

The Highlights - Conditions in Time

I want to talk about being five years old - or roughly the time that one begins to become aware of the world beyond the home, family, group, nest, or equivalent. I also want to flick back and compare a bit with the Grown Up mind and touch on some vaguely related other topics briefly. Also, this is very late-twentieth century, and mostly United States-specific.

It's around this time when the basic structures of the outside world go from random phenomena to increasingly ordered systems and events, and a budding comprehension of media, commerce and government infrastructure begin. Natural brain development coupled with the beginnings of literacy and most likely the influence of kindergarten introduce a whole new amount of 'things' into the 'real.' Meaning that into the set of 'real' things, which had included cereal, bedrooms, walls, possibly pets, toys, TV, and bath time, is now added a solid concept of the postal service, the mailman, that letters go in envelopes and travel. I'm broadly generalizing. Coffee tables exist. They are named after coffee, a mysterious circumstance in and of itself. Here I will begin to use examples specific to my own memory of being five, some of which may resonate with others born in the mid 1970s, but will most likely bore those who were not. If you glaze over at the examples, please try to supply some of relevance to you.

The coffee table is made of wood and two squares of smoked glass. Cars drive on roads and highways. Or freeways. Or tollways. The dogs are fed in bowls on the ground. People eat at the table. Adults listen to music heavy with saxophone. Fruits come from trees. Summertime involves hot weather, swimming, running through sprinklers. One must not sleep in a bathing suit. Seasons happen every year in a regular fashion. Dinner happens at X time of the evening. If you swim after eating you will get a cramp and drown. Your kindergarten classroom always smells like _____. Cartoons come on Saturday mornings. French toast is a delicious breakfast for the weekends. Adults devote much emotional fascination to dry bits of paper known as 'bills.' Kitchens are to be painted mauve. Mauve is a superior color to avocado.

My point is that all bits of information of how the world works are weighted equally, as you do not have the knowledge of what is fleeting fashion, what is cultural institution, what is meteorological certainty. Some of these things will soon pass and some will continue into your adulthood and beyond. But my concern here is to revel in the magic of this state of non-differentiation.

Personally, I thought that someday the inscrutable world of adult motivations and smells would be comprehensible along with the emotional value of Christopher Cross, dense chocolate wood colored interiors, walls lined with books, mind bogglingly large wicker chairs with backs like cobras, hanging wicker bird cage chairs for humans, high fire ceramic

wares with grotesque carved faces...the mysterious meaning of wooden beads embedded in macramé. Some day my mind and fingers would be nimble enough to create my own macramé, because it is hanging spider plants that are a fundament of a home.

Although I would come to understand bills, cars, and voting, so many of the others would obviously pass away. Some gaining in their realness, as others would diminish but remain (sugar cereal perhaps). Again, I don't mean to aim at sentimentality, rather to invoke the salient details of a shifting reality. And of course it shifts still, but I'm not interested in - what's the word for vaguely self-righteous,

I-will-help-you-see-the-light-and-the-mystical-reality-of-existence-type - sermonizing. Does my seven-year-old cousin realize that American Idol is not a *fundamental condition* of TV but is in fact a moment beginning and ending a few years twixt?

Of course, there would be loads of very important additional 'outside world' reality shifts if one were raised in an economy that went through wild inflation, or a government coup. Or even something like a shift in currency to the Euro.

Back to the domestic: A few important reality-shift snapshots from later in childhood/early adulthood: Gold is the most precious metal. It is used as a monetary and metaphoric standard of value and quality, wealth and luxury, and endurance. But then at some point I learn that platinum, in all these counts, is EVEN MORE SO. (This is from the Gold-Platinum game, about relative values, created by my friend David Rudolph.) The black widow spider is the ultimate poison household spider of North America, danger to the young and old. Later I learn that even more deadly is the brown recluse spider, danger to all. Akin to this is the relation of CEO to chairman of the board, principal to superintendent of schools, magnitude of the Mississippi River to magnitude of the Amazon, etc...always a deeper or more powerful level of reality to be found just beyond the current one.

And to the frustration of those trying to put together a concept of the twentieth-century looked like before their own birth...Happy Days WAS NOT ACTUALLY FILMED IN THE FIFTIES.

Anyhow, there is no conclusion to be reached here. Rather an invitation to muse over some idea threads, leading you whichever way you please.