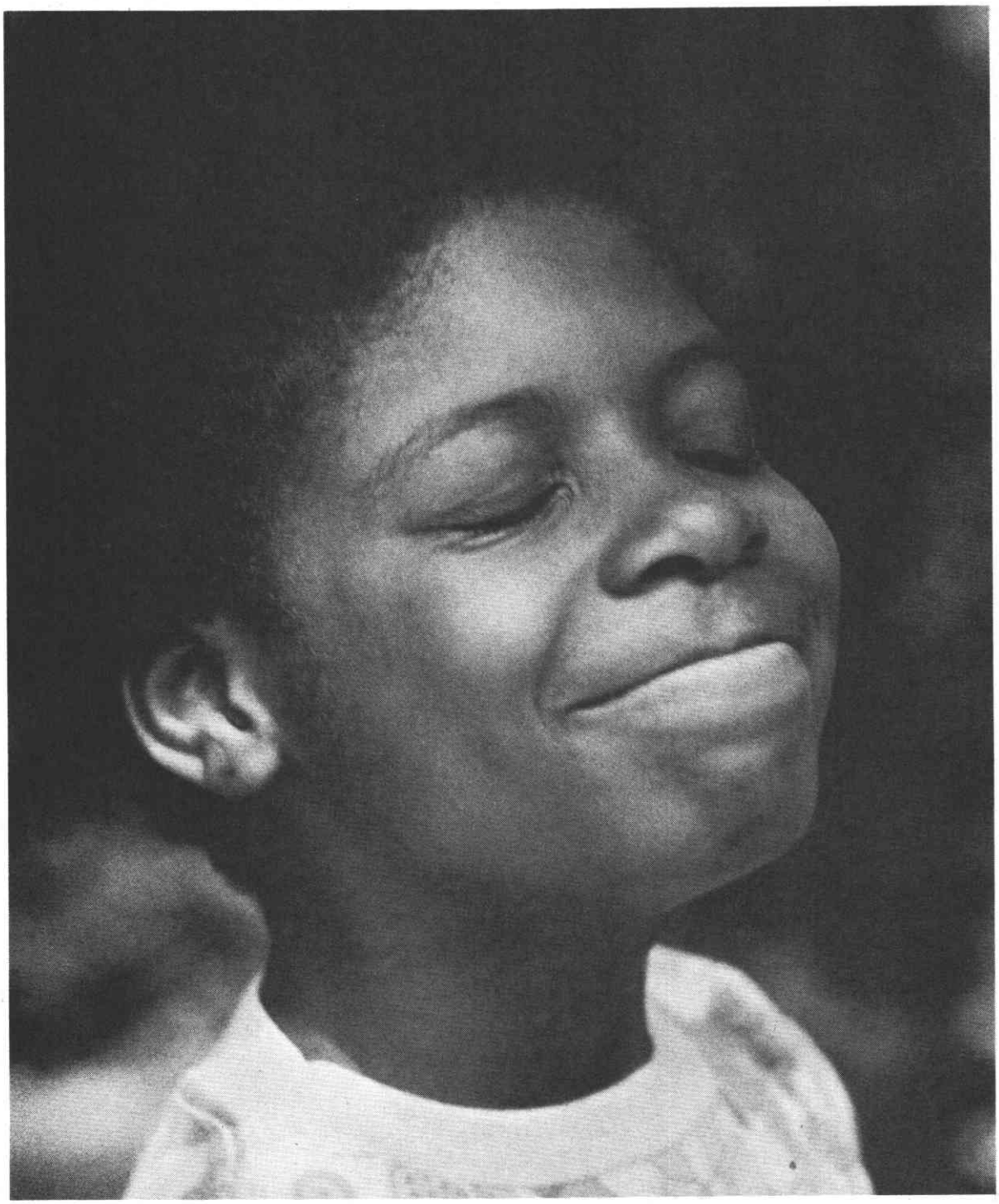

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"Experience depends on sensory equipment. A child is finely equipped: his senses are sharp, undulled by age"
Yi-Fu Tuan

Experience and Appreciation

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ABSTRACT. A young child has keen senses, but his world is not thereby more filled with sensory values than that of an adult. To enjoy the physical environment fully the mere capacity to experience stimuli is not enough; it must be complemented by appreciation, which is an intellectual activity. A young child's experiences of nature are often more intense than those of an adult. Among the reasons for this are synesthesia and the child's ability to isolate experience from its distracting social, theoretical, and practical contexts. However, the isolation also causes impoverishment. Remembrance, which broadens the context, is an important component of appreciation. In remembered pleasure the adult is far richer than the child.

IN "TINTERN ABBEY", Wordsworth wistfully expressed his lost childhood in these famous lines::

> For nature then
> (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
> And their glad animal movements all gone by)
> To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.

The idea is that to the child nature is a feeling and an appetite. Once we reach the age of discernment thought places a veil, as it were, between nature and ourselves. Direct experience is edged aside by quiet appreciation. There is obvious truth in this belief. I should like to explore it further.

What is experience? We don't normally say of plants that they have experience. We do sometimes say of animals—particularly the higher animals—that they have experience. It is a term, however, used primarily of human beings. This suggests that experience is more than the passive registering of environmental stimuli. It is also an activity; an exploration of the environment; an attempt to order impressions. Seeing, we know, is a discriminating and creative act. But, to perhaps a lesser degree, this is also true of the more passive senses of touch and smell. We accept the term "visual thinking" *(Arnheim 1969).* Touch and smell are also permeated by thought, in the sense that these are discriminating activities capable of articulating tactile and olfactory worlds. We say of a cloth-feeler that he has an educated touch, and of a perfumer that he has an educated nose. The intelligence of touch may precede visual intelligence and the forming of concepts with the help of words. An infant may be aware of a difference between animate and inanimate objects through his sense of touch, but he will not know the difference by looking, or conceptually, till much later.

Experience depends on sensory equipment. A child is finely equipped: his senses are sharp, undulled by age. But the ability to make use of his senses is limited. Consider smell and the olfactory world: A child lives close to the sources of smell. When he walks along fruit stands or in a hay field he is flooded by odoriferous molecules that do not so readily reach the skyscraping adult. Does this mean that the child is aware of—and can appreciate—a greater range of odors than the adult? Isn't the ability to

smell also a matter of education? We do know that children have odor preferences that differ significantly from those of their elders. According to Moncrieff *(1966)*, children "are much less favourably impressed by flower scents, much more by fruity flavors." They show "a remarkable tolerance for substances with a fecal note in their odour; they do not like these substances but they are more or less indifferent to them, whereas the adults actively dislike them."

Why do adults like flower fragrances? Flower fragrance doesn't play any obvious role in biological survival. The child's preference for fruit odor is easier to understand. The ability to appreciate flower fragrances and make fine discriminations among them exhibits the strong human desire to extend the known world, whether the additional knowledge is useful or not. Children have a rather high tolerance for odors of decay; animals are even more tolerant. Even with their highly sensitive noses, animals seem undisturbed by the stench of putrefaction: trappers often smear traps for carnivores with a concoction of rotten fish in water left long in the sun. Herbivores show no particular reaction to foul but nonsignificant smell. Susanne Langer *(1972)* suggests that animals may tolerate charnel odors because for them such odors apparently do not have the *memento mori* associations that they often do for adult human beings. Classifying certain odors as bad is thus in part an intellectual judgment, beyond the ability of the young child despite his sensitive nose.

Superficially, experience and appreciation have quite different meanings. Examined more closely, they show large areas of overlap. Appreciation depends on experience, but experience itself is seldom naive; even the so-called passive senses of touch, taste, and smell have in them elements of appreciation. How does the child's world differ from that of the adult from the standpoint of experience and appreciation?

A sophisticated adult distinguishes a wide range of fragrances in his foods, wines, and cigars. These subtleties pass over the child because he has not yet learned to discriminate; he has yet to learn the enlarged world of finely graded sensations. On the other hand, this very lack of discrimination contributes to an inchoate richness in the child's world. The child benefits more from synesthesia than the adult. An adult frequently confuses taste with smell, but he easily distinguishes among the senses of hearing, seeing, and touch. This power to discriminate entails both a loss and a gain. The gain is subtlety. The loss is a certain inchoate richness. An adult speaks solemnly and a child punctures the solemnity with the remark, "What a crumbly, yellow voice you have." What the grown-up takes to be the child's nonsensical prattle may in fact be the child's report of his experience. Actually, I have a confession to make. The example just given of synesthesia does not come from a child but from the famous mnemonist, Shereshevskii, whom A.R. Luria *(1968)* described. Shereshevskii, however, is like a child is that he has retained the child's vividness of images and the child's tendency to confound one sensation with another.

It is difficult for an adult to envision the child's world. To Ernest Schachtel *(1959)* the difficulty lies in the fact that grown-ups structure their impressions far more elaborately than, and in different ways from, children. We have forgotten how our sensory responses to the world are biased by a culture's concepts that we have acquired in the process of maturation. In an advanced society, for example, the distinction between "natural" and "artificial" is often made. Is the distinction universally recognized? We are not sure. Children, at least, show little awareness of it. Piaget *(1969)* believes that to the small child Lake Geneva is as much an artifact as the city of Geneva. A small child can perhaps use the words "scenery" and "landscape," but they cannot mean the same thing to the child as to the adult. "Scenery" and "landscape" are rich and value-laden concepts which the child has yet to acquire. On an emotional level, for example, adults are easily able to see moods in a scene. A scene is gloomy, sad, or happy. The child is often puzzled by this kind of response. How can a scene without people be either happy or sad? Everyone knows how highly imaginative the child can be when he plays: a stick is a horse and an overturned chair is a fortress. Yet he can be very matter-of-fact, like a scientist, when he is asked to evaluate the aesthetics of nature *(Honkavaara 1961)*.

In childhood anything can happen. The world is full of miracles because there is no physical relationship between what a child does and what he receives in the way of toys, food, and

care. Wash one's hands and food automatically follows; say please and toys pop out of an inaccessible drawer. Because the child's world is so full of miracles, the word "miracle" can have no precise sense for him. Just as nature is not distinguished from artifice, so the natural is not distinguished from the supernatural *(Chartier 1974)*.

To the small child events and objects seem vivid and dramatic because their utilitarian, social, or scientific contexts are not perceived. Adults respond to objects in the context of use; they are simply "at hand." When an everyday use object is removed from its normal setting and put on a pedestal as in a museum it becomes vivid and almost qualifies for art. The child sees many things—commonplace to adults—as though they are framed or on a pedestal. Garbage collecting is not glamorous when perceived in its social context; but the child doesn't recognize the social context, only the excitement of the activity itself. This conceptual limitation is his innocence and it pays in many delights. Robert Coles *(1972)* reports a garbage collector as saying:

> You know, when kids are 6 or 7, they'll tell you they want to be garbage collectors. They're all excited because of the big truck and the big pails we have. They come and watch you and ask you questions and tell you that it won't be long before they're on with you, working up there on that truck. They think it's great, standing there on top of that garbage, pushing it and shoveling it. I've heard the same thing from white kids and colored kids, so long as they're only 5 or 6 or 7. But then the white kids get smart.

The child's time frame is narrow. When an adult contemplates a sweeping view he perceives time as well as space. The converging line of trees and the distant horizon suggest the future—or, on the contrary, remote objects, such as a church spire or a ruin, may suggest the distant past. This temporal dimension of landscape is not a part of the child's experience. The city, Lewis Mumford once said, is time made visible. A child, however, cannot perceive time in the city: ancient buildings are essentially dark, rather dirty, and perhaps haunted. Only when the child reaches the age of 8 to 10 does the idea of antiquity in buildings appear, and along with this awareness a sentiment for old things, the notion that old things should be preserved for what they tell of the past *(Jahoda 1961)*.

What are the happy experiences of childhood that adults look back upon with such yearning? The happy experiences of a child are, of course, enormously varied. Let me give three examples, which differ from each other in kind and in intensity, and then comment on them. The first is the most intense, and it is recalled by the distinguished physician Percival Bailey *(1967)*.

> I remember going fishing. I cannot have been more than 4 years old at the time. The whole setting is still a vivid picture in my mind—the creek which ran across my grandfather's farm, the big willow tree, my mother and my grandfather, who had prepared the hook and line and given the pole to me to hold. When the cork bobbed, I pulled as I had been told, and out came a little sliver of silver which danced in the sunshine at the end of the line. I ran around like one possessed, shrieking in a delirium of joy, and, for a long time, would allow no one to touch my treasure.
>
> I have no recollection of the rest of the day, but never since have I ever experienced such an undiluted ecstasy. Soon afterward we moved away, and I have never developed a liking for fishing. My favorite treatise on the art is not *The Compleat Angler* but a more modern one entitled *To Hell with Fishing!* Can it be possible that there is a subconscious wish to protect this ancient memory? At any rate, on that day I was completely happy, for I was too young to realize the tragic destiny of mankind, and no one to whom that realization has come can ever be completely happy again.

The second example is the recall of the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis *(1966)*. He was 4 years old and played with a girl a year younger. Kazantzakis reported:

> She rose then, took me by the hand, and brought me inside. Her mother was away the entire morning; she hired out as a charwoman. Without losing a moment, we took off our socks, lay down on our backs, and glued our bare soles together. We did not breathe a word. Closing my eyes, I felt Emine's warmth pass from her soles to mine, then ascend little by little to my knees, belly, breast, and fill me entirely. The delight I experienced was so profound that I thought I would faint... Even now, 70 years later, I close my eyes and feel Emine's warmth rise from my soles and branch out through my entire body, my entire soul.

The third example is not autobiographical. It is A.A. Milne's *(1925)* idea of the happy child:

> John had
> Great big
> Waterproof
> Boots on;
> John had a
> Great big
> Waterproof
> Hat;
> John had a
> Great big
> Waterproof
> Mackintosh—
> and that
> (said John)
> is
> that.

As we look at these examples it seems to me clear that such experiences of joy and happiness are far from being unique to the small child. The occasions that cause them may indeed change. A small child eating cake will not comprehend that as an adult he will find sex a greater pleasure. Habit dulls one's appetite and greater stimulus must be sought for the same kind of sensory reward. A small boy goes into ecstasy over a little sliver of a fish; the adult angler requires a bigger catch. A great big waterproof hat soon loses its magic, but adults seem to get no less satisfaction out of new toys and possessions than a child. The child does enjoy great advantages over the adult: he comes to his experience fresh. This does not only mean that every experience for him is likely to be new; it also means that the child comes to his experience out of context—out of the context of work, for instance. To the adult, pleasure requires work—that is preparation. A fishing trip is something that has to be planned, perhaps weeks ahead. The fisherman has to make sure that there is enough gas in the car and that the beer bottles in the trunk will not break as the car runs over the washboard road. The child has no such worries. He comes to the river miraculously. Grandfather prepares the hook for young Percival Bailey and the fishing rod is miraculously in his hands: there remains for him only the pure experience of fishing.

Another advantage that the child enjoys over the adult is his lack of social awareness. He is not aware that places have social meaning and can serve as status symbols. The local water hole and stream offer all kinds of opportunities for fun and the fun is not tainted by an awareness of social prestige or its lack *(Smith 1973)*. By contrast, the adult's motivation for visiting one place rather than another is seldom pure. Places are not only to be seen, but they are also to be seen in. It is curious how the child does not take to the camera. He doesn't care to stand still and pose for it, nor does he care to use a camera. The camera is very much a toy for adults, and perhaps one may go so far as to say that it is essentially a toy of middle-class and middle-aged adults. As Susan Sontag *(1973)* has reminded us, an early use of the camera was to make portraits of rather stuffy-looking people and, of course, to take wedding pictures. The cameraman is almost as necessary as the minister at a wedding. The wedding picture is a social document; it legitimizes an occasion. Can anyone imagine visiting the Grand Canyon without a camera? To the adult, it is as though an environmental experience is not real unless it is documented. The documents—the pictures taken—can then be presented to friends for their admiration. A child does not live exclusively in the visual world of the camera. He rarely pauses to admire a panoramic view. He prefers the accessible and the immediate, which he explores in action and through the sense of touch. The older child, like an adult, seeks for a social confirmation of his experience. But since his world is not so much visual and aesthetic as packed with action, the child *tells* his experience and boasts of his adventures. He has little use for static pictures.

What advantages does the adult enjoy over the child? A key word is appreciation. Experience, we have seen, is informed by thought. Appreciation is even more an intellectual activity. Growing older often means substituting appreciation for direct sensory pleasure. Wordsworth seems to have viewed the change with regret. Many adults mourn for their lost childhood. A hungry child wolfs down a hamburger; it is a passion, whereas the adult has to make do with whiffing the perfume of a rare wine. A child may be fascinated by small objects—a daisy, for instance. The adult? When Wordsworth was 64 years old and felt a dimming of his poetic vision, he wrote the following lines in a child's album in praise of service:

> Small service is true service while it lasts:
> Of humblest Friends, bright Creature! scorn not one:
> The Daisy, by the shadow that it casts,
> Protects the lingering dew-drop from the sun.

The child, who knows the daisy and the sun, will not appreciate the poem. To appreciate the poem and the experience it so deftly captures, one needs to have sensed the charm of the daisy and the warmth of the sun, but one needs far more: the poem's force rests on the further knowledge of the utmost contrast between the omnipotent and eternal sun on the one hand, and the ephemeral flower on the other. We do indeed recognize the wonder of the daisy as a child, but to know the flower in all its richness and poignancy we may have to wait until we are 64 years old.

Remembrance is an important component of appreciation. We tend to think of remembrance as warmed-over experience, forgetting that it

can itself be an exquisite pleasure. In remembered pleasure the adult is far richer than the child. Let a wise *hross* of the planet Mars or Malacandra explain the role of memory in happiness. In C. S. Lewis's *(1965)* novel, the human hero Ransom wants to know why a *hross,* native of Malacandra, finds no compulsion to repeat a delightful experience. On earth man wants to have his pleasure again and again like a greedy child; he is not content with mere remembrance. The *hross* says:

> A pleasure is full grown only when it is remembered. You are speaking, *Hman,* as if the pleasure were one thing and the memory another. It is all one thing... What you can remember is the last part of the pleasure, as the *crah* is the last part of a poem. When you and I met, the meeting was over very shortly, it was nothing. Now it is growing into something as we remember it. But still we know very little about it. What it will be when I remember it as I lie down to die, what it makes in me all my days till then—that is the real meeting. The other is only the beginning of it. You say you have poets in your world. Do they not teach you this?

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