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Motion&Emotion: Moving Bodies, Touring Subjects

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Abstract

The paper explores the concept of 'radical mobility' as the historical result of accumulated diasporas in modern and post-modern culture, and as the distinctive lifestyle pattern of today's transversal communities, both real and imaginative, that dwell along the paths designed by old and new globalisation. In this view, places and subjects imply a rethinking of the tropes of travel and tourism, whereby places resist the simplistic 'non' imagined by Marc Augé, though suffering the grip of consumption detected by Urry. The paper analyses the concept of 'touring subjects', i.e., regular movers that revive "nomadic" attitudes (Braidotti) and are attached to "temporary identities" (Augé), entangled in constant but unpredictable desires of consumption (Appadurai). Not yet totally nullified in their ability to make sense, react, produce emotion and agency, 'touring' figures and voices are widely represented in literature and in the media, and can be found at the crossroads of many crucial cultural and aesthetic stances, as well as in topical situations not devoid of moments of serious crisis, dramatic choices and even tragic events. Associated to authorial narrative figures caught up and lost in the puzzle of their multiperspective narrations, these subjects face paradoxical, unprecedented conditions in their being strongly exposed to multicultural, hyperreal complexities that go far beyond the common post-modern rethorics, whose social and political potentiality is still to be imagined and acknowledged.

1. Inside the becoming of mobility

> Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes. But what would happen, I began to ask, if travel were untethered, seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences? Practices of displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension [...]. Moreover, when travel, as in his account, becomes a kind of norm, dwelling demands explication. Why, with what degrees of freedom, do people stay home? (Clifford 2001: 3-5)

We live in a world of rapid global mobility. To define this current social scenario, scholars speak of a *traveling society* and of *touring cultures* (Royek, Urry 1997) whose subjects have embraced mobility among the practices of everyday life (Highmore 2002). In this sense, we might speak of a *touring life,* which is altering our very perception of existence: life is no longer perceived as a seamless, continuous whole, interrupted occasionally by periods of time spent traveling, but rather as a fluctuating series of more or less arranged interstices, in a fraught tangle where simultaneity prevails. Such interstices are in fact, à la Bakhtin, veritable 'chronotopes' projected onto the tangible scene of radical mobilities daily performed in a heavily infrastructural space (motorways, railways and tube stations, airports), and now made familiar by the imaginary scenarios put forth by the media and by powerful narratives scripts devised for mass consumption. James Clifford (1997), reflecting on routes as the true contexts of life and identity (as counterparts of roots), speaks of humans as "touring subjects" identified, explored and interpretable via multiple discourses. Today these are in fact cultural objects themselves, located at the crossroads of many situations, transmedially portrayed and continuously re-defined.

Scholars from a number of disciplines – philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, mediologists – currently understand this perpetual state of dislocation as a paradigm loaded with social and political implications, and with repercussions on governance. What we are facing here are subjects who have embodied transit also on a mental level, floated through and beyond endless, imperceptible 'motion shocks' experienced in segmented and reiterated space-time junctions consumed in areas of transit and of global contact. And mobility is pervasive, whether it is physical or virtual: 'driven by' and 'trapped inside' this powerful motion device, steered by collective imagination (Salazar 2012), the touring subject builds up an anti-narrative energy (Said 1984), being in fact the object rather than the subject of speeches or narratives. The touring subject is a recurrent *topos* in media, literature and visual arts, as well as in social studies, academic writing and research. It is often paired with adjectives such as migrant, diasporic, nomadic, cosmopolitan, multicultural, polyglot, decentred. Along the lines of James Clifford, who considers travel "in its broadest sense" (2001: 55), we will draw a provisional map of these subjects 'in transit' with a view to outlining their distinctive features.

In its broadest sense, the term 'travel' may well be linked to "experience" (Leed 1991: 5), varied experiences which, albeit overlapping at times, do not necessarily coincide: our touring subjects may thus occasionally be either cosmopolitan travellers, temporary citizens, regular commuters, professional travellers or simple tourists, all in their own ways bearers of a given form of controlled nomadism. Described, narrated and qualified according to "differentiation" (one strong claim in the 1920s was on the difference between travel and tourism, that distinctive scholars such as Barthes and Eco have then contributed to blur; Bonadei 2005), in the globalised dynamics of 'marketing of everything', supported and reinforced by pervasive digitalisation, the individuality of experience enters a viral narration that rather collapses into "de-differentiation", a critical concept which is paramount in the present academic debate on tourism and tourists as cultural objects embodied in everyday life.

According to Jansson (2018; 2020), the normalization of transmediated tourism planning and the exposure to other people's tourism practices in everyday life are the major factors involved in the incumbent de-differentiation, and only new proposed typologies could yield answers to several important questions. One question is relevant to our present discourse: "How is the streamable transmedia tourist discursively constructed across business sectors and social fields – and how is this mode of address related to other means of producing digital subjects?"

(Jansson 2020: 404). The research is open to new explorations, towards a more comprehensive understanding of "how transmedia opens up tourism to ordinary life, and vice versa, and thus plays into, and reinforces, long-standing processes of de-differentiation, while at the same time invoking new forms of reflexivity, distinction and boundary work among post-tourists" (ibidem).

2. From travel to transit: Narrations on the move

> Were I to choose an auspicious image for the new millennium, I would choose that one: the sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher who raises himself above the weight of the world, showing that with all his gravity he has the secret of lightness. (Calvino 1993: 12)

When we think of the imaginary scope of travel and its landscapes, memory and instinct carry us away across the vast galaxy of travel literature. Although jagged and altered by time, this galaxy yields to us images of well-rounded travellers, men and women, men of every status, women of initiative and action, capable of getting lost and of finding themselves no matter where in the world. We speak of travel 'heroes', exposed to dangers and encounters, adventurers from elsewhere in the throes of a role and of identity crisis which travel amplifies and occasionally solves. Apart from journeys explicitly assigned to the fantastic, the characters/actors involved in travel coincide with the authors of journey accounts which, by tradition, straddle two contiguous genres: journal writing and reporting. Travel literature is dotted with author-travellers, whose deeds, more or less dramatic, are reflected in a writing full of autobiographical markers and generally conveyed in the first person. Hence the fortune of a genre established under the 'romantic' aegis of champions of adventure and of exotic encounter: starting with Byron (the hero of many foreign disguises) and the legendary Loti, through Stevenson's tropical shores and all the way to Chatwin and Morand, to name but a few. Turning to more prosaic accounts, we find as well minor travellers, whose main concern was to draw up an honest account of a journey starting with material details and precise information: a journey that is no less 'unique', especially in the past centuries, hence worth recording and handing down.

We can proceed, quite deliberately, by way of generalizations to pinpoint common traits and trace rhetorical motifs: at stake is again the experience, not quite the fate of just any subject, but of one who also happens to be the author of her/his own story. What happens, however, to rhetorical strategies and narrative conventions when very ordinary travellers show up on the scene? For they do not hide their ordinary condition of subjects quite possibly uninterested in travel for signalling status or for pursuing something just to feel different. On the contrary, in a world where travel is becoming more and more a daily practice, such subjects in transit – labelled above as *touring subjects* – are confronted with people and situations that belong to everyday life, not so heroic indeed. They thus live in traveling and in their journeys experience what closely resembles everyday life. Accordingly, the collective imagination whereby stories of *touring subjects* are built draws less and less on the literary resources of the adventurous or the exotic: if it does, it is to evoke dystopias or play with some oxymora of post-modernism (sublime squalor, 'local colour' that is artificial and grotesque, a picturesque so glossy that it comes across as pathetic).

At the centre of multiple narratives and textual representations, hijacked by media and advertising, *touring subjects* are thus 'diminished' heroes: some present themselves as dispossessed inhabitants of a world which, all things considered, is still very much marked off by borders and walls, a world where passports and customs checks reassert physical and symbolic differences. In today's traveling society, and if we look at contemporary fiction, both migrant subjects and luxury travellers – professionals, artists, scholars, or tourists – inhabit mobility, their routes constantly crossed through. In their various capacities and different roles, they are all users of public spaces and goods tied to the topic of travel, taken by surprise as they are off to a train station, drive down the motorway or pull up at service areas, as they await boarding at an airport, indulge in some duty free purchases or end up in one of the many shopping venues that irretrievably infest places of transit and vacation. They seem all at home in public spaces (where one leaves and arrives), stationed in airports – like the illegal immigrant in Spielberg's *The Terminal*, who manages to get by for months on expediency

while the tragedy slowly blurs into its happy ending (Bottiroli 1995). Identifiable by the suffering inherent to their condition, these migrant in transit share some superficial features with cosmopolitan commuters of the global society, who experience nomadism without being forced to it.

3. Diaspora subjects

> "I belong to nothing, to no law, I circumvent the law, I myself make the law". This stance on the part of the foreigner certainly arouses the conscious commination of the natives; just the same it attracts the unconscious sympathy of contemporary subjects-unbalanced, wanting everything, dedicated to the absolute, and insatiable wanderers. (Kristeva 1991: 103)

Between the 1970s and 1990s, many writers had distinguished themselves for narratives that could be defined (and were defined by postcolonial criticism) as 'diasporic', that is, linked to narrations retelling of subjects who resided in a foreign country, separated from their land and cultural roots, far from their native homes. These men and women established their home in a foreign elsewhere, in the wake of their fathers' (or their own) migration, in places that often coincide with a metropolitan, multicultural landscape – first London or Paris, the 'centres' of former Western empires, then the Asian and South American metropolitan centres of global miscegenation or *métissage* (e.g., Bombay, Mexico City or Seoul). These writers gave voice and narrative form to a world of migration and contamination, which saw the emergence of "a differential community" (Bhabha 1990); a world where individuals inhabiting a 'third space' of identities in the making (neither residents nor foreigners) wage a daily battle with their condition as "discrepant cosmopolitans" (Clifford 1992).

Rushdie, Kureishi, Ishiguro, Ghosh – to name but a few of the most notable champions of migrant literature – have reached inside the interstices of a diasporic history that "is perpetually broken down and remade in the dynamic interweaving of what we have inherited and what we are" (Chambers 1994: 24). The homes and movements they narrate ultimately indicate that now we are all displaced subjects "traveling across the networks of a world invariably strained between individual heritage and a potential, shared cultural heritage" (ibidem).

At the end of the 1980s, a young generation of writers, mostly European and American, or in any case trained in the West for a part of their lives, emerged in the international literary arena by embracing cultural globalization as a fact. They did use the spaces and objects familiar to diaspora narrative but in an inverted logic, whereby those who are chronically displaced (*dépaysé*) are in fact the citizens of a centre despoiled of its distinctive marks, a place whose central tokens now lie scattered across multiple contaminations. Post-modern, or new-modern anti-heroes, a gallery of fictional subjects find themselves involved into stories they tend to pass over with the apparent ease and nonchalance of those who have embraced nomadism as a pose, lingering in the many 'contact zones' encountered in their touring lives, casual witnesses of scenarios where prosaic life turns into dramatic events.

From the grotesque New York metropolis outlined by De Lillo, to the epic forays of Houellebecq, from the domestic melting pots dissected with irony by many young writers to the cosmopolitan "sentimental traveller" of Xavier Marías, up to the post-tourist pace of the protagonist of Geoff Dyer's *Yoga For People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It* (2003): in these novels, we are met with narrating subjects and characters situated in multicultural realms or microcosms which forces them to perpetually struggle with translations, or rather more often makes them 'lost in translation', the victims of intriguing and sometimes destructive misunderstandings. As a result, these stories are kind of travels within, bitter self-revelations of impotence or indifference with the admission of one's displacement.

Chatwin – maybe the last, most remarkable among the 'romantic' writer travellers – claimed that anyone who travels, regardless of how and why one may do so, becomes a potential "autobiographical individual", a subject who, by looking around, undergoes a progressive change in himself/herself and in the way s/he observes the world. Drawing on the tradition of travel reports, such itinerant storytellers are closer to amateur ethnographers or professional reporters engaged in chronicles from everywhere. Here is the emergence of a 'writing gaze', very much full of visual inceptions and of cinematic imaginaries, whose dis-

cursive strategies recall those advocated by Italo Calvino in his *Six Memos*, when he proposed a writing able to *travel quickly and lightly.* Calvino was then detecting in the literary tradition the stylistic modes that were best suited to the becoming mental speed of the advancing new millennium and to the touring subjects that were to inhabit it – "lightness", "speed", "correctness", "visibility", "multiplicity" – considering that "correctness of style is a question of quick adjustment, of agility of both thought and expression" (Calvino 1993: 39).

On closer inspection, the statute of travellers and wayfarers and the literary modes that are inherent in their wandering in fact share some intrinsic qualities (and instances of fracture) of contemporary subjects: they are indeed imploded, Babelic and discontinuous like the landscape they cross. Along these lines, Calvino warns, lightness, speed, correctness, visibility and multiplicity no longer form a repertoire of figures *which speak* of modernity; rather, they become discursive tools *for talking* about modernity, for recognizing it and hence for learning how to control it, by matching distant and different points between them, negotiating among languages, meanings, voices, perspectives.

Bouncing frantically between the four corners of the planet, today's touring subjects are *de facto* compelled to 'travel quickly and lightly', in a whirlwind of fleeting encounters, differences, multiple stimuli, images. And yet, in a world whose lightness drifts dangerously towards superficiality, overwhelmed with data, or invited to unnecessary consume, they are forced to pursue, if not literal *correctness,* at least a fair degree of knowledge of the real, lest they should be utterly swamped by it.

4. Lifestyles of transit

> This inevitably implies another sense of 'home', of being in the world. It means to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging. (Chambers 1995: 4)

Over time, capitalism and its – mobile par excellence – social agents have generated "accumulated diasporas of modernity" (Chambers 1995: 5) in all their present varieties. It is the result of an "induced, often brutally enforced, migration of individuals and of whole populations" (ivi: 6) and of that endless roaming tied to work and trade, to tourism and to mainstream shopping, everyday practices shared by an ever wider and more intersectional community. The well-known and widespread Fly & Drive tourist formula, commonly applied to holidays and leisure trips, is also perfectly suited to even broader and frequent activities. On our way to work, billboards display landscapes that appeal to our faculties as individuals on the move, while for their part, radio and television make us travel, forcing us to come to terms with sudden perceptual alterations and unending mental deterritorialization. And sitting comfortably at a desk in front of a computer, we can navigate across the fluid non-place of an IT network, which makes it possible for us to traverse the world without physically leaving home or office. In our prosaic, ordinary lives and rather in spite of ourselves, a sort of travel life-style has been gaining ground: clothes, objects, food and technology gadgets have all become visible signs of belonging to a mobile population, present and exhibited even outside airports, highways, stations, and other places more conventionally devoted to transit and mobility. The journey, we might adventure, with its symbols and its fetishes, has thus been reasserted as a truly global 'mythology' à la Roland Barthes (1957), which bears the stigmata of the perfect postmodern myth: it is imitable and exportable, contagious, fashionable and marketable. The distinguishing marks of mobility-driven inhabitants – casual clothes, backpacks, travel bags, but also credit cards, mobile phones and laptops – are in fact totemic objects of a vast tribe that today identifies itself in accordance with viral trends which, via a silent shared sense of belonging, transcend borders and demand immediate mutual recognition. And yet, beyond the imitative symbols and global pressures exerted by a pervading mass imaginary, each subject is granted a degree of freedom whereby, in the words of Arun Appadurai, everyone may express a "situated difference" (1996: 12), i.e. a deviation from the prevailing norm dictated by a contextual, individual or private concern. Let us not forget that if ways of thinking and lifestyles

are indeed shaped in a highly pervasive instance of mass brainwashing, it is also true that these are then taken up by individuals in the micro-context of their own personal experiences rather than by simulacra. Life, imaginary life as much as actual life, is invariably lived by people in flesh and blood, watched over by actual eyes, matched to private agencies which inhabit a difference reworked into individual idiolects (Appadurai 1996: 11-16) and possibly translated – as James Clifford would say – into "indigenous articulations" (2001).

By ascribing value and dignity to "situated" subjects and "indigenous articulations", charged with meaning even at a minimal scale, Appadurai and Clifford propose to re-read globalization by calling into question the notion of "difference". This is achieved by relying on the heuristic value of difference in highlighting similarities and contrasts on a "minimal" and invariably "situated" scale, in other words via the viewing of practices, distinctions, objects or ideologies as endowed with a cultural dimension, whereby culture ceases to be a value in itself and for itself, becoming a form of agency always related to given contingencies. In this view, even diasporic experiences, as forced outcomes of globalization, are reinterpreted not only in light of the conflicts they trigger, but also as historical and social vectors; in short, they are seen as part of a broader process of mobility that perpetually drives humanity across the world. Ultimately, the subjects of these multiple diasporas of modernity witness an extraterritorial condition that may be understood not merely as a loss but also as an option. Admittedly, the social and political potential of these diasporic subjects, as well as the nomadic option, are yet to be widely imagined and recognized.

5. Cityscapes and technoscapes

Mobility is somehow spectacular. It has to do with techno-prosthesis, and the city is its grand, historical, stage, i.e., a physical and imaginary space, made of concrete and woven into verbal images, as Augé claims in a short but intense essay, the city is squarely rooted in land but also pursues its own infinite expansion, which somehow ascribes it to the category of "non-places" (Augé 1992). A polymorphic and proliferating body, the city – the mobile landscape par excellence, the site of transit and exchange, of strolling and of meeting, of display and consumption, of stylistic production and proliferation – invariably embodies its natural inclination towards novelty and excess. All that is *of the* or *in the* city is sooner or later radiated, transmitted and translated outwards. It colonizes its surroundings and at the same time it dissolves its borders. This network-like logic, which inheres in the city and in its way of relating to the non-city, pertains to that web space which we cross with the same ease as we would cross a city. If in more than one prediction of the future cities philosophers and architects could imagine them as clusters of actual spaces connected to each other via virtual ties, the internet age has collapsed space into time, consigning our whole life to instant interconnection: with it, a sense of boundaries, measurement criteria, discriminating judgments collapse. (Here the city ends and what begins? London is bigger than Manchester; Paris is smarter than Bangkok). Cities and the Web share a fluid body and flexible boundaries, as icon-homes of a mobile population who, while still liable to unbridled information and driven to compulsive consumption, seems nevertheless amenable to "smart initiatives" (Rheingold 2002). Without fully subscribing to the utopian assumption underlying such approach, the fact remains that – as it happened for cities in past centuries – the Web has established itself as the greatest social laboratory for collective imagination: a workshop in which, more than elsewhere, languages and lifestyles are built, transmitted, consumed. Mobility and interconnection on a global scale, then, arguably become features of a mental attitude less anchored to ownership, whereby one is ready to 'walk with a light step' (Carter 1992), not averse to the countless multicultural shocks which transit entails.

Inhabitants of this transit-driven spacetime continuum experience a series of imperceptible changes which are at the same time a cause and an effect of deterritorialization, a special type of nomadism which is the outcome of identitarian devolution. Some scholars have noted that such state recalls an older condition, when senses and consciousness acted *through* space-time rather than *in* it, and when physical location was not perceived as one of the markers for self-recognition (Leed 1992).

There is no doubt that – regardless of social class, race, gender or wealth – the new nomads are proud

technology users: mobile phones (to everyone) and laptops are essential technological appendages young nomads use everywhere, with no effort: the Web has thus become the ultimate non-space of contemporary wandering, and PDAs, smartphones and laptops the useful totems of a "dwelling in mobility" daily projecting people into a multicultural and multilingual "third space" (Bhabha 1990) which politicians and legislators are still ill-equipped to grasp and govern.

Many around the world today share the idea and the mythology of a present / future entrusted to "intelligent mobility" and to technical-scientific solutions, where techno-mythology would group masses no longer by class or social environment, but rather by lifestyle and imaginary consumption. Some others speak of "smart mobs" (Rheingold 2002): communities of individuals who elude statistical grids (laid out in terms of age, class or gender), connected with each other and the network, able to carry out social and political activities which defy classification and enforce unconventional acts of power and consensus. Unlikely as it may sound, the Web has indeed been feeding the collective imagination with militant zeal, also by way of utopian perspectives that challenge distances and differences, making ideas and people travel, meet, measure up to each other. Beyond clichés, to be interconnected has become an actual marker of social status, the tangible sign of a participation made desirable and in many respects also 'fantastic' by accessibility and immediacy. Not surprisingly, all terms related to the Internet in the early days revolved around travel metaphors, and the contemporary nomads seem to set themselves up as the emerging figures inside virtual communities, headed by a new "intelligent communication" élite. Yet, as we learn day by day, such community is brittle, all the more fragile for being endlessly exposed to the buzz of an "industry of conscience" (Enzensberger 1962) which, much more keenly than in the past and thanks to the irresistible surge of the Web, seeds and fosters con-fusion between word and action, fiction and reality, symbol and commodity.

6. Transmedial mirrors and the hyper-real space

Organized travel, understood as the consumption of escape products within short, predetermined timeframes, provides a striking example of the pressures exerted by the so-called 'industry of conscience'. In organized travel, the spectacular production/consumption binary, with its special effects (the media carousel, glamorous ads, luxury, extravagant marketing, virtual seductions, promises of *uniqueness),* reaches fever-pitch. Among the numerous icons of travel culture, the tourist is arguably the one most deeply imbued with prevailing consumerism: s/he is the icon of a desiring subject whose practices, but also whose mere presence, yields controversial and paradoxical outcomes. This also affects our representation of ourselves, as we are rarely and unwillingly ready to take on the irksome label of 'tourists', still very much laden with demeaning connotations and tied to passivity and superficiality. People have a habit of thinking of themselves rather as travellers, perhaps nomads, or otherwise super-modern *flâneurs.* Yet speaking of ourselves as tourists is nothing more than an honest ethnographic act of self-recognition, for tourism is *de facto* a widespread cultural practice, quite possibly the most emblematic of contemporary Western society, an 'observational activity' practiced in mobility (Urry, Larsen 2011) that is calling for rigorous, in-depth investigation by scholars.

There lies a tourist inside each one of us, and not solely inside us Westerners. Tourism as a social phenomenon has rapidly expanded beyond the Western world, challenging regional and cultural borders. Due to its collective and 'tribal' ramifications, this fact has momentous epistemological significance. Modern anthropologists suggest that the *homo viator* of globalization is to some extent the most distinctive anthropological specimen of the new millennium. From another angle, the tourist is also a living paradox. Unwittingly a 'fugitive', he is also an irresponsible invader; at the same time actor and hostage to consumerism; a lover of differences and potentially able to "think differently", yet at once likely to drop into hackneyed clichés; highly creative yet also quite capable of grotesque conformity (Bonadei 2004; 2005).

In his severe assessment of mass "mythologies", Roland Barthes (1957) pays much attention to tourists and their icons, tracked down across the realms of literature, cinema and advertising. While he never wavered in his denunciation of certain bourgeois and

narrowly Western underpinnings, he was also fascinated by the strategies underlying a tourist's way of looking at the world, with 'desiring' eyes, hence potentially imaginative eyes, eager to cross borders and embrace differences. Albeit often unconsciously, Barthes' tourist falls within the paradigm of the 'open' subject, entitled – albeit for a limited time – to gaze at the world with the eyes of a stranger, to be an 'other' person and even to return home as 'different' (1970). With Michel Foucault (1984), we can talk about holidays and tourism as something that pertains to heterotopias, spaces of transit, rest, or contact, which involve breaking the seamless flow of time: mountain trails, beaches, hotels, holiday villages and even museums are all perfect instances of heterotopias made available to tourists and vacationers by dream makers.

In tourist heterotopias, an ambiguous game is played between the natural and the artificial: nature and history are nothing but fiction, cancelled and replaced by reassuring dimensions that belong neither to nature, however anthropized, nor to history, however mediated by narration. In short, space is here *disneyfied.* The sparkle of sensation leads tourists into the realm of invention, on dreamy, secluded islands carefully preserved and immaculately landscaped, desert resorts boasting artificial springs and lush palm trees which recall adventure-bound oases, quaint villages in the jungle where bungalows are well guarded and where Aboriginals, if sighted at all, are complacent and friendly.

In the wake of Baudrillard (1986) and his quest for 'sidereal' America and of other apocalyptic analysts, Augé (1999) considers virtual landscapes and their eco-technological dreams as the last frontier of tourism: 'museums for everything' and domesticated wilderness are becoming the quintessential example of landscapes intended for mass tourists, comfortable and easily accessible niches where emotions may be safely over-excited, and critical alertness is instead numbed, curbed, kept on a leash. Still on the streets of America, Umberto Eco (1986) observed how clearly artificial objects and landscapes draw thousands of visitors, apparently untroubled by the notion of a country staged as a Disney-style artificial display and yet perceived as more real than the real, i.e., as "hyper-real". What visitors craved for was less the real country than hyperreality itself, made up of mostly artificial sites where every object that elicits a 'gaze' turns into a spectacle. Eco's journey, which started with a holographic image of two naked girls in a cage, enclosed in a sort of transparent plastic cylinder, ran along the tracks of a "frenzied hyperreality" which cast holograms and waxworks as unique attractions. What Eco eventually came across in this "pilgrimage" is proof that the "all-true" is one with the "all-false", where "lies are enjoyed in a predicament of fullness" that is turned into *horror vacui*. It is a revelation shared with a mass of visitors, all captivated by the mock-up world conjured up by ardent supporters of the American legend. In short, it was the exhibition of a final check on reality, "not the image of the thing but its calque, or rather its double" (1986: 17).

According to Eco, American ideology grounds reassurance in imitation. The country lies enthralled by the dream of Universal Taming – and by the consequent 'Linus syndrome' (whereby happiness must take the form of a child's fateful blanket); a country where Nature and History are dangerous realities, to be kept at bay – we might add – via magical thinking recast in technical terms. Given these premises – and the tourist's transformation into a concerned philosopher – the "condition of pleasure lies in the fact that something has been falsified" (ivi: 64). In the last decade of the twentieth century, ethnographers of complex modernity (as they rather like to call themselves) have stigmatized the growing popularity of hyperreal or completely artificial places, where tourists experience a "retour du régard", where "les joies passives de la désidentification et le plaisir plus actif du jeu de role" may be tasted (Augé 1997: 129), and where the subject "s'éprouve comme spectateur sans que la nature du spectacle lui importe vraiment. Comme si la position du spectateur constituait l'essentiel du spectacle" (ivi : 110). Today many Disneylands lie scattered all over the world, and many sites resemble them: theme parks, shopping malls, museums and artificial landscapes. In these, nature and history are but quotes from a film whose plot is the consumption of goods and whose hero is the errant buyer of globalization.

7. Music for airports

> Where there is pleasure there is agency. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape. (Appadurai 1996: 7)

Much like nineteenth-century railway stations, airports are nowadays undoubtedly sites that best embody the idea and ideology of a travel culture across continents: airports stand out in contemporary topographies of global transit as quite possibly the most powerful icons of a *touring society.* Featured in the daily news, evoked by literature, used as advertising or movie locations, airports have forced their way into our daily imagination: not only as regards travel or vacation, but also against the backdrop of daily tragedies of migration and the persistent threat of impending catastrophe and post 9/11 terrorism.

As sites of everyday practices, airports have recently engaged scholars of modernity and post-modernity, who have made airports the object of critical reflection and have conjured evocative names for them – e.g., 'non-places', 'contact zones', 'heterotopias' – which mimic everyday life but redirect it functionally, opening opportunities for new spatial practices which lead us to rethink our relationship with space and time.

In recent years, railways stations and airports have also undergone substantial architectural redefinition: from mere public, anonymous places providing more or less standardized services, airports have been turned into facilities stylistically suited to a range of contexts, with furnishings and decorations that play with national insignia and with the cultural contaminations brought about by globalized markets and globalized taste.

It is now quite common, and by no means not limited to Western contexts, for someone to end up spending a few hours at an airport, enjoying an ever-wider range of first-class services while being exposed to proximities and experiences one may only partially expect or select. Airports are therefore certainly sites of daily consumption, but also of human contact, adaptation and sociability, even entertainment: in short, they are collective workshops, which bracket work and sales spaces, as well as sites for inspiration and creative activity. As noted by Rosi Braidotti, a keen observer of 'nomadic' landscapes and global transit, there now exists a whole sector of public art – tied to the social art and street art of the 1970s – which has taken hold in airports and has come to terms with the paradox of spaces charged with meaning and yet at once profoundly anonymous. As alienated and artificial as they are, once located in the New Millenium, they become loaded with a new sense, they become "non- non places" (2000).

Coming to the point of airports as entertaining angles of the transit arena, by virtue of their minimal, infinitely adaptable sound installations, Brian Eno can be considered the first effective interpreter of an intuition soon shared by many artists, who eventually came to terms with the relationship between art and mobility: the act of transposing fluidity and contamination into an aesthetic sign, typical of transit places, where hybrid forms prevail, conjured up at the intersection between figurative arts, music, and plastic arts. Albeit "inhuman" in its author's own definition, Eno's music endows a vaguely dehumanized place with a voice, hence humanizing it: "Eno creatively appropriates the cold heart of those somewhat dismal sites that are public spaces" (Braidotti 1994: 25).

In a conversation about *Music For Airports* (Gatti s.d.), Eno described his post-Roxy Music production–think of *Discreet*, *Ambient* or *Possible* records – as a highly synthetic, almost inhuman kind of music, radically unsuited for live performances which, Eno claimed, would be like watching a painter painting at home. And indeed, when it came out as a music album in 1978, *Music for Airports* consisted of a collection of tunes meant for looping, a kind of soundscape assembled to loosen up the tense, strained atmosphere of an airport terminal. For a limited time, a test was actually carried out at the Marine Air Terminal of La Guardia in New York, a few months after the album's release. The idea was part of an 'ambient music' project put together with Harold Budd and Jon Hassell, with a view to creating background music designed for large airport lobbies, but also for waiting rooms, exhibition venues or art galleries.

Music is thus seen as furniture: environments become huge boxes to be filled with sounds. This signals, in some way, the end of conventional 'listening' and the birth of a new soundtrack genre, designed to match spaces, rather than images: Eno's work may be seen as the ultimate outcome of sound-related experiments begun by Erik Satie in 1888, with the song

Gymnopedias and continued in the 1960s and 70s by pioneers such as Terry Riley, Steve Reich and John Cage, as well as by Eno himself. In fact, Eno's album marked the official coinage of the *ambient-music* label: in this case, the chosen environments were airports, international crossroads, points of arrival and departure, places for meetings and leaving, sites of expectations and tensions.

Along its four movements, minimalist even as far as the (virtually non-existent) titles of its tracks are concerned, Eno's *Music for Airports* somehow revolutionized the very notion of making music: sound radiates slowly, it is abstract, pictorial, mental, endlessly looping ethereal piano airs, counterpointed by other freewheeling instruments; everything is suffused, incorporeal, rarefied, replicating a kind of electronic ecstasy that could go on indefinitely, along its slow fluctuations, its obsessive calm and its hypnotic patterns. Thus stripped away, mutilated of its traditional harmonic layers, music becomes nothing more than a part of an environment – whether it be the waiting room of a station or the lobby of an airport. Such music soaks up atmosphere and noises, transforming itself into a background that no longer requires careful listening. It is a practice that reinforces an idea of listening Eno had already theorized in 1970 in his *Music for Non-Musicians*, which envisioned a musical heritage no longer made up of composers and performers, but of 'incompetent geniuses', tape jugglers, synths, equalizers and other electronic gadgets.

Art thus made its way into airports with its own artefacts and turned airports into 'meaning-making artefacts'. This assumption, expanded even to include other places of transit, has given rise to a new wave of critical discourse, across disciplines and art practices, which intertwines 'aesthetics' and 'mobility', engages artists and scholars in creative activities, exhibition initiatives, academic research, and editorial projects. These typically zero in on the relationship between aesthetics and mobility, or even go as far as probing the boundaries of an aesthetics of mobility taken as the key feature of contemporaneity.[1]

Recently, a new aesthetic for airports seems to underlie a project which quite possibly marks a first in the field of architectural collaborations (Green 2006). In this case, aesthetic contamination seeps through architecture and choreography, the space and the body. Visitors in flesh and blood are a key part of the event, probably as unwitting but doubtlessly active agents, responding to stimuli and invitations. The project space is the Jet-Blue Airways terminal at Kennedy International Airport; the artists are an architect and a choreographer (David Rockwell and Jerry Mitchell, former co-writers of the *Rocky Horror Show)* and the formula is that of a public theatre, which manages to transform the nearly instinctive movement of the crowd into a sort of dance performance. The aim is to enable hundreds of people to flow together towards an area that is said to be "devoid of confusion or contusion and bears instead the theatrical composure of a formal dance" (Green 2006). This is achieved simply by addressing posture and gestures: by directing visitors through architectural markers – stairs, mirrors, doors – carefully placed in order to guide people flows effortlessly. Everything keeps moving to and fro. Everyone looks at each other, stares at oneself in a mirror, moves one's arms and heads and legs to a rhythm that seems instinctive yet is 'dictatorially' induced. Establishing who is who, on this 'public stage', is part of the challenge, as we well know that we are in front of a mirror: are we the actors? or is it the other people we watch? Could we really call ourselves the co-authors of this spectacle?

Notes

[1] A vast network of information and links, which refer to academic sites, art and publishing projects, may be found online under the key phrase *aesthetics of mobility*. The School of Visual Culture at the University of Helsinki is notable for specific research on the subject; *Aesthetics and Mobility* is the title of a special issue (2005) of the magazine *Contemporary Aesthetics* (www.contempaesthetics.org), active since the end of the 1990s.

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