

The Elevator Effect

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A tired and familiar *ding* signifies that you have landed at your destination. The faded metal door slides to the right as your reflection disappears from in front of you, replaced by a much more glamorous view. The dull, crackling music that has been rattling your brain for the last two minutes becomes overpowered by the new entourage of white noise that floods into the tiny room in which you stand. Each sense begins tingling, heightened by the sudden onslaught of stimulation. Glasses clink, smiles flash, scents of flowers and cuisine are so delectable that they are almost tangible. This is something I would refer to as the Elevator Effect. Each time an elevator opens, it presents a new world. You enter this magical vessel in one environment, and through a blinded transition period, you emerge into a new one. This is how international travel impacts one's life. It is a mixture of where you start and where you end up, and how they influence each other.

When riding an elevator, you deliberately place your finger on a button with the intentions to arrive at a specific floor. The first time you land here, you do not know what exists behind the door other than what lies in the speculations you have concocted. However, the second you become exposed to the actual new atmosphere, there is a sort of unbalanced feeling as new stimuli and applied knowledge collide. When entering a new country, one has predictions of it based on Google searches or travel book research, but the place does not become experiential until one is physically there. Differences between expectations and reality sends our senses into a frenzy, as they attempt to synthesize everything unfamiliar to the brain.

It is this synthesis where life becomes a breath of fresh air. The door has opened, and a new supply of oxygen has been provided. However, this is the pivotal moment when one must decide whether to exit the elevator, or continue the familiar ride as it descends to its starting point. Stepping out of the elevator is a full immersion experience. Entering into a new world exhibits how best it has managed to provoke those senses—we take the leap in hopes of finding more. Many humans become accustomed to minimal variability in their lives. However, a new culture stimulates the regular in an exciting way, reinventing the ordinary. Using the nose to smell a new type of flower, or seeing exquisite architecture, becomes new information for the brain to hold.

When a person returns to the elevator, and descends to the ground floor, it is not with the same mindset that they departed with. Their senses have been exposed to an environment that required a revitalized use, which is then retained when returning to the familiar. New knowledge is applied to known meaning.

International travel is that elevator, a vessel to discovery. Choose the button, press it, and let the unknown tantalize your senses.