Dashiell Hammett

à la Mode

A Mystery Story or Dashiell Hammett à la Mode

Every time I leave my hotel room
here in Tokyo
I do the same four things:
I make sure I have my passport
my notebook
a pen
and my English-Japanese dictionary.

The rest of life is a total mystery.

Tokyo, May 26, 1976

Richard Brautigan, June 30th, June 30th

"Inspiration from Unusual Sources:
Integrating Innovation into Your Work"
19th Annual Hunter Conference

Kent Lesandrini
(Revised: Feb 28, 2007)

UW-MANIAC
Madison Area Network for Innovation and Applied Creativity
Richard Brautigan
‘The Trip’ as a Source of Inspiration

What’s going on here?

- Trips as a form of periodic disorientation
- Re-introducing ‘mystery’ into everyday life...

Conditions for Inspirational Experience  (Preliminary Thoughts)
- Availability (or openness)
- Engaged detachment
- New eyes or ears or something that reframes our experience
- Others:

The Trip Creates Transitional Space
(a zone of new possibilities)
Departure Doesn’t Assure Transformation

Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1929)
The story of Flitcraft (buried in chapter seven)

⇒ What about the problem of re-entry or return?

What happens to the inspired moment when we come back?

Points on a continuum of re-entry:

Transformation      Integration      Compartmentalization
[and/or Dissolution]

"Life could be ended for him at random by a falling beam: he would change his life at random by simply going away . . . He [Flitcraft] wasn’t sorry for what he had done. It seemed reasonable enough to him. I don’t think he even knew that he had settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma. But that’s the part of it I always liked. He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling."

-- from Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (Chapter 7)

The challenge and tension of practical application:
(What do we do with inspiration?)
Discussion Questions

1. How does inspiration come to you? (An example from your own experience?) How does this work for you?

2. Possible conditions for inspiration (or creativity) based on your own experiences?

3. What about the problem of re-entry (or application)?

4. Are there any analogies or parallels here for organizations?

Inspiration from Unusual Sources (Other examples):

1. Zipping the tab from a box of Gardner’s doughnuts
2. Smell of newly waxed floors on first day of elementary school
3. Yee’s Laundry on Park Street: Mrs. Yee speaking Chinese while other staff speak Spanish with Elvis Presley singing ‘Heartbreak Hotel’ on the radio in the background
4. 24 hours of continuous Marx Brothers movies
5. Maria Callas singing famous arias from Puccini’s operas
6. The totem power of expiration dates (seeing your birthday on a milk carton in the grocery store, for example)
7. Will someone please give me my medication now?

We’ll compare notes in about 10 minutes. (Have some fun with this.)
Summary Observations

Regarding Trips

- Forced outside your routine and put in strange circumstances
- People don’t know you and don’t know what to expect of you—so you don’t know what to expect of yourself (in a weird way)
- The trip makes possible a ‘departure’ and creates transitional space qualitatively different from our everyday routine
- Re-introduces mystery and more possibilities for ‘re-framing’

The challenge of re-entry or return

☐ What do we do with inspiration when we return?
☐ If departure does not assure transformation (as in the case of Flitcraft), then where does that leave us?
☐ What does the trip have to do with the world we return to?

How do we maintain the Mystery of everyday life?

To stand in electric connection with the mystery beneath—

- Identity and the self
- Intimacy and relationships
- Vocation and work
- Communities and culture

The deep down willingness (periodically) to turn the tables on ourselves and everything we are so sure of

⇒ Playfulness and Crazy Wisdom

Tom Robbins, Still Life with Woodpecker

(conclusion)