

Moving

By Troy Carlyle

“For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.”

-- James Baldwin

Touch, sight, smell, taste, hearing... When we rattle off the list of our five senses, we rarely stop to think that the list isn't really true – at least not all of it. Sure, we can see, smell, taste and hear, but “touch” is an action, not a sense.

“What?” You say, “This is ludicrous! Of course there's a sense of touch!”

But I beg to differ. In support of my argument, I suggest you touch something, and then see if you can feel what you are touching. Of course, you feel the change from before and after you started touching an object, but leave your finger on the object a while, and the sensation vanishes. As an experiment, you might place one finger on sandpaper and another on a marble surface. Soon, neither finger can decipher what it's touching, or whether it is touching anything at all!

We confuse the idea of “touching” with the idea of “rubbing.” Those same fingers, momentarily confounded by their stillness, quickly remember what they are touching when moved slightly. Grainy, rough – ah yes, sandpaper. Smooth, cool – ah yes, that's the marble.

I make the point because it applies to much that we sense, and because we have confused “touch” with “rubbing.” We have confused the snapshot with the movie. We have confused the non-changing moment, which is the false construct, with the always-changing eternity, which is the truth.

People tend to prefer the snapshot, because it is easier to understand. We see the ocean, the sky, the clouds, the pier. And we can assume it has always been so and that it will always be so. Staring at the photograph, we can assume



that it has always been sunny here, that the night never falls. We do not see in this photograph the beginning of time, when the planet was formed, or the storms, or the construction of the pier. We do not see the pier's eventual withering away, or the gradual evaporation of the sea or the distant death of our solar system. We do not see the truth, which is the fact that the pier is but a temporary figment of our collective imagination. It exists but for a moment, and then is gone.

By itself, this revelation may seem hard enough to swallow... but there's more! It is not the image we experience, but rather the *change* in the image. If I look at a tree, I may see a jumble of leaves – but add the slightest motion, and the image becomes three dimensional. I can suddenly see that some leaves are behind others, that there is a gentle breeze. I begin to understand what the tree is about, and why it can't be described by a single image, or felt by a single touch. If I watch long enough, I can observe this tree's entire life cycle. You see, the *tree* occurs over time and involves change. Any instantaneous sample can do little more than hint at the reality of the tree.



Similarly, human intimacy is not about touch, but rather the *change* in touch... the movement of a hand over a shoulder, for example; the longing to touch or the act of beginning to touch, rather than the touch itself, which has no feeling whatsoever. Touch is an illusion... a photograph that without motion has no depth or feeling, no past and no future.

Likewise beauty, which cannot be captured but only alluded to. It has been said that a rose's beauty exists in the fact of its impermanence – that it is beautiful because it is fragile and temporary. In other words, because it will soon die. Our own youth may be said to be beautiful for the same reason – not because it fits any particular aesthetic criterion, not because it can be captured in a photograph, but rather because it is delicate and impermanent. If this is true, then beauty cannot live in a moment, but only in the context of passing and change.

The mistake, though simply stated, has profound and disastrous consequences for our collective psyche. The aged Hollywood starlet, trapped in that moment of her youth when she was most fetching, feels her entire life should have been captured in that one youthful photograph, that instant from her past. Now, she feels robbed of her true essence, the illusion of eternal youth. Ironically, she has lost in the process her ability to live. She becomes the pup from Aesop's fables who sees the reflection of its bone in the water and reaches for it, losing both bones in the process.

In our case, the second lost bone is the illusion of youth, or happiness, based on our impression of a single image sampled from the past – an image which was never true, anyway. The first bone was the opportunity to live, which we have thrown away, chasing after the illusion of the second bone, which was only ever a reflection to begin with.

When I look around me, I see a world nervous about losing an image of itself. Rather than realizing that change is the source of our perception, of life itself, we run from it in fear. We cry out to God that “evolution is impossible,” even as we evolve, because it is all change. We are made of the stuff. As surely as we are made of atoms, we are made of change.

Perhaps that's why free countries are destined to go through cycles of oppression. Perhaps we collectively grow bored with freedom, and decide to try "this other way" for a while. In any case, I'm convinced the theory holds up at every level, from the tiniest atomic particle through the biggest galaxy... everything changes, everything is forever in flux. We can complain about it or refuse to accept it as much as we like, but there never was any such thing as "stasis," no "status quo," no "good ole days" to return to, because even the good old days were changing by the minute.

Nor is this a bad thing. Much like the sense of touch, our existence loses all feeling the moment it stops moving. We need the constant change in order to understand or see. The moment of joy felt when I stop to smell a flower is only joyous in the context that I was not smelling the flower before or after. Similarly, the only reason loss is painful is because I have something to compare it to; a "before" to weigh against my "after."

Still, we rail against change, as if we can stop it. How much pain and suffering do we inflict on ourselves by trying to deny change – the energy we waste ineffectively reaching backwards through time trying to grasp the fleeting shadow of our idea of youth or happiness or power? How much pain and suffering of others is unnecessarily brought about by people vainly trying to maintain an old snapshot they have of themselves wielding power or wealth? The fight against civil rights is such a battle against the inevitable loss of power over certain classes of people. Men didn't want to give up their power over women; whites didn't want to give up their control over blacks; straights still don't want to relinquish the control they have over gays... none of it is anything more than a play for power... an attempt to recapture a false snapshot of stillness in an ever-changing world. So they lose both bones, which are the unreal illusion they are chasing and the opportunity to live freely now that has been squandered.



What else is the fight against gay marriage, but the struggle to recapture the snapshot of control by people who long to return to an unchanging past that never really existed anyway? Like the pier in the ocean that we see in a photograph and falsely believe it has always been and will always be.

Go ahead and believe in touch, if you want to. For me, I believe in rubbing. I believe in feeling and moving and change and yes... evolution, because these are the only things that have ever been real. All else is mythology. All else is illusion.