16

DESIGNING DESTINATIONS
Advertising and Touristic Desire

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I

Tourism studies have come of age. Between the brief article by T. Nunez published in 1963 and *Anthropology of Tourism* by Dennison Nash (1996) much has been mapped by the discipline of tourism studies. But the occidental tourists' (henceforth tourists) looking at the 'Other' worlds, and how such 'looking' is shaped by their constructed desires, the advertisement industry, and marketing of the destinations is one field that has not been adequately discussed in a comprehensively focussed theoretical framework. This essay seeks to make a contribution by situating tourists within a theory of development that encompasses both the tremendous imbalances of the global political economy and an expansionary and dominating social formation in the more wealthy nations. Such a project needs to explore the symbiotic relationship between the image of the Third World in tourist advertisements and the broader practices—both touristic and otherwise—that it mediates.

Here, John Urry's use of Foucault's concept of the 'gaze' provides a useful framework for a critique of the occidental tourism—for looking at tourists' looking—by bringing

together both the socially constructed nature of the gaze and its power to organize experience (Urry 1990). As the amalgamation of power, social communication, and visual imagery, the tourist gaze has many strong affinities with the advertising image. One could say that tourism participates in a 'symbiotic' relationship with its advertising (Truong 1990:124-25).

II

Although one could trace the history of travel as far back as the history of mankind itself (Nash 1996:10) mass tourism in developing countries is a relatively recent phenomenon, emerging only after the Second World War. In conjunction with social legislation that guaranteed paid vacations (such as the Holiday Act of 1938 in Great Britain), an upsurge in First World 'guests' resulted from a post-war economic boom that saw not only higher incomes, but the corporate expansion of leisure services in an effort to absorb this surplus income (Truong 1990:98). These factors combined with the post-war surplus of aircraft to generate large-scale international air travel and tourism in the developing world. Because of geo-economic disparities, the pattern of mass tourism is essentially privileged people from the 'North' travelling in places where inhabitants do not have the means to travel; there, hotel labour and artisan goods are cheap (Rossell 1988:2). As Truong points out, it is crucial to note that the expansion of leisure services in the Third World did not arise from the initiative of developing countries. This lingering external influence is closely connected with the expansion of multinational corporations into the Third World, with interests in air transport, hotels, and tour operation (1990:99). In this way, tourism as a development strategy sadly parallels broader mis-development policies of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, fostering dependency upon both a single industry and multinational capital. Within the context of 'dependency theory', tourist policy can be seen as facilitating the integration of Third World

countries into a 'new world order' of production closely allied with the goals of 'free' enterprise (Truong 1990:116-23).

The general trend toward vertical and horizontal integration in the tourist industry also means that industrialized countries tend to control the advertising industry which, to a large extent, shapes and determines demand. This consolidation within the industry has implications for some of the particular qualities of the touristic advertisement. The high 'quality' of brochures is one manifestation of an integration that allows for huge advertising budgets in order to attract the rich consumer's attention. J. C. Holloway remarks: "While some might contend that there is today a disappointing similarity among leading tour operators' brochure covers, taken individually the quality and professionalism of brochure design is exceptional" (1989:141). The 'disappointing similarity' is certainly a second consequence of an integration that requires transnational marketing (Wyer and Towner 1988:23).

III

One thing that distinguishes the tourist product from other commodities is that it is a service rather than a tangible good; made more intangible by the fact that it does not occur at the place of purchase, and thus cannot be inspected before being bought. This makes it a highly 'speculative' investment, with images occupying a more central role than they do in the case of tangible commodities. In some cases, Third World destinations are not very well known, and it requires elaborately contrived advertising to build up some consciousness of place.

The primacy of images is enhanced by the fact that the tourist product is more than just services; it is an *experience*. A holiday is not just a packaged dream but also a change of experience from the ordinary routine life to a sacred, 'high' existence (Graburn 1989). It is speculative of both the future and the future-past, of both anticipation and memory (and

the visual memory of photographs). We all travel with Lacan: anticipation becomes an element of the product itself.

Further, the tourists' dream vacation is shared by a million others with democratization and 'commoditization' (Greenwood 1977) walking arm in arm. The role of advertising to create demand for international travel in order to fill the post-war planes has succeeded despite economic recessions in the industrialized world. In the age of mechanical reproduction, many destinations are constructed to be as interchangeable as their brochures. This culminates in what the industry unabashedly calls 'Identikit' destinations - tourist ghettos such as Club Mediterranees and other, cheaper resorts - that have been built to guarantee the mass demand that is perpetuated by advertising (Holloway 1989:35). The reproducibility of the tourist experience is, in effect, its consumer guarantee; and Third World countries find themselves pictured formulaically in advertising in part as a reflection of a broader tourist 'bliss' formula of 'sun, sea, sand, sex, and servility'. Economic dependency on tourism and fierce competition within the industry combine to make it very risky to deviate from the formula. As Cynthia Enloe remarks, "to be a poor society in the late twentieth century is to be 'unspoilt'" (Enloe 1989:31)

The tourist product is a 'positional' good; aspects of it are either scarce or subject to congestion or crowding (Urry 1990:43). Hence, there is tremendous value placed upon the "unspoilt" - a word that appears in almost all brochures and advertising for Third World destinations. Urry traces the genesis of this quest for the unspoilt in the rise of what he calls the 'romantic gaze' (1990: 45-47). The romantic gaze - as opposed to the collective gaze - seeks pleasure and, more importantly, authenticity through the solitary 'speculation' of unmarred sights. 'Firsts' become important: the first tourist to go to this destination, see this tribe, walk on this beach, experience this panorama. Part of what makes tourism positional is that the romantic gaze tends to usher in the collective gaze and 'spoil' it; the romantics are the pioneers

of mass tourism before mass migration. In the words of Turner and Ash, there is a 'pleasure periphery': new places give pleasure for their unspoilt beauty and novelty, which then brings more people there causing congestion, which in turn acts as a stimulus for the romantic gaze to leave the well-tried locale in favour of virgin sights (Turner and Ash 1975). It is not hard to discern a form of neo-colonialism in this expansionary pattern, though Nash (1996:85) warns us that we need to look into "other aspects of this contact" as well.

The primacy of the virginal helps to explain the profusion of environmental imagery and the rhetoric of isolation in Third World tourist advertising. Almost every Third World destination includes some isolated beaches having "uninterrupted, brilliant white sand" and "lush green vegetation". An immense resort becomes "an isolated location", "delightfully secluded", "unspoilt", "unsophisticated", "a perfect retreat" (Turner and Ash 1975:24). And a potential native is 'prehistoric', 'primitive', and 'untouched' (Bruner 1991:239).

There is also an implicit class character to the romantic gaze, with the prevalence of the romantic desire for positional goods residing largely among the middle and upper classes (Urry 1990:47). Thurot and Thurot discuss the trickle-down effects of tourist locales:

> All destinations or all models of touristic consumption associated with the idea of belonging to a specific social stratum must in turn infiltrate the next lower stratum, while those at the top have to process the renewal of the "signs" in order to maintain social distance between the classes (Thurot and Thurot 1983:180).

They argue that this renewal of the signs of social differentiation is represented by the 'aristocratic' lifestyle in tourist advertising - the depiction of a 'jet set' and their accouterments of cruises, tennis, cocktail parties, casinos, being served, and so on.

Advertising of the 'aristocratic' is of course not targeted toward the aristocracy; it is aimed at the upper middle class: the collective gaze is attracted by the romantic gaze. Thurot and Thurot identify four ideological models that appear in tourist advertising - traditional (aristocratic), clerical/executive, youth, and the 'intellectual class' - that all depend in part on the playing off of tensions between the romantic and collective gazes.

Another aspect of the tourist product that enhances the role of advertising is highlighted by both Truong and Jost Krippendorf (Truong 1990:124-25, Krippendorf 1984:22-24). They argue that the tourist market is essentially a 'symbiotic market' that brings together factors that are normally associated with the home (food, accommodation, rest), and which become tourist attractions only when processed into goods. Thus advertising functions symbiotically in its mediation and ideological transformation of household-related services into tourist experiences. "In this connection, the significance of the ideological constructs of the advertising industry cannot be separated from tourism itself" (Truong 1990:125).

Tourism becomes tautological semiology with holiday areas confirming the images, dreams and pictures that are mainly shaped by tourist advertising. This provides insight into the phenomena of local cultures adapting to tourists' preconceived images in what Dean MacCannell has called 'staged authenticity': heritage is constructed, tribal dances that never occurred become traditions, gentrified seafronts are artificially restored to squalor (MacCannell 1976: ch.v). Now we are traveling with Baudrillard in hyperreality, witnessing the "imperialism" of the tourist operators: those "present-day simulators (who) try to make the real, coincide with their simulation models" (Baudrillard 1981:2). In his book on the image, Daniel Boorstin describes both tourism and advertising as 'pseudo-events' (1987). Both function as 'self-fulfilling prophesies': just as "the tourist's appetite for strangeness ... seems best satisfied when the pictures in his

(sic) own mind are verified in some far country", so too is the 'novelty' of the advertisement merely "the appeal of the contrived" (Boorstin 1987: 109,224).

John Berger also describes advertising as a kind of 'pseudo-event', but gives it a somewhat more pernicious character than Boorstin. Publicity is essentially *eventless*. For publicity all real events are exceptional and happen only to strangers... Publicity, situated in a future continually deferred, excludes the present and so eliminates all becoming, all development. Experience is impossible within it. All that happens, happens outside it (Berger 1972: 153).

Publicity's distinct 'way of seeing' the world, coupled with its enormous influence within capitalist culture, "marks what is happening in the rest of the world" (Berger 1972:149). Thus to refer back to Baudrillard's vocabulary, the primacy of 'simulation models' in Third World tourism relates not only to the mass reproduction of tourist 'pseudo-events', but also to the interests of tour operators to conceal the 'real'; their interests in both simulation and dissimulation. Although tourism can be organized around negative sentiments (e.g., trips to concentration camps), it is generally marketed with the characteristic 'euphoria' of advertising images (Barthes 1990: 33). When people's leisure is at stake poverty is not a strong selling point. The creation of 'environmental bubbles' is essential in order to prevent tourists from minding the gap between advertising images/ rhetoric and the unesthetic realities of Third World poverty. The ambiguous nature of advertising's symbolic power is foregrounded by the nature of the tourist product: "promoting a society, especially a developing one, is not the same as marketing soap, no matter how commoditized travel has become" (Go 1989: 175).

IV

No matter how commoditized or reproducible the tourist product has become, homogeneous advertising methods

have serious strategic limitations for successful marketing. In a competitive market it is not enough to be an easily interchangeable warm place, one must promote a distinct image in order to "ensure a product with a differential, competitive edge" (Go 1989:177). This involves Third World countries promoting not only their distinct natural assets (e.g., a Kenyan safari) but especially cultural assets like architecture, folklore, arts and crafts. The tourist advertisement thus shares with other types of advertising - and the tourist experience generally - a propensity for things novel: new places, new sights, new cultures, culminating in a new and improved self.

However, too much novelty is not the answer: a little 'difference' can be quaintly aestheticised; too much can be threatening. Many advertisements thus simultaneously present novelty while attempting to assuage the tourist's preoccupation with personal safety and creature comforts. Hence the average Third World destination appears to be "a land of contrasts", embodying both the thrill of the exotic and the comforts of home-genity.

The tension between the strange and the familiar in the tourist advertisement is characteristic of the element of contradiction latent in touristic desire. One aspect of this relates to the previous discussion of tourism as a 'symbiotic market' - that tourism involves household-goods becoming commodified. The tension here is between the personal and the professional: the tourist's desire for a commercial 'home away from home' leads, for example, to the 'emotional work' of the attendant who must smile, pamper, and exchange pleasantries while serving food and drink. Another relates to the tension between the romantic and collective gaze: Third World tourist sites are advertised as simultaneously "unspoilt" and yet with all the amenities. Any potential contradiction between tourism development and its corrosive self-destruction through growth - the way in which tourism destroys tourism - slickly elided. As a development strategy, tourism exemplifies much that is problematical in the

philosophy of 'sustainable development': tourist advertising, however, skillfully incorporates both poles of dichotomy, unproblematically highlighting both untouched nature and extensive facilities.

These tensions and ambiguities co-exist on the semantic field of the tourist advertisement because both the advertisement and the tourist product are geared toward satisfying a multitude of fantasies. The advertisement brings together the diverse elements of tourists' desire under the umbrella of a kind of overarching, diffuse mythology. Advertising in the tourist industry is a form of discourse. As David Uzzell points out, tourist advertisements function not through the superficial attributes portrayed in brochure photographs (sun, sea, sand), but by utilizing the discourse of advertising to provide the reader with a range of cultural tools with which fantasy, meaning and identity can be created and constructed (Uzzell 1984: 79-99). The tourist advertisement constitutes "a vast meta-system where values from different areas of our lives are made interchangeable" (Williamson 1984:85). Uzzell emphasizes that tourists are not motivated by the specific qualities of the destination, "but rather the matching of a destination's major attributes to the tourist's psychological needs" (1984: 80). The repetitiveness of the imagery and messages of packaged holiday advertisements thus highlight the semiological 'code' by which our cultural system constructs escape and fantasy.

In addition to his general semiological approach, Uzzell brings to his analysis of tourist advertising two further elements from Roland Barthes: myth and photography. He underlines the manner in which both myth and photography involve a collusion of the natural and the cultural: how they both serve an ideological function of naturalization (Uzzell 1984: 87). This can operate at several levels in the tourist advertisement through what Barthes calls 'connotation procedures': from 'poses' that reinforce physical male power and women's subordination to the gaze, to the 'syntax' of a brochure whose composition can juxtapose the various images of tourists' desires (Barthes 1977: 87).

Partly because he is focussing upon the packaged holiday brochure generally and not specifically Third World advertisements, Uzzell ignores certain relevant supplements to the connotation procedures. For example, in his discussion of 'pose', he provides a strong analysis of the ritual subordination of Western women holiday-makers in the brochure photographs. However, he neglects the ubiquitous discourse of the exotic/erotic in the construction of the female Third World host. Similarly, the category of 'objects' - referring to the use of objects as colourful cultural backdrops - can be expanded to account for the use of cultural minorities such as the hill tribes of northern Thailand or the Masai of Kenya are put on exhibition to promote 'ethnic tourism' and come to represent a variety of things: authenticity, spirituality, nature, uncomplicated honesty.

V

Uzzell's semiotic analysis of the discourse of advertising in the tourist brochure must be supplemented with an investigation into the discourse of the 'Other' —a dominant mode of understanding Third World cultures in the West, and prominent feature in the advertising of Third World destinations. MacCannell emphasizes that any accurate understanding of tourism must discuss the central role of "consciousness of otherness". He argues that it is largely responsible for the symbolic import of many destinations, noting that "original macrodifferentiations of the tourist world were labeled by outsiders - The Wild West, The Dark Continent, The Mysterious East" (MacCannell 1976:141). Uzzell's insight into the cultural narcissism of tourist advertising can be supplemented with an analysis of how self-discovery is linked to this search for an Absolute Other, and the structural context for interpreting this discourse. A contextualising of tourist advertising's discourse of the Other within the structural context of capitalist modernity may serve to historicise tourists' desire more effectively than Uzzell's analysis. These two unifying theoretical concepts of the

discourse of the Other and its relation to modernity demand further elaboration.

One of the most penetrating analyses of the discourse of the Other is Said's *Orientalism*. Said describes orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'" (1978:2). It is sustained and reproduced by discourses about 'the Orient' which serve to reinforce the asymmetrical relationship of power, domination and complex hegemony between the West and the East. Orientalism is thus a discourse that aid the 'systematic discipline' by which European culture manages others politically, socially, militarily, and so on (Said 1978:3). It is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1978: 3).

Said's work is particularly relevant to the manner in which the Third World 'destination' is constructed in tourist advertising. It highlights once again how it is the West that produces and controls most of the discourses about the Third World. It calls attention to the asymmetries of the international information order: the Third World has very little control over the information and images produced. Truong points out that the control of information and knowledge about the tourist market that has emerged as a consequence of economic integration has particularly important consequences for an 'experience good' like the tourism product because of the way in which intangible products are to a greater extent influenced by their advertising (1990: 198-99). Control over information promotes the "ontological and epistemological distinction" between the West and the Third World (in collusion with the economic distinction) and enhances the travel destination's status as a liminal zone. The West has effectively restructured the Third World as 'exotic', 'simple' and 'natural', as essentially 'Other'.

But 'Other' than what? What is this 'Same' that structures the discourse of the Other in Third World tourism? One

cannot ignore the enormous role that the structural context of an affluent capitalist modernity in the West plays in constructing the Third World Other of tourism. In this sense tourism is as much ideology as physical movement; it is a package of ideas not only about Others, but about industrial, bureaucratic life. Third World tourism represents for many an escape from modernity (Turner and Ash 1975:19).

Mass tourism is a product of a developed phase of capitalism. "It requires both large, claustrophobic cities and the means to escape from them"; "the urge to escape uniformity and complexity" (Turner and Ash 1975:21). The Third World has come to symbolize an uncorrupted anti-modernity, a Shakespearean 'Green World' whose 'innocence' may serve as the hope of cultural salvation. For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere; in other periods and cultures. This explains the particular attraction to 'ethnic tourism' focussed on cultural minorities, "represented as an earlier stage of humanity, closer to Origins and Nature" (Rossell 1988:5).

Some of the insidious effects of this discourse can be seen by reversing the dictum "that to be poor society in the late twentieth century is to be 'unspoilt'". As John Sinclair puts it, the western counter-cultural identification is pernicious, "to the extent that this view romanticized wretchedness, conflated all non-Western cultures and patronized genuine Third World aspirations for material improvement" (Sinclair 1987: 158).

The discourses of the Other can amplify into particularly harmful effects for women and cultural minorities, groups that serve as archetypes of Difference. At the intersection of discourses concerning Third World societies and presumptions of masculinity and feminity, Third World women become the "quintessence of the exotic", "something to be experienced" (Enloe 1989: 28).

The discursive element of the Other in advertising legitimizes sexual availability while eroding moral boundaries.

This attitude is clearly manifest in the enormous international sex-tourism industry, which depends upon economically dependent women and men from affluent societies with visions of available and submissive women of colour in their heads (Enloe 1989:36). Many Asian airlines play up this stereotype of the exotic/erotic oriental woman in their advertising through the ubiquitous presence of the female flight attendant: "Singapore Girl. . . You're a great way to fly", Air Lanka: "When your business is business . . . our business is pleasure". Another advertisement—from a German travel company, Rosie Reisen, is a more explicit articulation:

> Thailand is a world full of extremes and the possibilities are unlimited. Anything goes in this exotic country, especially when it comes to girls . . . (now) you can book a trip to Thailand with exotic pleasures included in the price (Enloe 1987: 37).

Sex tourism in the Third World can be seen in one light as a resistance to modernity. In this reading, the attenuation of male power in an urbanized modern world - and the destabilization of subjectivity in postmodernity - see their antithesis in the regressive, oppressive assertion of masculinity by the male sex-tourist. Tourist advertising strives by the very logic of its representation to overcome fragmentation. Its figuration - sunset/moon = romance, 'fun' = sex, exotic = erotic, woman = object = servile, cultural minority = nature - is a constant effort to naturalize sex and gender relations. This is in keeping with the earlier analysis of the naturalizing functions of both myth and photography.

Whether through the naturalizing of gender roles or the fantasy of the 'noble savage', there is a great deal of nostalgia motivating tourism. If 'the past is a foreign country', so too is 'a foreign country the past' in the tourists' imaginings (Urry 1990). Touristic nostalgia can be situated within modernity partly as a reaction against disintegrating social formations, partly as the 'alienated leisure' that accompanies

alienated labor, and partly as a function of defining oneself in the modern world: "the death of the social, the loss of the real, leads to a *nostalgia* for the real: a fascination with and desperate search for real people, real values, real sex" (Kroker 1991: 85). MacCannell relates this nostalgia to the developing world: "The deep structure of modernity is a totalizing idea, a modern mentality that sets modern society in opposition both to its own past and to those societies of the present that are premodern or un(der)developed" (MacCannell 1976: 7-8). MacCannell lucidly identifies how the cult of naturalism and the premodern is merely one of the "spoils" of victory:

> Interestingly, the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society (MacCannell 1976: 8).

This 'museumification' of the premodern is one of the tasks of the tourist advertising agency, which constructs a Third World even more 'primitive', 'exotic', and nonmodern than in life; "more smiling, more authentic, . . . like the faces in funeral parlors" (Baudrillard 1981:23). Tourist locations that - like Baudrillard's Tasaday Indians - die for having been discovered, are embalmed and preserved for the collective gaze of posterity through advertising photographs and 'staged authenticity'.

VI

One of the tendencies in analyses of advertising is to problematically project the advertising message onto the consumer's subjectivity: in other words, to highlight the standpoint of the 'capitalist imaginary', the fantasy of the capitalist control of agency (Kellner 1989: 28). But this is clearly a fantasy, as frustrated marketing agents will admit. Hopefully, this essay will have pointed out some of the ways in which political, economic, and symbolic systems structure

the context of the tourist's gaze - at advertising and Third world 'sights' - without positing a transparent subject. The tourist subject is not passive: as Uzzell suggests, understanding the advertising message involves an active construction of meaning; an act of collusion with the 'tools' of the advertisement that inform the social differentiation of consumption. Identifying the symbolic nature of both consumption and advertising is only one part of the process: one must ask the question 'symbolic for whom and with what ends?" (Jhally 1990:6). The contextualising of the active power of symbolic 'tools' as discourse/practice helps to account for their functioning within modern subjects, their appropriation and production by the tourist industry, and their participation in the perpetuation of global inequalities between rich nations and poor nations.

In closing, it is interesting to speculate on the future of the Third World tourist advertisement. The short-term future of the tourist industry looks very bright from a *fin de millennium* perspective: it is currently the fastest growing industry worldwide, and is projected to be the world's largest industry in the twenty-first century. The economic integration of the tourist industry - particularly relevant to the omni-present multinations in the Third World—is continuing to 'open up' more places for the tourist gaze. The market is becoming more segmented and individuated, reflecting the increasing diversity of consumer demand. But, as John Berger states, the world depicted in advertising is perhaps not so diverse:

> The entire world becomes a setting for the fulfillment of publicity's promise of the good life. The world smiles at us. It offers itself to us. And because everywhere is imagined as offering itself to us, everywhere is more or less the same (1972: 149).

The equivalence of places as subjects of the tourist gaze and the general 'spectacleisation of place' are the setting for Urry's postmodern 'post-tourist'. One of the features of the post-tourist is that she does not have to leave her home

in order to see many of the typical objects of the tourist gaze: i.e., "with TV and video all sorts of places can be gazed upon, compared, contextualised and gazed upon again" (Urry 1990:100). More and more travel agencies are in fact using video technology in order to preview the sights and sounds and sites of destinations on their premises: a multimedia effort to reduce the risks and ambiguities of a 'speculative' investment. Perhaps it is not science fiction to imagine an ever increasing identification between tourist advertising and its product. In other words, perhaps the post-tourist will one day be able not only to see but experience many of the typical objects of the tourist gaze from her own house. The growing sophistication of holography and 'Virtual Reality' technology is enough to make one speculate its implications for not only the tourism industry, but also its potential effects on leisure more generally conceived.

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