

BOOK REVIEW

The Impossible Travel: Tourism and its images *Augé Marc, editor (1998). Barcelona, Editorial Gedisa*

During the review of abundant material in my Doctoral Thesis, I come across with two well-known scholars who addressed the matter of the risk perceptions and the emptiness of places, one of them was Marc Augé, the other Dean Maccannell. To wit, the term non-placed was originally coined by Marc Augé who in 1992 wrote a book entitled *Non-lieux. Introduction a une antropología de la sub-modernité*. This of course can be translated in English as *Non-Places, an introduction to the anthropology of postmodernity*.

In this insight Project, Augé considers whether if a place can be catalogued as a place because it refers to a broader process of heritage, tradition and identity, a place wherein this lacks very well can be named non-places. Oddly, sites of anonymity where predominates the condensation of visual and present events (Augé, 1996: 83) (Augé, 1998a). His main thesis was that non-places emerge as a result of the advent of market as well as postmodernity where declines the social bondages and trust in the others. To this mayhem, it accompanied with a set of others phenomena such as the disattachment for territory and tradition. Starting from the premise that a place produces identity also a non-place opens the territoriality of home. The transit and motilities play a pivotal role in the configuration of these kinds of places. Examples of non-places are everywhere ranging from a Bus Station to a hospital. Nevertheless, the Augé's argument does not suffice to the extent his method and rhetoric tarnished the understanding of text. Secondly, our author is unable to determine what are the involving factors which create a non-places nor a specific contextualization in the moment a place passes to be a non-places and vice versa. Ultimately, there are a plenty of examples which contrast with the thesis of Augé in where a route or even an airport can be considered sites of identity. This means that a migrant who landed returning to their country at an airport should feel the same impersonality than a tourist, or event the hooligans of Manchester United



who congregated to receive their team after an outstanding triumph abroad.

In support of this thesis, P. Virilio argues that fear works as a mechanism of self-indoctrination at the time re-channels the consumption towards specific targets. In our times, large cities associated to a growing of population give in consequence a closeness which prevents the real encounter. Overcrowding in urban cities in the era of meditated conform converges with a much broader psychological isolation (Virilio, 2007: 17). This jeopardizes seriously the manner how a person constructs the otherness. For other hand, deregulation of time creates an empty space which is often fulfilled by Mass-Media and mass-consumption. The voyeurism of disaster, which seems to be no other thing than the ongoing dissemination of news containing information, impinges the ontological security of citizenship.

Throughout the Impossible Travel: tourism and its images, Auge will re-address the criticized points in previous works synthesizing his most widespread thoughts, above all topics exclusively related to tourism and hospitality. On his introductory chapters, Auge suggests tourism mythologizes fictionalized forms of entertainment based on the logic of spectacle, simulacra and visual saturation (Augé, 1998b: 15). From his perspective, the tour operators divide the map creating new schedules, sites, sojourn and attractions in sites which are reserved for the non-interaction. The impossible journey represents the end of real displacement, the end of new discoveries with people whose customs differs from ours. That way, from consumers human beings become to consumed goods, in other words from being spectators to a spectacle in such.

In chapters second and third, author reminds readers that the accessibility to a tourist destination such as a beach or a museum is very well circumscribed to imbalances of the societies wherein the time and space are blurred. In successive sections, fourth, fifth and sixth, ranging from the appraisal of Mont-Saint Michel to Castle of Louis II, our French ethnologist re-examines the role played by infrastructure and literature genre in the conception of certain imaginaries which trigger the tourist demands. This means what a consumer is seeing at time of purchasing a tour package corresponds with an illusion resulted from the interaction of imaginary, expectances and previous stereotypes. However, in Auge's development the encounter between hosts and guest will never occur. Apollonian Perfection associated to a much broader visual process give as a result the creation of bubbles fraught with impersonality and characterized by the declination of trust in otherness. Enrooted in the

convergence of imaginary and functionality of fiction (a fiction which specially is functional to interests of market), tourism seems to encourage making a travel that never will take place in reality. Following this argument, Auge inverts the meaning of what a travel is. Whether the modernity created a sentiment of belonging giving to the trips a function to bridge the relationships between cultures, tourism and postmodernity. These relationships are enrooted in the falseness. For that reason, tourism should be understood as a complex process of fictionalization of authentic travels. This moot point is of course expressly addressed in final chapters which are fully dedicated to the ethnology of urban cities.

In accordance to Virilio, Auge does not hesitate to argue that urban towns are certainly being experienced a rise of visual saturation which attracts thousand of visitors but gradually prevents strangers from personal contacts. In these spots predominates the mass-consumption, hedonism, egocentrism, images, nets of information, and a big theatricalization of the world. Similar concerns can be envisaged in D. Maccannell who warned tourism articulated as a form of ideology whose end was the postmodern market expansion. Typically, the emotional issues of people are being relegated to specific staged places where converge the leisure with unreality (Maccannell, 2003: 10).

Even though, in recent years the thesis of Auge gained considerable acceptance in tourism and anthropology fields, a development of this caliber lacks of a certain consistency at time of evaluating what a place is; even defying basic assumptions of social anthropology. This means that any site which holds a meaning for anyone, a name should be deemed as a place. An airport, a highway, even a train station have lesser or more signification depending of the subjective values of involved people. For example, after 11/09 the site where World Trade Center was erected passed from a non-place to be a place. Same examples can be applied on routes where daily happen thousand of fatal accidents or at hospitals. To put this in brutally, there is no clear basis or boundaries at time of defining scientifically what represent a non-place. Secondly, the most polemical implication of Auge's thesis is whether we consider that public-related sites should be named non-places, also are implicitly accepting the people who usually live there (in almost all cases, vagrants, homeless, and chronic unemployed) might be seen as non-persons with non-rights. Most likely, Auge like Maccannell or Virilio trivialize the role of tourism in the process of territorialization, or perhaps, he misjudges discursively concepts of space with home. Whichever this is, the readers who like to delve into the book of Marc Auge will find a couple of striking, polemical but interesting ideas which focuses on a criticism

appropriate for students, scholars, practitioners and researchers concerned in tourism and hospitality issues. Nonetheless, His assumptions are dangerous, pseudo-scientific and lead to a disclosure of social bondages which unwittingly paved the pathways towards discrimination and classism. To be honest, we strongly believe at least these critiques should be reconsidered along with our previous argument developed in this piece.

REFERENCES

- Augé, M. (1996). *Los no lugares: espacios de anonimato*. Barcelona, Editorial Gedisa.
- Augé, M. (1998a). *Hacia Una Antropología de los Mundos contemporáneos*. Barcelona, Editorial Gedisa.
- Augé, M. (1998b). *El viaje imposible: el turismo y sus imágenes*. Barcelona, Editorial Gedisa.
- Maccannell, D. (2003). *El Turista: una nueva teoría de la clase ociosa*. Moia, Melusina Ed.
- Virilio, P. (2007). *Ciudad Pánico: el afuera comienza aquí*. Buenos Aires, libros el Zorzal.

Maximiliano Korstanje

Maximiliano E. Korstanje (mkorst@palermo.edu) is a Lecturer at the University of Palermo, Department of Economics. Larrea 1079, Capital Federal, Buenos Aires, Argentina. CP 1188 AAB.