



Dialogue concerning tourism and religion

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ABSTRACT

This edited email dialogue between a senior American social scientist, Dean MacCannell, and an early career French anthropologist, Thomas Apchain, began soon after they observed that two of the earliest contributions to tourism studies, MacCannell's and Nelson Graburn's, both claimed tourist phenomena to be underpinned by classical theories of religion. The lack of follow-up on either MacCannell's or Graburn's claim of an analytically heuristic relationship between tourism and religion is traced back to a preexisting schism in the sociology and anthropology of religion between Arnold Van Gennep and Emile Durkheim. MacCannell and Apchain find that this division persists as a fracture in the foundation of the social theory both of tourism research and of the human sciences more generally.

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Introduction

TA: Tourism studies are not noteworthy for having taken up and developed concepts that are already established in the human sciences. There is at least one intriguing exception. You bluntly declared your book, *The Tourist* (MacCannell, 1976), to be in a line of inquiry that begins with Durkheim's (1912-15) *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, extends through Mauss (1925) on ritual, and eventually through Lévi-Strauss's masterwork multi-volume study of Native American myths beginning with his *Mythologies 1: Le Cru et le Cuit* (1964). You wrote, "tourist attractions are precisely analogous to the religious symbolism of primitive peoples" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 2). Nelson Graburn (1977), writing at almost the same time, began his influential *The Sacred Journey* with these words: "The anthropology of tourism, though novel in itself, rests upon sound anthropological foundations and has predecessors in previous research on rituals and ceremonies, human play, and cross-cultural aesthetic" (p. 11).

MacCannell and Graburn on tourism and religion

TA: I have not had any luck finding books or articles based on Nelson Graburn's "General Theory of Tourism" (1977) in which he states tourism is a "sacred journey" and frames it as a "rite" after Van Gennep. The same is true for your assertions in *The Tourist* that "sightseeing is a ritual performed to the differentiations of society" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 16); and your modeling of the presentation of tourist attractions as strategies of "site sacralization" (p. 43). I did not find any research that either refutes or supports your work on tourism and religion or Graburn's. Have you found anything?

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DMacC: No. I have struck out completely. However, I did find a helpful article by Noga Collins-Kreiner (2020) that parallels our search and confirms our findings, or lack thereof. Collins-Kreiner, using what she calls a “bottom-up approach,” did a machine search for articles published after 1990 containing the keywords “tourism” and “religion.” This yielded 200,000 articles. She based her findings on a close analysis of a sample of 776 of these, and an even closer analysis of 40 of the sampled articles that were published between 2015 and 2020.

TA: Your *The Tourist* (1976) and Graburn’s “Sacred Journey” (1977), which provide competing theoretical models of the relationship of tourism and religion, would not have made it into Collins-Kreiner’s (2020) search or her samples, right? Because they were both published before 1990.

DMacC: Right. They did not fit the parameters of her study. But her conclusions are remarkably similar to what we have been finding using our “top-down” approach: starting with our two competing theories and searching for references to them. She comments that the literature “offers no criticism of the various theories as each scholar offers a unique view” and decries the “predominance of case studies and the lack of comparative research” (p. 18), and finally concludes that there are needs “for a holistic conceptualization of the field ... and for a better understanding of the universalistic components of the field, which is currently fragmented” (Collins-Kreiner, 2020, p. 19).

TA: Did Collins-Kreiner (2020) pick up any discussion of the strengths or weaknesses of either the Graburn or the MacCannell model?

DMacC: I doubt it. I did not detect any references to Graburn’s or my earlier work.

TA: There are thousands of references to yours and to Graburn’s work.

DMacC: I meant specifically to our conceptual modeling of the relationship between tourism and religion. That’s where we find nothing.

TA: Right. It is fair to say that no one has ever considered *The Tourist* (MacCannell, 1976) for its central thesis linking tourism and religion. Before trying to explain its uses that do not yet exist, I want to say something about the general tendency of the commentary on your book. Most readers jump directly to the question of authenticity, which of course is related to your main thesis, but which loses a lot of sense when is not included in it. What these readers focus on is the idea that moderns believe authenticity to be elsewhere, or that authenticity only existed in other historical times, and tourism is a quest to find it. This is not wrong; but the idea of sightseeing being a ritual, and its ritual function, are left to one side. The mis-readings of *The Tourist* that have led some to conclude that you believe in authenticity (Bruner, 2005; MacCannell, 2008) are undoubtedly linked to this omission of your central hypothesis from consideration.

DMacC: This slippage might have been avoided if those readers had recognized the important influence of Erving Goffman on my work. While Goffman said little about tourists and tourism, he also regarded himself as working in the French tradition of the human sciences that had started with Durkheim. Goffman (1959) wrote the first draft of *The Presentation of Self* in Paris in the early 1950s, very much under the influence of Durkheim and Sartre. Indeed, for some time now, your French line has not been exclusively French in its applications. Goffman defined ritual as a “conventionalized act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some object of ultimate value to that object of ultimate value or to its stand-in” (Goffman, 1972, p. 62). This concisely updates Durkheim. I openly acknowledged that the Durkheim/Goffman model of ritual heavily influenced my handling of sightseeing in *The Tourist*. I only added “symbolic” (“or to its symbolic stand-in”) which I believe both Durkheim and Goffman would readily accept.

TA: What about Professor Graburn’s (1977) early assertion of a relationship between modern tourism and so-called “primitive” religions? Was there any follow-up?

From Van Gennep to Leach, Turner and Graburn

DMacC: I have found some. In a study of Finnish tourists seeking sun, Tom Selanniemi (2001, pp. 80–92) cited Graburn’s opposition of sacred and profane in tourism. But mainly, it has been Graburn himself who most actively developed this line. His approach has been to highlight similarities between religious ritual and ceremony as described by anthropologists on the one hand, and on the other, the organization of tours and modern-day tourist behavior and experiences. His “Introduction” to a special issue of *Annals of Tourism Research* (Graburn, 1983) is a detailed, masterful overview of the important moments in the history of anthropology’s quest to understand religion in cross-cultural perspective.

Graburn (1983) noted that, in the ethnological record, celebrations of annual events or the administration of puberty and other rites of transition involve temporary suspension of routines and separation of the initiates and/or the celebrants from their everyday activities; and that tourists, like such initiates/celebrants, are supposed to return to their workaday, everyday lives improved or renewed, sometimes with a new identity or status. On the renewals and transformations attributed to primitive rite and ceremony, he commented: “How remarkably analogous to the claimed benefits of tourism!” (p. 12).

TA: Yes, but a series of analogies is insufficient support for a robust conceptual model. Can we really assume that the separation of the tourist from everyday routines while on vacation at the beach has the same or even a similar meaning and function to that of the separation of a Native American youth on his quest for a guardian spirit, or the elaborate ceremonies surrounding the coronation of a new queen?

DMacC: You are correct to point this out, and it clearly concerned Graburn as well. He revised his contribution to Valene Smith’s (2001) influential edited volume *Hosts and Guests*, to provide a much stronger conceptual argument. I am referring to his “Secular journey: A General Theory of Tourism” (Graburn, 2001). Already in his 1983 “Introduction” he had signaled where he would eventually go, citing “the brilliant work of Van Gennep” as “the best framework for the understanding of the ritual

process" (Graburn, 1983, p. 13). In the later of those two pieces, Graburn noted the emendations and improvements made by Victor and Edith Turner (1978), Edmund Leach (1961) and others to Van Gennep's (1960) *Rites de Passage*. Graburn (2001) accepts the Turners' (1978) idea that authentic interpersonal relationships ("*communitas*"), not tainted by considerations of social status and role, occur in the liminal space of ritual, and by extension on tour or on vacation.

Taking relevant work done after Van Gennep into consideration, Graburn (2001) built a strong model based on a binary opposition between ordinary, everyday routines and the quality and meaning of vacation time, arguing that the "ordinary everyday" versus "vacation" binary is the same as the opposition of profane/sacred in classical religious studies (p. 45). He quoted Hubert and Mauss (1898) on primitive rite, inserting his own argument in brackets: "Each festival [and each tourist trip we contend] represents a temporary shift from the Normal-Profane order of existence into the Abnormal-Sacred order and back again" (p. 45). He went on to suggest that the "out of the ordinary" experience in modern tourism "might be expressed as 'I was living it up. Really living ... I've never felt so alive.'"

From Durkheim to Goffman and MacCannell

TA: Can we say that there are two levels of analysis in play here? Individual and society? And that the main focus of the Durkheim/MacCannell model is society, social organization and social structure, whereas Van Gennep and Graburn are modeling individual motives and perceptions?

DMacC: Yes, that is a fair characterization to start from. We are still casting a broad net here, and it captures another influential theoretical text in tourism research. John Urry (1990) based his *The Tourist Gaze* on the same foundational "ordinary/extraordinary" opposition (p. 3). This aligns his study with Van Gennep/Graburn as fully elaborated at the individual level, but without religious overtones. Within the theoretical restrictions that Van Gennep, Urry, and Graburn set themselves, society does not make an appearance as other than aggregations of individual motives, perceptions and desires. To focus on rituals, religious or touristic, is to explore an intermediate ground between individual and society.

TA: Yes, in so-called "primitive" societies rituals are ceremonial acts through which one hopes to achieve something or to get through one of life's potentially problematical key transitional moments: fecundity, weddings, harvest, birth, death, puberty, criminal trials, and so on. Most studies of rituals including Turner's (1969) and Van Gennep's (1909) stay on the individual level. However, after Durkheim, we must also assume that rituals have another wider function related to social coherence: rituals create and recreate society.

DMacC: Yes, there are always two levels at play, even if one of them goes unacknowledged. Only the Durkheim/MacCannell position requires observation and analyses on the societal level. Van Gennep et al. assume that aggregating ritual experience at the individual level will automatically add up to everything we need to know about society. "Society" hovers over the lives of individuals as a jumble of offices, age grades, statuses, changes in location, etc., that put their stamp on individual thought, action, and identity. As individuals negotiate their passage through careers and life, rites of passage help them out of their old positions and ways of thinking and into their next ones. The rite pulls them out of positions they are familiar with, strips them down to their basic humanity, reveals the secrets they must know to assume their new stations in life, informs them of their new rights and responsibilities, confers upon them the badges and titles they will require to discharge their new responsibilities, and releases them – ritually rebuilt – back into society. Throughout this process, society is a residual category accessed indirectly, and always only partially, through ritual observances.

TA: The logical unfolding of tourism studies after Durkheim would strongly emphasize the organizational features of tourist contexts: their representational or symbolic functioning, and how they are integrated into other aspects of society. From the French perspective, this summarizes your overarching project in *The Tourist*, which was to interrogate the actions of tourists for what they might reveal about the structure and integration of an emergent globalized society. Am I correct that your focus on this level is no accident? And can I assume that you share the Durkheimian idea that society is the only scale that is of interest for sociology?

An historic schism in social theory

DMacC: If we look more closely at the different ways Graburn and I derived our positions from classical social theory, we may be able to discover why our primary hypotheses concerning tourism and religion failed to gain greater traction in tourism studies and in the social sciences generally.

TA: Probably. Graburn leans heavily on Van Gennep and locates tourism in the liminal space of *communitas*, whereas you made no direct or indirect reference to Van Gennep and instead began with Durkheim's (1912) *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. While it seems that no one recognized this until now, it sets up tourist studies to re-litigate one of the great disagreements in the history of social theory. Perhaps tourism research remains atheoretical because no one has been willing to open that Pandora's Box.

DMacC: If you are willing, I think it would be worthwhile to pry it open. I suspect that tourism studies is not the only precinct of the human sciences that is stymied by these same issues.

TA: I agree. We cannot move forward if we persist in ignoring this moment in our distant past. We are fortunate that much has already been written about the opposition between Van Gennep and Durkheim, and that body of work may shed light on why tourism research today is theoretically blocked.

DMacC: As an American, I am aware that this historic debate took place, but not intimately familiar with it. Can you give me a quick summary that will help me understand why it continues to be relevant to our discussion?

TA: I'll begin where many others have begun: with the career of Arnold Van Gennep. In his lifetime, he never managed to secure the academic appointments and status he sought in France. Today, however, he is regarded as a pioneer of French ethnology and folklore, but something of an enigma. He is perhaps especially poorly understood in the Anglo-Saxon world, where most of the revival of *Rites of Passage* occurred, especially via the efforts of Leach (1961) and Turner (1969).

Van Gennep's career problems overlay a series of theoretical points on which he and Durkheim (and Marcel Mauss, who was Durkheim's nephew) were unalterably opposed. These theoretical disagreements were aired in a series of review articles written by both sides in the early twentieth century. Durkheim, for the most part stayed, above the fray: commenting on it in just one footnote in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. It was left to Mauss to clarify the differences between Van Gennep and the *Année Sociologique* school.

Van Gennep's failure to obtain an academic appointment in France seemed to intensify the virulence of his remarks. As the two sides' mutual animosity grew and the hope of contemporaneous academic recognition for Van Gennep receded, their respective theoretical positions became more polarized.

The romantic view of Van Gennep as a cursed researcher tends to sum up his opposition to Durkheimian theory as a byproduct of affect, ego, and academic conspiracies. Several key elements of this view of Van Gennep's exclusion are that Durkheim's position was hegemonic; that the *Année Sociologique* was exclusive; and that Van Gennep was a *franc-tireur* (loose cannon) who was aware of being one. Wouter Belier (1994) cast doubt on this romantic vision, insisting that the two positions were irreconcilable because of a very real theoretical difference, not a mere matter of academic politics.

Sociology, and *a fortiori* ethnology, were in the process of being institutionalized when Van Gennep exchanged blows with Durkheim's group in the early 1900s. Durkheim was fighting ardently to establish sociology's scientific constitution. According to Belier (1994), his exclusion of an "intellectual libertine" (p. 141) was understandable, especially if the latter's theoretical position directly opposed that project. On the side of ethnology, or the sociology of exotic peoples as it was conceived at the time, it had to be Mauss who would carry forward the ambition of the *Année Sociologique* group, not Van Gennep.

The debate between Van Gennep and the members of the *Année Sociologique* was based on several related points: the question of religion, especially the interpretation of totemism; the relationship between society and the individual; and the status of ethnographic data. It is on this last point that the opposition is the most explicit, the most frontal. Mauss (1909) fired first in his review of *Les Rites de Passage*, where he accused Van Gennep of making a trek through all of history and all of ethnography. It is striking to see Mauss (1967), who never did any fieldwork, criticizing Van Gennep for comparing second-hand data, a method that he himself would use in his most important work, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1967 [1925]). On this question of data, Van Gennep retaliated in his review of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, accusing its author of relying on secondary data that he did not gather in the field himself.

The conflict crystallized around this point. Van Gennep took a stand for ethnography against the secondary analyses of Durkheim, whom he said turned phenomena and living beings into dried plant specimens in an herbarium (Van Gennep, 1913, p. 389). Van Gennep's columns in *The Journal of Ideas* continued his advocacy for a science based on direct observation, to the point of becoming a "marotte" or [a fixation] (Laurière, 2021, p. xx) From our vantage point, it is evident that what was presented as a divergence in data-collection techniques covered up a much more fundamental theoretical difference. Van Gennep implied that Durkheim's lack of ethnographic practice was the cause of his putative contempt for the individual. It was on this question, the place of the individual in sociological theory, that Van Gennep and Durkheim really clashed. As Belier (1994) pointed out, it was here that the positions of the two parties were irreconcilable.

For Van Gennep (1906, p. xxiv), the individual "invents and proposes modifications" that are then accepted, or not, by society. In other words, consideration of the role of individuals is the singular basis for explanations of social organization and the processes of change in society. This is radically opposed to the Durkheimian idea of the social. For Durkheim, the individual is not determinate. On the contrary, individuals are products of society. Individuals' thoughts and behavior should be explained by their cultural, social, and historical contexts. Indeed, according to Durkheim, the very idea of The Individual is a creation of Western modernity and cannot have the same meaning in societies with mechanical solidarity. For Durkheim (1895), given how he defined the object of sociology as early as *Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique*, Van Gennep's position is untenable because it does not deconstruct the Western notion of the individual.

Using the Durkheim/Van Gennep debate to move toward a general theory of tourism

Society vs. individuals in religion and tourism

DMacC: You are suggesting that at the outset of tourism studies, we can identify two diametrically opposed foundational positions that repeat this classical schism. On the one hand, there is Van Gennep's vision in which there is no "society," only individuals co-creating their collective experiences. On the other hand, following Durkheim, we have diverse frameworks of social norms into which individuals are born, live their lives, and die, and over which they exercise hardly any control. I would agree that it is precisely this difference in how one sees the individual that is refracted through the differing positions on religion that Graburn and I staked out at the inception of tourism studies. Until these issues are brought out into the open, there can be no tourism theory, or any meaningful articulation of tourism research to preexisting theory.

TA: This has been a problem since the beginning of academic tourism research. In *The Tourist*, you make explicit reference to Durkheim and argue that the individual qua tourist is the figure that best embodies the cultural dimensions and social contexts of our current historical moment, i.e., precisely a Durkheimian figure. You then proceed to follow the tourists to map society as it is

currently evolving. Let us consider the following passage, which I believe crucially represents your understanding of what is at stake in the tourist experience:

I am quite certain that if the idea that “a group [of individuals] develops a world view” holds a grain of truth, modernity reverses the relationship or inverts the structure. Modernized peoples, released from primary family and ethnic group responsibilities, organize themselves in groups around world views provided by cultural productions. The group does not produce the world view, the world view produces the group. (MacCannell, 1976, p. 30)

Here, we find the idea of collective membership and social-identity formation based on a certain freedom of choice and association, but no less determinative in a Durkheimian sense.

DMacC: There is a widespread tendency in the human sciences to default to an individual level of analysis. Paradoxically, this is common within sociology as without. In the absence of Durkheimian or other structural influences locating tourism in its broad societal context, tourism studies devolves into an examination of individual tourists, classifying them by type – sun, sand and sea tourists, extreme tourists, medical tourists, sex tourists, etcetera ad infinitum – as if vacation preferences are indelible components of individual identity. The dominant trend in tourism research is to proliferate these “types” and study hospitality-industry arrangements to facilitate their passage. Tourism researchers didn't need Van Gennep to devolve to this level; they got there on their own. Had the mainstream of tourism research been under the direct influence of Van Gennep for the past 40 years, it would not be much different from the current disconnected proliferation of atheoretical studies that comprise it today, as noted by Collins-Kreiner (2020).

Nelson Graburn's unique contributions make it clear that tourism studies at the individual level can be improved by a focus on ritual and consideration of the later development of Van Gennep's paradigm by the Turners, Leach, and others. Can you tell me more about the theoretical emendations to Van Gennep's model that occurred after Van Gennep but before Graburn?

TA: Van Gennep never claimed his model of ritual to be anchored in any social theory. It is descriptively focused on the value of rituals to help people through certain stages of life. In his view, remember, individuals “invent and propose,” while society only “accepts or rejects.” Later, after its first translations into English in the 1960s, *Rites of Passage* received new interpretations. Based on its focus on patterns, some (e.g., Zumbalt, 1982) would even make of Van Gennep an early structuralist. However, any structuralist or functionalist interpretation of Van Gennep comes not from him but from those who commented on *Les Rites de Passage* long after his death. One of the first to do so was Max Gluckman (1962), who, by stating that all rites aim to resolve potential or actual social conflicts, added a functionalist perspective.

Victor Turner (1969) was most responsible for reframing “rites of passage” theoretically. Turner emphasizes that the central stage of the ritual process is he calls “liminality” (p. 94). It may be noted that Van Gennep's terms focus on the rite as experienced by the individual, while Turner's have more to do with the status of the individual from a societal point of view. After Turner, liminality become the emphasis for most of those who comment on rites. As an ambiguous, in-between state where social status no longer applies, liminality is a time for rites of role reversal (men/woman, slave/master, etc.). In other words, the liminal phase of rites shows an upside-down society, and the social may be read through the way society pictures itself backwards.

DMacC: I took Victor Turner's seminar as a graduate student at Cornell in 1965. He was familiar with the Durkheimian tradition and closely followed Lévi-Strauss's thinking about structure and structuralism, which was then still in progress. But Turner had strong tastes on these matters. He was deeply antipathetic toward what might be called the scientifically desiccated social, instead favoring the kinds of close, warm, intimate bonds that can form between individuals independent of their social positions. He held onto his belief so strongly it may have biased his reading of both Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss; and this could have led to his emphasis on *communitas* that forms between initiates in the liminal spaces of rites of passage.

TA: Graburn acknowledges Turner's addition of *communitas* to Van Gennep's model, but makes little use of it. Graburn's application is more derived from the work of another British anthropologist, Edmund Leach. Leach (1961) was interested in the way societies represent time and divided the vision of time between the observation of a continuous flow (everything lives and dies) and repetition of sequences (the clock's ticking, moon cycles, annual harvests, and so on). According to Leach, it is religion that links these two contradictory experiences of time and allows the former to be represented in terms of the latter. This cyclical vision of time is due to “psychological (and hence religious) repugnance to contemplating either the idea of death or the idea of the end of the universe” (p. 126). According to Leach, rites are an attempt to create cyclical time when time itself – as shown by the plurality of lived experiences of time – has no regularity as “an intrinsic part of nature” (p. 126). Celebratory events and rituals function to mark time in societies without mechanical measures of it. Leach posited that the liminal phases of these rites are time opposed to secular time, and thus congruent with rites of inversion: as Leach put it, it would be “logically appropriate ritual behavior” to “play normal life back to front” (p. 136).

DMacC: This playing of normal life back to front appears to be the key analogy connecting tourism to religion as analyzed by Van Gennep and his followers. I agree with Leach's (1961) argument that certain rites might effectively resolve the tension between the two ways humans experience time, i.e., as constant flow vs. series of repetitions. But the religious rigor required for the human invention of time is, I suspect, more than most touristic observances, and some religious ones, can bear. Leach wrote that “the rite as a whole falls into sections, a symbolic death, a period of ritual seclusion, a symbolic rebirth” (p. 133). At the level on which it is supposed to work, i.e., the individual level, I have difficulty fitting this model onto trips to the beach.

TA: Nevertheless, the expression “rite of passage” has entered common usage and been applied to various human activities, without too much tinkering with Van Gennep's model. Given the breadth of its application, I don't think we should be looking for flaws in the general model, which has proved useful in opening up a number of valuable questions; and this is certainly the case with Nelson Graburn's work on tourism. As you suggest, we need to look closely at Graburn's definitions and assumptions, including that tourist travel is an “extra-ordinary” human activity (2001, p.45), and that he has provided a “general theory

of tourism" (2001, p.42–50). Perhaps in the first instance the application of Van Gennep's model to tourism needs to be more severely interrogated before it can find general application. The tourist activities Graburn writes about appear to have little to do with the rituals Van Gennep spoke of, or even with those described by Gluckman (1962) and Turner (1969).

Graburn's thus-far idiosyncratic use of the Van Gennep model relies almost entirely on ideas about the separation of time; an assumption that vacation travel is a ritually framed liminal practice; and a notion that tourism is a grand ritual of inversion, opposed to tourists' ordinary workaday situations. Graburn (1977) extended Leach's (1961) analysis by asserting that modern people resist their reliance on scientific instruments to measure time: "I believe that even 'scientific secular' Westerners gain greater meaning from the personal ... than the numeric" (p. 21). In the same work, Graburn also posited that tourism is a ritual to create personal, cyclic time from common representations of time.

DMacC: When I first read Graburn's (2001) "Secular Ritual: A General Theory of Tourism," I was taken aback by its title. If ritual is to have any meaning beyond *habit*, it must have a sacred element. Thus, the idea of a "secular ritual" seemed to me to be a contradiction in terms and not one that might lead to a productive dialectic. But I relaxed after a few pages as he defined the tourist experience as occurring in a "liminal", "sacred" space or moment. I guessed that by "secular ritual" he was acknowledging that tourism is not a ritual component of any currently recognized religion. The touristic components of recognized religions, their pilgrimages, e.g., are not regarded as tourism from within them.

Graburn set up an oscillation of human lives between periods of profane, mundane activities and escape from the mundane into the sacred and liminal spaces and moments of their tourist experiences. Presumably there is an alignment – as you suggest – between the sacred and the authentic. Certainly, Graburn's "Secular Ritual" is the most thoroughgoing integration of the Van Gennep/Turner/Leach model with tourist studies.

The potential impact of Van Gennep and Durkheim on tourism theory today

DMacC: We have arrived at a point where we might ask, What does the Durkheim/Van Gennep opposition look like in its current twenty-first century incarnation as inflected through tourism research? The first thing I would call attention to on the Van Gennep-Graburn side is that there may be a bit of a tautology. The tourist experience is sacred not because there are any specific observances involved, but simply because it is not profane. Perhaps this can be set aside by noting that, in constructing any general theory, we need to sacrifice specificity to gain universality. Graburn's "General Theory" effectively incorporates everything tourists have been known to do. It is not derived from observing specific beliefs or actions of tourists. Every tourist activity *ipso facto* fits into his "sacred liminal" gaps in the mundane where tourists are doing something different than what they do at other times. This framework includes a vast and diverse array of activities: going on a cruise, a ski vacation, out to a bar after hours with co-workers, to Eastern Europe for cheap cosmetic surgery, to gaze at the Mona Lisa, to a regional park to walk its trails, to Mt. Everest to attempt to climb it. The list can be as long as anyone would wish to make it.

Turning to the Durkheim-Goffman-MacCannell line, *The Tourist* is not – contrary to what some have claimed – a general theory of tourism. The only tourist activity analyzed throughout *The Tourist* is sightseeing. As I attempted to make clear in *The Ethics of Sightseeing* (MacCannell, 2011), sightseeing is the most universal among all the millions things tourists do as tourists. Getting drunk and barfing on a beach in Bali is a part of tourism that needs to be accounted for. It might have been done by a sightseer, and it might be a sight to be seen, but it is not sightseeing. Looked at from the standpoint of religious studies, much of what tourists-in-general do is highly profane and the opposite of sightseeing.

I designated *sightseeing* as the "conventionalized act" through which tourists convey their respect to an object of value, and the *tourist attraction* as the object of value or its symbolic stand-in. Here, we can see a clear contrast between the two approaches that can be traced back to their different theoretical beginnings. In the Van Gennep-Leach-Graburn line, all vacation time away from one's ordinary workaday world is equally extra-ordinary and therefore equally sacred. However, I made no claim that all tourist attractions are *equally* sacred. I set aside commercially hyped, pseudo-attractions like Disneyland; though eventually, even it became sacred according to my theory, via the construction of copies of it. Rather, my focus was on those aspects of nature and culture that are established objects of tourist veneration *whether or not* a tour company or a destination hypes them. Some of these, like the Grand Canyon or the Pyramids of Egypt, are monumentally attractive; and others, like Napoleon's hats on display at Les Invalides in Paris and Chantilly, are less so.

I constructed my model of the "stages of site sacralization" (MacCannell, 1976, pp. 43–48) to account for differences among attractions, and my language clearly signaled that I was conducting that work within a quasi-religious frame. The first stage was the marking of the object as worthy of veneration. This was adapted from and consonant with Durkheim's assertion that the Churinga boards of the Australian Aborigines are not sacred in and of themselves. It is the markings that they carved on their boards that made them sacred. "Marking" is followed by "staging and elevation," "enshrinement," and finally, on the grandest scale, "mechanical reproduction" or iconic copying of sites.

In the course of modeling site sacralization, I made my much-cited note to Walter Benjamin's (1969, pp. 217–252) "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Benjamin claimed that original works of art have a "religious aura" that never attaches to their reproductions. I suggested instead that reproductions of the original *constitute* its religious aura. Several philosophers and literary theorists have held up this note as an incisive critique of Benjamin's thesis, but I think it may be close to what Benjamin had in mind all along.

TA: Your model of the stages of site sacralization effectively situates any attraction, anything tourists gather around simply to stare at it, from the most grand to the picayune, in a quasi- or neoreligious framework. Indeed, from a strict Durkheimian perspective, it would be a fully religious framework. It is noteworthy that your model immediately revealed sightseeing to be both a

positive rite and a negative rite, just as Durkheim would have predicted. Even though tourism is supposedly about “fun,” “pleasure,” and “enjoyment,” along with positive-rite attractions, you found sacralized sites of assassinations, massacres, slave markets, concentration camps, the “Ten Top Polluters in Action,” and so forth.

DMacC: The existence of negative-rite sightseeing alongside positive attractions is a strong validation both of Durkheim's general theory of religion and of its applicability to tourist phenomena. It also constitutes a theoretical challenge to those researchers who assume that the motive for tourism is pleasure and fun. They need to explain the connection of trips to Auschwitz and Gettysburg and the Great Pacific Garbage Gyre to human enjoyment.

Thirty years after *The Tourist* was published, studies of negative-rite sightseeing began appearing in the literature. These were touted as recently discovered “new types” of tourism and given labels like “Dark Tourism” and “Death Tourism.” But they are not based on my observations, or even Durkheim's, Freud's, or any other theoretical perspective that might connect their findings and make them add up to something.

Religious observance in the act of sightseeing

TA: Your chapter on “The Semiotics of Attraction” (MacCannell, 1976, pp. 109–134) describes the tourist's act of obeisance to the attraction: the way tourists apprehend the markers that set them in motion toward the attraction and eventually arrive in its presence.

DMacC: That chapter, taking its cue from Charles Sanders Peirce (1955), provides a phenomenological description of the act of sightseeing. Peirce explained in excruciating detail how phenomenology and semiotics are obverse and reverse of the same coin that he called “Phanerescopy” (p. 74). My semiotics chapter was an attempt to provide a close situational-level description of the range of possibilities within the mental experience of sightseeing.

My aim has never been to try to get into the head of any given individual tourist, as a would-be phenomenologist might struggle to do. I placed brackets around the act of sightseeing and closely described the logical combinations of the various symbolic and perceptual tools all tourists have available to them while engaged in this act. I obviously assumed that this method would get us as close as we will ever get to what goes on in the minds of tourists as they approach and experience attractions. And although I wrote it about sightseeing, it also applies to a range of experiences situated within other forms of attraction, including seduction and courtship.

While the chapter on “The Semiotics of Attraction” contains few direct references to the sociology of religion, there is a section on charm-bracelet souvenirs that strongly affirms the similarity between touristic and primitive religious beliefs – something you have noticed as worthy of comment.

TA: Yes, you observed that in Paris, a tourist can buy a miniature street-sign souvenir reading “Rue de Rivoli,” rendered in solid gold:

This street sign charm is a double identification. . . . [T]he real street sign displaces the street as the object of tourist recognition, and the charm displaces the street sign as sight. The street sign and the charm are at once both markers and sights. And this is what makes a charm charming (or a totem totemic). (MacCannell, 1976, p. 125)

The discontinuity between individual experience and societal forms

TA: You also wrote that tourists are trying to construct totalities to counter the sensation of a world that does not allow them a clear and stable position in it. On the other hand, your main thesis, as you remind us, was that “sightseeing is a ritual performed to the differentiation of society” (MacCannell, 1976, p.13). In other words, the *individual* reasons tourists engage in ritual and the *collective* effect of engaging in it are not merely different, but opposite or opposing. Perhaps this is the paradox that discourages most of the potential extensions of your theory, at least among those who do not distinguish between individual thought and behavior, on the one hand, and social forms, on the other.

DMacC: Your comment decisively reveals what is going on in *The Tourist*. I clearly do not accept that there is continuity between individual tourist experiences and the social formations within which their experiences occur. The two levels, as I endeavored to show throughout *The Tourist*, are often in opposition to each other. Lévi-Strauss (1968, p. 61) expressed the same theoretical stance in his – I think, premature – dismissal of phenomenology on the grounds that it posits a continuity between experience and reality. But this “continuity” is found only in clumsy attempts to adapt phenomenology to sociology and anthropology. It does not spring from an accurate reading of Husserl.

TA: An early critique that was raised against *The Tourist* suggested that tourism is about pleasure and fun, and there was no need for you to have wrapped it in all that supposedly superfluous theory: Marxist, Saussurean, Peircian, Durkheimian, Lévi-Straussian, Goffmanian, whatever.

DMacC: That might have been little more than academic laziness and indifference, i.e., cover for an unwillingness to tackle the dozen or so books that might bring the critics up to speed. Yet, it was also an expression of unwarranted confidence in continuity between levels of analysis. The idea that tourism is about “fun” is simply not scalable to the societal level. Permit me to introduce perhaps the most egregious example of a tourist spectacle. Lynchings in the American South occurred well into the twentieth century and were announced, attended, experienced and celebrated as enjoyable events. Attendees prepared picnics and brought their children to watch the spectacle. Some witnesses may have felt really “alive” when they saw the innocent victim's body drop and neck snap. But I have difficulty accepting the notion that the delight of these tourists reflects similarly positive formations or adjustments at the level of society.

Elevating the Van Gennep/Turner model to the societal level

DMacC: There is a way of accommodating the enjoyment of lynchings in a religio-touristic frame and raising the analysis to the level of the social. But it might produce unwanted results. Turner's (1969) important contribution to social theory in general, and potentially to tourism studies, is his analysis of the *communitas* that occurs in the liminal space of ritual. Before we go down this path, we should note that Graburn does not emphasize the *communitas* of tour mates as important to his "general theory," so what I am about to say does not necessarily apply to Graburn. By *communitas*, Turner meant the bond that initiates form with one another as they are reduced to their basic humanity: when they are stripped of their social identities and statuses, sometimes of their clothing, hair, and foreskins, before being tattooed, soaked in blood, provided with physical tokens of recognition, etc., then having new statuses conferred upon them and being released back into society. Turner claimed that solidarity formed in liminal space, when the person is neither here nor there but "betwixt and between" as he put it (p. 94), is the ultimate and singular basis of the cohesion of societies even on their grandest level. He called it the essential and generic human bond without which there can be no society. If this postulate is correct – and a reasonable case can be made that the experiences of tourists are analogous to the initiation of Arunta boys or the crowning of an Ndembu king – then there is a strong reason for concluding that tourism has religious echoes and overtones without any recourse to the Durkheim/Goffman theoretical line. We might conclude that tourist attendance at the spectacle of a lynching contributed to the social solidarity of racist sub-groups of American society. But I doubt that many tourism researchers would want to go there to observe.

I am continuing to try to give Van Gennep, Turner, and their tourism-studies follower Graburn their theoretical due. We are all trying to make sense of and understand the same phenomena. But at this juncture, we need to observe that neither Goffman nor Durkheim would accept individual feelings as a basis for society – even, or perhaps especially, if they were feelings of a strong bond with a group of one's fellows. An individual psyche may be held together or ripped apart by feelings. Society is held together by interactions between individuals and groups that strategically interpret social norms and symbols in their dealings with one another. Feelings are involved, but orthogonally to the strength or weaknesses of social bonds. The most successful social outcomes usually occur between those who manage to keep their feelings in check, at least for the duration of negotiations. Every fictional drama is based on this tension. Humans are endlessly capable of falling in love with those who are impossible to live with. Strong bonds of sub-group cohesion (e.g., within racist groups) are more likely to tear apart what Durkheim (1984, p.85) termed "organic solidarity" than to hold it together. In the same work, Durkheim acknowledged intimate familiarity and intense closeness and caring based on feelings of cultural sameness in his analysis of *mechanical solidarity*, but argued that it is the weakest form of social cohesion, not the strongest. If you drop a mechanically organized sub-group into an organic solidarity, it will either be neutralized and assimilated, or try to tear the entire system apart to remake it in its own image.

How the two models theorize tourists when not on tour

DMacC: To me, the most troublesome aspect of individual-level modeling that avoids systematic or logical engagement with what is going on at the societal level is not its characterization of tourists qua tourists. Rather, it is the way it theorizes the lives of tourists when they are *not* on tour, of their lives at home and at work. Research restricted to the individual level declares that the reason someone becomes a tourist is because their normal lives are too boring and dull to sustain their interest. It is a commonplace declaration of this approach that ordinary everyday lives are tedious, exasperating, uninteresting, etc. But I do not think there has ever been an "ordinary" human life, at least not from the perspective of the person who is living it. And to call someone else's life "ordinary" strikes me as arrogant and insulting.

John Urry (1990) provided us with the clearest expression of this casually pejorative assumption about the everyday lives of tourists. Tourism, he said, "results from a basic binary division between ordinary everyday and the extraordinary. [Tourism provides] pleasurable experiences that are by definition out of the ordinary" (p. 11).

TA: I have a more recent revised edition of *The Tourist Gaze* in which a similar passage appears, though not quite as theoretically unequivocal as positing a "basic binary division." It says: "Tourist experiences involve some aspects or elements that induces pleasurable experiences which, by comparison with the everyday, are out of the ordinary" (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 15).

DMacC: I have said this before and I'll say it again. There are tourists whose everyday lives are exciting and rarely boring; whose work is productive, creative, and appreciated; who maintain strong erotic and other attachments to their lovers; and who are buoyed by a network of friends, relatives, co-workers and acquaintances. I hope their numbers are as large as possible. Nor are lively and interesting everyday lives restricted to highly educated, well-paid professionals. In my own extended family there are, or have been, welders, machinists, blacksmiths, crop-duster pilots, firefighters, homemakers, mechanics, secretaries, policemen, long-haul truckers, army sergeants, supermarket checkers, postal workers, and nurses, none of whom thought of their daily lives as dull or ordinary. Usually, the issue was that they contained too much excitement.

There may well be a binary between the ordinary and the extraordinary, but I see no theoretical or empirical reason to apply it to the everyday lives of tourists. The only motive that needs be ascribed to sightseeing is a desire to see the sights.

TA: The ordinary/extraordinary opposition may have been exaggerated by the tourism researchers who make use of it. I question whether it has any validity at the societal scale. Society has no need for a ritual dedicated to controlling the effects of the mobility of its members, as if social mobility constitutes some kind of transgression. Yet, we find in Van Gennep (1909), as also in Frazer (1918), numerous examples of purification rites that take place at the departure and return home, and that show that the integrity of the territory is threatened by the comings and goings of people (whether its members or outsiders). Van Gennep wrote: "a man who lives at home, in his clan, lives in the profane; he lives in the sacred as soon as he leaves on

a journey” (p. 21). If this was ever true, it is no longer true today. Capitalist society has fully integrated mobility into its functioning. The physical mobility of the tourist is not, at the level of society, a passage from the ordinary to the extraordinary, but a normalized and normal practice. The possible rituals that tourists engage in and that Graburn writes about – departure parties, parties on the last day on vacation before returning – may not have a higher social function, only an individual function: that of a mental framing of the experience that will serve as a temporal marker. It would be intriguing if they do have some function or significance at the level of society or general culture, but if so, it has yet to be discovered.

Conclusion

DMacC: Can we wind this conversation down with some comments on what we think we gained from it?

TA: Agreed. In “Sacred Journey,” *Graburn (1977)* wrote that “For Westerners who value individualism, self-reliance, and the work ethic, tourism is the *best kind* of life, for it is sacred in the sense of being exciting, renewing, and inherently self-fulfilling” (p. 23, emphasis in original). It seems that the real opposition is to be found at the level of value. It does not mean that the work/tourism opposition is real, and that time spent as a tourist will automatically be better than time spent doing something else. On the contrary, Graburn acknowledged that tourist experiences can be disappointing. I might be wrong, but I see in this reference to value something that is not too far from your approach to authenticity. Authenticity and the belief that tourism is the “best kind of life” are both emic thinking, and both drive tourism.

DMacC: There are other possible points of connection between Graburn's formulation and mine. It is unquestionably true that “MacCannell's work ... is not universal theory”, as *Graburn (2001, p. 50)* asserts. But my work might be fitted into Graburn's (2001) “General Theory” in an interesting way. We need only note that the act of sightseeing is one of the most frequently occurring tourist behaviors. It is certainly not restricted to “educated Western” tourists, as Graburn claims (2001, 49). All classes and nationalities of tourists engage in sightseeing. Even if the primary goal of the vacationer is relaxation, sex, or a sport like horseback riding, they will lapse into sightseeing when an attraction presents itself. We might productively locate acts of sightseeing in Graburn's liminal gaps and spaces, and compare sightseeing to the other tourist activities found there viz. their putative sacred dimensions.

If we undertake this exercise and locate my observations in the available liminal slots in Graburn's “General Theory,” it quickly becomes clear that the sacred and religious aspects of tourism may well be *uniquely* contained in the act of sightseeing. Every other thing that tourists do may be framed by a thin fuzzy tinge of sacredness deriving from its separation from and opposition to the profane, ordinary, workaday world. But in sightseeing, we observe behavior with clear similarities to religious observances. And sightseeing uniquely mirrors existing religions insofar as it connects to larger socio-cultural issues such as how humans can live with enormous social complexity.

Among the things tourists do, only sightseeing is driven by a strong moral imperative, a sense of “ought”: when you are in Florence, you ought to see the David, even if it is only the more accessible, full-sized copy. If you did not see the David, you had better come up with a good reason for having missed him. A sightseer may be the degree zero of Durkheim's “churches,” a church of one.

TA: I'm glad you brought up Durkheim's “church of one” because it has strong relevance for the overall connection of tourism and religion. In *Elementary Forms*, he gave a decisive definition of religion by affirming that “in history we do not find a religion without a Church” (Durkheim, 1915, p. 59), but shortly afterward, he was compelled to nuance his own statement by introducing different scales of cults. He claimed that what constitutes “the Church” can be of various sizes, from the people as a whole to a reduced group the size of a family or corporation that celebrates together. At this point, Durkheim asked himself a question that has particular resonance with our conversation, and in particular with our query, Is tourism a part of religious life? In this passage, Durkheim permits himself a rare moment of speculation about the future of religion: “Not only are these individual religions very frequent in history, but nowadays many are asking if they are not destined to become the pre-eminent form of the religious life – and if the day will not come when there will be no other cult than that which each man will freely perform within himself” (p. 61). Durkheim opens the possibility of a future in which there are chapels but no longer necessarily a Church, or at least no Church identified as such in which individuals participate collectively. Is this not what we are observing in tourism? It does not mean there is no longer any religion in the Durkheimian sense, as for him, religion was, of necessity, eminently collective. Modernity simply inverts the relationship: the individual chapels form the Church, not vice versa. Is this not analogous to your assertion that “[t]he group does not produce the world view, the world view produces the group” (*MacCannell, 1976, p. 30*)?

DMacC: Yes, but everywhere tourists are coming together in larger congregations. At shared attractions they may be observed extending to one another the kinds of courtesies and understanding that occur between congregants. They observe a moment of silence when in the presence; they take care not to spoil one another's experiences with unwanted commentary and by trying to hold themselves in such a way as to minimize blocking others' views. They have little tolerance for non-believers. If some teenagers act out irreverently, they will be cautioned to shape up or leave. These “congregants” feel the need to create proof of their devotion by taking photographs, especially photographs of themselves in the presence of the attraction. They have a certain unspoken solidarity with one another. When a stranger hands a camera to a fellow sightseer, no explanation need be given; the desire for proof of having been in the presence is understood. Obtaining a souvenir of the visit, holding it close and carrying it away is akin to Christian Holy Communion: “This is my blood. Drink it. This is my body. Eat it.” It shares with religions, conventionally so-called, the imperative that it ought to be personal and meaningful even when it isn't.

TA: You foreshadowed all of this in *The Tourist* when you stated up front that tourism is a “reflexive structure that expresses the totality of the modern spirit as, e.g., a modern religion might if a modern religion existed. On this level, only the system of

attractions ... reflect the differentiations of ... society and consciousness" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 15). And later, you noted that the global collection of attractions was "functionally equivalent to the sacred text that still serves as the moral base of traditional society" (p. 40).

DMacC: Yes. And I have persistently argued that an important component of the next phase of tourism research should be close readings of the human values encoded in attractions, large and small, as the shortest path to collective self-understanding.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Thomas Apchain: Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Dean MacCannell:** Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Data availability

The [audio recording(s), video recording(s) and/or transcript(s)] on which this paper was based have been retained by the authors and will be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of competing interest

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