

Moving Beyond Borders: The Creation of Nomadic Space through Travel

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I stepped onto the plane as easily as most people walk out their front doors in the morning, barely giving it a second's thought before plopping down into my uncomfortable and cramped airplane seat. The seatbacks were adorned with a monotonous pattern of grey circles on grey background. My own personal green plaid "Air New Zealand" mini-blanket and sterile-nylon wrapped pillow were now on the thinly carpeted floor under the seat in front of mine, having been hastily cast aside moments before. I fly quite frequently, since most of my family lives on the east coast and requires frequent visitation in exchange for a free stay in a small room and all the pimento-cheese sandwiches and red-beet eggs I can eat. But, this was my first international flight since moving back from Germany more than ten years earlier, and I had never been to New Zealand. I was excited and impatient, and though I was one step closer to New Zealand, I had plenty of time to mull over the fact that I would be sitting in a cramped chair trying to entertain myself for thirteen hours, at the end of which I would walk out that same airplane door into another world. (Travel to New Zealand, 25 July 2003.)

Every journey has a beginning, this is one of mine. Everyone's journey must begin somewhere, a departure from somewhere, a step out the door, a movement beyond the cycles of everyday activities and lifestyle patterns, a step in a new direction. This first step is comprised of a fundamental change, the representation of an individual's movement from familiar surroundings and interactions to a transitory existence based on new experiences, confusion and strangeness. The traveler's first step on a journey represents the beginning of a process that will give the traveler a new perspective, a new way to see and understand the world. Though this first step is an important one, this single step cannot possibly encompass all the sensations and sights one may experience while traveling. Each succeeding step on a journey is just as important as the first, and each step represents a new direction and a new set of possibilities for

the traveler. With every step, the traveler is engaging in a process that makes the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

Placing oneself outside a realm of familiarity, into a world where the traveler is the foreigner, the other, the stranger, gives the traveler a valuable insight into the meaning of difference and identity in our world. Though there is an endless plethora of ways to experience this process of engagement with the strange, I will focus primarily on international travel. I will discuss the importance of the travel process as a way to deconstruct one's structured patterns of thought in favor of an unrestricted, positive and critical way of experiencing the world.

I will begin by explaining in detail the process of travel, of moving through the world in a way that engages the traveler in a new world of thought and dialogue, leading to a rethinking of one's own identity. The process begins with a departure from the familiarity of one's home. A departure from one place takes the traveler on a journey through new spaces, eventually arriving at a destination somewhere. At some point on this journey, the traveler experiences an event which is overwhelmingly strange and confusing, and in order to continue on the journey, the traveler must explore this strangeness, engaging in a process of understanding.

I will argue that this travel process creates a new ideological space for the traveler, which I refer to as 'nomadic space.' It is a space which breaks through existing thought patterns or frameworks and becomes a place where the traveler can reinvent herself or himself. This discussion of nomadic space will be connected back to the process of travel, and I will suggest that the experience of travel and discussions of nomadic space should exist together to facilitate a movement towards dialogue and global understanding. I will then further discuss the implications of nomadic thought and introduce potential ways to encourage travel in education, as well as discussions of nomadic thought within travel programs.

Finally, I will conclude as most journeys are accustomed to conclude: with a return to one's place of origin, a return to the familiar, and the ideological implications that this return may have on the traveler and her journey.

The theories presented within this paper are all different and unique. In many ways, the authors and proponents of these theories agree on many points, but there are also sections of each viewpoint which cannot be integrated into one unified theory. This paper is a space where multiple theories that would otherwise be separate and distinct may find themselves drawn together within a course of movement that spans several doctrines and many ways of thinking.¹ I intend for this paper to maintain an organization that is conducive to the flow of ideas over several similar subjects, and hopefully this structure will lend to a nomadic way of moving through ideas.

Part I: The Process of Travel

I started my travels—where else?—in the airport. Many of my most vivid memories of growing up had come from those times when I'd say good-bye to my parents and get onto a jumbo jet as an “unaccompanied minor” to fly to school.²

It is difficult sometimes to know exactly when a journey begins. In terms of travel, a journey represents the experience of movement into a new place; the physical movement of journeying signifies a transition into something new. For some, a journey is set in motion with a concept, the thought of a foreign place, a decision to go somewhere; some journeys begin with buying a ticket, or stepping onto a plane. For Pico Iyer—an author with a British passport, an Indian heritage, an American education and a global soul—the journey begins in childhood. Usually, the movement of a journey follows some sort of movement through space.

For the purpose of this paper, the term ‘journey’ will be used to signify a movement from familiar surroundings into an unfamiliar place. Being removed from familiarity is critical to the process of changing one’s perspectives and reconsidering one’s knowledge; if an individual is presented with a strange sight within familiar surroundings it is much easier to assimilate this strange occurrence into one’s own conceptual contexts than if that person were fully immersed in strange sights. In his book, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Stephen Greenblatt, a Professor at the University of California at Berkeley, explains that travel “enables one to place familiar customs in relation to the customs of others and hence to view the ordinary and everyday in a revealing new light”.³ For instance, one may not perceive certain things given a particular context, and moving out of that context is necessary in order to see in a different way, from a different point of view.

The movement into a strange place often requires a significant amount of travel time. The physical act of moving away from a familiar place into a strange world is conducive to an opening up of a new way of thinking based on the steady, free-flow of thoughts. During a study abroad program in Berlin, Germany with the *Comparative History of Ideas* program, our class took a trip to Weimar on the train, and the physical movement across the country for an extended period of time provided unique insight, and allowed me to engage with my surroundings in a new way.

I’m currently sitting on the ICE (Intercity Express) train, watching the countryside go by. I just wanted to make a note about the train ride, because I love them so much. For some reason, train rides through the country—and even the U-Bahn (Berlin inner-city train lines) to some extent—make me feel so philosophical and allow me to imagine that I have even the smallest grip on reality. I have no idea why; I think it’s just the rapid movement through space and time,

passing all the people in their cottages, living their own lives with no idea that I even exist. It makes me feel more in tune with everything. (Travel in Germany; 21 October, 2004)

The train moved smoothly across the country, with a subdued rumble of movement along the tracks, while my mind raced along with the flashes of new sights: a country house, a windmill, grain towers, a patch of trees, a river and a rusted fence. The rapid movement through new places allowed my imagination to run wild, preparing me for the new ideas and adventures I might find upon arrival at our destination in Weimar. Alain deBotton, author and world traveler, has a similar experience while riding on a train; he is thinking about the death of his father, about an essay he is writing, about his friends, and when his mind goes blank or encounters a difficult idea, he has only to look out the window, and his thoughts are helped along by the changing scenery.

“Journeys are the midwives of thought. Few places are more conducive to internal conversations than moving planes, ships or trains. There is an almost quaint correlation between what is before our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our heads... new thoughts [at times requiring] new places. Introspective reflections that might otherwise be liable to stall are helped along by the flow of the landscape.”⁴

The steady, silent movement of the landscape is a perfect introduction to travel because not only does this travel time provide a traveler with plenty of time to allow her mind to wander, but long journeys also provide a traveler with the acknowledgement that he is moving far from the familiar into an unknown land. The journey prepares the traveler for new experiences while allowing her to open up her mind to new thoughts and sights.

But travel isn't always a smooth movement from one place to another, and being trapped in a place—an airport terminal, for instance—provides an environment for new thoughts and experiences as much as a train ride can. Many people think of traveling as simply a departure

and an arrival, with a swift movement directly from one to the other, and become annoyed or frustrated when they are forced to wait in a place that is neither, a “between” place, a waiting room where the world seems to be passing by, leaving the traveler behind. With no place to go, we have the ability to sit, watching the world. In this way, the between-space of an airport terminal is similar to the between-space of the train car or airplane cabin. In each circumstance one’s mind can wander, imagining the various places people are going and who they will meet, where the rapidly descending planes are coming from and why the cabin full of people have ended up here.

Even considering the mental preparation that long journeys provide, arriving in an unfamiliar place can be overwhelming and exhilarating. Alain deBotton writes that upon arriving at Amsterdam’s Schipol airport, he is struck by the exotic, foreign signs hanging from the airport terminal’s ceiling and how different they are from the signs he would be likely to see in his own country. Concurrently, deBotton imagines that this sign is a product of a culture with a significantly different history; he recognizes the diversity of thought and practices that vary from place to place.

On disembarking at [the] airport, I am struck, only a few steps inside the terminal, by the appearance of a sign hanging from the ceiling, which announces the way to the arrival hall, the exit and the transfer desks... If the sign provokes in me genuine pleasure, it is in part because it offers the first conclusive evidence of being abroad. Although it may not seem distinctive to the casual eye, such a sign would never exist in precisely this form in my own country... I sense, confusedly, the presence of another history and mind-set.⁵

This sudden awareness of differences is related to the acknowledgement that one cannot simply impose one’s own worldview or cultural history upon a new place. Further, and more importantly, the traveler at this point begins to realize that his own point of view and

understanding of the world may not be shared by all cultures everywhere; different places have unique ways of perceiving things. deBotton understands that he must adopt a new way of thinking based on the acceptance of difference and a desire to understand the culture that produced this sign. This new way of thinking will be the foundation of a program of learning based on travel.

Like deBotton's sudden realization of foreignness at Schipol, many travelers have a moment of sudden awareness, a jolting awakening, as a result of the strange sights around them. This jolt does not always occur at the moment of arrival in a new place, it can occur whenever an individual witnesses an act or sight which cannot be placed within the realm of the traveler's existing understanding of the world. The traveler happens upon a scene that is so foreign and strange that it immediately provokes a sense of wonder and amazement that cannot be categorized into any existing framework of understanding; the absolute strangeness of that sight creates an absence of meaning which forces the traveler to pause and be overwhelmed with a sense of wonder.⁶ This moment may be brief, but is absolutely critical to the transformative potential of travel; it creates a pause, a "rift in time" in which the individual is removed from all attempts at categorization or assimilation.⁷

For me, this push into a new and foreign world lasted, on and off, for a whole day. I decided to venture into Nadi (pronounced *Nan-dee*) the small town just south of the hotel I was staying in. For sixty cents, I caught a bus to town. It took only about five minutes to ride into town, but already I was feeling miles away from my newly familiarized surroundings at the hostel. The bus had no windows, and the other riders, all Fijians, were casually watching the scenery flash past us—a school with pink or grey uniformed children engaged in after-school chaos, a man selling chickens in crates on the roadside, a small village, a woman drying her

laundry—by the time we reached Nadi-town I was already in a state of wonder and amazement, and found myself two hours later, wandering the streets of Nadi in a daze, completely overwhelmed by the new sights around me, as if I had been moving through a dream. When I had finally returned to my hotel room, and tried to write about my experiences in town, I was at a complete loss for words, and though I was unable to fully articulate my encounters, I felt compelled to use the words “wonder” and “shock and awe” continuously. (Travel in Fiji, 25 June 2005)

Greenblatt also explores the use of the terms ‘wonder’, ‘awe’, and ‘marvelous’ by Christopher Columbus and the “discoverers” of the New World. The journals of Columbus and his crew consistently refer to the people, the new sights and strange behaviors they encounter as “marvelous” and the Spaniards “wonder” at the existence of these strange encounters. Though Greenblatt applies this appeal to the marvelous to the Conquistadores, it is easily applicable to all abrupt encounters with the strange. Travelers frequently experience an overwhelming amazement at strange figures or acts which are beyond their comprehension. Travelers who journey into the strange are often met with brief encounters which shock them into a state of awe.

This fleeting glimpse into the strange gives an individual an awareness of another world that exists outside of all her developed understanding of the world. The experience of witnessing a foreign scene is critical because it allows a glimpse into another world and a way of life that is not based on the same assumptions or experiences of the traveler; it opens up a space for a dialogue based on a different world, giving the individual insight into a place that cannot be comprehended with existing tools of understanding.

Descartes calls this moment of wonder and confusion a ‘first encounter’ characterized by

a “sudden surprise of the soul” in which individuals are incapable of categorizing what they are seeing.⁸ However, once the moment has passed, individuals are returned to a state of consciousness in which they desire to understand or possess the scene they have witnessed by assigning it meaning.⁹ Stephen Greenblatt argues that there are two paths from the first encounter of wonder: in the first path, the traveler articulates the strange as being so radically different, so completely estranged that the situation cannot be resolved for the traveler without the transformation and appropriation of the strange; this path is best illustrated by a traveler who refuses to acknowledge difference, and forces her views upon the strange to a degree that the strange loses all autonomous meaning. The second path from wonder is based on a self-awareness that acknowledges a mutual estrangement: the traveler is simultaneously able to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange, forging links between the other and the self and accepting both.¹⁰

Greenblatt’s book provides an insight into the historical consequences of walking the first path of conquest and appropriation, and ominously reminds readers of the importance of dialogue and transformative thought.¹¹ Greenblatt includes a discussion of Herodotus’ *Histories*, an argument for the necessity of travel. Herodotus, a 5th century Greek historian, argues that he must understand alien cultures in order to place the history and achievements of his own culture in an appropriate context while moving beyond cultural narrowness. Herodotus travels in order to see the world, to collect information, dispel rumors and gain a personal, eyewitness view of the world.¹² Herodotus leaves us with the wisdom that we must see and experience the world for ourselves, to understand on a personal level what lies beyond our familiar boundaries.

Herodotus beckons us out into the strange, lifting the veil over the world and allowing us to perceive the strange and be immersed in the marvelous. Once again, we come to Greenblatt’s

two paths: the first path towards possession and conquest of the strange, and the second path down a rabbit-hole of wonder, forcing us to reach out in an attempt to grasp something that we can begin to understand, and engaging in a process dialogue and an acceptance of our new space.

For Hongyu Wang, a professor in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University, walking along this second path is the movement into a ‘third space.’ Wang defines the third space as a place where multiple cultural identities can interact, but still maintain their unique qualities. This space is in constant motion, being constantly reformed and transformed by new experiences. The very act of reconceptualizing the strange and the familiar in new terms, while creating a reciprocal relationship with the strange is moving within the third space. For Wang, the third space embodies her struggles with Chinese and American identities: Wang is a Chinese citizen who moves to America to study, and after spending a significant time in America, she develops an American identity that cannot be reconciled with her Chinese identity. The two are not opposed, but neither are they able to be integrated into a hyphenated, blended identity. Wang’s frustration and creativity allow her to create a ‘third space’ where she can honor the uniqueness of each identity while exploring the interactions and interconnections between the two; a place that respects the in-between spaces between multiple identities.¹³

Similar to Greenblatt’s path of self-awareness and mutually beneficial dialogue, the third space is based on a new transformation of space: “Engaged and engaging, such a journey does not take over the places it visits. Refusing to occupy and conquer, a third space is ‘nomadic’”.¹⁴

Nomadic space is defined by the absence of set patterns or identities; it is a smooth space of fluctuation where individuals and identities are constantly being shaped by new experiences. Nomadic space is “intensities and becomings rather than representation, new relays and formations instead of the structure of categories and boundaries that has dominated mainstream

practice.”¹⁵ Nomadic thought, then, is synonymous with Wang’s ‘third space,’ it is a way of thinking that does not separate differences into oppositional categories, but provides a dialogue based on becoming; it represents the relationship between separate entities and the potential for all things to change.

The task, then, of any travel program should be to reconcile a moment of confusion, a glimmer of awareness based on the ‘first encounter’ and incorporate it into a program of dialogue and nomadic thought. The development of a nomadic way of thought, of a third space where there are no hierarchies or subjugations is fundamental to the creation of a global environment that is not based on ethnocentrism and the assimilation or destruction of the strange.¹⁶ Kaustuv Roy, a professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University asserts that educational curricula should provide a space for dialogue where individuals can share their experiences in a diverse learning environment.¹⁷ This environment could be made most effective through travel programs or journeys that encourage nomadic thought.

Part II: Nomadic Spaces

In the previous section, I discussed how individuals may experience the process of travel. The process begins with a departure, then an arrival, it continues with an immersion in the strange inducing an epiphany of sorts, a sudden re-perception of reality, a shift into wonder and shock that cannot be overcome with the mindset the traveler began with. From this point, the process ideally leads to a dialogue and a shift of thought which accepts the strange, making it familiar while simultaneously allowing the traveler to question her own identity and past experiences in a new light—making the familiar strange. This process creates a philosophical discussion on nomadic thought and the process of change through the immersion and

juxtaposition of ideas about foreignness, identity, the strange and the other.

Individuals grow up in very culturally specific, group-oriented ways. Every individual is a product of her or his own life experiences, and most maintain a unique and stable identity. The idea of nomadic thought is based on the deconstruction of these established identities in favor of identities that welcome fluctuation and change.¹⁸ These identities are referred to by Gilles Deleuze, a 20th century French philosopher, as a state of becoming. Becoming refers to a process of constant change and transformation of the individual based on “dynamic interaction” such as the interaction one is immersed in while traveling.¹⁹ Becoming is a state of existence that moves beyond set categorizations or identities, but rather affirms the unique identities and differences between all people.²⁰

Deleuze’s nomadic thought is something which exists outside of the realm of the ‘State’. The State is not necessarily a physical entity comprised of borders but an institution of hierarchies and dualistic oppositions, it is a set of ideas, histories and truths which are common to a group of people and passed down over generations.²¹ The State utilizes a form of thought based on universality that first establishes this thought as the supreme and superior form of rational thought, and second, assumes that everyone, everywhere shares this same rationality.²² By moving out of the State into the realm of nomadic thought, one is able to consider ideas which are not present within one’s familiar cultural surroundings. If State thought is comprised of universal ideas and structured identities, then nomadic thought is based on the smooth flow of ideas and an absence of supreme truth or universality. If State thought is based on meticulous grids, hierarchies and striated spaces, then nomadic thought is based on a horizontal, smooth thought that moves across grid lines, connecting points which would be otherwise separated by State thought.²³

By engaging in the process of travel, one moves beyond the universality of State thought, into a world which utilizes a different form of thought or organization. Because the State imposes a form of universal thought on its citizens, first-time travelers who move outside of the State and experience a world that operates on a system that is different than the State thought they are familiar with may experience an overwhelming shock, and an inability to categorize or understand the strange. This connects back to the discussion of the ‘first encounter’ in the first part of this paper: a fundamental disruption of one’s foundations to the point of amazement and wonder. Perhaps it is the absence of meaning due to a void in one’s State-provided set of understandings that forbids the traveler of understanding the situation.

Engaging in a process of travel does not instantaneously change a citizen into a traveler, or a traveler into a ‘nomad’ but instead allows an individual to become something new, to adopt a new outlook that acknowledges the transitory nature of identity, and the changes in identity that accompany new experiences. Each step on a journey is unique and important, and represents a slight change in the threshold of becoming.

Though nomadic thought was first described in detail by Deleuze and Guattari, in the chapter entitled: “Nomadology: The War Machine” in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, it has since been adopted in several different forms by a number of other philosophers and theorists in a number of unique contexts. Rosi Braidotti, a professor of gender studies and contemporary feminist theory has adapted nomadic thought to a feminist redefinition of gender categories, arguing that nomadic subjects free individuals from the tendency of the State to center thought on male-dominated truth.²⁴ Hongyu Wang explores the impact of nomadic thought on personal identities and school curricula.²⁵ Wang does not explicitly invoke Deleuze and Guattari’s *Nomadology*, though her exploration of the ‘third space’—a place where multiple identities

interact and change—very closely echoes nomadic thought. Kaustuv Roy uses Deleuze’s nomadic space as a springboard for the transformation of educational curriculum and pedagogy.²⁶ Fred Dallmayr, a professor of policy and political theory at the University of Notre Dame, uses nomadic thought to argue for the deconstruction of ethnocentrism and the development of a global awareness.²⁷

Each of the above theories has unique explanations of why nomadic thought is important, though many of these implications are interconnected. First, nomadic thought encourages critical thinking and multidimensional considerations. Roy argues that nomadic thought releases us from the restrictive, linear relationships created by the State, allowing the free-flow of interconnecting ideas.²⁸ Roy describes this form of thought as “rhizomatic”. A rhizome is a plant with roots that grow horizontally, forging with the roots of other plants and creating connections across different types of plants. This term was introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* as a metaphor for the movement between multiple ideas without borders, as opposed to the opposing and grid-like relationships established by the State.²⁹ Rhizomatic thought, like nomadic thought, is a form of thought based on engaging with the world by crossing boundaries and making interconnections with a multitude of various ideas and across multiple disciplines.

Similar to nomadic thought and the rhizome, Wang suggests that opening up a third space for her students encourages them to think creatively about their own identities and break out of the institutional constraints that limit them.³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari propose that nomadic thought frees an individual from the all-encompassing State thought, allowing her to proceed in a smooth space that is not restrictive.³¹

Second, nomadic space affirms difference: it creates an ideological place where an

individual is freed from social constructions, and is free to shape his identity as he desires, instead of being trapped within a specific socially imposed category.³² Nomadic space is transformative, creative and accepting of all individuals.³³

Third, Braidotti argues that nomadic thought can be used to deconstruct binary representations—specifically, for Braidotti, representations of women, but this logic can and should be applied to any categorical representation—by opening up new routes of thinking and new connections.³⁴

If nomadic thought has the potential to enact such profound change, it should become more readily available to all people. Programs which introduce and support nomadic thought in any form are an important step; however, travel programs are the best introduction into nomadic thought, as I have argued, because of the transformative potential of the travel process.

Each of these authors brings a unique and essential piece to the discussion of nomadology, and each author in some form or another suggests a transformation of existing State structures in favor of a more open, nomadic way of thought. However, this transformation must include a significant self-ostracism, a removal of oneself from familiar surroundings, in order to be successful.³⁵ One cannot simply be taught nomadic thought; it must be experienced on an individual level.³⁶ A change in curriculum and pedagogy is important to facilitate this change, but cannot create a significant transformation, because a curriculum is inevitably tied to State structures of universal thought because curricula exist within the boundaries of the state. Travel is an important way to facilitate nomadic thought because the travel process is so conducive to an actual experience of this type of thought.

The notion of a program of nomadic thought seems to present a significant theoretical paradox: if nomadic thought is predicated on the movement outside of categories and structures,

how can a travel program be nomadic? There are several answers to this question. First, programs need not be heavily structured, they can be flexible and allow students to pursue whatever subjects or disciplines they wish.³⁷ Second, programs are just a basis for future reflections on nomadic thought; the real process takes place on an individual level, a program serves to prepare a person for individual journeys and insights. Third, programs can exist in any shape or form as long as they provide an open space based on dialogue and education. The existence of a structure does not preclude nomadic thought. The basis of nomadic thought is that it does not reduce thought or identity into categories as the State does.³⁸

What is of utmost importance is the development of nomadic thought by opening up new spaces for thought through the experience of travel. Programs should be established that support movement through places and ideas, and encourage wandering through the world while engaging in a dialogue with the strange.

Knowledge of nomadic thought is not and should not be a necessary prerequisite for travel, but it may be important or desirable for some to place their travel experiences within a greater context. For others, traveling in conjunction with a program which incorporates nomadic thought may provide a positive environment of understanding, as opposed to a rejection or a possession of the strange. In these terms, it may be helpful to refer back to Greenblatt's two paths from wonder: a program of nomadic education may assist individuals in accepting differences and engaging in a dialogue with the strange, as opposed to an on-face rejection of new ideas, or attempts at conquest or negativity. Programs such as international study abroad programs can serve to create an environment where students can come together to speak about their experiences in a comfortable and dynamic environment.

Many school programs within the institution of the State have been implemented which

attempt to deconstruct minor frameworks within the State, for instance Hongyu Wang's open-structured and transcendent pedagogy based on giving students a space to flex their identities and question categories, or Kaustuv Roy's pedagogy of becoming, based on a Nomadological space of rhizomatic connections which create bridges of discursive associations.³⁹ It sounds confusing, because it *is* confusing, and these ideas become even more inaccessible when one cannot connect the philosophical ideas to real-life experiences, such as those gained by moving through places and experiencing the strange. Though these programs are indicative of a breakthrough in educational pedagogy and teaching styles, it may be difficult for those who have never existed outside the institutions of the State to understand exactly what this thought is or why it is important. When one is given the opportunity to understand the world through travel, she gains an endless horizon of experiences and information that cannot be taught or dispensed. These programs are a fundamental step in the deconstruction of State frameworks and categorized thinking, but must be accompanied with individual, real-life experiences to solidify the theory into realistic examples. Theory and reality must be combined in order to facilitate the greatest change. Furthermore, exposure to these theories should take place in a space that is outside of a person's familiar surroundings and beyond the State's institutionalized frameworks in order for the individual to be fully immersed in a strange world. For these reasons, international study or volunteer programs which incorporate nomadic spaces and encourage nomadic thought are critical components of any educational program.

Immersion in a strange place can only last so long, however, and for most people, educational programs are finite. Eventually, most travelers must end their travels by returning to their home. What happens when the long and winding road leads back towards its origins, and the traveler must return home? After the traveler has experienced so much, and engaged in a

strenuous process of deconstructing identities, understanding difference and making the strange familiar, how does he return to a place of fixed identities and oppressing structures, a place where everybody knows his name, and his origins, and his identity...

Returning to the familiar, going *home*, is an inevitable part of the journey for most travelers. However, the “home” that many travelers return to is surprisingly—and often overwhelmingly—different than the home they left: what once may have been familiar to them is now strange, frustrating, uncomfortable or even fundamentally incomprehensible. This state is referred to as “reverse culture shock” and gives a traveler the chance to find out exactly *how much* he or she may have changed while being away. Reverse culture shock is a new step in the journey through thoughts and identities; it allows the traveler the experience of feeling like a stranger within one’s own familiar settings, which is a very unique and confusing process of re-familiarizing oneself with one’s surroundings in a process of re-evaluating one’s past history in the light of new experiences.

Reverse culture shock expresses a perpetual displacement, an awareness that the familiar is only what one makes of it, and that even the familiar can become strange. In *Mandeville’s Travels*, a book compiled in the 14th Century by Sir John Mandeville, is a story about a young man who leaves home to travel the world. After years of travel, he comes upon a place where his own native language is being spoken to oxen. This is a great marvel to him, because, unlike today, apparently the widespread proliferation of languages and oxen was marvelous; he is amazed to see a place so similar in nature to his own home, and yet with such strange practices as communication with oxen, and he is dumbfounded by the absurdity of the men using this language to speak to livestock. And thus, he retraces his journey until he is once again within the boundaries of his homeland, only to find the very same man speaking out to his oxen, and

realizes that he had witnessed the marvelous at the very boundaries of his own land, but had been so displaced and changed by his travels that he thought his own lands to be strange.⁴⁰

Mandeville explains that, by experiencing the strangeness and marvel of his own familiar world, the traveler was forced to realize the absolute relativity of experience and knowledge by experiencing his origins as an outsider or stranger would. Mandeville's account of this man is an example of classic reverse-culture shock: one's thought patterns are so fundamentally changed by travel that they find their own familiar origins strange, absurd and incomprehensible.

Greenblatt adds that this relativizing of knowledge may also come at the cost of being uprooted from one's origins, at the cost of "never again feeling quite at home".⁴¹

The process of returning home is often more stressful and frustrating than journeying into the strange, because when one moves out into the unknown, she or he can reformulate an identity, can re-think existing structures and frameworks within the context of a new structure and new ideologies. However, when one returns home, she or he is confronted with structures which may now seem inadequate, inefficient or outdated. The returnee's home now seems unfitting, society appears to be wasteful or offensive, and State institutions can be maddening, overly structured and oppressive. More importantly, travelers return home to friends and family who had, when the traveler departed for those distant lands, said goodbye to a completely different person than the one who is standing before them now. How can the traveler express the new ideas she acquired while she was away? The traveler must make an attempt to share information through stories, photos, souvenirs or videos; and, although each of these cannot fully explain what the traveler experienced, the process of storytelling gives the traveler a chance to explain their process of transformation while at the same time sharing the nomadic ideas and experiences he encountered while away. This process is cathartic for the traveler, giving friends

and loved ones a re-introduction to the new ideas and identities one may have gained while abroad.⁴²

However, it is often the case that the most transformative aspects of travel cannot be expressed in words or fragments of a journey; the formulation of travel stories cannot tell the whole story of travel. Pico Iyer writes that he is able to understand how much he has been affected by his travels when he returns home and recognizes that he has become estranged.

I know in my case that a trip has been successful if I come back sounding strange even to myself; if, in some sense, I never come back at all... I bring back receipts, postcards, the jottings I have made, but none of them really tells the story of what I've encountered; that remains somewhere between what I can't say and what I can't know.⁴³

When one returns to the familiar, the remnants of one's travels—in the form of pictures, ticket stubs, scribbles on a page, an airplane blanket, a collection of music—all help to tell a story of a journey, but once again, our identity becomes fluid, it is again beyond the scope of understanding or words. The new ideas the traveler grasped while abroad have once again become vague inclinations, veiled by distance, and the traveler must once again engage in a new dialogue with the strange—this time in the form of the home which has become confusing and strange.

When I was forced to return to America after living in Fiji for three months, I was frantic and distraught; this was my home now, and I did not want to leave. When I returned home, I was no longer sure where “home” was, I missed my friends and my routines. Like Iyer, I brought back small tokens of my time in Fiji, but my keepsakes were unable to fully tell the story of all I had seen and experienced, and upon my return I was unable to fully understand how I had been transformed by my travels.

Two days after my return to Seattle, I wrote about my thoughts at the time, and the trouble I had in reconciling my existence here. *It's strange to be home*, I wrote, *very, very*

strange. I feel torn between thinking I'm just a tourist here, but at the same time all these places are so familiar to me. And, I *remember*—driving down the Ave, I remember where to eat, where the buildings are. I feel like this should all be new to me, but I *know* this place. I knew the money would be different, too, that I'd have to go back to ugly U.S. dollars, but mum, she had a \$1 bill in her bag today and when I saw it I was amazed. My whole life I've been using these, but it looked so strange and foreign... like I'd never seen a dollar before in my life. And the cars and steering wheels are on the wrong side. I feel so uncomfortable here. No one says “bula” (Fijian for “hello”) or “yadra” (“Good Morning”), everyone avoids eye contact... I miss [the food]. I miss the sun! It is so cold here! And, when I walked back into the office, it's just business as usual, “hi, where have you been, let's get to work.” But I feel so different! And nothing here has changed. And I want to go home. (Seattle, 28 September 2005)

I had experienced a new world, learned a new language, new customs, established a new identity; but now that I was home, no one understood my new language, my friends and family were confused by my new identity, and no one could fully understand the process of change I had undergone. I shared pictures, foods, souvenirs and small mementos from a faraway, foreign land, but my experiences were fleeting moments that I could not describe with photos or stories, something that even I had trouble understanding. Returning home, I was given the opportunity to understand how significantly I had changed, and was able to reflect upon the small transformations that had taken place over the course of my journeys; I was able to see familiar places in new ways and consider the fluid nature of my own identity.

By becoming estranged from one's origins, a new journey begins which recreates the process of travel, creating a spiral of overlapping, interlocking journeys. When one loses one's sense of familiarity at home, one must engage in a process of re-understanding her or his origins,

which sets the traveler on a new journey of understanding. The engagement with new ideas and ideologies remains a task that does not end when one returns home—indeed, it only serves to spark new experiences, connections and ideas; and, hopefully, along with these new connections spring new desires to travel and explore more ideas and stranger lands. Hopefully, this process also produces a desire to travel in others—family and friends who see the strange, exotic and beautiful places through photographs and souvenirs will be affected by an overpowering wanderlust, and must see for themselves the fantastic world beyond their borders, producing new connections, new stories and new nomads.

Notes

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- ¹ Wang inspired me to include this section in my paper; she expresses very similar sentiments in the beginning of her own book, and I agreed so much with her reasoning that I felt compelled to present a similar argument. Wang, Hongyu, *The Call from the Stranger on the Journey Home* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 19.
- ² Iyer, Pico. *The Global Soul: Jetlag, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. 42.
- ³ Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 122-123.
- ⁴ deBotton, Alain. *The Art of Travel* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), pp. 54-56.
- ⁵ Ibid. pp. 67-69.
- ⁶ Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, p. 19.
- ⁷ deCerteau, Michel. *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 213.
- ⁸ Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, p. 20.
- ⁹ deCerteau, Michel. *The Writing of History*, p. 213.
- ¹⁰ Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, p. 135.
- ¹¹ Ibid. p. 43.
- ¹² Ibid. pp. 123-4.
- ¹³ Wang, Hongyu, *The Call from the Stranger on the Journey Home*, p. 16.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. p. 148.
- ¹⁵ Roy, Kaustuv, *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces: Deleuze and Curriculum* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Dallmayr, Fred. *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 47.
- ¹⁷ Roy, Kaustuv, *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces: Deleuze and Curriculum*, p. 4.
- ¹⁸ Dallmayr, Fred. *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village*, p. 56. A very similar argument is made by Deleuze and Guattari in *Nomadology: the War Machine*, p. 2.
- ¹⁹ Braidotti, Rosi, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 111.
- ²⁰ Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 23-4.
- ²¹ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Nomadology: the War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), p. 2.
- ²² Ibid. p. 42.
- ²³ Ibid. p. 18.
- ²⁴ Braidotti, Rosi, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, p. 8.
- ²⁵ Wang, Hongyu, *The Call from the Stranger on the Journey Home*, p. 16.
- ²⁶ Roy, Kaustuv, *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces: Deleuze and Curriculum*, p. 2.
- ²⁷ Dallmayr, Fred. *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village*, 47.
- ²⁸ Roy, Kaustuv, *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces: Deleuze and Curriculum*, pp. 90-1.
- ²⁹ Rosi Braidotti gives an excellent summary of the metaphor of the rhizome in her book, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 23.
- ³⁰ Wang, Hongyu, *The Call from the Stranger on the Journey Home*, pp. 77 and 107. Wang borrows the term “institutional constraints” from Michel Foucault.
- ³¹ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Nomadology: the War Machine*, p. 48.
- ³² Roy, Kaustuv, *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces: Deleuze and Curriculum*, p. 12. See also Wang, *The Call from the Stranger on the Journey Home*, p. 77. Both Roy and Wang use Deleuzian notions of becoming in their classroom pedagogy in order to encourage their students to deconstruct and reinvent their identities.
- ³³ Wang, Hongyu, *The Call from the Stranger on the Journey Home*, p. 150.
- ³⁴ Braidotti, Rosi, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, p. 277.
- ³⁵ Martusewicz, Rebecca, *Seeking Passage: Post-Structuralism, Pedagogy, Ethics* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2001), p. 37.
- ³⁶ Wang, Hongyu, *The Call from the Stranger on the Journey Home*, p. 156.
- ³⁷ Ibid. pp. 156-157
- ³⁸ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Nomadology: the War Machine*, p. 18.
- ³⁹ Roy, Kaustuv, *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces: Deleuze and Curriculum*, pp. 44-45.

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- ⁴⁰ Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, p. 48. See also the text of *Mandeville's Travels* online at: <http://www.cofc.edu/~mccandla/Travels.htm>.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, 48.
- ⁴² Storti, Craig, *The Art of Coming Home* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1997), pp. 30-1.
- ⁴³ Iyer, Pico. *The Global Soul: Jetlag, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home*, p. 8.