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Inventing the Self
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CHANGE IN PLACE CHANGES US
Exploring the Self's Response to Travel

“A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”
—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Travel changes us. When we travel, we journey to another place in order to encounter new people, places, and things. Not only do these experiences move us physically—crossing borders, interacting with people who are different from us, looking at things from different vantage points, incorporating the things we find that excite us, and readjusting ourselves when things get tough—they also move us psychically. We are changed from the experiences, never again the same. Before a trip, we may feel anxiety and fear in anticipation of bowing to “the new.” While journeying, we may feel a big freedom from our everyday routines or excited to get outside of our comfort zones. When we return home, we may reflect on the difference the experience has made in us: how our new perspectives affect our interactions with the people, places, and things in our usual surroundings, as well as how they have become important new parts of us and who we are in relation to our pre- and post-travel selves. If the experience was affirming, we may even start to plan our next journey.

Travel not only grants travelers the opportunity to envelop themselves in new surroundings but also to encounter diverse people. Meeting people who are different from us—especially locals, since their identities likely reflect the surroundings in which the traveler is travelling—also fuels our opportunity for self-transformation. However, while the new people we encounter during travel have a powerful impact on our experience of a new place, this essay considers them as part of the overall experience of place: they are in the space outside of our selves and distinct from our first-person memories. As such, they (the “who”) are inseparable from the “where,” the “when,” and the “what” we see and do.

Amid the new experiences travel affords us via people and places, travel also coerces us into experiencing the passage of time differently. As we experience something new, our relation to time changes. Each moment seems set apart from the next: “the new” is not something we “usually” experience in our everyday lives. Therefore it is distinct from the everyday—it stands out because it is different from all the other times. On a trip, we move through the world, encountering, consuming, digesting, and reflecting on places and events. From this, our brains create a patchwork of memories, positioned in relation to one another along a timeline. We recall this spatio-temporal collage linearly because of the relation of its parts to one another in time. We then re-access this collage through memory whenever needed, learning from it and enacting its fruits to alter the trajectory of our selves, even if only in the slightest of ways. Thus, travel changes our overarching autobiographies by placing us at a new vantage point different from the vantage point we had when we started. This new vantage point is the culmination of “the new” at work in us.

One of the best ways to build this spatio-temporal collage while traveling, because of its potential in creating close encounters with our surroundings, is the motorcycle. As Ted Simon, celebrated motorcycle-traveler and author of *Jupiter’s Travels*, declares, “[The motorcycle] puts you so much in contact with everything. You can almost taste the cultures you’re riding through, because it exposes you to the climate and the wind and rain; it’s a much more complete experience.” But riding a motorcycle is not stress-free or for the faint of heart. The same elements that make motorcycle travel so visceral and exciting also make it arduous and dangerous. This essay explores the self’s response to travel through the travel narratives *Motorcycle Diaries* and *Long Way Round*, both of which take place on motorbikes. For these narratives’ travelers—Che, Alberto, Ewan, and Charley—it is the ups and downs of this mode of transportation—the highs and lows, the proximity of the body to the elements, and the exhilaration and the daring of it all—that bind them together toward a common purpose: completing the journey *because* of the joy and overcoming challenges *in spite of* the hardship.

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In Paul Fussell's travel writing book *Abroad*, we are reminded of the etymology of the word travel, from the French *travail* (work): "deriving in its turn from the Latin *tripalium*, a torture instrument...to rack the body. [Before] tourism, travel was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the formation of judgment. The traveler was a student of what he sought" (Fussell 1980, 39). Fussell's book offers insights into the function of travel writing over the years, alluding throughout to the experience on the reader of a traveler's relayed narratives of new places. Through the travel narrative, the traveler and the reader go on a journey together. The reader is reading about a journey external to their self, but internalizing the experience as a fellow traveler in and of the mind. Travel narratives, therefore, have always captured our imaginations and taken us to places our bodies were unable to go at a specific time. As we all have the ability to move from one place to another physically and psychically, we all share in this circumstance of traveling together through narrative: We all tell one another stories of where we have been, what we are doing now, and where it is we are headed.

Fussell notes Northrop Frye's description of travel narrative as a replaying of the "myth of the hero...first, the setting out, the disjunction from the familiar; second, the trials of initiation and adventure; and third, the return and the hero's reintegration into society" (Fussell 1980, 208). This primeval repetition shows itself throughout the great travel stories of history from Homer and Herodotus to Paul Theroux and Jack Kerouac, as well as the travel documents of today in movies and on television, so many of which are told by curious, regular Joes (for instance, Rick Steves, Anthony Bourdain, and Michael Palin, to name a few), all proclaiming that seeing and experiencing new things will renew us, and for the better. So what happens between a departure, an arrival, and a return home that might change us? When we make a journey, how do the days, hours, and minutes instead become powerful and distinct "moments" that we remember so viscerally? How do these moments then become a "great present" we cannot forget? How do we describe the experience of these moments to communicate that we, ourselves, have changed?

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“Like everyone else, I gave myself over to the traditional hobbies of the traveler: lust and sightseeing.”—Kenneth Minogue

We seem to feel more alive when we are away from the everyday by interacting with “the new.” In *The Atlantic* article, “For a More Creative Brain, Travel,” Brent Crane asserts that travel creates new neural pathways that revitalize the mind. He reports that when a trip is successful, it also engenders our trust and faith in humanity. The traveler’s—and subsequently, travel reader’s—jump from known to unknown and back again, is described by Peter Fleming as “moving from nonexistence to existence... [then] regaining normal self-consciousness among one’s accustomed audience” (Fussell 1980, 209). The juxtaposition of this jump and our relation to it before, during, and after it happens is an indication of the self’s movement from pre-experience self to post-experience self.

During travel, we leave the everyday behind. Free from the inhibitions of the familiar, we approach the world around us with openness and a desire that is lacking when we are enmeshed in our regular lives. A trip offers us a shift in vantage point, propelling us to a new level of engagement with our usual surroundings once we return to them. The difference in what we see, do, and feel when traveling shifts our perspective so that we are someone similar afterward yet slightly new. When moving from one new place to another, we experience a freedom of choice and a sense of purpose that provoke new paths of self-discovery and self-expression, allowing us to connect with our inner selves through others as well as the larger environment. A destination is much more than a spot, then; it is a mindset. What happens in our minds while we are in a new spot that moves us from experiencing time as “usual” to experiencing it as “memorable”?

In the Moment

“We do not remember days. We remember moments.”—Cesar Pavese

A moment is a portion of time, comparatively brief to overall time. It comes from the Latin *movere* and means “to move,” and overlaps with the word *momentum*, or “movement.” It can also mean a present time, or a time of excellence or importance. In science, it can be the distance to a particular axis or point. In “The Structure of Time in Autobiographical

Memory,” John Campbell states “we identify remembered times by their relations to remembered events” (Campbell 1997, 106), in turn, creating a linearity within our autobiographies. Our ability to create spatio-temporal continuity from one memory to the next aids us in documenting our self as it transforms amid the various remembered events, which we then use to pinpoint changes from one point to the other, acknowledging the development.

What exactly distinguishes one instant as memorable among others as we sift through remembered events? We recall certain moments more easily than others, but why? In “The Moment as a Factor in Emotional Well-Being,” James Roy King helps to define exactly what makes one moment different from any other. For King, a moment is an instant in which any of the following may occur: “the steady flow of time seems to halt; some long-extended process may be consummated; apparently disparate factors are brought together and propelled in new directions; assumed boundaries may be challenged; hidden or unthought elements revealed; [or] a sense of meaning experienced more deeply than ever before” (King 1986, 207). King then describes moments as instances of conversion, in which “events are turned in one direction or another” (King 1986, 207). In this sense, travel is the perfect hotbed, offering a limitless supply of opportunities for converting challenges into successes and unknowns into knowns. There are particular struggles and puzzles intrinsic to travel (planning itineraries, navigating new streets, overcoming language barriers, initiating money exchanges) which travelers work through in order to emerge “into a brighter and livelier space...suffused with life, meaning, and possibility” (King 1986, 208). The resolutions from these conversions then stand out in the line of remembered events because they are distinct and valuable.

Spontaneity also plays a role in a moment becoming distinct from other instances in time. The element of surprise forces us to recognize a moment and take note of it. During travel, as our everyday circumstances (responsibilities and social obligations) fall away, we are “alert, focused, no longer imitating the movements of others but generating [our] own” (King 1986, 215). We are dedicating our attention to things “in the now” and are receptive to

objects in front of us. We are “present” so that our experience of our surroundings becomes “present tense.”

These moments could be considered the most conscious of times, ones in which mindfulness—a prime state of awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis—exist. King calls this mindfulness, which I consider akin to the moment, as a “freedom from any of a number of forms of enchantment...an inner sense of direction” (King 1986, 218), where enchantment means busywork and doldrums. We dedicate less time to menial tasks or getting ahead in the rat race, as well as less time “keeping up with the Joneses” or escaping into addictions. Experiencing a moment involves an attention to the here and now, and usually includes a dash of desire or excitement, as well as a feeling of progress or moving forward.

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Travel many times is synonymous with adventure because it is outside of the ordinary and involves exploration, but how do we approach describing an experience that usually doesn’t start with words but action? In “The Language of Adventure,” James Lill asks, “Is the real meaning of adventure to be found in the events which transpired or in the feelings and thoughts they evoked?” (Lill 1978, 845). The travelers in *Motorcycle Diaries* and *Long Way Round* present their journeys’ events alongside after-the-fact reiterations, combining the two parts of Lill’s question. Both travelers’ narratives express the things that happened to them along the way and contain plenty of superlatives during the moments they find most striking, saturated with meaning applied in hindsight during the retelling. In this sense, a travel narrative gives us a deep and meaningful context from which we can see change at work: it contains both the events *and* the feelings they evoked.

But how “real” (momentous, candid) can a recollected moment be when it is retold? Lill offers that adventurers inherently tend “to amplify the fact with rhetoric” (Lill 1978, 850) for optimum impact in conveying the purpose and meaning of a journey. In this sense, stories about travel may feel more intimate, important, and transformative when told and retold for our consumption than when they are actually occurring. The feedback loop involved in relaying journeys (comprised of imagination, empathy, and understanding) forces

us to invest in their outcomes, heed their calls when pleasurable, and beware of their forewarnings when dangerous.

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In their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs contend, “Travel broadens the mind” (Hulme & Youngs 2002, 2). They acknowledge that travel narratives are powerful because they symbolize agency: “to have been there and seen with one’s own eyes” (Hulme & Youngs 2002, 4). And isn’t *seeing*, as they say, *believing*...

Let the World Change You and You Can Change the World

“I am not the person I once was. All this wandering around...has changed me more than I thought.”—Che Guevara

Each new encounter and new place in *Motorcycle Diaries* tells the story of a mind moving ever so forward, progressing slightly with each day toward this idea of a unified people. Traveling throughout Latin America from Argentina with his friend Alberto Granado over the course of nine months, partly on their motorbike La Poderosa, Che came away from the trip with a vision that disparate people throughout Latin America from seemingly incongruent countries could be integrated in a revolution toward a United Latin America. As we will see, the end of his journey culminates in his revealing one specific moment that changed his sense of purpose in life; a moment in which he felt a palpable change in himself, as brought about by the trip. Through reading his narrative, we learn things about the world around him and his place in it.

Alberto and Che’s journey begins like any other, chasing Visas and collecting documents so they can cross borders. Che comments, “the enormity of our endeavor escaped us in those moments; all we could see was the dust on the road ahead and ourselves on the bike, devouring kilometers in our flight northward” (Guevara 2012, 33). He describes their plan and the whimsy that accompanies their great escape: “The first commandment for every good explorer is that an expedition has two points: the point of departure and the point of arrival. If your intention is to make the second theoretical point coincide with the

actual point of arrival, don't think about the means...the means are endless" (Guevara 2012, 37). Soon after they depart, Che depicts Alberto seeing the Atlantic Ocean for the first time. He relates it to the journey ahead. Alberto is "overwhelmed by this discovery that signifies an infinite number of paths to all ends of the earth... We have no idea whether or not we'll get there, but we do know the going will be hard" (Guevara 2012, 34).

And the going *is* hard, but exhilarating. Che describes their impatient joy on the first leg: "We seemed to breathe more freely, a lighter air, an air of adventure" (Guevara 2012, 40). His psyche merges with their plan, stating, "my destiny is to travel, or perhaps it's better to say that traveling is our destiny, because Alberto feels the same" (Guevara 2012, 42). Along the way, they see lakes, forests, and mountains; the sights, smells, and sounds of the landscape, beckoning them to stop and immerse themselves, though they usually press on, interacting with different people and traversing language, appearance, and economic lines; sometimes with difficulty, sometimes with ease. Points within their journey become crossroads, like in Casa Pangué, where Che finds himself "looking to the future,...to what lay beyond" (Guevara 2012, 55); spots become instances of exhilaration: "Easter Island! The imagination stops in its ascending flight to turn somersaults at the very thought" (Guevara 2012, 69); and moments become metaphors: "At night...we would look out over the immense sea. There we understood that our vocation...was to move for eternity along the roads and seas of the world" (Guevara 2012, 75). As travelers, Che and Alberto feel the past, present, and future all at once, their purpose in life coalescing with the purpose of their trip.

For Che and Alberto, coming into contact with diverse people in extreme situations creates a space in which the lines between everyone blur. On a particularly rough night, Che recalls: "It was one of the coldest times in my life, but also one which made me feel a little more brotherly toward this strange, for me at least, human species" (Guevara 2012, 78). They marvel at the layers of meaning that each arrival point possesses, providing constant food-for-thought: "The word that most perfectly describes the city of Cuzco is 'evocative'...but there are two or three Cuzcos" (Guevara 2012, 103). Similarly, Che reflects on the multiplicity of experience at Machu Piccu; its different visitors, especially North

versus Latin Americans; that a place can be different things to different people while bringing them together in a common place, whatever their individual reasons.

Overall, Che finds a determination always pushing his and Alberto's movement across the landscape: the mystery of the landscape piquing their desires and compelling them to explore. There is always a sense of progression, even when their motorbike breaks down, or they miss docking their raft; when Che is unable to breathe from his asthma, or when the constant hunger in their stomachs calls to be satisfied. For Che, these moments demand perseverance so the journey can continue: "My eyes traced the immense vault of heaven; the starry sky twinkled happily above me, as if answering in the affirmative to the question rising deep within me 'Is all of this worth it?'" (Guevara 2012, 143).

At journey's end, Alberto and Che are speaking to an interesting man and are about to part ways when the man says, "The future belongs to the people, and gradually, or in one strike, they will take power, here and in every country." Later that night, Che can't stop thinking about it: "I knew that when the great guiding spirit cleaves humanity into two antagonistic halves, I would be with the people" (Guevara 2012, 165). Through these words, the reader understands that Che's trip—each encounter, place, conflict, and success—has changed him inside and out. We recognize the groundwork has been set for Che's transformation into an eminent revolutionary.

As Good As It Should Be: Travel As Peak Experience

"Doors that open on the countryside seem to confer freedom behind the world's back."
—Ramon Gomez de la Serna

What are we trying to convey when we describe our experiences of moving, in a way we have not moved before, from point A to point B? What is so intriguing about our seeing, doing, and feeling new things that make relating it to others proof that it has truly "made its mark"? In his article "Travel, Travel Writing, and the Literature of Travel," Michael Mewshaw claims that our ability to move around leads us not "just to a destination but to a condition in which 'discovery' remains a potential reality even in places where masses of human beings have proceeded us" (Mewshaw 2005, 2). As place-bound beings, we inherently change by moving from place to place. As Mewshaw states: "we are shaped by

where we are. Place works on us just as do events and people, and we become—or have the capacity to become—different people in different settings” (Mewshaw 2005, 9). Further, not only does change in place have the ability to change our individual mindsets, its results can also profoundly affect the world, as in Che’s case.

In *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Abraham Maslow uses his definitions of B-Cognition from studies of self-actualizing love relationships to inform his expositions on people undergoing peak experiences. Maslow defines peak experiences as vibrant moments in which we transcend ego. It involves our seeing an object as a whole “rather than as something to be used” (Maslow 1968, 77), and “the perceiver and the perceived [fusing] into a new and larger whole” (Maslow 1968, 79). During peak experiences, a “person is outside of time and space subjectively.” The experience is “sufficient to itself...just as good as it *should* be” (Maslow 1968, 80).

Maslow mentions that these times can be considered moments of “desireless awareness”: times when we engage with the outside world in an undemanding and contemplative way. Travel contains these characteristic moments in acts of gazing upon and surrendering to “the new.” So much of the experience of moving through a new space and digesting it involves awe, wonder, gratitude, and humility, often including a perception of being enveloped by our surroundings (Maslow 1968, 88). When traveling, we might also feel less conflict between our sub-personalities in that our experiencing-self and our observing-self are more unified. Maslow reports that peak experiences contain moments—unique instances—when our natural splits are integrated, and we are “more open for experience...spontaneous...more creative...more independent of [our] lower needs...more truly [ourselves]” (Maslow 1968, 94–97). The effects of peak experience—some of which are long lasting—make us feel less constrained. Our movements are more instinctive, self-determined, and free of blocks. Our views of others, the world, and ourselves are changed. The world is invigorating and not just plain.

So many descriptions of peak experiences overlap in rhetoric with those of travelers describing their travels. James Lill contends that moments of adventure bring us “into a revealing, reassuring, and fulfilling identity with the very purposes of the universe” (Lill

1978, 846). In *Motorcycle Diaries*, Che describes one such moment when his soul interacts with the dark and starry sky: “the stars drew light across the night sky...and the silence and the cold made the darkness vanish...everything solid melted away...eliminating all individuality and absorbing us” (Guevara 2012, 163). In an instant, the awe and humility Che feels in relation to the immensity of the space around him, compressed and considered against past, present, and future, reduces the usually strict borders between him and the world.

Though Maslow argues that “peaks are not planned or brought about by design” (Maslow 1968, 113), Che’s narrative illustrates these peaks *can* be achieved within the context of a planned trip. During the kind of travel in which we plan to get away from the everyday, planning to put ourselves into a certain circumstance does not prevent the moments that arise during our travels from surprising us. These moments where we lose our usual constraints and try on new facets of identity are full of spontaneity as steps “along the path to the transcendence of identity”(Maslow 1968, 114). It is in these moments that our sense of self is strengthened overall. Just like the mending process makes a broken bone stronger than it was before the break, so too is our position made stronger after a peak experience brought about by change: Though we started in one place and lost our footing, we have regained it by steadying and repositioning ourselves, making us stronger than before.

It’s the Journey, Not the Destination: Travel’s Present Tense

“The journey isn’t about visiting this place or visiting that place. It’s a bigger, deeper picture about moving through countries and...feeling a sense of where you are ‘present tense’; feeling that we’re here and now.... It really is the stuff of dreams”—Ewan MacGregor

In *Travelers, Immigrants, Inmates*, Frances Bartkowski suggests that travel offers us the opportunity “to learn from the collision of identities” (Bartkowski 1995, xvii). She proposes the journeys we embark on can be seen as a metaphor representing our earliest journeys—like the journey into language—and, like all journeys, involve crossing a space or border from novice to mastery and re-centering ourselves on the other side. Through submitting ourselves to “the new” during travel, we traverse the border between ourselves and others, decipher the interiors and exteriors of both, and blur, strengthen, and redraw them. Our

self's new position vis-à-vis the world represents a change in outlook, "for we come to understand ourselves...through particular vantage points" (Bartkowski 1995, xxii).

In the video travel document *Long Way Round*, both actual and metaphorical border crossings abound. Ewan MacGregor and his best friend Charley Boorman ride their motorbikes 20,000 miles from London through 13 countries to New York City. Ewan imagines that "a holiday doesn't have to be lying on a beach; it can be exploration and adventure," wanting to use it as a means "to get out on [his] own and back to [his] own decision-making" (*Long Way Round* 2005, Episode 1). Charley suggests that the journey might become an historical record of his youth for his children. Either way, preparing for the undertaking is a great challenge. In similar fashion to Che's realizations about his trip with Alberto, the idea and desire is easier than the actual doing.

During preparations, the journey becomes an obsession for Ewan: "Whose idea was this? and then I realized it was mine!... The second my mind is awake, I'm only thinking about this" (Episode 2). As he and Charley cross the border from Prague, they begin to feel far from home. The visible change in place, as well as the noticeable passage of time from traveling by bike instead of plane, adds credence to the excitement. When they ride into Kazakhstan, the roads turn to dirt, and Ewan says, "Tarmac's a thing of the past. It's good to have...shaken free. We're really out there" (Episode 4). Once through the worst parts, Ewan asserts: "It was really hard work...but it was a huge sense of achievement" (Episode 4). As they set up camp for the night, Ewan recalls a moment of bliss from the day that places the journey in context, symbolizing the trip's purpose for him: "I looked over and saw my mate Charley there. It was a brilliant moment that I'll never forget. I really feel this is where I belong.... It's where I should be" (Episode 4).

Traveling from Kazakhstan to Mongolia, in similar fashion to Che's asking the night sky for approval when things got rough, Ewan begins to question: "What are we doing this for? I've got to toughen up a bit. It's testing us in every respect. It's beautiful...but it's hard; harder than anything we've done so far" (Episode 5). As they ride through miles of bogs, their bikes tipping and crashing constantly with rain approaching in the distance, and nothing for miles, Charley says, "This is just madness. Look where we are; where we've

come from; this is just crazy” (Episode 5). As fellow companions watching them through the screen, we understand it is an immense undertaking, and we too question whether or not they will make it when Ewan says, “A day like today is like living hell...falling all the time...every three feet; that’s kind of what the trip’s all about I suppose because those are the memories you look back on and laugh about, or are proud you got through” (Episode 6). Charley concurs: “These last few days have been so testing really.... My wife said, ‘Don’t forget, when it’s really bad, that you’re on this great adventure. And that it’s probably the one great adventure maybe you’ll ever have in your life’” (Episode 6). We ask ourselves: “Would *I* make it?” Or even, “When will *I* have my adventure?”

When they finally find tarmac again, Ewan laments, “I want to go back to the land I don’t understand” (Episode 6). As they make their way to the Road of Bones, Ewan echoes their pre-journey talks: “This is going to be the toughest bit...that we’ll enjoy in retrospect” (Episode 6). They know they are crossing the wetlands and that most of the bridges have been destroyed. Their anxieties become reality as Ewan recollects: “They were 12 of the most exciting hours of motorcycling I’ve ever, ever done in my life. The roads deteriorated; we’re riding on mud, gravel, and puddles, potholes, and rivers...bogs. Everything thrown at us at once. I could feel a difference today. I conquered my fear of the water by doing the thing I feared the most: drawing water into my engine” (Episode 6).

The next day, after overcoming their fears, they get stopped in their tracks by overpowering floods: “Is this when we’re meant to look at each other and smile, and remember where we are?” (Episode 6). When they finally make it to Magadan, Charley says, “I’m confused about my feelings, now that we’ve finished...[my] sadness to leave Russia” (Episode 7). Two weeks later, as they ride into NYC, Charley laments: “I’ve loved it. I don’t know what I’m gonna do. There’ll be nothing to do, nowhere to go” (Episode 9). Ewan articulates the takeaways with, “I hope it will inspire people.... A lot of things in life people don’t do because of the ‘what ifs.’ It stops us doing things; in actual fact, the ‘what ifs’ and the ‘might bes’ are what make it so exciting. It’s the biggest experience of my life, in terms of a plan, an adventure, a trip. It’s the most extraordinary thing” (Episode 10). As Charley says

at their journey's end: "The further you went in the journey, the more you...delves into your mind" (Episode 10).

Just a few years later, riding through Malawi on their next journey, *Long Way Down*—a 15,000-mile trip through 18 countries from Scotland to South Africa—Ewan and Charley hitch themselves to their trip's dreams as Ewan exclaims, "Look at the scenery. This is a moment I want to mark to remain in my memory forever. The beautiful blue sky and the perfect clouds," and Charley adds, "It's those moments, those slap you in the face moments, when you suddenly realize where you are.... Out into the nothingness; it's just beautiful, man" (*Long Way Down* 2010, Episodes 9/10). Ewan and Charley's entire trip is symbolic of the desire to encounter something different in order to renew our selves. Once the journey is through, they cannot imagine their lives without having experienced it.

The Effects of Space's Wonders

"As I stood in contemplation of the gardens of the wonders of space, I had the feeling I was looking into the ultimate depths, the most secret regions of my own being; and I smiled, because it had never occurred to me that I could be so pure, so great, so fair!"—Oscar Milosz, *L'amoureuse initiation*

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard muses on the extraordinary ways in which space affects us. He proposes that the world's spaces emit resonances and repercussions, where "the resonances are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence. In the resonances we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it.... The reverberations bring about a change of being" (Bachelard 1994, xxii). This description speaks to why we spend so much time thinking about space, from architecture to home improvement to travel. When we have the financial resources, we focus on improving our surrounding space, controlling the resonances, and directing the repercussions, like a conductor working sounds from their orchestra. When recognizing that a place has a certain reverberation, we find that it affects how we feel toward it, how we feel in it, and how we feel from it, even long after we have left it. Many times, a space—think of the view from Whiteface Mountain, the surrounding earth in Chaco Canyon, standing in Venice's San Marco Square, or gazing upon Machu Picchu—serves as "a center where we can sense the concordance of world immensity with

intimate depth of being” (Bachelard 1994, 189). In essence, we “pick up” what a space “puts down.”

Travel offers us a mode of experiencing space separate from its utility (as being a place where we live and work). As travelers, we open up to our surrounding. We contemplate what the objects around us mean, their place in the world, and not just how we might use or inhabit them. Because we are able to contemplate them as separate, we enact what Bachelard recalls from Baudelaire: that “man’s poetic fate is to be the mirror of immensity...immensity becomes conscious of itself, through man” (Bachelard 1994, 196). By looking, we “experience an extension of our intimate space [where] intimacy and world-space...blend,” and the “inside and outside exchange their dizziness” (Bachelard 1994, 199, 203, 221).

In “The Narrative and the Ambient in Environmental Aesthetics,” Cheryl Foster suggests that we bring words to nature where there are none in order to contextualize the non-self to make sense of it as we do the self. This contextualization then allows us to integrate the non-self into the spatio-temporal collage of our autobiographies more easily. Foster offers that we read environments like a story. Many times we move from place to place in order to gaze upon, confront, and interact with these stories as a way to further, deepen, or rewrite our own. As James Lill points out, the excitement or danger we come up against when experiencing something new during travel or adventure—the emotions that are elicited—are often difficult to describe. Bachelard refers to this difficulty as an encounter with primitivity: feeling the difference between the landscape and ourselves, but simultaneously feeling these two things are one and the same. By exploring the separation of ourselves from what is new around us, we attempt to engage it, decipher it, and add it to our autobiographical memories via the emotions it stirs within us.

Feeling a Place’s Time

In “Place and Space,” Andrew Merrifield defines place as “the fusion of space and experience” (Merrifield 1993, 519). Our lives are embedded in particular places through practices made up of moments “when the conceived, the perceived and the lived attain a

certain ‘structured coherence’” (Merrifield 1993, 526). If space and experience define place, how does change in environment affect one’s experience of time?

Thinking back to when we were children, we may have taken a certain path to school. We learned to swim here; we rode our bikes there. Our father was from this town; our grandparents took us to that ice cream shop. In *What Time Is This Place?*, Kevin Lynch contemplates the ways in which our environments (space) support our individual images of time, proposing that these images are crucial to our well-being and ability to manage the changes that happen around us.

In our everyday environment, we synchronize our schedules—what Lynch refers to as *déjà vu* (already seen)—in order to work and be social with others: work starts at 9 a.m., lunch is at noon, and work ends around 5 p.m., etc. Conversely, when we go on a trip or on an adventure, we are able to make our own time and experience a “deep immersion in present rhythms” (Lynch 1972, 79)—what Lynch refers to as *jamais vu* (never seen). For instance, historically rich structures from the past, like the Roman ruins, arouse emotional sensations in us when we first see them. We experience them through a “heightened sense of the flow of time” (Lynch 1972, 44) where we are immersed “in immediate sensation” (Lynch 1972, 84). In other words, upon seeing them, we immediately comprehend the passage of time and our small place within it, not having confronted that particular place until then.

Similarly to John Campbell’s conviction that autobiographical memory relies on time possessing linearity, Lynch confirms, “the self is a way of organizing temporal events” (Lynch 1972, 124). Lynch then adds a layer of meaning to it by also suggesting that the *jamais vu* is even more distinct because we borrow time from our memories or projections to thicken the present, evoking the “sensation that past, present, and future are momentarily and mysteriously coexistent” (Lynch 1972, 173). His deliberations overlap with those of Bachelard and Maslow in terms of the defining characteristics of how certain moments rise to the top of our memories in terms of value and importance. In these moments, Lynch points out, a place’s time, its space (which is also around us), and our insides all coalesce, creating a “vital stillness.” He believes this moment of stillness then becomes suspended in time as a “great present”; it is a moment when “the inside and outside worlds connect, and

we seem to be the landscape itself.” Driving home the importance of the distinctiveness of this moment, Lynch admits: “the experience is not readily evoked. It may happen...in some very special place whose access was difficult and whose presence surprises us” (Lynch 1972, 177). It is not a moment that happens everyday. It is a challenge and is brought on by “the new.”

In essence, Lynch offers us an explanation that an experience combined with our recalling it via its place and time is proof of our changing self. He believes environment has “a profound effect on the growth and development of individuals” (Lynch 1972, 221) and that planned travel in particular aids us in rewriting our autobiographies, many times for the better.

* * *

“We should not judge people by their peak of excellence; but by the distance they have traveled from the point where they started.”—Henry Ward Beecher

In “Travel and Unsettlement,” Brian Musgrove defines travel narrative as “bringing the state of seeing into the state of reflecting” (Musgrove 1999, 32). Perhaps the travel narrative—telling the story of a journey from point A to point B and back again, and considering place and time—grants us the opportunity to impose even more linearity onto our autobiographies, giving us a tighter grasp on our selves by organizing and strengthening the spatio-temporal collages that comprise them. Travel documents allow us to consider, experience, and digest a journey, from beginning to end, as well as reflect afterward on its meaning within the greater scope of our lives.

In his text, Musgrove suggests that a lot of our time as travelers is spent experiencing a part of a larger whole and then filling in the gaps between the parts within the whole from the experience of the part. Perhaps this filling in of experience (or smoothing of knowledge between gaps) is part of the reason travel and travel narratives are so valuable to us biographically. When we move from our usual everyday surroundings into a new environment, we not only experience the change physically (noticing the differences between us and the world) but psychically (feeling differently sense-wise in what we see, hear, touch,

smell, and eat, and time-wise by relating moments of conversion to our overarching autobiographies). In this sense, travel is a powerful agent toward identity transformation.

The difference we notice between the everyday and “the new” makes the moment we notice it “stand out” among our recollections. The extraordinary character of these distinct moments then compels us to see them as game-changers in relation to our other and overall experiences. Travel’s space and time components work specifically to affect the autobiographical collages we create and use to describe the stories of our lives. We are spatio-temporal beings, inseparable from the environments in which we live and the times that we inhabit, and both place and time are not static; they change. Whether reading, viewing, or listening to the stories of travelers, or telling our own, all of us, all our selves, are affected by moving from one place to another to see, do, and feel new things in order to learn and grow. We take travel experiences with us long after they are over: They live on in us through our autobiographies, ever-changing and ever-evolving.

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