

**TRANSCIENCE AND PLACE:  
EXPLORING TOURISTS' EXPERIENCES OF  
PLACE**

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You spend half your life in transit  
But that's just the way God plans it

...

Oh, where am I now  
10 CC

Every story is a travel story  
— a spatial practice.  
Michel de Certeau

**Introduction**

The transient experience of place seems typical to considerable parts of international tourism, if it can be said that there is a particular place interest at all. The transient experience is especially important to those who go on sightseeing tours to places they have not previously visited. At the same time, there seems to be a tendency to condemn the fast traveller who makes only brief stops in each place. Especially among those tourists whose ambition is to interpret foreign cultures, an underlying assumption is perhaps that these brief encounters lack the depth which is a prerequisite to achieving a proper sense of place. This idea, however, presupposes that the sense of place is achieved only after the passage of time. The question is then: how long is long enough? This paper advocates the view that in most instances the transient experience of place is the only alternative for those desiring to achieve a first-time impression of larger geographic areas within the time limits imposed by today's holiday tours. With reference to Georg Simmel's theories of the stranger and the adventurer, the paper attempts to describe the charm of novelty and the bliss of the first

encounter with a fascinating place. The transient experience of place often provides the easiest access to a sought-after dreamlike and intensive experiencing of place.

The experience of place in tourism seems to some extent to be a parallel to an extremely empirical field research approach in the social sciences. As Ong states it, the cinematic culture contributed to an understanding of vision as an analogy for knowing (1977:122–123). A central aspect of tourism is to see for oneself, as a kind of visual knowledge or sensation. This type of travel experience, to see the real thing for oneself and to take photographs, may also be regarded as an important ritual in modern society (cf. MacCannell 1976; Neumann 1992). For instance, early ethnography was defined essentially as a visual and spatial activity; as observing and gathering (Fabian 1983:122). Likewise, in today's travel, photographs and souvenirs appear to exhibit some of the corresponding themes.

It is important to keep in mind that most of the first time visits to places by tourists on round trips or sightseeing excursions are brief encounters, lasting for hours rather than for days. This type of sightseeing tourism, such as for instance «Europe in ten days», has been extensively criticised. The film «If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium» (1969) is perhaps the best known example of this criticism of the transient experience of place. The same transience or ephemerality is found in other, more individual travel forms, such as for instance motor tourism and railway travel.

The focus of the paper is more concerned with transient place encounters and the charms of novel travel than about the places themselves. The paper will relate to the formal sociology of Georg Simmel, and Simmel's theories of the stranger and the adventurer. The paper further draws on insights from several disciplines but is at the same time predominantly sociological in its approach. As this is a large and rapidly developing theme of research, the paper covers only a portion of the applicable aspects related to transience and place experiences. The paper is partly based on empirical research, especially studies of motor tourism and holiday tours from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean. The focus of the paper is

on tourism in Western Europe, and most of the examples and discussions have inter-European travel as the frame of reference.

### **What is tourism?**

There is no generally accepted definition of tourism within sociology and the social sciences. According to Cohen (1979:21), two images have been prevalent in the writings on tourism: An early image saw the tourist primarily as a superficial nitwit. A later image recognises the tourist principally as a contemporary pilgrim. Since most of the border-crossing holiday-makers do not fit the idea of the pilgrim, it seems that they are often delegated to the nitwit category of this dichotomy. Tourist is often utilised as a derogatory term, in contrast to terms such as traveller and adventurer. According to Pearce, a traveller distinguishes herself or himself from the tourist by experiments with local food and by exploring new places privately (1982:32). The idea of the traveller is also employed by those people desiring to distinguish themselves from what is considered to be the «traditional» tourist role, the non-hero who participates in a tour group or who goes on a fully organised journey. In contrast to what characterises the traveller, both the traditional tourist role and various tourist institutions within organised travel seem to provide protection against the experience of foreign places, and to accept non-involvement in local cultures.

Theroux (1986:132) points out that confusion has arisen because we regard travel and vacation as interchangeable. In this context, it seems useful to differentiate between sightseers and vacationers. Most people who go abroad during their summer holiday are not explorers in foreign cultures. Many of the international travellers should rather be compared with those who go to their summer cottages in their native country, often living a relaxed family life for one or two weeks. According to Cohen (1974), vacationers merely seek change, whether or not this brings novelty, while sightseers seek novelty. Sightseeing tours are ordinarily perceived as non-recurrent, while vacation trips tend to recurrency (Cohen 1974:544–545).

In this case, the term tourist is employed in a broad sense, as a common denominator for several more or less connected symbolic actions away from home. Here, the term tourist also includes the so-called travellers. One has to keep in mind that the hierarchies in tourism are not fixed, but are applied by those who wish to designate themselves as different from those they want to avoid or condemn (cf. Taylor 1994:7). Bruckner & Finkielkraut suggest that the truth about the modern tourist is that it is non-existent, because the tourists are always «the others». To be loyal to the original idea of tourism, one must then spit at tourism itself (Bruckner & Finkielkraut 1979:37, 43). A distinctive travel style or genre has developed from this kind of criticism of group travel and of fellow tourists, namely «anti-tourism», i.e. tourists, travellers, or travel writers who dislike being regarded as «ordinary» or «typical» tourists, and who attempt to put a distance between themselves and the tourist role (cf. Aubert 1965). But a tourist who condemns fellow travellers is not necessarily an anti-tourist in the strict sense of the word. For instance, Culler points out that all tourists can find someone more touristy than themselves to sneer at (1981:130). In a sociological sense, anti-tourism can be understood as both an attitude and as certain travel practices. The attitude seems to be especially important when anti-tourists call upon places which are also visited by large numbers of fellow travellers, while the practices of anti-tourism imply an interest in, for instance, off-beat destinations and off-peak seasons. Anti-tourism also seems to express a nostalgic longing for the earlier, aristocratic and more exclusive modes of travel, of times «when the going was good», as Waugh (1981[1946]) formulates it. But anti-tourists generally do not have the time and the assets necessary to set off on such long-term tours. Actually, most anti-tourists today are quite young people who generally experience a gap between their travel ambitions and their financial and time resources. Such anti-tourists often want to go off the beaten track to make their travel money last longer (Jacobsen 1996b). One of the origins of anti-tourism is perhaps the idea of an expected shallowness in experience of place within organised group travel. The anti-tourists and travellers often

declare that they search for depth and authenticity on their tours, or, at least, they are in favour of such an approach.

The kind of tourism that is most often described as *the true essence* of tourism is the quest for authenticity (cf. MacCannell 1976), wherein some people proceed to the outskirts of modernity, where there is still something they imagine to be authentic or unspoilt. Important in this case of place transience is tourism defined as the procurement of a sensation of difference (Segalen 1978; quoted from Urbain 1989:107). One of the oldest and most widespread reasons for travelling is a desire to experience the unusual, including unusual places. Tourism as a sense of place seems to a large extent to be influenced by the kind of tour that developed in the nineteenth century, often called «The Romantic Grand Tour». This mode of travel represents a taste for romantic, scenic tourism, with a more private and passionate sensation of the beautiful and the sublime than was the case with the earlier, «classical» Grand Tour (cf. Towner 1985; Urry 1990).

As part of the development of a theory of tourism, Urry distinguishes between the *romantic gaze* and the *collective gaze*. The collective gaze takes place in the presence of large numbers of people. The typical object of the romantic gaze is «undisturbed natural beauty» (Urry 1990:45). The core of the experience of place in transient tourism seems to be *the passing gaze* (Jacobsen 1997b). This concept is influenced by Neumann's notion «the travelling eye» (1992), and is further inspired by a study of tourists' use of scenic roads (cf. Jacobsen 1996a). The term «travelling eye» is also employed by Selänniemi, in a more restrictive meaning, and in contrast to the «fastening gaze» (1997). The passing gaze should not be confused with what Shepard calls «the itinerant eye» (1967).

This paper will essentially concentrate on two aspects of transient tourism: the tourist as an adventurer and the tourist as a stranger. Tourism as a ritual process of sightseeing will also be mentioned.

### **What is experience of place?**

Place has several meanings. Place is in some ways synonymous with space. Place can also be understood as a region or a locality, a city,

town or village, or a particular spot (cf. Collins Concise Dictionary 1978:571). A sense of place is often associated with belonging. It is suggested that alienation and homelessness «may have partial roots in the growing rupture between people and place» (Walmsley 1988:63). It is often mentioned that people's quality of life is reduced when the «binding» to place is broken. Belonging to a place is often contrasted to mobility, indicating that mobility is in opposition to belonging to a particular place. Relph indicates that the experience of place is different from that of landscape or space. According to Relph, experience of landscape and of space is part of any immediate encounter with the world, while places are constructed in our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations (1985:26):

Place experiences are necessarily time-deepened and memory-qualified. In geographical experiences, a place is an origin; it is where one knows others and is known to others ...

This approach appears to be nostalgic, and it further seems to preclude the possibility for people in large cities to have a sense of place, since being known to others depends not only on where you are, but also on when you move. Relph (1985) further excludes most transient tourists from having a place experience, and implicitly reserves this possibility for the returning vacationer, the habitué.

Both place experience and the spirit of place are often described in mystical ways. Some scholars would say that there are no distinctive places, only distinctive experiences. Others, such as Lynch, suggest that to some extent there are inherent qualities in places. Places with a high imageability seem to be regarded as advantageous in the tourists' quests for place sensations (Lynch 1960). Place determinism seems to be quite common (cf. Durrell 1971). It is therefore important to have in mind that people can be happy in surroundings that others might consider ugly, noisy, smelling, etc. This seems to be true both of tourists and of permanent residents. According to de Certeau, «haunted places are the only ones people can live in» (1984:108). For tourists, haunted

places may perhaps be less interesting, but it is still possible that such places may be considered charming.

As mentioned earlier, it is often presumed that gaining a sense of place is possible only through a longer visit, exceeding the time limits of most people's holiday journeys of one to four weeks. To mention one example, Lawrence Durrell considered himself «not really a 'travel writer' so much as a 'residence-writer'» (1971:156). As he states, his books are «always about living in places, not just rushing through them». Several other travel writers, for instance Evelyn Waugh, could also be described as residence writers, especially when considering the average length of today's tours.

According to the insights of Lash & Urry, one might say that pre-modern space was filled with markers of place, and was recognisable only according to social practices: «It was space not dominated by the temporal element; that is, space not to move through, but to live in» (1994:55). In contrast, modern space is understood as objective, as subjectively significant symbols are extracted. The most important type of place in tourism is perhaps «landscape», and to some extent, «cityscape». The ideal tourism landscape, in the meaning of sightseeing, is the spectacular landscape.

In this paper, the sense of place is understood as a concept more comprehensive than Relph's interpretation, and it also includes brief encounters with landscapes and townscapes. The theoretical problems with the employment of concepts such as landscape and place are recognised but not dealt with in detail. In a broad sense, modern tourism as place experience can also be understood in relation to tourism's organisation around attractions, often analysed as «sacred places» (Sears 1989; Jacobsen 1997a), including sightseeing as a modern ritual. In this sense, tourism is understood as one's own sensation or interpretation of mostly well-known places or attractions. Several enduring tourism attractions can be described as travel classics. A classic is something under study, a message from the past chosen for its semiotic density, and also for its suitability on ideological grounds (cf. Hodge & Kress 1988:192). As there is no final interpretation of the knowledge which has been passed down (cf. Gadamer 1975),

classics must be re-interpreted by new generations. Well-known examples are, for instance, Niagara Falls, Grand Canyon, and, to some extent, North Cape, all of which have been important and enduring tourism attractions, although interpreted again and again in new and different ways. Jakle emphasises that sightseers thrive on place images rich in detail, and that when possible they seek to capture the peculiar flavour of a place and its nuances (1987:75–76).

### **The senses of place**

It is assumed that the sense of place in tourism is mostly obtained through vision. Vision is a dominant mode of consciousness in the modern world. The principal reason why the sense of place in travel writing is predominantly concentrated on the view of landscapes and architecture, is perhaps found in the influence of romanticism. The romantic imagination entails an approach to the world that insists on aesthetic pleasure and control, from the detached position of the «educated eye» (Taylor 1994:9–10). The importance of this vision in international tourism is perhaps strengthened by the fact that most tourists do not speak the languages of the foreign countries they visit. Tourists are often perceived as superficial and passive consumers of packaged experiences (cf. Neumann 1992:23), partly because most of them have less time at their disposal than ethnographers, and partly because they perform a ritual that critics regard as repetitive and unoriginal. The favouring of the eye to the other senses has been criticised, especially in French social thought but also in travel writing (cf. Boorstin 1992[1961]). In virtue of the criticism of the visual experience, sightseeing has been denigrated to a superficial experience. Urry puts it this way:

Sight is not seen as the noblest of senses, but as the most superficial, as getting in the way of real experiences that involve other senses (1992:177).

There is thus an ambivalence about the visual experiences in tourism, both in tourism research and in practical travel life. Sightseers are repeatedly described as passive «sight consumers», even though this is a quite demanding activity, as, for instance, the



notion «educated eye» suggests. The visual tourist sensation of place also seems to be influenced both by what is called «the cinematic society» (cf. Denzin 1995), or by «the society of the automobile», both suggesting an experience of place through a continual flux. Intrinsic features of tourism as a visual experience of landscapes and townscape often include glimpses of the objects passed, the building of a collection of images and changes in our minds (cf. Rodaway 1994:125). Motor tourists especially seem to travel through landscapes as if they were watching a film. This attitude seems partly to be related to an enjoyment of the actual progress of the tour (Jacobsen 1996a). Clark also underlines the ephemerality of visual pleasure:

I fancy that one cannot enjoy a pure esthetic sensation (so-called) for longer than one can enjoy the smell of an orange, which in my case is less than two minutes (1960:16–17).

Despite the emphasis placed on the tourist gaze, experiences of otherness and the different are not always merely visual or cognitive but are sometimes equally sensual or emotional. A tour is partly about new tastes, smells, sights, sounds and other feelings. Olfactory experiences in tourism are largely neglected as the tourists' attention is drawn to the experiences generated by the eyes and the ears (cf. Rodaway 1994:61). For instance, Game suggests that the only point of travel when anything visible can be seen on television is to smell and eat the food of another culture (1991:180). Still, olfactory experiences of place often seem to be undesired by tourists and are often negatively described, as for example smells and unwanted close contact with strangers. To mention one example, the smell of manure can sometimes be experienced at some famous tourist hotels in Norway's fjord regions, as the hotels are situated opposite farm fields. This is how an olfactory tourism experience of place is described in Forster's novel «A Room with a View»:

... Then Miss Lavish darted under the archway of the white bullocks, and she stopped, and she cried:

'A smell. A true Florentine smell! Every city, let me teach you, has its own smell.'

'Is it a very nice smell?' said Lucy, who had inherited from her mother a distaste to dirt.

One doesn't come to Italy for niceness,' was the retort; 'one comes for life. Buon giorno! Buon giorno!' bowing right and left. ... (Forster 1955[1908]:37)

Taste is perhaps considered more important than smell as a desirable and sought-after experience of place. Food is to a certain extent regarded as a central ingredient in place sensation. Some people believe that the only way to discover a foreign place is to taste the local food, while others avoid this kind of encounter. Considerations regarding international style seem less common than the catering to specific lifestyles. The holiday hotel or apartment centres often cater to certain lifestyles (cf. Graburn 1977:31) rather than to a specific national or regional cuisine.

Because people cannot stop sounds, they are especially vulnerable to sounds in the experience of place (cf. Wyburn et al. 1964, quoted from Rodaway 1994:95). In encounters with landscapes by car or coach, traffic noises can negatively affect the experiences. There is a general problem of noise in tourism, and noise is one of the three to five main sources of complaints in the travel industry. But what is noise to some travellers, may be a distinct and desired feature of a place to others. For instance, some cities are expected to have immense traffic and therefore a high volume of sound. Music can be important in the auditory experience of place, both positively and negatively. Tuan suggests that «music is for most people a stronger emotional experience than looking at pictures or scenery» (1974:8). Music is often employed as a place characteristic in films. For instance, when the story moves to France, one immediately hears the accordion. Similarly, the bagpipe is an auditory symbol of Scotland. For a considerable number of foreign tourists in Norway, the «sound of silence» is important, as these tourists enjoy peace and tranquillity. The anti-tourist and traveller's dislike of certain tourist places is often related to the ambience created by music or musak (cf. the expression «Costa del Disco» as a description of Spanish coastal

resort areas). Sometimes, tourists say that their favourite cafe in a place is the one with no music. But foreign musical expressions are also desired. In a survey of Norwegian tourists in some Mediterranean destinations, one tenth of the respondents answered that if they wanted to experience something thoroughly and typically Greek/Spanish/Turkish, they would listen to local music, and possibly also watch a local dance.

It is perhaps a contribution to the quality of the visual experience of place that many tourists in foreign countries do not understand the local language, making it easier to exclude trivial and temporal aspects in their sense of place. This is important in nostalgic tourism, where the sense of place emphasises the past, often ignoring today's local inhabitants. Ambitions of «time travel» and links to the past are often only possible for brief moments, when there are no disturbances from the temporal.

«High touch» or polysensualism in tourism is a manifestation of the increased use of senses other than vision in place experiences. This seems to be especially significant when encountering nature or landscapes (cf. Jacobsen 1994:8–9). Naisbitt (1984:52) suggests that the more technology is introduced to society, the more people will want to be out in nature, going camping or going to the seashore. There is an increased tourist interest in communication with a vanishing nature or in enjoying proximity to nature. Tourism is spreading into forests, river basins, mountains and islands, and growing numbers of tourists wish to penetrate areas with few or no amenities (Brackenbury 1993:21). High touch is also found in city tourism. The big city is often considered the most appropriate place to experience the manifold aspects of the world. For instance, it is often mentioned that it is possible to «travel around the world» in metropolises such as London or New York.

There are different types of attractions in relation to the experience of place. Some places are independent attractions, so significant to certain tourists that they are enough in themselves (Jacobsen 1997a). Other tourism attractions are important largely as clusters, which together amount to encountering, for instance, a region, a nation or a continent. To the adventurous tourist, especially interesting places are those unknown before departure

and «discovered» *en route* or after arrival (cf. Leiper 1990:374–375). Horne suggests that there are several and different agendas for tourist trips (1984), also for trips to the same attractions and destinations. Many people think they experience too much of a sense of foreign places, and they feel that travel abroad or far away calls for particular services from the tourist industry.

According to MacCannell (1976:13) sightseeing is a ritual performed in order to experience the differentiation of society:

Sightseeing is a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience.

The important sense of place is sometimes merely to have been at a particular area or site: The brief encounter of a place may then be understood as an empirically-oriented ritual, vision as knowing. To visit important tourism attractions could partly be understood as an expression of moral values, to see the real thing for one's self and to take photographs. The length of the stay is normally not important when the point is just to have been at a site. Bruner points out that, in some cases, to have «seen it» requires only the presence of the tourist. To «see» is then a ritual analogous to collecting a souvenir to be placed in the centrepiece of a buffet table (Bruner 1995:233). This could also be called «checklist tourism».

Learning is often perceived as a central motive for place experiences. Extensive information acquisition and the employment of expert knowledge in sightseeing is sometimes important. Often, the well-prepared tourist will learn about and experience a place by utilising sources other than the senses, for instance by reading or by listening to a guide. Certain tourists want to expand their mental horizon with the help of authoritative and detailed sources like travel guide books especially suitable for their interests. At the same time, deficient knowledge might bring blessedness into travel: Lucy, in «A Room With A View», was at first unhappy when she visited Santa Croce with no Baedeker. But:

Then the pernicious charm of Italy worked on her, and, instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy (Forster 1955[1908]:41).

Lucy did not know «which, of all the sepulchral slabs that ... was really beautiful ...» and she realised that they had mistaken Machiavelli for some saint (Forster 1955[1908]:40–41). But she had enjoyed herself and had a nice time.

### **The quality of transience**

As suggested earlier, the quality of the transient experience of place can be understood in relation to being a stranger and a kind of adventurer. Freedom from the repetitiveness and the obligations of everyday life is part of being a stranger, in unfamiliar surroundings. The procurement of «culture shock» is important to some tourists, who look forward to arriving in new and unfamiliar cultural surroundings and who have a desire for excitement and adventure. Some tourists, at least, are more or less open to new and exotic sensations or to making new acquaintances. The implications of familiarity and routines to the experience of place is illustrated in this way by Viktor Shklovskij (quoted from Chomsky 1972:24):

People living at the seashore grow so accustomed to the murmur of the waves that they never hear it.

An inherent factor in this perspective is the implication that freedom from routines would temporarily refresh the senses of the tourist. Simmel's contribution to the comprehension of transience is found in several texts. With reference to Simmel (1971[1908]), the tourist may be analysed as a stranger. The typical stranger in tourism is the transient visitor; the one who comes today and goes tomorrow. The stranger's view of place may be characterised by the union of closeness and remoteness, of involvement and indifference (cf. Simmel 1968[1908]:685–691). According to Simmel, the stranger is further characterised by objectivity, because he or she is not bound by roots to the place visited. Simmel underlines that

... the stranger ... is the freer man, practically and theoretically; he examines conditions with less prejudice; he assesses them against standards that are more general and more objective; and his actions are not confined by custom, piety, or precedent (1971[1908]:146).

Similarly, tourists are both close to and far from the new places they reach. This will be dealt with later. Further, it seems possible to understand place experiences in tourism in relation to adventure, which is understood in several ways. Two basic ways of understanding adventure in relation to travel experiences will be employed here. The first type of adventure to be mentioned is Simmel's understanding of this phenomenon. According to Simmel, a typical feature of an adventure is that it has no fixed duration. At the same time, Simmel also points out that an adventure has a much more sharply delineated beginning and end than do other forms of experiences. «The most general form of adventure is its dropping out of the continuity of life» (1971[1911]:187):

Because of its place in our psychic life, a remembered adventure tends to take on the quality of a dream. ... What we designate as «dreamlike» is nothing but a memory which is bound to the unified, consistent life-process by fewer threads than are ordinary experiences (Simmel 1971[1911]:188).

A momentary possibility to slip through the realities or the continuity of everyday life does not necessarily implicate travel. But to many people it seems easier to break with set routines and to readjust themselves to the adventurous mode of experience by leaving home. Merleau-Ponty sees the phenomenologist as a «perpetual beginner», who takes nothing for granted and who wishes to experience things as if for the first time (1962:xiii–xiv). Similarly, the transient tourist with the passing gaze may be understood as a kind of phenomenologist. The transient or ephemeral tourist sensation of place could perhaps be described as «love at first sight», as this expression is often utilised to describe the blissful experience of the first meeting with a place to which one is strongly attracted. Another way of understanding this charm of

novelty could be to stress the temporary aspect by using the metaphor «love at last sight» (based on the poem «To a passer-by», by Charles Baudelaire) to describe the feeling of an encounter with an extremely attractive place which one leaves after a brief moment, falling in love with the place as it vanishes from sight (cf. Pollock 1988:79).

The second type of tourist adventure is in various ways influenced by writing, especially fiction. This is how Bruckner & Finkielkraut (1979:110) explain it:

In the novel there is an aspiration to grasp or describe life; this is called realism. In life there is an aspiration to literature, a desire to reach the intensity of fiction, to resemble a novel; this is called the adventure.

The adventurer is the extreme example of the ahistorical individual, of the person who lives in the present (Simmel 1971[1911]:190). However, most tourists are not adventurers according to Simmel's definition of the term. The tourist could perhaps be conceived as a moderate adventurer, negatively described as «the adventurer who shows the white feather», or an adventurer who is in continuous danger of being embroiled in other roles. The role of the adventurous tourist could be understood as an example of a situational role. If the past or the future interfere with the adventure, the claim of the role is not redeemed. Assuming the role of the heroic adventurer presupposes in extreme cases the exclusion of other roles, in disparity to the tourist role, which demands only the relief of other (everyday) roles (cf. Jacobsen 1984:34). As Schmidt puts it, the tourist is not in transition from one role to another, «the tourist is in transition only spatially» (1979:461). The moderate adventure in tourism often includes or assumes an element of uncertainty (cf. Carpenter & Priest 1989:74). Urbain puts it this way:

The tourist is also a traveler who is willing to die, but only just a little, in order to be born again. ... this is the symbolic matter of his journey, the meaning of his adventure ... (1989:117)

Parts of the adventure of tourism have been compared with the Lotus Eaters in *The Odyssey*. On the island of the Lotus Eaters, Ulysses encountered people who were addicted to an extraordinary diet and lived in an enduring state of blissful drowsiness (cf. Turner & Ash 1975:151). «Only a little lotus for me, please», is perhaps what today's tourists, as reluctant adventurers, would say if they were invited to taste the diet of the lotus eaters.

Unlike many other temporary roles, tourists do not normally enter new situations alone (Schmidt 1979:455), as most people travel with spouse, family, friends or in a larger group. Differences of interest in place sensations also seem to vary according to one's travel companions. The travel connoisseur Theroux (1986:131) states that if travel «is to have any value at all – you go alone». In opposition to the view of Theroux, Viard suggests that the vacation experience is an identity adventure, and that it does not matter whether the adventure is conceived on an individual-biographical level or on a collective-ethnological level (1984). According to Urbain (1989:116), «what the individual and the collective share is the presence of complementary narrative programs, the escapade and the quest».

A relative freedom from the past and the future could at least denote an increased probability to intensive experiences, including place encounters. Tourism as a moderate or potential adventure seems to partly fit into Goffman's concept of non-focused interaction (1963:33–79), where the tourist interest is an unadulterated concentration on the gaze and *the possibility* of becoming involved, rather than having to be verbally or by senses (other than vision) involved with the strangers. Tourism, then, is regarded as a time for the feasible adventure. The tourist adventure is often compared to a mental image or a dream, for instance in travel marketing. Reverie-like impressions of place are often employed in tourism advertising. For instance, Northern Norway is described as a land of enchantment, fantasy and adventure. According to Simmel (1971[1911]:188),

... The more «adventurous» an adventure ... the more «dreamlike» it becomes in our memory. It often moves so far



away from the centre of the ego and the course of life ... that we may think of it as something experienced by another person.

It would seem that many of those tourists who are on the move are predominantly interested in the charms of novelty and «the bliss of the first meetings». Some of these first encounters are with places that are well-known in advance. The joy of the first meeting is perhaps more notable when one arrives at an awe-inspiring place, or when a place really conforms to the expectations of the visitor. To go even further in «defence» of the charm of novelty and the blissful adventure of the brief encounter, one may add that in some instances, the further quest for an «authentic core» of place would lead only to disappointment. This seems to be especially true of places perceived as extremely spectacular, such as for instance Geiranger in south-western Norway. Even in critical travel-guide books, this place is described as stunning and «absurdly picturesque» (Brown & Sinclair 1993:272–273). A closer investigation of the «depth» of such places would sometimes reveal that it is impossible to have finally «arrived»: «there is no there there».

### **The limitations of transience**

Vision is perhaps the most important sense in a transient tourist experience of place. According to Tuan, the world perceived through the eyes is more abstract than that rendered by other senses. The visual field is also far larger than the fields of the other senses. Humans further have a tendency to think about seen objects as «distant» (Tuan 1974:10). The tourist interest in viewpoints and bird's eye views might indicate a distanced sense of place. Tuan further suggests that vision creates a distance between the self and the object gazed upon:

Seeing, like thought, is evaluative, judgmental, and conducive. ... The fleeting intimacies of direct experience and the true quality of a place often escape notice because the head is packed with shopworn ideas. The data of the senses are pushed

under in favor of what one is taught to see and admire (Tuan 1977:146).

To mention one example, many tourists try to negate or ignore the street noise and the danger of being run over by speeding cars as they admire classical buildings in Rome. Some of these tourists also aspire to be «time travellers», as their main interest is in the historical, classical Rome, and not the temporal city life. When a place is experienced by a transient gaze only, something seems to be lacking or left out. For instance, one does not feel a landscape while in an air-conditioned vehicle. Theroux suggests that too much luxury reduces the sensation of place (1986). «High touch» or polysensualism in tourism seems to provide an answer to this problem, as it implicates increased use of senses other than vision.

Several authors argue that most tourists understand little of what they see in the unfamiliar societies they visit (cf. Bugnicourt 1977; Pearce 1982). This seems to be more relevant when applied to the tourist who is an observer in a unfamiliar culture than when applied to one looking at landscapes. It is often labelled «cultural blindness» when one does not understand or is ignorant about foreign customs. But the comprehension of different cultures is not central to the expectations of most tourists, if it is considered at all. Furthermore, tourists are generally not prepared for and do not have the time to interpret the unknown. Well-prepared tourists who actively seek new insights about strange places seem to comprise a minority of today's international travellers. Among travellers and anti-tourists with ambitions to depict or participate in foreign cultures, there seems to be a tendency to condemn the fast traveller, the one that makes only a brief stop in each place. The underlying assumption is that these brief encounters do not have the depth requisite to procuring a proper sense of place. The most important limitation of the transient travel experience is not so much related to the ephemeral sensations, as there are aspects that cannot be understood or experienced in the course of a brief visit alone.

## Conclusion

This paper contributes to the understanding of transient sensations of place by focusing on the adventurous mode of tourism. It has been shown here that the transient tourist is not primarily passive and superficial. For instance, vision in tourism may be understood as both the «aristocrat of the senses» and as superficial. Many tourists travel through landscapes as if they were watching a film. The film as a metaphor seems especially suitable to describing motor tourism. But the journey is eventually a film which to some extent includes olfactory experiences, taste – and the possibility of an encounter with the events on the screen.

The transient tourist with the passing gaze may be understood as a moderate adventurer and a kind of phenomenologist, one wishing to experience the scenes as if for the first time. The ephemeral tourist sensation of place – the charm of novelty and the great joy of the first encounter with a place one has looked forward to seeing or is amazed to «discover» – could to a certain extent be compared to «love at first sight». The tourists' breaks with set routines and the freedom from past and future provides a possible freedom to find intense experiences. Seen from the point of view of the tourists, the paramount problem with the adventurous and transient experiences of place is eventually how they are or are not brought back into the everyday and the continuity of life. As a stranger, staying for a brief period in new surroundings, one has again the possibility to hear the murmur of the waves. The reverie-like experience of place is often a result of the brief encounter of the stranger or the adventurer, combining remoteness and nearness. The freedom peculiar to that felt in a place where one is not known might be an important aspect of the transient encountering of place.

Sightseeing at a swift pace provides both sought-after and high-grade sensations, and could also be called a «place kick». But such sightseeing has its obvious limitations, compared for instance to ethnographical field work. Getting acquainted with a place through a longer period of time not only increases the possibility of going native but often also leads to the loss of the fresh perspectives and the adventure mode that the newcomer might experience. Not

going native is as important in the field work of anthropology and sociology as it is to the adventurous tourist. A long stay in one place might result in the replacement of one's own view of this place with that of the natives, and thus in a loss of the stranger's objectivity and reduced prejudice. By way of conclusion, the paper suggests that the restrictions on time inherent in today's holiday tours usually result in a transient experience of place as the only alternative for those desiring to gain a first-time impression of larger geographic areas.

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