

Unawareness

*Unawareness is the state of not being aware of this or that—of what county you are in, of the law governing the sale of alcohol to minors, or of a rise in the price of cheese. When you are unaware you are in danger of being victimized, and yet in order to concentrate, to achieve, to organize, you **must** be partially unaware. While you are intensely aware of the class you are teaching you **cannot** be aware of your three year old son who is riding his tricycle. While you are eating cornflakes for breakfast in Iowa you **have** to be unaware of your sister in Tulsa, who is eating fried eggs.*

Examples

1 Personal unawareness

I am frequently unaware of what others think of me. I was a long time buddy of X, a colleague at my University. We traded translation projects, we talked about books, and we knew one another's families. We had a farewell lunch, when he retired and returned to his country. A couple of years later another colleague, G, retired, visited X in his country, and was surprised to hear X badmouthing me. G told me this. I asked G what X had said about me. I was genuinely mystified. G would not level with me. I wrote to X several times, to ask him if we were cool, but he never replied. Had he found out something about me that he had not known before? He is not the first person whose disaffection from me came as a total surprise.

2 Walking ballet

I think increasingly of how and where I should walk. (People around me are falling and breaking bones.) I stand erect, swing my arms, and look straight out in front of me. Yet after a half minute of this attentive posture I begin to slump. I jerk my head up again, look straight ahead at eye level for a while, and yet after a little I still get 'lost in my thoughts' and let my head bend forward. This ballet of strategies—forgetfulness followed by a sharp correction—constitutes the psychodrama of my two mile morning walk, during which I am under constant self-imposed pressure to fight unawareness. By the time I complete the walk I am more tired from the drama of self-correction than from the walk itself.