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Leisure and Labor in New Orleans' "Number One Factory": Work, Culture, and the Political Economy of Tourism

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**Leisure and Labor in New Orleans' "Number One Factory": Work, Culture, and the
Political Economy of Tourism**

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

the Department of Anthropology and Sociology

of the University of New Orleans

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts, With University High Honors

And Honors in Anthropology

by

Dylan Hogan Freemole

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Abstract

As the symbolic and functional heart of the New Orleans tourism industry, the French Quarter has been described as the city's "number one factory". Using this evocative image as a starting point, this paper explores workaday life within this factory. I argue that the political economy of tourism brings together the world of work and the world of leisure in such a way that neither can be meaningfully understood apart from each other. To get at this point, I examine the commodity which at the heart of the tourist economy, which, I contend, is the touristic experience. Drawing on data gleaned from interviews, participant observation, and analysis of tourist discourse, I show that the production of this commodity – immaterial as it may appear – is in fact quite labor intensive. Furthermore, as tourism has become the driving sector of the New Orleans economy, the social and economic arrangements that the industry entails have extended out from the factory, integrating a broader swath of the city's geography into its structure than is generally supposed.

Keywords: Tourism, labor, political economy, New Orleans, service economy.

Introduction: Production of the Tourist Commodity

There is a quiet hour on either side of dawn when the French Quarter seems to stop for breath. The streets are nearly empty, though not entirely still. As the sun rises a pair of drunks fall laughing from an all-night bar. A garbage truck makes the early rounds—its brakes squeal and wheeze as the young men on the back leap to the street, tumbling trash from an overfull bin into its rear-end jaws, spreading around the sharp smell of a spoiling night. The sweepers and the scrubber come after, passing by in a spray of lemon scent and ammonia. Down on Canal the streetcar disgorges yawning workers in maid uniforms or rubber kitchen shoes, while the eighty-eight bus crawls along the outskirts of the French Quarter, working its way up from the Ninth Ward; passengers on their way to work ring for a stop at Toulouse or at Conti and walk the few sleepy blocks to the Quarter, into the belly of what one historian has called New Orleans' "number one factory" (Souther 2006). But the morning proper cannot begin without the worker's other half, who arrives from out of town, out of state, or overseas to set the gears into motion.

In New Orleans, the tourist and the worker share the factory floor. They are intimates in a way, the labor of one wrapped up in the leisure of the other. Beneath the same roof they produce and consume, offer service and demand (however politely) to be served. We see them together out on the street: perhaps they share a car—a division of labor ensues, one calling out the destination, the other working the brakes as they crawl through the snarled traffic of the French Quarter. Or perhaps the tourist prefers to walk—the worker hails them: "No cover, folks! No charge!" A buggy clacks by, drawn by an ancient mule. The driver's head is turned backward towards her passengers: "This here is Royal Street. Back in 1804..." Her horse-whip is mainly for show; the mule knows the route. Toe-blistered and sunburnt, the tourist returns to their hotel. The doorman smiles; the desk clerk smiles. The bartender assures the tourist that yes, he can make a

Sazerac—earlier, the tour guide had recommended just *that* particular cocktail, made with *this* rye and *these* bitters. The maids, meanwhile, have tidied up. At every turn the tourist finds themselves entangled in the working life of another; the workers, for their part, tangle back, their livelihood depending upon it.

A factory, then, in the sense that in this space – the hotel, the French Quarter, the City of New Orleans – all the raw stuff of an eventual commodity is brought together for assemblage.¹ But a strange factory, and a strange kind of commodity, one whose "manufacture" entails the physical presence and interested participation of its consumer, who "works" right alongside their laboring other. Together they produce a commodity whose exchange underwrites the city's economy: the New Orleans *Experience*! Or, more specifically, the *touristic experience* of New Orleans, a commodity cobbled together from all the moving parts of culture's "complex whole," every bit as lively and strange as Marx's dancing table².

In part, this paper explores the nature of this commodity, but it does so only to the extent that I believe necessary to better understand the intertwined relations of production and consumption that the political economy of tourism entails. Because while it may be possible to study labor under an industrial regime without any practical knowledge of the inner workings of a Chrysler, say, I believe that labor in the tourist economy is arranged in such a way that the dynamics of its production processes cannot be meaningfully divorced from either the

¹ I should stress that I mean "factory" in a very loose sense, as a spatial analogy, rather than a description of how production is actually arranged—the economy this paper concerns is, after all, a deindustrialized one, in which Blake's "dark satanic mills" have been renovated, converted to spaces of consumption.

² Writing of the "mystic quality" of the commodity form, Marx describes a simple wooden table, which, "as soon as it steps out as commodity, it metamorphoses itself into a sensually supersensual thing. It does not only stand with its feet on the ground, but it confronts all other commodities on its head, and develops out of its wooden head caprices which are much more wondrous than if it all of a sudden began to dance." (1990: 163-64)

commodity produced or from its consumption. In short, to speak of work within a tourist economy is to speak, at least in part, of tourism itself.

This project, then, is an attempt to bring together a structural analysis of tourism with the study of labor in a tourist-led service economy. In bringing together these two fields of study, it is my hope to develop a more holistic understanding of what has emerged as one of the world's largest industries. I have already alluded to my central argument, namely that the political economy of tourism is organized so that the world of work and the world of leisure and consumption are too closely related to be studied in exclusion of each other. From this, several concomitant claims arise:

1. To understand the role of mass tourism in modern society requires a critical look at how the commodities it traffics in are produced: just as large segments of industrial economies come to be organized around industrial production, so does the production of touristic commodities come to restructure the social and economic life of a touristic culture. New Orleans is such a culture. "Touristic commodities" here refer to the sundry tchotchkes and comestibles that are immediately recognized as commodities as such, as well as the immaterial congeries of culture, history, and experience which the institutions and practices of tourism commodify.

2. The particular dynamic of tourism brings the processes of production, exchange, and consumption far closer together in space and time than other modalities of economic activity. The producer and the consumer (the worker and the tourist) come together to form an often intimate and always symbiotic relationship, i.e., they share the factory floor. It is in this sense that labor and leisure can hardly be discussed outside of each other.

3. What is "the particular dynamic of tourism," then, that it requires this simultaneity? I contend that it is the nature of the touristic commodity itself. Not the kitchy bauble or the

stunning vista, but the ultimate commodity underwriting the tourist economy, which is the *touristic experience*. This commodity is an assemblage of the material and the immaterial aspects of space, place, and culture; it is the role of labor to run the machine which translates these disparate elements of cultural and spatial capital into a saleable experience, i.e., into capital *per se*.

4. To the extent that a city – New Orleans – has organized itself around the production of this commodity, aspects of social life which may appear separate from the tourist sphere are in fact intimately bound to it. This intimacy need not imply direct interaction between locals and tourists; within the local population, only a select few actually engage with tourists on an individual basis. Instead, it is the tourist in the aggregate and in the abstract who becomes a social and economic fact in the lives of their hosts. This is made especially visible in the world of work, but I believe that it applies to a variable degree to all major fields of social reproduction.

5. Where tourism is economically dominant - New Orleans being a case in point - the tourist in aggregate holds a considerable amount of class power. This obtains despite the fact that individual tourists may occupy very different class and status positions vis-a-vis other tourists as well as the local residents they interact with. As a class "for themselves" (MacCannell 2013: xxi), tourists interpose between "traditional" social arrangements, including those with which the language of political economy is more familiar: worker and management, labor and capital.

6. This may lead to conflict as different class fractions within a local population try to navigate the situation to their advantage, seeking to position themselves so as to gain access to the tourist dollar while avoiding socially negative connotations of servility. It is in this context that "the hustle" assumes a degree of particular importance within the political economy of

tourism, while sharp distinctions between the "formal" and "informal" segments of the economy begin to break down.

A Brief Note About "New Orleans' Culture"

As this paper concerns the production of the touristic commodity, it necessarily touches upon the concept of "culture," whether this refers to the celebrated culture of the city that the tourist travels to consume, or the workaday culture of those locals who serve them. But, as Clifford Geertz (1973) and many others (e.g., Moore 2004, McGee and Warms 2008) culture is a notoriously slippery term, even for (especially for) anthropologists, who have laid a special claim to the subject as their discipline's own. There is, of course, Taylor's vision of "that complex whole" which includes enough elements for Geertz to dismiss it as "*pot-au-feu* theorizing" (4) and to supply his own conception of culture as the "webs of significance" (5) which we spin even as they ensnare us. But as Gotham (2002) has argued, to view culture as simply a "complex of signs and signification" is to miss the ways in which significance is always caught up in the material world of "spatial and political economic trends" (1738-39), trends which include the very commodification and spectacularization of culture which this paper partially concerns. I follow Gotham in this particular conception of culture, in which its semiotics are never wholly freed from the social relations of capitalist political economy.

While this is not the place for any robust discussion of "the culture concept," the subject at hand does beg at least some clarification of how the term is being used in this specific context—culture, after all, is of prime concern to both the anthropologist *and* the New Orleans tourist, who is advised to "sink their teeth" into a piece of it. Within the context of tourism in New Orleans, there seems to be two broad categories into which the concept can be divided. There is the outward facing world of cultural production, which includes the spectacles of Mardi

Gras, second lines, and live jazz, but which also incorporates certain tropes and mythologies of the city, such as the city's *laissez faire* attitude, its purported tolerance and loose morality—in short, its "Big Easiness". And then there is the inward facing cultural world of social reproduction, which is the quotidian world of the workplace, the kitchen table, the church, and the schoolyard. The distinctions between these categories are admittedly artificial, and it is often hard to tell how to categorize a certain cultural practice or production. This is actually rather the point: insofar as any distinction can be made between outward and inward facing cultural practices, the dynamics of tourism all but ensures that a dialectic will emerge between them wherein elements of the inward facing become incorporated into the spectacular. I return to this dialectic in greater detail below. For now I merely want to point to the difficulty of drawing any clear line between the daily culture or habitus of a "local" or "authentic" New Orleans and the commodified cultural productions of the city's touristic elements.³

Methods, Methodology, and Outline

To support the propositions enumerated above, I draw on fieldwork conducted in New Orleans' French Quarter, which I take to be both the functional and symbolic heart of the city's tourism and hospitality industry. Over the course of this study, which began in earnest in January of 2019, I turned my job washing dishes in a French Quarter restaurant into an opportunity for participant observation, documenting the daily coming and goings of workers and tourists alike with the intention of finding anthropological meaning within the workaday world of this "factory". On a daily basis I was able to observe the shuffling paces of guided walking tours,

³ The fraught relationship between tourism, authenticity, and culture in New Orleans has been the subject of considerable public debate as well as scholarly writing, notably Gotham's (2007) *Authentic New Orleans* and the more recent collection *Remaking New Orleans* (Adams and Sakakeeny 2019)

listening to the rhythm of the guide's storytelling and noting the structure and content of their tales. Countless conversations with fellow workers accustomed me to the argot and habitus of the kitchen, the back alley smoke break, and the nightshift barroom. Several of these workers were generous enough to sit with me for formal interview sessions which were recorded and transcribed; out of these, I have chosen two in particular to highlight, and selections of their transcripts appear below. These interviews, in turn, gave me new perspectives through which to interpret the dozens of less formal conversations I was having on a daily basis. I spoke to delivery drivers, noting the breadth of their daily rounds, listened to the complaints of waiters and bartenders, and watched as the tourists they served stumbled down Bourbon Street and into a waiting cab. Throughout all, it has been my intention to find some coherence in this often spectacular interplay of culture and economy.

By incorporating interview and workplace participant observation into a study of one of the global economy's largest industries, my intention is to foreground the role that labor plays in what Kevin Fox Gotham (2007) has called "tourism from below," a concept which calls attention to the agency of local actors, the structural constraints of that agency, and the contingent factors of locality at play within the political, social, and economic structures of global tourism. However, as I have argued, a singular focus on the figure of the worker elides the symbiosis of labor and leisure that tourism entails; the figure of the tourist therefore appears throughout, driving, at times, the economic action, and at other times simply being driven.

After briefly reviewing some of the pertinent literature regarding the service economy writ large, I turn to the issue of tourism in particular, including several theoretical approaches to its sociology, and discuss how the field of tourism studies may benefit from a closer attention to the world of work within the industry. To do so I employ Gotham's "heuristic" of "tourism from

above and below" (ibid.), while also addressing what I call "tourism from afar," a concept I elaborate below. The articulation of these different "levels" of tourism, which, I argue, is made possible through the labor of the industry's workers, is a critical element of the commodification process whereby certain products or practices are marked and authenticated for touristic consumption. Focusing on the discursive labor of tour guides and other "front stage" workers, I argue that these workers play a crucial role in making the city "legible" to the tourist gaze and thus consumable.

The majority of workers in the tourism and hospitality industry, however, *do not* occupy these critical front stage positions. Instead, their labor takes place in the industry's back regions. Restaurants, with their often sharp distinction between "front of house" and "back of house" employees, offer a clear example of this division of labor. Furthermore, because the presence or invisibility of certain workers vis-a-vis the tourist gaze is *itself* an element of the touristic experience, the social identities of workers may become entangled in the commodification process, making the question of front and backstage divisions especially pertinent to the study at hand. Drawing on interviews with restaurant workers, I explore some of the causes and implications of this structural division. I argue that while historical patterns of race and gender divisions are certainly implicated in the segmentation of this particular labor market, the habitus and culture of the workplace may make these processes disappear into the realm of common sense, both for the workers themselves and for the tourists they serve.

In a final section, I turn specifically to the industry's back regions, arguing that it is here where the extensiveness of the tourist economy can best be grasped. The restaurant again becomes a case in point as I draw on field notes and participant observation in an effort to map the extensive web of exchange which facilitates tourist productions. By way of conclusion, I

argue that in order to develop a more holistic approach to the political economy of tourism we must extend our understanding of the tourist sphere and note the ways in which seemingly disparate forms of labor are caught up in its logic and its rhythm.

Review of Labor and Leisure

I. The work I am presenting here is considerably different from the project I had originally envisioned. *That* project was to have addressed the changing nature of work and the working classes as the long "shift to services" has ushered in changes of "revolutionary proportions" to the political economy of the developed world (Schettkat and Yocarini 2003). I had wanted to see what working class opposition looked like in an economy where the factory, strictly speaking, was no longer the primary provider of unskilled or low skilled employment (OECD 2005, Autor and Dorn 2013), and where the factory floor was no longer the center of working class culture and politics (Carbonella and Kasmir 2016; cf. Willis 1977). I was to argue that the atomization and casualization of the productive base of society, culminating in the modern "gig economy," had overdetermined the current social moment, with all the nihilism, anomie, precarity, and inequality that has attended it. As these socially negative traits have worked their way into the lexicon and framework of anthropological study (cf. Ortner 2016, Han 2018), I felt that an analysis of the material conditions underlying these dispositions was called for. New Orleans, with its high rates of unskilled, low wage, and unsteady employment, was to provide an example *par excellence* of these structural trends, making it an ideal case study of the neoliberal city (Buras 2010, Adams 2013). I had intended to eschew sticky and subjective questions of "culture"— I would focus on *facts*, social and economic, grounding the study on the "factory floor" of the city's vaunted restaurants, where I hoped to discover some new internal contradiction, some unexplored form of capitalist exploitation, or perhaps some satisfying display of labor's subtle resistance.

After weeks of interview and transcription and months of participant drudgery, what I "discovered" was a sweaty confirmation of the literature: wages in the industry were persistently

low (Nelson et al. 2015), workers were unlikely to be unionized (USDL 2019, Bernhardt et al. 2003; *but cf.* Gray 2004, 2014), racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination was widespread and normalized, with white workers tending to fare a bit better than non-whites, men a bit better than women (Jayaraman and Schneider 2014, Habans and Plyer 2018)—in short, there were few remarkable differences between my study of New Orleans and more general studies of service economies writ large (Applebaum et. al. 2003, Sassen 1999).

Disappointed, I looked back through my notes and drafts to see what I had missed. There I found quite a few references to the importance of keeping economic analysis "socially embedded" (Granovetter 1985), and to "extending" the case study so as to "locate everyday life in its extralocal and historical context" (Burawoy 1998); subsequent write-ups, however, showed little evidence of either of these approaches. What I had missed was this: In New Orleans, economic action – including labor and its politics – is not embedded in the abstractions of the so called "service industry," but rather in the specific dynamics of *tourism*, understood as both a political economic framework and a set of cultural and socio-spatial practices (Gotham 2002).

II. As tourism has grown in scope and scale to become one of – if not *the* – largest industries in the world economy (Lippard 2013), the study of tourism has grown accordingly, as have its theoretical approaches. On the theoretical level, much of the work regarding the practices of tourism has focused on *what* tourists go to see, *why* they go to see it, and what they *do* once they're there. This work has explored tourism as a modern quest for authenticity (MacCannell 2013), one which bears a significant resemblance to the premodern religious pilgrimage (Badone and Roseman 2004), and whose practices reflect (and call for reflection upon) patterns of *post*modern consumption which extend beyond the strictly touristic (Urry 1990). In this regard, tourism has even been seen as a kind of social theorizing and ethnographic

practice in its own right (Van Den Abbeele 1980). Beyond this, we also encounter theories of tourism as "commercialized hospitality," "democratized travel," "neocolonialism," "an acculturative process," "an expression of basic cultural themes," "a type of ethnic relations," and simply "a modern leisure activity" (Cohen 1984: 376).

The multiplicity of ways in which tourism can be analyzed can in part be read as both a function and an index of the tourist's ubiquity in the world—and it is because of this worldwide ubiquity that tourism can provide "an ideal context for studying issues of political economy, social change and development, natural resource management, and cultural identity and expression" (Stronza 2001: 261). But the tourist and their activities, as well as their relationships with host communities, will appear very differently depending on the analytical frame used—neocolonial studies, for instance, are unlikely to seize on the same social facts as a study in "democratized travel." It is for this reason that I think it necessary to be explicit about the labor-centered approach to tourism this paper takes. However, as I have already argued, this necessarily entails attention to the social matrix in which labor is embedded.

Importantly, critical attention has been paid to the transformations that a locality undergoes as it "remakes itself in the tourist's image of it" (MacCannell 2013: xviii; see also Greenwood 1972, Thomas 2014). This includes questions of how cultural productions, from the spectacle of public celebrations (Gotham 2002) to local foodways (Wilk 2006), change in substance and in meaning as they are commodified for touristic consumption. Furthermore, as the socioeconomic entailments of tourism become stitched into local patterns of culture and interposed within local social structures, new formulations of cultural identity may emerge, drawn around issues of autochthony, belongingness in space and place, and cultural ownership (Regis 2019). On the other hand, already existing social divisions and inequalities may be

compounded as categories of race, gender, class, and status are mobilized in the determination of just *who* is allowed access to the tourists and their money (Thomas 2014, Roland 2011).

This last point bears directly on the specific study of labor within the political economy of tourism, as it raises questions of how and why different segments of a local population involve themselves in the tourist economy (Stronza 2001). It also hints at the unequal returns which tourism metes out to those involved. In a city like New Orleans, where tourism has eclipsed all other major industries (Souther 2006), these are more than academic questions; for many New Orleanians participation in tourism is hardly a matter of choice—it is, rather, one's position within the industry that becomes the critical question.

Insofar as a "touristic culture" (Gotham 2007) comes to reorganize itself around the production of touristic experience, it should be expected that social structural arrangements - including class and status positions - will reflect certain structural elements of tourism. Therefore I think it is necessary to touch on two intersecting theories of the structure of tourism, with the intention of connecting these admittedly abstract concepts to the lived-in physicality of labor within the industry.

The first is MacCannell's 1976 *The Tourist*, which offers a structural analysis of sightseeing. More than this, MacCannell has set himself the ambitious task of working towards a "semiotics" of modernity⁴. For the modern subject, he argues, the tourist attraction is "precisely

⁴ For MacCannell, the modern world can be understood as having two fundamental characteristics. The first is that, as economies deindustrialize, leisure and consumption replace work as "the center of modern social arrangements" (5). Secondly, modernity can be viewed as a continual process of "social structural differentiation," through which "social life constantly subdivides and reorganizes itself in ever increasing complexity" (11): sightseeing and tourism, in this context becomes "*a ritual performed to the differentiations of society...The differentiations are the attractions*" (13, emphasis his). In the political economy of leisure and consumption, it is *difference itself* which is commodified, and the extent to which that difference can assure its own unique, authentic quality, is the extent to which it is a "value added" commodity.

analogous to the religious symbolism of primitive peoples" (2), and thus a suitable object of structuralist (in the Levi-Straussian sense) study. The things that the tourist goes to see, and the reasons they go to see them, offer an "unplanned typology of structure that provides direct access to the modern consciousness" (2). Following Charles Peirce's formulation that "*a sign represents something to someone*," (109) MacCannell gives us this (110):

[represents / something / to someone] sign

[marker / sight / tourist] attraction

This, then, is the "semiotic of attraction" (109). It is the *marker* which makes the attraction meaningful to the tourist, which enables "the tourist gaze". In other words, without the marker (eg., a sign informing the viewer that the empty field they are viewing is in fact the sight of a famous battle) *there is no attraction*. The marker holds this constitutive power because it allows for, if not insists upon, differentiation: *this* is the battlefield, distinct from all other fields. In short, to be regarded as such, an attraction must be made to appear as unique, as the authentic thing in itself. But, as Van Den Abbeele (1980) had argued, because the marker necessarily mediates the relationship between the tourist and the sight there is a (hypothesized) danger that this mediation will preclude any real, immediate experience of the actual attraction. Contra Van Den Abbeele, however, I contend that this mediation is *itself* a fundamental element of touristic experience, and one which is largely facilitated by labor. I return to this contention in some detail below.

The Tourist Gaze (Urry 1990) provides the second relevant theory of tourism as a structured practice. As the phrase suggests, the concept of the tourist gaze is borrowed from Foucault, specifically from *The Birth of the Clinic*: just as the "medical gaze" came to be constructed around a specific way of seeing and knowing, one which was "supported and

justified by an institution" (quoted in Urry, p. 2), so too have touristic practices given rise to their own modes of perception and to their own supporting institutions.

The concept of "the tourist gaze" speaks to the relative power of the tourist vis-a-vis the people, places, and things which they gaze upon. Under the gaze, the patient (to stretch the medical analogy just a bit further) is to the medical student as the attraction is to the tourist: an object of intense curiosity to be scrutinized, sketched, diagnosed (what else is a *Lonely Planet* guide to New Orleans than a diagnosis of the city?), and catalogued. A society which lives and works beneath this gaze will naturally respond to the pressure which it exerts to correspond to the expectations of the relationally powerful gazer. It is this, backed by the economic weight of the tourist dollar, that makes the tourist in the aggregate such a dominating faction within touristic cultures.

Tourism From Above, Below, and From Afar

As I noted earlier, there are different levels of perspective for analyzing the practices and impacts of tourism within and upon a locality. I owe this point partially to Gotham's "heuristic of tourism from above and from below" (op. cit.), but also to James Scott's (1998) critique of the state's "synoptic," bird's eye vision of the world. For Scott, the project of top-down governance is predicated on a mode of "seeing" which takes in the raw and messy tumult of the living world and reduces its complexity to a set of bureaucratically legible facts—facts which are necessarily reductive, unsubtle, and blinkered. This vision, limited as it may be, has a transformative power, insofar as it has the backing of the state's economic and political-coercive power. The "facts on the ground," ie. the workaday life of a city, a district, a strategic hamlet, etc., will come to feel

the pressure which top-down visions exert upon them to conform to the expectations of the planner.⁵

I am not, of course, suggesting any close parallel between tourism and a modernist state project.⁶ I *am* suggesting that Gotham's conception of tourism from above shares certain traits with more dramatic manifestations of top-down visions of locality. A joint production of marketing boards, corporations, and city planners, tourism from above grasps onto certain salient facts and produces from these a synopsis of the totality which can be easily transmitted across departments: whereas the contradictions and social dramas which the political economy of tourism gives rise to are difficult to express in the language of the New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation, statistics regarding "jobs created," "annual number of visitors," and "visitor spending" fit neatly into a city council powerpoint presentation (NOTMC 2019).

The synopsis of place which tourism from above produces and disseminates speaks the language of the advertising firm, as well as the language of the city council.⁷ This brings me to the level of perspective which I call *tourism from afar*. Tourism from afar refers to the collection of images, narratives, and expectations which a potential visitor collects about a certain location

⁵ Urban revitalization schemes are an apt example of this dynamic, provided we substitute the purported flexibility of "private-public partnerships" for the absolutish drive of the modernist state. It is no coincidence that increased tourism has consistently been both a goal and an index of "successful" urban projects, whether or not local residents endorse these visions of their city, neighborhood, or block. The crucial point here is the power that the vision of the "outsider" holds over the locality in question, whether we are talking about the "tourist gaze" or the "mile-high" vision of the modernist planner.

⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that mass tourism *did* become part of the soviet project: in the 1920's, the Russian Society of Tourists was liquidated and replaced with the Society of Proletarian Tourism; the ideological expression of soviet tourism is perhaps best captured in a 1951 *Trud* article, "For Mass Touring," which proclaimed "The tourist movement must become a mass movement!" (Gorsuch 2003).

⁷ Gotham calls this the "branding" of the city, by which he means "the marketing of a corporate-oriented version of urban culture as an object of consumption" in which "the distinction between the real city and the imagine city implodes" (2007: 10)

in anticipation of their actual experience of it. This collection is at once deeply individualistic and subjective, built up in the mind's eye from past experience and personal desires and anxieties, and highly mediated and homogenized, a product of the multiple and mutually reinforcing representations of their desired destination that the visitor-to-be has encountered through advertising and place branding.

Like tourism from above, tourism from afar produces visions of place akin to Scott's synoptic state, albeit with a (perhaps more) romantic bent. It creates desire across a multiplicity of affective terrains (e.g., the nostalgic, the sexual, the gustatory, etc.), and it stirs touristic curiosity, whetting the appetite for touristic experience. If we consider tourism from above as an institutionalization of tourism which traffics in synoptic narratives of place and history, creates romantic notions and exotic visions of difference—and then uses institutional power to support this discourse, we can imagine the articulation of above and afar as akin to a kind of "*Orientalism*." And like the colonial writers whose romantic projections (and often disappointed experiences) Said (1979, see especially pp. 166-97) recounts, the tourist is all but certain to find the world into which they have arrived to be a far cry from the destination they have dreamt of.

Upon arrival there is a moment of bewilderment, brought about by the sudden shift from above and afar to the hurly burly instant of the street, which is a moment of liminality for the visitor as they find themselves yanked from the structure of their "normal" life into the "anti-structure" of a foreign land (Turner 1969)⁸; in the tourist economy, the fulfillment, reconciliation, or prolongation of this liminal moment becomes the labor of others. This is the

⁸ Levi-Strauss (1961) also notes the disjuncture (the "anti-structural" character) of travel, especially in regards to social structure: "People generally think of travel in terms of displacement in space, but a long journey exists simultaneously in space, in time, and in the social hierarchy...[the traveler] may go up in the world, or he may go down; and the feeling and flavor of the places he visits will be inseparable in his mind from the exact position in the social scale which he will have occupied there" (89-90).

moment of conjunction between tourism from above and afar and tourism from below. Like Scott's "local trackers" who make the intricacies of life on the ground intelligible to the state's administrators, the tourism economy has given rise to a kind of economic specialist whose role it is to guide the bewildered tourist through their liminality, pointing the way through the gauntlet of hustlers and knockoffs towards the desired experience, be it a "real" jazz club, a bowl of "authentic" Creole gumbo, or a glimpse of a "genuine" colonial facade. This is labor's role in constructing the tourist city, in directing the tourist gaze, a partial theory of "tourism from below" that accounts for the worker.

Although he largely fails to account for the specific role of labor, Gotham's heuristic is directly applicable to the matter at hand, i.e., to the worker's place in the tourist economy. For Gotham, tourism from below is marked by local appropriations of the "generic and standardized products of tourism from above" (Gotham 2007: 159). At this local level, the institutions and categories that the industry relies on – the mechanisms that translate cultural capital into exchange value – become sites of conflict and contestation. Locals may try to seize control over the touristic narrative of their city painted by industry elites, or they may try to exploit the tourist infrastructure for their own gain. In the political economy of tourism, these localized struggles present a possible arena for workers to assert themselves while still operating within the constraints of the industry's structure.

One place where we can observe this particular kind of (constrained) agency is in the practice and performance of those workers who occupy positions on the city's front stage. I mean the waiters and bartenders and cabbies of New Orleans who, unlike the city's visionary elites, have unmediated access to the actual tourist. Put another way, these workers are *themselves* the mediation between the tourist and the city. This is where MacCannell's structural analysis of

sightseeing becomes especially relevant. But whereas MacCannell posits [marker / sight / tourist] as the semiotic of attraction (2013: 110), I would suggest that we could conceptualize the role of the front stage worker as something along the lines of [worker / city / tourist] = *touristic experience*. In other words, it is through the performative discourse of these workers that the city is made legible to the tourist gaze.

The most immediate example of this kind of work is seen in the figure of the tour guide, whose labor is the very embodiment of the process of marking something for touristic consumption. In what follows, I offer a brief example of this kind of narrative work, an example that I believe points to the role of labor in the production of the tourist commodity as well as the negotiation of its "authenticity," that rarified quintessence of the tourist experience.

Guiding the Tourist Gaze

Early on a spring afternoon, the guide of a French Quarter walking tour turned his clients away from the heat and noise of Royal Street, one of the Quarter's busier stretches, and into the relative quiet of Exchange Alley. Here the group gathered in the shade of a French Quarter Revival style townhouse, sipping cocktails from white paper cups. "Do you know what you're drinking?" the guide asked rhetorically. "It's a Pimm's daiquiri". Some of the assembled crowd, of which there were about a dozen, nodded in recognition, familiar with either Pimm's cups, or with daiquiris, or with both. Others simply sipped away, listening with mixed interest as their guide touted the artisanal qualities of their cocktails before launching into a charming, if fanciful, history of one of New Orleans' most iconic drinks, the frozen daiquiri.

Not to be confused with the classic rum cocktail of the same name (the guide began), the New Orleans-style frozen daiquiri "actually" has its roots in a middling sized college town outside the city. The drink's creation was something of a happy accident: One day, the owner of a certain liquor store found himself in possession of several crates of sweet orange liqueur which, for the life of him, he could not seem to sell. Not even to the thirsty and undiscerning student body which made up his chief clientele, not even at a steep discount. Despairing of ever being rid of the stuff, the enterprising man turned his hand to alchemy, mixing the syrupy liqueur with Everclear and Grenadine and selling the result as a readymade cocktail, served over crushed ice. The drink became a local success. Invigorated with entrepreneurial spirit, the store owner managed to track down several granita machines; loaded up with his colorful mixture the swirling machines quickly became the focal point of a new business model: the frozen daiquiri stand. The frozen daiquiri proved to be so successful, in fact, that the liquor store proprietor was able to export his creation to the city of New Orleans, where it soon became a staple of the

French Quarter experience, the bright churn of the machines enlivening the countertops and backbars of Bourbon, Canal, and Decatur Streets, a sugary fuel for the debauch of Spring Break or Mardi Gras.

This is the "just so story" of the frozen daiquiri, or at least the version that the guide offered up, and while I can't speak to the veracity of the tale, I can say that it was delivered with no small amount of charm and wit. But it's not the content of the story that concerns us, so much as the function of its telling. The myth of the frozen daiquiri, I contend, serves to authenticate a particular type of tourist experience; in doing so it helps to cultivate a particular type of tourist and to direct the tourist gaze. This will hopefully become clearer if we look at the context surrounding the myth's telling, especially the highly structured nature of the moment: the myth was not told willy-nilly, an anecdote to pass the time while walking from one attraction to the next. No, it was a scripted performance, complete with set changes and props.

Exchange Place, where the actual telling of the tale took place, is set apart from the hum and bustle that surrounds it—it doesn't stand out from the rest of the French Quarter so much as it hides away from it. In the alley there is no neon, no jukebox thud, no club barkers. There are, instead, balconies hung with cascading planters and a row of quiet palm trees whose ceramic pots match the flagstones of the walkway. Rather than neon signage, there is instead a workshop dedicated to the hand crafting of Victorian gaslights. Compared to the hurly-burly of Bourbon Street, Royal Street, or Decatur Street, Exchange Place is presented as a brief stretch of refinement and charm. It is to Bourbon Street what an "artisanal" Pimm's Daiquiri is to the Grenadine-and-Everclear punch of the myth.

And this is the importance of the Pimm's Daiquiri, the myth of the orange liqueur, and the tour's scripted stop in Exchange place. Through the narrative work of the guide, the classic

(iconic, even) New Orleans-style frozen daiquiri is rendered inauthentic, even vulgar—it is shown to be an *import*, associated with college students, and (even worse!) tourists. On the other hand, the commodities presented by the tour – I mean commodities in the strict sense (a craft cocktail) and also in the sense that the *ultimate* commodity of tourism is an authentic experience (the colonial quiet of the alley, the sensation of flagstones, the individual pleasure of gazing with distinction) – are set over against the "typical" French Quarter experience, and are all the more valuable for this juxtaposition.

We can perhaps better understand the dynamics of the scenario described above if we take MacCannell's assertion that tourism and sightseeing are a kind ritual performed to modern society in a rather literal sense. An analysis then becomes possible along the lines laid out by Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* (1969). To borrow from Turner's structural model of Ndembu ritual (1-44), we find here a set of dyadic oppositions drawn around the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, as well as a triadic relationship in which the tour guide acts as mediating force. Grouping the salient components of the scene around the twin poles of authenticity we find:

<u>Inauthentic:</u>	<u>Authentic:</u>
<i>Bourbon Street</i>	<i>Exchange Alley</i>
<i>Everclear</i>	<i>Pimm's</i>
<i>Tourists and Students</i>	<i>Distinguished Guests and Visitors</i>
<i>Loud Street</i>	<i>Colonial Quiet</i>
<i>Neon light</i>	<i>Gaslight</i>
<i>etc...</i>	

The guide, acting as a kind of "religious specialist," leads the tour group from the liminality of their initial encounter with the city, through the dangers of inauthenticity posed by the left hand column and into the safety and enlightenment of the right. In doing so, the guide also acts as a

mediating, third party between the tourist and the raw city, as well as between these particular visitors and their unwashed other.

This leads me to one final analysis of the scene, which employs what MacCannell has called "*the dialectics of authenticity*" (145). This concept needs a bit of unpacking if it is to be much use to the case at hand, but I believe it warrants the digression as it points to a central contradiction within the political economy of tourism—thankfully, Abbeele (1980: 7) has provided a rather tidy synopsis of the process:

The tourist's desire for authenticity is an individualistic one in which he seeks to appropriate that authenticity for himself as opposed to other tourists...who can render the sight inauthentic by their mere presence. This dilemma is complicated by the fact that once the sight is marked, it is also marked as "for the tourists," and therefore as no longer authentic. The desire for authenticity however only leads to the marking of new sights which then become inauthentic through the very act of their being marked.

In other words, authenticity is an unstable quality, or at least an unreliable commodity, always approaching its own negation. This is not the only contradiction which the tourism economy gives rise to, but it is an important one, especially as it perpetuates the continual incorporation of ever new spaces and practices into the tourism economy. These new sights of touristic consumption then become themselves subject to the kind of mediation provided by workers within the industry.

To conclude this section, the guided tour recounted above demonstrates that the front stage of the tourist world is a key site where authenticity (and therefore touristic value) is created. But it can also emerge as a site of struggle over the meaning of the touristic object, in this case the city of New Orleans. This becomes clearer if we join Gotham in "understanding authenticity as plural, conflictual and contested" (2007: 161), and look towards a process which he calls "hybridization," wherein "local people use tourism institutions and practices to produce

new authenticities and cultural innovations" (ibid., 159); while the bona fides of a frozen daiquiri may not rise to the level of sociopolitical relevance that Gotham has in mind, I believe that this process is precisely what took place in Exchange Alley.

I have chosen to highlight the narrative work of the tour guide in particular because I think it is the clearest, most immediate example of the role that labor plays in structuring tourist experiences and constructing the tourist gaze. But the role is not reserved for the guide alone. For every tour guide in New Orleans there are dozens, if not hundreds of waiters, bartenders, cabbies, bellhops and hustlers constructing their own myths of the city, directing the tourist gaze – and the cash it carries – towards *this* neighborhood, *this* street, *this* barroom, *this* drink (made with *these* bitters), and not the other. By "marking" certain spaces and practices, these front stage workers make the city legible (and thus consumable) to the gaze of the millions of visitors who filter through their hands. And in doing so, they are performing the daily operations which keeps humming the machine that translates culture into capital.

By placing labor in the framework of "tourism from below" I have tried to highlight the agency of certain workers within the industry. Before considering some of the limitations to this framing I would like to quickly recap my argument so far: the ultimate commodity in the tourist economy is the touristic experience; through the multiple forms of their labor – affective, discursive, and physical – workers on the front stage *produce* these experiences through their direction of the tourist gaze and by marking the place or practice to be experienced as worth its asking price. In this way workers are engaged in "tourism from below" and participate in the construction – and (occasional, possible, limited...) contestation – of the city's myths and its narratives of authenticity. These workers, then, continually "make" the city, but, to borrow an old line, they do not make it just as they please.

Front and Backstages of the Tourist World

There are, of course, limits to residents' – particularly workers' – ability to construct or contest narratives of their city. Only certain places or cultural elements can be successfully incorporated into the "repertoire of authenticity" (Gotham 2007) that firms and workers draw from in their competition for the tourist dollar. For that matter, only certain workers are able to participate in this narrative work. These issues are not as unrelated as they may seem; the categories of authenticity, indigeneity, culture, and belongingness which accumulate so much value within the political economy of tourism are often built around categories of group identity, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity. These categorical identities may become associated with certain kinds of work, leading to an "ascriptive segmentation" of the labor market. They are also caught up in the production of the tourist commodity itself, as the performance of certain aspects of these identities becomes a part of the touristic experience.

Whereas the last section focused on the guided tour, and particularly on the work of the guide, in this section I turn to the bars and restaurants of New Orleans to examine how social identity and position factor into how cultural productions are translated into capital and, just as importantly, who is effecting this translation. In a city which markets its cuisine and cocktails as a distinctive part of its culture, these establishments provide an ideal place to examine the interplay of concepts like authenticity, performance, and culture, within the analytical categories of political economy—specifically how social relations of production and consumption are organized. As Beriss and Sutton (2007) have written, restaurants provide modern instances of "total social phenomena," reflecting important elements of culture and social organization, as well as providing the setting for the performance of identity and status. Restaurants, the authors contend, are sites where "non-market relations" of "kinship, gender, and politics" are

incorporated into market oriented practices and organization (3), where cultural capital enters into the "symbolic economy" of the city, "reflecting and shaping" its physical and social geography (3,8). In short, "restaurants bring together nearly all the characteristics of economic life studied by cultural anthropologists - forms of exchange, modes of production, and the symbolism behind consumption - under one roof" (1).

In what follows I draw on interviews conducted with two veterans of this segment of the industry to explore how workers experience this congeries of cultural and socioeconomic facts while working beneath the tourist gaze. Together, the two women whose voices appear below have a combined experience of nearly twenty years working the front stage of the New Orleans tourism industry. Sam, who began waitressing at an upscale, uptown establishment when she was twenty, now works in the French Quarter, managing the "front of house" for a popular mid-sized restaurant, as well as tending bar and waiting tables. Though Nadia no longer works in the Quarter, she has several years of experience in its "factory," alongside her more recent experiences waiting tables in another of New Orleans' tourist-heavy neighborhoods. The conversations which I partially reproduce here touch on several important aspects of work within the industry, including ascriptive divisions of labor, the informality of the wage structure, and the processes through which the workers themselves become a part of the touristic commodity.

I. Division

From a sociological perspective, one of the most striking aspects of restaurant work is its partitioning of "front of house" from "back of house," a division which incorporates not only the spatial regions of the restaurant, but also the nature of labor within these regions, and often the social identities of the workers positioned within them. Spradley and Manning's (1975) study of "Brady's Bar" makes clear that divisions of labor and of physical space are not simply

outgrowths of a rationalized organization of tasks. Instead they indicate that the socio-spatial arrangements of work they studied are shot through with unequal power relations whose conflicts are mediated by social norms and expectations which serve to shift workplace struggles into the realm of culture — and through this shift normative roles are reinforced as they are practiced on a daily basis.

Speaking specifically of New Orleans (though there is plenty of evidence that the dynamic she describes is hardly limited to this particular city), Nadia gives a succinct description of the "common sense" reading of the breakdown of the restaurant workforce when she says "I think that division comes from the nature of the work, as well as racial divisions. Back of the house tends to be browner, front of the house tends to be whiter". Unsurprisingly, this observation is borne out by both qualitative and statistical data (Jayaraman and Schneider 2014, Habans and Plyer 2018). But Nadia quickly moves past the kind of common sense that assumes that there is anything "natural" about this kind of segmentation, and offers an analysis of how the perceived expectations of the clientele (tourists, in this case) may influence staffing decisions:

Someone wants what they perceive to be a friendly white woman offering them food, as opposed to people that they might be more afraid around or maybe can't connect to as well....I think that people who are in charge of hiring have an assumption of what the general public wants. And the general public is kinda racist, so they might not be *wrong* in that assumption—like, wrong in that opinion—however, it's still wrong, and if we're going to work on breaking down these racial barriers, things like hiring brown people to be the face of your company is important. You can't just cater to the lowest common denominator.

The "lowest common denominator" in this case is not necessarily the *actual* desires of the tourist, but rather the *expectations* that management has about what these desires are likely to be, e.g., "a friendly white woman offering them food". This seems to suggest that there is a dialectic between what is actually presented to the tourist gaze and who the tourist is thought to be, in this case "kinda racist". By asserting that restaurants can and

should challenge this dynamic by hiring non-white workers to be the "face" of their business, Nadia is also calling attention to issues of representations of and within social space, issues that are given a special importance if we take seriously the role of the gaze in structuring the tourist experience.

But there is another element at play in the segmentation of labor within the New Orleans restaurant industry. Both Sam and Nadia spoke of the importance of social networks in job attainment, placement, and mobility. While Sam explicitly recognized some of the problems for workforce diversity that a reliance on social groups may lead to, she was also frank in acknowledging that this too is a commonsensical aspect of staffing decisions:

I realized after I started [working in New Orleans restaurants] that we just hire our friends. That's just the way it goes...I think it's normal for New Orleans. I can't speak to the restaurant industry in other places, but it's *definitely* normal for New Orleans.

Nadia too has relied on networks of friends and acquaintances to find work in the industry, and to achieve a degree of mobility. Her gloss on the situation, however, again highlights how this hiring strategy functions to reinforce the racialized divisions of labor common to the industry:

Obviously it's more complex than just 'we don't like brown people.' It's a matter of the people in power tend to be white, so if they're hiring their friends, their friend groups are also white and so they continuously replace people with people they know, or people that get recommended to them, and so those jobs just tend to stay in certain groups.

Again, labor segmentation seems to occur as an outgrowth of the natural inclination of business to a.) tailor their product (the *experience* of the restaurant, including the demeanor and identity of its "face") to the tourist gaze, and b.) the inclination of workers to mobilize social networks to attain good jobs. At least this is how it appears at the level of the individual firm—neither my informants nor I would be naive enough to suggest that these individual cases were not deeply embedded in historic patterns of racialized labor segmentation and control. Nonetheless, the "on

the ground" experiences of these workers help us to see how these patterns are reinforced in the workaday world. Furthermore, as Mark Granovetter (1973) has argued, the individual agency of workers at the firm level becomes a constituent element of larger socioeconomic structures as they operationalize social groups in pursuit of employment: "It is through these networks that small-scale interaction becomes translated into large-scale patterns, and that these, in turn, feed back into small groups (1973: 1360).

II. Serving

The primary division of labor within the restaurant is between the front and back of house, a division made quite familiar to sociology through Erving Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which the author explores the social geography of front and back regions, or "stages". The front stage, of course, is the world of performance and role playing—in the world of tourism (and especially within the restaurant) this is the segment of labor which the structure of tourism opens up to the tourist gaze. It here, in the front of house region, where workers are put on stage. In fulfilling their role they become a part of the tourist commodity: they are part of the show, and therefore an integral part of the touristic experience. There are several interesting contradictions contained on this aspect of tourism, not the least of which is the commodification of the front stage worker's personhood. Sam drives straight to the point when she says

I feel like waiting tables is selling your personhood. I feel like when your waiting tables it's about —it's about the food I *guess*, it's about the service I *guess*—but because tipping is a thing it's about selling *yourself* to a person.

And with this short quote I believe that she has struck at the heart of the matter: we often do not think of *wage* labor in this way, as an alienation—not of our "socially necessary labor time", our

productions, or even the surplus value they generate, but of our personhood.⁹ In fact, it seems that this is far enough from many people's common conceptions of wages and labor that when I asked Nadia what she wished more people understood about her line of work she replied

I think there's a lot of people out there who don't know that we don't really make an hourly. Especially in terms of getting tipped, they think of gratuity as a monetary appreciation of the work that you did, rather than the backbone of your paycheck, and that if you don't get tipped you don't get paid.¹⁰

The apparent implication of arrangement is that – for workers like Sam and Nadia – conflicts over wages (so familiar to the class conscious language of political economy) do not occur simply between owners and workers, but *also* between workers and the clientele they deliver services to, who may very well be from similar class backgrounds as the workers. In this situation, as I alluded to earlier, the tourist is interposed between "traditional" class structures. Although this doesn't reconcile the fundamental conflicts over wages that inhere within the relationship between labor and ownership, it may lead to several *new* avenues of conflict, not the least of which is the possibility of front stage workers withholding part of their personality from the commodification process, much as workers in other industries withhold their labor as a form of resistance. Sam speaks eloquently to this dynamic when she asserts that

⁹ I stress *wage* in "wage labor" for the obvious reasons that a tremendous amount of labor, both historically and in our current arrangements, is predicated precisely on the alienation of personhood; this work is often structurally excluded from the wage system, however. Furthermore, there is no evidence that I know of that disproves the suggestion that this particular kind of exploitation, i.e., keeping certain kinds of work *outside* of the wage system, has been eagerly absorbed into the structure of the tourism industry—Sam and Nadia's emic analysis of tipping offered above seems to drive this point home.

¹⁰ The state of Louisiana has what industry workers refer to as a "waiter wage" of \$2.13/hr., the assumption being that the "actual wage" of tipped workers is many times that amount. Louisiana's "waiter wage" has the effect of outsourcing the cost of service work to the clientele, the argument being that most restaurants cannot afford to pay their workers, and should thusly be excluded from the requirement to do so. By contrast, the city of San Francisco (which also boasts a considerable tourism industry — an industry in which its restaurants play no small part!) has no such exception to its minimum wage laws, which mandate a rate of no less than \$15/hr for *all* private sector workers (San Francisco Office of Labor Standards Enforcement 2019).

*I don't invite personal questions. I try to avoid them. My tips would probably be better if I didn't...I feel like people only get a certain amount of me, like you're only entitled to so much of my personhood while I'm waiting on you, and then I have to keep a small part of it for myself. I can't put a price tag on my *actual* personhood, so I'm just not gonna give them that part.*

In this statement we can also perceive the strain placed upon workers like Sam to "buckle under," to conform to the pressure of the tourist gaze and give *that* much more of themselves in order to increase their pay rate, despite their understandable reluctance to part with that piece of themselves they have withheld from commodification. Sam, again:

*There's things about waiting tables that I *will* give into sometimes, like if I wear lipstick my tips are like thirty percent better. There are certain outfits I wear that I know that my tips will like twenty percent better. I've done the math. It's disgusting. But sometimes I'll be like, fuck it, my energy bill's high, I'm gonna put some lipstick on and wear this outfit and make thirty percent more tips.*

From what I have observed, and have had several front stage workers explicitly corroborate, this dynamic leads to an approach to front stage work that can only be described as "hustling," a term which at once speaks to a kind of disingenuous approach to the tourist as a "mark," as well as to the physical "hustle" of hard work. It is my opinion that this seemingly peculiar system of recompense functions as a kind of labor control in a situation where business owners have given over the sticks and carrots of the hourly wage to the tourist. While the "hustle," to a degree, may be seen by some front stage workers as an opportunity to exert their own agency in their constant (table by table) wage negotiation, there is nonetheless a degree of anxiety that this situation gives rise to. On this matter I defer to Nadia, who speaks of

[the] financial stress you're under when you don't have a stable paycheck and your pay is directly tied to anyone that walks in the restaurant and sits down at a table. It's different when you go to an office and you know that you'll be making X amount of money a day. Working in a restaurant, every twenty minutes, every

hour, there's a different person sitting in front of me who gets to decide what I'm getting paid for that moment.¹¹

I have selected these interviews in particular because the insights of these workers, and the eloquence with which they expressed their experiences have significantly informed my own reading of the structure of the tourist economy. In the next section I shift my focus from the frontstage to the back regions of the New Orleans tourism industry. Before moving on, however, I would like to restate the claims I made at the outset of this paper in order to reflect on how Sam and Nadia's accounts may have contradicted, complicated, or corroborated these claims. To reiterate: I have argued that much of the political economy of tourism is structured around the production of a particular commodity, i.e., the touristic experience; that this commodity is composed of material and immaterial elements, and that it is the role of labor to cobble together a saleable experience from these disparate elements; insofar as labor is organized around the production of this commodity, the tourist gaze becomes structurally significant, and is lent a transformative power vis-a-vis the organization of labor itself; this means that the tourist interposes between "traditional" arrangements of capital and labor, often in a literal, physical sense.

¹¹ This is not the case for the back of the house, where hourly wages are the predominant form of recompense. There is some conflicting data about how wages breakdown by occupation that I think is important to note here. For instance, reports from the New Orleans Data Research Center find that median wages for both front of house and back of house jobs hover around \$10/hr (Habans and Plyer 2018), a wage which is fairly consistent with reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS 2017, 2019) Jayarman and Schneider (2014), however, have back of house wages to be around \$9/hr., while front of house positions are reported as nearly twice that. One of the significant problems in trying to break down front of house wages into an hourly wage is that wages for front of house employees are significantly tied to the tips they receive, which will vary hour to hour and day to day, as well as being inextricably linked to seasonal flows of tourists in and out of the city.

From Stage to Region

The front stage of the restaurant necessarily has the appearance of a unique site, standing alone and in contrast to all the establishments that surround it — it is, after all, the presentation of the restaurant's specificity that enables the tourist to choose this menu over that, this ambience over the other, this *particular* restaurant instead of any of the others that the French Quarter offers up in abundance. But there is a world of work which takes place beneath these surfaces, a field of activity which the tourist gaze may brush across but hardly penetrate. This is the world of dishwashers and delivery drivers, of maids and maintenance men and janitors,¹² i.e., all those workers whose labor is rendered largely invisible by its position within the structure of tourism.

Regarding this segment of the industry a number of analogies come to mind: there is of course the dramaturgical reference to the "back-stage" or "back-region" (Goffman 1959:107-13) which the performative relationship of tourists and workers immediately conjures; but to capture the breadth of this relatively hidden segment of labor, I feel it is more apt and more evocative to use the subterranean language of root systems, plumbing lines, and perhaps even the ant colony, whose scurry and throng only manifest above ground in puny, isolated hills. In this section I again use the restaurant setting to empirically explore this subsurface world, drawing on participant observation to reconstruct a day of work for a dishwasher in the French Quarter. By recounting the interactions and exchanges that take place over the course of a single workday I

¹² In many instances, such as is the case with maids and janitors, the "backstage" so to speak is not defined by a geographical area. The work of cleaning up after tourists necessarily involves both workers and tourists moving through the same space. In this sense, the invisibility of certain workers is not so much an issue of their being barred from entering the spaces occupied by tourists, so much as it is an organization of their movements through space and time drawn around the temporary absence of the tourist.

hope to show that the totality of the tourist "ecosystem" is far more extensive and encompassing than is commonly supposed.

Arriving at work, the dishwasher finds the heavy evidence of a complex economic web already awaiting him in the backroom. Beneath the yellow carbon copies of invoice slips are crates of wine and mineral water, cases of beer, wheels of cheese, and so on, all of which is to be hefted to the storage room upstairs. Sometime during the second or third trip, the dishwasher hears the telltale clank of the produce man's hand truck as he pushes his way through the backdoor. A ruddy and gregarious man with the hoarse-throated and sharp-voweled accent endemic to certain segments of the region's working class, the produce man leans heavily on his hand truck and recounts his morning's tribulations: traffic backed up to the parish line; disreputable wholesalers and recalcitrant shopboys; the problem with finding decent tomatoes this time of year. He adds another invoice to the pile, and offers a rousing "Who dat, baby" to all within earshot before heading off to the next stop on his daily round.

More deliveries will arrive throughout the day: beer coolers full of fat shrimp brought fresh from the Gulf and carried in from the hinterland on the bed of a pickup truck; gallon bags of small and spicy garden greens from a cooperative farm in the East; a wilted cardboard box full of Chanterelle mushrooms wrested from the wilds of southern Mississippi; a box of boudin sausage and another of andouille. Of course, more prosaic deliveries also appear: the linen service brings bar-towels, mop-heads and aprons, carting away bags of the soiled same; a serviceman from the Dish Machine Company comes to change out a burnt motor and leaves behind a fresh drum of sanitizer; the iceman comes, followed by the liquor distributor....The yellow carbon copies pile up, a crumpled index of the extensive web that this single restaurant is caught up in.

Leaving there, each delivery driver continues their round, piling up paper at any number of restaurants, bars, and cafes as their oversize trucks wend through the tight streets of the French Quarter. The routes of these delivery trucks seem to offer an empirical description of the French Quarter as the central node of a functional region which spokes outwards to the city's periphery and beyond. As they bring the raw material of what will become the touristic commodity into contact with those workers who will eventually assemble it, the daily round of these drivers ties each individual location they service to the locations that came before and the locations that come after, linking this aggregate in turn to the peripheral region from which each truck departs, whether that is a cooperative farm, a produce warehouse, or an industrial washing facility.

In focusing on the largely unseen "subterranean" world that this network of labor takes place in my intention has been to draw attention to the linkages between an individual establishment, the broader ecology of the French Quarter, and the functional region which it dominates. By implicating delivery drivers, warehouse workers, shrimpers, and repairmen in the workday of a single dishwasher, I want to challenge the notion that any clear distinction can be made between "the tourist industry" and the "non." Just as MacCannell can claim (to varying degrees of exaggeration) that "we are all tourists" to some extent (2013: *x*), I believe that much of the work being done in the New Orleans region is tourist work, and much of it is tourist work undertaken in the functional region of the French Quarter, if not in the formally designated "Historic French Quarter" neighborhood. This is, perhaps, really just another way of framing an "industry cluster"—segments of the market that relate to each other, less by what they *do*, but through their shared infrastructure needs, labor pools, geography, etc. As the example above indicates, industries within a cluster will easily develop symbiotic relationships, further complicating any claim made about any particular segment of the cluster in isolation.

Finally, the individual establishments serviced by the delivery drivers begin to lose their veneer of self containment. To varying degrees they draw from a common well of resources, delivered to them by a common cast of characters through a common infrastructural arrangement. In this sense, they are highly reliant one another, even as they maintain a degree of competition over the resources represented by the tourist dollar. No single restaurant (to return to the world of the dishwasher) could create the demand for the specialized services provided by the drivers; now that this highly specialized structure is in place, however, it seems doubtful that many restaurants could survive without it.

All of this raises what I find to be a surprising and interesting point about the nature of work within a tourist economy. Front-stage workers, who have a direct and intimate relationship with the individual tourist, are often dependent on the individual elements of the touristic commodity—the freshness of a fish, say, or the ambience of a dining room, all those qualities which come together to please or displease a patron—and so they are necessarily concerned with the specific arrangements of an individual firm and the experience of an individual tourist. At this level, the details of their work offer us a perspective of tourism "from below," at the ground level. But it is those workers who I previously analogized as "subterranean," e.g., the delivery drivers, who can provide a way of incorporating the world of work into an analysis of tourism "from above". It is these workers who contend with the aggregated demands of the city's millions of visitors, rather than the individual tastes of a particular customer. The livelihood of these more "peripheral" workers is tied not to the fate of this restaurant or that, but to the collective fortunes of the functional region they service. For while the failure of a particular restaurant may have little impact on the driver who brought them (along with a dozen other restaurants) clean towels,

a greatly diminished tourist trade would impact their livelihood to the same degree to which that particular closure would a waiter there employed.

The produce man, with his hand truck and his wholesalers, brings into articulation the amassed labor of the functional region and the aesthetic, performative, and cultural labor of the waitress, the bartender, and the guide: if the one directs the tourist gaze and mediates the touristic experience of the city, the other facilitates these intimate encounters and enables the fulfillment of touristic expectations. There appears, then, to be a dialectical relationship between the pace and rhythm of the lives of the regions working classes and the structures of tourism theorized by Urry and MacCannell.

Extension, Implication, and Conclusion

I want to return, by way of conclusion, to the different analytical "levels" through which I have approached this study. The cases presented above have moved progressively outward in focus, from the narrative work of an individual guide, to the staged production of the restaurant, and finally to the functional region described by the daily rounds of the delivery driver. It is at this last, macroscopic level, I believe, that the scope and scale of the tourist economy's transformative effects become apparent, as do the material imperatives behind these transformations. This is the level of analysis in which its more granular precedents can be articulated with the "world-system," can meaningfully "extend" towards the extra-local and the historical-material. But it is precisely at the granular level of the guide, the waitress, the dishwasher—and the tourist, whose gaze and dollar structure the workaday world of their laboring other—that the processes of these transformations become legible.

It has been my intention throughout this paper to bring these different analytical levels into conversation, to bring the mess and contradictions of a city's daily life to the sober study of its ledger. In doing so, I have also tried to bring the analytical tools of political economy to bear on the study of the culture of New Orleans, or at least the cultural piecework that the city brings to market. In this regard, my tack has been towards the touristic commodity itself which incorporates those material and immaterial aspects of social life and cultural capital which have been translated into capital *per say*.

To court the tourist dollar, firms within the New Orleans tourism industry employ the language of "authenticity" on the one hand, and "uniqueness" on the other. This is actually a bit of a balancing act: the guide, the chef, the restaurant group, the hotelier, must compete to establish themselves as something beyond the ordinary, as something special, while

simultaneously tapping into the common well of cultural heritage and history from which New Orleans derives its reputation. As Beriss suggests (he speaks quite literally of the city's food, but I will hardly be the first to extend the metaphor of New Orleans' cooking to its sociocultural world) this reputation is "built on the reproduction and re-invention of a particular indigenous cuisine" (2007: 156). The tourism industry, then, calls for its participants to "cook the mythology of New Orleans" (ibid.), as well as to engage in the continual production of new mythologies; *new* mythologies, yes, but mythologies which must nevertheless appeal to the touristic search for culturally authentic experiences.

We are not too far from MacCannell's dialectic here—nor from the Pimm's daiquiri, for that matter. There is a tension – if not an outright contradiction – between the presentation of the traditional, the indigenous, the classic, and the constant pressure to present the *new*, a dynamic which is, admittedly, hardly unique to the political economy of tourism: the world of commodities and consumers is a world which is continually being remade in the name of novelty. The production of the new and the tarnishing of the old seems to be an inherent aspect of capitalist accumulation, ideologically as well as functionally. This is most obvious in the realm of "traditional" consumer products (the new car, the new television, the new and improved blender, etc.), but the same logic seems to propel the "new economy" of specifically experiential consumption in such a way that space, place, and culture become subject to the same contradictions contained in the material commodity form. The political economy of tourism seems to provide a clear example of the contradictory nature of these economic arrangements.

At this point I cannot refrain from one further extension, which is the linkage of New Orleans' "number one factory" to the world-economic system. This linkage, though, is a two way affair, and after briefly stepping out into the world-system, I will conclude by returning to the

"shop floor". By doing so I hope to reconcile the actors that have appeared in my descriptions of tourism "from below" with an analysis of tourism from above and afar. But first, something must be said of the structural context in which *all* of this is embedded, for despite the dialects of locality that tourism employs, it also speaks the global language of capital, just as well as it speaks the language of culture.

As the more critical political economists have long argued, there is a strong, determining motivation for the owners of capital to seek out and maintain monopolies or "quasi-monopolies" over the means of production (Wallerstein 2004). However, the long term entailments of globalization¹³ have rendered "traditional" monopolies over production less tenable and less profitable (ibid.). But capitalism, as Harvey writes, "*cannot do without* monopoly powers and craves the means to assemble them" (Harvey 2002: 98, emphasis mine). Capital therefore has an incentive to seek out areas of investment which are "immune" to the diffusive and disruptive forces of globalization, i.e., which are "spatially fixed." Whereas older models of accumulation were tied to control over the means of production (Taylorism and the Fordist factory being the prime examples), new strategies have emerged that focus on the ability to extract monopoly rent from the space which once contained the factory. This entails not only the commodification of place, but *the portrayal of that specific commodity as incomparable* to other like commodities and, therefore, able to be held monopolistically. "In this [portrayal]," Harvey argues, "the language of authenticity, originality, uniqueness, and special unreplicable qualities loom large" (ibid., 100). Here, I believe, the nexus of culture and political economy is made visible, and the

¹³ This is not the place to discuss globalization in any depth. I think it is enough to say that the "annihilation of space by time" and the diffusion of the technologies of production have proved disruptive enough that economic activity on *any* scale is incoherent without some attention to their global context. Again, see Harvey (1990, 2002, 2006).

discourses of particularity and authenticity which are fundamental to tourism are given their proper economic context.¹⁴

Returning to the restaurant, the guided tour, the Pimm's daiquiri (admittedly with some vertigo), we find precisely this interplay of economic imperatives and discursive appeals to culture. The underlying logic seems to go something like this: In the increasingly competitive global tourist economy, New Orleans has a monopoly on being New Orleans; as the touristic heart of the city, the French Quarter has quasi-monopoly power in the local industry by virtue of being the French Quarter; a French Quarter business (a restaurant, say) is only able to extract monopoly prices from their services to the extent that they can simultaneously tie their particular establishment to the unique "myth of New Orleans" while promising to provide an experience with "special unreplicable qualities". And it is only by charging monopoly prices for their services that these firms are able to afford the monopoly rents which the rentier class is able to extract from their valuable holdings—the axiom of "location, location, location" obtaining to a heightened degree in this case.

All of this – the extraordinary valuation of space and place and its subsequent marketing and sale – necessarily entails an appeal to culture; culture, however, like authenticity, is neither a stable nor an uncontested concept. This is particularly true in economies where culture is itself the currency exchanged for the tourist dollar.¹⁵ Cultural ownership, then, becomes an economic issue to a greater degree than the language of political economy typically assumes. But – as I have tried to show by way of the guide, the waitress, the dishwasher, and the delivery driver –

¹⁴ There is clearly a parallel to be drawn between the dynamics of the tourist economy and the economics of gentrification. In a very real sense they speak the same language. See Harvey (2002), Zukin (2008, 2010), and Stein (2019), among others.

¹⁵ Recall MacCannell's assertion that social differentiation is *itself* the attraction that the tourist consumes. "Culture", seen in this context, is made a marker of social difference, and thusly acquires a very particular kind of exchange value in addition to its "use" value.

this commodification of culture is "labor intensive": it requires the sweat and blood of local workers, just as its machinery requires the catalyst of the tourist dollar. This seems to complicate the work of those sociologists and economists who would, following Polanyi (1957, see also Granovetter 1985), strive to return the dismal science to the flesh and blood of living culture, as well as those anthropologists who "having accused economists of abstracting economy from society, opt for its mirror image, social embeddedness abstracted from the wider economy" (Hart 2016)

Suggestions for Further Research

There are several lines of research which constraints of time and space precluded me from including here. The first is a more robust exploration of the geographical elements of tourism. I don't necessarily mean the permanent infrastructure which the industry requires, or even the relationship between the industry's expansion and gentrification (though both questions are important), but rather the less permanent spatial relations that the seasonal rhythm of tourism entails. How do the meanings of space and place change during the tourist season and the off season? How does the presence or absence of tourists in a certain area affect spatial use, from transportation to policing and surveillance? The ebb and flow of tourists in and out of urban space seems to considerably alter its social makeup; what are the long term effects of this rapidly "cycling" demography on the way locals understand this space? Second, if – as my research suggests – social networks and "weak ties" are implicated in the division of the workforce, further research into how workers forge and manipulate these networks could help shed light on the persistence of ascriptive segmentation within the industry. What structures and institutions perpetuate this dynamic? What practices challenge it? Finally, while this paper has mainly limited itself to the formal sector of the tourist economy, tourism also gives rise to a large informal economy. Ethnographic work among the hundreds of musicians, street artists, unlicensed vendors, etc. who work highly touristic areas such as the French Quarter could explore the intersection of formal and informal economic action, a question of especial importance given the rise of the "gig economy," and the increasing precarity of the workforce.

A Final Thought

It will likely be noted – *should* be noted – that many of the points I have tried to raise in this paper are not endemic to tourism *as such*: the tourist economy is, after all, only a subsector of the wider service economy, albeit a large one—and, in the case of New Orleans, the predominant sector, barring none. This point is readily given. However, there is a growing concern (at least among those who can afford such concerns) with those areas of social life which have historically been of especial interest to "the tourist". By this I mean that patterns of consumption in the post-industrial, post-modern world resemble to no small degree *touristic* consumption, with its affinity for the experiential and the novel, towards the highs *and* lows of culture, towards distance and differentiation, and in a preoccupation with a kind of authenticity whose dialectic seems to recede its subject ever further from reach. And yet all of these seemingly "cultural" (or even "socio-philosophical") concerns snag upon the sweaty nail of the material world wherever they encounter the necessity of labor, which, I have hoped to show, is at every turn. Because tourism necessarily collides the worlds of labor and leisure I believe that it allows for a critical examination of both, an examination of work and society which cannot at this point meaningfully eschew either.

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