

What do you think about when you think about nothing?

When asked ‘*where do you get your ideas from?*’, my answer had frequently been something along the lines of: childhood memories, things people tell me, overheard things, observed things, funny things, sad things, things that pop into my head... But when I gave myself space to consider my answer fully, it struck me that I was wrong: these are just elements that contribute to the genesis of an idea. A memory is not an idea. A sad happening is not an idea. Ideas begin to form when these particles collide, and I begin to see pattern or meaning in the connections, something whole and original. A new thing. A complete idea.

The process can be slow and uncertain. It needs time and mental space. Time simply to stare out of the window; to muse; to daydream; to be bored or frustrated; to be curious, to fail to find meaning, to embrace happenstance. For me, it is not linear and cannot be forced.

It seems to me that that creative process is open to all. I don’t believe in some magical creative gift, the exclusive possession of a few, nor need it concern “big” or sophisticated ideas. On the contrary, creativity may depend upon the recognition that our own thoughts and ideas are as valid as anyone else’s; something which we knew as children, and which we were taught to unlearn. Our confidence in our ability to create is thus often undermined in our early lives, when we tend to believe what we are told.

The experiences of our early years are in the bones of us. We grow *with* our experiences, remembered or not. We don’t become adult and simply shed our child-self as soon as we reach a particular age. Those childhood experiences are part of who we are and they do not have *less* impact because we were little when they occurred, quite the contrary.

As a child I had favourite artists - Bonnard, Matisse, Braque, Vuillard - just like any adult might. Remembering this reminds me that, whilst of course we need stories and art created specifically for children, they will respond to all forms of artistic expression. Good art is for everyone: adults reading children’s literature, watching drama created for children, listening to music with youth at its heart.

There is a common, and lazy, assumption that creating work with children in mind is easier or less demanding, and that a writer or artist would approach it with a lesser degree of seriousness or sincerity than when creating for an adult audience.

I do not believe that to be true. One might as well suggest that shorter books hold less meaning than longer ones, or large paintings are better than small. Nevertheless, the view prevails, something which leads one to wonder: what unhappy reality does its existence reveal about the way many view our children, and our child selves?