

Tralfamadorians

I was reading *Slaughterhouse-Five* the other day. It was written by Kurt Vonnegut, and it's about this guy, Billy Pilgrim, who was in World War II. Billy says that on the night of his daughter's wedding, he was kidnapped and taken to the planet Tralfamadore. Billy says that the creatures on Tralfamadore were friendly and that they could see in four dimensions. Needless to say, human beings on the planet Earth can't see in four dimensions.

There is all this other stuff about how Tralfamadorians experience time, but that is not as relevant to what I want to say. I want to talk about dimensions that we are unaware of. Actually, to be a little more precise, I want to talk about things that go on every day in this country, and in this world, that we are unaware of.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. As I write this, I am sitting in a room typing out words on my computer keyboard. Now, to tell you the truth, I don't think about my computer very much. I just sit down at it, and either go online or start writing in my word processing program. If I wanted to look closer at the computer, though, I could learn more about it and about the world in which I live.

For example, if I take the computer apart, I could learn about its different parts. I might not know about all the parts, but I would be able to set them down on my desk and say, here is one part, here is another part, and here is a third part. I bet some of those parts were made by companies in other countries.

If I look a little closer—but this time I have to look with my mind instead of my eyes—I bet I could identify the companies that manufactured various parts.

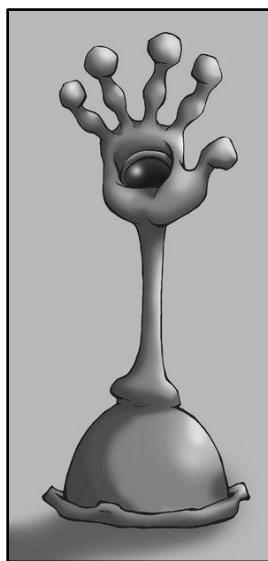
But then that leads me to ask, how did the computer company get money to build the factories that manufactured my computer? I bet the company had to issue either stock or bonds to get the money.

And if I look even closer, I would have to realize that someone had to buy those shares of stock and those bonds. I would bet you that there is an investment manager who bought some shares of stock in the company that made my computer. I bet he bought those shares of stock to add to a portfolio of stocks that will ultimately be used to payoff someone's retirement benefits. In other words, if I look closely enough, I can see in my mind the retired person who will get a retirement check based on the stocks an

investment manager bought in the company that made my computer. See how many people are "in" my computer?

Now I know I am not seeing in the fourth dimension in the same way that Tralfamadorians see in a fourth dimension, but if you look at something like a computer closely enough, you can see a lot more than a monitor, a keyboard, and a mouse.

Let me give you another example. This morning I made myself two pieces of toast. I put some peanut butter and grape jelly on the toast and ate it with a small glass of milk.



SUMMARIZE THE MAIN POINTS OF THE ARTICLE IN 10 BULLET POINTS. TYPE YOUR SUMMARY IN EITHER WORD OR POWERPOINT.

If you look closely enough, you can see a lot in a piece of bread that you put in a toaster. There is the bread, of course. But the bread is made from wheat. The wheat is grown by a farmer on a farm.

Now maybe that farmer was worried about the price at which she would sell her wheat. Maybe she was worried about the price of wheat six months before she even harvested her wheat. Maybe she was so worried that she entered into a futures contract specifying that she would sell her wheat at a certain price in six months.

In other words, as that piece of bread is popping out of the toaster, there could be a long story to tell: a story that runs from the grocery store, to the wholesaler, to the baker, to the farmer, to a futures contract.

How many people are popping up with that piece of toast? How many people are sitting down to breakfast with me as I put peanut butter and jelly on my toast?

Here's what I think. I think Billy Pilgrim, the main character in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, was onto something when he said that the Tralfamadorians could see in a fourth dimension. I think if we learn to focus on things hard enough, maybe we can see in more "dimensions" than we think we can.

A lamp is not just a lamp. It is a company that makes the lamp, workers in the factory where the lamp is made, shares of stock that the company issues to get the money to build the factory, and so on.

Lamps don't just appear out of thin air. By the time they reach your desk or end table, they have traveled a long way, and they have a story to tell, if only we know how to read that story.