

Overcoming Tourism

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In the Old Days tourism didn't exist. Gypsies, Tinkers and other true nomads even now roam about their worlds at will, but no one would therefore think of calling them «tourists».

Tourism is an invention of the 19th century—a period of history which sometimes seems to have stretched out to unnatural length. In many ways, we are *still* living in the 19th century.

The tourist seeks out Culture because—in our world—culture has disappeared into the maw of the Spectacle culture has been torn down and replaced with a Mall or a talkshow—because our education is nothing but a preparation for a lifetime of work and consumption—because we ourselves have ceased to create. Even though tourists appear to be physically present in Nature or Culture, in effect one might call them ghosts haunting ruins, lacking all bodily presence. They're not really *there*, but rather move through a mind-scape, an abstraction («Nature», «Culture»), collecting images rather than experience. All too frequently their vacations are taken in the midst of other peoples' misery and even add to that misery.

Recently several people were assassinated in Egypt *just for being tourists*. Behold the Future. Tourism and terrorism:—just what is the difference?

Of the three archaic reasons for travel—call them «war», «trade», and «pilgrimage»—which one gave birth to tourism? Some would automatically answer that it must be pilgrimage. The pilgrim goes «there» to *see*, the pilgrim normally brings back some souvenir; the pilgrim takes «time off» from daily life; the pilgrim has nonmaterial goals. In this way, the pilgrim foreshadows the tourist.

But the pilgrim undergoes a shift of consciousness, and for the pilgrim that shift *is real*. Pilgrimage is a form of initiation, and initiation is an opening to other forms of cognition.

We can detect something of the real difference between pilgrim and tourist, however, by comparing their effects on the places they visit. Changes in a place—a city, a shrine, a forest—may be subtle, but at least they can be observed. The state of the *soul* may be a matter for conjecture, but perhaps we can say something about the state of the *social*.

Pilgrimage sites like Mecca may serve as great bazaars for trade and they may even serve as centers of production, (like the silk industry of Benares)—but their primary «product» is *baraka* or *maria*. These words (one Arabic, one Polynesian) are usually translated as «blessing», but they also carry a freight of other meanings.

The wandering dervish who sleeps at a shrine in order to dream of a dead saint (one of the «People of the Tombs») seeks initiation or advancement on the spiritual path, a mother who

brings a sick child to Lourdes seeks healing; a childless woman in Morocco hopes the *Marabout* will make her fertile if she ties a rag to the old tree growing out of the grave; the traveller to Mecca yearns for the very center of the Faith, and as the caravans come within sight of the Holy City the *hajji* calls out «*Labbaïka Allabumma!*» «*I am here, O Lord!*»

All these motives are summed up by the word *baraka*, which sometimes seems to be a palpable substance, measurable in terms of increased charisma or «luck». The shrine *produces* baraka. And the pilgrim takes it away. But blessing is a product of the Imagination—and thus no matter how many pilgrims take it away there's always more. In fact, the more they *take*, the more blessing the shrine can produce (because a popular shrine *grows* with every answered prayer).

To say that baraka is «imaginal» is not to call it «unreal». It's real enough to those who feel it. But spiritual goods do not follow the rules of supply and demand like material goods. The more demand for spiritual goods, the more supply. The production of baraka is *infinite*.

By contrast, the tourist desires not baraka but *cultural difference*. The pilgrim we might say—leaves the «secular space» of home and travels to the «sacred space» of the shrine in order to experience the *difference* between secular and sacred. But this difference remains intangible, subtle, invisible to the «profane» gaze, spiritual, imaginal. Cultural difference however is measurable, apparent, visible, material, economic, *social*.

The imagination of the capitalist «first world» is exhausted. It cannot imagine anything *different*. So the tourist leaves the homogenous space of «home» for the heterogenous space of «foreign climes» not to receive a «blessing» but simply to admire the *picturesque*, the mere view or snapshot of difference, to *see the difference*.

The tourist *consumes difference*.

But the production of cultural difference is not infinite. It is not «merely» imaginal. It is rooted in language, landscape, architecture, custom, taste, smell. It is very physical. The more it is used up or taken away, the less remains. The social can produce just so much «meaning», just so much difference. Once it's gone, it's gone.

Over the centuries perhaps a given sacred place attracted millions of pilgrims—and yet somehow despite all the gazing and admiring and praying and souvenirbuying, this place *retained its meaning*. And now—after 20 or 30 years of tourism—that meaning has been lost. Where did it go? How did this *happen*?

Tourism's real roots do not lie in pilgrimage (or even in «fair» trade), but in *war*. Rape and pillage were the original forms of tourism, or rather, the first tourists followed directly in the wake of war, like human vultures picking over battlefield carnage for imaginary booty—for *images*.

Tourism arose as a symptom of an Imperialism that was *total*—economic, political, and spiritual.

What's really amazing is that so *few* tourists have been murdered by such a meagre handful of terrorists. Perhaps a secret complicity exists between these mirror-image foes. Both are displaced people, cut loose from all mooring, drifting in a sea of images. The terrorist act exists only in the *image* of the act without CNN, there survives only a spasm of meaningless cruelty. And the tourist's act exists only in the images of that act, the snapshots and souvenirs; otherwise nothing remains but the dunning letters of credit-card companies and a residue of «free mileage» from some foundering airline. The terrorist and the tourist are perhaps the most alienated of all the products of post-imperial capitalism. An abyss of images separates them from the objects of their desire. In a strange way they are twins.

Nothing ever really touches the life of the tourist. Every act of the tourist is *mediated*. Anyone who's ever witnessed a phalanx of Americans or a busload of Japanese advancing on some ruin or ritual must have noticed that even their collective gaze is mediated by the medium of the camera's multifaceted eye, and that the multiplicity of cameras, videocams, and recorders forms a complex of shiny clicking *scales* in an armor of pure mediation. Nothing organic penetrates this insectoid carapace which serves as both protective critic and predatory mandible, snapping up images, images, images. At its most extreme this mediation takes the form of the *guided tour*, in which every image is interpreted by a licensed expert, a *psychopomp* or guide of the Dead, a virtual Virgil in the Inferno of meaninglessness—a minor functionary of the Central Discourse and its metaphysics of appropriation—a pimp of fleshless ecstasies.

The real place of the tourist is not the site of the exotic, but rather the no-place place (literally the «utopia») of median space, liminal space, inbetween space—the space of travel itself, the industrial abstraction of the airport, or the machine-dimension of plane or bus.

So the tourist and the terrorist—those twin ghosts of the airports of abstraction—suffer an identical hunger for the *authentic*. But the authentic recedes whenever they approach it. Cameras and guns stand in the way of that moment of *love* which is the hidden dream of every terrorist and tourist. To their secret misery, all they can do is destroy. The tourist destroys *meaning*, and the terrorist destroys the tourist.

Tourism is the apotheosis and quintessence of «Commodity Fetishism.» It is the ultimate Cargo Cult—the worship of «goods» that will *never* arrive, because they have been exalted, raised to glory, deified, worshipped and absorbed, all on the plane of pure spirit, beyond the stench of mortality (or morality).

You buy tourism you get nothing but images. Tourism, like Virtual Reality, is a form of Gnosis, of body-hatred and body-transcendence. The ultimate tourist «trip» will take place *in* Cyberspace, and it will *be*.

CyberGnosis SM_
a trip to paranirvana
and back,
in the comfort of your
very own
«workstation.»
Jack in,
leave Earth
behind!

The modest goal of this little book is to address the *individual traveler* who has decided to resist tourism.

Even though we may find it impossible in the end to «purify» ourselves and our travel from every last taint and trace of tourism, we still feel that improvement may be possible.

Not only do we disdain tourism for its vulgarity and its injustice, and therefore wish to avoid any contamination (conscious or unconscious) by its viral virulency we also lavish to understand travel as an act of *reciprocity* rather than alienation. In other words, we don't wish merely to avoid the negativities of tourism, but even more to achieve *positive travel*, which we envision as

a productive and mutually enhancing relation between self and other, guest and host a form of *cross-cultural synergy* in which the whole exceeds the sum of parts.

We'd like to know if travel can be carried out according to a secret economy of baraka, whereby not only the shrine but also the pilgrims themselves have «blessings» to bestow.

Before the Age of the Commodity, we know, there was an Age of the Gift, of reciprocity, of giving and receiving. We learned this from the tales of certain travelers, who found remnants of the world of the Gift among certain tribes, in the form of potlach or ritual exchange, and recorded their observations of such strange practises.

Not long ago there still existed a custom among South Sea islanders of travelling vast distances by outrigger canoe, without compass or sextant, in order to exchange valuable and useless presents (ceremonial art-objects rich in *mana*) from island to island in a complex pattern of overlapping reciprocities.

We suspect that even though travel in the modern world seems to have been taken over by the Commodity—even though the networks of convivial reciprocity *seem* to have vanished from the map—even though tourism *seems* to have triumphed—even so—we continue to suspect that other pathways still persist, other tracks, unofficial, not noted on the map, perhaps even «secret»—pathways still linked to the possibility of an economy of the Gift, smugglers' routes for free-spirits, known only to the geomantic guerillas of the art of travel.

As a matter of fact, we don't just «suspect» it. We *know* it. We know there exists an art of travel.

Perhaps the greatest and subtlest practitioners of the art of travel were the sufis, the mystics of Islam. Before the age of passports, immunisations, airlines and other impediments to free travel, the sufis wandered footloose in a world where borders tended to be more permeable than nowadays, thanks to the transnationalism of Islam and the cultural unity of *Dar al-Islam*, the Islamic world.

The great medieval Moslem travelers, like Ibn Battuta and Naser Khusraw, have left accounts of vast journeys—Persia to Egypt, or even Morocco to China—which never set foot outside a landscape of deserts, camels, caravanserais, bazaars, and piety. *Someone* always spoke Arabic, however badly, and Islamic culture permeated the remotest backwaters, however superficially. Reading the tales of Sinbad the sailor (from the *1001 Nights*) gives us the impression of a world where even the terra incognita was still despite all marvels and oddities—somehow familiar, somehow *Islamic*. Within this unity, which was not yet a uniformity, the sufis formed a special class of travelers. Not warriors, not merchants, and not quite ordinary pilgrims either, the dervishes represent a *spiritualization of pure nomadism*.

According to the Koran, God's Wide Earth and everything in it are «sacred». not only as divine creations but also because the material world is full of «waymarks» or signs of divine reality, Moreover, Islam itself is born between two journeys, Mohammad's *hijra* or «Flight» from Mecca to Medina, and his *hajj*, or return voyage. The hajj is the movement toward the origin and center for every Moslem even today, and the annual Pilgrimage has played a vital role not just in the religious unity of Islam but also in its cultural unity.

Mohammad himself exemplifies every kind of travel in Islam:—his youth with the Meccan caravans of Summer and Winter, as a merchant; his campaigns as a warrior his triumph as a humble pilgrim. Although an urban leader he is also the prophet of the Bedouin and himself a kind of nomad, a «sojourner»—an «orphan». From this perspective travel can almost be seen as

a *sacrament*. Every religion sanctifies travel to some degree, but Islam is virtually unimaginable without it.

The Prophet said, «Seek knowledge, even as far as China». From the beginning Islam lifts travel above all «mundane» utilitarianism and gives it an epistemological or even gnostic dimension. «The jewel that never leaves the mine is never polished», says the sufi Saadi. To «educate» is to «lead outside», to give the pupil a perspective beyond parochiality and mere subjectivity.

Some sufis may have done all their traveling in the Imaginal World of archetypal dreams and visions, but vast numbers of them took the Prophet's exhortations quite literally. Even today dervishes wander over the entire Islamic world—but as late as the 19th century they wandered in veritable hordes, hundreds or even thousands at a time, and covered vast distances. All in search of knowledge.

Unofficially there existed two basic types of wandering sufi: the «gentleman-scholar» type, and the mendicant dervish. The former category includes Ibn Battuta (who collected sufi initiations the way some occidental gentlemen once collected masonic degrees); and on a much more serious level—the «Greatest Shaykh» Ibn Arabi, who meandered slowly through the 13th century from his native Spain, across North Africa through Egypt to Mecca, and finally to Damascus.

Ibn Arabi actually left accounts of his search for saints and adventures on the road, which could be pieced together from his voluminous writings to form a kind of *rihla* or «travel text» (a recognised genre of Islamic literature) or autobiography. Ordinary scholars travelled in search of rare texts on theology or jurisprudence, but Ibn Arabi sought only the highest secrets of esotericism and the loftiest «openings» into the world of divine illumination, for him every «journey to the outer horizons» was also a «journey to the inner horizons» of spiritual psychology and gnosis.

On the visions he experienced in Mecca alone he wrote a 12-volume work (*The Meccan Revelations*), and he has also left us precious sketches of hundreds of his contemporaries, from the greatest philosophers of the age to humble dervishes and «madmen», anonymous women saints and «Hidden Masters». Ibn Arabi enjoyed a special relation with Khezr, the immortal and unknown prophet, the «Green Man», who sometimes appears to wandering sufis in distress, to rescue them from the desert, or to initiate them. Khezr, in a sense, can be called the patron saint of the travelling dervishes—and the prototype. (He first appears in the Koran as a mysterious wanderer and companion of Moses in the desert.)

Christianity once included a few orders of wandering mendicants (in fact St. Francis organised one after meeting with dervishes in the Holy Land, who may have bestowed upon him a «cloak of initiation»—the famous patchwork robe he was wearing when he returned to Italy)—but Islam spawned dozens, perhaps hundreds of such orders.

As Sufism crystallised from the loose spontaneity of early days to an institution with rules and grades, «travel for knowledge» was also regularised and organised. Elaborate handbooks of duties for dervishes were produced which included methods for turning travel into a very specific form of meditation. The whole Sufi «path» itself was symbolised in terms of *intentional travel*.

In some cases itineraries were fixed (e.g., the Hajj); other involved waiting for «signs» to appear, coincidences, intuitions, «adventures» such as those which inspired the travels of the Arthurian knights. Some orders limited the time spent in any one place to 40 days; others made a rule of never sleeping twice in the same place. The strict orders, such as the Naqshbandis, turned travel

into a kind of full-time choreography, in which every movement was preordained and designed to *enhance consciousness*.

By contrast, the more heterodox orders (such as the Qalandars) adopted a «rule» of total spontaneity and abandon—«permanent unemployment» as one of them called it—an insouciance of bohemian proportions—a «dropping out» at once both scandalous and completely traditional. Colorfully dressed, carrying their begging bowls, axes, and standards, addicted to music and dance, carefree and cheerful (sometimes to the point of «blameworthiness»!), orders such as the Nematollahis of 19th century Persia grew to proportions that alarmed both sultans and theologians—many dervishes were executed for «heresy». Today the true Qalandars survive mostly in India, where their lapses from orthodoxy include a fondness for hemp and a sincere hatred of work. Some are charlatans, some are simply bums—but a surprising number of them seem to be people of *attainment* how can I put it? people of self-realization, marked by a distinct aura of grace, or *baraka*.

All the different types of sub travel we've described are united by certain shared vital structural forces. One such force might be called a «magical» worldview, a sense of life that rejects the «merely» random for a reality of signs and wonders, of meaningful coincidences and «unveilings». As anyone who's ever tried it will testify, intentional travel *immediately* opens one up to this «magical» influence.

A psychologist might explain this phenomenon (either with awe or with reductionist disdain) as «subjective» ; while the pious believer would take it quite literally. From the sun point of view neither interpretation rules out the other, nor suffices in itself, to explain away the marvels of the Path. In sufism, the «objective» and the «subjective» are not considered opposites, but complements. From the point of view of the two-dimensional thinker (whether scientific or religious) such paradoxology smacks of the forbidden.

Another force underlying all forms of intentional travel can be described by the Arabic word *adab*. On one level *adab* simply means «good manners» and in the case of travel these manners are based on the ancient customs of desert nomads, for whom both wandering and hospitality are sacred acts. In this sense the dervish shares both the privileges and the responsibilities of the *guest*.

Bedouin hospitality is a clear survival of the primordial economy of the Gift—a relation of reciprocity. The wanderer must be taken in (the dervish must be fed)—but thereby the wanderer assumes a role prescribed by ancient custom—and must give back something to the host. For the bedouin this relation is almost a form of clientage:—the breaking of bread and sharing of salt constitute a sort of kinship. Gratitude is not a sufficient response to such generosity. The traveler must consent to a temporary adoption—anything less would offend against *adab*.

Islamic society retains at least a sentimental attachment to these rules, and thus creates a special niche for the dervish, that of the full-time guest. The dervish returns the gifts of society with the gift of *baraka*. In ordinary pilgrimage the traveler receives *baraka from* a place, but the dervish reverses the flow and brings *baraka to* a place. The sufi may think of himself (or herself) as a permanent pilgrim—but to the ordinary stay-at-home people of the mundane world the sufi is a kind of perambulatory shrine.

Now tourism in its very structure breaks the reciprocity of host and guest. In English, a «host» may have either guests or parasites. The tourist is a parasite for no amount of money can pay for hospitality. The true traveler is a *guest* and thus serves a very real function, even today, in

societies where the ideals of hospitality have not yet faded from the «collective mentality». To be a host, in such societies, is a *meritorious act*. Therefore, to be a guest is also to *give merit*.

The modern traveler who grasps the simple spirit of this relation will be forgiven many lapses in the intricate ritual of adab (how many cups of coffee? Where to put one's feet? How to be entertaining? How to show gratitude? etc.) peculiar to a specific culture. And if one bothers to master a few of the traditional forms of adab, and to deploy them with heartfelt sincerity, then both guest and host will gain more than they put into the relation and this *more* is the unmistakable sign of the presence of the Gift.

Another level of meaning of the word adab connects it with *culture* (since culture can be seen as the sum of all manners and customs); in modern usage the Department of «Arts and Letters» at a University would be called *Adabiyyat*. To have adab in this sense is to be «polished» (like that well-traveled gem)—but this has nothing necessarily to do with «fine arts» or literacy or being a cityslicker or even being «cultured». It is a matter of the «heart».

«Adab» is sometimes given as a one-word definition of schism. But insincere manners (*ta'arof* in Persian) and insincere culture alike are shunned by the sufi—«There is no *ta'arof* in *Tassawuf* [Sufism]», as the dervishes say; ..*Darvishi*» is an adjectival synonym for informality, the laid-back quality of the people of Heart—and for *spontaneous adab*, so to speak. The true guest and host never make an obvious effort to fulfil the «rules» of reciprocity—they may follow the ritual scrupulously, or they may bend the forms creatively, but in either case they will give their actions a depth of sincerity that manifests as natural grace. Adab is a kind of *love*.

A complement of this «technique» (or «Zen») of human relations can be found in the sufi manner of relating to the world in general. The «mundane» world—of social deceit and negativity, of usurious emotions inauthentic consciousness («*mauvaise conscience*»), boorishness, ill-will, inattention, blind reaction, false spectacle, empty discourse, etc. etc.—all this no longer holds any interest for the traveling dervish. But those who say that the dervish has abandoned «this world» «God's Wide Earth»—would be mistaken.

The dervish is not a Gnostic Dualist who hates the *biosphere* (which certainly includes the imagination and the emotions, as well as «matter» itself). The early Moslem ascetics certainly closed themselves off from everything. When Rabiah, the woman saint of Basra, was urged to come out of her house and «witness the wonders of God's creation», she replied, «Come *into* the house and see them», i.e., come into the heart of contemplation of the oneness which is above the manyness of reality. «*Contraction*» and «*Expansion*» are both sufi terms for spiritual states. Rabiah was manifesting *Contraction*: a kind of sacred melancholia which has been metaphorized as the «Caravan of Winter», of return to Mecca (the center, the heart), of inferiority, and of asceticism or self-denial. She was not a world-hating Dualist, nor even a moralistic flesh-hating puritan. She was simply manifesting a certain specific kind of grace.

The wandering dervish however manifests a state more typical of Islam in its most exuberant energies. He indeed seeks *Expansion*, spiritual joy based on the sheer multiplicity of the divine generosity in material creation. (Ibn Arabi has an amusing «proof» that *this* world is the *best* world—for, if it were *not*, then God would be ungenerous—which is absurd. Q.E.D.) In order to appreciate the multiple way-marks of the Wide Earth precisely as the unfolding of this generosity, the sufi cultivates what might be called the *theophanic gaze*:— the opening of the «Eye of the Heart» to the experience of certain places, objects people, events as *locations of the «shining-through»* of divine Light.

The dervish travels, so to speak, both in the material world and in the «World of Imagination» simultaneously. But for the eye of the heart these worlds interpenetrate at certain points. One might say that they mutually reveal or «unveil» each other. Ultimately, they are «one»—and only our state of tranced inattention, our mundane consciousness, prevents us from experiencing this «deep» identity at every moment. The purpose of intentional travel, with its «adventures» and its uprooting of habits, is to shake loose the dervish from all the trance-effects of ordinariness. Travel, in other words, is meant to induce a certain state of consciousness or «spiritual state»—that of Expansion.

For the wanderer, each person one meets might act as an «angel», each shrine one visits may unlock some initiatic dream, each experience of Nature may vibrate with the presence of some «spirit of place». Indeed, even the mundane and ordinary may suddenly be seen as numinous (as in the great travel haiku of the Japanese Zen poet Basho)—a face in the crowd at a railway station, crows on telephone wires, sunlight in a puddle...

Obviously one doesn't *need* to travel to experience this state. But travel can be used—that is, an art of travel can be acquired—to maximise the chances for attaining such a state. It is a *moving meditation*, like the Taoist martial arts. The *Caravan of Summer* moved outward, out of Mecca, to the rich trading lands of Syria and Yemen. Likewise the dervish is «moving out» (it's always «moving day»), heading forth, taking off, on «perpetual holiday» as one poet expressed it, with an open Heart, an attentive eye (and other senses), and a yearning for Meaning, a thirst for knowledge. One must remain *alert*, since anything might suddenly unveil itself as a *sign*. This sounds like a kind of «paranoia» —although «metanoia» might be a better term and indeed one finds «madmen» amongst the dervishes, «attracted ones», overpowered by divine influxions, lost in the Light. In the Orient the insane are often cared for and admired as helpless saints, because «mental illness» may sometimes appear as a symptom of too much holiness rather than too little «reason». Hemp's popularity amongst the dervishes can be attributed to its power to induce a kind of intuitive attentiveness which constitutes a controllable insanity: —herbal metanoia. But travel in itself can intoxicate the heart with the beauty of theophanic presence. It's a question of *practise*—the polishing of the jewel—removal of moss from the rolling stone.

In the old days (which are still going on in some remote parts of the East) Islam thought of itself as a whole world, a wide world, a space with great latitude within which Islam embraced the whole of society and nature. This latitude appeared on the social level as *tolerance*. There was room enough, even for such marginal groups as mad wandering dervishes. Sufism itself or at least its austere orthodox and «sober» aspect—occupied a central position in the cultural discourse. «Everyone» understood intentional travel by analogy with the Hail—everyone *understood* the dervishes, even if they disapproved.

Nowadays however Islam views itself as a partial world, surrounded by unbelief and hostility, and suffering internal ruptures of every sort. Since the 19th century Islam has lost its global consciousness and sense of its own wideness and completeness. No longer therefore can Islam easily find a place for every marginalized individual and group within a pattern of tolerance and social order. The dervishes now appear as an *intolerable difference* in society. Every Moslem must now be the same, united against all outsiders, and struck from the same prototype. Of course Moslems have always «imitated» the Prophet and viewed his image as the norm—and this has acted as a powerful unifying force for style and substance within Dar al-Islam. But «nowadays» the puritans and reformers have forgotten that this «imitation» was not directed only at an early-medieval Meccan merchant named Mohammad but also at the *insan alkamil* (the «Perfect Man»

or «Universal Human»), an ideal of *inclusion* rather than *exclusion*, an ideal of *integral culture*, not an attitude of purity in peril, not xenophobia disguised as piety, not totalitarianism, not reaction.

The dervish is persecuted nowadays in most of the Islamic world. Puritanism always embraces the most atrocious aspects of modernism in its crusade to strip the Faith of «medieval accretions» such as popular sufism. And surely the way of the wandering dervish cannot thrive in a world of airplanes and oil-wells, of nationalist/chauvinist hostilities (and thus of impenetrable *borders*), and of a puritanism which suspects all difference as a threat. This puritanism has triumphed not only in the East, but rather closer to home as well. It is seen in the «time discipline» of modern tooLate-Capitalism, and in the porous rigidity of consumerist hyperconformity, as well as in the bigoted reaction and sex-hysteria of the «Christian Right». Where in all this can we find room for the poetic (and parasitic!) life of *Aimless Wandering*—the life of Chuang Tzu (who coined this slogan) and his Taoist progeny—the life of Saint Francis and his shoeless devotees—the life of (for example) Nur All Shah Isfahani, a 19th century sufi poet who was executed in Iran for the awful heresy of meandering-dervishism?

Here is the flip side of the «problem of tourism»:—the problem of the *disappearance of «aimless wandering»*. Possibly the two are directly related, so that the more tourism becomes possible, the more dervishism becomes impossible. In fact, we might well ask if this little essay on the delightful life of the dervish possesses the least bit of relevance for the contemporary world. Can this knowledge help us to *overcome* tourism, even within our own consciousness and life? Or is it merely an exercise in nostalgia for lost possibilities—a futile indulgence in romanticism?

Well, yes and no. Sure, I confess I'm hopelessly romantic about the *form* of the dervish life, to the extent that for a while I turned my back on the mundane world and followed it myself. Because of course, it hasn't really disappeared. Decadent yes—but not gone forever. What little I know about travel I learned in those few years—I owe a debt to «medieval accretions» I can never pay—and I'll never regret my «escapism» for a single moment. BUT—I don't consider the *form* of dervishism to be the answer to the «problem of tourism.» The *form* has lost most of its efficacy. There's no point in trying to «preserve» it (as if it were a pickle, or a lab specimen)—there's nothing quite so pathetic as mere «survival».

But: beneath the charming outer forms of dervishism lies the conceptual matrix, so to speak, which we've called *intentional travel*. On this point we should suffer no embarrassment about «nostalgia». We have asked ourselves whether or not we *desire* a means to discover the art of travel, whether we *want and will* to overcome «the inner tourist», the false consciousness which screens us from the experience of the Wide World's way-marks. The way of the dervish (or of the Taoist, the Franciscan, etc.) interests us—finally—only to the extent that it can provide us with a key—not THE Key, perhaps—but ... a key. And of course—it does.

One fundamental key to success in Travel is of course *attentiveness*. We call it «paying attention» in English & «prêter attention» in French (in Arabic, however, one *gives* attention) suggesting that we're as stingy with our attentiveness as we are with our money. Quite often it seems that *no one is* «paying attention», that everyone is hoarding their consciousness—what? saving it for a rainy day?—and damping down the fires of awareness lest all available fuel be consumed in a single holocaust of unbearable *knowing*.

This model of consciousness seems suspiciously «Capitalist» however—as if indeed our attention were a limited resource, once spent forever irrecoverable. A *usury* of perception now appears:—we demand interest on our payment-of-attention, as if it were a loan rather than an expense. Or as if our consciousness were threatened by an entropic «heat-death», against which

the best defense must consist of a dull mediocre trance-state of grudging half-attention—a miserliness of psychic resources—a *refusal* to notice the unexpected or to savour the miraculousness of the ordinary—a lack of *generosity*.

But what if we treated our perceptions as gifts rather than payments? What if we *gave* our attention instead of *paying* it? According to the law of reciprocity, the gift is returned with a gift—there is no expenditure, no scarcity, no debt against Capital, no penury, no punishment for giving our attention away, and no end to the potentiality of attentiveness.

Our consciousness is not a commodity, nor is it a contractual agreement between the Cartesian ego and the abyss of Nothingness, nor is it simply a function of some meat-machine with a limited warranty. True, eventually we wear out and break. In a certain sense the hoarding of our energies makes sense—we «save» ourselves for the truly important moments, the breakthroughs, the «peak experiences».

But if we picture ourselves as shallow coin-purses—if we barricade the «doors of perception» like fearful peasants at the howling of boreal wolves—if we never «pay attention»—how will we recognise the approach and advent of those precious moments, those *openings*?

We need a model of cognition that emphasises the «magic» of reciprocity:—to *give* attention is to *receive* attention, as if the universe in some mysterious way responds to our cognition with an influx of effortless grace. If we convinced ourselves that attentiveness follows a rule of «synergy» rather than a law of depletion, we might begin to overcome in ourselves the banal mundanity of quotidian inattention, and open ourselves to «higher states.»

In any case, the fact remains that unless we learn to cultivate such states, travel will never amount to more than tourism. And for those of us who are not already adepts at the Zen of travel, the cultivation of these states does indeed demand an initial expenditure of energy. We have inhibitions to repress, hesitations to conquer, habits of introversion or bookishness to break, anxieties to sublimate. Our third-rate stay-at-home consciousness seems safe and cozy compared to the dangers and discomforts of the Road with its eternal novelty, its constant demands on our attention. «Fear of freedom» poisons our unconscious, despite our conscious *desire* for freedom in travel. The art we're seeking seldom occurs as a natural talent. It must be cultivated practised perfected. **We must summon up the will for intentional travel.**

It's a truism to complain that difference is disappearing from the world—and it's true, too. But it's sometimes amazing to discover how resilient and organic the different can be. Even in America, land of Malls and tv's, regional differences not only survive but mutate and thrive in the *interstices*, in the cracks that criss-cross the monolith, beneath the notice of the Media Gaze, invisible even to the local bourgeoisie. If all the world is becoming one-dimensional, we need to look *between the dimensions*.

I think of travel as *fractal* in nature. It takes place off the map-as-text, outside the official Consensus, like those hidden and embedded patterns that nestle within the infinite bifurcations of nonlinear equations in the strange world of chaos mathematics. In truth the world has not been completely mapped, because people and their everyday lives have been excluded from the map, or treated as «faceless statistics», or forgotten. In the fractal dimensions of unofficial reality all human beings—and even a great many «places»—remain unique and different. «Pure» and «unspoiled»? Maybe not. Maybe nobody and nowhere was ever really pure. Purity is a will-o-the-wisp, and perhaps even a dangerous form of totalitarianism. Life is gloriously impure. Life *drifts*.

In the 1950's the French Situationists developed a technique for travel which they called the *derive*, the «drift.» They were disgusted with themselves for never leaving the usual ruts and pathways of their habit-driven lives; they realised they'd never even seen Paris. They began to carry out structureless random expeditions through the city, hiking or sauntering by day, drinking by night, opening up their own tight little world into a terra incognita of slums, suburbs, gardens, and adventures. They became revolutionary versions of Baudelaire's *famous flaneur*, the idle stroller, the displaced subject of urban capitalism. Their aimless wandering became insurrectionary praxis.

And now, something remains possible—aimless wandering, the sacred drift. Travel cannot be confined to the permissible (and deadening) gaze of the tourist, for whom the whole world is inert, a lump of picturesqueness, waiting to be consumed—because the whole question of permission is an illusion. We can issue our own travel permits. We can allow ourselves to participate, to experience the world as a living relation not as a theme-park. We carry within ourselves the hearts of travelers, and we don't need any experts to define and limit our more-than-fractal complexities, to «interpret» for us, to «guide» us, to mediate our experience for us, to sell us back the images of our desires.

The *sacred drift* is born again. Keep it secret.

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Overcoming Tourism

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