

Anamnese (Anamnesis)

by Íris Schmitt

Watching *Anamnese (Anamnesis)*, I try to remain detached and sober, but I cry the same way I cried the first time. It is not an easy film to watch, and therefore, unlike most of what is out there, it brings back a power that was lacking in the treatment of the subject. There is something surprising, sensitive and challenging about the choice of point of view in this film. The volatile, bumpy and absent report of someone who is losing cognitive ability is usually not considered. The repetitive, confused and sometimes deceitful speech of a person with dementia disturbs the self-declared 'sane' in ways that we promptly use our supposed sanity to disqualify them. For a certain notion that someone needs to remember, we take on the responsibility. Out of love and affection, but also out of the need to control and order, we assume the role of managing, recording and speaking for those who can no longer represent themselves as they used to.

The fear of loss, the difficulty of dealing with changes, the lack of control over the process and the imminent threat of the arrival of the day when we will no longer recognize each other haunt the depths of everyone who lives with victims of dementia. Tiago Lipka's film is an intense immersion that urges us to leave our safe place of self-control and begin to recognize what haunts the depths of those who experience the disease. We are so steeped in the practical, pragmatic sobriety of our own pain that we forget who matters most. We forget that whoever we are losing is losing himself first, and that is the most painful of pains. We intensely want to believe that dementia may be, at least, shielding its victims from the awareness of their own condition, that the apparent innocence of oblivion prevents them from feeling the weight of the truth.

One of the scenes of the documentary shows a picture on the wall that tells the demented that he is fine. That it's okay. That he won't move out. That no one will move out. It says he's not bothering anyone. I can't get past this image unscathed. I can't help but remember that my own grandmother was always restless too, wishing to go to another house; who had heart-breaking crying fits during ordinary activities; that, yes, many of her disordered behaviours created discomfort and that omitting this petty feeling was part of the collective pact to alleviate her suffering. We do what feels right, but we almost never ask what they prefer.

(To do) Anamnesis bothers. We remember who they were, what they did, what they liked. Their mannerisms, their catchphrases, their vitality. We can remember, they can't. We look at them and see everything: the now, the before and everything that is yet to come. We think that they don't understand any of this, that they are caught in the loop of the present. How painful would it be to assume that we were wrong, that we silenced, ignored and neglected the subject who was there while we selfishly missed what was no longer there?

Anamnese (Anamnesis) hurts by leaving no doubt that we have feelings from the beginning to the end of our lives, that we will cry at birth and at death, even if we don't understand what makes us cry. In my case, it challenged me to see that maybe my grandmother knew why she

was crying and that I didn't have the courage to ask. Maybe her pain was so big that it couldn't fit into words, or, at least, not in those normal coherent sentences, with a beginning, middle and end, that the 'sane' like to use. Anyway, maybe trusting logic, memory and the concatenation of ideas is a protective barrier for our sensitivity, a way to escape from the rubble of our soul, keeping our eyes wide open, stable and attentive to the outside, but afraid to see the sandcastles and creepy monoliths that dwell in our darkness.