

Cannibal Tours

Dean MacCannell

Dennis O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours* is the latest of his documentary films on Pacific peoples, following his *Yumi Yet* (1976), *Ileksen* (1978), *Yap...How Did They Know We'd Like TV?* (1980), *Shark Callers of Kontu* (1982), *Couldn't Be Fairer* (1984), and *Half Life* (1986). The narrative structure of the film is unremarkable. A group of Western Europeans and North Americans, by appearance somewhat wealthier than "average" international tourists, travel up the Sepik river in Papua New Guinea in an ultra-modern, air-conditioned luxury liner, and up tributaries in smaller motor launches, stopping at villages along the way to take photographs and buy native handicrafts. The travelogue is inter-cut with ethnographic still photographs and with "talking head" interviews of both tourists and New Guineans who try to answer questions about the reasons for tourism and its effects on the local peoples. The background soundtrack contains occasional shortwave messages from the wider world, a Mozart string quartet, and an Iatmul flute concerto. O'Rourke (1987) says of his own film:

"Cannibal Tours" is two journeys. The first is that depicted—rich and bourgeois tourists on a luxury cruise up the mysterious Sepik River, in the jungles of Papua New Guinea...the packaged version of a 'heart of darkness.' The second journey (the real text of the film) is a metaphysical one. It is an attempt to discover the place of 'the Other' in the popular imagination. [Ellipsis in the original.]

The film makes it painfully evident, the choice of the Sepik region drives the point home with precision, that this primitive "Other" no longer exists. What remains of the primitive world are ex-primitives, recently acculturated peoples lost in the industrial world, and another kind of ex-primitive, still going under the label "primitive," a kind of performative "primitive."

This loss and transformation can be linked historically and conceptually to the shift from the *modern* to the *postmodern*. During the first slow phase of the globalization of culture, colonialism and industrialization, eventually tourism and modernization, modernity, the modern—during this phase the energy, drive and libido for the globalization of culture came from Western European and North European cultures. But today, the older centers of modernity are demanding a return on their investments, an implosive construction of primitivism (and every other 'ism') in a postmodern pastiche that might be called "globality."

Postmodernity is itself a symptom of a need to suppress bad memories of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the other genocides on which modernity was built. Of course it is not possible to repress the past without denying the future. Thus the central drive of postmodernity is to stop history in its tracks. One finds, even within critical reflections on the postmodern, a strange glee over the failed revolutionary potential of the western working class and all the various socialisms.

The opening scenes of *Cannibal Tours* neatly frame several postmodern figures. A voiceover taken from Radio Moscow world service announces a Paul Simon rock concert in Lenin Auditorium. But the film's postmodern figure *par excellence*, is a self-congratulating German tourist who comes as close as anyone in the film to being its central character. He compulsively records his travel experiences on film while speaking into a handheld tape recorder: "Now we see what remains of a house where cannibalism was practiced. Only the posts remain." His age is ambiguous. He might be old enough to have fought in World War II, a suspicion not allayed by his attire, which is designer re-issue of African campaign stuff. He explains to O'Rourke's camera, "Yes I have been to Lebanon, Iran, India, Thailand, Burma, China, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Pacific Islands, Australia two times, once to New

Zealand, South Africa, Rhodesia, all of South America...I liked Chile. Next year, middle America and Panama." He appears in the film as someone under a biblical curse to expiate the sins (or would it be the failures?) of National Socialism, and also to displace certain memories. He goes where the German army was not able to go, expressing a kind of laid back contentment when he encounters a fascist regime: "I liked Chile. Next year Middle America . . ." Only the United States is unmentioned in his recounting of his itineraries. He asks his Iatmul guide, "where have they killed the people. Right here. People were killed here? (he pats the stone for emphasis) Now I need a photograph for the memory."

The Economics of Tourist/Recent Ex-primitive Interaction

The little reliably obtained ethnographic evidence we now have, tends to confirm a central theme of *Cannibal Tours*: that the relations between tourists and recent ex-primitives are framed in a somewhat forced, stereotypical commercial exploitation model characterized by bad faith and petty suspicion on both sides. Ex-primitives often express their belief that the only difference between themselves and North Americans or Europeans is money. The German in *Cannibal Tours*, responding to what was supposed to have been a high level question from the film-maker about commercial exchanges spoiling the New Guineans, "agrees" that "these people do not know the value of money," but the workmanship "often justifies" the prices they ask. In short, he thinks it is he, not the New Guineans, who is being exploited. He is doing them a favor by not paying the asking price—he simultaneously gives them a lesson in commercial realism and, by withholding his capital, he helps delay their entry into the modern world. He thinks their eventual modernization is inevitable, but they would benefit from a period of delay. The dominant view of white Europeans and North Americans expressed by recent ex-primitives is that they exhibit an unimaginable combination of qualities: specifically, they are rich tightwads, boorish, obsessed by consumerism, suffering from collectomania. The Sioux Indians call whiteman *wasicum* or "fat taker." This arrangement can devolve into hatred. Laureen Waukau, a Menonimee Indian told Stan Steiner:

Just recently I realized that I hate whites. When the tourist buses come through and they come in here and stare at me, that's when I hate them. They call me "Injun." Like on television. It's a big joke to them. You a "drunken Injun," they say...I hate it.

And, of course, it should not go unremarked that *intention* in these exchanges does not alter the outcomes. The tourist who

calls an Indian "Injun" means to insult, but the well-intended tourist on the same bus is no less insulting. Steiner describes an encounter between Waukau and a tourist:

One lady gently touched the young girl's wrist. 'Dear, are you a real Indian?' she asked. 'I hope you don't mind my asking. But you look so American.' (Both incidents are reported in D. Evans-Pritchard, 1989: p. 97.)

The commercialization of the touristic encounter extends to the point of commodification not merely of the handicrafts and the photographic image, but to the person of the ex-primitive. Southwest American Indians complain that tourists have attempted to pat up their hair and arrange their clothing before photographing them, and that they receive unwanted offers from tourists to buy the jewelry or the clothing they are actually wearing.

As degenerate as these exchanges might at first appear, there is no problem here, really, at least not from the standpoint of existing social conventions. All these behaviors are recognizably boorish, so the "problem" as represented is entirely correctable by available means: counseling ('don't use ethnic slurs'); education ('Indians were the original Americans'); etiquette ('don't be condescending in conversation,' 'don't violate another's person or privacy,' 'don't comment on how "American" they appear'); etc. With a bit of decency and sound advice these 'problems', including their New Guinea equivalents, would go away.

Or would they? I think not. Because I detect in all these reports on exchanges between tourists and others a certain mutual complicity, a co-production of a pseudo-conflict to obscure something deeper and more serious: namely, that the encounter between tourist and "other" is the scene of a shared utopian vision of profit without exploitation, logically the final goal of a kind of cannibal economics shared by ex-primitives and postmoderns alike. The desire for profit without exploitation runs so strong, like that for "true love," even intellectuals can trick themselves into finding it where it does not exist, where, in my view, it can never exist.

The touristic ideal of the "primitive" is that of a magical resource that can be used without actually possessing or diminishing it. Within tourism, the "primitive" occupies a position not unlike that of the libido or the death drive in psychoanalysis, or the simple-minded working class of National Socialism which was supposed to have derived an ultimate kind of fulfillment in its labor for the Fatherland. Or the physicist's dream of room temperature superconductivity and table top fusion. These are all post-capitalist moral fantasies based on a desire to deny the relationship between profit and exploitation. Let's pretend that we can get something for

nothing. The fable is as follows: The return on the tour of headhunters and cannibals is to make the tourist a real hero of alterity. It is his coming into contact with and experience of the primitive which gives him his status. But this has not cost the primitives anything. Indeed, they too, may have gained from it. Taking someone's picture doesn't cost them anything, not in any Western commercial sense, yet the picture has value. The picture has no value for the primitive, yet the tourist pays for the right to take pictures. The "primitive" receives something for nothing, and benefits beyond this. Doesn't the fame of certain primitives, and even respect for them, actually increase when the tourist carries their pictures back to the west? It seems to be the most perfect realization so far of the capitalist economists' dream of *everyone* getting richer together.

Of course this is impossible. If a profit has been made, some bit of nature has been used up or some individuals have worked so that others might gain. It is easy enough to see how the advanced techniques of modern statecraft and stagecraft, recently merged into one, permit the destruction of nature and the alienation of work to be hidden from view. But how are they hidden from consciousness? The only way is by negative education, specifically the suppression of an understanding of exchange within exchange relations. In the relation between tourists and primitives, this pretense transforms the literally propertyless state of primitives into a property. Tourism has managed (and this is its special genius in the family of human institutions) to put a value on propertylessness itself. "Look, there are no fences around their fields. That's worth a picture!" "They work only for their own subsistence. That's worth reporting back to our overly commercial society at home!"

And for their part, the performative primitives, now ex-primitives, have devised a rhetoric surrounding money that perfectly complements the postmodern dream of profit without exploitation. They deny the economic importance of their economic exchanges. They will explain that they are exploited absolutely in their merely economic dealings with tourists, but also as far as they are concerned, at the level of symbolic values, these exchanges count for nothing. By the ex-primitives' own account, their economic dealings with tourists are spiritually vacuous and economically trivial, producing little more exchange than what is needed to buy trousers.¹ Their problem is not petty exploitation by tourists. Rather it is getting money and having it. The New Guineans in *Cannibal Tours* repeat to the point that it becomes a kind of litany, their position that money is simply "had" and "gotten", never *earned* and spent, and are quick to guard against the formation of any idea that the tourists, especially, earned their money. An old admitted ex-cannibal speaks to the camera about the tourists: "These are very wealthy people. They got their money, I know not where, perhaps their parents earned it and gave it to them, perhaps their governments give it to them." Clearly, he is thinking not in terms of earnings

but capital. Sounding more like Donald Trump than a Western proletarian, the old warrior complains, "I have no way of persuading them to give me money." From an ethnological standpoint, this is not especially surprising coming from a people whose basic unit of money, their equivalent to the American dollar or the British pound, is the *tautau*, *nassa*, or *maij*, a string of shells, which at the time of first European contact, was estimated by Mrs. Hingston Quiggin (1949: p. 172 ff.) to be worth the value of between two and ten months of labor. There is a deeply ironic movement of the camera in the scene in *Cannibal Tours* in which a New Guinea woman complains with bitter eloquence that "white men got money...you have all the money." For an instant, the camera drops down to the blanket in front of her showing what she is selling: it is *maij*, strings of shell money. She knows herself to be positioned like the Western banker, trading in currencies under enormously unfavorable exchange conditions. The tourists think they are buying beads.

In sum, there is so much mutual complicity in the overall definition of the interaction between the postmodern tourist and the ex-primitive that the system comes close to producing the impossible economic ideal. The performing primitives claim to be exploited, but in so doing they take great care not to develop this claim to the point where their value as "primitive" attraction is diminished. In short, they must appear as almost noble savages, authentic except for a few changes forced on them by others: they sell beads, they do not trade in currencies. They gain sympathy from the tourist based on the conditions of their relationship to the tourist. And the entire arrangement almost works. O'Rourke asks a young man on camera how it feels to have his picture taken, and points out that as he (O'Rourke) takes his picture, one of "them," (a woman tourist) has also come up behind to take yet another picture. "One of them is looking at you now." The woman tourist gets her shot and awkwardly steps into O'Rourke's frame sideways to give the young man some money for letting himself be photographed. O'Rourke comments dryly, "It's hard to make a dollar." We can feel sympathy, but only to the point of considering the working conditions of a steel worker in a foundry, an agricultural worker in the fields of California, or even a model in Manhattan who is also paid to have her picture taken, but under conditions of somewhat greater performative demand.

Performances

The conditions of the meeting of tourists and ex-primitives are such that one predictably finds hatred, sullen silence, freezing out. Deirdre Evans-Pritchard (1989: p. 98) reports that sometimes this sullenness is heartfelt and at other times it may be performed as a way of humoring the tourist. Southwest American Indian males hanging out in a public place and joking

around with each other, for example, have been known to adopt a frozen, silent, withdrawn stance on the approach of tourists, then they break back into a joking mode as soon as the tourist is gone, their jocularity redoubled by their mutual understanding that the tourists accepted their "hostile Indian" act. This is only one of the ways that ex-primitives knowingly overdose tourists with unwanted pseudo-authenticity.²

The micro-sociology of the arrangement between tourists and ex-primitives reveals an interesting balancing mechanism. Even if the tourists bring greater wealth and worldly sophistication to the encounter, the ex-primitive brings more experience in dealing with tourists. Most tourists do not repeatedly return to a specific site; they go on to new experiences. But ex-primitives who have made a business of tourism deal with tourists on a daily basis and soon become expert on the full range of touristic appearances and behavior. I have personally been picked out of a crowded Mexican market by a vendor who called me over to look at his wares, "Ola, professor!" Jill Sweet (1989) reports on a Zuni Pueblo four-part typology of tourists labeled by them as: (1) New Yorker or East Coast type, (2) Texan type, (3) Hippie type, and (4) "Save-the-whale" type. In the Zuni typology as reported by Sweet, "Texas types" wear cowboy boots and drive Cadillacs. "Hippies" are represented as wearing tie-die T-shirts, attempting uninvited to join in the Indian's dances, and as incessantly asking questions about peyote and mescal, etc. All of these figures are beginning to appear in Indian dance routines, sometimes in the dances they do for tourists. The "save-the-whale" tourist dancer is played by an Indian wearing hiking boots, tan shorts, a T-shirt with a message, and a pair of binoculars carved out of a block of wood that he uses to study the Indians. The "East Coast" tourist is represented as a woman played by a male Indian wearing high heels, wig, dress, mink coat, dime store jewelry, clutch purse, and pillbox hat. As "she" awkwardly approaches the dance ground, she stops to coo and cluck over the small Indian children along the way. In their tourist routines, the Zuni represent all types of tourists as disappointed that they (the Zuni) do not fit the stereotype of plains Indians who hunt buffalo and live in tipis.

The more elaborated performances that occur in the relations between tourists and ex-primitives assume what are according to Jameson (1984) characteristically postmodern dramatic forms: parody, satire, lampooning, and burlesque. All these forms involve identification, imitation, emulation, impersonation, to make a point. No matter how negative this point might at first seem to be, even if it might hurt a bit, it is always ultimately positive, because it suggests that relations could be improved if we pay more attention to our effects on others. Parody builds solidarity in the group that stages it and potentially raises the consciousness of an audience that is the butt of it. But to accomplish this the parodist must take risks.

Intercultural burlesque is necessarily structurally similar to efforts on the part of individuals from stigmatized minority groups to emulate the appearances and behaviors of representatives of the dominant culture. So any dramatically well-constructed parody that misses its mark, even slightly, becomes self-parody, just as postmodern architecture always risks losing its ironic referentiality and simply becoming tacky junk, not a parodic "comment" on tacky junk. It may well be insecurity in this regard that drives performers of tourist routines to cast their burlesque in such broad terms: to cause an Indian male to represent a tourist woman, etc. A Japanese-American student of mine recently remarked to me that some of her friends lighten their hair and wear blue contact lenses in order to look like Anglo-Americans. "But," she added perceptively, "they end up looking like Asian-Americans with dyed hair and blue contacts." Something like this seems to have happened toward the end of *Cannibal Tours* in a party scene where a heavy-set male tourist attempts to act savage for his fellow tourists. He has the necessary props. He is stripped to the waist. His face is painted (he would like to think, for war) by his New Guinea hosts. Only he can't act. His hackneyed way of making himself seem to be fierce for others is to strike a pose similar to that seen in pre-1950s publicity shots of professional boxers. It is so profoundly embarrassing that no one can even tell him that he is making an ass of himself. The new Guineans could not have done him better.

It is harrowing to suggest that these performances and aesthetic-economic exchanges may be the creative cutting edge of world culture in the making. But I think that we cannot rule out this possibility. In a very fine paper, James Boon (1984) has argued that parody and satire are at the base of every cultural formation. Responding to A. L. Becker's question concerning Javanese shadow theater ("Where," he ponders, "in Western literary and dramatic traditions with their Aristotelian constraints" would we find "Jay Gatsby, Godzilla, Agamemnon, John Wayne and Charlie Chaplin" appearing in the same plot?") Boon answers: "I suggest we find such concoctions *everywhere* in Western performance and literary genres except a narrow segment of bourgeois novels." Further suggesting that Becker has not even scratched the surface of the "riot of types" found linked together in cultural (as opposed to Cultural) performances Boon throws in Jesus Christ, the Easter Bunny, Mickey Mouse and Mohammed.

The remainder is, to say the least, impressive: miracle plays, masques, *Trauerspiele*, follies, carnivals and the literary carnivalesque, everything picaresque, burlesque or vaudevillian, *Singespiele*, gesticulations, romances, music drama, fairy tales, comic books, major holidays (Jesus cum Santa; Christ plus the Easter Bunny), Disney, T.V. commercials, the history of Hollywood

productions, fantastic voyages, sci-fi, travellers' tales, experimental theater, anthropology conferences... (1984: p. 157)

Boon's comment precisely affirms the logical procedures employed in the selection of figures for a wax museum: Jesus, Snow White, a Headhunter from New Guinea, John Wayne, Aristotle. Framed in this way, the absorption of the ex-primitive into the new cultural subject is theoretically unremarkable. It simply repeats the logic of the wax museum and "hyperreality," which is Eco's term for the valorization of absolute fakery as the only truth. Still, there is something O'Rourke has caught in the eyes of these New Guineans, perhaps a memory that they cannot share, that suggests there remains a difference not yet accounted for.

Let me summarize: Overlaying our common ancestors, primitive hunting and gathering peoples, we now have a history of colonial exploitation and military suppression, missionary efforts to transform religious beliefs and secular values, anthropological observations and descriptions, and now the touristic encounter. This complex system of overlays is all that is left of our common heritage and it has, itself, become the scene of an oddly staged encounter between people who think of themselves as being civilized or modernized and others who are said to be "primitive," but this can no longer be their proper designation. The term "primitive" is increasingly only a response to a mythic necessity to keep the idea of the primitive alive in the modern world and consciousness. And it will stay alive because there are several empires built on the necessity of the "primitive": included among these are anthropology's official versions of itself, an increasing segment of the tourist industry, the economic base of ex-primitives who continue to play the part of primitives-for-moderns, now documentary film-making, and soon enough music, art, drama, and literature. The rock star David Bowie takes several Indians from the Amazon basin, carrying spears and painted for "battle," with him on tour.

I am arguing that at the level of economic relations, aesthetic exchange (the collecting and marketing of artifacts, etc.), and the sociology of interaction, there is no real difference between moderns and those who act the part of primitives in the universal drama of modernity. Modern people have more money usually, but the ex-primitive is quick to accept the terms of modern economics. This may be a practical response to a system imposed from without, against which it would do no good to resist. But it could also be an adaptation based on rational self-interest. The word has already gone around that not everyone in the modernized areas of the world lives a life as seen on television, that many ex-primitives and most peasants are materially better off, and have more control over their own lives

than the poorest of the poor in the modern world. Perhaps a case for difference could be made in the area of interactional competence. Ex-primitives are often more rhetorically and dramatically adept than moderns, excepting communications and media professionals. Still, up to this point, it would be tenuous and mainly incorrect to frame the interaction as "tourist/other" because what we really have is a collaborative construction of postmodernity by tourists and ex-primitives who represent not absolute difference but mere differentiations of an evolving new cultural subject. Probably, if James Boon's formulation is acceptable, the new cultural subject is no more or less of a pastiche than any other culture was before it got an official grip on itself.

The Psychoanalytic and the mythic

Still, one cannot visit the former scene of the primitive without concluding that even within a fully postmodern framework, there is a real difference that might be marked "primitive," but it is not easy to describe. It does not deploy itself along axes which have already been worked out in advance by ethnography. These former headhunters and cannibals in *Cannibal Tours* are attractive, have a lightly ironic attitude, and are clear-sighted and pragmatic in their affairs. The tourists are most unattractive, emotional, self-interested, awkward and intrusive. It is difficult to imagine a group of real people (i.e., non-actors) simply caught in the eye of the camera appearing less attractive. This is not because of any obvious filmic trick. There is no narrator to tell the viewer how to think. Everyone on camera, the Iatmul people and tourists alike, is given ample opportunity for expression. The film is not technically unsympathetic to the tourists. The ostensible perspective is emotionless and empirical. The tourists do themselves in on camera. So the effect is really unsympathetic. The film often feels as if O'Rourke instructed his subjects to do an insensitive tourist routine, and they tried to oblige him even though they are not good actors.

That the tourists should come off second best to the Iatmul provides a clue to the difference, but to follow up on this clue requires yet another trip up the Sepik River. Here is the scene of much more than *Cannibal Tours*. It is, not by accident, also the place of perhaps the thickest historical and ethnographic encounter of "primitive" and "modern" on the face of the earth, suspended between perfect historical brackets marking the first 1886 exploration of Europeans in the Schleinitz expedition, and the 1986 filming of *Cannibal Tours*. During this 100 years the headhunters and cannibals of the Sepik region were visited by explorers, prospectors, missionaries, German colonists, labor contractors, anthropologists, government district police, Rockefeller the younger, and now, tourists. The anthropologists who have visited the Sepik include John Whiting, Reo

Fortune, Gregory Bateson, and of course Margaret Mead.

The images that appear in *Cannibal Tours* are mainly tight shots that are geographically nonspecific. Dennis O'Rourke is careful to name the villages which hosted him in the credits at the end. But at any given point in the film, the viewer, especially one unfamiliar with the Sepik region, cannot know the precise location of the action. The only places mentioned by name on film are Kanganuman and Anguram villages and Tchamburi lake, where the stones used in the beheading ceremonies were found. An old warrior says "Here in Kanganuman we..." It is remarkably strange that these lapses into specificity should also have named Anguram and Kanganuman, Gregory Bateson's headquarters while assembling his observations for writing his ethnographic classic, *Naven*, and Tchamburi lakes where Margaret Mead lived while making her observations for *Growing Up in New Guinea*. Kanganuman was also where Bateson hosted his friends and colleagues Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune, sharing his eight by twelve mosquito enclosure with them while they wrote up their field notes, the scene of an anthropological romance properly-so-called, where Margaret Mead changed husbands, or as she more delicately puts it, where she fell in love with Bateson, without really knowing it, while she was still married to Fortune.³

There is a gravitational pull, operating at a level beyond myth and psychoanalysis, between Western ethnography and these people of the Sepik who, I am arguing, only seem to put the anthropological doctrine of cultural relativism to its ultimate test. Consider *Naven*, the Iatmul ceremonial celebration of cultural accomplishments. Bateson tells his readers straight away that among the Iatmul, the greatest cultural achievement is "homicide":

The first time a boy kills an enemy or a foreigner or some bought victim is made the occasion for the most complete *naven*, involving the greatest number of relatives and the greatest variety of ritual incidents. Later in his life when the achievement is repeated, there will still be some *naven* performance..., but the majority of ritual incidents will probably be omitted. Next to actual homicide, the most honored acts are those which help others to successful killing [...such as] the enticing of foreigners into the village so that others may kill them. (p. 6)

Ritualized murder among the Iatmul is a reciprocal form embedded in intra-and inter-group social control mechanisms to the point that a victim's own people may arrange for a kill, for example by letting it be known to an enemy group that reprisals will be light if they select the "right" individual. But this should not be taken to mean that only delinquents and misfits are killed. The Iatmul people and their neighbors, it has often been noted,

are remarkably free from status distinctions, and this certainly shows up in the range of victims, by no means limited to initiated males but inclusive of men, women, children, pigs and dogs. A more recent ethnographer, William Mitchell, who took his young children into the field with him describes a recent raid on his village:

Entering the unprotected village, the Taute men shot and killed the first human they saw. It was a little boy. Returning victorious to their village, the Tautes beat their signal drums in triumph and danced through the night while the Kamnum women wailed the death of Wuruwe's small son. (Mitchell, 1978: p. 92)

And he captions a photograph of his children playing with Kanmun kids: "On the sandy plaza where little Tobtai was murdered, Ned and Elizabeth now played with their new friends." (p. 131)

The anthropologists' fascination (the sheer number of Sepik ethnographies is a symptom), and the tourists', with ecstatic violence, taking heads, eating human brains, involves displaced anal-sadism which is a strong, albeit necessarily denied, component of Western culture and consciousness. A side benefit of Sepik ethnography is free psychoanalysis, and not cheap stuff either, but a one that finds its authentic substrate in the Western cogito and consciousness. For the Iatmul people of the Sepik and their neighbors, male homosexuality and anal sadism are not deep secrets accessible only by psychoanalytic methods. They are openly avowed, key features of the ritual and social order, open to ethnographic observation.

In *naven* celebrations, according to Bateson's account, the maternal uncle dresses in women's clothing and goes about the village in search of the nephew who has done his first murder, carved his first canoe, or other major cultural accomplishment. The uncle's purpose is supposed to be to offer himself to the nephew for homosexual intercourse. The nephew is painfully embarrassed by this and usually manages to absent himself from the ceremony, leaving the uncle to sprawl about in the sand in a burlesque agony of sexual desire, a show which delights everyone, especially the children. Sometimes the uncle's wife will put on mens' clothing and act the part of the nephew, pantomiming homosexual intercourse with her husband in the presence of the entire village. Very rarely is there actual physical contact between the *wau* (uncle) and the *laua* (nephew whose deed is being celebrated). A gesture, which Bateson calls a "sort of sexual salute," the possibility of which is at the heart of all *naven*, is called *mogul neggelak-ka* which literally means "grooving the anus." Bateson describes his only sighting as follows:

This gesture of the *wau* I have only seen once. This

was when a *wau* dashed out into the midst of a dance and performed the gesture upon his *laua* The *wau* ran into the crowd, turned his back on the *laua* and rapidly lowered himself—almost fell—into a squatting position in such a way that as his legs bent under him his buttocks rubbed down the length of the *laua*'s leg. (13)

Fascination for these Sepik peoples and their highland neighbors, has always been a reflex of our own economic values and associated gender order. No matter whether we are for or against the homoeroticism of our own social order, in which everyone, not just women are supposed to adore the "great man," New Guinea provides a certain comfort. If we oppose the arbitrary segregation of the sexes in our society and gendered hierarchies, we can tell ourselves that at least we have not gone so far as the Iatmul. If we favor our own phallic order, we can use the New Guinea materials to support our claims that the separation of the sexes and hierarchical arrangements are "natural." If we are for or against our system of economic exploitation, we can take certain comfort from a people who actually eat the brains of their dead enemies. I have long suspected that this "either-orism" is the unwritten social contract that establishes the conditions for the widespread acceptance of the doctrine of "cultural relativism." The peoples and cultural practices which are handled "relativistically" must seem to support both sides of the deepest oppositions and ambivalencies of their observers. No ethnographic case accomplishes this at a level of intensity and detail that can compete with the New Guineans. In a celebrated remark, the father of modern phenomenology, Edmund Husserl states: "[J]ust as a man, and even the Papuan, represents a new stage in animality in contrast to the animals, so philosophical reason represents a new stage in humanity..." (Quoted in Derrida, 1978, p. 62, and in Ferry and Renaut, 1988, p. 102.)

Another highland New Guinea case has become famous because they have universally enforced homosexuality for young boys until marriage, after which they are said to begin practicing normal heterosexual relations. We can read a brief account of these people in a recent *New York Times Magazine* article on homosexuality:

Consider the Sambia of New Guinea, described by Gilbert Herdt in "Guardians of the Flutes." They belong to a group of cultures in which homosexual practices are actually *required* of boys for several years as rites of passage into adulthood. After adolescence, the young men abandon homosexual practices, marry women, father children and continue as heterosexuals for the rest of their lives. The lesson is threefold: first, a culture can make such a rule and get every person to

conform; second, years of obligatory homosexuality apparently do not commit the average man to a lifetime of homoerotic desires. Third...(April 2, 1989. P. 60)

The normalizing tone of this account is remarkable in view of the subject. The "Sambia" (it is a pseudonymous case) practice referred to, but not specified in the *Times* article, is young-boy-to-adult-male fellatio. "Sambia" initiates are required to eat semen on a daily basis from about age seven through adolescence. The justification given for this practice is that male stature and strength, courage in war, and the ability eventually to be reproductively competent requires the ingestion of enormous quantities of semen. The more semen you eat, the bigger, stronger, more intelligent and more masculine you will become.⁴ The "Sambia" point to the first growth of pubic and facial hair, and the first appearance of adult muscle contours as proof of the effectiveness of their initiation procedures. Herdt (1981: p. 3) comments:

ritualized homosexuality becomes the center of their existence. Born from the deepest trauma of maternal separation and ritual threats, homosexual fellatio is dangerous and enticing, powerful and cruel. And from such experience is born a boy's sense of masculinity .

...In short, Sambia boys undergo profound social conditioning through early, exciting homosexual experiences that continue for years. Yet they emerge as competent, exclusively heterosexual adults, not homosexuals. Contrary to Western belief, transitional homoeroticism is the royal road to Sambia manliness.

These statements can be read, indeed they must be read, as expressing what is meant by "manliness" and "competent heterosexuality" in current Anglo-European culture. We can discover, for example, that "competent heterosexuality" means only that men marry women and have children. Modernized cultures contain well-developed internal mechanisms that effectively resist the detailed specification of behavioral rules for adult heterosexual males. The "Sambia," even in the context of marriage and "normal" heterosexual relations, consider the female sex to be so polluting, that if a man should utter the word for vagina, he must spit repeatedly lest he be poisoned by his own saliva that has come into contact with the word. At about the time the boys end their homoerotic career they are subjected to the ramming of a long cane down their throats to the point of forcing (they believe) out of their anus the last bits of filthy contaminated food, and also words, given to them in their youth by their mothers.⁵ Let me suggest that the cessation of homosexual activities on the part of "Sambia" boys does not end in heterosexual relations, at least not from their perspective. It

ends with the taking of heads. When they stop giving head and start taking heads ritually marks the transition when they join with the men as a man. In Herdt's accounting scheme, only the youthful fellators are engaged in homosexual activity, the adult male fellatees have "abandoned their homosexual practices" and are simply going about the business of their offices as competent adult male heterosexuals. They also get married and father children, and initiate the young boys. Still, attention to the ethnographic record reveals that heterosexual relations remain for them, frightening, dirty, and dangerous, the way that women steal their strength. Apparently also, according to Herdt's account, the kind of contamination and danger associated with heterosexual relations can be sexually exciting, working a powerful erotic attraction on certain adult males in the direction of what would be for them the exotic and the alien, i.e. sex with women.

Viewing *Cannibal Tours* in the context of Sepik ethnography one necessarily begins to wonder about what Freud gave us. It is not so much a question of psychoanalysis as mythology, a mythology of modernity which includes the primitive as a veil for our cannibal and other homoerotic desires. The primitive modality in the new cultural subject is already contained, or almost contained, in a touristic frame. Certainly O'Rourke's camera has assumed the point of view of the old paternal analyst, steady, listening, silent, pretending to be non-judgmental. Its gaze remains when the subject has run out of things to say. The tourists in O'Rourke's movie, after a pause, begin to say anything that comes into their minds; this is how O'Rourke finds the modern myth of the primitive in the touristic unconsciousness. When the camera is left running, the Italian girl blocks on decapitation and castration: "It was *symbolic*. For survival but also *symbolic*. It was *symbolic* when they cut off the heads of the white explorers. Not with malice, but a part of a *symbolic* tradition."

The ex-primitives, for their part, maintain much more rhetorical control. When the camera is left running, they often comment, "that is the end of my story," or "that's all I have to say," gladly telling about taking heads and eating brains, but stopping short of revealing the secret of *Naven*. But their rhetorical brilliance does not nevertheless permit them completely to escape the touristic, or postmodern frame around their consciousness. Within this frame, it is the ex-primitives who have internalized and who rigorously apply the doctrine of cultural relativism. They maintain that there is no difference between themselves and Europeans with the single exception that the Europeans have money and they don't. An old warrior relates his past making an ultimate statement of the principle of relativism. "We would cut off the heads, remove the skin and then eat. The Germans came, but white men are no different."

Language

All that remains is the question of language. Within the touristic frame, there is a characteristic deformation of language. This deformation might originally have resulted from noncompetency ("the breezy from high mountains which surrounding . . .") but now it has grammaticality and intentionality of its own. Deirdre Evans-Pritchard describes an interchange between an Indian artist, and a tourist who unfortunately mistakes him for someone with less than full competence in English:

A lady was examining the balls on a squash blossom necklace. She turned to Clippy Crazyhorse and in the slow, over-emphasized fashion for someone who does not understand English, she asked "Are these hollow?" Clippy promptly replied "Hello" and warmly shook her hand. Again the lady asked, "Are these hollow?" pronouncing the words even more theatrically this time. Clippy cheerily responded with another "Hello." This went on a few more times, by which time everyone around was laughing, until eventually the lady herself saw the joke. (Evans-Pritchard, 1989: pp. 95-96)

Jacques Lacan (1966: p. 113) once remarked, "beyond what we call the 'word' what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language." I prefer to take this as a methodological, not theoretical, statement to mean that we can arrive at the unconscious without necessarily naming it as our destination if we are sufficiently attentive to language. Attention to the structure of tourist language suggests the possibility of building a case for real differences in primitive vs. modern modalities and to find a way out of the singularity of the postmodern touristic frame. Tourist language, pidgin English, or, in pidgin, "Tok Pisin," has reached its point of greatest perfection on the Sepik.

Tok Pisin, Tourist English, Tourist German, or, viewed from the other perspective, what some of my respondents call "Tarzan English," like all other languages are built out of transvaluing mechanisms. This is so they can draw upon their own internal resources for meaning, which is only another way of saying that they can function as languages. In the early stages of its development, the transvaluing exchange of tourist language may be between language and language, or even language and some extra-linguistic material. A woman tourist repeatedly asks a New Guinean to smile and gets no result. Finally, in frustration, she asks "can you smile like this?" and pushes up the corners of her own mouth with her fingers. Clippy Crazyhorse

would have obliged her, saying in effect, “sure I can smile like that,” by manually pushing up the corners of his own mouth.

The two master tropes on which all languages depend for internal self sufficiency are metaphor and metonymy. The transvaluing mechanism is blatant in *metaphor*: “my love is like a red, red rose.” *Metonymy* depends on concrete association and a violation of the boundaries western science has erected around “cause and effect” relations. A metonymic transvaluation has occurred, for example, when we think something is poisonous because it tastes bitter. Metaphor contains much more potential power to transvalue across originally disconnected and separate matters. A “shining” example rests on a metonymic association of glittering, glistening, diaphanous, golden, perhaps crystalline exemplarity. But effectively to “make an example” of someone requires false identification with a victim, necessarily a metaphoric reach and suppression of one’s own humanity.

Gregory Bateson provided a model that is potentially helpful here: the double-bind theory of schizophrenia. (Bateson *et al.*, 1956) I would like to think that “the hand that strikes the blow can heal the wound”; that Bateson’s later work on language and madness was also a product of his earlier New Guinea experience, at least in part. According to Bateson, well-formed language is so because its users have achieved a synthesis, balance and harmony between metaphoric and metonymic mechanisms of transvaluation, to the point that both are found in any given utterance. Deformed languages develop increasing specialization, dependence and separation of the two master tropes, eventually prizing one over the other as the only “proper” medium of exchange. The talk of schizophrenics is rigorously tropo-logical, that is, overly metaphoric, for example, as when a patient refuses to state anything directly, coding every message in elaborate allusions and allegories. Or it may be defensive in a metonymic direction, admitting no allusion, as when an unguarded remark like, “there were about a thousand people in the elevator” causes a schizophrenic to hallucinate a compact cube of gore.

This kind of imbalance is well-documented at the level of the “speaking subject.” What I want to suggest here is that we begin to attend to something like the same phenomenon at the level of *language*. This move potentially leads to real analysis of Fredric Jameson’s (1984) assertion that “postmodern society is schizophrenic” which is airy in the way he presented it, but also intuitively correct. Tourist language is deformed by an odd internal specialization and separation. There is a basis in the language that is used in tourist settings for designating a primitive modality deployed along the metonymic axis and a modern modality along the metaphoric. At least there is a strong statistical tendency in all the examples that I have collected for tourists to speak metaphorically and primitives to speak metonymically. If this is supported by further investiga-

tion, we would have a case of a discourse which is itself, in its totality, perfectly normal, built out of two complementary schizoid subvariants. This is a theoretical model for a structural mechanism for producing a normal speech community within which all discourse is schizophrenic, a postmodern speech community.

The raging metaphoricity of the language of the tourists marks virtually every one of their utterances. In rejecting a large mask, a woman in *Cannibal Tours* cannot bring herself to say “I think it’s ugly.” She cannot even say “it would not look good in my house.” Instead, she says, “it would not go in a house *such as* mine, in Chicago.” Each metaphoric move to disconnect and to separate (her husband might take note—at some level she evidently desires to exchange her own house for one like it in Chicago) builds up an absent authority, or standard, a power that controls every decision, a power that has no name except, perhaps, “Chicago.” Another Papuan mask is said to be “like Modigliani.” Even direct experience is assimilated only as metaphor: a couple walks briskly down a path, “This is *definitely* jungle.” A German man gazes across the Sepik, “it reminds me of the Zambezie.” This same man understands himself, only as metaphor, “for me *as tourist* it is very impressive.”

The ex-primitives in *Cannibal Tours*, for their part, appear unable to get a metaphor past their lips in either direction. Their way of assimilating the German colonist was to eat his brains. It is noteworthy in this regard that Americans also eat their former enemies, the Germans, but only metaphorically, of course: as frankfurters, and hamburgers.⁶ When the old ex-cannibal told O’Rourke’s camera about the loss of his “sacred symbols” he was not speaking of traditional values, beliefs, ideals which are fading from thought. What he has in mind were some carved wooden objects that had been stolen from the spirit house and destroyed by the German missionaries or sent to European museums. New Guinea languages are possessive, imperative, even when command and presence is not called for. One of the most frequently occurring words in Tok Pisin is “bilong.” The Tok Pisin name for a dildo-like penis sheath, an instrument that teleotypically stands for standing in, that is, for absence, is “skin bilong kok.” The term itself takes the form of a miniature moral harangue about the importance of presence, association, connection: this is a dildo but don’t forget, skin belong cock.

Metaphor always involves suppression: a veiling of the obvious through which the outlines of the obvious can be seen. The tourists’ historical dependence on metaphor necessarily produces something like an unconscious. The cannibalism, violence, homoeroticism, of the primitives are openly avowed and principled. The New Guineans experience their myths as myths, while the tourists experience their myths as symptoms and hysteria. It should not go unnoticed that this is the exact

opposite of the difference conventionally attributed to “primitive” vs. “modern.” An old man tells the story of the reaction to the arrival of the first ships carrying German colonists. This is a fascinating moment in O'Rourke's film because the ex-primitive mobilizes a strong metaphor, ‘the tourists are like death,’ which he deftly proceeds to explicate, situate historically, and render concrete. In listening to this story, neatly packaged as it is with its own interpretation, we must not forget that death for an old Iatmul warrior is close and real. The tour boat as the death star would be a fitting end to a tragic narrative. He tells the camera with a smile that his grandparents ran down to the river to look at the ship, shouting “Our dead ancestors have arrived! Our dead have come back! They have gone someplace and gotten new faces and skin, and now they are back!” And he continues, the sly grin never leaving his face, “Now when we see the tourists, we say the dead have returned. That is what we say. We don't seriously believe they are our dead ancestors—but we say it.” He might also believe it. It is possible to frame his point with some theoretical precision: that the Western tourists are indeed the embodiment of the spirit of dead cannibals.

One does not find among the tourists any similar lightness of sensibility, any detachment from what might be taken as their deepest insights. The woman in *Cannibal Tours* who is perhaps an “art historian” from New York explains that after the “disappearance” of Governor Rockefeller's son in New Guinea, “I became an exponent of primitive art.” The word “art” as it escapes her lips inscribes itself heavily on the film. At this embarrassing moment, in searching for another place to look, the viewer's gaze may fall upon her eyebrows which seem to have been penciled onto her forehead with an almost brutal force. Again, there is the same contrast with the New Guinea face painting scenes where the touch is always light.

Here is the only difference between primitive and modern, as best as I can make it out from the materials at hand. The modern-day tourists, are incapable of a conscious detachment from their values, a detachment that is the most evident feature of the New Guinean images and discourse. As the tourists cannibalize the primitive, they repress and deny the myth of modernity so it necessarily expresses itself always as an out-of-control force leading to a kind of violence that has no ritual outlet. An Italian family states, “We must enter their villages as the missionaries did. We must make them desire our values, our convictions, to teach them something, to do things for themselves, to teach them to desire our point of view, to make them want to wear our kind of clothes.” The language of the Iatmul people is filled with concrete images of violence: “one of our spears went down the barrel of his gun...it wouldn't fire, so we captured him and took his head.” The language of the tourists is filled with repressed violence: “we must make them want to wear our kind of clothes.” The “art historian” never

confronts her own denial and suppression of the “primitive” on the Sepik and in her own soul. Instead, she states somewhat shrilly as she buys artifacts, “I for one think it is too bad if they deviate [from their traditions] and work for tourism as such.” The potential for evil and cruelty lurking unsaid in this statement is far greater than anything openly expressed by the old warriors.

Notes

1. Few accounts of cannibals neglect to remark that they need exchange to buy pants. Montaigne ends his essay “On Cannibals” with the words, “All this is not too bad. But wait. They don't wear trousers.” (p. 92) It should not come as any surprise that covering the penis is the first requirement for absorption in a new cultural arrangement in which hierarchy based on material wealth, with males at the top, is taken to be the “natural” order. Any re-appearance of the penis in this context would reveal the ludicrous basis for the rather vast claims made on behalf of males. Primitive men can afford to expose themselves because so long as they live in a primitive condition, they have nothing to lose: men and women, the young and the old, the rulers and the ruled all live in virtually the same material circumstances. But as soon as differences in material well-being become socially significant, the men begin to cover their “privates”: the wealthier, the more covered. The young man in *Cannibal Tours* says simply that he needs money to buy the “things I like,” and the woman says she needs it to send her children to school. But the powerful old men and the tourists always give the purchase of “trousers” as the reason these almost ex-primitives need money.
2. I reported on some others in D. MacCannell (1973).
3. Amply described by Mead (1972) and interpreted by James Boon (1985).
4. On the relationship between eating semen and such intelligence factors as ability to learn foreign languages, See Schieffelin, 1978.
5. See the references to ramming out “bad talk” in Herdt, 1981 p. 224. “Bad talk” is the mother's nagging reprimands and insults that stultify and “block his growth.”
6. Marshall Sahlins (1976: pp. 166-79) has provided an alternate, more normative, “vegetarian,” solution to the problem of the cannibalistic drive in contemporary culture. He refuses to use the term “frankfurter.” For him, they are only “hot dogs.”

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- Dean MacCannell is Professor of Applied Behavioural Sciences at University of California, Davis. He is Co-Editor of American Journal of Semiotics and author of *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class 1989 (1976)* New York: Schocken Books, and (with Juliet F. MacCannell) *The Time of the Sign: A Semiotic Interpretation of Modern Culture, 1982, Bloomington, Ind.*