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Introduction

Scholars have noted time and again the constitutive nexus between travel (in its manifold guises) and the formation of American culture(s). From the European invasion, to the colonial period, from the birth of the US and the nation building phase to the twentieth century and the contemporary age of globalization, travel has been a foundational experience and a defining feature for America. In a broader perspective, travel has become also "[c]entral to the idea of modernity" (Urry, *Consuming* 141) for "[t]he modern subject is a subject on the move" and it is in the modern and contemporary era that travel has become a key "trope," a "narrative paradigm" (Burden 7) underpinning a "new consciousness of mobility and borders, of difference and otherness, and of the limits of western ways of seeing and representation" (8) that typifies a whole transnational, even globalized, cultural atmosphere.

Starting from the 1960s, a new sub-field of research and investigation has emerged as particularly relevant for understanding travel in contemporary society: tourism. As is well known, the term 'tourist' appeared in the late eighteenth century and was originally used as a synonym for traveler. But, with the rise of middle-class travel practices in the following century, it soon came to acquire a negative, derogatory connotation, identifying a lesser figure compared to the nobler one of the "real" traveler, that of a mere pleasure and entertainment seeker (Buzard 1-17). As time went on, tourism thus came to occupy the opposite pole of travel: while the traveler was actively in search of the unexpected, the unknown, and the radically other, all experiences conducive to a deep self-transformation, the tourist, by contrast, was depicted as a consumer in search of entertainment, attracted by stereotyped images of the exotic and passively following the beaten track of pre-arranged, packaged tours, in which there was hardly any room for individual experiences at all. Whereas the traveler was intelligent,

cultured, smart, subtle, and moving mostly along an individual itinerary, the tourist on the other hand was superficial, ignorant, moving around in hordes, and interested in collecting souvenirs rather than knowing the places visited. Noticeably, the passage from travel to tourism is historical: in Europe, for a couple of centuries the Grand Tour had epitomized travel as an aristocratic, individual, and unique experience; the slow emergence of mass culture at the beginnings of the nineteenth century, by contrast, marked the rise of tourism as a typically middle-class phenomenon, bringing about the alleged demise of traditional forms of travel. Or, one might rather say, the transformations caused by the industrial, market, transportation, and information revolutions, especially in Europe and the US, reconfigured traveling along an ideal spectrum between the two poles represented by the figures of the traveler and the tourist.

It cannot come as a surprise, therefore, that no systematic theorization of tourism appeared until the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, the first scholarly studies on the phenomenon of tourism appeared only in the aftermath of the ascension of mass culture to the role of a leading form of cultural expression of Western societies. In 1958, Hans Magnus Enzensberger published an interesting article significantly titled "A Theory of Tourism," in which he observes that "there are few things in our civilization that have been so thoroughly mocked and so diligently criticized as tourism" (120). Enzensberger maintains that such criticism is "a reaction not only in sociological terms but also in psychological ones" (121). It responds to the "threat" posed by tourism to a "privileged" social condition: these critiques "demand that travel be exclusive" (121). Reading tourism in historical terms, the critic interprets it in a Marxist perspective as a form of personal rebellion to the very force that made tourism possible in the first place, industrialization and the rise to power of the bourgeoisie. A rebellion which, paradoxically enough, ends up in a standardization of travel, which duplicates the same social dynamics it apparently set out to evade.

The widespread initial academic hostility towards tourism is best exemplified by American historian Daniel Boorstin's well known essay "From Traveler to Tourist: The Lost Art of Travel," published in 1961 as a book chapter of his *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events*, the title of which is

a clear indication of the author's position. For "pseudo-event," the scholar meant an image, which substitutes reality and is experienced, in our contemporary, commodified media world as more "real" than reality itself. Something close to what Baudrillard would later define as "substituting the signs of the real for the real" (2), the postmodern logic of the simulacra. While Enzensberger read tourism as a reaction to modernity, Boorstin saw it as a typical postmodern product. According to him, tourism means the commodification of travel, and the substitution of distant destinations with a set of "attractions" offering "an elaborately contrived indirect experience, an artificial product to be consumed where the real thing is free as air" (99). Sightseeing, the quintessential touristic activity, is for him highly symbolic of the tourists' insulation from the surroundings they visit: "The modern American tourist now fills his experience with pseudo-events. He has come to expect both more strangeness and more familiarity than the world naturally offers. He has come to believe that he can have a lifetime of adventure in two weeks and all the thrills of risking his life without any real risk at all …. He has demanded that the whole world be made a stage for pseudo-events" (79-80). Boorstin's interpretation constitutes a first attempt to systematize an anti-tourist rhetoric dating at least to the end of the nineteenth century. Significantly, Enzensberger and Boorstin both adopt a culturalist approach, which testifies to the growing importance of tourism in the contemporary age.

It was only a decade later, in the 1970s, when tourism became a major social, economic, and cultural force, that the approach changed drastically. In 1976, Dean MacCannell, who is generally regarded as the founder of tourism studies, published the landmark *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, where he developed a new vision of tourism, proposing an innovative theoretical methodology and new key concepts for investigating this phenomenon. Building on the linguistic turn of the late 1960s, he combined a classic sociological approach with a pioneering recognition of the semiotic nature of tourist attractions, which allowed him to read tourism in a new light. This paradigmatic shift was also stimulated by the sharp increase of the role of tourism in conjunction with the beginnings of the contemporary phase of globalization. In MacCannell's view, the tourist is an icon of the modern man himself: "Our first apprehension of

modern civilization, it seems to me, emerges in the mind of the tourist" (MacCannell 1). And tourism is but a modern, lay version of the ancient pilgrimage, and the attractions undergo a process of sacralization which makes them the expression of the tourists' yearning for the sacred.

Unlike Boorstin, MacCannell reads in tourism a truly modern quest – a quest for authenticity – which has since become a pivotal precept of tourism studies. This quest constitutes for the critic a major tourist motivation: building on Eric Goffman's division of the social space into front and back regions – with the second generally associated with ideas of real life behind the scenes, of intimate truth, and authentic experience (MacCannell 92-96), MacCannell argues that tourists are driven by a desire to move from the first to the second, to gain a closer, deeper, more authentic view of the reality visited. This tendency explains at once both the thrill and disappointment experienced by tourists, since the back stage seems to recede indefinitely the closer the tourist appears to get to it. Sightseeing, the tourist's activity *par excellence*, is for him another modern form of ritual, aiming at "overcome[ing] the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience" (13). An eminently social act, sightseeing is a search for meaning and a way of conferring value to the tourists' experience.

Thus, through the study of tourism, MacCannell aims at drawing nothing less than a "structural analysis of modern society" (3) as well as at doing "an ethnography of modernity" (4). While no one nowadays would assume the existence of 'the' modern man as such, and while modernity itself no longer appears as a monolithic, homogenizing reality, but rather as formed by multiple, crisscrossing historical processes happening in diverse forms for different subjectivities in different places at different times, the idea that tourism constitutes a privileged lens through which to view and interpret the contemporary world has actually gained momentum since the publication of MacCannell's book, and is now a widely accepted one, provided, though, that one acknowledges the inherent multiplicity of experiences and forms it can take (Cohen, "Phenomenology").

In the wake of MacCannell's groundbreaking work and boosted by a skyrocketing tourism industry – which found in the economic globalization an ideal environment to flourish at an unprecedented rate and scale –

tourism studies have become, in recent times, both a powerful hermeneutic paradigm for understanding social and cultural change, and a sprawling field of inquiry. And yet, despite increased interest, many aspects of the interaction between tourism and culture require further investigation. Given the vastness of the area of study, we will limit our remarks to some of the most important recent advances in the field which are more closely related to American Studies and American Literature.

The notion of authenticity, and its problematic status in our postmodern world, has been frequently discussed (Cohen, "Authenticity in Tourism"; Wang). Many scholars have criticized MacCannell's framing of tourism as a quest for authenticity, claiming that authenticity can assume different meanings (Cohen, "Authenticity and Commoditization") and that especially postmodern tourists seem to thrive in the inauthentic and find their pleasure in simulated, contrived Disneyland-like experiences (Ritzer and Liska; Cohen, "Contemporary Tourism"). MacCannell replied to these critiques in his 2011 *The Ethics of Sightseeing*, where he asserts that his earlier concept of "staged authenticity" has transcended tourism studies and achieved a much wider application in today's social reality. It is on this basis that he maintains that tourism forms "the beta test version of emerging world culture" (13).

A parallel line of research has focused on the typical practice of sightseeing which, from its emergence during the seventeenth century (Adler), has been recognized as a cornerstone of tourism experiences. But while in the past it was generally associated with a largely ethnocentric aesthetic protocol, in recent years scholarship has emphasized its socially construed nature and the plurality of its forms. In 1990, John Urry published *The Tourist Gaze*, in which he, taking cue from Michel Foucault's theory, defines the kind of gaze standing at the core of the activity of sightseeing as a "socially organized and systematized" (1) way of seeing, which is "construed through signs" and aimed at "the collection of signs" (3). According to Urry, what distinguishes the tourist is not just this peculiarly structured form of seeing, as the fact that the gaze is "directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience" (3). As such, the tourist gaze produces an ideologically charged social and cultural differentiation of places, and of the ways of seeing and representing them.

More generally, recent research in the field has read the ubiquity of tourism as metaphoric of our contemporary globalized and fluid social reality. At the same time, though, scholars have also insisted on the variety of forms, destinations and expressions that, especially nowadays, characterize tourist experiences. In addition to the standard package tour, or the traditional cruise holiday, tourism has multiplied its offer in innumerable ways, which have nuanced our understanding of the phenomenon of tourism. Among the various forms one might enumerate without claiming exhaustivity, we find cultural tourism, heritage tourism, literary tourism, health tourism, ecotourism, religious tourism, academic tourism, business tourism, dark tourism, alternative tourism, culinary tourism, e-tourism, sex tourism, sustainable tourism, disaster tourism, and wilderness tourism (see Smith et al.). Each form entails different experiences and different ways of being a tourist, and it is not always easy to find a common meeting ground. As the latter examples show, moreover, tourism has clear, strong moral implications, which cannot be severed from larger ethical concerns. It is this aspect of tourism that MacCannell specifically addresses in his *The Ethics of Sightseeing*. Far from being associated only with pleasure and a voyeuristic charm, sightseeing has, for him, unavoidable ethical repercussions, of which the contemporary tourist must be fully aware.

Traditionally associated first with exploration and discovery narratives, and then with the Grand Tour, the idea of the acquisition of *culture* has been a major component of travel and has been recognized as relevant to tourist practices by ethnography, anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology. More specifically, tourism has been associated since its inception with the appropriation of immaterial but extremely important forms of capital (cultural, symbolic, social) theorized by Pierre Bourdieu. In this sense, tourist practices have been analyzed not as reflecting but as founding of our very concept of culture. Thus, educational institutions (museums, heritage sites, even academic campuses) and cultural artifacts (art works, books, etc.) can all be regarded as having an ostensible touristic value, which can hardly be dissociated from their own, 'autonomous' cultural status and value.

Literary tourism in particular provides a good exemplification of the aforementioned association between cultural prestige/distinction and

tourism. Classic studies like Buzard's *The Beaten Track* (1993), Stowe's *Going Abroad* (1994), and Larzer Ziff's *Return Passages* (2000) have described the central function of tourism in the formation of modern transatlantic literary culture as an elitist practice championed by a restricted number of travelers and writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These studies have also been pioneering in extending the research on culture and tourism beyond the narrow category of travel literature, encompassing fiction and minor non-fictional genres (such as tourist guidebooks) and contributing to expanding and problematizing the very notion of travel writing.

A very broad and heterogeneous category, travel writing has drawn growing scholarly attention from various academic disciplines – sociology, literature, anthropology, and cultural studies, history, geography, post-colonialism, economy, ethnography and semiotics – and it now appears to be a privileged site for the study of a wide range of cultural, literary, sociological and historical materials and aspects. Several elements, in the past, made travel writing difficult to categorize and recognize, both as a literary form and as a legitimate field of study. Its fluidity and instability as a genre, its loose boundaries, the bewildering array of disparate topics covered by its narratives; its frivolous, if not morally dubious, character; its middle-class, when not plainly popular, appeal were some of the factors that pushed it to the margins of academic research. However, with the theoretical reorientation induced by New Historicism and Cultural Studies in the 1980s and 1990s, these very factors played a key role in conferring new significance and prestige to travel writing. This genre is now seen as a challenging and fertile multidisciplinary field, capable of offering key insights into Modernity and its discourses, cultural change, and the complexities of human societies.

While travel as such has "emerged as a crucial epistemological category for the displacement of normative values and homogenizing, essentialist views" (Holland and Huggan IX), travel writing, broadly conceived as any cultural product of "the negotiation between self and other that is brought about by movement in space" (Thompson 9), in particular seems to have provided a specifically suitable conceptual terrain for the articulation and expression of such sensitive and pressing issues as otherness and identity,

the far and the near, tradition and innovation, the local and the global, imperialism and post-colonialism, the real and the imaginary, displacement and belonging, as well as for the strong ethical implications that all these issues bear (Clifford).

The four essays included in this selection all engage in the complex task of destabilizing any simplistic definition of tourism and representing its manifold entanglement with narrative discourses. In one way or another, they all demonstrate that the tourist paradigm has a remarkable interpretive potential when applied to literary texts, but also that tourist practices have the power to determine and (re-)shape narrative choices and genres, as well as to influence the very acts of producing and consuming literature.

Frédéric Dumas's essay focuses on Mark Twain, perhaps the great initiator of American travel writing, and on his late travel book *Following the Equator* (1897), a work which, according to the author, is more introspective and psychologically complex than Twain's previous travel books, as it displays an important redefinition of what a tourist experience is as well as of the very notion of American identity itself. Dumas reads Twain's description of the tourist experience in the book as representing a sort of psychoanalytic regression to childhood, and he further interprets Twain's own ambivalent attitude towards it, conveyed with all its ironic power, as a critique to the limits of the American mind abroad. Unlike other journeys recounted by Twain, this one concerns an extremely alien and largely unknown part of the world and does not allow Twain and his fellow tourists to experience their own activity as pleasurable; on the contrary, it forces them to confront the unfriendliness or the emptiness of the cosmos, providing a chaotic/dreamlike transformative space where to ponder the inadequacy of a symbolic and rhetorical reordering of the world motivated by imperialism and colonial expansion.

Anna De Biasio's essay embraces a very recent scholarly trend which investigates war tourism, and in particular the (seemingly paradoxical) relation between war experience and tourist experience, providing an original tourist re-reading of Hemingway's war fiction masterpiece *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Speculating on the analogies between the writer's poetics of the "Iceberg Theory" and Dean McCannell's notion of "staged authenticity," De Biasio shows how the novel both "evokes and denies a tourist dimension." According to the author, Hemingway here breaks

with a "time-honored" tradition in Anglo-American realist literature where accounts of European tourist sights had become a sort of mandatory cliché, and he instead uses spare and meticulously crafted descriptions to enhance Frederic Henry's fantasized dreams of love and peaceful fulfilment, in the Milan section and in the last chapter of the book. But far from conveying a sense of escapism, as De Biasio argues, the "tourist-like situations and activities" that the novel stages effectively convey "the sense of impermanence typical of life during wartime" as they are properly used to enhance the tragedy lurking behind a deceptively quiet surface.

Virginia Pignagnoli tackles contemporary American literature and examines Dave Eggers's recent novel *Heroes of the Frontier* (2016) from a narratological angle, reflecting on its particular re-combination of multiple genre conventions. Like De Biasio and Dumas, Pignagnoli pays attention to the presence and manipulation of tourist markers in the novel meant to destabilize commonly accepted notions about tourist practices and in particular to redefine the key notion of 'American frontier.' The essay is divided into three chapters where Pignagnoli progressively analyzes the interplay between the representation of space (informed by a 'tourist gaze' thwarted by the presence of "spatial frames" which blur the strict division between ordinary/extraordinary experiences) and the frustration of genre-expectation (deriving from Eggers's blending of realist and fantastic elements in a way that reminds of what critics have defined as postmagical realism). This kind of manipulation, Pignagnoli argues, serves to "enable social commentary" in the text, in particular about family and parenthood.

The present selection concludes with an essay by Klara Stephanie Szlezák that contributes to expanding and redefining the commonly accepted notion of literary tourism, according to which "readers may want to follow a path described in a book, or visit the place where a book was written or its author was born, lived, or died." Szlezák examines an interesting phenomenon concerning the contemporary experience of a canonical classic of American literature, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, addressing the so-called *Moby-Dick* reading marathons – a sort of collective readings organized at various locations along the American East and West coasts, which ultimately turn the novel into a performance and into a visitor attraction at the same time. This is a perfect case in which a "touring text" becomes one with the act of "touring a text." In this particular form of literary tourism,

Szlezák observes, Melville's book figures centrally "not in the sense of the book as a material artifact displayed as a touristic sight … but in the sense of the book as a text, as the product of a creative act and an active medium of signification." The various Moby-Dick marathons around the country described by Szlezák (San Francisco, San Diego, New York, Mystic Seaport CT, New Bedford MA) are participatory literary heritage events which, in contrast to individual reading, are "multi-sensory rather than merely visual," and highly interactive, in the sense that all the participants are called to perform and to consume other participants' performance. Most importantly, the author argues that this kind of itinerant collective act also impacts the transformation of both tourist practices (which are enriched and broadened thanks to the variety of geographical, institutional, cultural settings in which they take place) and reading practices (individual and collective readings fruitfully interact).

The four essays included in this section testify to the variety of themes, approaches, and critical perspectives through which the complex interplay between tourism, literature – and culture in general – can be discussed and interpreted. They also help us better understand the deep imbrication of tourist practices with a number of other discourses. They are, in this sense, an indication of how vast and potentially productive tourism studies are, as well as an invitation to continue research in this increasingly interdisciplinary field.

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