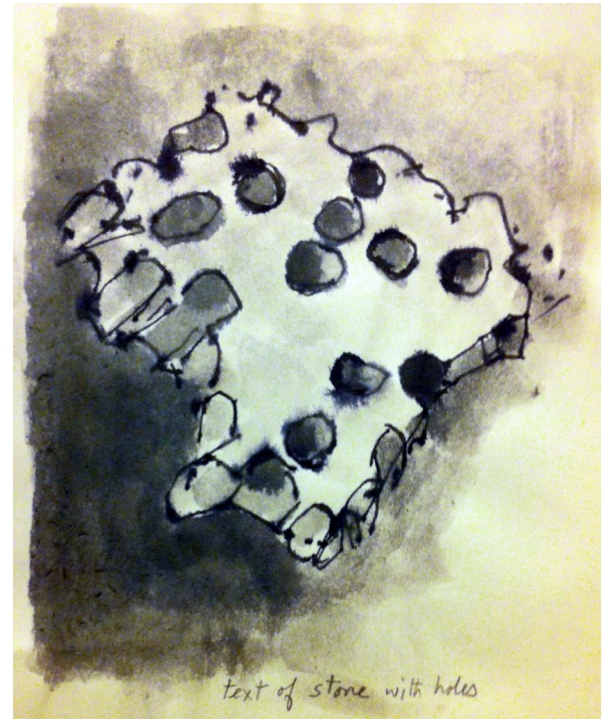


Last week Picasso's painting Les Femmes d'Alger, painted in 1955 (sixty years ago) was sold at Christies in New York for 180 million dollars. Picasso's decision to paint it was, in part, inspired by his wish to announce his support to the Algerian people in their struggle and their war, which had started the year before, against French colonialism.

Today is Ascension Day, forty days after Easter. According to the Gospels, it was the day when Christ, as witnessed by his disciples, ascended into the sky, into heaven. On the earth they were now on their own.

During the last week I've been drawing, mostly flowers, motivated by a curiosity which has little to do with either botany or aesthetics. I have been asking myself whether natural forms – a tree, a cloud, a river, a stone, a flower – can be looked at and perceived as messages. Messages – it goes without saying – which can never be verbalised, and are not particularly addressed to us. Is it possible to “read” natural appearances as texts?

For me there is nothing mystical in this exercise. It is a gestural exercise, whose aim is to respond to different rhythms and forms of energy, which I like to imagine as texts from a language that has not been given to us to read. Yet as I trace the text I physically identify with the thing I'm drawing and with the limitless, unknown mother-tongue in which it is written.



In the totalitarian global-order of financial speculative capitalism under which we are living, the media ceaselessly bombard us with information, yet this information is mostly a planned diversion, distracting our attention from what is true, essential and urgent.



Much of the information is about what was once called politics, but politics have been superseded by the global dictatorship of speculative capitalism with its traders and banking lobbies.

Politicians, of both Left and Right, continue to debate, to vote, to pass resolutions, as if this were not the case. And, as a result, their discourse refers to nothing

and is inconsequential. The words and terms they repeatedly use – such as terrorism, democracy, flexibility – have been emptied of any meaning. Their publics across the world follow their speaking heads as if they were glancing at an interminable school exercise or school class for learning Rhetoric ! Bullshit.

Another chapter of the information with which we are bombarded concentrates on the spectacular, on shocking, violent events wherever they occur across the world. Robberies, earthquakes, capsized boats, insurrections, massacres. Once shown, one spectacle is replaced by another. There are seldom patient explanations or follow-ups. They come as shocks not stories. They are reminders of the unpredictability of what can happen. They demonstrate the risk factors in life.

Add to this the linguistic practice used by the media in their presentation and description of the world. It is very close to the jargon and logic of management experts. It quantifies everything and seldom refers to substance or quality. It deals with percentages, shifts in opinion-polls, unemployment figures, growth rates, mounting debts, estimates of carbon dioxide, et cetera, et cetera. It is a voice at home with digits but not with living or suffering bodies. It does not speak of either regrets or hopes.



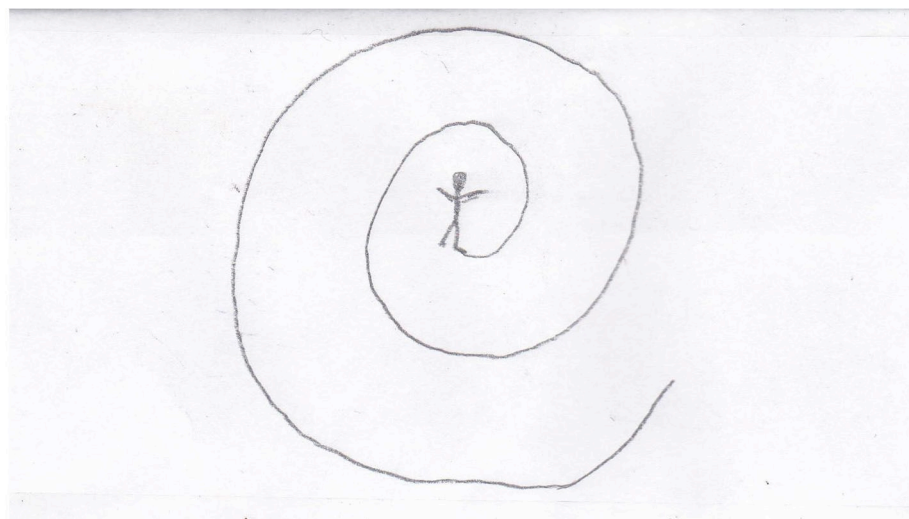
And so what is being publicly said and the way it is being said promotes a kind of civic and historic amnesia. Experience is being wiped out. The horizons of Past and Future are being blurred. We are being conditioned to live an endless and uncertain Present, reduced to being citizens in a state of Forgetfulness.

Meanwhile what is happening around us is going from bad to worse. The planet is over-heating. The wealth of the planet is being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, whilst the majority are underfed, junked-fed or starving. More and more millions of people are being forced to emigrate with the slimmest hopes of survival. Working conditions are becoming more and more inhuman.

Those who are ready to protest against, and resist, what is happening today are legion, but the political means for doing so are for the moment unclear or absent. They need time to develop. So we have to wait. But how to wait in such circumstances? How to wait in this state of Forgetfulness?



Let us recall that time, as Einstein and other physicists have explained, is not linear but circular. Our lives are not points on a line – a line which is today being amputated by the Instant Greed of the unprecedented global capitalist order, we are not points on a line; rather, we are the centres of circles.



The circles surround us with testaments addressed to us by our predecessors since the Stone Age, and by texts which are not addressed to us but which can be witnessed by us. Texts from nature, from the universe, and they remind us that symmetry co-exists with chaos, that ingenuities outflank fatalities, that what is desired is more reassuring than what is promised.

Then, sustained by what we have inherited from the past and what we witness, we will have the courage to resist and continue resisting in as yet unimaginable circumstances. We will learn how to wait in solidarity.



Just as we will continue indefinitely to praise to swear and to curse in every language we know.

John Berger (May 2015)