

19. Lost in an Instant

Progress is a precious thing, to be cherished, what Cummings called a “comfortable disease”, but with each step comes a new set of gambles. Cell phones increase safety for those in emergencies if used appropriately. Automobile itself is a boon that expands your load capacity, lets you go easier, and shields you as long as you drive wisely. In either case, there’s limitless potential for misuse. Technology is wasted on stupidity. It may seem unnatural not to be plugged into Internet or telephone after day long connectivity at home and work, or to be driving after avoiding it for so long. Whatever you do to make things more convenient will be used against you. Bombers use cell phones as electronic triggers. As a bicyclist, which would you prefer: Motorists darting to road edge while reading maps or driving distractedly while receiving directions by cell phone from a newly offered service? Since it’s against the law and really asinine if not suicidal to wear headphones while riding a bike, there’s precious little else to do but pay attention to what you’re doing, mull over petty complaints, and ponder how to make the World a better place, at least a bikeable place, like initiating class actions against losses such services cost. Lazy louts lust after follies that makes their lives easier, but sometimes technology simply complicates lives.

Creativity will put something into motion that wasn’t there before, thereby changing how something has always been done. Creative ideas—thinking outside the box—may or may not further advancement. Imagine being able to drive with a gauge or a heads-up display that indicates time until intercept, or senses proximity to other vehicles, or shows speed trap locations for a 100 kilometer radius. This is how good applications work, natural progressions from how things are already handled. Take car phones, prized especially by salesmen who drive more than they’d prefer. Car time was dead for them. People can’t read when driving, but they can listen and talk. Carphones that freed one’s hands came next. Then cell phones that could be carried out of car. Voice activation is available. What else could be done to advance this technology into something desirable? Perhaps cells with built in dictaphones that record ideas; when you aren’t talking to someone else you could be talking to yourself, organizing thoughts, getting the edge you need for next meeting.

How about interactive daily news? You name topic, cell reads story titles back for you to select, almost like a conversation. They now offer podcasts, something lesser but similar. People with long commutes would be up-to-date with news that affects them before their workday begins. Instead of listening to deejays yapping about everything except what you want to hear, you can interrupt to focus on whatever interests you. Could also control *voice*, as well. Pick Chronite, Cosell, or whomever, or just its flavor, like dominant or elderly or feminine or meek or sultry, vary randomly, whatever. By speaking the word, “repeat”, story would stop and resume at beginning, just as done with a button push for DVD viewing.

Although such advances are already within realm of probability, do drivers need any more distractions than they already have? Each year sleepiness causes 1,500 deaths and 100,000 crashes (3.4% of total). Many find driving too dull to endure. Mindless chatter might make commutes bearable. This book on tape would completely disconnect driver from what’s most important in the moment, planning ahead and steering. Airline pilots get alarms and warnings when they deviate from optimal glide slope or positional attitude. Perhaps some analogous warning in cars would be useful, brake deactivated, like cruise control. “Danger, Will Robinson, bicyclist ahead”.

Despite motoring’s high fatality rate, news shows that some businessmen would rather drive than fly, not because flying is more dangerous, but because it’s too much of a hassle with flight delays, security lines—it’s just too slow! They reckon if they drive they can visit several clients en route and wrangle more deals out of every trip, possibly a more efficient way to conduct business. Highway pace in least congested areas averages 75 mph. In wide open stretches of Texas and western states where unrestricted, 120 mph is not uncommon. Only the most advanced automotive and tire technologies found on less than 1% of vehicles permit such speeds. Lately, they’ve concluded that tires have an effective life of only 6 years. Going fast on old tires on SUVs or vans is apparently a death wish. Are a few extra sales commissions worth pushing technology to the very edge of personal catastrophe? You have to pity car buying based on increased speed; nobody’s tells you that you can’t drive more than 25 mph, the de facto limit, most of the time.

Between freedom and responsibility lies an ocean of possibilities. In a madness to get ahead, go farther, grab more, outdo everyone, society has adopted as a norm a self-destructive mentality. So much hangs on an instant. Timing is crucial to success. If you leave your home a second later, you catch an ugly jam, or get into a

horrific accident, yet you always possess an ability to slow down or speed up at any point before tragedy occurs. It's that whole "preordained" argument, tempting fate, trusting in either free will or a nihilism of endless choices. Nobody knows how to answer those questions, but why thoughtlessly endanger everyone near you?

Everything enrages motorists. They're like white rats from a research realm outside laboratories. Just as everything gives rats cancer, anything that makes a motorist react causes stress. Stress is cumulative and ultimately debilitating. Wave after wave of lemming civilians moved into suburbs to avoid urban claustrophobia, only to find it every day on highways during rush hour. A cheaper and easier solution would have been to stay in a city or near wherever you work, which forces you to get along. Far less perilous to take mellowing prescription drugs, a little Prosaic, perhaps, than risk stress of driving among semiliterate jerks who don't know they're supposed to drive in the *middle* lane, use *right* lane to get off and on, not pass, and *left* land to *pass only*, not hog indefinitely. As long as people escape to country and suburbs, such self absorbed cruelty will reign.

Back 35 year ago, Daniel Behrman wrote, "The car cannot solve any urban or suburban transportation problem. It *is* the problem... The car distorts communities just as it bloats and distorts individuals. It consumes itself as it consumes energy. Sooner or later, it consumes us, mentally as well as physically. The car bestows power without responsibility. The bicycle is a vehicle for revolution. It can destroy the tyranny of the automobile as effectively as the printing press brought down despots." History has borne out Behrman's observations, even consumed Daniel, who, after riding for years in traffic and weighing cardio fitness versus pulmonary damage, succumbed to lung cancer at only 66, almost a self-fulfilled prophecy. But these days, despots own all your newspapers and roads. Having seen these many personal revolts coming, they effectively headed them off before they amounted to anything substantial. Bicycling was marginalized by design. Every day society spins a giant roulette wheel of death called a beltway, and whether you die or survive doesn't seem to matter.

Yeah, Prosaic. Everyone takes it. Al didn't much believe in psychotropic drugs; they sometimes boomerang, make users suicidal. Didn't believe in drugs, period, not when there's another way, although some people absolutely should take them, especially if they've been using them long term, like blood pressure pills.

Did you ever notice contraindications given for Claristain, Lipitox, Pixil, and all those crazy new drugs for minor maladies? Cures sound worse than discomforts. Ambience offers a nice nap, or sometimes a coma that last for months, or binge eating while sleep walking. Insomniac dieters can't understand why they're gaining weight. People want a simple pill for whatever ails them, an unreal expectation. All cause dependencies; who needs that? He once suffered from hay fever. For him, bicycling seems to have cured it, all that fresh air, those allergens inhaled and resistance built. Maybe that's all people really need, is to go outside and get moving, ride their bikes in from suburbs.

For stress alleviating bicycling, injuries resulting in death register at bottom of every list, a fraction of a percent for each age group. Your 5- to 9-year-old is 53 times more likely to die in a car crash than on a bike and you are 500 times more likely yourself, mostly because of careless motorists, excessive speed, and substance abuse, not necessarily your own. Neither children nor women can be careless, never mind their godfathers. Statistics are swayed by unequal comparisons. Granted there are an estimated two hundred million motorists versus fifty-seven million bicyclists, roughly three and half times as many. Automobile trips far outnumber those by bike, which only number 3.5 billion per year. But, for bicycling, instances per trip are extremely low. Also, bumping into something at 10 mph is less likely to be fatal. Excessive speed clearly kills.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that bicycling accidents annually cost people collectively ~\$8 billion, a tiny fraction of what automotive accidents cost. They say most serious injuries would be eliminated by riders wearing helmets; ~30% of riders, seventeen million, don't. To supply them all with a free coupon for wholesale helmets at ~\$23 each would only cost <\$400 million, <5% of what nation now pays, with a complete return on investment in 2.6 weeks. That's incredibly good bang for the buck for a program that needs no administration. Local nonprofits could distribute coupons at bike races, rides and rodeos; shops could use them as marketing promotions and be reimbursed by manufacturers with more free helmets. PSA's would alert consumers that they are free to avoid selling on black market.

It bears repeating: Drive not only for your own defense, but for those riding with you, in other cars, on foot, or upon bicycles. Don't assume everyone else can see or can hear you. Don't be fooled by relative insulation a vehicle affords. Drivers often get into a hypnotic trance, lose concentration, spellbound, like watching

television through a windshield. At today's turnpike speeds, you have but a fraction of a second to react, if at all. Each day precious lives are lost in an instant from bad judgement or distraction. Give yourself every chance to avoid becoming or causing the next statistic.

This is just how the end comes, quickly. You're never prepared. Suddenly, something that had always been a routine chore or safe fun threatens life. Like chopping vegetables then, momentarily distracted by a boiling pot, you put knife down awkwardly and it falls into your foot. Best to cut all vegetables before turning on stove. Adequate planning helps. Driving is just like this, too, suddenly turning innocents or practitioners into victims. Poor train infrastructure and unavailability of low cost housing can mean commutes of up to 3 hours each way. Better to start drive earlier. If rushing to be early or punctual means someone eventually dies, perhaps you, is it really worth doing? Why major corporations don't arrange for safe houses close to headquarters is just further proof that lives of employees mean nothing to them. Maybe you ought to find work closer, move nearer work, or start a competing business by stealing client list from bosses. Best to avoid distractions and prepare mentally, as they advise for chainsaw use.

Not only of humans, but beware of creatures by roadsides. On a driving day, he slowed his pickup to watch a whitetail deer cross the asphalt understory of his mundane route. Young doe was scampering warily. Other motorists also slowed, afraid poor, dumb beast might dart in front of them, dent or scratch their precious cars. Deer were becoming more of a nuisance every year with populations breeding unchecked; fewer were interested in cruel hunting anymore, or paying exorbitantly for hunting tags to mercifully thin herds. With pirouette and sashay, this graceful dancer made it to hedgerow. What a treat, chaine spins of Bambi ballet executed with indecisive grace in slanting afternoon sunrays. Had seen deer in this industrial area before, but it never made him pause to reflect.

Whatever instinct drives their peregrinations, deer have no other way to negotiate traffic but remain alert and rush across. Mostly they survive chances taken, sometimes sadly not. But at least motorists usually give them room. The same cannot be said about their concern for bicyclists, who are lower on their car damage index than potholes or squirrels, practically unworthy of notice.

"Bicyclists are agile and smart enough to get out of my way, aren't they?"

"Why isn't that bike on sidewalk? Streets are for cars."

“How dare that bike slow me down for a second.”

“I’ll just roll along hugging curbstone while I take this important cell call.”

Here’s some incentive. As a bicyclist, he could assure motorists that gutters aren’t where they want to drive. They’re invariably full of broken glass, disgusting half-decayed carcasses, loose grates, mud, missing manhole covers, sharp bits of metal, slippery sand, and other such hazards that you’d destroy your expensive Gooddays or Michonloans, even Kevlar belted ones. Once flying down a long hill, he had to take travel lane in panic to avoid a mangled beach chair. Owners doing the right thing “curb” their pets’ evacuations right where most bicyclists ride. As a motorist you ought to yield to all creatures, especially cyclists, who can’t always hear you, notice you, or react as you’d expect. They’re busy dodging jetsam, flung from your windows or forged under your wheels, and pavement fissures you create. It’s no wonder bicyclists feel a kinship with roadkill. Furthermore, hitting a bicyclist will destroy your quarter panel or rip a mirror off just as well as a deer or moose. Then there’ll be a bunch of paperwork and increase in insurance premiums. Stay out of gutter! To hard-pressed, revenue-poor municipalities and towns, ticketing parking lane violators is a good untapped source of income.

In cities like Turin, Italy, which he had visited on business, motorists acted nonchalantly about crashes, seemed to invite them. It was Italian machismo, proving superiority, tempting fate, for all those who fabricate and fashion demon vehicles in this Detroit of Europe. Pedestrians didn’t dare step off curb, lest a speeding vehicle be steered into them intentionally out of a homicidal hate of anything unmotored. For them, operant roots of “automobile” were “auto” and “bile”, or “self hatred”. Trends in Europe are often cited as 10-20 years ahead of America, great end-consumer of global culture, assimilation of whatever is brought by green-carders to milk this economic cow. Anchovies, beet soup, capers, chilis, exotic sauces and spices and all manner of unlikely foodstuffs now fight for space on supermarket shelves. Food was benign compared to attitudes cultivated on overcrowded cities with limited opportunities, a nightmare foretelling where America is headed.

Not through work but *play* is how culture expresses itself, they say, and is more impossible to do without than work. Play asserts itself. Bicyclists all know this instinctively, and turn routine motive chores into fun exercise. “We ride bikes; cars are for idiots,” boasts Be Your Own Pet. Dreams that involve bicycles can be interpreted as a need to balance the daily grind with recreation and rest.

Bicyclists seldom dream of cycling. Having stamina for only the most intense sensations—adrenaline highs, furious speed, loud beats, orgasms, spine tingling rushes—one loses subtle motivators for ordinary tasks—clean up, housekeeping, laundry, yard work. In fact, bombardment by media leads to a metabolic syndrome. Catecholamines and cortisol pour into one's system and set up flight or fight scenarios, suppressing calming dopamine. You gain weight and get stressed, which rewires neurons in a condition that takes years to reverse. People on edge dress sloppily, keep messy records and unsightly properties, and simply let bad stuff happen. A whole movement during late 1960's among urban youth could be identified by decrepit jeans and devil-may-care infatuation with mind expanding drugs. Today it's meth labs and thrill seekers mixing liquor and stimulants. But neither proved sustainable, never will. Dull important things don't get done.

Best to be aroused by everything, boring and exciting, gentle and hardcore, as much as you can stand being totally alive. Brains need multiple simultaneous stimuli, but simple tasks, when fully appreciated, can provide them. This takes total involvement, wide eyed intensity, then spells of rest, weeks off doing nothing, not the kind of schedule generally demanded of wage slaves. Instincts fluctuate between acquiring and feeling satisfied. Takes practice to extend participation and a purpose to get out of bed. Whatever survival motivators—hungry offspring, menacing boss, or rent in arrears—simple tasks require no more reason than being done as prayer, the most primal form of worship for a Divine Creator's benevolence, just living intently, just using whatever you're born with in whatever circumstances you find yourself. Without a canticle of the sun, as time wears on, people become increasingly disjointed, can't justify in their minds any need to do every step of complex processes they've blindly accepted, skip many. They don't care anymore, think they know better, wander into blind alleys of misanthropy where they cut themselves off from mutually beneficial interactions. Atheists lose this quintessential drive, intentionally or subconsciously, and add an extra burden upon themselves, to come up with a reason, one that often doesn't quite suffice.

He gradually became disgusted with motoring. Just like smoking, once quit, its appeal gradually disappears, even becomes repugnant. During countless moments where he exceeded posted speed limit himself, usually motorists were simultaneously passing him. They pass in groups, two, three or more, all unable to modulate their speed, impatiently thrusting themselves up the skinny back bumper of a shriveled blue hair at head of queue. What totally

amazed him was his early infatuation with auto racing, NASCAR, a showcase for nothing more than endless consumerism, lots of engines, parts and tires wantonly destroyed by wiggled out yahoos. Spectators go mainly to see spectacular wrecks, since they could hardly distinguish individual cars at those speeds. Might as well set up a folding chair next to any highway for free. Bicyclists, too, seek speed, gearing all their choices on how marginally more they can hurry. Admittedly, he did too, but considered speed as a reserve, for when next rottweiler threatened. Cranking full bore just decreases a ride's duration, makes one breathless, reduces rapture of being outdoors. You run out of real estate really fast, unless you're riding out West, where it all looks the same across dreary, drawn out distances.

Bicycling forces you to confine your range. He bought his fruits and vegetables from local growers as often as practical. Not because they cost less this way; quite the opposite, they charged more, were farther away than local grocer, and cost him more in gasoline for times that he drove. But he reasoned it out. Buying locally meant they didn't have to ship from California's Imperial Valley, thousands of miles away. This meant fewer big tractor trailer trips, which clears air, cuts congestion on highways and secondaries being used as short cuts, and decreases outflow of wealth to OPEC monarchs and theocrats who oppose modernity. Supporting area farmers also helped preserve farmland, making local riding more pleasurable. He mixed in trips to local farm stands, often biking, whenever produce was available in season. If everyone did likewise, environmental reparations could certainly add up.

Truckers have every right to haul, only they should concentrate on hauling whatever must come to wherever it had to go: almonds out of Anaheim, olives from overseas off port docks, oranges from Orlando, pig iron into Pittsburg. Bananas and date palms don't grow in Northern states. New England's textiles mills were long gone, moved to where cotton grew, a sensible postbellum strategy. Industry ought to locate close to where they intend to distribute; cuts transport costs and stays in tune with community needs. Yet presence of cotton couldn't keep Southern mills open, either. Export technology, not materials. Import ideas, as does China, who wisely insist on setting up factories and do it themselves rather than consume products made elsewhere. Collecting ideas is hard to do when other nations have nothing to offer except winning strategies they'd rather use against you. Temporary price reductions at Wallymart aren't very low when you account for all

they represent. Labor rates in China are far lower. This meant closing mills throughout America. Who can deny Chinese a chance to make a livelihood? So many hungry mouths, as Melua sings, "...nine million bicycles in Beijing/That's a fact,/a thing we can't deny." Shouldn't everyone favor exploiting underprivileged people in unregulated sweatshops somewhere else? Distance results in disposable workers, false assumptions, and ill-fitting garments. Furthermore, all profit goes to Communist Party figureheads, who are intent on growing the largest army on planet, one SEATO nations combined couldn't defeat in 2 wars, neither Korea nor Viet Nam, and that was a generation ago. Keep supporting this madness, by all means, if you want to instigate mutually assured destruction. Ponder multiple phallic images contained in an attack submarine armed with nuclear missiles to deliver mushroom clouds of left brained masculine annihilation from secret depths. There's nothing femininely soft to balance out this threat, except the image itself of a blue delicate Earth seen from afar in space. The collapse of business and diplomacy will hasten the end of global blight brought by wanton applications of technology.

Because someone doesn't do something crucial in a sober way, people die. If you regulate business, it costs money, so they relocate somewhere it isn't, where materials are bad and merchandise fails from shoddy workmanship yet still carries American, European and Japanese brand names renowned for quality. Forces at work struggle to provide anything that resembles reliable service, never a given. Airline companies run in red, so would prefer replacement parts to cost as little as possible. Travelers want the cheapest fares. Then there's chaos theory, the notion that something slightly interfered with somewhere else results in some chain reaction that affects you. If a bee stung an allergic flight attendant at a picnic, meant a substitute attendant had to take her place, which meant person who usually latches cabin door didn't, cabin you're riding in depressurizes, and plane crashes. Can't anything be done to control chaos? Yes, planning, standards, third party audits, in short, those regulations corporations so abhor for themselves, flee to other countries to avoid, but force gleefully and mercilessly upon competitors and consumers. They never sweat your inconvenience.

Clear thinking and consistency should prevail. They ought to scientifically study a problem and make a quantitative decision rather than the many emotional ones that have yielded this mess. All he knew was that when drug abusers are stoned, they have no ambition to do more than eat sweets and watch television. Each drug should be treated separately. Heroin is far more deadly than

marijuana, unless pot smokers drive intoxicated. Cocaine is deadly, too. Hashish and opium have been used for centuries in some regions without terrible consequences, if you discount their role in assassinations, covert operations, and terrorism funding. People cannot deal with a half century of widespread drug use on an individual basis. You need technological solutions that automatically take drug stupors into account, like airliners that can't start if door isn't securely shut. Take idiots out of important equations where lives are endangered and losses are passed onto society.

Deliberate and slow may seem the enemy of progress, yet diligent application of good manufacturing practices and operational protocols save lives, although they can become a reactionary trap that stifles innovation. Slower is simply less stressful. His book was purposefully written to defy speed reading. No, you'll simply have to read episodically and put it down between sessions. It's not something you're likely to read anyway, so why let you breeze through it? It's a visit to another country, borderless but lying between familiar territory and the unknown future, somewhere to lose stress, poke about, and recoup before the next leg of mankind's big adventure.

Of course, should cheap retail fail, commerce be somehow cut off, or vast network of transportation built on a rapidly diminishing source of fuel be interrupted, people could probably survive by scavenging food and wearing fur pelts or rags. But what about industries that are keys to domestic infrastructure or national security? He worried that development and research, which innovated new products and opened new markets, were disappearing with outsourcing. Unless you're building products in the same plants where you're developing new ones, you lose capability of making prototypes, means of testing them, and necessity to invent. Inventions don't arrive out of a vacuum, but as by-products of a consistent concentration on ordinary phenomena. The vast majority of new industries and opportunities are spun off from existing vital ones. A lot more was at stake and could be lost as instantly as a life if nobody pays attention or plans ahead.

