

"I'd been in a Boston recording studio..."

I'd been in a Boston recording studio all day, so I didn't realize till I got to Logan airport that evening that in heading to Atlanta I was headed for trouble.

Depending upon whom I talked to all traffic in and out of Atlanta had been shut down because a terrorist with a knife, a journalist with a point to prove or a college prankster with nothing in his head had broken through security, taken hostages or opened fire and was now under arrest, in the hospital or still on the loose.

Atlanta, of course, is a major hub and the trouble there soon affected everything. By late afternoon flights scheduled to depart Boston were hours behind and my 7:30 flight was a distant glow of pixels marked "delayed." I decided to use the time to re-organize my life. After two pocket-emptyings for the metal detectors and repeated requests for my photo I.D. my nail clipper was in my billfold, my credit cards were in the side pouch of my carry-on and I couldn't find my ticket.

This gave me my only moment of panic.

In general, for the next six hours, till we arrived in Atlanta, my fellow passengers and I faced every mishap with an ironic patience. This included the emptying of the flight before us for a visit by bomb-sniffing dogs, the removal of a passenger from our own flight whose ticket said Puerto Rico, not Atlanta, and, oddest of all, the fact that, even after the stewardess rolled up the screen, the in-flight movie kept playing all through the landing. Apparently the airline had laid off not only the ticket checker, but the projectionist.

As I'd read the next day, the person who had started the alarm in Atlanta had been taken into custody hours before we landed. That didn't stop security from detaining our plane on the outskirts of the landing field for another hour and a half.

Let me repeat. There was no fear. But it was midnight by now and our ironic patience was beginning to implode.

When they finally freed us from our seatbelts I went to get my carry on from a bin a few rows back. A young woman in the aisle, swaying with alcohol, wouldn't let me by. I asked her to move. She refused. I pushed past. She kicked me in the shin.

Inside, we learned that bags from a dozen flights, including our own, had gone astray. One passenger I spoke to had landed four hours before and still wasn't a minute wiser. But no one would leave. Rumor had it that if your bag had been

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impounded during the security alert, you could only reclaim it in person.

Everywhere, you could feel the chill of missing hands – the laid off personnel who should have been there to keep us informed. As my own group left, two hours later and two suitcases lighter, I realized terrorism had scored another victory. Not at a terrorist's hand, but at our own. In a sense, we had been part of a massive horizontal collapse of travel systems and services all along the Eastern seaboard, far less tragic but no less sudden than the vertical collapse of the trade towers in New York.

My reading of history leads me to believe that is how terrorism succeeds. Not by directly taking over the system, but by making in cave in under the excessive weight of its over-reaction to danger and fear. Fellow Americans, and I say this with a sincere heart and a still tender shin, if we're going to overcome the troubling times we're in, we've got to let each other come and go.

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"I spent my childhood in the 1950s..."

I spent my childhood in the 1950's in Mexico, a land of crushing poverty and want. Everywhere you looked back then, babies died of malnutrition, children ran half-naked through the streets, young men drowned in cheap *pulque* and beer, women grew old before their time under relentless pregnancies, and beggars of every age squatted on sidewalks and public stairs, looking too dispirited to stand. Even the spare change they got from passers-by diminished then. The heavy five- and twenty-*centavo* coins, offered and received without eye-contact, would drop into their outstretched palms like stones, pressing them further to the ground.

It took me several years to realize that charity was alive and well in Mexico. It just took a different form. Stealing. The transfer of objects of value from people of means to people of need by petty theft was so common you rarely mentioned it. After two years of house breaks, even our dog stopped barking.

Usually, the pilferage was small. A pair of socks and the pants from a suit from the veranda. A rake from the garden. A hub cap from your car and an old spare tire from the trunk. The pattern was always the same; hardly anyone took money, only objects to answer a specific need.

You didn't feel the anger or fear you did at being robbed in the United States. The loss was too small and the touch too light to feel like assault. Besides, if you kept your eyes open, you could often find your former possessions, magically transformed, down the street: the hub cap into a frying pan for someone's *tamales*, the socks and pants into a mismatched outfit at a christening or wedding, the tire tread into new soles for an old pair of *huaraches*. Whatever you could say against it, this steady transfer of goods from one life to another did not diminish their value, it usually enhanced it. Two years after it was boosted, I remember, I ran across a neighbor's shattered piggy bank. Who knows how many hands it had passed through by then, but its latest owner had made the pig new *papier mache* ears and a tail on pegs that pointed inside, and covered the hole in its bright pink head with a cork for trapping flies. As the flies buzzed back and forth inside, they'd strike the pegs, making the pig's ears and tail wiggle and twirl and sending kids like me into peals of laughter.

You could always build a wall to protect yourself against the theft, but I don't remember many who did. Mexican life back then was built on the open plan. Houses had verandas, not guard posts and every town center had a *zocalo* or public garden built in a circle, for strolling round and round, where everyone went to see and to be seen by everyone. Mexican life was relentlessly public; they may not have had much, but they had each other; whatever their problems, no one lived or died alone. That sense of interdependence speaks even today in the elaborate courtesies Mexicans exchange with each other, regardless of social rank, and in the respect they feel for anything in the public trust. In France, they have to post a guard to protect the Mona Lisa and still it gets mauled, but in Mexico, the magnificent murals of Rivera, and

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Orozco, and Siqueiros, are in reach of anyone and never defaced. Theft, *si, señor*, but vandalism, never.

I'm not sure what the Mexicans I knew back then would say of the kind of institutional charity we practice here up north. A sort of anonymous, one-way transaction where your money is transformed by middlemen into someone else's salvation; a process where your life and the life of the person you're helping never touch. Even the beggars back in the plazas of my home town knew that money alone couldn't save you. The only ones that seemed to survive were the ones who enhanced the value of what they got by doing something useful in return. An elaborate thanks that was itself a gift -- a small service like straightening the giver's jacket or dusting off his shoes, done with imagination and accepted with respect.

What Mexico taught me, I suppose, was to think of charity not as a matter of money flowing from haves to have nots, but as the creative exchange of things of value, of personal encounters on a two way street -- or better yet, a zocalo, where the flow of faces going round and round reminds you no one's place in life is ever fixed and what goes around comes around, and always will.

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"At the stroke of noon, December 31st ..."

TOLLING OF BELL

At the stroke of noon, December 31st, eleven European countries will fix the value of their currencies to the Euro. Twelve hours later, at midnight, those currencies will die and the Euro will be born.

Well, not exactly.

For three more years, the Euro will be used for electronic transactions only. Till 2002, the only money Europeans will be folding in their wallet, flipping in their fingers, or jingling in their pockets will be the officially extinct francs, liras, pesetas and deutsche marks of old.

EERIE MUSIC BEGINS UNDER - track 3

Europe will enter a financial twilight of the living dead, using the new virtual Euros in cyberspace and . .

EERIE MUSIC UP FULL FOR STING AND THEN -- track

zombie money . . . on the ground.

I have no idea what impact this strange set of circumstances will have on governments, but the effects on average human beings are going to be ve-e-e-ery strange.

First of all, never underestimate the shock of kissing your currency goodbye. I was in Mexico at an ice-cream shop the night the government issued the first new one-peso coins to replace the old, fluffy devalued one-thousand peso bills. Customers got their change and drifted off in shock, staring at the tiny coins as if someone had just spat in their palms. For that moment, they weren't even sure what it meant to be Mexican. The next day, stores everywhere posted the same old prices - not one new peso, but one thousand old pesos, not three new pesos, but three thousand old pesos. "Señor," one old lady explained to me, "it sounds crazy, but that new money makes me feel a thousand times poorer."

Now, Mexicans are optimists. Add French pride, Swiss anxiety, Iberian intensity or Bavarian braggadocio to the mix and you've got real trauma. Not to mention lumpy mathematics. None of the old European currencies divides evenly into the Euro by a thousand. Can you imagine a 30 franc copy of Vogue going for .2230972 Euros? Or that 600,000 peseta Spanish sofa special going for 3500.95179900642 Euros? And what about the Italians? The lira is so inflated they haven't used a decimal point in generations!

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All right, you argue, but at least with everything set to the same standard people will accept your national currency anywhere without worrying about the latest exchange rate. Oui? Non! Ask yourself – if you have an American quarter and a Canadian quarter in your pocket, equal for all practical purposes in value, which do you try to get rid of first? And why? Because that American quarter feels more like you. “Accept your deutsche marks as change for my francs? Over my dead body politic, monsieur!”

And consider this. The central bank is going to be in Germany. For a while, most announcements regarding Europe’s collective financial policy, like the interest rate, and ultimately the cost of doing business in your own home town, are going to be made in a German accent. This is not likely to fall lightly on the ears of a non German, especially if the policy is designed to solve someone else’s problems. *Any* foreign accent, asking a prosperous Portuguese to pitch in for France’s failing economy or a well-heeled Milanese to shell out for Berlin’s unemployment, is going to rasp along the nerves like a buzz-saw.

PARISIAN ACCORDION MUSIC – track 1 or **track 4** or track 15

So much for people trying to do their best. What about the crooks? Consider the case of a hypothetical French candy bar. Sort of like an Almond Joy. Call it the “Almond Joi de Vivre.” Made in France and sold for a nice round franc, the new price of the Joi de Vivre becomes .149411706347428 Euros. Is anyone going to pay a ridiculous price like that? No. So, to raise the price to a nice round Euro, you increase the size of the “Joi de Vivre.” And, while you’re at it, how great is the temptation to make it maybe just a little smaller than it should be? Eh, mon ami? A penny for your thoughts – or should I say a Euro for your emotions?

Notice, by the way, that I haven't mentioned the potential rage of tens of thousands of money changers in little bunkers all over Europe who know they have only three years left to their careers. Or the fact that people are being asked to say goodbye to their beloved, dying currency for three long years? Do you know any relationship that ended happily when it took three years to call it quits?

So, what are we left with? A lofty plan for a united Europe, offering whole new opportunities for political tension and emotional distress. And does anyone really understand that its coming next week? In a recent British poll only 30% of the respondents knew the Euro was a currency and not an East European car and last week an American foreign trade official admitted he didn't realize international exchanges wouldn't be listed prices in European currencies any more.

START BOB DYLAN: THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING – track 1 toward end

Bob Dylan may be right. The times they are a changing. But is this the best time to start making new change?

THE TINGLING OF SPARE CHANGE

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"At age 88, film director Jules Dassin..."

At age 88, Film Director Jules Dassin has mastered the art of perspective. I discovered that halfway through our interview when we learned that not a word had been taped.

2. Jules: Laughs.

1. Tony.... You're very kind, Mr. Dassin, kinder than I ever could have expected you to be.

3. Jules: This half hour of silence was successful? We'll have to accept the silence.

We had been speaking about the re-release of his 1955 French film noir classic, *Rififi*, the story of the falling-out of four thieves after they lift a fortune in gems from a Paris jewelry shop. My father had insisted I see *Rififi* when I was only ten and I'd never forgotten the riveting, half-hour scene of the heist itself, done without a single word of dialogue or note of music.

DASSIN ON THE MUSIC

54. Jules: The man who wrote the music, one of France's really important composers, his name is Georges Aurique, said "I'm looking forward to writing music for this scene," and I said, "No, I don't want any music." And he said, "Oh, come on, a half hour!" I said, "I don't want any music," and he said, "I'm going to protect you and I will write it, because you're going to change your mind." I said, "You mean you're going to write almost a symphony for something I don't want?" He said, "I will protect you." And he did, he wrote a half hour of straight music. And then I called him and said, "Georges, I want you to see this film once with music and once without and you tell me what you think." And we went through that and he said, "No music!"

Dassin's image of Paris was equally unadorned..

28. Jules: ... I didn't want a sunlit Paris. I wanted there to be a Paris that somehow harmonized in some mystic way with these guys. They were in the shadows, so to speak.

31. Jules: My producer used to go mad when I said "I'm not shooting today, because there is sun." He used to go crazy.

Though Dassin had enjoyed international acclaim as the Hollywood director of *The Naked City* and *Night and the City* *Rififi* was his first film job in five long years. Like hundreds of American screen artists in the late forties and fifties, he had been blacklisted because someone had identified him as a member of the Communist Party.

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Dassin got the job of adapting Rififi from a popular French potboiler, in fact, not in spite of his alleged anti-Americanism, but because of it.

14. Jules: this French producer said . . . “We have a problem in France. We have a very delicate situation with Algeria, with North Africa and since all the bad guys in this book are North Africans, you can make them American bad guys,” considering that I was an anti-American subversive. . . .

15a. Jules: Then I said to the producer, No, no, no, no. “We’re going to make the bad guys French.” ...

32. Tony: “What have I done? I’ve hired this un-American communist who refuses to cast the bad guys as Americans and he’s shooting in Paris and doesn’t want to make Paris look good.”

33. Jules: Yes, he had a few furrows in his brow.

34. Tony:“Thank God I’m not paying him anything,” huh?

35. Jules: Well, he didn’t. My friend, for that film, which ... I wrote, I directed, I played in, I got \$8,000. ... He knew that he was taking advantage of me. 8,000 bucks. However...

Fifty years later, Dassin’s gift for perspective has softened the blow of the former friends and colleagues in America who kept him from working for fear of losing their own jobs.

21. Jules: I have very little bitterness left in me. As a matter of fact I have sympathy for the guys ... who just couldn’t resist. They knew what they were doing, they knew they were going to kill friends of theirs. And I know what a horrible thing that was for them to do. ... I understand that when you say to a guy “You’re never going to work again,” you just break him down.

Dassin’s forgiveness for those who named names ... stops short of one man -- Elia Kazan, Director of *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway and *A Streetcar Named Desire* on stage and in film. After naming a number of his friends as former fellow communists before a Congressional Committee, Kazan had gone on to co-write and direct the 1954 Academy Award winner, “*On the Waterfront*.”

SFX: ON THE WATERFRONT

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“On the Waterfront” celebrates one man’s fight against a crooked longshoreman’s union but many see it as Kazan’s justification of the rightness – and patriotism – of informing on his own friends – whom he portrays, in the film, as enemies of freedom and goons.

SFX: I’m glad what I done!

5. Jules: ... after he did what he did I never talked to him...Never.

7. Jules: I couldn’t forgive him. I couldn’t forgive him for hurting people that he grew up with . . . and he very clearly destroyed. . . . and there are some people who broke down, collapsed, had to do it because they just faced a jobless life. But he was the king of the theater in New York. New York didn’t accept any blacklist in the theater and he had a fine and rewarding life in the theater, he didn’t have to do it. So I saw him in a very special way.

In Rififi, Dassin’s statement on the politics of betrayal comes near the end of the movie.

Cesar the Safecracker, has betrayed the names of his partners to a rival gang to save his ...life. One of the partners – and his girl friend – die horribly at once. Another partner, Tony, unaware of what Cesar has done, finds Cesar tied to a post in the rival gang’s den. Rather than lie to Tony, Cesar, surprisingly, masters his fear, confesses to his betrayal and accepts his death –at Tony’s hands.

SFX FROM RIFIFI AND PISTOL SHOTS

40. Jules: ... You see, when you do something and you know what you are doing, you either later on try to justify it and find excuses for yourself or you face the truth and you say, “...I was ugly, I betrayed my friends. I know it and I don’t try to justify it.” ...

41. Tony: ...It’s . . .an amazing moment. ... an amazing transformation.

42. Jules: Yeah. I’m glad you sense it.

43. Tony: Oh yeah...You know, I didn’t sense it when I first saw it. ... when I was ten years old. And I’ll tell you why I saw it when I was ten years old. . . .my father was blacklisted.

JULES: Oh. . .

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44. Tony: My father was Gordon Kahn, the screenwriter.

45. Jules: Oh my God, I knew Gordon Kahn! Oh, my God, well, hello to you.

47. Jules: Oh my God, Gordon. I remember him with much affection. Oh. . . .Let me ask you a question then, since you're Gordon's son. Many people who had to face this said, My God, I have a family, I have kids, what do I do if I don't work? I understand that and I did then. But I wonder how many kids resented their fathers because they used to smear dirty words on our houses . . .

51. Jules: You know, I always wonder about a man . . .who went to jail rather than betray his friends and he had to explain it to his kids and his kids were resentful of his not going and telling so the family could be protected, but he made the kids understand and he went to jail, but he couldn't stand jail and decided the hell with it, I'm going to cooperate. And I always wonder what was in the minds of these children who were told "I'm doing the right thing by not betraying" and then turned around and betrayed....

Why one person can stand up to fear while another cannot is a mystery that continues to vex Dassin. The Hollywood Blacklist required no police force or, as in Kazan's film, union goons to enforce it. Just average citizens, neighbors, and friends willing to inform on each other to keep their jobs. As many who went through that period can testify, until the moment comes to chose between friendship and fear, loyalty and self-preservation, you don't know what you're going to do. The return of films like Rififi can help remind us what's at stake - for oneself and for others -- when the time comes to stand up for what you believe.

52. Jules: ...wherever Gordon is, I liked him very much, your Poppa.

53. Tony: ...and he made me go see your movie, and I'm glad. When I was ten years old.

57. Tony: I thank you so much . . .

58. Jules: You're very welcome.

59. Jules: Yeah, well he was a dear man.

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"Paul has clarified the signage . . . "

PAUL GIVING DIRECTIONS . . . FADE UNDER FOR

P: Airport exit! You just passed it. And-
T: Oh, here's another one!
P: Oh, no, we go, no, we go, hmmm!
T: Oh oh. We're stuck-
P: Do right! Do right. Do right. Airport exit.
T: But-

TONY: Paul Mijksenaar is an international expert in the art of giving directions.

P: Boston - in the middle! And clearance, how high is your car? I only know it in meters, so . . .
T: Oh, good point!

TONY: And Boston needs all the help it can get.

P: Boston! Revere—
T: That's a town called Revere.
P: Is it?
T: Right.
P: Ah, I thought it was reverse - we go to the terminal

TONY LAUGHS

TONY: Paul has clarified the signage at Holland's Schiphol and New York's Kennedy Airports, and at transportation centers around the world. And his skill at getting vital information to travelers quickly and effectively has never been more in demand.

P: You have no idea how much information people has to digest - advertisements, traffic signs, even. Warnings, whatever. Here! "Caution, look left before crossing." That's not for us, that's for pedestrians! But I already read it, because I can see it. MOVE THIS DOWN TO AFTER WHERE TONY AND PAUL LAUGH

TONY: My day with Paul began dim and early several hours when I'd picked him up at Logan Terminal C, an area criss-crossed by concrete obstructions and slowed to a standstill by the Big Dig, one of the world's more endless construction projects. I'd told him to be on the lookout for a dark green car with a dent on the door. I should have added and a big fresh parking ticket on the windshield.

PAUL CLOSES DOOR.

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P: Well, we meet here only by violating the law, because you are not supposed to park here

T: There is a sign right in front of us that says active pickup only. Would that be comprehensible to somebody who had just arrived in this country?

P: There are two kind of pickups, obviously, a passive pick-up only, and an active - I don't know the difference! What does it mean?

T: (LAUGHING) I have no idea! And I live here.

HONKS.

P: Ah, you honk!

T: He won't leave. He will not move!

HONKS REPEATEDLY.

ALSO ADD IN DESCRIPTIONS OF LOGAN AND WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AS WE PASS THROUGH IT . . .

TONY: Paul had never been to Logan before, so I asked him to give me a spontaneous evaluation of its information landscape by getting us to Downtown Boston simply by following the signs.

P: Toll.

T: There are also signs that say Fast Lane, no cash -

P: I would choose the fast lane because it sounds good, fast lane.

T: And what you don't know is that Fast Lane means you have to have a special gizmo on your windshield that triggers an electronic device that lets you go through -

P: Oh, like the Easy Pass, I know that.

T: Take that and you'd be stuck in front of a machine with no human being there to help figure out --

P: And still don't know if we're on the right way to Boston. You know, all those signs were put in good faith to help us. But there's hardly anybody who takes the trouble to see it as a whole system and reacts accordingly - change names, find terminology which makes sense, instead of "Fast Lane" say, well, "this is a lane for members only," something like that. You can make this drive in any city of the world.

Yes, all cities can be confusing, but few got their street grid, as legend has it, from following a wandering cow. And name me one other major metropolitan area that takes pride, when it labels a major throughway at all, in giving it not one name, but two.

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T: This is a tunnel called Sumner Tunnel, only in one direction. In the other direction it's called Callahan Tunnel.

P: Really. Why is that?

T: Why? You ask why?)

TONY AND PAUL LAUGH

Most American cities, Paul says, actually have a habit of naming a bridge or tunnel without ever telling you where it goes.

PAUL ON THE VAN WYCK

After an hour of looking for something resembling a downtown, we decided to execute a U-turn, a maneuver in Boston more closely resembling a W, and head back to Logan's central parking lot.

The wall of misinformation heading in was as solid as it was heading out.

P: All terminals and parking!

T: So forget about what all these letters mean.

P: I try to avoid to read any more signs because otherwise I get confused.

TONY LAUGHS

P: Here, left! That's E!

T: LAUGHS. Oh, 'cause that's the airport exit.

PAUL LAUGHS.

T: I'm not kidding, folks, this is really confusing.

TONY: After some confusion re-entering the building from the rooftop parking lot,

P: Where is the entrance?

TONY: . . . after an attack of agoraphobia in an elevator clearly designed for an elephant herd

LAUGHTER OF WOMAN ON ELEVATOR

TONY: . . . and after a trip down a motorized walkway offering a lovely view of soaring planes and no warning of a looming off ramp . . .

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TONY: . . . we arrived at the international terminal and its thundering crowds. Like the converging points of two mighty rivers, the cross-currents of arriving and departing passengers create a delta of potential information disasters.

P: Look, arrivals, exit to ground transport - that's for arriving passengers, we are departing passengers. "Welcome to Boston." But I am leaving.

TONY LAUGHS

T: Good point! It's for those who don't know if they're coming or going
P: That would be helpful, of course. Split it up and make it color coding as we do it. For example, we made three categories, flying, waiting and leaving the airport. We are leaving so we have to look for the KLM booth or whatever airline. That's the only information you need.

TONY: Paul has taught himself to look at every new situation with the eyes of a child – often in need of guidance and prone to take things at face value. Like most travelers, in other words. Following him, you realize how tough a job clear signage can be.

For instance, the sign can be clearly visible but too complex to follow.

P: Look at that guy who tries to get a smart cart. You need a dollar, I think.

MAN: Yes. I just read it.

T: Right, there's a sign that says it's as easy as one, two, three. Is it as easy as one, two, three?

MAN: It's not easy. No.

P: You don't like it any more?

MAN: No, I don't like it any more.

TONY: The sign can make sense, but be pointed the wrong way.

T: Sir, do you know that you're next to a sign that says check in here for international passengers?

MAN: No, I didn't. CHUCKLES

T: Nobody has come up and asked you how to get to Tel Aviv?

MAN: Fortunately, they haven't asked me because I wouldn't know where to send them.

T: You find this a little absurd?

MAN: All airports are like this - they put signs and I think it's to confuse people? Gotta go in this direction, they should go in that direction . . . 'Cause there's domestic flights here, there's overseas flights there. People who buy E tickets get in the wrong line, 'cause there's no signs telling them this.

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T: What kind of work do you do, may I ask?

MAN: Oh, I'm a water supply engineer.

T: Do you think this has engineering problems? Information engineering problems?

MAN: Well, see, the engineers are the ones that don't put the signs up. PR people put the signs up. That's the problem.

TONY: The sign can be clearly lit, perfectly positioned, and simply written and still be gibberish.

P: You have ticketing and checking, some people don't understand what you mean by that, check-in, because they have to buy a ticket. And if you say ticketing, they don't understand because they have to go to the airline.

T: Courtesy bus.

P: I didn't know what means before I came to United States and I think it means mainly free shuttle. So why don't you say free shuttle? That would be helpful if at least American airports sit together and have the same terminology. That would be wonderful.

TONY: Even then, you still have to tackle the greatest cause of illiteracy among travelers – panic.

P: People in stress they forgot everything they ever learned. They don't read signs. They jump from people to people, “where is the KLM?” They have no time to read, they have no time to think, they are not able to consume any information besides from human beings.

TONY: The job of any good information artist, says Paul, is to create an environment in which the traveler feels not only helped, but welcome.

P: I think airports should take an example Barnes and Nobles or Starbucks. If you go to Barnes and Nobles, for example, it looks like a sitting room. So if people like to stay there for hours in a book shop, with a cup of coffee and a stack of magazines, why shouldn't they the same do in an airport while waiting for hours for connecting flights?

T: Where do you get your inspiration? You mentioned Starbucks .
..

P: Well, museums for example, or let's say zoos, because their main thing is that you enjoy people at zoos. So I don't what to suggest

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that every airport has to become a zoo -

T: It is already.

P: (LAUGHS) It's already - but you can learn from that kind of environment. Because it's more entertaining, keep it easy, and things like - here, this gentleman talked about that line, that long line. You see the same line at Metropolitan Museum of Art or in Disneyland, but then you have entertainers, they walk along the lines, they entertain people, why shouldn't you use it here?

T: That's very true.

P: That's the first time I come up with entertainment in queuing lines.

T: We're here at the birth of an idea?

P: Yeah, I think so, yes. LAUGHS. I hope so. Why not?

TONY: Next time you're at an airport or train station anywhere in the world and you see someone who looks both confused and bemused, it may be Paul. If so, go up and say hi. You might want to tell him what sorts of signs and designs have helped you find what you needed simply, safely, and fast. He may want to try a few ideas of his own out on you. His latest is for the main destination travelers need to locate - usually at once - the bathroom. He's thinking translucent walls. By the sinks. It would be a first. A place that speaks for itself. For further updates, as they say, watch this space.

T: Any other thoughts, Paul?

P: Let's have a drink.

T: Let's have a drink.

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"Recently, my wife, 12 year old son and I ..."

Recently, my wife, twelve year old son and I met two of Mexico City's brightest young men. The first was a 26 year old pediatrician, who paid a house call to treat my son's ear infection. The second approached us the evening before on the street and offered to shine our shoes.

The Doctor had earned his medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania and spoke perfect English. The man on the street had never been to the United States, but was picking up English as best he could.

The Doctor had the flawless technique and human touch Mexicans seem to bring to everything they do. The man on the street had been just as attentive to the welfare of my shoes, applying an extra coat of wax he said would last for months.

The Doctor, it turned out, came from one of Mexico's so-called 400 ruling families, who tend to speak only to each other. The man on the street had his own friends. While he worked on me, three of them came from out of nowhere and started shining my wife's sandals and my son's sneakers.

The Doctor nearly forgot to charge me and then wrote a bill for 400 pesos -- a little over forty dollars. When the man shining my shoes finished, he stood up, and, as his friends surrounded us, told me we owed him ten bucks -- a shoe -- or else.

I had heard that crime had sky-rocketed in Mexico City and that holdups were happening everywhere, but nothing prepared me for the chill of a stranger's voice threatening me, my wife, and my child in the middle of a busy, well-lit street. Something made me reach for my side pocket where I had slipped a weapon far more useful than a gun -- two one hundred peso bills. I shoved them at him and told him it was all he would get. Apparently, it was more than he expected without violence and, as his friends moved toward him, we got away.

It didn't hit me till later, between sickening swells of rage and fear, how carefully contrived his scam had been -- and how little our lives might have been worth that night -- 200 pesos -- half of what I would later happily pay the Doctor, behind a double-bolted door.

Despite what happened to us we will continue to visit Mexico City and walk its streets. We have roots there and go back every year. When we do, the Doctor will probably still be there and so will the man who robbed us. The reason is simple -- any Mexican with talent and ambition has no place else to go. It is Mexico's Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago all rolled into one. And every year it keeps swelling, past its official 20 million people to thirty million and more, widening the already tragic gap between its few haves and countless have-nots.

I hope the Doctor and the man who robbed us never have to practice their skills on each other, but the future of this gifted country may well depend on how smart its equally talented doctors and thieves can be about leveling the playing field between them.

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"To the news of the world's biggest proposed business merger . . ."

To the news of the world's biggest proposed business merger of Chrysler and Daimler-Benz – and the news of the world's possibly biggest medical breakthrough with the discovery of two chemicals that cure cancer completely in mice – comes the cosmic news that scientists have discovered the biggest explosion in the universe since the Big Bang.

Taken together huge stories like these reinforce the sinking feeling some of us have that humanity is at the mercy of massive corporations, research institutions, and natural laws. But think about this:

The discovery of the universe's biggest gamma ray burst since the Big Bang was a piece of pure luck. The burst lasted only forty seconds, traveled over 12 billion years and was caught only because the Italians and the Dutch put up a satellite to measure things like that two years ago.

Second, the burst was so faint, it would have been lost in the growing list of similar gamma ray bursts if it weren't for the fact that the Italian-Dutch device was programmed to ask gamma ray bursts where they came from. This strikes me as a particularly European question. Given our mixed feelings about immigration, Americans just aren't comfortable asking foreign visitors where they're from.

Thirdly, even though scientists knew which galaxy produced the gamma ray burst, they weren't sure how far away it was. But two small groups of scientists in California were nice enough to take an awful lot of time out of their own projects to stare through their telescopes for months at a smudge in the sky no brighter than a hundred watt bulb a million miles away and come up with the mind-boggling distance of 12 billion light years.

So, a discovery that could undermine fundamental assumptions about the universe, how it goes there, and where we're all going, might never have happened without the good will of a handful of people in the US, a small business deal – and touch of national character – from Italy and Denmark, and a wink and a smile from Lady Luck. Chalk one up for the little guy.

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"Chuck Sudetic covered the Bosnian War ..."

Chuck Sudetic covered the Bosnian War for the New York Times in over 500 dispatches, from 1992 to '95. But when it came time to write about it in his new book, "Blood and Vengeance," he chose to focus the story on around a single man whom he never met and spoke to - only once.

"After the first offensive that the Serbs mounted against Srebrenica in January of 1995, I went to an office in Sarajevo and got him on a ham radio and he actually begged me to help them get away. I had a vendetta against me that the Serbs had put on for things that I had been writing and there was no way I was going to get to Srebrenica to do anything. You can't imagine how helpless you feel in such a situation, (TONY: Hmmm) a guy asking you to help them basically imprisoned and there's no way to get to him."

SFX: TONY: Huso? CHUCK: Huso Celic . . .

The man was named Huso Celic - a Muslim and the father of Sudetic's brother-in-law, who'd escaped the killing for Canada the year before.

SFX of Serbian radio broadcasts

"Huso Celic was a very superstitious character, not unlike many of the other character in this book. When he saw the TV that came from Serbia - you have to understand that the television content from Serbia during the 1980s were essentially hate broadcasts, something that you might imagine would occur if, for example, the Ku Klux Klan got a hold of National Public Radio and began to disseminate hate through the airwaves of the United States. And here was a man who saw the forces that caused the death of his father during World War II - the forces of extremist Serb nationalism reemerging. He was afraid that it was going to lead to what it led to - but he had so little opportunity to deal with this, to run away, he had no way of getting way - he had no car, he had no money, he had no passport, he had no visa for a foreign country - and he ended up basically imprisoned in a United Nations protected concentration camp that was Srebrenica . . ."

Srebrenica was the tenth shelter Huso, his pregnant daughter, and her husband had found since fleeing their village of Mount Zvezda near the Serbian border in Eastern Bosnia at the start of the war.

SFX of Serbian radio broadcasts, cont. And music?

Like most Bosnians, the people of Mount Zvezda had never seen a single generation come and go in peace. Since the days of the Roman Empire, their ancestors had fought pagan legionnaires, feudal lords, Islamic Ottomans, Aryan Nazis, and Communist Slavs. But no matter who started the invasion, sooner or later it always ended up with neighbor killing neighbor. Serbian against Muslim, Muslim against Serb.

The match was held by Slobodan Milosevic, the President of Serbia, who as a socialist leader sitting atop a government that could not manage the economy and the political life of his country, turned to the poisonous, aggressive nationalism that was manifested in Serbia in the late 1980s and early 1990s to prop up his power. When he felt his power begin to slip, he threw the match into the tank of gasoline and what we saw was the explosion that was Bosnia."

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After fleeing the Serbs, scouring the countryside for food, and hiding in caves, Huso and his family had reached the stronghold of Srebrenica. But in 1995, the Serbs had the city surrounded and with the Muslim authorities themselves holding them in, there was no place left to go. Huso himself might have been one of those haunted faces staring from the daily newspaper pictures of the siege. Often, you needed captions to tell you which side was which – all of them white, all of them European, the Serbs and Muslims looked unsettlingly like each other – and most of us.

Officially, the United Nations it had declared Srebrenica a “safe area,” but when the Serbs moved in to settle their scores with the Muslims, the United Nations stepped aside.

“Essentially, Huso and his wife and daughter and his grand children were herded into a factory – the grounds of a factory where the women were eventually separated from the men – Huso was taken away by Serb soldiers and never seen again. The only picture I can draw of what happened to him subsequent was the testimony of a survive who was taken away in a similar manner and who by the grace of God survived the shooting, and came back to tell about it. It was a horrible story of very, very intimate violence against people whom clearly the local Serbs in addition to the leaders of the Bosnian Serb Army wanted to eliminate as a possible threat and to exact a vengeance vendetta.”

Though they’d fled hundreds of miles from home, Huso and his family died – literally -- at their neighbors’ hands.

“A neighbor of the Celik family and schoolmate of my brother in law’s brother is a Serb guy named Milan Lukic, who may have killed more people with his own hands during the Bosnian War than any other single individual. He reappeared in Srebrenica in 1995 and led away neighbors that he had lived beside his entire life – in the area where my brother-in-law was from. They knew each other; they talked to each other. He tried to tell the men, the Muslim men, that he had gotten and arranged for a special charter bus to take them to safe territory and in fact he was leading them away to their deaths.”

The slaughter in Srebrenica finally forced the Western powers to act. Bombed into submission by NATO jets, Milosevic signed the Dayton Peace accord of 1995, recognizing the existence of a Bosnian state. By the following spring 60,000 NATO soldiers, 20,000 of them from the United States, had deployed to make the agreement stick.

“It’s a very peaceful experience. It’s not the horror that you think it would be. It carries none of the fear that you think you would associate with an event of that dimension, of that quality. It was an eerie quiet – an eerie silence -- you are walking among the dead, you are walking among the skulls of the dead through a woods.

When the dust had settled, a year later, Sudetic walked the hillside outside Srebrenica, looking for Huso’s remains.

And I was there with one other friend, alone on this hillside and I think paradoxically it was one of the most peaceful experiences I ever had in my life.”

Writing about this experience, the horrors that people who fled Srebrenica lived through was for me an enormous cathartic experience. Because of what went on inside me during the war, that made me in a way traumatized – covering the war and not being able to do very much about it. Experiencing it vicariously was I think in many ways as difficult as experiencing it in reality. Because you build up a tremendous amount of anger within you. As I said, the writing process was the catharsis. In going on to that mountain and walking among the dead and searching for the remains of someone that you had – with whom your relative had intimate contact is absolutely astonishing. It’s an astonishing experience. But as I said it’s ironically, very peaceful.”

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But peace is short-lived here, even in the democracy of death.

Many of the victims of this war, Muslim and Serb, lie unavenged; and in the absence of any real political stability or economic promise, Sudetic feels, blood vengeance remains Bosnia's strongest law.

"The daughter of Huso Celik, this would be my brother-in-law's sister, gave birth to a baby on July 15, 1995 - a son - this was the day after she was released from Srebrenica by the Serbs and driven across the front line. That child lost his father, both of his grandfathers and an uncle in the executions that followed the fall of Srebrenica..."

The boy is only three now. But, as he grows, he'll hear the story of how his father, his uncle, his grandfather Huso and Huso's own father before him, were killed. All of them by Serbs that lived "next door." His fate may someday depend on the moral he draws from that tale.

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The New York Times announced today ...

The New York Times announced today that the day of the unknown soldier is gone. Because of advances in bio-engineering to help the living, we can now identify the dead by the smallest of their remains. More than several thousand unknown American soldiers still lie entombed from past wars, but if genetics can already indicate that Thomas Jefferson might have fathered a child 200 years after he denied it, can the day of total discovery be far behind?

As stories like this suggest, the only thing more surprising than today's technological advances are the uses to which they are actually put.

Take the answering machine. Intended to keep us in touch with people when we were out, it's now our principle means of staying out of touch with people when we're in. Or take the VCR. Intended to tape television programs you wanted to see later, it nearly displaced them with rented movies.

Generally, the disconnect between scientific advances and their social impact is far less entertaining. Take the case of the war against AIDS. The drug AZT, researchers recently discovered, can stop the transmission of the virus from an infected mother to her child. In countries where the drug is too expensive to buy, though, the news often has the opposite effect. Made even more hopeless by the knowledge their children's safety is possible but unaffordable, victims are forced deeper into denial. Expectant mothers refuse to take AIDS tests, or if persuaded, refuse to know the results, and their lovers and husbands assert their slim hold on destiny by taking other wives and lovers, further spreading the disease.

Making a cure free is no guarantee of success either. Not long ago a UN effort to distribute free condoms in parts of Africa failed because, bitter experience and sweet reason argued you get nothing for nothing. It was only after someone at the United Nations got the bright idea of charging a penny for each condom that the product started to move off the shelves. A chain of salesman appeared overnight to pitch them for a profit; condoms were bought and, presumably used, in huge numbers, to make sure the money wasn't wasted.

The lesson in all this is that no matter how advanced technologies become, human instinct - with its priorities of food, clothing, shelter, and entertainment wherever and whenever possible - has not changed at all. If we don't take account of the massive gulf between the labs where progress is conceived and the streets where it must make its way, the consequences of any new scientific advance will get harder and harder to predict.

We could begin, I suppose, by making sure, as the United Nations did, that every good intention is managed by people with common sense. They might not be able to control the direction a new product takes, but they could at least try to take advantage of its course and turn it to do the most good. Meanwhile, surprises, mistakes, disasters, and wars will, unfortunately, continue to happen. If it's any comfort, at least the future fallen will know that, thanks to progress, they will no longer die unknown.

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