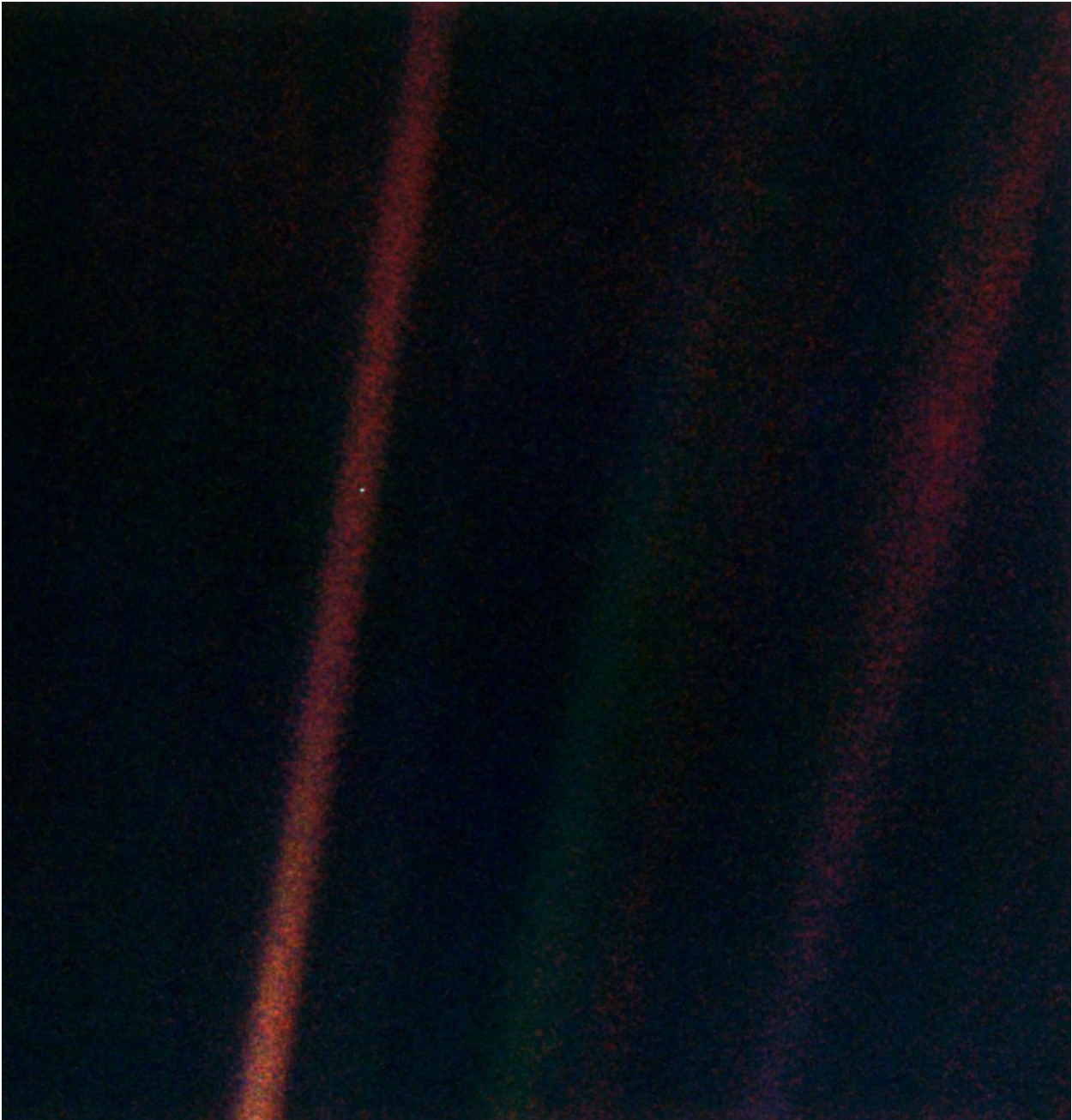


The Pale Blue Dot



I have been a fan of the [“Earthrise”](#) photo from 1968 since, probably, 1968. One of the greatest nature photographers, Galen Rowell, called it “...the most influential environmental photograph ever taken.” It is exquisite.

But I didn’t know about the “Pale Blue Dot” until the other day when I was watching a terrific new documentary from PBS: [The Farthest — Voyager in Space](#). The “Pale Blue Dot” is in a photo mosaic taken by Voyager 1 from beyond Neptune, four billion miles away. The incredible poignancy of that image is rhapsodized by the late Carl Sagan in his book from 1994: “Look again at that dot. That’s here. That’s home. That’s us. On it everyone you love, everyone you

know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives.”

It is because of the beauty of the Earth and, we know now, its fragility, that I've been an environmentalist all my life and I find the most compelling and important work that happens here is that which seeks to preserve and protect our magnificent home and its life, very much including our own too-often-sorry species, which yet has its many and diverse inspirations.

So, here are a few notes then from my recent family vacation to Europe, highlighting some of the things that they do so well over there. Unlike [the insane dinosaurs](#) rampaging through Washington at the moment who are systematically working to destroy nearly 50 years of federal environmental law, not to mention 150 years of natural resource conservation, the Europeans are steadfastly working to advance sustainability across all sectors of their societies and to help save us from climate catastrophe.

For an overview, you can check out the [ambitious EU targets for climate and energy](#). They are not only advancing their own agenda for change, but are pushing hard with the UN, NGOs and others for [sustainable development initiatives](#) far and wide.

First stop on our trip was Berlin. I was there two years ago, leading [a group of NYU grad students](#) learning about German clean tech policy and practice. This time around it was just the fam.



We had a lecture on the German federal system in the plenary hall of the Reichstag. This [magnificent building](#) was renovated by Norman Foster in the 1990s. Its distinctive dome

performs a couple of important tasks: provides natural light to the plenary hall and helps ventilate the building. The cogeneration plant runs on renewable biofuel and what would otherwise be waste heat is used immediately, converted to cold water with an absorption chiller, or stored belowground for later use. With its very high energy efficiencies and cogeneration plant, the building is a net energy provider to the other government buildings in the immediate vicinity.

Berlin, like the other capital cities we visited, has an immensely practical [public transportation system](#). It gets you everywhere you need to go, quickly, and for a reasonable price. Aside from that, Berlin is a great place to walk, the “Central Park” of Berlin, the Tiergarten being one place to ramble. There are [all manner of other parks](#) too.

The other cities on our itinerary each had a fun and functional system of trams, buses and subways for getting around: [Prague](#), [Vienna](#) and [Budapest](#). Needless to say, we also walked – a lot – in all these cities too. Lots to see. Public gardens? Of course: [Prague](#), [Vienna](#) and [Budapest](#).

We used intercity trains to get from Berlin to Prague, then to Vienna, and then to Budapest. Clean, on time, perfect way to go. On the ride from Vienna to Budapest, I was stunned by the number of wind turbines. Hundreds! What a thrill to see. I really love to see wind turbines. I can *feel* the earth cooling as the rotors spin. (See [Burgenland](#), southeast of Vienna, for a sense of what's there.) The Austrians, of course, are not the only wind power nation in Europe. Wind power accounted for [10.4% of the EU's electricity demand in 2016](#), with more and more coming on line every year.

So, in short, I was glad to be in Europe, particularly knowing how wonderful the efforts are there to preserve the *pale blue dot* in infinite space that is our home.