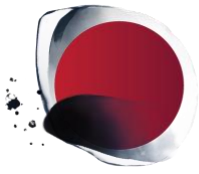




## Deep Travel



It was the near end of a global force.



## Oct. 26, 2010 Deep Travel<sup>1</sup>

“Although I was only leaving the house for a few minutes and only to run a few errands (mail a couple of bills; pick up an iced coffee at the local bagel shop), and although it was a perfectly ordinary day, like hundreds of others that unfold in any year, year after year, something was no longer the same. Before the door had even closed behind me, the familiar world outside immediately seemed — unexplored. That comes closest to describing the unexpected sensation that had arrived. “Fresh” and “new” were part of it,<sup>2</sup> but only a part, even though there were undoubtedly now some things present that hadn't ever previously appeared on my block, such as the particular play of light on the buildings across the street, and the array of zigzaggy clouds in the sky overhead, and the patterns formed by the various groups of people walking by.

But it was the familiar objects, the ones that were still what they had always been, that seemed the most transformed. It wasn't as if they had changed shape or color, but they now seemed charged with purpose, beckoning, calling out, and almost glowing or shimmering, with each detail etched in the sharpest kind of focus. Each thing I looked at seemed now to have a story curled inside it, and to represent something that many people from many places and times had thought about over long periods with great care and deliberation and a kind of intelligence that takes generations to accumulate and then get sifted through and refined and pared down. The corner mailbox, for instance. I live in Greenwich Village, in New York City — have done so for most of my life — and the corner mailbox has been there for as long as I can remember.

Battered, blue, durable, unprepossessing — already obsolete some might say. Square on the bottom with a rounded top and a squeaky, pull-down handle that needs a certain decisiveness to open and close, it was something I've often used but had never at any time given the kind of close examination that it in fact — what? needed; deserved;

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<sup>2</sup> “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lives our growth and our freedom.” Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* Sanford, Carol. *The Regenerative Business* (p. 9). Quercus. Kindle Edition.



wanted? Wanted — that seemed as close to it as anything. I was at the moment wide-awake in a way that reached out in all directions. Awareness and attention had been intensified, reorganized, redeployed, and I was abruptly eager to know more.<sup>3</sup>

That was one thing. Yet, inanimate as it remained, it seemed in this same moment almost as if the mailbox, too, were reaching out in my direction, that it [they or the situation]...was broadcasting on a wavelength I wasn't normally tuned to, and that when I listened as well as looked, if that was the right way of putting it, let me understand that it was as eager as I was, and pleased to have its role and purpose and its previously overlooked impressiveness better known and securely remembered. <sup>4</sup>But there was more than one role or function involved, as I could already make out. On the one hand, it was just a few cubic feet of public space set aside and protected — from the elements; from any marauders — so that outgoing mail could accumulate for several hours. On the other hand, it was the near end of a global force, an energy stream in constant motion and powered by millions of workers in all countries that can redistribute envelopes and packages to any spot in the world. Then, too, it was also a place of irrevocability, because once it had received something for transmittal, there was no getting that thing back.

Nor was the mailbox alone in the revelations that were being made available. Everywhere I looked were objects that, as I could start to see, played a part in sustaining or enriching the life of the area — the bright green awning over the bagel shop, for instance. When had it first occurred to people that they could move shadows around without the use of clouds or hills or trees, and could extend shade beyond the edge of a building and out over part of a street? The small, red, two-headed "siamese standpipe" next to the tall building on the nearby corner, and the round wooden bin up on that building's roof with a conical hat — in a modern city like New York, no building could stand more than six stories high without these odd devices. The standpipes keep the buildings safe from fires; they're linked to a network of other pipes in a building and when they're connected to hydrants by a Fire Department pumper, it's then possible to bring a high-pressure stream of water to any floor. The rooftop water tanks, by contrast, make tall buildings habitable by furnishing them with running water. Fresh water that reaches New York by running through

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<sup>3</sup> Reference to *Present Company*. This is a good description of the state achieved right after crossing the threshold from Induction to Awareness.

<sup>4</sup> That which we are aware of is also aware of us.

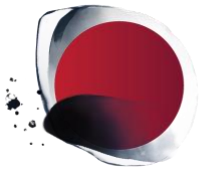


aqueducts that stretch toward the city from the Catskill Mountains will rise to about the sixth floor without any assistance, but that water has to be pumped to tanks on top of all taller buildings to provide sufficient pressure for water to flow to their upper floors.

I could go on; there were so many things to notice, so many explorations and side trips that could now be undertaken. Because of my fascination, a ten-minute trip to the bagel shop seemed, once I got home with the iced coffee I'd gone out for, to have lasted far longer, and I felt as though I had come home enriched and refreshed and in some small way slightly better equipped for my next trip outside. I had also arrived with food for thought that, as it turned out, I was still digesting days later.

But the most extraordinary part of this little trip, as I can now see, was that nothing extraordinary had happened. Nothing beyond our reach, at least, and nothing at all magical, if "magical" means either something that's just imaginary or something that at bottom is no more than a trick or a deception. Having since that day examined many such...[the minds had simply]... "changeover" trips, my own and those of both renowned and of anonymous travelers, taking a look at big trips and little ones, at journeys to nearby places and to faraway, exotic destinations, I've come to understand that the only difference between such greatly rewarding trips and the more conventional ones that get you there and bring you back and nothing much more is that, during the memorable trips, people somewhere along the way enter a different part of their own minds, and begin to make use of an awareness that has its own range of interests and concerns and methods. And when the mind is in motion in this way, the experience of travel changes.

The switchover often enough happens automatically or inadvertently or seemingly by accident, and frequently without anyone quite noticing that anything in particular has happened inside, except that outside things seem somehow different, or that the day itself seems more alive and full of possibility. But the very same kind of awareness change can also be deliberately evoked in several ways. By the successive moments and stages of a trip, for one thing, if the people who construct roads and paths and train lines and every conceivable kind of vehicle and right-of-way know what they are doing. In addition, and much more immediately, this is something that people can choose to do all by themselves and for themselves and at almost any moment, as soon as someone finds out how to get in touch with — actually, it's easier than it sounds, since it's more like resuming contact with



— what is a built-in, active, oddly ignored, complex, discriminating, many-dimensioned, and remarkably ancient capacity. We grow up fully equipped for such adventuring.”<sup>5</sup>

## Commentary

This book, among other things, is about that innate capacity: how it's often naturally activated by being in motion and by traveling; what its uses are; how it can play a larger role in everyday life; why we're lucky enough to have it; and where it long ago may have come from in the first place.

Sometimes I look ahead to what still seems like an impossibly ambitious destination for all the traveling billions of people undertake, day by day, year after year, locally, globally, and, increasingly, beyond the earth. At that point — when will it arrive? in whose lifetime? — the simple act and fact of moving around will be enjoyed, savored, treasured, as one of the most satisfying parts of being alive. People will know and expect travel to be fundamentally rewarding and nourishing, not just every now and then but almost invariably, the way eating, sleeping, and friendships are.

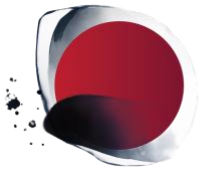
Because ordinary moving around will be familiar as a springboard for fully engaging the mind and the senses, people will turn to it for delight, variety, and renewal; for unexpected ideas and completed thoughts. The transportation systems of the time — presumably a still somewhat familiar mixture of roads and cars, planes and trains, along with other vehicles not yet invented — will be people's partners in this process, seeing it as a core part of their business. After all, they, too, will share the same common understanding that our minds are in motion whenever our bodies are. The one is evoked by the other.

As travel comes to be seen as a "whole-person event,"<sup>5</sup> so to speak, a continuum of actions and experiences with "interior travel" and "exterior travel" as its inseparable parts, we will see a similar reshaping of the now rather fuzzy concept of sustainability. It is already more than clear to many people, for instance, that today's transportation systems waste

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<sup>5</sup> Moves us out of the possibility of the moment and prevents the opportunity to have these moments of serendipity where possibility awaits in the shadow of our experience.

Example: Boredom and his children—"Diverting your attention to a screen to see who "liked"—Hensch, Doug. Positively Resilient . Red Wheel Weiser. Kindle Edition.

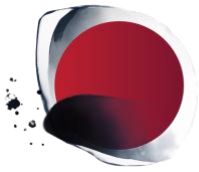


energy, cost too much, disrupt communities, add poisons to the planet and greenhouse gases to the air. Many people would also agree that today's ways of moving around force them to waste time — and that is the point where confusion cuts in. The widely shared if unvoiced assumption is that the time we spend moving around, except during vacations and getaways, is a burden, a necessary evil, a delayed goal, something we have to put up with.

There: it's insidious, deep-seated, and almost inescapable to say, "the time we spend moving around," rather than "the time we give to moving around." The message being delivered is that this is time subtracted from our finite daily allotment, a begrudged and regretted expenditure, endured rather than loved, something of an insult, a sour period that leaves behind the sense of an unrecoverable absence. This sets travel apart as a "disbenefit" or a "disutility" (two words economists use) or at best a "derived demand" (another one of their phrases), meaning an intermediate step, something with no intrinsic value, a postponed pleasure, an imposed surcharge on existence, part of paying our dues, part of the price we pay for civilization — something that feels like the tucked-away "preride" holding pens at Disney World, which you can't see from a distance but where you will be asked to stand in a snaking line between stanchions, standing and shuffling forward for an hour before getting to an exhilarating ten minutes on a roller coaster.

The many miseries, frustrations, and disappointments of present-day travel are a consequence of this distorted way of thinking, not the evidence that proves its truth. At its worst, this is a "parcel theory," making little distinction between moving people and shipping packages, making accommodations for bodies but not for bodies with heads and hearts. It sometimes feels as if we must hate ourselves — on a New York subway platform at rush hour in a heat wave — to treat ourselves so. Even at its humane best, when it pampers, soothes, comforts, and distracts travelers, this inadequate, foreshortened, and still grimly frozen model of how people respond to motion treats the human mind as no more than a flightless bird, unable to be sent soaring by travel.

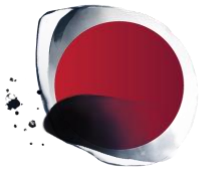
When this grotesque old misconception melts away, fixing travel's problems will take on new clarity and an even larger purpose. Addressing travel in whole-person terms will mean thinking about what transportation systems can do to sustain both our brains and our health, while also considering how they can use far less energy and add far less pollution to



the air and land and water around us. The mechanical parts of transportation as they change and change again will always respect and support the "bionical parts," so to speak, meaning the living, leaping minds within us, as distinct from automatic, predetermined, involuntary, clockwork responses. Such comprehensive thinking, a new practical discipline shared as a common concern by engineers, scientists, designers, planners, and the rest of us, will prove even more useful in the near future, since it looks as though we will want to keep our minds in play whenever possible, with all of our wits about us, to make it through the twenty-first century unscathed.

Many writers about travel have noticed that the word itself, in its original Old French form, *travaillier*, had only harsh meanings, such as "toil," "trouble," and "torment," and seems to trace back to an even older Latin word, *tripalium*, the name of a three-staked Roman instrument of torture. Modern travel, the movements of hundreds of millions of people day by day, also includes the extraordinary, often torturous circumstances of millions of migrants and refugees, many of whom are in motion only involuntarily, fearing for their lives. Ordinary twenty-first century travel itself has been accompanied by an undercurrent of fear since its first year, when 9/11 forced us to realize that any vehicle at all, even a passenger plane, can be used as a bomb. Sometimes the feeling of vulnerability fades, but its vibration is never quite stilled, and there are times when, even without a headline, we can feel it stealing back over us like some thickening of the air, a small, dark cloud or a patch of fog or mist, shifting, changeable, and capable, even when not directly overhead, of shadowing landscape and landmarks, draining off light and color, blurring clarity.

These ugly realities add to the difficulty of the turnaround ahead, and to the urgency of getting it right. Travel already confers so many blessings — moving goods and foods around and spreading ideas and innovations, lightening our load, extending humanity's reach, bringing together people who might never otherwise meet, challenging stay-at-home thinking. As we set our sights even higher, and restore its extra, innermost dimension, we will welcome it, seek it out, rely on it at any moment of any day, confidently, routinely, implicitly, as an ever-present opportunity, a built-in launchpad and catapult for lifting the wings of the human spirit.



The larger understanding about people in motion is approaching, though it could take a generation or more to arrive and will need leadership from citizens' movements yet to arise. Meanwhile, we live in "the meantime," as all people have in all ages. What can be done within this meantime to bring present and future closer together? In the Jeffersonian language Americans grow up with, the pursuit of happiness, one of our inalienable rights, seems to divide future and present into realms almost without a common border — with its emphasis on working for something that doesn't yet exist.”

## Reference

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In Motion:

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