

Deep Culture Podcast – Transcript

The Deep Culture Podcast explores the psychological impact of intercultural experiences, informed by the sciences of brain, culture and mind. Join hosts **Joseph Shaules** and **Yvonne van der Pol** as we look at the personal growth that can come from travel, living and working abroad, learning a foreign language, growing up in a multicultural context—and the challenges of bridging different cultural worlds.

Episode 7 - Oz moments

Joseph and Yvonne discuss the “Oz Moment”—the experience of wonder and surprise that comes from first experiencing the sights, sounds and sensations in a foreign place. This episode explores the mental processes that lead to Oz Moment experiences. We hear from Ayako, who had a life-changing experience when she stepped into the restroom at LAX. Oz moments teach us a lot about how our mind works when we have intercultural experiences.

Time	Speaker	
00:00	Ayako	(...) There was a gap between the floor and the door, and you could see if people were inside, you could see people's shoes. You can see a lot of things - from Japanese point of view too much, yes! (...)
00:27	Joseph	Welcome to the deep culture podcast, where we explore culture and the science of mind. I'm Joseph Shaules and I'm here with Yvonne Van der Pol. Greetings from Tokyo, Yvonne!
00:39	Yvonne	Hi Joseph! Greetings from Almelo [in the Netherlands]
00:42	Joseph	Well, I'm happy to spend some time with you today and we're going to be talking about the Oz moment. The Oz moment, that's the experience when you're in a foreign place, especially for the first time, this feeling of wonder or surprise when you notice little things that catch your attention because they are different. For example, the first time I arrived in Tokyo, I noticed a vending machine next to a rice field. And that just stuck in my mind. This vending machine next to a rice field! Um, you know, I think lots of people have had Oz moment experiences when they travel or go to a new place, right?
01:28	Yvonne	Oh, yes, of course. Yeah. And probably once you saw this one vending machine, you saw many more (laughs), is that correct?
01:34	Joseph	Yeah, you know, that's right. I started to see them everywhere.
01:40	Yvonne	Oh really? (laughs). Yeah, exactly. Well, actually I have a similar story, also arriving new. And in my case, um, for the first time being in an African country, in Senegal to be specific, and from the airport to the city center, taking the bus early morning. Um, and I had seen those documentaries about African places, cultures before, and now I was in the bus, but I sensed as if I was in the documentary or in the movie. And that was a wonderful hour, an interesting experience actually, because I saw ladies with babies on their back with goods

		on their heads, uh, many lively colors. I could smell the coal fires, goats on the streets and some bumpy roads in this bus and all these people and colors. It was really fascinating, but it sounds like it was the movie and here was the reality like. Wow! (laughs).
02:38	Joseph	And so it's amazing that all these details that you still have, all these details in your mind, after a long time.
02:45	Yvonne	I can still record back the movie, it seems like, yes.
02:50	Joseph	Yeah, yeah. So, so that's, those are Oz moments, these little detailed recalls, but our point today is not just to tell stories like this.
02:59	Yvonne	No, the thing is Oz moments, they might seem simple, but from the brain mind perspective, they are really fascinating. And then to have a closer look at them because they can teach us a lot about how mind works and when we have these intercultural experiences.
03:15	Joseph	So we're going to look at the mental processes that lead to Oz moment experiences. And we're going to show you that your Oz moment experiences are a treasure that you can discover in your mind and that you can learn from..
03:32	Yvonne	So today's episode is in three parts and part one is Dorothy arrives in Oz.
03:49	Joseph	So let's start with some background, the Oz moment. That's a reference to a scene from the 1939 film, the wizard of Oz. Now in the United States of America, this film is really well known. Uh, is it well known in the Netherlands Yvonne?
04:10	Yvonne	It's known, but probably not as well known as in the States. And I actually knew the term wizard of Oz, um, because of us collaborating. I finally had a look at this film. So it's only then that I noticed or saw the film actually.
04:25	Joseph	So this is a fantasy film about Dorothy. She's a simple girl from Kansas whose house is picked up by a storm and carried far away until it crashes down in this magical kingdom of Oz. And she goes on many adventures and she's enchanted by this magical place. But the story is about her trying to get help from the wizard of Oz, so she can get back home. "There's no place like home", she says. So, it is the story of her Odyssey and the difficult journey home. So here's just a tiny clip of the moment when her house crashes down in Oz.
05:08		<i>Extracts from the movie's soundtrack</i>
05:27	Joseph	And so this is when the Oz moment happens. She gets up off her bed, picks up her dog, Toto opens the front door and steps out into this magical world. And the movie up to that point is filmed in black and white, but she looks around in amazement at a Technicolor landscape. This was one of the first films that used Technicolor and

		she is really in a different world. And she says: “I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore”.
06:12	Joseph	Indeed. She is not in Kansas anymore.
06:18	Yvonne	Yes. That's the moments when you are in a foreign place or have a new experience. And there's this feeling of a new reality.
06:27	Joseph	So that's where the expression, the Oz moment comes from. This moment where Dorothy is standing there in awe at her new environment. And of course, anyone who has traveled or gone to foreign countries or gone to a foreign environment, you notice things often, very little things, but somehow they stick in your mind. You can't remember what you had for lunch two days ago, but even after many years, you can remember these Oz moments, and they can have a big impact on us, even though they seem tiny.
07:07	Yvonne	So let's hear an Oz moment story. You spoke and I echoed into.
07:09		Yes, my wife and I, when we first were going out, we talked about our foreign experiences, and she told me about the very first time she went abroad to Los Angeles. And within minutes of arriving at the airport, she had a life-changing experience... in the restroom! And just to give you some background: in Japan, the doors in a public restroom, they go from almost from the ceiling all the way down to the floor. They're very private in the United States, not so much.
07:49	Yvonne	So that brings us to part two: “Ayako in LAX” (Los Angeles Airport).
08:04	Joseph	Hi Ayako! I'm so happy to have you on the deep culture podcast. Welcome. Thank you.
08:10	Ayako	Thank you!
08:12	Joseph	You know, I'm really interested in how foreign experiences affect people. And when you and I were first going out, we talked a lot about living abroad and traveling and learning a foreign language. And I was remembering one story that you told about the first time that you went to a foreign country.
08:33	Ayako	I visited my friend who was studying English for three months in LA. Going abroad was something that I never thought about going doing myself. So it was like going to the moon. So after I went through the immigration and customs, I went to the bathroom and I found a different bathroom in LAX (Los Angeles Airport), unexpectedly.
09:02	Joseph	(laughs) What is this different bathroom?
09:05	Ayako	There was a gap between the floor and the door, and you could see if people were inside, you could see people's shoes. You could see a lot of things - from Japanese point of view too much, yes!
09:21	Joseph	Yes. And so what was kind of your internal state?

09:28	Ayako	I was very surprised and I noticed that I was the only one who was surprised! And I did, I realized that I had only one choice, which is to go to this bathroom. There was no other bathroom.
09:42	Joseph	(laughs) It is the new reality!
09:43	Ayako	New reality...
09:45	Joseph	...but you hesitated, right? You didn't really want to go to this exposed...
09:50	Ayako	I had to really make up my mind!
10:00	Joseph	Did this raise questions in your mind about what kind of place this was or what kind of people these were?
10:08	Ayako	I didn't know what it means to be in a foreign country. And I didn't know that discovering these different realities or different normals would be what was waiting for me, when I went to the United States or any other countries.
10:37	Joseph	You told me in the past that this experience had some effect on you, that it made you want to experience life in other places.
10:39	Ayako	So when I first went to the United States and experienced this different normal, or different reality, I realized that what I was thinking as normal in my country is not necessarily normal elsewhere. And if a small thing like a bathroom is different, is so different, I felt the need to experience different parts of the world's normals, not just traveling, but by living to experience different normals, to really absorb that what is normal in my country is not normal, and the world is a big place...
11:25	Joseph	But this is just a bathroom door. So is this a big difference or is it a small difference?
11:31	Ayako	Well, a bathroom door is a big difference. First of all, and the bathroom door difference gave me a big difference in my life!
11:50	Joseph	So did this give you some impression of the Americans, since they have bathrooms like this?
11:56	Ayako	All the bathrooms in the United States or even at the American embassy in Japan they had the same door...
12:00	Joseph	...the American Embassy, right? They must have imported the bathroom doors! (laughs)
12:10	Ayako	But this difference is not just the bathroom only the usage of the bathroom must be different about how you think about the space, how you think about your privacy, how you think about the relationship between yourself and the rest of the people, how you see yourself in public space, all kinds of things.
12:30	Joseph	So on the surface, it's a little difference, but it actually is a lot deeper than that.

12:39	Ayako	I think so.
12:40	Joseph	Well, it sounds like this experience had a big impact on you.
12:46	Ayako	Yes, I think so. I, I still not fully understanding what happened, but I think since then, my journey has been continuing...
13:00	Joseph	...and this triggered a desire to experience other countries.
13:06	Ayako	Yeah
13:07	Joseph	And then you did. You have lived in foreign countries, you went to university in the United States, you have traveled extensively. So maybe your international journey started in the bathroom at LAX
13:23	Ayako	Most likely.
13:24	Joseph	Well, thank you for sharing your experience with me.
13:28	Ayako	You're welcome.
14:19	Joseph	Part three, the Oz moment and the intuitive mind. So here's what I find so interesting about stories like this and in Ayako's case something that seems so small can actually have such a big impact. For example, remembering all these details. We remember all these details, but in Ayako's case, not only does she remember these details, but she says that this created some kind of a shift in her mind, such that she now knew that she wanted to live or experience another country because there was this new normal, there had been some deep shift. Isn't that? That's amazing.
15:13	Yvonne	That's amazing. No, that's fantastic! That what happens is this very brief moment is huge. Actually it can be even life-changing.
15:24	Joseph	And so how is that possible? Why do we remember these little details and how can such a small experience kind of shift our perceptions in that way? That's the kind of magic and the mystery of Oz moments. So let's look at that from the brain and mind perspective.
15:55	Yvonne	So to understand the Oz moments, uh, you need to understand that intercultural experiences are processed in two ways. So we have the attentive mind and the intuitive mind. So the attentive mind is conscious intentional, much slower also, and it's about conscious problem solving. It's also related to linear thinking and to directing our attention towards what is needed at that moment.
16:25	Joseph	And the intuitive mind is like our autopilot, the unconscious autopilot that guides us through the day. So we've got the attentive mind and the intuitive mind, both reacting to this foreign experience. So let's break this down, let's call this the anatomy of a Oz moment. And so Ayako enters into the bathroom. The first thing that happens is...

17:00	Yvonne	...it all starts with entering a new environment and mismatch with internal models.
17:04	Joseph	Right? So what you expect is not what's there, or it's unexpected the predictive processing that your intuitive mind is doing. Uh, it's always scanning and filtering and predicting, and then suddenly...
17:20	Yvonne	...there is the difference you detect the difference.
17:23	Joseph	So there's some difference that is detected and this kind of wakes up the attentive mind and we become aware of this difference. And we may have some emotional response, like Ayako was "What, this is embarrassing!" and this activates our interpretive schema.
17:44	Yvonne	It's all about making sense of the situation. Um, it's the reflective, sorting, and analysis.
17:50	Joseph	So our mind is kind of juggling what all of this possibly means and what to do. So in Ayako's case, she's like, well, should I go to a different bathroom, while I can't do that? Well, I guess I need to, you know, suppress my embarrassment and just go anyway. Um, and so in this moment of decision, you're reacting to this experience, and this brings about some sort of..
18:21	Yvonne	...this is cognitive impact!
18:24	Joseph	So there's, it has an effect on us. That effect might simply be that we remember it, but in Ayako's case, it really seemed to have a very deep impact on her.
18:37	Yvonne	It's going to have a deep impact, a lifelong impact. But it can also go the other way around. And you might see also reinforced prejudice, for instance.
18:46	Joseph	Yeah. These experiences aren't always necessarily good. We can have a bad impression of the foreign places that we are. But I think that one thing that's very common about these Oz moments is that they stick with us and somehow we have the impression of something having changed.
19:14	Joseph	Okay. So the question then, is that, what do these Oz moments mean? What, what can we learn from them?
19:23	Yvonne	Yeah. Well, that's a good question, Joseph, and you know, I have your book here...
19:29	Joseph	(laughs) you have my book...
19:32	Yvonne	You might be surprised but I have underlined various sentences, and one way to look at them, I'm going to watch you, one way to look at them...
19:42	Joseph	Let us just be clear. I wasn't expecting this. Okay, go ahead.
19:47	Yvonne	I always have the book present here when we talk about these things. The things that I've underlined, those nice sentences here

		and there. And they are just precious because, here “one way to look at them is as a conscious echo, intuitive, largely hidden cultural learning process, a sign of an unconscious mind, hard at work.”
20:10	Joseph	Wow! a sign of an unconscious mind, hard at work, an echo of a cultural learning process. I like that. No, that's good.
20:19	Yvonne	And that's what you wrote it years ago, but you know, that's also why we do this podcast is about the journey and the exploration of, of cultural learning and what it all means.
20:32	Joseph	And, um, so I, I really do think that, you know, when we reflect on those Oz moments, what we're really doing is kind of exploring the experience of new normals because that's what cultural learning is. We discover that what's normal here is not what was normal for me. And it's that gap, which teaches us lessons, not just about some foreign place, but it teaches us lessons about these mental habits that we have that Ayako was surprised at the bathroom because she had these mental habits about what she expected a bathroom to be. And when we go to a foreign place, we have all of these mental habits that are guiding our perceptions. And these Oz moments are a way for us to be aware of this deep learning process
21:29	Yvonne	And the most interesting part of these mental patterns is that we usually don't notice them. They're just there and they are being awakened. All of a sudden here they are!
21:40	Joseph	And that's the power of having foreign experiences that they, they bring to light parts of ourself that we weren't aware of.
22:05	Joseph	So one final thing that I find interesting about Ayako story is that she told me that no one had ever asked her about this experience. And she had never talked about it to anyone, but that when she did remember it, uh, it was all so clear in her mind. And I'm wondering your experience in Senegal, uh, Yvonne, had you talked to other people about this?
22:30	Yvonne	Of course, I was traveling with my friend and we discussed it during, but afterwards it's probably until we worked together and I reading your book and getting this word Oz moment and studying it more in depth, I immediately was at this moment, but I never, probably never talked about it with anyone in between quite some years, I must say.
22:55	Joseph	And my experience with vending machines of course, was not something that I talked about to people, but I still remember my first days in Tokyo noticing vending machines. And it was like an ongoing question in my mind. I, I noticed there a lot of vending machines, and then I noticed there little trash cans next to the vending

		machine with a little round hole so that you could put the can. And I noticed people drinking drinks in front of the vending machine and then throwing the can away. And they weren't walking while they were drinking. And all of this was raising questions in my mind. And I was thinking, well, this isn't very environmentally friendly. It takes a lot of electricity...
23:42	Yvonne	(laughs)
23:45	Joseph	And so there are all these judgments, you know, there all these judgments going on in my mind at the same time, you know, and this is not just, you know, these are not just memories are they involve our whole body and our values and our judgment and everything. And so, so I could really feel that I was having to examine things that I'd never thought about before. And it's that I think it's that re-examination, that is what sticks in my mind, uh, because I've spent now many years living in Japan and there are still times when I'm asking myself, what does this mean? You know, it's a never ending process, uh, to be discovering different worlds
24:32	Yvonne	It is continuous learning and, uh, fascinating in itself, but probably it's also time to wrap up this episode.
24:42	Joseph	It is. It is. And so I encourage all of you to think about your Oz moments, reflect on them, send us a message, let us know about them. We'd love to hear from you.
25:08	Joseph	The deep culture podcast is sponsored by the Japan intercultural Institute, an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. I am the director of JII. If you're interested in culture and the mind, why don't you check out JII's Brain, Mind, and Culture Masterclass. It is a blended learning course and online community of cultural bridge people, to find out more, just do a web search for the Japan intercultural Institute. And if you liked today's episode, we'd really like to hear from you, leave a comment on Apple podcasts or write us at dcpodcast@Japanintercultural.org . Thank you Yvonne for spending this time with me and thanks to Ayako Hoshino for telling us her story, and as usual, thanks to our sound engineer, Robinson Fritz, and Chris Koyama our production assistant. See you next time.
26:10	Yvonne & Joseph	Yeah, see you all next time. And if you're having an Oz moment, why don't you send it to us? Yes, looking forward to it.