

SIGHTSEERS: THE TOURIST AS THEORIST

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Mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve.
—Karl Marx, Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*

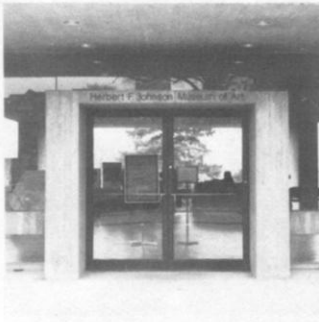
Mais les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent / Pour partir
—Charles Baudelaire, “Le Voyage”

Dean MacCannell. THE TOURIST: A NEW THEORY OF THE LEISURE CLASS. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.

In an article entitled “Semiotics: A Discipline or an Interdisciplinary Method?” [in *Sight, Sound, and Sense*, ed. T. Sebeok (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978)], Umberto Eco states that “every discipline at a certain stage of its metatheoretical development should be concerned with semiotic phenomena, and if one does not want to consider semiotics as a discipline *per se*, one should at least consider it as a methodological approach serving many disciplines” (p. 81). While one may wince at the suggestion of semiotics as a kind of supradiscipline dominating the field of all others, there can be no doubt that one incontrovertible effect of Structuralism and its aftermath has been the systematic putting into question of the pertinence of the traditional categories and disciplines of thought.

If one could call such a movement a tradition, Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist* would fall squarely into it. MacCannell’s project is to establish an “ethnography of modernity” (a formulation which already questions the traditional lines of demarcation between the various social sciences and especially the tenuous one between sociology and anthropology) by calling on the semiologies of Peirce, Barthes, and Lévi-Strauss on the one hand, and on the sociologies of Durkheim, Veblen, and Frank Young on the other. The result is an extremely useful and fascinating discourse both in its attempt at the theoretical articulation of a semiological sociology and in its often superb practical analyses of the particular object of study, tourism.

In the pursuit of this study, MacCannell is able to mobilize an extensive collection of newspaper clippings, advertisements, excerpts from travel guides and brochures, oral and written commentaries by and on tourists, and numerous other recondite materials. Exemplary in this regard is the chapter in which MacCannell reads a couple of early twentieth-century guidebooks of Paris in order to decipher what sights tourists went to see as well as how and why they saw them. That the Morgue, for instance, should have been marked as a tourist attraction is not without certain social and political implications: “The display of the corpses is ostensibly for the purpose of their identification, but what is represented is the importance of social order and of leaving society in an orderly way, preserving one’s identity to the very end” [p. 72]. That MacCannell’s analyses are often reminiscent of Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* is not



surprising given MacCannell's avowed indebtedness to Barthes. On the other hand, MacCannell's theoretical entrenchment in the early Structuralism of the fifties would make for the book's greatest flaw in the eyes of a contemporary reader. MacCannell gives no indication of having read even the later Barthes, much less the work of the "Post-structuralists." In MacCannell's defense, however, it is important to recall that nearly five years have passed since *The Tourist's* publication, which took place under conditions which would have made the book amply radical in the context of contemporary American sociology. I also suspect that MacCannell himself may have changed some of his strategies since 1976. My aim then is to attempt less a critique of *The Tourist* than a rearticulation of some of its most interesting points in the light of more recent critical developments.

For MacCannell, tourism is to be understood in terms of the "cultural production" around which it is organized: the tourist attraction. Basically, a tourist attraction has three components: a sight, a marker, and a tourist (MacCannell later identifies this tripartite structure with that of Peirce's concept of the sign, i.e. as something (marker) representing something (sight) to someone (tourist)). The most important and interesting component of the tourist attraction is the marker, without which the tourist would not only be unable to recognize the sight but the sight itself could not exist as such. Markers can be either "on-sight" (signposts, commemorative plaques, inscriptions, etc.) or "off-sight" (postcards, picture books, advertisements). Sightseeing can be understood as a process whereby the tourist moves from marker to marker until reaching the sight (or as MacCannell reformulates it, from signifier to signifier until reaching a signified). So sightseeing constitutes a kind of basic narrative sequence in which the tourist first hears or reads about a sight through an off-sight marker and then follows the directions given him by subsequent markers until arriving at the on-sight markers which trigger his recognition of the sight.

Given such a conceptual framework, the establishment of a semiotics of tourism requires the development of a typology of markers, and such is what MacCannell's book aims to provide. But not only are sights marked in different ways but the very process of producing a sight, which MacCannell terms "sight sacralization," involves different types of markings. Sight sacralization consists of five stages, each of which is distinguished by a specific type of marker. These stages include 1) naming; 2) "framing and elevating" (the establishment of an official boundary around the sight and its being put on display); 3) enshrinement (in which the framing material itself is marked according to phase 1—an example would be when a building which encloses a famous work of art becomes as much of a sight as the work of art itself); 4) mechanical reproduction (prints, postcards, etc.); 5) social reproduction (the naming of groups, areas or cities after the sight). Sight sacralization entails less something done to the sight than a proliferation of markers which point to the sight. But again it is not so much the sight which produces markers (or attracts attention) as it is the process of marking which produces the sight (by pointing to it as something to be "seen" and defining it therefore as a "sight"). But insofar as the marker "stands for" the sight, it can not only replace the sight, it can even "obliterate" it (such as high-rise tourist accommodations which destroy the "natural" character of a setting which attracted the tourists in the first place, or the historic battlefield in which there is literally nothing to see except its markers: a cemetery, monuments to famous generals, "the polished cannon with its welded balls" [p. 129]). Interestingly, areas supposedly lacking in tourist attractions are not in such a state, according to MacCannell, because of any intrinsic lack of sights but because the processes of marking are less developed there. But if the marking marks the sight as such through a set of markers, it becomes difficult to distinguish sight from marker. The marker can itself become a sight, and the sight is inevitably seen as a marked site, one which, like the Saussurian sign, exists only because it is different from any other. MacCannell implies such a differential notion of the sight although he never states it explicitly in such examples as those he finds in a travel brochure put out by the state of Iowa. That these mundane sights (like the glacier-formed gravel deposit) may attract few if any visitors does not belie the fact that they are *marked* as tourist attractions.

This semiological view of the tourist attraction is articulated within a general sociology of modernity, which is to explain the social function of tourism. MacCannell's basic hypothesis is that concomitant with the transition from an industrial to a "postindustrial" society there has been a shift from work to leisure as the "center of modern social arrangements" [p. 5]. Traditional sociology with its emphasis on work relations is therefore declared obsolete and must be replaced by a "sociology of leisure" which is to study modern society as it is structured around "cultural productions." The latter "are valued in-themselves and are the ultimate deposit of values, including economic values, in modern society" [p. 28]. Their value is not "determined by the amount of labor required for their production" but is "a function of the quantity and quality of experience they promise" [p. 23, MacCannell's emphasis]. According to MacCannell, it is through the accumulation of experiences gleaned from cultural interaction that the individual is supposed to be able to situate himself in society. Not only is the number of one's experiences a sign of one's social worth (people with lots of experience are considered better than those with fewer), but one's very involvement in a cultural experience is supposed to authenticate one's membership in the society in which this experience takes place.

MacCannell characterizes the act of sightseeing as "uniquely well-suited among leisure alternatives to draw the tourist into a relationship with the modern social totality" since it allows him to "step out into the universal drama of modernity" (p. 7). Tourism is seen to fulfill the ideological function of palliating the individual's sense of "alienation"¹:

Although the tourist need not be consciously aware of this, the thing he goes to see is society and its works. [. . .] Given the present sociohistorical epoch, it is not a surprise to find that tourists believe sightseeing is a leisure activity, and fun, even when it requires more effort and organization than many jobs. In a marked contrast to the grudging acquiescence that may characterize the relation of the individual to his industrial work, individuals happily embrace the attitudes and norms that lead them into a relationship with society through the sightseeing act. In being presented as a valued object through a so-called "leisure" activity that is thought to be "fun," society is renewed in the heart of the individual through warm, open, unquestioned relations, characterized by a near absence of alienation when compared with other contemporary relationships. This is, of course, the kind of relationship of individual and society that social scientists and politicians think is necessary for a strong society, and they are probably correct in their belief. [pp. 55-56]

Although MacCannell doesn't remark on it here, the tourist's activity has taken on some sinister connotations indeed. Thinking he is engaging only in his own pleasure, the tourist is unconsciously contributing to a "strong society." Tourism is thus an institutional practice which assures the tourist's allegiance to the state through an activity which discreetly effaces whatever grievances, discontent or "alienation" that the tourist might have *felt* in regards to society. The tourist enslaves himself at the very moment he believes himself to have attained the greatest liberty. Tourism, to paraphrase Marx, is the opiate of the (modern) masses. Furthermore, institutionalized tourism establishes a double-edged imperialism since it involves just as much an imperialism over the foreign culture turned into a sight, an object of cultural consumption, as an imperialism over the tourist himself who in practicing tourism unwittingly contributes to the modern state's power both over its own and over foreign

¹The sense of the word "alienation" undergoes considerable slippage in MacCannell's discourse. Sometimes it is used in the technical Marxist determination meaning the worker's separation from the object of his labor; sometimes it is used in a generalized and vague way to refer to the individual's feeling of being "out of place" or of "not belonging." At one point, MacCannell even coins the phrase "alienated leisure" to describe the "perversion" of the aim of leisure which takes place when tourists visit factories or other work places (p. 57).

populations. The state can be seen to derive a certain surplus-value from the tourist's tour of and then back into his society. The tourist "works" to the state's benefit and "strength."

We have yet to understand, however, how the structure of touristic practice works and why it should produce such unsavory effects. MacCannell specifies:

the integration of the individual into the modern world require[s] only that one attraction be linked to one other: a district to a community, or an establishment to a district, or a role to an establishment. Even if only a single linkage is grasped in the immediate present, this solitary link is the starting point for an endless spherical system of connections which is society and the world, with the individual at one point on its surface. [p. 56]

At least two comments about this statement are in order. First, the tourist's "integration into the modern world" is accomplished through an interpretive act: the "linking" together of the attractions he has seen into an imaginary system of relationships. The result of this interpretive work is a topographical representation which is necessarily self-referential: the attractions must not only be linked to each other, but each one must also be linked to a fixed point of reference, the tourist's "home," since all of these attractions must have at least one characteristic in common—that of the tourist's having seen them. The implication then is that the tourist does not merely place himself "at one point" on the surface of his sphere of experiences, but that he places himself at its center. It is in relation to himself that the tourist orders his repertoire of attractions: "The act of sightseeing is a kind of involvement with social appearances that helps the person to construct totalities from his disparate experiences. Thus, his life and his society can appear to him as an orderly series of formal representations" (p. 15). This imaginary construction of a universe which revolves around himself is also that which allows him to identify himself with his own society as opposed to those in which he would be marked as a foreigner. The tourist produces what is variously called a world view, a synthetic representation, or an ideology, the production of which is ideological insofar as it is the very production of this ideology which entraps the tourist within a social order. MacCannell's discussion remains unclear, however, as to whether the tourist's interpretive vision is supposed to correspond point for point to a systematized class or societal "world view" or whether it is a purely personalized representation of his relationship with both his and other societies. In either case, we can be said to be dealing with a certain concept of ideology, whether it be, as in the first case, the traditional Marxist one of a dominant system of ideas or as in the second, the Althusserian interpretation of ideology as a "representation of the imaginary *relationship* of individuals to their real conditions of existence" ["Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. B. Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 162; my italics].

My second comment on the passage from MacCannell concerns the stipulation that the "linkages" the tourist makes be "grasped in the immediate present." For the tourist to feel that he is no longer in a displaced, alienated or mediated relationship with society, his new perception of the world must be characterized by the meta-physical categories of "immediacy," "presence," and what for MacCannell is a keyword, "authenticity." Authenticity is what the tourist is supposed to find in the presence of the sight itself, whereas various kinds of markers (such as pictures, written descriptions) are seen as "inauthentic" reproductions. Tourist attractions are also supposed to supply an authenticity which is felt to be lacking in the modern world. This authenticity of the sight allows the tourist to make utterances such as the following: "this is the very place the leader fell; this is the *actual* pen used to sign the law; this is the *original* manuscript; this is an *authentic* Tlingit fish club; this is a *real* piece of the *true* Crown of Thorns" (p. 14, MacCannell's emphasis). The illusion of authenticity depends upon the tourist's feeling himself to be in an immediate relationship with the sight. This immediacy is assured by the sight's presence, to which the tourist can *point* (this

presentability of the object is marked in the above passage by the preponderant use of the deictic in the enunciation of authenticity). If the tourist's appreciation of the sight is seen to be mediated in some way, say through an inordinate amount of advertising, then the sight comes to be seen as inauthentic or "staged." We know, however, from the semiotic analysis of the attraction that there can be no sight without a marker, that is without some form of mediation. Once a sight is marked as authentic (say an authentic French café), it is by the very fact of its being marked no longer quite authentic (the café is marked as special and therefore as distinct from all the other "authentic" French cafés). The marker, while constitutive of the sight in its supposedly unmediated authenticity, is what, through the diacritical act of its marking, perpetually removes or defers the sight from any undifferentiated immediacy. As a result, the distinction between "on-sight" and "off-sight" markers ceases to be an absolute one since even an "on-sight" marker is always already "off-sight" insofar as it is able to signify or point to the sight, that is to be different from the sight. On the other hand, the tourist can never possibly accede to the pure presence of the sight. All he ever receives in return for his pilgrimage to the sight is another marker. To take an extreme example, instead of a postcard showing the Rue de Rivoli, the tourist only gets the corner signpost reading "Rue de Rivoli." Then too, there is always the possibility that the marker is inaccurate or even purposefully misleading, such as an inscription bearing false or even just unverifiable historical information. What MacCannell refers to as a "dialectics of authenticity" ensues in which the tourist's experiences are perceived as "shallow" because mediated or inauthentic, the effect of which is to fuel the desire for a more "real" or "authentic" experience.

An example of how this dialectics of authenticity works can be seen in the case of the tourist's relation to other tourists. The tourist's desire for authenticity is an individualistic one in which he seeks to appropriate that authenticity for himself as opposed to the other tourists (who are seen simply as "the tourists" since the tourist rarely considers himself to be one) who can render the sight inauthentic by their mere presence. This dilemma is complicated by the fact that once the sight is marked, it is also marked as "for the tourists," and therefore as no longer authentic. The desire for authenticity however only leads to the marking of new sights which then become inauthentic through the very act of their being marked. Current visitors to Paris may find it fashionable, for example, to ignore famous sights such as the Eiffel Tower or the Louvre in order to find the "real" French life in little known parts of the city. As such a movement begins to take place though, the sights of that "real" or "authentic" Paris become themselves just another tourist attraction and therefore just as inauthentic. MacCannell is able to conclude in one of his boldest moves that the denigration of tourists and of tourism is "not an analytical reflection on the problem of tourism" but a "part of the problem" [p. 10].

It may now seem that tourism operates less to palliate than to exacerbate alienation as the tourist in his insatiable desire for immediacy and authenticity finds himself enmeshed in the very web of mediacy and inauthenticity from which he is trying so hard to flee. But as long as value is still placed on a notion of authenticity, the result of the dialectics of authenticity is the world-wide proliferation of sights evidenced in modern tourism. Everything can be turned into a tourist attraction and indeed must be if the ideological production of ideology is to be kept going. More and more sights must be marked off in an endless differentiation of the habitable world.

And it is exactly as unlimited differentiation that MacCannell understands modernity in general. "Social structural" or "sociocultural" differentiation is a term used by MacCannell "to designate the totality of differences between social classes, life-styles, racial and ethnic groups, age grades (the youth, the aged), political and professional groups and the mythic representation of the past to the present" [p. 11]. Modern societies are considered to be more differentiated than primitive ones, or to be precise, modernity is the process of differentiation in which we find "elements dislodged from their original, natural, historical and cultural contexts fit together with other such displaced or modernized things and people" [p. 13]. For MacCannell, this process represents nothing less than total revolution:

Modern culture is more revolutionary in-itself than the most revolutionary consciousness so far devised. Every major section of modern society—politics, ethics, science, arts, leisure—is now devoted almost entirely to the problem of keeping pace with this revolution. “The Revolution” in the conventional, Marxist sense of the term is an emblem of the evolution of modernity. [pp. 12-13].

Modernity, for MacCannell, would seem to be a utopia of difference. Within this framework, tourism is considered to be a “ritual performed to the differentiations of society” [p. 13], and its purpose is the hopeless one of trying to overcome the “discontinuity of modernity” by “incorporating its fragments into unified experience” [p. 13]. The differentiations of society, it turns out, not only have “the same structure as tourist attractions,” but “the differentiations are the attractions” [p. 13]. As we remember, the sight is what is marked off or differentiated from its context as worthy of being seen. That these differentiations should be the same as the sociocultural ones which constitute modern society is intriguing and poses some interesting problems. Two questions in particular arise: 1) How can a phenomenon (the unlimited production of differences) be seen as practically enslaving on the one hand, as our analysis of the ideological function of tourism would suggest, and as, in theory, liberating on the other? 2) Which of the two, social structure or tourism, is anterior to and grounds the other? Is tourism just an exemplary expression of society’s deep structure, or is it—as a key manifestation of social mobility—the driving force behind the production of differences in a social structure defined only by its differentiations? Is tourism, in other words, *the* societal process?

These two questions, however, can only be answered if we can answer a third, namely the relation in MacCannell’s discourse between his analysis of tourism and his theory of society, or if one prefers between his semiotics and his sociology. What interests me is not that MacCannell’s observations of tourists should have produced a theory of tourism (that would be a banality) but that it should have produced so all-encompassing a theory of society. The problem is emblemized in the relation between the book’s title (*The Tourist*) and its subtitle (*A New Theory of the Leisure Class*). MacCannell remains well aware of the difficulty of articulating these two strands in his discourse, and he repeatedly attempts to explain (away) their relationship from the first page of the introduction to his final section on “Theory.”

A glance at one of MacCannell’s explanations might be useful. On the first page of his book, MacCannell claims to have undertaken his research “with much disregard for theory.” He describes his having heard Lévi-Strauss state the impossibility of broaching the ethnographic study of modernity because of its overwhelming complexity. Taking this magisterial pronouncement on a theoretical impossibility as a cue, MacCannell felt free to pursue his analysis of tourism “outside of existing theoretical frameworks” [p. 2]. Such freedom from theory, however, was not to be had and MacCannell found Structuralism and the sociology of Durkheim “forced” upon him: “The more I examined my data, the more inescapable became my conclusion that tourist attractions are an unplanned typology of structures that provides direct access to the modern consciousness or ‘world view,’ that tourist attractions are precisely analogous to the religious symbolism of primitive peoples” [p. 2]. Such a conclusion stems from a “theoretical transfer” by which MacCannell means that a theory capable of fitting a body of facts has unwittingly been found in another discipline, in this case, that of structural anthropology. The appearance of theory is excused in this narrative because of its coincidental relationship with MacCannell’s study: “the existing theory that best fit my facts” [p. 2]. This coincidental relationship between theoretical framework and empirical observation is posited, however, at the same time as another in which the analysis of tourism is seen as a privileged investigative avenue allowing “direct access” to “modern consciousness.” The analysis of tourism is to serve then as an “introduction to the structural analysis of modern society” [p. 3]. Tourism itself is to be the link between the facts of tourism and a general sociological theory. This link is made explicit in MacCannell’s definition of the word tourist, where we see that the

relationship between the two terms is made an aspect intrinsic to one of the terms. "Tourist," says MacCannell, "is used to mean two things." The tourist is at once the "actual" tourist who goes sightseeing and "one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general" [p. 1]. But if the tourist is exemplary of modern man, it is because he is primarily an interpretive creature, whose activity as MacCannell's text unfolds becomes more and more explicitly identified with that of the social theorist or ethnologist. The tourist's quest for authenticity and his production of theory (in the largest possible sense of the imaginary construction of reality) parallel the social scientist's search for authentic social data and his own production of a theory to explain it: "The sociologist and the tourist stare at each other across the human community, each one copying the methods of the other as he attempts to synthesize modern and traditional elements in a new holistic understanding of the human community and its place in the modern world" [p. 177]. The object of this study on tourists becomes the double of the subject undertaking that same study. The tourist is a social theorist *avant la lettre*, and if as we shall see he is considered inferior he nonetheless has the benefit of anteriority: "Our *first* apprehension of modern civilization, it seems to me, emerges in the mind of the tourist" (p. 1, my emphasis). This apprehension, which is also the tourist's ideological construction of the world, is indistinguishable from a theory of social reality and thereby implicates the latter's ideological basis. The tourists, concludes MacCannell, are already "way out ahead of the sociologists and anthropologists in their attempt to reconstruct modern social structure" [p. 175]. Modern mass tourism is seen as a "multibillion dollar research project" [p. 4].

The tourist's theorizing, however, does not take place in a void; it is a response to the primary activity of the tourist, traveling. His theorizing, nonetheless, always lags behind the voyaging, both temporally and causally. The tourist theorizes because he is already *en route* and caught up in a chaotic, fragmented universe that needs to be domesticated. The very concept of "the voyage" is this domestication in that it demarcates one's traveling like the Aristotelian plot into a beginning, a middle, and an end. In the case of the tourist, the beginning and the end are the same place, "home." It is in relation to this home or *domus* then that everything which falls into the middle can be "domesticated." This circular structure of referentiality is what we saw in the production of touristic ideology. But again, that positing of a point of origin which can be given the designation "home" is an eminently retrospective gesture. The concept of home is only needed (indeed it can only be thought) when home has already been left behind. Rigorously speaking then, one has always already left home, since home can only exist at the price of its being lost. Perhaps that's why voyages occasion such elaborate rituals surrounding departures and arrivals. These rituals, in defining an incontestable point of departure or home, function to allay any fears of not realizing we were in transit until too late, i.e. until *after* we had already begun (or stopped). If the "first step" in domesticating the voyage is to posit a *domus*, then the taking of that "step," instead of containing the voyage, prolongs it. Travel resists any immediate perception of itself. The beginning, middle and end of a voyage can only be assigned *après-coup* and arbitrarily. If I go on a plane trip somewhere, at what point should I say I begin it? When I board the plane? When it begins to taxi? When it takes off? When it reaches cruising altitude? Or, when I check-in my baggage? When I arrive at the airport? When I leave home to go to the airport? When I first step out the door? When I first step out of bed? Arguments could easily be made for all of these moments and others, but no matter when I decide my trip is beginning, in some fashion it *has already begun*. Immediacy is denied by the fact that that cognition of beginning a voyage is always already mediated by the very *motion* of the voyage.

The ritualizing and/or institutionalization of the voyage can also be an attempt to achieve a certain immediacy (of knowledge, of presence) through the realization of a priorly conceived project. One attempts to circumvent the delay in cognition by being there so to speak before one has begun, by preparing an "ambush" so that when the experience takes place it can be grasped as fully present. Tourists plan their trips in great detail often both to avoid the awkwardness and embarrassment that comes

from being in a strange place and to be able to appreciate “more fully” what they see, that is to perceive it more “authentically” or “the way it ought to be seen.” But all this preparation to assure the immediacy or authenticity of the experience only renders its occurrence all the more mediated and inauthentic as it has been mediated by the very preparation designed to assure its immediateness.

The fear of voyaging can be deduced as the fear of mediation and all the more so if the voyage is undertaken as a quest for immediacy. The voyage is always what stands between the voyager and where he wants to go. It may be experienced then as a useless encumbrance or as something to be “gotten through” as quickly as possible. Distance is felt as something to be reduced, a desire borne out by the continual development of transportation technology. The desire for authenticity is also motivated by a denial of mediation but as mediation is required in the very movement of seeking authenticity, the result is only an exacerbation of the inauthentic.

The tourist’s theory then is an attempt to stop the voyage, to domesticate it, to totalize its disparity into a single representation, e.g., “My Trip to Paris.” Everything can be collected into the circle of the tourist’s experiences between the beginning of his journey and its end, which closes the circle by the return back to the beginning, back “home.” The theory though is not only, as we have seen, inadequate to its object, the voyage, but far from stopping the movement of the voyage, the theory can only repeat it, coming as it does afterwards and in a constant effort to keep up with the voyage. In repeating the voyage, the theory can only prolong it. The “spherical system of linkages” is qualified by MacCannell as “endless.” Our circle has become an infinite spiral.

How then are we to understand the tourist’s relation to society if the means of his ideological entrapment, a self-centered theory of the world, can never be fully realized or brought to closure? To the degree that the tourist strengthens or shores up the social structure by going outside of it, his marginality becomes central to the maintenance of the social order. If the social order, however, is defined as unlimited social structural differentiation (motivated, as it is for the tourist, by a desire for the authenticity his very activity defers), and if “the differentiations are the attractions,” then the tourist can be seen to be at the locus of production of differences. Differentiation then is the marking process which progressively sacralizes and devalues sight after sight. And while MacCannell is right to point out that “no person or agency is officially responsible for the worldwide proliferation of tourist attractions” [p. 45], the role the tourist plays in the structure of the attraction implies that both “society” and the individual tourist are implicated in the marking process (the former through the institutionalization not only of sights but of tourism in general; the latter through the displacement of markers his activity implies—in other words, his activity is also a marking) and that neither is fully in control of it. The tourist re-inscribes each marker in a particular itinerary of sights to be visited, but that reinscription of the marker is as much a displacement and an inscription elsewhere of the marker as it is a repetition of it which is seen to affirm the institutional character of the sight. Tourism is then not only a “ritual performed to the differentiations of society” but the actual production of those differences. The tourist would be at the cutting edge of the production of social reality insofar as he re-marks the sight in his pilgrimage to it. He can even mark the sight literally by carving his initials into it. He can also disperse markers of the sight (by sending souvenirs and postcards to his acquaintances) as well as provide the sight with a new marker in his very person—that he went there signifies to others that there is something to see there. It is worth noting in this regard that the five-stage sequence of markings we saw in the process of sight sacralization is a movement outwards and away from the “original” sight.

The politics of this production of social reality as a kind of figural displacement depends upon the relation established between sight and marker. When sight is privileged over marker, the movements of the marking process can be easily totalized through the by now familiar figure of the sphere, at whose center stands the “sacralized” sight to which all its markers point. Institutionalized tourism depends upon this privileging of the sight: it is not enough to read or hear about a particular attraction,

but one must go through the trouble and expense of going to see it, of putting oneself in its presence. That totalizing figure can be deconstructed by a reversal and displacement of the sight/marker opposition. Such a deconstruction is broached though not pursued by MacCannell when he insists on the constitutive status of the marker for the sight. A radical politics would then contest the institution of tourism by asserting the supplementary character of the marker. The marker follows the logic of the supplement to the extent that the marker is extrinsic to the "pure" sight—the signpost, for instance, which designates a particular attraction is not supposed to be part of the attraction and is often seen as "detracting from" the sight, especially in the case of a "natural wonder," since the sign inevitably attracts attention to itself as it attracts attention to the sight. But it is also what comes to fill a deficiency intrinsic to the sight (for without the marker, the sight cannot attract attention to itself, cannot be "seen" and therefore cannot be a "sight"). A chain of supplementarity is established in the inevitable proliferation of markers (in the sight's sacralization) as each marker stands for the other, indecidably replacing it and adding to it. The affirmation of the supplemental play of marking would be radical to the extent that it contests the elision of marker into sight which institutionalized tourism presupposes and which allows it to value the sight's presence. The totalizing figure of the sphere would become a dispersed constellation of markers in which each marker refers to another in an infinite chain of reference.

As for the activity of the tourist, if the circularity of his journey out of and then back into society (re)produces its ideology, it can only do so through the implicit critique of that ideology in the movement outward and the implicit revision, be it ever so discreet, of the ideology in the activity that (re)produces it. On the one hand, the tourist is motivated to leave by a sense of the inauthenticity of his own milieu. On the other hand, it can be asked whether the tourist is ever fully re-integrated into society, that is if he ever fully returns from his trip. Not only may his home have changed in the course of his trip, but the tourist's perception of home may have changed and he may return home with a "foreigner's perspective" on it. This is perhaps the moment to remember that not everyone has either the political right or the economic means to travel. Travel is expensive and it often involves complex legal interactions such as passports, visas and quarantines, to name the most common. MacCannell's work therefore can only treat the "leisure class." But if traveling is relatively restricted, it must be because of some danger it poses to society's integrity. And if one must accept MacCannell's notion of an "alienated leisure" then one must credit its worker, the tourist, with at least the *possibility* of revolutionary action. This necessity of posing the possibility of a "revolutionary tourist" is certainly not the least interesting or curious implication of MacCannell's text.

We can see then that the anteriority of the tourist to the social theorist is no longer accidental but structural, for tourism would be where the social structure is produced, and social science in its attempt to reconstruct that structure can only lag behind, no matter how quickly it follows upon the tourist's trail. Social theory will then merely repeat the tourist's ideology just as MacCannell's social theory repeats his theory of tourism. As for the latter, it cannot even constitute the object of its study in any pure form. A semiotics of touristic activity (that is to say, of a certain interpretive activity) cannot help but reflect back on and undermine the status of the semiotic-social theorist (i.e. MacCannell) insofar as he cannot differentiate in any significant way his activity from that of the tourists. Here, we begin to see the necessity of establishing an all-encompassing theory (such as MacCannell's) capable of including all possible tourist theories. What is at stake then is less the ideology of tourism than the ideological function of theory.

The relationship between tourism and theory is neither one of contingency nor one which unproblematically allows for "direct access" to the truth of the latter through the mere observation of the former. Rather it is MacCannell's reflection on the empirical facts of modern travel practices which leads him to posit a theory of society which is less a social theory than a theory of travel: modernity as unlimited structural differentiation driven by a quest for authenticity—a perpetual narrative of

adventure. The theoretical “transfer” MacCannell speaks of is testimony to the inevitable intrusion of travel into any discussion of it. What we are left with is a (discursive) voyage between theory and practice, that voyage being the (theoretical) practice which disallows the primacy of either one. In the relation between tourism and theory, one cannot talk about the one without immediately *drifting* into the other. What is interesting is not that travel reflects more general social or ideological structures but that the *movement* from one to the other can be made so easily and so assuredly. In other words, wherever one turns one finds oneself caught up in the very movement of travel one is trying to relate to some other level of conceptualization and yet that movement is readily denied its unsettling complexity. Nothing is more banal than the “theme” of the voyage, and yet nothing is more difficult to define in any rigorous fashion. Indeed, travel cannot be thought in isolation, for it inevitably resists any confining definition (to define from *definere*—the setting up of boundaries, enclosures) since it can only be thought of as a crossing of boundaries. Discourse on travel can only produce a meta- or theoretical discourse, one that must talk about its definition of travel as the narrative of defining, as the circuitous trajectory around the periphery that plants the boundary markers prior to any possible recognition of the space of enclosure. It is radically impossible to talk about travel in empirical terms no matter how clearly and unproblematically the category of the voyage presents itself to our intuition. The ease with which we think we know what travel is may be the greatest impediment to any rigorous study of it. Travel is also therefore the category which is the easiest to overlook or to elide. On the other hand, theoretical discourse cannot in its own turn circumvent the question of travel. The metaphors of the voyage is the privileged discursive mode in which theoretical discourse takes place (since Plato, or even Heraclitus, in philosophy; since Homer in literature). This is not, however, to privilege travel as some extra-linguistic or theological principle. Rather it is to concede that any reflection on or theory of voyages must inevitably follow a certain itinerary, undertake its own voyage and thereby undermine the integrity of its object of study. (This problem resembles the one encountered in the study of language insofar as that study begins and generally takes place in language.) Nor do I wish to suggest that only travel (or language) poses this same problem.

What is the difference, then, between tourist and theorist? It is in the final chapter of his book that MacCannell must confront this problem, which has been raised implicitly throughout his study and which threatens to dislodge the assuredness of his own position as ethnographer or social theorist writing on tourism. To save this position, MacCannell must reject one of the principal strategies which has allowed him to produce a strong reading of tourism, that of siding with the tourist against his detractors, who, as we have seen, react against the tourist only to protect their own (or what they refuse to see as their own) brand of tourism. MacCannell even goes so far on several occasions as to make explicit the comparison between his activity and that of the tourist. The upshot has been the radical thesis of the tourist’s anteriority to the social theorist, to the grounding of the latter’s theory in the former’s theorizing. Nevertheless, in the closing pages of his analysis, MacCannell reasserts the ethnographer’s superiority through the introduction of the opposition between conscious and unconscious: the social scientist is aware of what he is doing whereas “the tourist remains mystified as to his true motives, his role in the construction of modernity” [p. 178]. The construction of modernity is again the unlimited production of differences, which appears as theoretically liberating and practically enslaving. We now see the reason for this contradiction. The tourist is seen to be enslaved by and through the practice of his theorizing because he is unconscious of it whereas the same practice is equated with freedom by the social thinker because he is not “mystified.” The status of these oppositions can be schematized as follows:

<i>Theorist</i>	<i>Tourist</i>
Freedom	Slavery
Conscious	Unconscious
Theory of Practice	Practice of Theory

The hierarchical neatness of these oppositions is put into question by two examples, one of an ethnographer, one of a tourist, one at the beginning of the book, the other at its close. The latter involves a tourist whose report on the Shetland Islands “gets down to the hard business of ethnographic description” [p. 175] including sections on the islands’ prehistory, culture history, ceremony and ritual, cottage industry and economy, language, cooking, games, and cosmology. The result is a travel review indistinguishable from an anthropological monograph. On the other hand, we are presented at the beginning of the book with an ethnologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose celebrated diatribe against travel books in *Tristes Tropiques* would, following MacCannell’s thesis, earmark him as a tourist *par excellence*. As for his unconscious adherence to the most traditional positions of Western metaphysics, that too has been amply demonstrated [Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. G. Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, pp. 101-140)].

The distinction between tourist and theorist is all the more difficult to sustain if one remembers that the first definition of the word *theory* cited by the O.E.D. is “a sight, a spectacle” from the Greek *theôria* meaning the same. The theorist is as much of a “sightseer” as the tourist. Perhaps that is why Lewis Coser in a statement reprinted on *The Tourist’s* back cover qualifies the book as “a heady mixture of *acute observations* and *acute theoretical vision*” (my emphasis). The pun may seem less spurious if we remember that MacCannell notes at least one kind of sightseeing which is specifically directed towards watching the tourists who are seeing a sight [pp. 130-31], the very activity involved in writing a book on tourists, on developing a theory of tourists and a theory of society capable of explaining their behavior. The theorist (whose proper name we can now read as that of MacCannell) is as much of a sightseer as the tourist in his desire to make present to himself a conceptual schema which would give him immediate access to a certain authenticity (the “real nature” of his object of study). The theorist’s pretention is even greater though than that of seeing a sight, for he wants to be a seer in another sense of the word as well, someone who knows. He not only wants to see the sights, he wants to possess them and his fellow sightseers through his superior knowledge. No matter how much he may compare himself to a tourist or ridicule the “moral superiority” of those who look down on tourists, MacCannell must inevitably assert the superiority of his own theoretical vision as being the more complete, the more correct, and the more authentic.

What we have encountered then in the case of the tourist as well as of the (social) theorist is theory understood as a stopgap which attempts to restrain and contain a certain traveling which always exceeds it. Ideology is not so much the theorizing as its product, the theory, whose self-referential structure defines the theorist’s place in society as a *fixed* place in a *fixed* society. That this theory or ideology be a theory of unlimited social structural differentiation changes nothing, for nothing is so totalizing as a concept of differentiation—nor so apt to be undermined by the very play of differences it attempts to name and de-limit.² Rather the ideological structure of theory must be questioned in its very presupposition of a fixed *position* or “home” in relation to which all else can be subordinated, domesticated. The theories of both tourist and theorist assume such a position. But if the tourist’s home is forever lost and can never be refound, and if the theorist’s position is eroded and undermined by the very object of his theory, then we must cease to think either theory or travel in relation to some fixed place. Comforting notions of positionality must give way to what can be called after Gilles Deleuze “nomadic thought,” one which would no longer know the concept “home.” Such an instability could no longer even be understood as travel, for nomadism is not to be confused with a simple privileging of motion *per se*. Rather it is what renders impertinent the very opposition between rest and motion, between home and travel: “the nomad is not necessarily someone who

²It is instructive to consider Derrida’s rejection of the term, differentiation: “such a word would suggest some organic unity, some primordial and homogeneous unity, that would eventually come to be divided up and take on difference as an event” [“Differance” in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, tr. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 143].

moves; there are some voyages in place [*des voyages sur place*]” [Gilles Deleuze, “Pensée nomade,” in *Nietzsche aujourd’hui?* (Paris: U.G.E. 10/18, 1973), p. 174; my translation]. The nomad can no more be said to be moving than not moving since there is no longer any fixed point of reference in regards to which movement can be either perceived or measured.³

Perhaps the distinction to be made then is not between different notions of theory, but between theory and its Other, not exactly practice (for the preeminently theoretical gesture of insisting only on practice is often only a way of denying by proclamation one’s own theoretical presuppositions) but *theorizing* as practice.⁴ A nomadic theory then, or a theorizing without theory, if such is even possible, would affirm the supplemental play of marking and travel from inauthentic marker to inauthentic marker without feeling the need to possess the authentic sight by totalizing the markers into a universal and unmediated vision.

³On the figure of the nomad in philosophy, see also Dominique Grisoni, ed. *Politiques de la philosophie* (Paris: Grasset, 1976).

⁴The distinction between theory and theorizing is drawn on the analogy of Louis Marin’s distinction between utopia and utopian practice [*Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces* (Paris: Minuit, 1973)]. The latter is the fictional process or “play of epistemological spaces” whereby the givens of social reality are neutralized, allowing for a radical critique of society. A new configuration, however, is defined in the utopia itself which institutionalizes through its totalizing representation a new social reality and ideology. The problem then is that of formulating a radical practice which does not by virtue of its very formulation become a new institution.

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