



Source: Josh White, 'U.S. falters in bid to boost Iraqi business', *Washington Post online*, 24/08/07.

Tags: [travel](#), [discomfort](#)

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A word of warning: it won't be the way you imagine it. You won't feel the things you thought you would, and milk and bread are not the same. Not milk, bread, water, cake, street lamps, or chocolate for that matter. Nor door handles, counter tops or bus stops, or the way people congregate. You'll see—they are never the same, these things.

First off, the air won't smell right, and that means you will smell it, you will be more conscious of it. You will smell the air more often than you normally do, because usually it's just there; air is just there. It's there as air, and full of smells you know, so you don't smell them, you don't smell smells. Most of the time, the air doesn't smell of much in particular, except when there's a fish or gas or loud perfume, you know, something that's not air but it gets *in* the air? But, so, there it will be different, the air. That means your breathing is different, right, and so your organs and all, the very way you move and what moves in you, through you, at the level of blood, I mean, at the level of kidneys, that kind of movement. At the level of sleep. And the stride in your step will alter, the steps you take, I mean, the way you take steps. You will catch yourself sideways in a storefront when you walk down the street and you will shudder. You will do that double-take thing, I can guarantee it. You will look, and look again. It's not that you will think you look like someone else, but you won't look like the you that is you either, at least not from where you are now standing, from where you are now walking. It won't be the you that you think you are. It's all in a different scale, like cities are. Like, say, London and Tokyo. They are differently scaled. Or Brussels and Chicago, you know what I'm saying? Who or what determined that scale? Who set the limits round here? You will find yourself wondering about the things you take for granted. Walking, breathing, post offices, the city. You will become aware of scale and air.

And, like, green...there will be green, and you will know it's green but at the same time you will notice it isn't green like you know it. It's unpredictable green. In the most ordinary things the strangeness of a foreign place comes to you. Sure, there are trees, plants and all; but grass is thicker, and the trees—their outline won't make much sense to you, not that familiar feeling you get when you pass a horse chestnut or an oak or a fir or one of those that even if you didn't know that's what its name was if someone said, 'That's an elm,' you'd know right away it was and you'd nod your head in that way that means, 'Yes, of course, of course, I knew that already, I remember now,' that kind of lazy knowledge we have about where we come from that just sits there all quiet.

Because you know trees where you come from, we all do. You learnt their names at school, you traced their leaves, someone told you, or you learned them in a book, and trees gave you some of your very first shapes even before you knew language or sadness or what 'tree' or 'tomorrow' or 'maybe' meant. But these trees you see now, where you are, you won't know them, but you will have a sort of half-recognition with them, and the rest is some kind of misrecognition thing, a lag, like a meaning-smudge or something. It's trees and grass and air that tell you you're not home. Looking out of the window on the train between the airport and your city of destination, you will see trees and houses. And it will all be like fuzzy shapes with enough pattern recognition that you know that you're in a system though it's not your own system. But it's a system that recognises you and you recognise it. Disambiguation they call it. You will be able to disambiguate things, but there will be a blur around the edges, there will always be a lapse. Like I say, it won't be the way you imagine it; you won't be able to anticipate this world. It will remain uncertain.

(Pause. She shifts in her seat and looks back at him blankly, as if she doesn't understand. He tries a different tack.)

I guess it's like fuzzy logic, you know that theory? Imprecise logic? Like what they use in rice cookers and air conditioning and washing machines, or in video game artificial intelligence and stuff? That thing a physicist once told me, about how systems have to be smart enough to recognise things but not too smart, not too fucking smart and precise because if that's the case and there's a slight thing a machine detects that isn't entirely and absolutely the same it will mean the machine doesn't recognise any system at all, you get what I'm saying? So there has to be room for generality, for vague definition in physics and math and making machines and scientific work of exactitude. And people. There has to be uncertainty in order for things to work. So there's this fuzzy logic theory about imprecision that explains the erratic behaviour that means a system can function. It's about membership, see? Like a machine or person or whatever has to be able to recognise members, that one thing can belong with another, or that it doesn't, but not be so picky that it excludes anything that's not exactly completely and utterly the same. Some mathematician computer scientist guy at Berkeley in the seventies or something; he came up with that theory. And that's how it will be for a while when you get there. Like fuzzy logic.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sara Jane Bailes.*