The Birth of the Tourist
out of the Spirit of Modernity:
The travel bug from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*
to Houellebecq's *Platform*

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Abstract

Zygmunt Bauman once proposed 'the tourist' as one of the four archetypal characters of the postmodern. This suggests more than a coincidental link between postmodernity and the rise of mass tourism. Modernity itself has, of course, long been associated with increasing ease and speed of travel. This piece reviews some of the theoretical and literary reflections on the relation between the rise of leisure travel and the transformation of the sense of space from modernity to postmodernity, or even what Augé called 'super-modernity'. Towards the end of the piece there is a discussion of Michel Houellebecq's novel, Platform (2001), a provocative take on long-haul sex tourism and the global tourism business around the year 2000. Houellebecq's novel is read alongside Daniel Defoe's classic tale of travel, adventure and business, Robinson Crusoe (1719). These two novels – one a classic of early modernity, the other of postmodernity – are discussed here in the context of a long history of reflections on the significance of travel and the transformations of the sense of space in modernity and postmodernity, drawing on theorists including Guy Debord, Richard Sennett, Zygmunt Bauman, Marc Augé, Paul Virilio and Rem Koolhaas.

This piece is part of a chapter of a longer work provisionally titled Modern Time, Post-natural Space: From Modernity to Here in Fiction and Theory.

> I will arise and go now, and go to …
> W.B. Yeats, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'

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The Pilgrim's Progress

No less an authority than the *Rough Guide to Spain* informs us that 'the great pilgrimage to Santiago [de Compostela] was the first exercise in mass tourism'[1] – an exercise that became

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[1] Ellingham, Fisher. *The Rough Guide to Spain*. (Rough Guides, 2002)590. More recently: https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/spain/galicia/santiago-de-compostela/the-camino-de-santiago/ (accessed 11.6.18)

popular among the Christian faithful of Europe in the eleventh century and has become increasingly popular among the not necessarily so faithful activity-holiday enthusiasts of the present day. There is of course an obvious historical connection between foreign travel and religion. From medieval times to the mid-nineteen fifties, many Europeans who travelled for a short spell abroad had some kind of religious pretext for doing so, apart from a small, privileged minority of eighteenth-century grand tourists, less privileged armies of soldiers, and much less privileged armies of migrants and refugees who were departing for much longer spells. For many it was the only way of getting away, experiencing different cultures, feeling the excitement of great cities like Paris or Rome. For many it was surely the experience of foreign travel to exotic places that was foremost in their minds, rather than the spiritual journey of devotion. It is probably fair to say that the Catholic Church was one of the first great tour operators.

Richard Sennett suggests that 'the people of the Old Testament thought of themselves as uprooted wanderers' and goes on to quote Saint Augustine writing of 'wandering as on a pilgrimage through time looking for the Kingdom of eternity' before coming to the conclusion that 'Judaeo-Christian culture is, at its very roots, about spiritual dislocation and homelessness'.[2] Sennett's point is that this deeply engrained notion that the only really important place is an invisible one in the sky has led to the development of particularly inhuman cities where speed of movement of motorised traffic to somewhere else is prioritised over any appreciation of the place itself. That suggests there is a very intimate connection between the cultural influence of a religious outlook, emphasising the superiority of the spiritual over the bodily and a need to be constantly on the move, even a possibly unhealthy and dangerous obsession with speeding through city and country alike. Perhaps the rise of the tourist industry goes back to the birth of religious / philosophical dualism and whoever first divided the soul (or the mind) from the body. It is this that has led to our sense of being perpetually at odds with ourselves, 'spiritually dislocated and homeless' indeed, and constantly seeking that perfect place somewhere else. One might then suggest that while for centuries religious faith has exaggerated the soul / body divide and the sense of dislocation *and* supposedly offered a way of overcoming that dislocation and a path leading home, the demise of religion and the rise of a more secular society has unleashed the dynamic energy of that same divide and consequent desire for a perfect place of reconciliation on the unsuspecting beauty spots of the globe.

One might further suggest that, just like the religious institution, the tourist industry (and consumer culture generally) thrives by exaggerating the soul / body or mind / body divide while supposedly offering (and at the same time withholding) the answer / resolution. This may be related to what Guy Debord calls 'spectacular separation' in *The Society of the Spectacle*. One of the effects of tourism is to destroy the experience of being in a different place, or as Debord writes pithily: 'basically, tourism is the chance to go and see what has been made trite. The economic management of travel to different places suffices in itself to ensure those places' interchangeability'. Yet as places become more interchangeable and distances diminish, the aforementioned divide and sense of spiritual dislocation and homelessness is further exaggerated. This is, I think, what Debord is suggesting when he writes: 'This society eliminates geographical distance only to reap distance *internally* in the form of spectacular separation' (my italics).[3] Not only is tourism 'the chance to go and see what has been made trite', according to Debord, it is 'Human circulation considered as something to be consumed', 'a by-product of the circulation of commodities'. Of course it was Marx who pointed out that

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[2] Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, (New York, London: Norton, 1992), 6.
[3] GuyDebord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Nicholson-Smith , (New York: Zone Books, 1995), sections 167-168.

the commodity was 'a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'.[4] He might have said the same of the tourist.

Zygmunt Bauman writes about how the Christian notion of pilgrimage left a lasting legacy and was gradually absorbed by a more secular culture of modern times, mentioning Max Weber's description of how the Protestants became 'inner-worldly pilgrims' thus leading, according to Weber, to the birth of modern capitalism out of the spirit of the Protestant Ethic and a long tradition of Christian asceticism. Weber himself noted how the 'intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into sober economic virtue … as in *Robinson Crusoe*, the isolated economic man who carries on missionary activities on the side takes the place of the lonely search for the Kingdom of Heaven in Bunyan's pilgrim, hurrying through the market-place of Vanity'.[5] The extended title of Bunyan's famous work, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* (1678), may then be seen a few hundred years later to have been uncannily prophetic. For Bauman, *modern* life was generally thought of as a kind of life-long pilgrimage, even if that came to mean, in secular translation, just 'saving for the future' and the construction of a life, an identity, a career through the constant pursuit of some distant goal. Something changed fundamentally with the arrival of *postmodern* times, however: the world became 'inhospitable to pilgrims', to the very notion of life as one long pilgrimage. According to Bauman the pilgrim has been superseded by what he suggested might be the four archetypes of postmodernity – the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player. What these character-types have in common with each other as well as with the pilgrim, of course, is the fact that they are constantly on the move. What sets them apart from the pilgrim is the fact that they are not constantly, slowly, collectively moving towards a single place, some great goal of special significance. The postmodern characters are, rather, darting all over the place – perhaps just a result of a more exaggerated version of the restlessness, that 'spiritual dislocation and homelessness' at the heart of Judaeo-Christian culture mentioned by Richard Sennett.

The tourist (as distinct from the pilgrim) does seem to be a species that thrives particularly well in postmodern times. Mass international tourism (of the non-religious variety) only really 'took off' in the latter half of the twentieth century along with its 'fellow travellers', the mass media, consumer society and celebrity culture. As with Bauman's other archetypal characters of postmodernity, the tourist is not a complete newcomer; what is new is that what was once a marginal activity is now mainstream. The problem, as Bauman sees it, is that 'as life itself turns into an extended tourist escapade, as the tourist's conduct becomes the mode of life and the tourist's stance becomes the character – it is less and less clear which one of the visiting places is the home, and which but a tourist haunt'.[6] In fact the 'life strategies' of Bauman's postmodern 'tourists, strollers, vagabonds and players' all have the effect of 'render[ing] human relations fragmentary […] and discontinuous […] and militate against the construction of lasting networks of mutual duties and obligations'.[7] One can see how darting all over the place and never staying long in any one place might have such consequences. In a world where it has been estimated that at any one time around half a million people are literally 'up in the air' (to use the title of a recent film) and tourism is very big business indeed, one might suspect that this is actually what is happening. In the age of the horse-drawn carriage Charles Baudelaire famously defined modernity as 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent'.

[4] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, in McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, (Oxford University Press, 2000), 472.
[5] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons , (London, New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 119.
[6] Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 97.
[7] Ibid., 100.

Postmodernity seems to be 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent' a million times over, propelled by thousands of powerful jet engines.

Airport-ness

'To be a modern human', according to Christopher Schaberg, 'means to be always somewhat preflight: waiting and ready for an airport trip to come [....] This is all part of *airportness*, or how the feel of air travel precedes and extends past the more obvious dimensions and boundaries of flight'.[8] *Airportness*, he writes, 'is about how air travel gets in our heads and bodies, how it becomes something *natural*'.[9] Rather as the late nineteenth century was the great age of the train station, the late twentieth century could be said to have witnessed not just the dawn of the postmodern, the 'supermodern' (see below), the consumer society, or the information age, but also the 'age of the airport'. One might add that just as the great nineteenth-century railway terminuses were so often built like grand opera houses – think of the Gare du Nord in Paris – the airport of our times usually bears an uncanny resemblance to the (sub)urban shopping mall. That is perhaps a comforting resemblance compared with the impression created by the photograph by Andreas Gursky of Frankfurt airport (2007). Here the apparently dark, cavernous space of the departures hall with dispersed clusters of trolley-pushing passengers is completely dominated by an enormous black display indicating imminently departing flights all around the globe. If this were a newspaper photograph, it might accompany a headline such as 'Big data looms over helpless travellers'.

Marc Augé opens his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* with a description of a man driving along the *autoroute* to Charles de Gaulle airport, checking in, wandering around the duty-free area and boarding a long-distance flight. Airports – along with motorways, airplanes, aircraft-like high-speed trains, as well as supermarkets, large department stores, hotel chains etc. – are precisely the kind of *non-lieux* / non-places Augé suggests are 'the space of supermodernity', 'the real measure of our time':

> a world where […] transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shanty towns […]); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the *habitué* of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral.[10]

The last phrase clearly echoes Baudelaire's description of modernity. The same nineteenth-century poet's famous *flâneur* may not have realised it at the time, but his wanderings would eventually lead him, not just, as Walter Benjamin suggested, to the department store, but to the (increasingly department-store-like) *airport*. Non-place 'is a space devoid of the symbolic expressions of identity, relations and history: examples include airports, motorways, anonymous hotel rooms, public transport … Never before in the history of the world have non-places occupied so much space'People are spending an ever-increasing proportion of their time in such anonymous non-places, following various written instructions on signs and screens – 'No smoking', 'Insert card' – and 'interacting' with machines, being fed 'real-time' updates and 'everything proceeds […] as if there were no history other than the last forty-eight hours of news', if even that. .[11] This is a feeling that appears to be shared by the narrator of

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[8] Christopher Schaberg, *Airportness: The Nature of Fligh*t, (New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 3.

[9] Ibid., 6.

[10] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, . (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 78.

[11] Augé quoted by Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 102 and 104.

Houellebecq's novel *Platform*: as he waited for his flight in Phuket airport he 'had an inkling that, more and more, the whole world would come to resemble an airport'.[12] Since the late twentieth century it has been an increasingly widespread inkling: around that time in an essay under the title 'Airports: The True Cities of the 21st Century', J. G. Ballard provocatively welcomed the development of an emotional landscape that some clever critic could no doubt coin as *Heathrow-ness*.[13]

It is inevitable that airports tend to have a particularly weightless atmosphere; one feels one's feet have almost left the ground – and any attachment to a particular planetary place – once one has entered the building. Airports tend also to look more or less the same everywhere – sleek, shiny, 'super-modern' non-places with smooth surfaces designed for the friction-free rapid transit of huge numbers of strangers, who generally expect to have and indeed have no contact with others apart from commercial and functional transactions. Having 'proceeded' to gate 45 when instructed by a message on a monitor, the tourist / passenger boarding the aircraft will probably expect that the airport at the far end of the flight will be much the same as the one s/he is leaving. The thing is, as more of the global environment comes to be constituted by airport-like non-places, it is increasingly likely that quite a bit of the local environment at the destination will be similarly constituted.

Our anonymous tourist will probably come to rest in an anonymous hotel room that will probably be decorated in accordance with the same global trends as one would have found in an anonymous hotel room at home. It may well be owned by the same company. How right was Debord when he wrote (in the 1960s!): 'The economic management of travel to different places suffices in itself to ensure those places' interchangeability'! The shopping streets of many a 'foreign' city nowadays contain many of the same shops one would find at home, laid out in exactly the same way, displaying exactly the same products. The department stores may have different names, but look the same inside – sleek, airport-like non-places with the same global brands on display. A small section dedicated to local products catering to tourists desperate to spend money on something *different* to bring home might be found on the ground floor. There is usually an air of fraud or inauthenticity about these more or less tacky tokens of 'place' in the midst of a super-modern, globalised 'non-place', a performance of authenticity in a *hyperreal* theatre, of quaint, earth(l)y rootedness in an airport.

Around the time when Augé was writing about the proliferation of 'non-places' in 'super-modernity', Rem Koolhaas wrote an essay on the subject of 'The Generic City'. This is, he says, 'all that remains of what used to be the city', 'the city without history', 'what is left after large sections of urban life crossed over to cyberspace'. Koolhaas even suggested that airports

> …are on the way to replacing the city. The in-transit condition is becoming universal. […]
> In the completeness of their facilities, they [airports] are like quarters of the Generic City,
> sometimes even its reason for being (its center?), with the added attraction of being hermetic
> systems from which there is no escape – except to another airport.[14]

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[12] Michel Houellebecq, *Platform*, trans. Frank Wynne , (London: Vintage 2003)131.

[13] J.G. Ballard, 'Airports: The True Cities of the 21st Century', (Blueprint 1997, reprinted here: https://www.utne.com/politics/homeiswherethehangaris, (Accessed 23.3.18..Ballard writes: 'I suspect that the airport will be the true city of the 21st century. The great airports are already the suburbs of an invisible world capital, a virtual metropolis whose border towns are named Heathrow, Kennedy, Charles de Gaulle, Nagoya, a centripetal city whose population forever circles its notional center and will never need to gain access to its dark heart.'

[14] Rem Koolhaas, 'The Generic City', in Koolhaas and Mau, *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 1252.

With the rise of the 'Generic City', the city as airport, the tourist 'abroad' may well feel he or she might as well be at home, or at least in his or her native airport / non-place – and recall the old joke told by Viktor Borge about the man who went to a ticket desk to ask for a return ticket, and upon being asked 'To where?', replied, 'To here, of course!'

Here or there?

But then, as Paul Virilio pointed out: 'Here no longer exists; everything is now'.[15] If it is true that 'here no longer exists', the same can probably be said of 'there' too. In fact, Virilio argues that we have witnessed the 'end of geography', brought about by the sinister combination of '*globalitarian*' globalisation and the collapse of all sense of distance and time intervals with the 'current transmission revolution', the rise of the internet and our arrival in a world where everything is constantly 'tele-present', twenty-four hours a day. One might well wonder what the 'end of geography' might mean for the average tourist's plans for the summer – and for the future of the world's largest service sector 'industry'.

Maybe as humanity experiences what Virilio calls 'the end of geography', a revolutionary transformation of our sense of physical space and distance as a result of the rise of the internet, it is balanced in some way by the rise of cyberspace, and it is in this space that contemporary cyber-tourists 'really travel for pleasure. Cyberspace appears to offer unlimited – though of course extremely commercialised – space for twenty-first-century *flâneurs / internauts* to roam and explore (and browse advertisements on what Virilio calls the 'single world advertising market') twenty-four hours a day. Just as Benjamin saw the nineteenth-century department store as where the *flâneur's* stroll would take him, maybe one could say that cyberspace is the real environment of contemporary tourism – the ultimate holiday destination, the 'last resort'. But, of course, the beauty of the internet is that there is no end to it; one can roam and browse ad infinitum in this vast tourist trap.

If the rise of the 'Generic City' can clearly be related to Virilio's diagnosis of the 'end of geography', it is worth remembering that Koolhaas referred to this as 'the city without history'. One might think that without either geography or history traditional tourism might be about to hang up its sandals for good, but fortunately, as Koolhaas points out, in the 'Generic City' there is always a quarter called 'Lipservice', 'where a minimum of the past is preserved':

> In spite of its absence, history is the major preoccupation, even industry of the Generic City. On the liberated grounds, around the restored hovels, still more hotels are constructed to receive additional tourists in direct proportion to the erasure of the past. […] Tourism is now independent of destination… Instead of specific memories, the associations the Generic City mobilizes are general memories, memories of memories: if not all memories at the same time, then at least an abstract, token memory, a déjà vu that never ends, generic memory.[16]

Tourists here, according to Koolhaas, may, presumably in the spirit of that 'generic memory', 'fondle' a 'universal souvenir', a 'scientific cross between Eiffel Tower, Sacré Coeur and Statue of Liberty: a tall building (usually between 200 and 300 meters) drowned in a small ball of water with snow or, if close to the equator, gold flakes'.[17]

I am a Camera

Whether or not the tourist goes beyond 'fondling' such items, no self-respecting tourist can refrain from taking a photographic souvenir or two of the place. It seems almost impossible to think of the tourist without some kind of camera or of tourism without thinking of the taking

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[15] Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, trans. Turner ., (London and New York:)Chapter 2.
[16] Koolhaas, 1256.
[17] Koolhaas, 1257.

and circulation of photographic evidence. It has even been pointed out that the invention of photography in 1839 coincided very closely with the early days of modern mass tourism; for example, in 1841, Thomas Cook 'organised the first-ever large-scale tour, taking four to five hundred temperance excursionists from Leicester to Loughborough and back again'.[18] Picture postcards may have been superseded by digital images on smart phones, but the principle is surely the same (except that postcards were addressed to individual people). The tourist's camera probably comes straight from the suitcase of one of Thorstein Veblen's 'conspicuous consumers'. What is prized in the quasi-feudal society Veblen describes is the 'performance of conspicuous leisure', the display of 'tangible evidence of prowess', 'booty' and 'trophies' won at the expense of others through conquest. Perhaps the tourist photograph may be thought of as such a form of 'booty' or 'trophy', intended to demonstrate to others one's 'prowess', as a member of the leisure class.[19] Everywhere at the height of the season there are tourists taking photos of themselves and each other – beside a famous monument, in front of a beautiful view, 'conspicuously consuming' an ice cream. Tourists very conspicuously consume places and their own presence in places *as images.* They appear to need to display the images *conspicuously* to others and to themselves to convince themselves that they are consuming / are there at all. The 'categorical imperative' here is perhaps: 'Be conspicuous, or not at all!' Perhaps the logic of this kind of tourist photo is really: 'If this is a "selfie", there must be a "self" in it'. 'The very activity of taking pictures', according to Susan Sontag, 'is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation. Unsure of other responses, they take a picture'.[20] (One might say the same of consumption generally: unsure of other responses, they (we) consume.) There is a scene in Mark Ravenhill's play, *Faust is Dead*, where two characters drive out into the desert. Alain finds the place beautiful, but Pete declares, 'I kind of prefer it on the TV. I prefer it with a frame around it, you know?'[21] He can only relax when he takes out his camcorder and starts filming. Of course, it is not just in tourist haunts in high season that everyone seems to be either taking a photo, posing for one or dodging out of the frame of one – increasingly this seems to be the case all of the time, everywhere, as the population at large has mutated into Bauman's postmodern tourists. It seems as if experience / life is not real at all unless it is captured as an image and broadcast on Facebook. We're not really in a place unless we take a photo of it, but then we're not really there either, *because* we're standing back taking a photo of it. And we want the place – and the photo – to look like the photo in the guidebook. The cynical narrator of Houellebecq's *Platform* at one point declares, 'In the end, what all lovers of journeys of discovery seek is confirmation of what they've already read in the guidebooks'.[22]

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord defined what he meant by the 'spectacle' as 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images'.[23] Images are the true currency of the postmodern life-tourist. Debord also wrote:

> An earlier stage in the economy's domination of social life entailed an obvious downgrading of *being into having*…. The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by

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[18] See Crawshaw and Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye', in Rojek and Urry (eds.), *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 180. In addition to pointing out the coincidence of the rise of tourism and of photography, the authors suggest a relation between this and a society where sight and the visual becomes increasingly prioritized … and Foucault's / Bentham's Panopticism.

[19] See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*,(New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1994).

[20] Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (London, New York:), 9, cited by Crawshaw and Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye', 183.

[21] Mark Ravenhill, *Faust is Dead*, scene ten, in Ravenhill, *Plays I*, (London: MethuenPublishing, 2001), 113.

[22] Houellebecq, *Platform*, 231.

[23] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, paragraph 4.

the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from *having to appearing*….[24]

What matters in the end are the tourist's photos on Facebook, not the actual lived experience itself. If tourism is, in Debord's words, 'Human circulation considered as something to be consumed', 'a by-product of the circulation of commodities', it is perhaps in the tourist photo that the circulation (and the human) is 'consumed'.

The development of photography has been described (in a phrase seemingly echoing Baudrillard) as 'the most significant component of a new cultural economy of value and exchange in which visual images are given extraordinary mobility and exchangeability'.[25] While the 'taking' of a photograph is itself an act of consumption, the tourist photo is inevitably itself consumed – swallowed up – by / in a consumer society where, as Baudrillard wrote, 'everything is *spectacularized* or, in other words, evoked, provoked and orchestrated into images, signs, consumable models. […] There is no longer anything but the transmission and reception of signs, and the human being vanishes in this combinatory and calculus of signs.'[26]

Noctis equi

Along with the circulation of commodities (and images), one might say that human circulation and the consumption thereof has for a very long time been a significant feature of Western modernity. Bauman refers to the particular relationship between modernity and the invention of ever faster means of human circulation, the 'construction of vehicles which would move faster than the legs of humans or horses could ever do'.[27]

It is no coincidence that when Marlowe's Dr. Faustus has signed his pact with the devil, declaring '*Consummatum est*', he suddenly finds the words '*Homo fuge!*' inscribed on his arm and asks himself 'Whither should I fly?', rather as a modern-day office worker might ask as summer approaches. Mephistopheles then takes him on a whistle-stop tour of Europe, taking in Trier, Paris, Naples, Venice, Padua, Rome…. Of course, Faustus ends wishing the horses would slow down, exclaiming 'O *lente, lente currite noctis equi*!', before he himself is 'consumed'. Modern Faustian man (and, of course, Faustus is a model modern *man*) is / has been a constant traveller, galloping at speed around Europe and the rest of the world, apparently unable to stand still for any length of time. 'Modernity', as Anthony Giddens pointed out, is a post-traditional order, and one might say Dr. Faustus epitomizes this modern 'post-traditional' outlook from the beginning in his impatience with traditional scholarly knowledge. Abandoning the slow, scholarly study of inherited tradition, Faustus focuses his mind on the future; what spurs him on his travels around Europe is the pursuit of knowledge as power, 'command' over 'all things that move between the quiet poles'. Zygmunt Bauman suggests that above all 'Modernity was born under the stars of acceleration and land conquest'.[28] Maybe one should add, given the opening of Dr. Faustus, that modernity was also born under the star of 'impatience'.

A Novel Idea

'Human circulation' was certainly considered 'something to be consumed' not just for Dr. Faustus and for the audience watching him, but very clearly also in the early days of the literary

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[24] Ibid., paragraph 17.
[25] Crawshaw and Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye' 182.
[26] Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 191.
[27] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 110.
[28] Ibid., 112.

genre of the novel over the course of the eighteenth century. The birth of the modern novel coincided, and perhaps not 'coincidentally', with the launch of the 'thousand ships' of global travel and global trade. Rapidly growing numbers of readers consumed large numbers of novels tracing the movements of characters circulating the country – or the globe – from Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver and Candide to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and his monstrous travelling companion. The 'circulation' of the characters Crusoe and Frankenstein, as of Faustus, so avidly 'consumed' as entertainment, involves, of course, no innocent, leisurely pleasure trips, but clearly significant stages of the secular 'pilgrimage' of Western modernity towards the holy grail of *power* to be achieved through the alliance of modern means of transport, bigger and better weapons, land conquest, imperialism, slavery, Capitalism, science and technology, as well as more than a little dabbling in the black arts. Both *Faustus* and *Frankenstein* are also warnings of where *this* 'grand tour' might really end: in darkness in both cases. However, it seems the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* – a tale of transatlantic travel and travel disaster, of getting away from it all and then reproducing it all using rudimentary DIY skills of rebellion and dominion, above all a tale of the *business* of survival and the survival of business – could go on and on forever. In the last pages, Defoe, with an eye to the commercial viability of a sequel and the business of his own survival, leaves the ending of this unending story of business (and) travel open.

If tourism is, as Debord suggested, 'human circulation considered as something to be consumed', there is a close affinity between tourism and modernity itself: both are inspired by 'circulation', by something that feeds the dynamism of modernity – a constant, restless interest in the new, in innovation and in escaping from the old, from tradition and routine to the 'transient, the fleeting and the contingent'. Yet at the same time, both tourism and modernity may be making it harder to discover anything new 'under the sun' at all. As Debord pointed out: 'tourism is the chance to go and see what has been made trite. The economic management of travel to different places suffices in itself to ensure those places' interchangeability'. The 'curse of the tourist' is described by the narrator of Houellebecq's *Platform* as the plight of someone 'caught up in a frenetic search for places which are "not touristy", which his very presence undermines, forever forced to move on, following a plan whose very fulfilment, little by little, renders it futile. This hopeless situation [was] comparable to a man trying to escape his own shadow'.[29] All the dynamism and frenetic movement of modernity may be caught in the same situation. To refer back to Augé's book on 'non-places', Virilio's talk of the 'end of geography' and Koolhaas writing about the 'Generic City', one might well ask: when all the world's an airport, where is there left to go?

Pleasure Class

Perhaps a world where everybody is a tourist – or rather a world where a particular culture is dominated by a tourist mentality – might not be a completely bad thing. Tourists are after all rather harmless creatures; at least they do not usually approach the 'other' in a threatening manner (however much the 'other' may still cower before their gaze / camera lens). The aesthetic pleasure-seeking of postmodern tourists, of 'gatherers of sensations', as Bauman suggests, may in some ways be preferable to the more aggressive, domineering attitude of the power-hungry, goal-directed modern producer/soldier/imperialist, or the blinkered vision of the pilgrims. Tourists may be only interested in their own pleasure, but they recognize they need 'others' to derive pleasures and new sensations from, whereas the power-hungry, goal-directed modern mentality thought all too much of controlling, utilizing, exploiting, dominating and ultimately even annihilating the 'other'. The superficiality of the postmodern tourist's gaze

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[29] Houellebecq, *Platform*, 311.

may be preferable to the sharpened focus of the eagle eye of the power-hungry modern, but the problem, of course, is that the tourist is only interested in immediate sources of pleasure and will be inclined to simply avert his / her gaze from anything which is not 'pleasurable'.

Houellebecq's *Platform* perhaps offers readers a somewhat extreme illustration of the mentality of Bauman's postmodern tourists, those pleasure-seekers and 'gatherers of sensations', that have taken the place of the supposedly modern, goal-oriented 'pilgrims'. Houellebecq casts a wry, ironical glance at the experience of the long haul tourist as well as at the tourist industry at the beginning of the twenty-first century, reminding readers early on that, 'In the year 2000, for the first time, the tourist industry became – in terms of turnover – the biggest economic activity in the world'.[30] The plot gradually leads up to an amusingly outrageous scenario involving a large, established travel operator rushing to cater to the Western tourist's interest in immediate sources of pleasure – more or less explicitly operating sex tourism – as a way of boosting its revenues. It seems for a time that a business plan bringing together droves of sexually inhibited, sex-starved, or jaded but rich Westerners and the exotic poor – naturally young and beautiful, willing prostitutes of the rest of the world, without all the sexual hang-ups of the West – could not fail to leverage a fortune for investors or to bring about the mother of all win-win situations. This is how the narrator puts the idea to the travel business executive:

> …you have several hundred million Westerners who have everything they could want but no longer manage to obtain sexual satisfaction: they spend their lives looking, but they don't find it and they are completely miserable. On the other hand, you have several billion people who have nothing, who are starving, who die young, who live in conditions unfit for human habitation and who have nothing left to sell except their bodies and their unspoiled sexuality. It's simple, really simple to understand; it's an ideal trading opportunity. The money you could make is almost unimaginable: vastly more than from computing or biotechnology, more than the media industry; there isn't a single economic sector that is comparable.[31]

This seems to be a plan that is destined to please – to give pleasure to – all concerned. Love life in the West is, as Houellebecq portrays it, badly in need of some spice, and the rest of the world is full of spice in search of buyers.

If one excludes, for a moment, the novel's treatment of the topic of sex and the potential of the sex tourism industry, one might see *Platform* as in some way a sequel to *Robinson Crusoe*, a novel which, at the very beginning of the English novelistic tradition, seems to overflow with excitement about the possibilities of global travel and the expansion of business. *Robinson Crusoe* also conspicuously lacks any sexual interest whatever; the sexual seems to have been completely supplanted by excitement about the clever use of resources, their transformation into capital and DIY. Crusoe, crucially, does not just survive; he builds his own personal empire. Describing how Crusoe's 'deepest satisfactions come from surveying his stock of goods', Ian Watt quotes Marx on the archetypal capitalist: 'enjoyment is subordinated to capital, and the individual who enjoys to the individual who capitalizes'.[32] In *Platform*, while there is an actual *love* affair, the passionate interest of some of the characters in business seems almost sexual, and it is ironic that the specific sector they focus on involves the transformation of sex into business. Houellebecq writes here almost as much about business as about sex; his characters' lives, careers and business interests are placed in the context of global tourism and the expansion of the tourist industry around the year 2000 before the evolution of the particularly audacious, though in business terms simply logical, business plan.

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[30] *Platform*, 29.
[31] *Platform*, 242.
[32] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, (Harmondsworth, New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 78.

Meanwhile, the insertion of occasional academic quotations on business and on tourism could be read as akin to a Brechtian alienation technique, breaking the continuity of the 'story' and causing readers to think along different, more critical lines, not just to follow the story. One chapter begins with a quotation attributed to Jean Louis Barma, *What Companies Dream Of*: 'Being able to understand a customer's behaviour in order to categorize him more effectively, offering him the right product at the right time, but above all persuading him that the product he is offered is adapted to his needs: that is what all companies dream of.'[33] The quotations do not just encourage readers to identify with the gathering enthusiasm of the characters for the business, but seem to add a layer of (academic) commentary on the narrative, insert some (ironic) distance from the story of the characters' developing business project and suggest that this is a novel *about* the travel business and society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. *Robinson Crusoe* with a dash (or a dollop) of irony, perhaps?[34]

If one does include the sex, one might be more inclined to compare *Platform* with Defoe's *Moll Flanders* on account of Moll's frank approach to sex as well as to the possibilities of less or more legally and socially sanctioned mergers of sex and business. Prostitution and marriage are both seen by Moll as equally legitimate means of achieving her financial survival. As in *Robinson Crusoe*, the business of survival and the survival of business are closely intertwined. Everything comes down to money. 'It's the economy, stupid!' Moll's transatlantic trip proves as immensely profitable as Crusoe's in the end. Both Defoe's eighteenth-century entrepreneurs are more successful in their merger of business and travel than Houellebecq's twenty-first-century specialists in the travel business.

Flight

Zygmunt Bauman famously suggested the tourist as one of the four archetypal figures of postmodernity. Bauman was also acutely aware, of course, that not everybody in the postmodern world is a tourist, and as the global gap between rich and poor widens, a world inhabited mainly by tourists is not a likely scenario any time soon; it just sometimes seems characteristic of a particular dominant culture: Western, middle class, comfortably-off. In some ways a wide gap between the lifestyles and resources of the rich and the poor suits the tourist mentality (and indeed the [sex] tourist industry of Houellebecq's novel), as tourists in search of the authentic, of the 'other', do not want everyone else to be (rich enough to be) a tourist. For the tourist mentality, authenticity is probably automatically linked with poverty. The problem, for the tourist, is when poverty ceases to be picturesque. Then the tourist's only answer is to look away.

Even if the world is turning into one big airport, not everyone in the airport is a tourist. Airports are full of low-paid workers who work unsociable hours in a dehumanised, 'supermodern' environment; the slick, shiny surfaces of smooth international transit are polished by an almost invisible army of cleaners from before dawn to well after dusk. So shiny are the surfaces that almost everybody becomes etherised, including involuntary travellers – migrants, refugees, deportees. Augé describes a world where 'transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to

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[33] *Platform*, 148.

[34] In a review of *Platform* entitled 'The Sexual Bomb Thrower', Charles Taylor writes: '"Platform" has been called the "A Modest Proposal" of sex tourism, and like Swift's essay, the safest, shallowest way to dodge its implications and distance yourself from its logic to is to fall back on the safe position of appreciating it as a wicked satiric exercise. Reading "Platform," the same as reading Swift, requires you to take the writer's reasoning seriously, meet it head on and, if you find it repulsive, refute it.' (Salon.com Review published 2.8.2003, http://www.salon.com/2003/08/02/platform_2/)

festering longevity)'.[35] There is an eerie parallel here between the world of tourists, full of 'supermodern' 'non-places' of transit, and a world where the poorest of the poor, the dispossessed, refugees from man-made or natural disasters, are also permanently on the move, or being moved on. There is very grim irony in the fact that the same period that has seen an exponential increase in the significance of the global tourist 'industry' has also witnessed a huge increase in the number of displaced persons across the globe.[36] This is the involuntary kind of travel, the dark shadow of the voluntary kind, reminiscent of the desperate journey undertaken by the famine-fleeing Irish woman in Eavan Boland's poem 'Mise Eire' [I am Ireland].[37] This woman, we're told, stands on the deck of the 'Mary Belle', 'holding her half-dead baby to / her as the wind shifts east', knowing a new language will be a 'kind of scar' and apparently not having much hope for anything at her destination but 'a passable imitation / of what went before'.

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[35] Augé, 78.

[36] 'The number of people displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution last year [2015] exceeded 60 million for the first time in the United Nations' history, a tally greater than the combined populations of the United Kingdom, or of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, says a new report released on World Refugee Day today. The Global Trends 2015 compiled by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes that 65.3 million people were displaced at the end of 2015, an increase of more than 5 million from 59.5 million a year earlier. The tally comprises 21.3 million refugees, 3.2 million asylum seekers, and 40.8 million people internally displaced within their own countries. Measured against the world's population of 7.4 billion people, one in every 113 people globally is now either a refugee, an asylum-seeker or internally displaced – putting them at a level of risk for which UNHCR knows no precedent.' http://refugeesmigrants.un.org/%E2%80%98unprecedented%E2%80%99-65-million-people-displaced-war-and-persecution-2015-%E2%80%93-un. Accessed 21.3.2017

[37] Eavan Boland, 'Mise Eire', from *The Journey*, in Boland, *New Selected Poems*, (Manchester: Carcanet, 2013), 59.

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