

The Tourist, The Resident:
An inspection of the undulating culture of modern urban tourism

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"The tourist is the other fellow. "

-Evelyn Waugh¹

*Main Entry: **tour-ist** Pronunciation: \ 'tūr-ist\ Function: noun Date: 1780 1 : one that makes a tour for pleasure or culture²*

-Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2010

The objective quality of the authoritative Merriam-Webster dictionary fails (or at least misleads) the reader in its overly simplistic definition of the tourist. The tourist is a permeable, ever-transforming subject that can be at its simplest defined by the action of travel and the seeking out of the unfamiliar. The tourism industry not only offers "pleasure" and "culture," but also opportunities of transformation, spirituality, fantasy, etc. As one can imagine, the industry's unique ability to produce these opportunities for its consumer has launched the growth of the tourism market into an increasingly influential and prominent economic sector. The United World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) states:

"Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and diversification to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Many new destinations have emerged alongside the traditional ones of Western Europe and North America. As growth has been particularly high in the world's emerging regions, the share in international tourist arrivals received by developing countries has steadily risen, from 31% in 1990 to 45% in 2008."³

As is obvious by this brief introduction, the tourism market is an extremely complex system bordering between many disciplines, including, but not limited to, economics, sociology, psychology, politics, geography and spatial practices. This

¹ Lippard, 1999. 2.

² Merriam-Webster. 2010.

³ UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2009. 2.

essay will focus on urban tourism and spatial practices (more specifically urban planning and design), a phenomenon that brings its own set of unique qualities to the tourism market. Urban tourism is distinctive because, unlike resorts or ranches, the tourist attraction is situated within a city, a space also used for business, residence, and play.

The blurred boundaries between tourist attraction and effective urban environment create a unique edge condition that merits further consideration. Occupation of these boundary spaces cultivates direct confrontation between host and guest, visitor and visited, spectacle and banal, and “authentic” and “in-authentic” experience. The following discussion will outline the creation, development, and mediation of this edge and its surroundings, and the border’s implications on the relationship between attraction and tourist. Lastly, the discussion will outline opportunities and proposals of the elimination of this uncomfortable border via urban planning and design. Case studies will include Chicago, Illinois, USA and Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, two cities which are engaged in the balancing act of tourist destination and livable city.

As stated above, urban tourism is complex- full of dichotomies and contradictions. Through marketing strategies and contextual signs and symbols, the modern city must portray itself as a “dreamscape of visual consumption.”⁴ Marketing in the tourism business is especially unique because the consumer can only really experience and test the “product” or “tourist attraction” after one is already there. This “means that the representation of place, the images created for

⁴ Zukin 1991, 221.

marketing, the vivid videos and persuasive prose of advertising texts, can be as selective and as creative as the marketer can make them—a reality check comes only after arrival.”⁵ This aggressive marketing scheme not only has an effect on the consumer/tourist before arrival, but also mediates the tourist’s actual experience at the destination. “The [tourist] gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs. Then tourists see two people kissing in Paris what they capture in the gaze is ‘timeless romantic Paris’...”⁶ Thus, as tourists view and understand an attraction are they acting semioticians or realists? Many would argue that tourism is only achieved via mediation; tourists isolate themselves from the host culture by seeking the ‘hyper-real,’ “reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism.”⁷

A quick trip to the *Chicago Office or Tourism’s* website immediately informs the tourist of Chicago’s essence in a fun catch-phrase, “CHICAGO—THE GREAT AMERICAN CITY”⁸ The website goes on to speak of the “famed ‘Magnificent Mile,’” and other attractions, and even asserts, “Chicago is the birthplace of the modern building.” While these things may be true of Chicago, similar parallels can be made in many American cities, such as New York or Dallas. But, because Chicago has been marketed as the “Great American City,” tourists will notice and seek out confirming signifiers, noticing the abundance of hot dog stands and deep dish pizza, Cubs fans, Marshall Fields (now Macy’s, the quintessential American department store,) and

⁵ Fainstein et al, 1999. 54.

⁶ Urry, 1990. 3.

⁷ Urry, 1990. 12.

⁸ *Explore Chicago*, 2010.

the flagship store of American Girl Place⁹ (conveniently located in the Magnificent Mile.) All of these attractions are not only objects of the tourist's gaze, but they are examples of the typified "American Mid-West Urban experience." Because of these distinguishable signs, the tourist can easily discern a sense of place, an "exotic" urban environment which can be understood and encompassed by a quick catch-phrase: "the great American city." Thus, the tourist destination becomes "a negotiated reality, a social construction by a purposeful set of actors."¹⁰ A similar conclusion can be made from any "tourist city," each markets itself with an image—pointing out key signs and signifiers for the tourist to fantasize about *before* travel and seek *in situ*.

A similar visit to Rio de Janeiro's official tourism website¹¹ finds a letter from the Secretary of Tourism, Antonio Pedro Figueira de Mello detailing the then upcoming World Cup events, "Rio is famed for its images of soccer and beaches, and in the upcoming International FIFA Fan Fest, both will be combined on Copacabana's beach [...] The expectation is that the sport will bring people together." This letter not only begins to identify signifiers but also suggests that the tourist will be able to experience these events "with the locals."¹² The Minister of Tourism completes his occupational responsibilities because he begins to construct a fantastical urban place in which all will unite amidst the excitement of the World

⁹ Note: The *Chicago Marriot Downtown* even offers an official *American Girl Place® Package in Chicago*. With discounted hotel rates and a guarantee that it will "make you American girl's dream come true." (Source: www.marriot.com)

¹⁰ Ringer, 1998, 5.

¹¹ Note: Official tourism websites were used in research as indication of the current cultural trend in which most of tourism related planning and research is done via the internet. "The Internet was used by approximately 90 million American adults to plan travel during the past year with 76 percent of online travelers planning leisure trips online." (Source: *Travelers' Use of the Internet*, 2009)

¹² *Rio Official Guide*, 2010.

Cup. “Places... are chosen because there is anticipation, especially through daydreaming and through fantasy,”¹³ and it is easy to construct a pleasant personal fantasy around soccer, Copacabana beach, and “the locals.”

After this brief study of tourism marketing, it is also apparent that most tourism is actually experienced through mediation. Tourist websites, guidebooks, photo-ops, a guided tour, etc. all create a ‘tourist bubble’ or node within a city. This node not only creates a ‘hyper-reality’ full of signs and signifiers of the expected tourist experience, but it also becomes a place of the exotic for the tourist. The tourist interacts with the ‘tourist node’ in an experiential state of play, seeking fantasy and amazement. The fostering of exoticism is created via the tourist’s state of mind, seeking signs of the typology sold to them before the action of travel, or displacement. The seeking of the exotic, along with the performance of play in the urban tourist node creates a stark contrast between the inhabitants of the city whom are often completing daily tasks, whether working, parenting, commuting, etc. This severe contrast of state of mind and social responsibility is often what creates the boundaries and geography of the tourist node, complicating host-guest relationships.

This edge condition manifests itself spatially and spiritually in many “tourist cities.” While marketing and mediation create the urge to experience the exotic, tourist attractions often push out the inhabitant of the city not only via the often uncomfortable relationship of being a “sight” but also through exclusive land use and access. Many tourist nodes include exclusive tourist programming such as

¹³ Urry, 1990. 3.

convention centers, museums, IMAX theaters, etc and are developed exclusively for tourist activity, only providing easy access to the nearest block of hotels. While these developments can increase quantity of tourists to a city, the city has become a pure marketing image mediated by a developer. This exclusive tourist development only exacerbates the often fragile relationship between tourist and toured, often by isolating the city's residents by providing extremely limited access (What is a city, but its people?" ¹⁴)

While these developments are a specific type of "post-modern" tourist node, a more organic tourist node can be observed in cities such as Chicago or Rio de Janeiro. Chicago's famous (or infamous) "Magnificent Mile" is a quintessential example of the tourist node and its complex edge conditions. The Magnificent Mile is arguably one of the largest tourist attractions in Chicago (not only in amount of visitors, but also in quantifiable land use.) "The Magnificent Mile offers over 3.1 million square feet of retail space, 460 stores, 275 restaurants, 51 hotels, 2 unique museums and a variety of sightseeing and entertainment attractions to more than 22 million visitors each year." ¹⁵ Signs of "midwest urban exoticism" readily abound in this space, the name "magnificent" perfectly coincides with the upscale Jimmy Choo, Gucci, Chanel and Prada stores, but also maps to the spectacle of the flagship stores of American Girl Place, Lego, Polo Ralph Lauren, and Nike. Not only are these stores exotic and spectacular for the rural or suburban mid-western tourist, but they also provide services to the residents of Chicago—creating a blurred boundary between tourist node and effective urban space. The conflict between "shopping as

¹⁴ Shakespeare, 2008. 3.1.238.

¹⁵ *Travel to Chicago Illinois*, 2010.

play and fantasy” and “shopping as necessity or task” is easily observed through the analysis of the use of this space by the conflicting populations. To be even more specific, a closer inspection of the Apple Store on Michigan Avenue of Chicago reveals the simple conflict between tourist and resident.¹⁶ The store was designed with tourists in mind, creating and fostering spectacle via a glass-front façade, floating staircase, and material finishes to complement its products. This spectacle invites tourists (in the state of play and performance) to partake in play, manually with the products, but also taking photographs and experiencing the flamboyant interior. But, the store also provides a distinct service to the inhabitants of the city (that being the utilitarian function of a store-- retail and customer service.) This conflict of state of mind (performance and play versus task-oriented and utility) occupying the same confined space often creates apprehension and frustration for both the tourist and the inhabitant—creating a hectic, uncomfortable environment, which neither population enjoys. While this example may seem somewhat trite and trivial, it is poignant in understanding the larger socio-cultural issue of shared urban spaces, tourist nodes and their power to segregate and fortify the city into inefficient environments (this discussion will not lay blame on either population, but only attempts to clearly define the issue and find opportunity for solutions via urban planning and design.) As is obvious, this confined example of the Michigan Avenue Apple Store can easily be transferred in scale to the Magnificent Mile-- as it is a module of the larger tourist attraction.

¹⁶ Note: Shopping as tourist attraction, creation of spectacle, and branding via architecture is an extremely complex and intricate topic, it is left simplistically defined above to define and examine the larger urban node and how it is contextualized in the urban environment.

A similar spatial analysis can be done on the neighborhood of Santa Teresa in Rio de Janeiro. A neighborhood which is described by most tourist websites as “A picturesque hillside enclave of crumbling colonial mansions, steep cobbled streets and laidback drinking and dining spots, Santa Teresa is beloved by artists, musicians, writers and other bohemian types.”¹⁷ This tourist node is not only known for its post-colonial architecture, but it is very specifically known for its tram known as *bondinho*, or the “little tram.”¹⁸ While many tourist guides and books celebrate this mode of transportation as antiquated or “charming” (creating signifiers for tourists to notice the “exotic symbols” i.e. cobblestone streets, the manually operated and “primitive” electric cable, etc.,) it is still an efficient mode of transportation to many residents of the Santa Teresa neighborhood. A single event of the electric tram getting off its track can be an annoyance for a resident trying to complete a task, it is a sign of “authenticity” for the tourist, further enhancing the guidebook’s descriptors as charming and bohemian. Again, this is a small event within a larger context of the urban environment, but these small events multiply into the carefully constructed and often tenuous relationship between host and guest, the exotic, and the “other.”

These edge conditions of urban tourist nodes not only affect the psychological condition of the users of that space, but the inefficiencies have greater implication of the urban fabric as a whole. A tourist node has the potential to isolate itself via the conflict between host and guest, thus creating fortified entities within the larger city. These fortifications are not in the best interest of the resident or the

¹⁷ “Santa Teresa’s Hidden Charms,” 2010.

¹⁸ “Santa Teresa,” 2010.

tourist. The tourist node is most often desirable to the resident because it often coincides with a place of beauty, affluence, or spirituality i.e. Sugar Loaf Mountain, Corcovado, Hancock Tower Observatory, etc. Coincidentally, the urban tourist does not want to fortify himself from the city, as the initial action of displacement, was an attempt to experience the urban city.

Thus, providing efficient urban spaces that also act as tourist nodes is of the utmost importance to all populations involved. An analysis of the Rio beaches (most specifically, Copacabana and Ipanema) provides a great example of a “democratic” urban space which functions efficiently for both tourist and resident. This urban space works efficiently because while the reason the tourist and the resident visit these destinations; their activity is parallel, coincidental with one another. A tourist initially visits Copacabana beach because it is the ultimate symbol of mediated Rio culture, visions of Copacabana Palace, skimpy bikinis, and impromptu soccer played on beaches roll through the fantasy of the tourist’s mind. The seeking of these symbols lures the tourist to the beach. The resident, however, attends the beach because they *enjoy the beach* possible functions include visiting with friends, playing soccer, surfing, or getting a tan. Because the activity of the tourist and the resident are parallel, considerable efficiency and space distribution is achieved.¹⁹

A similar argument can be made for the multitude of deep dish pizza restaurants in Chicago, both a tourist attraction and a resident favorite. The activity is the same, eating pizza, but the initial reason for the visit differs. Tourists visit the

¹⁹ Note: Many assumptions are made about the “personality” of the tourist. In this argument, the tourist is only defined by the seeking of symbols fed to him via tour guides and marketing. Assuming the tourist is satiated by the symbols of the beach, his activity would act coincident to the resident’s activity.

restaurant in search of the symbol of “authentic Chicago,” while the resident visits to fulfill a human necessity, to eat.

Thus while the reasons for actual travel to each tourist node/urban place may differ, the edge condition can be traversed by an understanding of the urban tourist and resident. Through careful study of the tourism market, a comprehension of the modern urban tourist can be derived as semiotician, seeker of mediated symbols and signs that satiate the cultivated tourists appetite. This seeking of signs can isolate the tourist from the residents of the city they have come to experience.

With this in mind an urban planner or designer can create spaces which can host both resident and tourist successfully by providing and maintaining sufficient access, and creating parallel and coincident land use. The creation of successful urban places/tourist nodes is beneficial for all populations, as each depend on each other to satiate their fantasies, contribute to their economies, and mutual creators of their shared urban experiences. While tourism is an extremely complex socio-cultural and political issue, it also provides a unique opportunity for global relations- creating a “supranational culture.”²⁰ The visitor and the visited become participants of the ever-changing and undulating global culture, one day becoming “the exotic” and the next, inhabiting the “familiar.”

²⁰ Fainstein et al, 1999. 268.

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