



### **The Global Soul**

What complicates the confusions of the Global Soul is that, as fast as we are moving around the world, the world is moving around us; it is not just the individual but the globe with which we're interacting that seems to be in constant flux. So even the man who never leaves home may feel that home is leaving him, as parents, children, lovers scatter around the map, taking pieces of him wherever they go. More and more of us may find ourselves in the emotional or metaphysical equivalent of that state we know from railway stations, when we're sitting in a carriage waiting to pull out and can't tell, often, whether we're moving forwards, or the train next to ours is pulling back.

Thus even those people whose lives haven't changed are subject, at times, to a universe increasingly shaped and colored by the Global Soul, and the Bangladeshi who's never moved from his village finds himself visited by images of Hong Kong (on-screen), and videos from Bombay, and phone calls from Toronto, perhaps, while the Torontonion who's never left the city walks out of his grandmother's house, only to see signs he can't read and hear words he can't understand, among people whose customs are strange to him. Never before in human history, I suspect, have so many been surrounded by so much that they can't follow...

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The world we like to think of as united, my experience suggests, looks, in fact, more and more like a group of differently colored kids all sleeping under the same poster of Leonardo DiCaprio, while arguing about whether *Titanic* is an attack on capitalist hegemony or a Confucian parable of self-reliance: in short, a hundred cultures divided by a common language. And though it may not matter if what I call "blue" suggests a different shade to you, it does matter if what I mean by "true" or "soon"—or "hope"—is different from what you do...

In the midst of all this change, the Emersonian hope keeps burning: in Davos, one of the scientists I met spoke of the Internet as the makings of a "planetary soul," and when people today quote Chief Seattle's famous dictum—"Whatever [man] does to the web, he does to himself"—they cannot fail to hear an extra resonance. A leader such as Václav Havel always takes pains to stress that the main term to be qualified by "global" should be "responsibility," and that in a world in which everyone's problems are everyone else's, a new sense of community must be formed on the basis of something deeper than soil and higher than interest rates, if our "One World" dreams are not to devolve into One Nation parties...

Yet it seems unlikely that globalism will prove any less ambiguous than any other of our dreams. While I was writing this book, I happened to visit the Dalai Lama in his increasingly crowded exile's home in the foothills of northern India (the clocks in the little village showing the time in Israel), and I heard him say, as he often does, that the shrinking of the planet is making visible and palpable what Buddhists, among others, have always held: that all our destinies are intertwined, and even the meanest self-interest suggests we look out for the ones around us. "Due to the modern economy," he told me, "and also due to information, to education and to tourism and the ecology problem—due to all these factors—now the world is heavily interdependent, interconnected. So, under such circumstances, the concept of 'we' and 'they' is gone; harming your neighbor is actually harming yourself." And your neighbor is everyone alive.

From Chapter One, *The Global Soul*  
Pico Iyer