Travel Writing and Environmental Awareness

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Edited by

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To Kev Reynolds

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[1] Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire. A Season in the Wilderness*. Touchstone Books,1990, 231.

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My first travels were offered to me by my family when I was roughly the same age—around two—as the tree my mother found one day on a mountain slope. All my thankfulness to my parents and grandparents who taught me to look at the world and to be aware of the smallest journey of an insect on the ground and of birds in the sky.

Many thanks to all the animals met in our travels, including travels in a garden, and to all the plants and trees that throw light on our paths.

PREFACE

TRAVELLING EMBEDDEDLY: IF I HAD AN ALTERNATIVE WAY BACK

WEI QINGQI

How I have, since the outbreak of the rancorous virus, missed the pre-covid-19 days! The days when I would travel to other cities to attend conferences, holding face-to-face talks. How I have ached for this vulnerable physical contact with visible fleshy features whose breaths were within bodily reach. And how diverse the congregation of cities is!

Yet when I plead to the heavens for the return of this good old age, there is another sense of vacancy that puts me ill at ease, for I can hardly recall many details of the visited places, as if I would be confronted with the inquiry: "Can you describe what you want to reclaim during your past travels?" Clear memories of the meetings and people linger only with the help of pictures taken in time, but these familiar and similar scenes do not automatically distinguish from each other, with hardly any distinctions save for the characters engraved at those entrances of buildings. Having been reflecting upon the loss of vividness, I realize that important ways of understanding a place have always been neglected.

Looking back, it is ironical for me to have participated in those ecocritical get-togethers in such a way that shielded me from where I was situated. I used to take a cab directly to the host university on my arrival in the strange city, and check my smart phone that had been shut down during my flight. I therefore would get to the hotel on the campus without knowing much about the most basic knowledge of the new place worth sighting. I thus availed myself with a pretended environment that sheltered myself from the genuine experience of those streets and squares. The same strategy would send me back to the railway station or airport, comforting me that I had called at the town. What an achievement I could boast to my family!

I would even join a short-time tour during the break of the meeting or just before my departure. Local resorts had been browsed online previously so that I managed to take photos that would prove I did go there. This,

nevertheless, was a lie told to myself that I was there. I was not. I hastily scurried from one place of interest to another, ticking them off from my list, convinced that I enjoyed the presence. The fact is I had built a paralleled transparent wall from the locality. I could not, or would not bother to identify the fragrance of the plants, the accents of the residents and the way they addressed the same places I saw. There was an important absence of affinity with the smell which more often than not I found unpleasantly alien. The hotel room seemed more hospitable. That in my eyes served to be an enclave, or a bubble to isolate me from any strangeness. I did not become aware until now that I built myself this bubble that had already ended my local exploration.

Mine is a pseudo travel.

And it is not the least ecological, no matter how green my conferences sounded, for I disconnected my life not only to the research, but also to the way the principle of ecology is practiced. Haven't we taken nature as if we are environed, when we are indeed part of it? At least on my part, I was blind to the irony that by taking the wrong route on my arrival, I was denied the right access to the conference room.

Given new chances, which rays of hope have revealed, I will not reassume this "travel". On the arrival, I shall use the most "corporeal" route to get to my terminal: on foot, by bike, taking vehicles swarmed with local men and women speaking dialects which invite me further to know the embedded culture.

Embeddedness. Yes. Which will allow an urge of merging to lead me to those backstreet alleys, places that are not marked on the travellers' map, not even qualified for modern hygiene, but embedded with the code I may read to understand.

And isn't this embedded travel the same way in which I shall travel my life?

INTRODUCTION

FRANÇOISE BESSON

"Celebrate life wherever you find it!" This is what the traveller, travel writer and author of guidebooks to the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Himalayas and several regions of England, Kev Reynolds, said in a lecture he gave in Toulouse in 2016, entitled "Making the Connection." He said that after evoking the least shrub or flower found in the rocks of the Himalayas.

"Celebrate life wherever you find it." This is what every traveller does while seeing the most wonderful places at the other end of the world or the birds, insects and plants living in the garden nearby. In this essay, he talks about something that happened to him during a walk in the Alps:

> In 1987 I was researching a guidebook to the Valais region of Switzerland and planned to visit the Mountet Hut, a refuge built near the foot of the Obergabelhorn. The normal route of approach entailed crossing a glacier, so on a morning full of promise, two of us followed a narrow trail teetering along a moraine crest, then descended onto the ice. There we roped up and set off across the glacier. It was a beautiful summer's day; calm, bright and warm. The glacier untroubled, its crevasses narrow enough to step across without concern, and the way had been marked by the refuge guardian with old tin cans painted red and weighted down with stones. There was nothing to concern us. Yet the moment we began, I felt distinctly uneasy, and that unease only intensified as for no obvious reason I became convinced that we should not be there. An inner voice urged me not to continue; but despite voicing my irrational fear, we plodded on towards the centre of the glacier, until I was physically unable to go any further. Then I turned around and scuttled back the way we'd come, almost dragging my friend behind me—his curses echoing across the valley.
>
> By the time we reached the safety of the moraine bank his abuse was loud in my ear; I'd stretched our years of friendship to the limit, and he was seething. But as we began to untie the rope that had united us, a sudden roar caused us to stop, and turning round we watched as the central part of the glacier, where we'd been only a few minutes before, collapsed into a large hole that had appeared from nowhere and was rapidly spreading outward. All around the hole, the ice was folding into it and the glacier seemed to be shuddering,

> for at its widest point it had been undercut, and had we not turned back when we did, we would have been swallowed by it.
> Now—was the inner voice that had warned me of the danger, a subconscious form of 'connecting'?[1]

At the end of the lecture, answering a question from the audience about what had made him aware of the danger while crossing that glacier in the Alps, he answered that maybe it was because he was connected.[2] Being connected, he said, is not only being connected with a bird or any living creature; it is being connected with all that surrounds us. If that day a voice inside him warned him that he and his companion had to walk back immediately, it was perhaps because his connection with nature was so strong that he felt what the glacier *said* it to him. This connection with nature started from childhood, thanks to a school teacher and nature lover that made young Kev discover the beauty of the natural world, a school teacher making him travel from the classroom to the world out there, just by teaching him to use his senses to be connected with nature.

> It was impossible to be in that classroom for more than a minute without knowing that the teacher—my teacher—was passionate about Nature. Having survived two world wars, he retained a childlike sense of wonder for the miracles of life Out There—and his passion filtered through every lesson he taught. Any child who responded to his enthusiasm (and I was one) would be treated to nature walks at weekends and in school holidays. There he would encourage us to chew the leaves growing in the hedgerows; to gather half a dozen different grasses and identify each one by taste. He would send us up trees to study a deserted nest and describe it—not just how it was formed and from what it was made, but what it *smelled* like! At the foot of one or two trees we'd find the furry balls of owl pellets and unravel them to discover the minute skulls or teeth of a field-mouse or vole contained within; we would listen to birdsong and the methodical buzzing of insects, study the tracks of small creatures in the mud of a streambed, and one night we sat in a moonlit wood to see our first badgers. What's more, the familiar low-lying countryside in which we roamed became as exciting as the Amazon rainforest.
>
> Through those nature walks, and without knowing it at the time, I learned how to *connect* with the natural world (Reynolds 2018: 14-15).

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[1] Reynolds, Kev, "Making the Connection", https://journals.openedition.org/caliban/3682, 78, 79, 80.

[2] https://www.canal-u.tv/chaines/universite-toulouse-jean-jaures/making-the-connection-kev-reynolds

When Kev Reynolds wrote these lines, he showed us the role of nature immediately outside the classroom window. He met what Scott Slovic writes in the same volume of the journal *Caliban* about *Anglophone Travel and Exploration Writing: Meetings Between the Human and Nonhuman*, when he says that in his classes, he "wanted to find a topic that would instil in [his] students the Thoreauvian spirit of visceral engagement with the world, engagement on the physical, emotional, and philosophical levels, while still allowing [his] students to remain in the city and live their regular lives as students. It occurred to [him] that part of what makes Thoreau's journal, which he maintained almost daily from 1837 (when he was twenty years old) to 1861 (just a year before his death), such a rich and elegant work is his sense of being a traveller, even when not traveling geographically" (Slovic 2018, 3). Young Kev Reynolds, while he was at school, discovered his passion for nature through nature walks initiated by his teacher, as Scott Slovic does with his students in Moscow, Idaho, making them aware of a nature close to them, which they had not always noticed, or when teaching nature writing in wild nature in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

When the book you have in hands was still just a project, Kev Reynolds was the first writer who sent me his beautiful and pregnant text "Here and There," suggesting another way of travelling. He, the great traveller who walked and climbed in so many mountains on all continents, shows the necessity to travel in another way to preserve the planet. Kev Reynolds, who wrote *A Walk in the Clouds*, talking about his travels in the mountains of the world through moments of life in nature, is now walking in the clouds and it is with emotion that we walk towards the end of this journey that the writing of a book is. If it is dedicated to him, it is not only because he left this world he loved so much and whose beauty he showed until the very end of his life in December 2021 – it is because his vision, appearing in the chapter he wrote for this book, is fundamental to showing the link between travel writing and environmental awareness. By showing us a new way of travelling, he, the great traveller, places cairns on the paths of the world to show us the way.

The cover of the book shows us a face to face between two kinds of travel writing in nature: a flock of geese and a few contrails: nature versus technology both inscribing their writing in the skies of the world. The flock of Canadian geese was seen in Kent. I was with Kev Reynolds when we first heard them before seeing them, just a few hours before I took a plane home to France. Animal travels link human generations who see them flying southward and northward, thus writing cyclical time in the skies of the world. N. Scott Momaday reminds us that the angle of geese seen in the sky

was seen by his father, by his father's father, by his father's father's father. All generations saw these "ancestral geese" inscribing the birds' journey in some sort of eternity ("Angle of Geese"[3]). Momaday's recurring angles of geese, or Richard Powers' cranes in Nebraska in *The Echo Maker*, inscribe "the memory of the place in their bodies," as Nathalie Cochoy writes,[4] and they teach us to do the same, to learn again this connection with the world that our ancestors had and that we have forgotten.

There are many kinds of texts, including natural writing. Angles of geese inscribe their travels in the skies of the world; forests are the living texts of travelling seeds or fruit. Human writing inscribes travel stories on the pages of books and diaries, and nature inscribes living texts on the earth and in the sky to tell about animal and plant travels.

This book is built according to four sections, each one introduced by one or several pictures. In the first section, "Sustainable Travels," Barbara Kingsolver's book, *Flight Behavior,* is open in the traveller/reader's hands, beside the plane window. The traveller reads about environmental activism, above the plane wing and above the clouds, perhaps sharing the sky with flights of migratory birds below. Reading and travelling and sharing space, from the ground, while looking up at migratory birds, or in a plane while flying from one place to another and self-consciously and self-critically reading about climate change: two ways of understanding the world, two ways of understanding our presence in the world. The second section, about "Literary Travels and Environmental Sensitivity," opens on two engravings by an American artist and traveller, Thornton Oakley who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, had travelled with his wife Amy along the Pyrenees,[5] using various vehicles. The first wood engraving represents a train leaving Perpignan. We cannot recognize the building on which the name of the southern city is written and the engraving suggests an interpretation reflecting the artist's sensitivity. The whirling black steam and the simple lines of the mountains in the background make a contrast between the movement of the train and the static landscape. The speed suggested by the movement of the steam contrasts with the quiet carriage drawn by a mule on the other engraving, both introducing different chapters

[3] Momaday, N. Scott, "Angle of Geese", in *Angle of Geese and Other Poems*, Boston: D.R. Godine, 1974.
[4] Cochoy, Nathalie, "*The Echo Maker*, de Richard Powers – le retour au pays", *Caliban* [Online], 61 | 2019, Online since 10 June 2021, connection on 08 January 2023. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/caliban/6120;
DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/caliban.6120
[5] Oakley, Amy & Thornton, *Hill-Towns of the Pyrenees*, New York: The Century Company, 1923.

in the book. In the second engraving, the point of view is exactly the opposite of the first one where the stress is laid on the train and the landscape is very discrete. In the second one, the carriage and the animal drawing it are quite small in a corner of the picture and what occupies nearly the whole space is a tree with tormented branches and foliage. The traveller's impression of what he and his wife call Perthus (Le Perthus) is the abundance of vegetation, the old age of huge trees overlooking the tiny vehicle. Opening that part with those two engravings suggests how travellers' sensitivity influences their representations of the places they meet. The third part, "Travelling Like Trees and Travelling with Trees," opens on the photo of an araucaria or Parana pine-tree, growing in Southern France and after having arrived from Brazil, as a seed, in a traveller's suitcase. This tree embodies both all the travels made by trees throughout the world and also the personal bonds that humans and trees can develop. The last section is devoted to animal travels and it opens with two Arctic wolves in the mountains. Displaced in the etymological sense of the term, these wolves had been brought from the Arctic to France when there was a project to create an Arctic park. Placing animals so far from their original environment often happens to create more tourism. These forced travels are made for economic reasons. In this case, the idea of that park was fortunately abandoned but the Arctic wolves were there. So they were adopted by those who had created another park in Spain, where animals live in the mountain in semi-liberty. Most of the animals there are mountain animals and even Pyrenean animals, so these wolves had to adapt to their new environment. Their white colour is a kind of letter sent to the world showing that they bear the colour of the place where they should be, the Arctic, and their presence in the Spanish Pyrenees is a sort of environmental clash. They show us what should not be done: animals should not be taken out of their environment for economic reasons. Seeing them walking in the forest in the photo may suggest the ancestral travels of wolves throughout the world, and especially those walking thousands of miles from Eastern Europe to Spain. Yet, if they are walking here, prolonging the movement of millions of wolves before them, the first journey bringing them to that place was an artificial journey that took them out of their ancestral environment. Through their white colour, they show a flaw in the human relationship to the nonhuman world. They show the dark side of animal travels, unlike the wolves walking thousands of kilometres by themselves. Animal travels, either those marking the rhythm of wild animals' lives or those decided by humans, give us indications about what we should do so that all creatures could choose the travels they have to do.

Today I was walking in an urban park that I did not know, in my city of Toulouse in Southwestern France. After lockdowns and restrictions of movements due to the COVID-19 pandemic, after days of pouring rain and floods in the neighbouring Pyrenees, walking outside in the sunshine and meeting with nature outside again was a true gift. While walking, I saw that the park included something like a small botanical path, as boards appeared in front of several trees. Reading them, I had a thought. Looking at a Japanese pagoda tree or *sophora Japonica*, at a Griffith pine that grows in the Himalayas, at a Himalayan cedar and another cedar whose ancestors are in the mountains of Atlas in Morocco, meeting trees that were initially growing in Mediterranean regions, from Spain to Pakistan, in the United States or in Canada, I looked at them standing out in the blue sky of Toulouse and felt as if I was travelling with them to the countries of their origins. A walk in my city offered a wonderful journey all around the world thanks to a few trees offering their lives to passers-by and silently telling them about the countries they came from. And I wondered…Do I need a plane to travel to the other end of the world in order to *see* the world? Aren't those trees living pictures of distant places making me dream as if I *was* in these distant places?

Writing about travels and travel writing at a period when the world is still affected by a pandemic and when most travels have been forbidden for months and are still not advised, when some people have no right to enter some countries if they have not been vaccinated, at a time when travels may bring about disease but also endanger the planet still more because of the impact travels have on climate change, has something paradoxical and even provocative about it. A small virus has taught us about the dangers of too much travelling. It brought about the awareness that travelling—at least the contemporary forms of travelling—threatens the planet and all its inhabitants, including mankind. If coronavirus could contaminate hundreds of millions of people throughout the world so quickly, it is because of globalization. We are in a world where distances are, as it were, abolished thanks to innumerable flights every day, and what allowed people to meet so easily also allowed a disease to spread as easily. With the repeated pandemic lockdowns, staying at home paradoxically taught us the meaning of travelling.

But this virus and all its consequences, political, social and industrial pressures on individuals had many side effects, among which was an upsurge of unawareness and violence. What first seemed to bring people to a new awareness of their connection with the rest of the world and with nature became, after a wave of fear orchestrated by the political power and fed by the media on the whole planet, a huge step into unawareness. By

introducing medical segregation, by bringing violence into non-violent people, by placing scientists suggesting alternative solutions to the global health policy in the dock, by punishing those who refused the new political-medical norm, obliging them to forget any social life and leading many to depression, by leading doctors, at a period when there is a lack of doctors, either to obey the central power or to stop healing people, the global political world highlighted a terrible flaw in the system, showing that the whole world might sink into any kind of obedience and that not a virus but its many interpretations can transform people's ability to think freely. I thought about Frankenstein's monster, created by a scientist wanting to equal God, unable to be understood and finishing his life isolated on an iceberg after a voyage to the extremities of the world. I thought about Newspeak, this language invented by George Orwell in *Nineteen-Eighty-Fou*r and "designed to diminish the range of thought," as he said, a language in which some words were eliminated. A journey into literature might have changed the global situation. This side effect of the pandemic made other serious problems vanish in people's consciences. One of them, perhaps the most terrible one in our time, being the problem of migration. Travelling because misery, wars, dictatorships oblige poor people to travel. Condemned in their countries because of political systems threatening them, those people trying to survive take the risk of dying in dangerous sea crossings, before being rejected by various countries. We can just give the example of what happened between France and England: more than three hundred people have died while trying to pass from France to England since 1999. On 24 November 2021, twenty-seven migrants drowned in the Channel while they had regarded that sea as a passage to hope. One of the side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is the multiplication of migrating travels and of flights of people from Lebanon, Iraq and other countries where life has become harder and harder to Eastern Europe. Travels of despair. This has often been the case and people have always migrated from places where there were political troubles or starvation, places where their lives were threatened, to places where they thought they would be safe. What is happening during the current war in Ukraine reproduces the migrations of thousands of people from Ukraine a century ago. Times change. Desperate migrations go on. And pandemics show that we are all in the same place, the earth, all on the same ship, and what happens to one individual may happen to all.

So should we write about the pandemic to find solutions to our life together? Or should we give the impression we get far from it, while writing about environmental awareness to approach possible solutions? The attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA had already suggested that we were all in the same ship. Scott Slovic, in his essay "Ecocriticism on and After

September 11," in *Going Away to Think*, talks about David Gessner's essay "The Punctured Pastoral," in which the nature writer tells about "his own 9/11 experience beginning with the story of his hike in the Colorado Rockies the day of the attack and exploring his efforts to return to normalcy back home on Cape Cod in the following months" (Slovic 2008, 97). And Gessner writes: "Perhaps, after the horror of the deed, that was the immediate message we took away from September 11. *Welcome to the World*. There is no place apart" (Gessner 172, quoted in Slovic 2008: 97). The writer has a dilemma and asks himself questions:

> Was heading for the hills, even the metaphorical hills, a cowardly retreat in the face of this new world? How could I spend another year observing and writing about ospreys or snails? I suspected very few nature writers were working in Israel, for instance. What use was it now to write of titmice or the migratory pattern of the semipalmated plover? Wasn't it a time to think only of war and politics? (Gessner 173, quoted in Slovic 2008: 97)

Yet, Slovic goes on to say that Gessner's "post-9/11 wanderings in nature reinforced his sense of humility, the vulnerability of life, and the need sometimes to feel modestly empowered by doing small constructive things" (Slovic 2008: 97). And his questionings lead him to write: "In this lack of a safe place, we joined not just the citizens of the world, but the other species that populate the planet. Vulnerability is a reality of life on earth, a fact we have tried so desperately to bury under layers of control" (Gessner 176, quoted by Slovic 2008: 98). Slovic adds that "[t]his realization reminds him of the strange unity between his own sense of frailty and the migrating monarch butterflies he had observed in Colorado, "engaged in their great and preposterous enterprise" (Gessner 177, quoted in Slovic 2008: 98). The shock of the attacks and the writer's sense of guilt when he was hiking in the mountains and observing "ospreys or snails" both generated a realization that any observation of other species may lead us to our own sense of vulnerability. With the attacks of September 11 and all over the world before and after them, as well as the pandemic in which a tiny virus affects all of mankind and generates health and political chaos, we could see the dark effects of globalization. Our system generated both. In both cases, planes were the vehicles of death or of disease. Does it mean that planes should be thrown away? In these cases, planes were the instruments of men's violence and of the spreading of a virus. But only humans were responsible for the chaos. Could this realization urge them to find a way in the non-human? Could they realize, like David Gessner, that we are as vulnerable as the migrating monarch butterflies? Does this realization mean that we should no longer travel, or that we should travel less and in a more sustainable way?

Migrating animals travel to survive. Many human migrations were made for the migrants to survive. But now, and while the pandemic is far from being over and the virus and other viruses can still spread thanks to planes, flights are more numerous than ever as they are part of an economic system, and in order to boost economy, they fill the skies of the world with contrails drawing strange pictographs in the blue sky. Maybe the well-ordered angles of migratory birds could help us to decipher the strange pictograms written by innumerable planes…

But planes are not only a danger. Planes also carry medicines and Aeropostale allowed communication between continents. The author of *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, was among the pioneers who made planes improve communication between people. And the little prince said, "The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched, they are felt with the heart." Once planes taught us how to *feel* the world.

With the pandemic, and before flights were allowed again, real travels have been replaced by virtual travels, videoconferences, in which people gather from all parts of the world at the same time while sitting in their home offices or dining-rooms. Is this the new politically correct form of travelling? Yet virtual connections are also dangerous for the planet. And real travels might be conscious travels. Travelling in the past centuries did not threaten the planet. Travels were slower, harder, and allowed people to see more of the world than when we just take a plane nowadays to fly to the other side of the globe. The mountaineer Henry Russell used nearly all existing ways of transport to travel around the world in the middle of the nineteenth century and his travel books contain hundreds of indications about the cultures and landscapes he met. The mountaineer, who spent then a part of the year on the Vignemale glacier in the Pyrenees, perhaps gives us a key to what we could change in our conception of travels. Jules Verne was inspired by Russell, and his *Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* is a fictitious interpretation of Russell and two more travellers' journeys around the world.[6] Yet there is a meaningful difference: for Phileas Fogg, what

[6] Piero Gondolo Della Riva, a specialist of Jules Verne, says that two travellers have probably inspired Jules Verne for his character of Phileas Fogg: George Francis Train, an American eccentric who, in 1870, said he had travelled around the world in 80 days, and Perry Fogg, also American, who visited Japan, China, India, Egypt, Europe, before returning to the USA between 1869 and 1870. The latter published a travel book, *Round the World*. (See Piero Gondolo della Riva "Un 'Tour du monde' qui a conquis la planète", in *Géo hors-série Jules Verne*, 2003, 84). To these two travellers who probably inspired Verne—one of them giving him the name of his character and the other the duration of the journey around the world—, we can add

mattered was speed, whereas Russell took all the time necessary to observe, understand and enjoy the world he discovered. Phileas Fogg, through his eccentric bet, perhaps foreshadows the travels to come and our world's rush when what matters is to go more and more quickly, forgetting to see the world. Earlier travels did not eat the resources of the earth, did not pollute it, and travellers could *see* the world. What the virus showed us, among many other things, is that travels as they are conceived now are first and foremost a threat to the world. But there is nothing in common between the traveller who wants to discover a part of the world and takes the plane once a year or once every two years, and the business man who takes a private jet or a commercial plane nearly every day to attend meetings. A middle way is necessary in all fields, in travels as for everything else. Excessive travel threatens the planet. This is a fact. Does this mean that we must stop travelling and turn only to virtual travel? The internet is another source of pollution endangering the world and is not the ideal solution. Zoom calls, which helped so many of us to feel less isolated during the pandemic, are one of the major power consumers.[7] And yet they are sometimes necessary to maintain human bonds. Here again, balance is the keyword.

Maybe we should travel differently. Some non-profit organizations like "Alternative Travel Project"[8] try to encourage people to travel in a more sustainable way. There are ways of travelling that allow us to enjoy the world without adding to its pollution. While nearly the whole human world was locked down in Spring 2020 and later in Autumn, and later in Spring 2021, nonhuman animals could freely achieve their migrating travels. Migrating wood pigeons did not risk their lives when arriving above some hunting areas, as is usually the case. While the human world could not move, seeds went on circulating from one place to the other, following birds' movements. While we had no other possibility to travel than watching the sky, hoping to see migratory birds, we could realize that seeing a flight of Canadian geese or cranes travelling to the North or to the South according to the season, is a wonderful way of travelling poetically, in the imagination, just listening to the birds and seeing them flying to the places where they must be.

Henri Russell-Killough, who seems to be the third source of inspiration as he had travelled around the world more than ten years before the other two travellers and he is quoted by Verne in one of his novels (*Michel Strogoff*). (See Françoise Besson, "Russell inspirateur de Jules Verne", *Pyrénées* n° 210, 2-2002, 117-137.)

[7] See Pitron, Guillaume, *L'enfer numérique. Voyage au bout d'un like*. Ed. Les Liens qui libèrent, 2021.

[8] http://www.alternativetravelproject.org

There are many ways of travelling. Reading is a way of travelling without consuming too many of the planet's resources. Travel books, nature writing, and novels allow us to travel by proxy and to follow travellers in all parts of the world, to discover the world through their steps, using their observation and our imagination as readers. The visual arts also enable us to travel all around the world. Watching a sea painting or a mountain painting leads you to the seaside or to the mountains. Even objects may help us travel. The beautiful Art Nouveau[9] glass vases of the Nancy school, by showing landscapes or a variety of flowers on the transparency of coloured glass, makes you enter these dream-like landscapes.[10] It is the same with pieces of furniture of the same Nancy school, mingling several woods and adorning them with marquetry flowers or landscapes in which the trees reflecting in the river are made of various kinds of woods. These objects are not only beautiful, they take the viewer into nature as when he looks at a painting. It is the same with the Eastern furniture ornate with mother-of-pearl landscapes and flowers. Looking at them brings you to nature and into the Orient.

There may also be wonderful travels in one's neighbourhood as Scott Slovic explains to his students when showing them all that could be discovered just beside their university in Moscow, Idaho. A garden is also a wonderful travel place and the name of plants offer such a journey around the world through botanical knowledge. When we are in the shadow of a pine of Parana in a French garden or of an Oregon pine-tree in a forest of Southwestern France, we travel in our imaginations to Parana in Brazil and Oregon in the United States while being aware that those trees have travelled really from their native places to France, since the Oregon pine-trees were introduced to France in the nineteenth century while the individual pine of Parana mentioned here arrived in the shape of a seed at the end of the twentieth century.

Plants and animals can also make still more distant travels when science uses them for research. Some scientists, for example, sent plants into space to observe their reactions to a different environment and some showed "that minimizing water usage and salt accumulations would produce healthier plants in space."[11] When humans decide to send non-humans on travels to

[9] https://www.beauxarts.com/grand-format/lart-nouveau-en-3-minutes/

[10] https://musee-ecole-de-nancy.nancy.fr/l-art-nouveau/l-ecole-de-nancy-2891.html

[11] "The idea was to validate in space the results of ground tests, to show that minimizing water usage and salt accumulations would produce healthier plants in space," said Topham. "For years we've used the same method for packing root modules, so

space, it's generally for research—research that can be made of sad, cruel experiences as when they used animals and sent them to space to observe their behaviour. The whole world knows about the story of Laika, that young female dog found in the streets of Moscow, Russia, who was the first living creature sent to space, in 1957. After undergoing plenty of stressful tests, she was sent to space; one can imagine the panic of that little dog, placed into a closed narrow space and undergoing changes of pressure and an increase of temperature and solar radiations. She died after five hours of flight. In 1960, two more dogs were sent to space, together with a rabbit, forty mice, two rats, plants and mushrooms. One cat was sent to space in 1963 and returned alive. She underwent many tests for three months before being euthanized so that her brain might be studied.[12] Is that progress? Only seven countries (the USSR, the USA, France, Argentina, China, Japan and Iran) have sent animals into space. Powerful countries. Is it power? These scientific travels probably provided interesting data to see if humans could bear travelling to space, to see the evolution of an organism in the journey from earth to space. etc… Did they provide interesting data on our place in *this* world, the earth? Have we solved problems on the earth when we sacrificed creatures in order to see if life is possible elsewhere? The human indifference to the suffering of all those animals placed in a terrifying environment, these tortures inflicted to them to achieve scientific progress, are a mystery as regards our relationship with the world. How, in order to bring answers concerning space, can humans be blind to the torture and death of living creatures? Is this the aim of travelling, travelling in general? Isn't travelling a way of understanding the world and one's place in the world? If that use of non-human creatures may have helped scientists to better understand what happens in space, did it help them to understand their own place in this world better? Did it help them to improve life on the earth? Isn't this a perversion of the mere notion of travel?

It's not that kind of *denatured* travel that this book will evoke, but any kind of travel on the earth, real human travel and travel reported in books, any kind of books, but also nonhuman travel written as prints on the ground or as geometric shapes in the sky.

There are many ways of travelling and many sustainable ways of discovering the world, as the authors of this book show. Does this mean that

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this was a comparison study between old and potential improvements and so far we have found a couple of surprising results."
https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/research/10-074.html

[12] See "Les animaux 'héros' oubliés de la conquête spatiale", *Sciences et Avenir*, 3 November 2017. https://www.sciencesetavenir.fr/animaux/les-animaux-heros-oublies-de-la-conquete-spatiale_117975

humans should stop travelling around the word? Certainly not, as this would have many other sad consequences due to economic loss and unemployment, and also this would break some vital connections, the connections underlined by all those travellers who, by writing books, essays, poems, and graphic novels, bring dreams of travel to those who cannot travel themselves. And they also guide those who spend their lives always trying to go more quickly, to have more money, to guide all those who are supposed to manage the world, to *have* more of the land and resources of the world, just to *be in* the world. Those travellers show a way to awareness, revealing the difference between wealth defined as material abundance and wealth defined as a capacity to see the beauty of the world and to feel empathy for all the people and creatures met on the way. We do not have to stop travelling to preserve the planet and ourselves. But we should travel in a more conscious way, enjoy short one-day travels just around our homes, walk and bicycle more often. There are so many landscapes, plants, trees, animals, villages, human communities to discover just beside our houses, even just by looking out of the window. And when we decide to fly to a distant country, we should understand that it is a wonderful gift and that our carbon footprint can be compensated for in one way or another. Travelling again and again, for those who can afford it or who are told that it is necessary for their work, leads them to no longer appreciate travelling. They go from plane to plane, they see airports looking like one another, and they see nothing of the places where they land. Doing this less often and in a more conscious way would give travels a new freshness. New travels might reveal the strength of discovery and freedom that travels had in the past, and that they still have for those who retain the capacity to wonder that is necessary to travel and be aware.

Scott Slovic's book *Going Away to Think* makes us think from its very title. We might reverse it and say that we should think to go away, to go away without threatening the rest of the world. We should think about a new way of going away.

During the pandemic, motionlessness allowed us to think about the various implications of movement. Travelling, having the traveller's curious, attentive mind, can be experienced in any place: in one's city, in one's farm, in one's garden. It is also what the 2020-2022 health crisis showed us. At the beginning, with the planetary lockdowns decided in most countries to try to stop the quick spreading of a virus, COVID-19, the planet's human inhabitants, each of them, locked down in their house or flat, could focus on essential things, at the beginning at least: attentiveness to the other, attentiveness to the world. No need even of a garden to be able to observe nature. In that Spring 2020 when everybody had to remain locked

down, everybody discovered the exterior world, discovered nature just by looking out of their windows, by letting the vitality of spring enter. Being locked down, we discovered the fundamental freedom to think about our relationship to the world; by being geographically motionless, everyone could discover the power of travelling at the heart of the world from the windows of their houses.

This volume, written by sixteen authors and travellers from China, England, France, India, Tunisia and the United States, offers as many conceptions of travels as means of revealing new ways of looking at the world, of thinking about one's relationship with the world and with space, of developing one's environmental awareness.

All these authors are both writers, readers and travellers, and all of them are aware of the beauty of the world and how we humans threaten this world and its inhabitants. They, we, are both writers who try to make more people aware, and audiences expecting other writers to show us the way. As writers, we should wonder if our writing activity can have an impact on the world. Kathleen Dean Moore, in a recent lecture she gave in France for the first festival about nature writing in the Pyrenees, a festival held in mountain villages, said:

> "Robin Kimmerer, a writer and Potawatomi elder, says that if you want to know what your responsibilities are, you should ask, what are my gifts? The lark has the gift of a beautiful song, so its responsibility is to wake the world each morning. The salmon has the gift of rich red flesh, so its responsibility is to feed the people. What are our gifts, we writers?
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> I believe we have four particular gifts. Each one gestures toward what we must do.
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> > *One*. Our gift is the gift of memory – what remains and what has vanished. Hold on to the memories of a free-flowing stream. Write about blackbirds in wheeling flocks over marshlands as deep as the horizon. In a boat rocking on a turquoise sea, write about the confetti of fish. Humanity will need to remember the glories of the natural world, or we will not know how to measure our terrible loss.
> >
> > *Two*. Writers have the gift of imagination. This, at a time that calls for the greatest exercise of human imagination the world has ever seen. Reinvent everything. Re-imagine what it means to live a good life—a question older than the Greeks, now answered almost exclusively by advertisers. Imagine new dreams. Re-imagine the story of human nature to replace capitalism's portrait of radically selfish, eternally unsatisfied consumers.

> *Three*. Writers have the gift of a sense of wonder. Human beings have the capacity to be astonished. The most important words a writer can put on paper are "look, just look." Look at this morning, at this damp light, at this wet sidewalk as if you've never seen a morning before. Then the truth is revealed to us—we cannot take this for granted, that there is something rather than nothing, and that it is so beautiful. The world is contingent, astonishing, glorious, gorgeous, irreplaceable, mysterious, beyond us. If the good French word for that is *sacré*, then let us use that word.
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> *Four*. The writer has the gift of a megaphone, an amplifying factor, and this imposes an obligation to speak the truth in every way a writer knows how. We do not have the luxury of living in ordinary times. Mary Oliver reminds us: "It's a serious thing just to be alive on this fresh morning in this broken world."
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> These are indeed grave facts: We are alive. We have been given this fresh morning. The world lies broken at our feet. All this is true. To be honest, then, we nature writers must intentionally, seriously hold both gratitude and dread. […]
>
> I call on you to think of new answers to the writer's most important questions: Who is my audience? What is my purpose? In these dangerous times, our audience is history. Our purpose is to save all that we love too much to lose."[13]

The sixteen authors participating in this book use these four gifts in their contributions, and we, as readers, should never forget that we have the gift of listening: listening to a nightingale, a tit or an owl, listening to trees creaking in the forests or to the steps of a deer, listening to the ocean waves or the murmur of the mountain torrents, but also listening to the sounds of the city, the engines, the human sounds and fury that can silence the world and remind us of all the places where we can say after the poet Keats "And no birds sing"; to listen in an active way so that we should not have, as scientist Rachel Carson wrote in her seminal book, "Silent Spring."

Each creature has their role on this earth and an ant, a butterfly, a robin, a trout, a bear, a tree, a gentian or a human being are all necessary to avoid a world where there would be only "silent springs."

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[13] Moore, Kathleen, Dean, "Écrire les grands espaces américains", 16 June, 2022, Pau, André Labarrère media library, Festival "Écrire la nature", Pau, Laruns and Ossau Valley, https://www.ecrirelanature.com/fr/actualites. Revised on 2 November, 2022.

Words may seem derisory while there are so many tragedies in the world, and yet, if poets and journalists are among the first who are killed in dictatorships and wars, it is because those who want to make fear reign over the world and annihilate all voices except the one of weapons, fear them, fear their words. Even once Ken Saro-Wiwa, Pablo Neruda, Federico Garcia Lorca, Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, and so many less well known or totally anonymous peace and justice fighters have been killed, their words can still be heard.

In his preface, Wei Qingqi, after remembering his past way of travelling without really knowing the places he went to for conferences, speaks about a new way of travelling, "embedded travel," that is travels using "the most 'corporeal' route", a route in which he might meet men and women, walk or ride to be close to the country and people he discovers in order "to know the embedded culture."

In a first section devoted to "sustainable travels," Kev Reynolds, in a poetic essay about "Here and There," reminds us that "the world 'out there' with all its rich diversity, is also '*just* out there' the other side of my window. [...] Why do we proclaim the beauty of the exotic, yet ignore the wonders all around us? Does familiarity make us blind? Or did we never see the world in which we live day by day? The environment is here. NOW. It surrounds us and we are part of it" (Kev Reynolds). This tireless traveller who walked and climbed so many mountains in the world, from the Atlas Mountains to the Alps, from the Pyrenees to the mountains of Norway, Turkey and Peru, and from Corsica and the green hills of England to the highest mountains in the Himalayas, was as happy when he observed a caterpillar hanging from a tree in Kent as when he discovered the Alpamayo at sunrise when the clouds vanished. In the last week of his rich life devoted to walks and climbs in the mountains of the world to celebrate the world and tell stories to share his travels with all those who were travelling in his words in his innumerable lectures and articles and his more than fifty guidebooks, travel books and poems, he went on celebrating the beauty of the world even from hospital and went on travelling with those he loved through their travelling stories. In his beautiful essay, he reminds us that even when you look at a photograph, you travel. Describing a black and white photograph then in 1953 "by British mountaineer, geographer and schoolmaster John Tyson," he enters the photograph, he enters the landscape and meets the porters in it. He lets us guess "the unseen pass [of] Tinkar Lipu, close to where the borders of West Nepal, India and Tibet meet." And he writes: "This photograph is not a static landscape scene. It moves." His essay reminds us that we can move and travel simply by knowing how to look at a photograph. This text is a sort of will offered to the world to teach all of