

I have consumed an unprecedented amount of lost memories over the past few months. Finding old MiniDV tapes and streaming over eight hours of my childhood didn't make the memories come flooding back, though. It showed me beautifully mundane moments in a past life of mine—ones that I could now freeze, rewind, and analyze under a microscope. It showed me my life as this separate thing. A lot of the events of the videos were only loosely familiar to me. Watching a three-foot tall blonde child giggle at his brother, bark requests at his mother, and smile for the camera forced me to connect who I am now to that child then.

My instinct in making that connection was to feel those memories again, to search my mind for those moments and re-experience their events in a mind space. But that wasn't possible. As a three-year-old, I wasn't committing much to memory. There's no hard drive in my head with a folder named "Christmas 2004". Watching digital memories only evoked a feeling of overwhelming comfort and serenity, but no specific time or place.

This feeling was addictive and, surprisingly, somewhat familiar to my adult life in certain ways. I would play videos of my younger brother all day, watching his infant self be adorable, watching the two of us play and try to say words we'd only heard without connecting their meanings yet. My heart grew warmer with each rewatch. The deeper into the past, the easier it was to identify the strange and satisfying affect it produced. I'm going to try to define that here.

The way I loved people in the immediate surroundings of my toddlerhood was deeper than the unconditional. Being so little, I accepted every stimulus as truth. My mom and brother accounted for a majority of that stimuli, so their existence was an ever present truth—air to breathe. For me, unconditional love is not loving something "no matter what" or "even if they suck sometimes," it's love that you can't deny yourself because it's irrefutably a part of you. I believe that when you're wholly surrounded by that kind of love, the gates open to Playland.

I wanted to start by saying that Playland is characterized by its lack of stakes, but that wouldn't be right. It makes more sense to say it exists pre-stakes. Loss cannot be realized in Playland. When I was a toddler I had not lost anything yet, or if I had it had been a toy left on a trip or a grain of corn fallen off the table. Even if I cried about losing something, my tears were rewarded with hugs and coos. This is an important baseline for Playland.

It's worth mentioning though that Playland is not reserved for children. I imagine a parent enters Playland pretty often without realizing. I know that in situations where I'm playing with kids, it's easy to join the childish trance in order to keep up with the activity. I also often end up in Playland while on drugs, and I think most adults do too. The trance-like intensity of the present moment while high, drunk, or playing soccer with my little cousins is another essential element of Playland.

Serenity is necessary, too. It's not that I'm not in Playland unless my heart rate is low, but I know I'm there when I can briefly stop whatever activity has led me there and be struck with the sense that all is well and it could never be otherwise. The sense that where I am is all there is. Or, dare I say, that this moment is heaven. I don't know how to describe heaven without sounding corny or religious. Maybe I will type about it some other time. But I know I have been there in the best moments of my life and that it overlaps into Playland.

And finally, fun! What's play without a little fun? Fun is not a word I can really pin down—even Spongebob had to split it into three categories—but you know it when you feel it. It's a word that can describe many different activities and be accurate and specific to each one. I remember my first grade teacher pulling her hair out trying to get us to describe things as anything other than 'fun' in our journal writing assignments. *Yesterday, I went to the store with my mom. It was fun. Then I had a play date with Maggie and Jeff and we had fun. We played Mario Kart and it is a fun game.* I believe 'fun' is a child's version of 'sublime': an indefinite and intense feeling of love and respect for your world and your place in it, but with the added adrenaline of activity. Something I undoubtedly feel in Playland.

So in there there's fun, there's a serene sense of singleness, there's focus and full consciousness, and there are no stakes. These things come together and I am somewhere else—wholly in my body's moment and a part of the body of the world, connected to the mind of others and united in an unquestionable intention. I have been there in Playland as a small child many times and I have been there as an adult too. Being more grown now, I oftentimes have an aversion and embarrassment to being there. But once I'm there I don't want to leave—and as soon as I have that thought, I'm already gone.