
Book Review

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The Ethics of Sightseeing

by: Dean Maccannell

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The Ethics of Sightseeing, one of the last works of dean Maccannell, explores the connection of modernity, mobility and tourism. Prompted to reveal the construction of a more ethic tourist, this interesting book enumerates all changes has suffered the ethics today. Not systematically ordered to be read, Maccannell reminds how important is transcending the existent epistemological view. What is important is not discovering a new technique, or conducting an experiment, but giving a sense to human acts. If the laboratory experiment has their limits, he adds, beyond remains a fertile ground for imagination. Scholars should question also where the root of identity ends. The boundaries of selfhood and otherness are carefully examined under the question who are the sightseers?

We see others at the same time others see us. Watching is a hermeneutical interpretation, which connects people to a daily life. It is important not to loose the sight that interpretations are not chaotic, they are subject to a one-sided discourse. To what extent the message is correctly deciphered or not is the key-issue of any social scientist. Unlike other texts, in *The Ethics of Sightseeing*, the debate is posed to the direction of philosophy. The history witnessed how the sacred-life has set the pace to more secular forms. If totemism, as a system of beliefs, is enrooted in primitive mind, tourism plays an analogous role in modern societies. In the Maccannell's conception, West has advanced in the trace of technology imposing to the world a new secular view about relation. The sacred-space that characterised the gaze of aborigines, today, has been replaced by a new one more elaborated, secular and fictional sightseeing: *tourism*. What is important to discuss here, seems to be the connection of tourists with social symbolism that mediates between self and consumption. Money serves a mediator connecting all dispersed consumers. In late modernity, consumption and mobility pave the ways for the advance of alienation and depersonalisation.

Unlike aborigines, the ubiquitous tourists travel to remote destinations in quest of authenticity. The discovery of what is covert in their life is of paramount importance to understand the tourist experience. In this vein, psychoanalysis has much to say. The social unconsciousness is repressed by the rational order of rules. Tourists need to see in others what they are unable to find inside them. This belief was originally forged in 1976 when Maccannell wrote the *Tourist*, toward a sociological theory of leisure class. From

that day onwards, the argument of primitive vs. modern accompanied his prolific academic career. In the ethic of sightseeing, Maccannell admits that tourism has serious problem to recognise the otherness, their rights, needs and expectations. The illusory landscapes created by tourism do not allow a genuine contact between guests and hosts. The staged-authenticity fulfils the gap opened by late modernity and the lack of trust in institutions.

On the tourist, towards a new theory of leisure class, the American sociologist wanted to develop a new method of research which may be applied on the fields but the problem of ethics does not need from epistemology. Rather, on the Ethics ... Maccannell is interested in developing the ethic of sightseeing, not tourism. "Please note this is an ethics of sightseeing, not of tourism, a much broader topic that includes sightseeing. I anticipate it will be misread as implying more". This begs an interesting question which is not formulated explicitly, does it mean tourism is not ethical?

Structured in 13 chapters distributed in four parts, the main thesis of this book is that the modernity and hegemony of market has been expanded by the modification of spaces. These transformations created a process of fragmentation between norms, institutions and behaviour. The tourist experience makes impossible if the otherness is excluded. The lack of ethics is exhibited whenever the other is silenced, invisibilised, disappeared. Taking its cue from Baudrillard, Maccannell recapitulates saying that tourists are motivated to the consumption of pseudo experiences. Presented as unethical agents more interested in fulfilling their dreams than in bolstering a genuine dialogue with others, sightseers blur the boundaries of ethics. To be honest, this point in the debate is of importance to appreciate Maccannell's legacy. The late capitalism has upended the roots of ethics making good from evil and vice-versa. What today is good or evil not only is not clear, but mixed. See for example, the question of eco-risk. At a first glance, the green-mania, which may be understood as altruistic acts aimed at protecting the planet but beyond the superfluous interests for sustainability, remains the most cynic ego-centric desires. The Eco-risk policies not only will not bring any valid solution but also are based to promote business and profits. The paradigm of sustainability is unsustainable as it has been originally formulated by expertise.

As the previous backdrop given, Maccannell acknowledges that the spectacle of suffering is the tenets of capitalism. It is unfortunate that tourism exploits the suffering to draw the attention of consumers. This process only may be reverted if a real concept of ethics is introduced. The sensibility is the only way to put oneself in the place of others. This provides an exchange between actors that gives origin to solidarity. Nonetheless, the problem seems to be that the human sensibility has been transformed in a commodity. As a result of this, spaces are being substantially altered. Unless otherwise resolved, tourists are condemned to internalise in them and others the power of Empire. The modern tourists would play (if their morality is changed) the same role than explorers in 19th century legitimising the dominance between centre and its periphery.

Why has the legacy of S Freud and his visit to the House in London inspired this book? The archive represents the explicit function of discourse. Many of the souvenirs bought by Freud in their travels were there, at his house. Like dreams, souvenir express an illusory order that remains subordinated to reality. The representation of Freud's life depended upon the value given to his objects. However, less is said about the experiences of Freud. This point suggests that the representation seems to be a copy of the experience.

We often visit spaces that are symbolically reframed to be kept in forms of memories and dreams. Like the museum may be not equalled to the Freud's life, the souvenir does not represent the sense of travels. The unconsciousness drives and desires are repressed by sightseeing.

This project corresponds with a good opportunity in order for Maccannell to respond to Cohen, Bruner and Urry by means of diverse examples. Basically, he was criticised by presenting tourist as persons obsessed by the authenticity. Since not all tourists look the same, Maccannell acknowledges that the false back region exhibits really the link between the institutions, norms and self. His observations focus on the fact there is an ongoing dissociation between rules and practices. This hole is fulfilled by the heritage. Therefore, staged-authenticity represents not only the emptiness produced by late modernity but also the decline human bonds. This latter point is more than important to understand Maccannell's legacy to tourism fields in an all encompassed way. To change the current ethics of sightseeing will facilitate the nuance of negative values given by modernity. The boundaries of time and space have been blurred into a new present setting. The ethic now is not part of our life any-longer. After all, the authenticity disappears because the needs of consumption fabricates mediated object between desire and gratifications. From a sociological view, his stance may be equalled to French philosophers as J. Baudrillard (simulacra), Virilio (Technology) and Auge (non-places). We will not criticise Maccannell for that in this review.

Most certainly, the outcomes of the Ethic of sightseeing may be applied to the anthropological research conducted at any tourist destination. In detail, some problems arise when we situate tourism under the lens of history. It served as a social institution. Far away of what historians precluded, tourism did not emerge in the mid of 20th century, this represents an ancient element of leisure present in almost all old cultures. As a subtype of leisure, tourism worked as a mechanism to revitalise the material asymmetries generated by the society. Maccannell strongly believes that Anglo-tourism (this means modern tourism) has overridden other non-western forms of tourist practices. Navajo or Sioux today not only has lost their ancestral forms of leisure but also adopted Anglo-tourism as the only valid resource for poverty relief. In view of this, aborigines like many other natives have been commoditised in products ready to be consumed by western tourist-gaze. Maccannell has developed a biased vision of cultural evolution, needless to say, coined in 19th century. On their inceptions, Ethnology and anthropology warned that West would expand its hegemony to other peripheral nations. The non-western cultures, due to their weaknesses, would have condemned to extinction. These concerns for protecting aboriginal cultures not only facilitated the expansion of European Empires but also were enrooted in the paradigms of social sciences. Ideologically, this created a one-sided European discourse that subordinated peripheries to centre.

Quite aside from this, ethic of sightseeing speaks of a new practice for consumption, present at modern tourist destinations but not limited to all types of tourism. If we pay attention to Disneyland, the comments of Maccannell are evident but if other forms of tourism are scrutinised, his theory does not suffice. With the passing of years, the negative and pejorative view of tourism posed by Maccannell has been aligned to the argument of detractors of scientification of tourism. In the last decades, many anthropologists and sociologists trivialised tourism as a serious academic discipline. His

thesis about staged-authenticity of tourism is illustrative, striking, and provocative but rests on shaky grounds. Whatever the case may be, Maccannell the person is not important so the epistemological debate he wakes up. The history of tourism reveals there were many other forms of tourism in pastime. How and under what context they surfaced is a form of understanding us now.