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**Bernd Stiegler**  
**Stationary Journeys**  
**A Short Cultural History of Travel in and around the**  
**Room**

**Translated by Michael Ritterson**

## Brief Travel Guide

*But it isn't necessary at all to actually travel great distances, to unfamiliar foreign places. Traveling in our sense is an internal state of mind. One acts differently toward the world outside... Perhaps one needn't even leave the room?*

Balázs, 94

Although it could perhaps appear so, this is not a book for stay-at-homes, agoraphobics, or confirmed non-travelers, who nonetheless – I readily admit – are often the subjects of the stories dealt with in what follows. Yet it is not meant as a manual for living-room journeys, but rather and above all as a history of that particular kind of indoor travel: *Zimmerreisen*. Standstill traveling. Traveling to the proximate distance and the distant proximity. Travel without traveling. Travel without moving from the spot, yet setting many things in motion. Outright discovery tours of the everyday world – which turns out to be strangely foreign. That is what this book is about.

Just as indoor travels represent a kind of experiment that removes the traveler from his accustomed surroundings without causing him to vacate them, so this book too is an experiment: If – to put a finer point on the initial question – we collect a number of indoor travels from a period of more than two centuries, can we then also read these as an investigation of experienced spaces? And if so, then what kind of experience are we dealing with in these very diverse travels? And finally: Does the history of indoor travel also yield a history of these changed experienced spaces?



Perhaps the practice of touring one's room can be expressed in a formulation borrowed from Viktor Shklovsky: defamiliarization, *ostranenie*, an "alienation of things." "The goal is ... to afford us a sense of the thing, a sense which is seeing and not merely recognizing again" (Shklovsky 13); thus he defines the task of art. And that is what happens with indoor travel: alienating presumably familiar spaces, bringing the eye of an ethnologist to bear on them and to investigate them as if this were a space entered for the first time, or at least seen with fresh eyes.

But what in fact is an indoor journey? Friedrich Nicolai wondered, seeming as early as 1781 to anticipate today's globalized tourism industry: How, assuming that one will

travel, is it possible to remain at home? Just a short time later the question was turned around: How, assuming that one will stay at home, is it possible to take a trip? Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre* from the year 1794 offered a reply to this question and at the same time laid the groundwork for a particular genre of travel literature. De Maistre made use of a forty-two-day term of house arrest to put into action a supposedly long-intended project – and traveled his room. The result was a witty, ironic, profound, and uncommonly stimulating little book which has lost hardly any of its freshness up to the present day, a special kind of travelogue about distant proximity and proximate distance, things happening in a space where nothing at all actually happens. This journey *in camera* is a kind of *Ent-fernung* that steps back from a familiar space so as to explore it anew and describe it.

Indoor travels – and this is the most important rule to be observed in the stages which follow – are not imaginary journeys. They are not utopian visions of an *Erewhon*, but rather concentrate on a supposedly familiar space, here and now. They describe not fantasy worlds but banal, everyday spaces. They explore not exotic, faraway places but remain in their immediate surroundings: in one's room, on the street or town where one lives. But once the (in-place) traveler is underway, these spaces can transform themselves and become veritable experiential spaces, up to then hidden from view or covered with gray quotidian mildew. The journey in place is a magic word for the everyday world, which suddenly springs open, revealing itself.

Xavier de Maistre's journey was not to remain the only one of its kind. Today we have numerous texts that have been published in this once little-regarded branch of literature. And most of them are not included in the body of literature generally thought of as canonical. Many of their authors have dropped into obscurity, and many of the texts are only to be found in dusty volumes with uncut pages in large libraries. But this in no way reduces their value. In the following chapters, we are not so much concerned with the literary significance or the aesthetic rank of a few texts published in out-of-the-way places as we are with reading them as experiments, as explorations and descriptions of experienced spaces.

The space defined by the room to be traveled will change greatly in the course of the following chapters (arranged for the most part in chronological order), as will the individual's relationship to proximity and distance, to the objects around that person, and, not least of all, to the person him- or herself. The service rendered by these curious travelogues is to make all of this accessible to readers. A reading of them will take us

through twenty-one stages, exactly half the number in de Maistre's journey, plus one excursus devoted to a journey that unquestionably leads us far away, but represents an important point of reference for many living-room travelers: Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Each stage can certainly be read independently of the others. At the end of each one are suggested readings on travel that might be useful for further explorations. "So I think," wrote the living-room traveler Friedrich David Jaquet in the early nineteenth century, "that a journey in my room cannot cause me boredom, and taking that journey is as much my prerogative as a trip to the moon is for Swift. Thus, the opposite extreme was open to me, and the journey began" (Jaquet 9). May it be thus for the readers of this book as well. But: "It is time! Let us weigh anchor!" (Baudelaire, *Le voyage*).

## FIRST STAGE

### Journey around the Room

*Search not for the secret of happiness save in  
thine own house.*

Abbé Gresset, *Vert-Vert* (1733), epigraph to the first ed. of  
de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre*

*How many people have traveled abroad  
without ever leaving their room.*

Perin, frontispiece

*In many an exceedingly learned author I have read  
that he who travels too much will be lost.*

*Journal de Paris* 977, and Jaquet 43

In the spring of 1790, Xavier de Maistre, the brother of the conservative political theoretician Joseph de Maistre, making the best of his forty-two-day house arrest, undertakes a living-room journey of which he writes a detailed account, thus establishing a new literary genre and producing a book destined for huge success in the French literary marketplace. Yet de Maistre was by no means as reluctant a traveler as he might appear on first sight. He was no stay-at-home, just the opposite. He was at home in the world and quite receptive to technological innovations. Together with his brother Joseph he undertook an ascent in a Montgolfier balloon, reported on the experience in two articles, and was very much on the move all his life – though not infrequently for political reasons.

Even today his *Voyage autour de ma chambre* can be found in various editions and translations; it even serves as a topic for interpretation on the written section of German secondary-school exams – a classic text whose success was immediate though unexpected, at least for the author, and is evidenced by the fact that many writers took up and elaborated on his basic idea. As early as February 16, 1803, at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu Comique in Paris, a vaudeville comedy by René Perin was staged, followed by several more by the mid-nineteenth century; and just a few years after publication of the first edition, we find a number of books and travelogues based on that model. Even de Maistre was a little surprised by his book's popularity. At the turn of the century, on December 31, 1799, he writes to his brother Joseph concerning its colossal success: "I've found it everywhere. It's been translated into German. A second book has been made out

of it with the title *Second Journey around ...* etc., also translated. That one is very nice. And a third one on this model: *Travels through My Pockets* – mediocre” (de Maistre, *Lettres*, vol. 1 60). Many years later he will write a kind of sequel himself, an *Expédition nocturne autour de ma chambre*, but one that lasts only one night. Charles Nodier also commented smugly on the popularity of this new travel literature: “For a long time now nothing has been printed but books about travel and books for children. Have you read *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, *Le voyage autour de vingt-quatre heures*, *Le voyage au Palais-Royal*, *Le voyage dans le boudoir de Pauline*, *Le voyage dans mes poches*? It’s a downright mania” (Nodier, cited by Sangsue 166).

De Maistre’s slender book, *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, with scarcely a hundred pages, is filled with allusions to the travelogue tradition, but also the literary one. On the one hand, his irony sets him apart from the once enormously popular accounts of the discovery voyagers he quotes both explicitly and implicitly. At the same time, however, he makes reference to the new emphases in travelogues set by Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*, where it is less a matter of astonishing discoveries, investigations of foreign peoples, fauna, or spectacular sights, and more a matter of the *sensations* of the travelers themselves. But even their portrayals are not exempt from irony in his travel account. Each and every discovery – and there is ample discussion of them – whether it refers to the object or the subject, is always refracted through irony as well, is always also a discovery of that which has already been discovered. De Maistre’s journey explores the world long familiar to him, and he does this by regarding it anew, from the traveler’s *and* the ironist’s distance.

For the new edition of his book in 1812 he added a foreword that made explicit, ironic reference to a common feature of discovery voyages: “It is by no means our intent to deprecate the achievements of those travelers who circled the globe before the journey whose discoveries and interesting adventures we publish here for the second time. Magellan, Drake, Anson, Cook, et al. were without doubt remarkable men; yet we may be permitted, and if we are not terribly deceived it is in fact our duty to point out, one particular feature of the *Voyage autour de ma chambre* which sets this book apart from all of those which have preceded it. The most famous journeys can be repeated: a narrow broken line will show us their route on every map of the world; and anyone is at liberty to set out in the tracks of those bold men who once undertook the journeys themselves. It is a different matter with the *Voyage autour de ma chambre*. That was done once and for all, and no mortal can boast of setting out on it again, the more so as the world in which it

was made no longer exists” (de Maistre, 1984 27). While the explorers’ sea voyages can be repeated, so de Maistre suggests with pointed irony, the journey around his chamber is perforce transitory, necessarily singular and non-repeatable. The experiences of travel in place are bound not only to the place but also to the time. They are explorations of a space whose goal it is to retrieve stories and experiences without themselves being repeatable. Even though de Maistre’s parlor journey was to become the model for numerous similar journeys up to the present day, the discoveries that each of these travelers makes will depend upon the experienced space of the room in question. Parlor journeys investigate experienced spaces and make them the subject of a travelogue.

De Maistre’s begins in the classic manner, setting the location: “My room, according to the measurements of Padre Beccaria, lies below the 45th parallel; it runs from east to west and forms a rectangle with a perimeter of thirty-six steps paced off along the walls. But my journey,” de Maistre continues, “will cover more than thirty-six; for I shall walk back and forth and diagonally in it, often without a plan and without a destination” (de Maistre 11). His travelogue will contain forty-two chapters, sometimes consisting of just a few lines and in one case only two words, thus giving the impression that each chapter corresponds to one day of his journey and one day’s entry in his logbook. But brevity of the chapters, the missing dates, and the oddly erratic “plot sequence” – if we can even speak of one here – compressed into the space of just a few hours, make it clear that this travel diary is about a different type of experience that does not require a chronological and retraceable sequence in order to be appreciated. Just as his friend Rodolphe Toepffer covers considerable distances in his likewise very successful *Voyages en zigzag*, deriving enormous profit without benefit of an itinerary, so de Maistre traverses his parlor: Right foot first, left foot then; round about and back again!



CHAPITRE XII.

le tertre



On his wanderings, the “sedentary traveler” (de Maistre 46) discovers not only the utilitarian beauty of everyday objects – plain, ordinary things found in an ordinary household, for example, a bed or an easy chair – he also reports on the history of pictures hanging in the room and on discoveries in his little library. But most important, de Maistre tells loosely connected stories of everyday life – reports on his domestic servant, his dog, and his beloved – stories in which the receptivity and sensitivity engendered by the traveler’s attitude hold “the dichotomy of ‘everyday tedium’ and ‘worldly marvels’” (de Botton 271) in a peculiar kind of suspension. The everyday is transformed, in the specific perspective of the living-room journey, into a special kind of story where it is

simply a matter of the power of familiarity surrendering its power for the brief duration of the journey.

Xavier de Maistre confines himself strictly to the space of his room on his journey. The view from his window, soon to become a standard feature of the literature (see the Fifth Stage), plays no more part here than the surroundings of his house, which go unseen. The only places that matter are the interior of the room and the interior experienced by “the one traveling about” (de Maistre, 1984 28). Precisely by virtue of their being lifted out of the world, these become spaces for discovery.

His own room is a “paradisiacal region containing all the world’s goods and treasures” (de Maistre 83) and requiring nothing more to make it complete. A world before the Fall, innocent in its momentary *splendid isolation*, lifted out of time for a brief while, yet enriched with history. Here he makes, as he says, “one discovery after another” (28). In this sense, de Maistre is the opposite of the wildly popular Robinson Crusoes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.\* While Crusoe – in whichever version you choose, for their number is legion – on his remote island in the faraway (and usually not very Pacific) Ocean recapitulates, tests, and reinstitutes the social and cultural patterns of his homeland; the living-room traveler in his sequestered yet centrally located domicile in the middle of the city explores the familiar space, all his belongings and objects of everyday life, with the foreigner’s gaze that transforms it all without changing it. Everything stays in its place. The traveler does not rearrange the things that surround him; his gaze takes in their organizing power. None of these objects is foreign, only the manner of seeing them is. The eye gives back to them the measure of foreignness they had lost by their familiarity. The objects are familiar-foreign reference points for his travelogue and for his life, which can really only be told with reference to these things.

In the interior space, de Maistre also practices the kind of introspection that leads to a particular metaphysical model, which places its stamp on the remainder of his journey: He discovers that he is “doubled” – that he consists of a thinking being and a body which he describes as *the other one*. “Never have I realized more clearly that I am *doubled*” (de Maistre 83). Not only can both be observed by him, but each can also observe the other. Thus it is “the most astonishing feat that a man can perform ... to arrest his spirit, attend

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\* This comparison is also found in one of the first monograph studies on de Maistre from the year 1918: “Let us acknowledge that one need not actually be a captive, a [Silvio] Pellico or a Crusoe, to grow fond – and quite naturally so – of the very smallest things in one’s own miniature domain and to do the honors for one’s friends with a gently teasing bonhomie: One need only be young, a friend of conviviality and solitude, and temporarily deprived of one’s freedom” (Berthier 48).

to the actions of its animal nature, and observe its workings without taking part in them” (18–19). Here, too, is the twin figure of motion and standstill, self and stranger, familiarity and distance that characterizes his attitude altogether. And thus it is also the hidden objective of the journey to “permit the spirit to travel all alone” (19). Xavier de Maistre’s journey around the living room can be seen as a guide to a journey of the spirit which, precisely by its spatial confinement to one’s own four walls, throws open the interior world as freedom and self-empowerment: “They have denied me the right to walk through a town, one geographical point; but they have left me the entire universe: the immeasurable and the eternal are at my service” (83). De Maistre offers an ironic commentary on this discovery as well, in his later preface, anticipating the transcendental philosophy that he believes could only arise in traveling the room: “Metaphysics is a branch of knowledge which travelers seldom encounter – with one noteworthy exception, that is: in the *Voyage autour de ma maison* [sic], one finds a complete system of transcendental philosophy; such that even those ladies who rarely, and only reluctantly, read lengthy books will know just as much about the critique of the spirit as did the renowned Professor Kant” (de Maistre, 1984 28).

De Maistre’s tour of the room, to continue his allusion to Kant, is a critique of traveling reason that discovers the stationary journey and with it a foreign gaze upon a supposedly familiar experiential space. Daniel Leuwers, two hundred years after de Maistre’s journey, tells of excursions with his grandfather to Beauvais, where de Maistre wrote his travel account, and Leuwers formulates it beautifully: “The room as the ideal place for stepping back [*retrait*] – rather than for retreat or retirement [*retraite*]” (Leuwers 103).



I.

*A Book of Discoveries.*

WHAT more glorious than to open for one's self a new career,—to appear suddenly before the learned world with a book of discoveries in one's hand, like an unlooked-for comet blazing in the empyrean!

No longer will I keep my book in obscurity. Behold it, gentlemen; read it! I have undertaken and performed a forty-two days' journey round my room. The interesting observations I have made, and the constant pleasure I have experienced all along the road, made me wish to publish my travels; the certainty of being



## TWENTY-FIRST STAGE

### The Final Journey

*To travel means to acquaint oneself with death.*  
Arsène Houssaye, 230

*Here we are then: underway on the grand journey.*  
Letter of Xavier de Maistre to his niece, Adèle de Maistre,  
25 April 1839, 182

*Not to live life in its truest way  
is a crime, not just against oneself,  
but against others as well.*  
Cortázar and Dunlop, 41

Probably the most touching journey in miniature, Carol Dunlop and Julio Cortázar's *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute*, locates itself in the tradition of surrealistic travel projects, yet is above all a wonderful love story. The two of them undertake a "rather surrealistic expedition" (Cortázar/Dunlop 13) in 1982 on a stretch of road that could hardly be more ordinary: the Paris-Marseille *autoroute*. Both of them know when they set out that they will soon die, marked as they are by terminal illnesses. Carol Dunlop will not live to see publication of the book. Julio Cortázar dedicates a postscript to her in which death becomes a "solitary journey" (Cortázar/Dunlop 359) and the *autoroute* a metaphor for the shared life that continues. This is not the only place where *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* takes up the classical motif of death as the final journey and transforms it into a love story and the utopia of a life well lived. Their drive down the highway, recently the subject of the film *Lucie et maintenant*, is at the same time a counterpoise to contemporary road movies, to which it is linked by the death theme; since so many films of this genre (think of *Thelma and Louise*, *Death Proof*, or *Natural Born Killers*) end in death or leave the traveler's path strewn with corpses. Dunlop and Cortázar's trip, by contrast, is all about the peaceful exploration of a "long drawn-out, closed microcosm" (58) in which the world is transformed as if by a magician's hand. The camping van becomes the gentle dragon Fafner, Dunlop and Cortázar become Little Bear and Wolf, and the *autoroute* a paradise.



Carol Dunlop and Julio Cortázar were planning initially to break up their trip in a particular way as they traveled the *autoroute du soleil*, the highway from Paris to Marseille that can be covered in just a few hours, even with traffic jams or driving at a leisurely rate. The plan was to pull off at every single rest area and to spend the night there. That project had to be abandoned for lack of time, but the trip that they actually did make in the space of 32 days, from May 23 to June 23, largely follows that stipulation. Now the rules are:

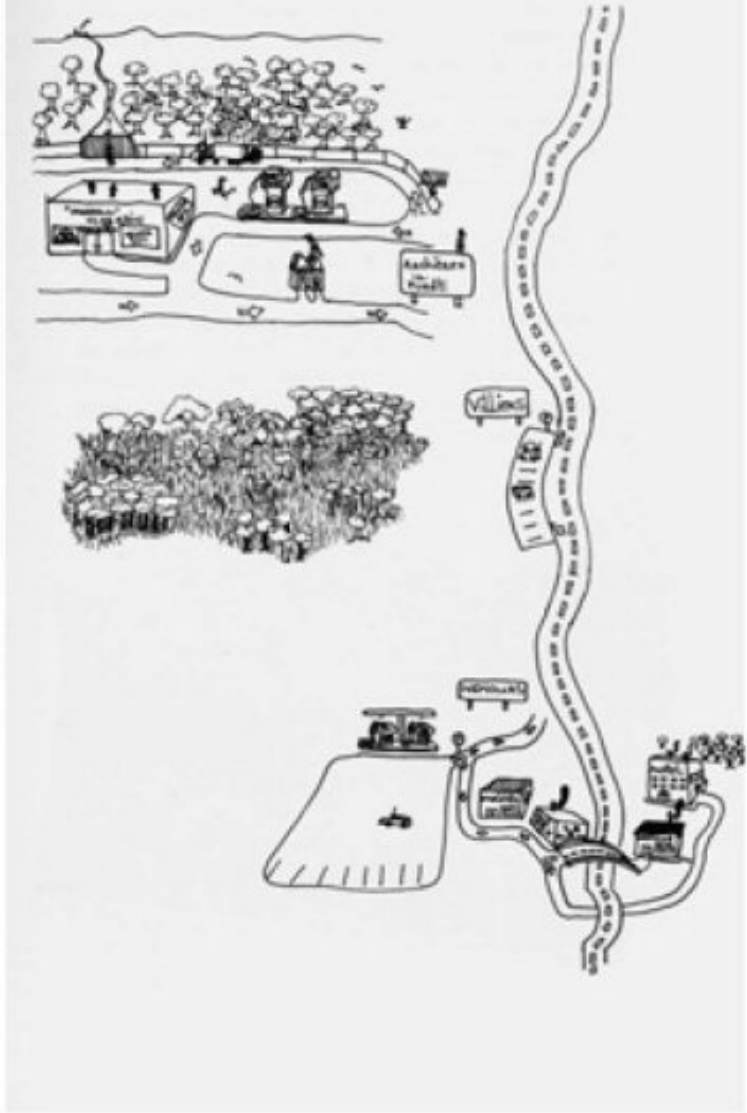
1. Complete the journey from Paris to Marseille without once leaving the *autoroute*.

2. Explore each one of the rest areas, at the rate of two per day, spending the night in the second one without exception.
3. Carry out scientific topographical studies of each rest area, taking note of all pertinent observations.
4. Taking our inspiration from the travel accounts of the great explorers of the past, write the book of the expedition.

(Cortázar/Dunlop 36)

The trip is planned as a regular expedition: with enough provisions for the whole journey (including stops for restocking their food supply); a detailed reading list (for both before and during the trip) of famous travel accounts, ranging from Cook – already frequently cited by our living-room travelers – to Jean Charcot’s account of his South Pole expedition, all of them now quoted at length; and, not least of all, a precise documentation of the trip in word and picture, purportedly scientific and exhibiting in many of its features a similarity to ethnological journals. They note “native customs” (136) with ironic bemusement, make detailed drawings of the parking areas with their curiously stereotypical yet often regionally coded facilities, and take note of the effects of globalization at the rest plazas, where even souvenir items from China are sold.

But why the superhighway, of all places? It’s hard to imagine a less attractive road or a more monotonous stretch of highway. The turnpike is the engineering symbol of speed, the “inescapable speed of this century” (24). The route they chose – anyone who has ever driven it will remember – was thus also meant to be traveled within a certain length of time. At the toll plazas, the time of entry and exit is precisely recorded. The highway is “not only a strip of asphalt designed for this speed and punctuated with stopping points according to practical and hygienic criteria” (34); it also influences the behaviors and reflex actions of drivers and, as the book says, introduces them into “a great, impersonal communality ... of the kind that every religion strives for” (23). The superhighway is the expression of the organized mobility that characterizes the modern age. It symbolizes rational practicality, “normalism,” and speed as modernity’s fundamental condition.







Der Garten der Versuchung mit einer verschlüsselten Botschaft (blauer Lappen). Glaubte die Gesellschaft, daß wir voller Verzweiflung in die Fluchtfalle gehen würden?

Hartmut Rosa has developed a theory of modernization with regard to the phenomenon of speed and based on the central observation that modernity is characterized by a social and technological acceleration, which threatens to reverse itself into “a profound structural and cultural standstill, a fundamental petrification of history in which *nothing more of significance* would change, however rapidly things shifted on the surface” (Rosa 16). Rosa thinks of his critical reconstruction of social acceleration as part of a “yet-to-be-written ‘sociology of the good life’ ... critically setting a society’s dominant implicit and explicit *notions of life well lived* over against its structural conditions.” These conditions mark not only the implicit normativeness of time structures, but also often lead to esoteric conceptions that place *another* time in opposition to speed.

Cortázar and Dunlop’s decelerated trip is precisely patterned on this design for “a life well lived” without falling victim to escapism. “There is nothing escapist about this

expedition,” they note (112), and at no point do they adopt an attitude of anti-modernization. In the complex interrelations of speed and slowness – and not only as seen in the cars speeding past them – they discover a “parallel highway” (50–51, 124) that seems to them, at least for a while, like a paradise. One section of their travelogue takes up the paradise metaphor explicitly and transfers it to the *autoroute* parking area: “Parking Land,” that “emptiness with décor” (138) that is always the same and yet “a land of freedom” (131). Ironically, this Parking Land paradise is enclosed by a chain link fence and so restricts them to the microcosmic turnpike parking area where they too, like de Maistre before them, make discovery upon discovery. The parking area as “recovery zone” becomes a “tangible image full of life and riches.” And even more emphatically: “Rest areas are the site and the hour of truth” (93).



This truth, this well-lived life consists not only in discovering the “*naturalness* of life” (106) and attempting to “live life in its truest way” (41), but most of all in its transformation by love. This is the well-lived life – nothing more, but also nothing less: “The freeway is me, you, us, and when your tongue looks for mine and unwinds .... We won’t leave the *autoroute* in Marseille, my love, or anywhere else” (295 ff.). This journey

is the discovery of “a happiness in the midst of the turmoil that we shut out by loving each other” (18). And for the “pale but undaunted reader” and “companion of our pages,” they hope – and this is my parting wish for the reader of this book as well – “that our experience has opened some doors for you too,” and “that some parallel freeway project of your own invention is already germinating” (41).