

VAGABONDS AND THE VIRTUAL: IDENTITY, ECONOMICS
AND ETHICS IN THE GENRE OF DIGITAL
TRAVEL WRITING

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ABSTRACT

While the genre of travel writing has been popular with authors and audiences over centuries, developments in new media, social media and public use genres have caused an adaptation of the genre in the digital space. This genre, as it exists, claims two antecedents: first, the traditional and literary version of the genre and second, the blogs that emerged and were popularized in the late twentieth century. In exploring the genre of digital travel writing, hundreds of internet publications were read, reviewed and cataloged. Of these, many began to demonstrate the criteria which would be considered prototypical for the genre. Any publication in the genre demonstrates, in various ways and to varying degrees, the following characteristics: frequent updates, multiple platform-use and multimedia inclusions, discursive constructions of identity, engagement with economies, and entanglements with the ethical concerns proper to both the genre and its situated ideology. In addition to stabilizing this vast archive of open source media as a perceptible genre, this dissertation hints at ways that the literate practices of these authors speaks to a nuanced appreciation of literacy and one that reverses the classical binary privileging reading over writing. Further, some suggestions are made for using open source and new media genres productively in writing classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1

TRAVEL AND GENRE IN NEW MEDIA

When I tell people of my frequent travels to visit family in Greece, I usually get one of two reactions. The first relates to the beauty of the country: its vibrant people, turquoise oceans, archipelagos of white-pebbled beaches, olive oil and feta cheese and lightly chilled wine; attractive people celebrating youth. The good life. The second relates to a graver reputation: political violence, an active fascist element and xenophobia, civil unrest, poverty, crime, and a financial recession that exceeds that of any capitalist country in the history of the world, dwarfing the Great Depression; scared young people fleeing a collapsing economy. One fantasy is of late-night techno raves at Lindsay Lohan's Mykonos beach club and three-thousand passenger cruise ships in fishing-boat harbors; the other of militarized police and Molotov cocktails and Banksy artwork, hungry children in the streets. Neither is entirely untrue and I have seen them both. And to this day, when asked about my travels in Greece, I hesitate on which story to tell.

This is *the* choice for a travel writer: which story to tell? What are the motivations? Assumptions? Where should it be told and to whom? To what end? If there is one thing that has endured about human travel, regardless of person or place or intention, it is the *telling*. The sharing of adventures is implicit in the adventures themselves. Some of the earliest confirmed writing about travel dates to Ancient Greece from around 450 B.C.—while at that time writing about human movement was

inseparable from more complex narratives of geography and history, the writing of Herodotus and Strabo nonetheless concentrates on the experience of a foreign person abroad. There is debate about whether this is in fact the same type of “telling” about travel as exists in more contemporary works which emphasize narrative—it is not travel for travel’s own sake, but still captures that particular experience of a subject, with their own cultural values and assumptions, encountering a culture that does not share those same values, or does not share them in the same way.

While these early works, including voyages and histories, are included in the greater canon of travel writing, it wouldn’t be until the 18th and 19th centuries that *narratives* about travel began emerging which would conform with contemporary expectations. Somewhere in that period, and for many reasons, the genre adapted—writers, as well as audiences, had a different set of criteria for what constituted travel writing. People were still traveling, in the strictest sense, and telling about their travels, but the stories they were telling, and how they were telling them, changed. This is expected within a genre—it is not stable and frequently evolves remediating antecedent structures into new media.

Travel writing, at least in its literary iteration, is largely understood as having originated in the late 1600s and progressing through the early 1800s, a period that scholars often refer to as the Long Eighteenth Century. This particular moment, saturated with complex economic and ideological narratives, saw an increase in prosperity, a growth in foreign markets through various imperial initiatives, and a greater access to education which meant a broader reading public. These features, combined with a growing western awareness of the globe, led to the stabilization of a middle class that was

both financially independent in degrees and directly aware of foreign concerns—these are the types of conditions which lead to a leisure industry. When you combine the growth in income, especially contributing to a discretionary portion, and the interest in leisure pursuits with the expansion of global markets, it is pretty easy to conceptualize the conditions necessary for the rise of leisure travel as both a type of industry and a type of narrative. While certainly there was recreational travel before this, this type of *wanderjahren* was usually reserved for the aristocratic class. So once again, it is really the growth of a middle class which created a travel industry as such including its narrations.

Nigel Leask also notes that the growth of the genre in this period was accelerated by increased markets and the relative collapse of feudal structures within Europe—the idea of movement, for many, came to represent a better life, a fresh start, and also often came with promises of land and enfranchisement for those who agreed to move their lives to the farther reaches of empire. Mary Louise Pratt explains that, “travel books...gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement, and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world” (3). The type of discursive practices Pratt addresses are more fully developed by David Spurr—he highlights how western writers “construct...a representation” of the foreign west that tends to meet the expectations of western audiences. These tropes he identifies, such as the *aestheticization* of the foreign site and *idealization* of ostensibly primitive cultures don’t just develop the fantasy of a travel narrative, but rather help to stitch together the administrative ideologies of colonial discourse and power more generally (4).

To rethink these structures in terms of travel is to walk a thin line—certainly travelers are not colonizers, at least not in the direct sense, but on one level, there is not much noticeable difference and many of the tropes Spurr investigates, such as *appropriation*, are alarmingly present in contemporary digital travel narrative. This too is not unexpected—digital travel writing is accountable to various antecedents. While it doesn't often directly represent the literary travel narrative discussed by Fussell or Spurr or Pratt, it does contain within a kernel of those earlier discourses, including those elements that can be identified as decisively colonial. Yet for a genre to actively shift, it must be actively taken up as a social tool—as Bakhtin writes, “the transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds...but also violates or renews the given genre” (Speech Genres 58). In the same way that prior historical movements shaped generic form, so contemporary shifts towards digital media are causing a re-evaluation of what can and cannot be included in the genre.

In the case of digital travel writing, the evolution is permitting more open and public contributions than ever before. But shared public textual initiatives do not always present as substantive genres—because these types of works, surveys or petitions or blog posts, are so tightly linked to their specific popular function, it can be difficult to conceive of an author and an audience linked by a shared system of rhetorical expectations. In some cases, even where there is evidence of shared purpose or device, the text produced can only be seen as part of a genre system. For example, a petition, while unable to be appreciated as part of the genre of *petitions*, could be seen as a component of the larger system of digital activism. In this case, people engaged in this discourse tend to produce texts of a certain type.

Yet at other times, a situated and particular public use apparatus evolves into something greater with participants who understand what they are doing as a community. Caroline Miller and Dawn Shepherd noted this evolution in the blogging community of the late 20th century, observing that self-inclusion in a culture which produces public texts is a strong indicator of an evolution towards generic cohesiveness. Digital travel writing has a similar origin. Rolf Potts, in his now-canonical travel work *Vagabonding*, names a community of travelers, giving identity to a lifestyle that he both encountered and promoted. It was these *vagabonders* who turned to a new media apparatus and deployed it to serve an *objectified social need*—like many travelers before them, they felt compelled to document their adventures. But unlike those earlier travelers, who often turned either to epistolary modes or narrative documentation, these vagabonders embraced digital evolutions, pushing the ostensibly-equitable medium in exciting directions. These writers saw potential, not just for documenting their travels, but in the capacity to link author and audience in an immediate way that could generate profit. The community of travelers embraced a style of representationality which, like the traditional travel narratives which preceded it, embodied an ideological attitude towards the world and generated profit along similar lines.

Studying this community of travelers-turned-writers and the works they produce—with their motivations, assumptions, and blindspots—is the purpose of this dissertation. More than documentation, these writers have a material impact; the texts they generate serve to promote and facilitate world travel. They borrowed from the earlier trope of the *travel blog*, adding tips and hacks and guides to journalistic documentation. Images began to serve a more refined rhetorical purpose, providing

context to the fantasy of long-term adventure-travel. Over time, as their work became more professional, these writers began constructing identity, engaging in mercurial digital economies, and encountering similar ethical concerns as those found in earlier literary travel narrative. And throughout this evolution, shared feature and shared intent began to refine a niche digital hobby into a well-established, novel and public genre. This is the genre of digital travel writing as it exists. It has knowable antecedents and a long history of social value. It has consistent characteristics and stable literacy practices. But most importantly, it exists as a key component of social exchange for a community that self-mediate contemporaneously in the physical and digital world. The texts discussed in the following chapters support both this rhetorical consistency and social value.

Literature Review

Travel writing as a digital and public genre is relatively new. In fact, traditionally travel writing has been represented at the privileged and canonical intersection of literature and history. Much of this work has been in English departments and is frequently and correctly tied to postcolonial studies. Paul Fussell has done some of the most distinctly literary work on the genre and it is his name which is most often associated with segregation of the more overtly literary “travel book” from other texts that simply deal with travel in some less poetic way. In his essay “Travel Books as a Literary Phenomenon” he writes, “A guide book is addressed to those who plan to follow the traveler, doing what he has done, but more selectively. A travel book, in its purest, is addressed to those who do not plan to follow the traveler at all, but who require the exotic or comic anomalies, wonders and scandals of the literary form romance which their own

place or time cannot entirely supply.” (105) This distinction, while perhaps stable enough at one point in the evolution of the genre to be relied on as a heuristic, is not nearly so clear today. For a number of reasons, both those relating to the audience and the writer, far fewer writings, at least in the digital space, can be reconciled to being simply a travel guide or a travel narrative.

Equally crucial to more literary understandings of travel writing, Mary Louise Pratt and Nigel Leask embrace a diachronistic, even historicist, methodology when investigating the iterations that sprung out during various periods of economic development and expansion. As so much early travel writing was tied to colonization and trade, it is no surprise that its documentation is mired in the overt apparatus of empire. The high narratives of travel, especially the ones spanning the Victorian era, are particularly fertile for this type of critical work because they seem to capture the type of biological superiority that fueled so much of the imperial age. These are the writings that created the ideas of “going native” and “white man’s burden.” They are, importantly, also the narratives which drew the largest contemporary audience and found their transposition into works of fiction and film.

The travel writing addressed by these scholars would seem to have nothing to do with the writing being done digitally in the contemporary geopolitical space, yet it cannot be comprehensively dismissed for several important reasons. First, because genre is fundamentally social, and thus is implicitly ideological and diachronic, prior iterations of travel writing and their theoretical interlocutors cannot be ignored without compromising the integrity of the overall project. To evaluate digital travel publication *ex nihilo* promotes an incomplete understanding of both the texts themselves and the work of genre

studies generally. To borrow Kathleen Jamieson's term, literary travel writing is an important *antecedent* to the genre as it exists. Second to this, the authorial motivations behind writing resonate across time and medium. As mentioned, there is something in travel, the sublimity of the experience, that causes people to turn to writing, regardless of the form that writing takes. Though Fussell would no doubt disavow much digital writing about travel out of hand, postcolonial scholars would be perhaps less inclined to entirely ignore an extant body of work which seems to obscure colonial apparatus in the language of global capitalist humanism.

Many of the concerns which plague the travel writing of a previous age, and on which many literary scholars have been most focused, still exist today, though in an altered form. It is tempting to believe that the imperial project was the cruel failure of a more ignorant age—with revisionist history on the rise, once-sacred idols, such as Christopher Columbus, are being toppled for the ideologies they represented. It is dangerous to feel rhetorically safe and in fact digital travel writing, just like the internet itself, is not the bastion of free speech and equanimity it can present to be. In fact, with public awareness of digital surveillance, fake news, and social media consumer manipulation at an all time high, it has never been more appropriate to investigate a body of literature that *exclusively* operates, profits, and proliferates online and presents itself as somehow immune to problematic ideological narratives.

Regardless of similarities, digital travel publication and traditional literary travel narrative cannot easily be discussed with the same language. Even where authors share similar reactions to alterity, their representations of these experiences are vastly different depending on the medium and audience. This does not sever digital travel publication

from the trajectory of the genre—it is certainly an evolution of the writing done about human movement. In fact, these key differences point towards the subtleties of genres, the complexity of inclusions and the expansive internal variety that these social vessels permit. Regardless, understanding the writing being done today, in the digital space, requires a different set of tools that allow an apprehension and evaluation of the genre for its shared characteristics, the texts it responds to and those it solicits, and the audience being addressed in that space.

Rhetorical Genre Studies, in its apprehension of genre as a social practice, provides an appropriate heuristic to begin placing and understanding these digital publications together as participants in a shared discourse. The scholars who work in this dynamic area look at genres as groups of *vital* social and dialogic traits as they are deployed rhetorically across various media. The field can be traced back to Carolyn Miller's 1984 essay "Genre as Social Action" which began to investigate genre through this Bakhtinian lens, essentially looking at social exchange within systems of ideological communication. This established "genre" as the set of actions, those of content or audience or presentation, which are possible within a given social space. The actions themselves are determined by the social applicability; what is deemed acceptable (or is foreclosed) for a genre is determined largely by the types of actions taken prior and the general system(s) in which it interacts.

Anis Bawarshi clarifies that, while these sets of possibilities *feel* stable to those investigating them, they in fact are always shifting, either in response to social injunctions or authorial intention, willful or otherwise. And within the space of the genre, various digressions can be tolerated, even those which don't seem to entirely fit

the larger system. Amy Devitt noted the way that related genres interact with each other, creating a type of interchange or overlap whereby similar criteria can be shared across multiple related spaces, further expanding the tolerance within generic conventions. Studying the interaction between the choices available to writers within a genre, the ideological systems they participate in and are beholden too, and the related sets of genres as they appear socially incites a layered understanding of a social discourse. Further, this type of study allows for a careful critique of the origins of a particular genre, the shared features, the authorial-will for communicating that genre, and the contemporary critical position of that genre within various networks of power.

An attempt to study artifacts for their generic fidelity in this way requires a clear and rigorous bracketing of what will and will not be included in the given set. Rather than starting with a stable category, and trying to fit artifacts into that space, the artifact themselves demonstrate characteristics that help to determine the social structure of the genre. Genres are heteroglossic and highly communicative—authors embrace certain tropes, communicate rhetorically among each other, and embrace or adapt similar audiences in their deployment of the available rhetorical apparatus. A genre must be understood for its use-value, and even that use-value has cultural significance as the demands of an audience or a society shift at various times in response to various pressures, developments, or injunctions.

A genre, and especially a public and digital genre like digital travel writing, is less one unified text and more a series of linked textual practices. Charles Bazerman, in his chapter “Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems: How Texts Organize Activity and People,” explains how one rather simple task can generate a multitude of related texts,

each mingling in distinct ways with the rigors of the genre itself. Bazerman writes, “...each text is embedded within structured social activities and depends on previous texts that influence the social activity and organization” (311). Essentially, what Bazerman emphasizes in a genre study is “how people [use] text to create new realities of meaning, relation, and knowledge” (309). Because genre is understood socially, and because it is employed to service a meaning-making and rhetorical purpose, it cannot be an *a priori* category. Given this definition, and the procedure of rhetorical genre studies more generally, the texts themselves, by nature of their dialogic and ideological character, demonstrate certain criteria that can be used to establish the greater confines of the mainstream genre. Again, genres are not entirely consistent and, as Bawarshi adds, they are willing to tolerate a fair number of outliers while still remaining perceptibly stable.

The genre which the literary scholar Nigel Leask discusses in his investigation into colonial exploration narratives is of a different composition than the type of genre understood by Bawarshi, Miller, or Reiff. Even if the two conceptions of genre could be brought into harmony, changes in technology have modified and redeployed old structures into new and unfamiliar ways. Though people still travel and human movement is still subject to imperial motives and class antagonism, a change in the lifeworld has shifted how humans experience their reality. When people travel now, they rely on the internet. That is to say that there is a digital shadowing of movement in the physical world. *Potential* travelers turn to blogs, websites, message boards, Instagram influencers, and YouTube for inspiration and guidance. *Current* travelers book flights and accommodations, engage in photo-documentation, Tweet, hashtag, and post. And

travelers who return home catalog, situate, and represent their travels for perusal by others, both formally and informally. This is a fact of contemporary travel: there is a digital component at some fundamental level of the experience.

Digital Travel Writing as a Stable Genre

In a 2004 study published by the University of Minnesota, Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd brought an understudied and even dismissed public use apparatus into the light of academic rhetorical investigation. While the “blog” or “weblog” was mostly known, both by the general public and the academic community, its label felt unstable, as if the term itself could not seem to capture the series of practices it ostensibly represented. Public genres generally are fickle—they quickly adapt and shift and seem mostly bound to their immediate deployment. Traditionally, these vessels were considered unworthy of serious study—they can be *atechnic*, devoid of device and embraced only to quickly accomplish a particular purpose. Yet within the fields of rhetoric, linguistics, and sociology, communicative practice is viewed explicitly for its use-value, as a socially-situated cognitive tool through which humans interact with the world.

In fact, almost exactly twenty years earlier Carolyn Miller had published her landmark work which established the field of Rhetorical Genre Studies. Miller understood these grouped traits, however remediated through new technologies, as social vessels with which humans determine how to interact with each other and their symbolically-structured world. She writes, “...at the level of genre, motive becomes a conventionalized social purpose, or exigency, within the recurrent situation... We learn to

adopt social motives as ways of satisfying private intentions through rhetorical action.”

(48) These “recurring situations” speak to a type of social need, which Miller uses to define communicative exigency itself. In other words, if certain discursive features, utterances even, are coalescing as to be relatively cohesive and perceptibly stable, then this speaks to a socially structured need.

Her theory was well-founded in prior work which looked at the complex systems of human communication which permitted various discursive insertions, however varied, into a unified communicative matrix. M.M. Bakhtin’s assertions regarding the dialogism of complex genres were not only unique because of the polyphony of voices allowed or even the profound heteroglossia of forms of discourse, but rather how socially situated discourse permitted some responses and foreclosed others. Sociologist Anthony Giddens took these theories further when he established his own theory of Structuration which understands human motivated communication as fundamentally structuring its own exigency—through social-constructive linguistic participation humans create their own experiential reality at the level of discourse. Humans discursively always create and perceive their reality as part of a unified process so that, when interacting, they rely on prior types, or genres, of communication to motivate exigency and facilitate participation. As Bawarshi and Reiff note decades later, “Such a multi-dimensional and complex understanding of genre— as a dynamic concept marked by stability and change; functioning as a form of situated cognition; tied to ideology, power, and social actions and relations; and recursively helping to enact and reproduce community—challenges RGS to consider how genre knowledge is acquired...” (Bawarshi Reiff 82) In the case of a public genre, this literacy is acquired through speech-will, or intent, and a shared social

need which is not stable and is always ideologically situated.

What Miller and Shepherd observed fifteen years ago was the remediation of a genre in response to an expanding lifeworld—in Habermas’ articulation, the lifeworld is the substance of lived human experience that is apart from overt institutional apparatus. That is not to say that the lifeworld is somehow free of ideological pressures—discourse, and especially genre, is fundamentally ideological. In fact, the work of Norman Fairclough, makes specific contributions in this very area. In *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, he writes, “A particular set of discourse conventions...implicitly embodies certain ideologies—particular knowledge and beliefs, particular ‘positions’ for the types of social subject that participate in that practice...and particular relationships between categories of participants...” (94) Thus there is no expectation that public genres, be they digital or otherwise, be devoid of ideological motivations—ideology is the substrate of discourse and exists in every utterance and communicative event. For Miller and Shepherd, it was clear that some aspect of lived human experience was now occurring digitally and that this shift, regardless of how one felt about it, was causing an expansion of previous iterations of the genre and new possibilities for genre Uptake, the borrowing of apt features of one genre for deployment in another area. New rules were being established along with new exigencies for communicative agency and this process was supplemented by technological and ideological shifts.

The language of genre investigation, in addition to Bakhtin, is heavily indebted to Burke. Long the theorist of communicative action, Burke looked towards shared human discourse as a key component in the creation of some type of discursive truth. For Burke,

human communication involved a type of Drama, where each participant occupied certain roles in relation to time, space, and even power. Hierarchies of domination and subordination, as well as a preoccupation with negation, often nullifies human communicative processes. Successful communication which exceeds these limitations is dependent on each participants' understanding of the genre they are participating in. Genre embraces conceptions of kairotic intuitiveness as well as Bakhtin's chronotope—while each member maintains a degree of “speech-will,” what can be said, how and when and why, is largely dependent on this type of situated cognition.

Once face to face, or even textual, conventions are displaced for digital referentiality, the situation becomes more nuanced and, thus, the genre itself becomes more difficult to conceptualize on either a cognitive or *dramatic-participatory* level. What now is taken largely for granted, that humans articulate in the digital world, was in 2004 far more nuanced. And where now the blog has, at least formally, been abandoned as a genre with enduring use-value, that does not devalue it as an historical apparatus. If the blog itself was a remediated form of prior journals, ships logs, or even epistolary composition, perhaps today's Twitter is a redacted and remediated form of the blogs of the early 21st century. As Amy Devitt notes, “Historical changes in generic forms argue against equating genre with form; note the formal changes in what we call a poem, for example, or the familiar letter. The forms may change but the generic label stays the same.” (86) The preserved element of an historical form, Kathleen Jamieson's “antecedent,” can be used as a clear marker of genre adaptation.

In any case, Miller and Shepherd's main problem then was to embrace the blog as a genre, with shared practice, traits, value, motivations, and even some degree of inter-

communication. They write, “When a type of discourse or communicative action acquires a common name within a given context or community, that’s a good sign that it’s functioning as a genre...The weblog seems to have acquired this status very quickly, with an increasing amount of attention and commentary in the mainstream press reinforcing its status” (Miller and Shepherd 1). While this is not the final word, it is a good litmus test generally. Of course by 1997, as they note, “weblog” had been shortened to “blog” and was already a part of the social structure of the technological space. It was a heavily searched term that had been translated across disciplines into multiple areas—while content varied, the general structure seemed to be consistent and, above all, it was a form that was being explicitly taken up and used to particular rhetorical ends. As Miller had noted in her work twenty years prior, “Genre serves as the substance of forms at higher levels; as recurrent patterns of language use, genres help constitute the substance of our cultural life.” (49) And Anis Bawarshi in his article “The Genre Function” reiterates, “Genres have this generative power because they carry with them social motives—socially sanctioned ways of ‘appropriately’ recognizing and behaving within certain situations—that we as social actors internalize as intentions and then enact rhetorically as social practices.” (168). People were embracing this genre and learning how to participate within it in a way that helped to define the field as a cohesive set of socially-situated practices. Further, this community was beginning to define itself, as the term “blogger” came to have its own cultural signification.

This is one of the things which John Swales especially looks for in emerging or redeployed genres. He writes, “A discourse community’s nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight.” (79) And while the idea of a discourse community, at least

in James Gee's original conception, did not necessarily apply to abstract digital spaces, we can now see that, in hindsight, the tide was turning and that indeed there are fewer and fewer discourse communities that do not in fact articulate in some way on a digital level. Charles Bazerman writes, "the changes facilitated by the internet and the social creativity released by the new medium facilitates rhetoric's responsiveness to changing politics" (34). What twenty years ago was radical enough to be dismissed or discouraged, is now so commonplace as to be almost beyond interest. Indeed, for generations entering college presently, this exact conversation is not about rhetoric or genre or even sociology, but rather simply of history. It is the past.

But people were authentically writing, self-fashioning, responding, and participating in a particular discourse. Bazerman states that a population "speaks and inscribes itself into existence" (34). And as he clarified in an earlier work, "...the intention, the recognition of the intention, the achievement of that intention with the co-participation of others, and the further actions of others respecting that achievement...all exist in the realm of social fact..." As participants begin writing, or exchanging utterances discursively, they begin to enact the very situation that gives shape to those utterances and allows them to make sense.

What Miller and Shepherd note, quite accurately, is that a group was identifying its communicative practices by a shared name and shared feature, albeit in a new and unfamiliar space and in potentially unfamiliar ways. They write, "We see the blog, then, as a genre that addresses a timeless rhetorical exigency in ways that are specific to its time. In the blog, the potentialities of technology, a set of cultural patterns, rhetorical conventions available in antecedent genres, and the history of the subject have combined

to produce a recurrent rhetorical motive that has found a conventional mode of expression... (15). Blogs were a popular vessel, spontaneous and expressive, not sanctioned by mainstream hierarchical structures of convention and communication. They were also cloaked in personal language and avowed subjectivity—though as Miller and Shepherd note, while not always the case, blogs seemed to demonstrate a confusing blend of both personal and public discourse. While the writers demonstrated literacy across a number of levels, including developing web-based programming languages, they still presented as somewhat amateur, even among those that Miller and Shepherd identify as the “A-list” bloggers (10).

In many ways, blogs and bloggers were playing by their own set of rules—they were simultaneously creating and participating in their reality similar to the process identified by Giddens above. Miller and Shepherd identify blogging as “a new rhetorical opportunity” which, due to its rapid proliferation and expansive appeal, “must be serving well established rhetorical needs” (15). Because of this novelty, Miller and Shepherd set very clear parameters for what their investigation will explore. They looked at works from popular hosting sites, borrowing an “ethnomethodology” that looked at what the bloggers thought they were doing, as a community, as well as the products themselves. They also planted this study in a particular cultural moment, looking at the kairotic deployment and the cultural power structures, as well as technological developments, that allowed for this unique genre adaptation. And, to that end, they also explored potential antecedent genres, looking at what bearing similar writing may have had on the current genre (Miller and Shepherd 2). Further, they assume, and rightly so, that the blog itself is a product of a larger cultural ethos by examining some of the intricacies of the late-

1990's in an attempt to position this discursive structure within a broader historical frame.

While this all sounds good, genre studies can get murky—this is the case for any taxonomy, where some things are included and others excluded, and it can be even worse for an emerging genre, with poorly agreed-upon antecedents, that only exists at the level of use-value for an isolated community. They describe their process of selection thus: “In order to identify the basic agreements that have coalesced around the blog, we have tried to honor the ethnomethodology of genres, relying to the greatest extent possible on the perceptions of bloggers themselves. We examined numerous individual blogs, of course, but we also paid attention to how bloggers talk about blogs.” As with any other genre, they found that there were relatively standard features that served writers and audience, many of which are still operational today such as frequent content generation, reverse chronology, authorial positioning, and thematic material that stabilized an interpreted audience. Blogs also shift reality, presenting unified semantic material relating to a particular topic position in both *physical* place and time and *digital* space: “The ‘reality’ offered by blogs is thus a thoroughly perspectival reality, anchored in the personality of the blogger. And although this reality it may seem to be ‘immediate,’ (that is, un-mediated), it is, of course, highly mediated.” (Miller and Shepherd 8). Blogs also illuminate aspects of identity in interesting ways—identity is often performed and rehearsed on the internet and used rhetorically to position the discourse in relation to an intended audience. They write, “The blogger is her own audience, her own public, her own beneficiary...” (9-10). There is no question that blogs tested the limits of genre—at times, the dissonance, such as between public and private, was enough to dismiss the

entire canon of work as immature, impractical, or pejoratively subjective. We see this today, for example, in treatment of social media and influencer culture. Regardless of any dissonance or trouble placing the blog either by shared characteristic, antecedent, or epistemic use-value, it endured as a site for prolific publication and shared discourse while accommodating immense heterogeneity and creating a type of participatory ecology. Today it survives, preserved in its direct digital descendant the digital travel publication.

As Bawarshi notes, studies which actively investigate digital communities as a discourse, for the genres they enact and proliferate, and the texts they produce, are hard to find (160). This is in part due to the difficulties in corraling features—where blogs could be read, cataloged and traced for both the features and values they displayed, as well as the community of writers who participated, this cannot be easily said for YouTube content creators or Instagram account holders. Even still, hundreds of thousands of accounts relating to travel still exist—even if an account does not intend to be a “travel account” as such, there is virtually no travel, private or public, to Mumbai or Ocean City, NJ, that does not have a hashtag and literally millions of examples of amateur photographic and textual documentation.

So at this point, it is important to reiterate a key distinction. Within the very broad set of people capturing their travels informally for digital representation, there is a specialized subset of travelers who very considerably, even *rhetorically*, represent the contemporary travel experience in a digital space. These writers communicate, both with an audience and with each other. They create dynamic visual and written texts, making choices regarding medium, content, economy, and identity. They solicit readers and

sponsors. And, in almost all cases, they are writers first and only then readers. As Deborah Brandt notes in *The Rise of Writing*, that stable binary of reader/writer, especially as it relates to the economies of publication, does not always function following traditional expectations of literacy, especially when influenced by digital apparatus. Further, these writers actively participate in two fully-conceived antecedent genres, the literary and blog, as well as demonstrate rhetorical fluency on several levels.

People are writing. They are mastering multiple discourses with concrete objectives. They accommodate new skills, they adapt photography and video, they isolate economies and they demonstrate an agility, or even a mastery, on multiple levels. This is not to say that these writers, or their publications, are in any way homogenous. They come from a variety of backgrounds and write with equally diverse intents. Some began traveling and only turned to digital documentation as way to continually fund their personal travels. Others choose to emphasize some complicated, or complicating, facet of identity which is raised through travel. And while a few may have professional experience as a writer or journalist, many do not. And this new literacy has allowed a redeployment of a genre—while the substance of the work is still travel, the ways in which that content is represented, both in form and structure, have changed. Far from amateur musings on blog hosting sites and wandering message board posts, these works demonstrate a consistency, cohesion, and inter-communication that allows for them to be understood as associates in a common, socially-constructed project in the same way as Miller and Shepherd's investigation of the blogging community over fifteen years ago. A critical analysis of the genre of contemporary digital travel writing, the community that advances it and the ideologies it conveys, is the objective of this dissertation.

Digital travel publication is an important and active genre that has roots in both human migration studies and the digital humanities. It is prolific—writers still work, publish, and self-articulate within the confines of this genre. Further their work has direct material impact, as they incite, promote, sponsor, and facilitate human movement across the globe. It is important to attempt to understand the motivations, device, and consequences of a genre with such a long and innovative history, especially when it exists at the intersection of profound economic, ecological, and ethical concerns. Yet, with so many interlocutors, sites, and redeployments, the study of any genre requires a careful reexamination of the definition of genre itself—below are direct references for how genre is understood specifically in this study.

John M. Swales in his essay, “A Working Definition of Genre,” goes to great length to sensitively incorporate potential vagaries into a cohesive, and functional, definition. It is his work that forms the primary bedrock of genre as it will be understood here. He writes:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains the choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as

prototypical by the discourse community (82).

Thus, for any inclusion within this project, understood to be a representative sample of a work in the field of digital travel publication, the “high probability expectations” Swales notes must be present in some form and some degree, understanding that genres fundamentally allow for a great degree of plasticity.

As a supplement to this, Anthony Giddens’ theory of Structuration is vital—digital travel writers are always creating and articulating within their discursive space at one and the same time. Travelers, and of course travel writers, are always creating the social structure in which they operate, demonstrating both an agency or independence and a participation in the essentially restrictive atmosphere of the structure itself. In this case, the structure is the genre they enact wherein writers develop and deploy an autonomous voice but only within certain conventions that they are always both preserving and advancing. There is communication between participants, but that exists in a collective and recursive frame. As Bawarshi clarifies, “This recursive process is what genre is.” (182) Genre, at least in the sense of a living genre, is constantly reinvesting in the discourse that makes the need for the discourse possible, becoming fundamentally its own exigency by stabilizing patterns of recurring situations in a human and discursive lifeworld. This is the very literal truth for writing about travel.

Further, Günther Kress, in his article “Genre in a Social Theory of Language” discusses the inherently responsive nature of genres and their implication in other socio-ideological processes and structures. As there is no travel writing without the various social values and discourses that makes that particular type of travel possible, it is important to emphasize this aspect of the genre. He writes, “If genre is entirely

imbricated in other social processes, it follows that unless we view society itself as static, then neither social structures, social processes, nor therefore genres are static. Genres are dynamic, responding to the dynamics of other parts of social systems. Hence genres change historically; hence new genres emerge over time, and hence, too, what appears as ‘the same’ generic form at one level has recognizable distinct forms in differing social groups.” (42) The shifting of the genre from literary to public, is not an obstacle to identifying the genre but rather a step in the path to recognizing the genre as a whole.

Of course, no genre so imbued with geopolitical value and artistic inheritance can be immune from commodifying practices. In the sense of digital travel writing, as will be discussed later, there is no form of the genre which does not directly account for economic apparatus. Frederic Jameson, in his work *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act*, discusses the relationship between artistic genre and commodification directly. He writes,

“...genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact...It is not merely the performance situation, but the generic contract and institutions and traditional practices, which falls casualty to the gradual penetration of a market system and a money economy.” (106-107) Again, because this process is so pronounced in digital travel writing, it is impossible to have an understanding of genre which does not take into account its involvement in directly economic, as well as ideological, apparatus.

Finally, it is important to look again at the immediate antecedent of *this* project for the final word on what genre fundamentally is. Carolyn R. Miller writes, “Exigence

is a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but makes them what they are: *an objectified social need*” (43, emphasis mine). These writers, producing these texts within these physical and ideological spaces, are addressing a particular need. They share a sense of purpose, both addressing and creating the exigence for their own project.

Thus a definition of genre, for the purposes of this dissertation, would look something like the following:

A genre is a grouping of features that represents a shared and motivated purpose that has use-value. Writers within a genre both construct and address the exigency of their project in a way that demonstrates a particular social need. Genres may connect to various historical and ideological apparatus, both internal, as in the case of direct antecedents, and external to the genre itself; they can be understood as artifacts of a particular system of values. As a result, genres are often directly involved with economies, either of vulgar and direct commodification, or within more diverse and socially-situated institutions.

Any genre can be exposed, either for its prototypicality in relation to other types or for the various inclusions, proper to that genre, that it displays. Even still, they remain highly plastic, tolerating notable variation. Genres are always both the sum of their parts and exceeding that sum contemporaneously.

This definition anchors the understanding the genre as a whole and it is by fidelity to this definition that each individual publication is included.

CHAPTER 2

STUDYING A DIGITAL PUBLIC USE APPARATUS AS A GENRE

Given the definition above, the genre of digital travel writing should, first and foremost, be divorced from its direct antecedents even while there is a hereditary remainder. Digital travel writing is *not* analogous to blogs nor could it be considered expressly literary. When Miller and Shepherd were conducting their study, the blog was a reified social apparatus functioning as both a type of public genre and a digital apparatus—the genre was worthy of study on a number of levels and their work contributed a great deal both to genre study generally and specifically to the way that rhetorical genre studies was going to adapt to the possibilities of remediation within new media. Now, the idea that people digitally self-fashion is past-tense, simply understood as a formative and structural component of modern life. They write, “The blog-as-genre is a contemporary contribution to the art of the self,” identifying an emerging trend that was beginning to impact the creation of strange pre-formatted quasi-blogging sites such as *MySpace* (15). Viewed in hindsight, their perspective has an element of almost-dystopian prognostication. Certainly no one could have conceived the terminal course that such self-commodification would take.

The ethics of this turn will be commented on at a later point in this dissertation but, as mentioned above, much of this amounts to an historical conversation—trends can be traced, placed potentially within a broader ideological superstructure, while fleshing out various antecedents but such a study could not have any impact on the fact that this is simply where technology has arrived. For now, it is important to clarify that a digital

travel publication is not a blog. Blogs, at least as they exist in the cultural imagination, were a product of the late twentieth century—even at the time Miller and Shepherd were writing, it is very possible that the heady days of blogging were already past their peak. Really, it was an innovation of the mid to late-1990s. And while Miller and Shepherd mention the various themed blogs that came out of this time period, one of which was the well-established “travel blog”, it is necessary to understand that the genre has long since moved beyond this paradigm—it has evolved in response to new uses, new technologies, new audience expectations, and of course new ideologies. This evolution itself is in fact one of the strongest indicators that there is a consistency and uniformity to the field that demands treatment as a perceptible stable genre.

Bakhtin remarks on this preserving function directly when he writes, “A literary genre, by its very nature, reflects the most stable, ‘eternal’ tendencies in literature’s development...A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously...Precisely for this reason genre is capable of guaranteeing the *unity* and *uninterrupted continuity* of this development” (106). Though perhaps contemporary manifestations of travel writing, especially in the digital space, do not sufficiently represent those “archaic” elements of Fussell’s “travel book,” those elements are still preserved within. In a similar way, elements of the traditional blog are also visible. But as Bakhtin notes, there truly is no genre if it has no contemporary manifestation—a genre not renewed is a dead and useless thing, an artifact decontextualized and misunderstood. And clearly, in the vibrant space of digital travel publication, this writing is alive and well with writers taking up and deploying both elements of antecedents and pushing the tolerance of the genre into new areas.

The ethnomethodology Miller and Shepherd used in their study of the blog is still valid as it pertains to the study of public genres and new media. Because these eruptions of spontaneous, need-driven public genre are so closely tied with a discourse community, it is really only effective to look at the genre as a piece of a larger system of behavioral practice. There couldn't be any real examination of the archive itself without an attendant ethnography of the culture which produced it. For the case of digital travel writing, the connection is all too literal: there are no authors without the travel, both of which exist in distinct community with a shared understanding of integrative discursive practice. Further, this iteration of the genre is only possible through digital innovation and the direct, often immediate, interaction with the audience that it facilitates. This inaugurates an even broader sense of community as those who engage with these publications are almost always already travelers and often even publish something about their travels, even informally, through some digital mediation. In such a complex cultural and rhetorical space, it is crucial to orient towards consistent truths—people are writing, spontaneously and authentically, with careful attention to audience and economy, about human movement and they are doing so in the ostensibly democratic space of the internet.

Miller, in her landmark essay “Genre as Social Action,” writes, “A useful principle of classification for discourse...should have some basis in the conventions of rhetorical practice, including the ways actual rhetors and audiences have of comprehending the discourse they use” (37). Any study that seeks to examine a genre in contemporary practice should look for the characteristics of the work that seem to connect the author to the audience. So before isolating the artifacts for inclusion in this

project I read, cataloged, critiqued, and tagged hundreds of iterations of digital travel publications. These publications were then sorted—at first, the sorting was simplistic, based on the age of the author or whether advertisement was used. This helped to establish that there was an audience for these works, separating the current genre from earlier antecedents, such as the blog, that mirror a type of personal or self-talk. As more publications were read and cataloged, clear categories that seemed to define general features of the genre emerged—every work may have engaged with a feature differently, using different approaches or subtleties, but the stabilizing and prototypical publications that came to occupy the median all worked within these spaces. In documenting these shared characteristics, a stable genre began to emerge where authorial will and autonomy in addressing subject matter met audience expectation of what the genre is supposed to do.

How an author adapts the genre to meet a situated audience determines how effective the deployment of the genre is and thus often whether the work endures as an artifact of that genre. In this, prototypicality helps establish audience expectations in relation to message and authorial intent—I took as a given that this was already a genre and the fact that there were shared features and a common self-identification with a community supported this. The greater field of Rhetorical Genre Studies supports both this approach and the identification of prototypicality.

As stated, these works seemed to share certain characteristics and engage in similar conversations and economies. Even while maintaining agency through their engagement with the genre, the successful texts were relatively consistent both in ideology and device. The individuals who produced these publications seemed to do

similar things, almost in conversation with each other. A writer, occupying the role of digital travel writer, distributed very similar types of texts, all of which deal with some aspect of the travel experience. As Bazerman clarifies, “A Genre Set is the collection of types of texts someone in a particular role is likely to produce” (319). This is demonstrated through shared features, shared medium, and almost always a shared intent.

These works also displayed similar fallacies, blindspots, and ethical concerns. So in selecting the works to be considered in this project as representative of the current genre of digital travel writing, I paid attention above all to the specific traits that appeared most commonly across multiple publications and which seemed to represent the concerns of someone occupying the role of *digital travel writer*. These traits should be considered a representative sample of the genre as it exists: they are within the *median* of the field with some standard deviation and are therefore not exhaustive. Within this chronotopic portrayal of a travel experience, it can be easy to see these publications as neutral—this would be a mistake. Digital travel writing constructs the author as a feature of the text; even where the works share similar characteristics and values, each is subjective and mediated. But regardless of the particulars of the deployment, each work is expected to discursively situate the author within the text itself.

As the population of artifacts was reduced by looking for generic consistency, it became clear that not all publications checked all boxes in equal measure. Some are more visually dynamic, including for example video that shows evidence of a high aptitude for cinematography and editing. Others rely more on narrative or social media. Still others focused more on a singular aspect of the travel experience, be it of identity or budget or simple geography. Regardless, all are current, digital, and diverse. From here,

more subsets emerged. Some authors very directly engage with their identity, presenting it as the substance of their work in some way and using it to construct an audience: the works that demonstrate this propensity are treated in their own chapter and in their own right as this became such a fundamental consideration for the genre as a whole. The same could be said of the economies: these entanglements were so alarmingly present in some works as to make it unclear whether the publication was about *travel* or about the *marketing* of travel. In the same way, several works needed to be discussed more for this element than any other, thus demanding a separate chapter. Each chapter is therefore organized around a certain feature and contains direct discussion of the texts that best represent that feature within the genre.

While certainly all of the works will be examined critically for the discourses they represent and the ideologies they willfully or ignorantly convey, several publications dominated this ethical intersection. The ethics of travel has historically been a primary concern of those theorists engaging with the print genre. In many cases, such as those relating to postcolonial or enlightenment studies, it is *the* concern; the unintended consequences or the far-reaching implications of this type of movement became the primary feature of its continued study, at least in this literary sense. The ethical issues raised, both directly and indirectly, by travel writing endure in the digital genre as it exists today.

Interestingly, just as digital travel writers tend to be outsiders from more traditional travel journalism, so too are many formally untrained in web development and publication. That said, for nearly every work discussed, it would be impossible for the average reader-consumer to tell. So theirs, interestingly, is a double-literacy, both

composing written and visual, rhetorically situated prose to accomplish their intended purpose for a particularly constructed audience, and then capturing that same objective for the digital space. The nature of this type of necessity-driven auto-didacticism is impressive on any scale, but considerably more so when the genre embraced is being used to generate revenue based solely on the quality of the work. Further all contributors to the genre, in a similar fashion described by Miller and Shepherd in their analysis of the weblog, commit to regular content generation and updates—this is mandatory for sustainability within this intersection of new media and public-use digital apparatus.

In order for a digital travel publication to tap into that particular economy, it has to demonstrate its ability to draw an audience and consistently and creatively comment on some aspect of the travel experience. Certainly a part of this is the content itself: travel guides for a particular place or for a particular group or with a particular interest are all examples of this. But the other half, and perhaps the most important, is how visually appealing and well-designed the publication itself is. Modern audiences, and especially digital ones, tend to be image-centric, privileging the visual exponentially more than other media—travel publications rely on creative photographic and videographic image to drive traffic. Obviously carefully selected photographs are a feature of any guide but embedded videos are increasingly more prominent, especially as drone photography has risen to prominence in various related fields including anthropology, nature documentary, and sports entertainment. For these reasons, each work discussed across all chapters has a high visual presence with a careful attention to visual detail on the level of photo and film.

The layout of each publication is also discussed, apart from direct commentary on video or image. If a publication is not easily navigable, if its resources are not archived or organized, it will not likely survive. Some writers tend to group sections by continent or country, creating a contiguous guide for a certain section of the world. In a few cases, a world map allows for clicking, causing a drop-down to appear which provides a brief list of related experiences or adventures. Others have embedded links within the guides themselves, allowing readers to move seamlessly through the entire body of work, a decision which simulates vagabonding, letting readers *wander* through text and image. Many have a single tool bar, often with sub-menus and drop-downs. Some have a search function. A few have a message board, allowing the author to talk back to the audience, answering questions and providing a secondary document. As Bazerman notes in his example regarding a classroom, one ostensibly simple objective can generate countless bits of dialog, both internal to the original text and beyond it, and within these dispersions are complicated layers of meaning and expectation. Message boards are an important example of the unforeseen engagements that one text within a genre set can generate.

So this type of intertextuality is specific to publishing in a digital space—the more fluid the experience, the more successful the work. If images and video are well-integrated with text, either through linked galleries or direct-mention, the work has a more professional feel and is thus more likely to gain sponsorship. And of course any allegiance, either to sponsors or travel societies or more traditional publications, is included visually as well, often allowing for a reader to click directly to a booking site or product as it is mentioned within the body of the publication itself.

Above all, these design elements are only made possible by publication within this digital space and, while digital rhetoric is not the primary substance of this dissertation, it is impossible to discuss the included works without some direct mention of the tools employed outside of the strictly written-compositional aspect. Rather than give these elements a separate chapter, unique inclusions, navigational features, and comment sections will be discussed as they occur. It can be safely assumed that all works discussed are professional even in their design choices—while they each have their successes and failures, all demonstrate a degree of mastery with web design and digital publication.

In writing about these publications as a genre, I group and discuss the publications that represent particular features of the genre together, both in an effort to clarify how the genre currently manifests and what those particular features look like in practice. This allows for a more direct critical intervention at the level of each particular feature. Each work of digital travel publication discussed was selected for its for its *generic* fidelity as well as its contribution to the diversity tolerated within the set. This is to say that each work represents a possible articulation of the genre which emphasizes one of the characteristics of the genre in representative ways. Certainly there are other publications that do something similar, or perhaps even better, but each work discussed allows for a more complex understanding: the isolated aspect of the genre *and* the work itself within the greater system.

What results then is really a threefold investigation: the genre as a whole including authors and audiences, the features themselves as characteristics of that genre, and of the greater systems, both related to prior versions of the genre and contemporary

geopolitical ideologies. Each individual work discussed is an example of relative prototypicality within the genre and the features discussed are each individually a facet of that prototypicality. These are the features considered as stable indications of the genre:

1. Consistent and regular contribution to content;
2. Multimedia construction and multiplatform distribution as part of a singular publication;
3. A deliberate rhetorical construction of identity;
4. The engagement with digital economies;
5. An entanglement with various ethical concerns.

While each work is not expected to include each feature in equal measure, all demonstrate some aspect of that feature as a requirement for inclusion in the genre as understood by the above definition.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 3: Discursive Identity in Digital Travel Writing

The first feature that all included publications share is their direct and deliberate interaction with the politics of identity on multiple levels. In many publications, *authorial* identity is a primary factor conditioning how content is generated and shared. Where historically consideration of authorial identity is bracketed or omitted, digital travel writers tend to place this in the byline of their works, making it as inseparable a component of the work as the places travelled themselves. This will be considered from a number of angles—certainly the current age of neoliberal capitalism emphasizes the celebration of identity alongside technological representationality. An identity can be

carefully scripted, displayed, and modified in a digital space in a way that is not quite so reducible in the physical lifeworld. Beyond this, consideration, or *re*-consideration, of one's own identity is often a consequence of the type of *othering* which occurs alongside an experience of foreign-ness.

The author's consideration of their own identity often leads to the construction of an audience. In other words, whatever categories an included author claims or identifies with are also used as a *tag* for a particular audience that shares those same features or values. Few travel publications in the digital space masquerade as all-purpose or neutral; it is far more common to see subject matter contrived for a particular audience based on the author's own identity politics. Again, while none of this is especially surprising given the social turn of the democratic state, it is imperative to assess this turn as a feature of the genre itself, as it exists, rather than a simple ideological blindspot.

Along these lines, and as mentioned above, the identities of the authors are played out in two highly commodified spaces: both the digital realm and the occupied foreign culture. This is a double alienation from self that has confusing effects. An author emphasizes their identity, not at home in the place where it is natural or rehearsed or performed, but rather in a foreign space where it is at best highlighted and at worst problematized. Further, that self-experience is then captured for a digital audience by directly rhetorical choices. In any case, the identities of the particular cultures where the travel takes place is also considered, especially in regard to some ethical concerns which arise from this process.

Chapter 4: Pathways of Profit in Digital Travel Writing

The second feature discussed is the peculiar entanglement with digital economies which these publications maintain. To reiterate, for the purposes of this study, there is no such thing as a “travel blog” regardless of how this idea endures as a stereotype. The idea of a publicly hosted travel journal was born sometime in the early 2000’s and endures in the cultural imagination more than reality. The artifacts considered in this work can, in various ways, be considered professional. All gain revenue from the consistent and novel generation of content. This may be through direct advertisement or clickbait. It may also be through referrals or sponsorship. Some travel writers only seek to generate enough income by travel writing to continue traveling and writing. Others have built a stable enough income stream to exceed this ambition and move towards a more traditional publication or other business model. Some disclose their sponsorships; others are not so transparent. Some digital travel writers fit more of an *influencer* or “travel influencer” model, making indistinct income through the mention of products or services on attendant social media platforms. Whatever the case may be, the projects are engaging in various digital economies and this impacts the development and deployment of their work in numerous ways and causes a reconsideration of the concept of *labor* within the digital space.

Chapter 5: Ethics and Authenticity in Digital Travel Writing

The ethics of digital travel writing itself is a necessary feature: all works considered engage with contemporary ethical issues, whether through conspicuous avoidance or direct acknowledgement. The authors, millennials almost all, travel, write,

reflect, and self-fashion in the language of neoliberalism. This is not without some good points: the world does *feel* smaller and a broader portion of the population is now able to see and engage with a world that was once almost entirely foreclosed, both in the imagination and in actuality. These access-narratives proliferate as more travelers, again frequently a millennial generation which overwhelmingly identifies travel as a life-goal, seek inspiration for their own adventures. There is nothing wrong with acceptance and tolerance, especially when authentically embraced. But upon close investigation of the ideological ramifications of neoliberal travel and its often absent self-critique or even outright hypocrisy, this accepted truth that the contemporary moment is so evolved is increasingly problematic.

Where, in the Carter era, neoliberalism simply denoted a reinforcing of enlightenment economic practices with an engorged consumer population, the term now reiterates the sanctity of the subject and attendant consumer practices, especially those entrenched in a diffuse digital economy of representation and commodification. So artistic production in this space relies on economic profitability for the determination of value and a type of labor that is consistent with the dominant means of production. Further, the subject or author, specifically their intention with the work, features highly in the work itself, such that a reader really has very little expectation of interpretive responsibility. Difference is often homogenized and the dominant heuristic within neoliberalism becomes a type of boring historicism, devoid of ideology critique.

This requires a deep and fearless questioning of whether a genre, one that exists at the intersection of global capitalism and digital representation, can ever be a vessel for good or is rather just another offshoot of capitalism's ever expanding search for novel or

diverse markets. Because ethical concerns are so present in one way or another throughout the genre, this area gets the final consideration as a characteristic.

Chapter 6: Pedagogical Potential and Final Thoughts

Finally, and as a type of conclusion, Chapter 6 addresses some possible pedagogical implications. Travel writing is not often directly embraced in writing curriculums, either as a heuristic for teaching about essay writing or for more creative motives. Yet many first-year writing programs rely on a host of transfer-based pedagogical apparatus, many of which emphasize citizenship and social justice. Further, the population that most frequently sees travel as a key component to a balanced and successful life is the same population filling first-year writing classrooms. It is possible that an inclusive understanding of travel writing, which sees it as a tool for teaching genre-agility and critical thinking, could support models already employed in many writing departments. Additionally, its prevalence as a largely self-taught and expressive writing style helps to cast new light on the expressivist tradition hailed by Peter Elbow and later callously dismissed by countless compositionists in favor of a social-discursive model. Digital travel writing highlights the reality that this may have been a false choice.

* * *

Despite the separation for purposes of analysis here, it should be emphasized that genre is never so tidy—the recognition of related features, and the grouping of these into the cognitive vessel of the genre, requires some improvisation. Further, there are some

features that are not easily split apart into chapters, as they seem to be part of the substance of the genre relating to its digital medium. Miller and Shepherd mention in their study of the blog that the largest emphasis seems to relate to the kairotic performance of the publication—authors must emphasize content but there is an expectation of *timeliness*, including regular updates and evidence of a continued artistic investment in the project. This is equally true of digital travel publication where these updates often negotiate global issues or trends in other areas outside explicit travel.

So all of the works considered are both relevant and current, with regular contributions to content. Certainly the internet is littered with the remains of dead or abandoned travel publications. These can seem active but, when dates are checked upon further examination, often years have passed without a contribution. Digital travel writing is not so much about durability but rather immediacy and utility. This could be simply an aspect of the millennial *episteme*, as most of these writers are from that particular moment, or an aspect of travel itself—even a *Fodor's* guide from 2012 will not be ideal for traveling in 2020. Equally likely, this is an aspect of digital representationality as a whole: frequent content-generation is the *sine qua non* of influencer-culture. Regardless of the motivations, all works considered are up-to-date with regular contributions.

Further, all of these writers compose in a variety of media which is to say that all publications featured in this project are both multimodal and multiplatform. At this point, there is effectively no such thing as a work of digital travel writing without the considerate juxtaposition of image and text. All active authors have Instagram and Twitter—they use both as a supplement to their formal publication. Almost all have a

YouTube channel as well, featuring video content and drone footage and all of them have multiple other social media outlets. These are considered a component of the *singular* work rather than as separate projects as this is how they are in practice. The authors and the audience *expect* this to be the case as part of their interaction with the genre.

When genres are enacted, it does not necessarily mean that all the same material conditions are in place and the discourse is a duplication of past utterances, but rather that every response carries with it layers of prior meaning, or memory, and layers of anticipated responses within that set of circumstances. These circumstances do not have to be identical. Miller writes, “What recurs is not a material situation (a real objective factual event) but our construal of a type. The typified situation, including typifications of participants, underlies typification in rhetoric. Successful communication would require that the participants share common types; this is possible insofar as types are socially created.” (156-157) When discussing travel and travel writing, it is necessary to understand genres in this way—it is this type of thinking about genre, as social exchange and construction, that allows the questions above surrounding identity practice and rehearsal as well as audience anticipation to be truly addressed. What writers (and travelers) discuss, how they discuss it, what they *highlight* and *background*, the anticipated audience and the response to other travelers and travel writing...all this is constructed and participated-in discursively. In many ways, genres can help with social prediction: given a particular set of discursive structures, what will an author or speaker likely do in a similar situation. This is why Bawarshi calls genre “both the situation and the textual instantiation of that situation...”(698). Travelers are simultaneously always experiencing and creating their world, making choices based on communication within

the community and participating in a disorienting heterogeneous space. The writing that comes from this is diverse and subjective but, like the community of travelers which sustains it, cohesive enough to be perceptible stable.

So in summary, the characteristics used to determine inclusion in the set and thus to define the genre of digital travel publication, both as it exists in practice and in this investigation, are as follows. First, a publication must be current and active, formed of mixed-media. Second, the publication deals with representation or experience of identity. Third, every publication engages in economies peculiar to the contemporary digital landscape. And finally, each publication raises ethical considerations that are apt to the genre itself and travel more generally. All are subject to critical ideological examination.

CHAPTER 3

DISCURSIVE IDENTITY IN DIGITAL TRAVEL WRITING

Though social media and the proliferation of digital technologies has incited a renaissance of the subject in many ways, this is not the first time identity, or the self, has been acknowledged as a rhetorical feature. In fact, the eradication of identity, or the author, from a text is a fairly new conception—ancient rhetoric, even within the Aristotelean genres, always accounted for a speaking self and that self, then as ever, represented complex system of beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Even in modern forms of oratory, many of which resembling classically deliberative modes, the speaking subject is understood as a type of metonymic representation. As Bawarshi writes, genre is “is largely constitutive of the identities we assume within and in relation to discourse” (343). Bazerman supports this as he acknowledges that, both within the field of composition and rhetoric and beyond, subtle shifts are developing whereby identity is understood through its entanglement with discursive systems. Identities are groups of sanctioned and unsanctioned behavior compounded by networks of power relations—this is a process that is implicated in all aspects of human cultural development, especially those processes, like travel, whereby mankind seeks to know itself.

Yet while the understanding of “identity” as a rhetorical *feature* of a discourse is nothing new, technological developments have afforded a contrivance of identity like never before. Even in 2004, Miller and Shepherd were observing a similar phenomenon

at work. They write, “The blog-as-genre is a contemporary contribution to the art of the self,” identifying an emerging trend that was beginning to impact the creation of strange pre-formatted quasi-blogging sites such as *MySpace* (15). They add, “self expression serves the intrinsic self-disclosure functions of both self clarification and self validation, enhancing self awareness and confirming already-held beliefs” (9-10). There is a mirroring effect created by the screen—to see a creative manifestation of self shining back is intoxicating; the ability to include desirable traits and efface undesirable ones provides an irresistible opportunity. But within this process there is also a communicative aspect—this self is also made for an audience that expects to encounter some aspect of identity. If the audience for a novel encountered bits of personal data about the author strewn amidst the prose, the effect would be unsettling because that characteristic is not proper to that genre. But in the digital space, neutrality, or sterility, is the unsettling feature—deployment of discursive identity is an expectation that must be met for the genre to function as a social apparatus.

For this reason, identity, rather than a simple aspect or ancillary concern, is understood as a formative feature of the genre. In fact, Miller and Shepherd note this exact process as a feature of the blog. They write, “Understanding exigence as an ‘objectified social need’ that functions as rhetorical motive, then, we must characterize the generic exigence of the blog as some widely shared, *recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self*; furthermore, in these particular times, we must locate that need at the intersection of the private and public realms, where questions about identity are most troubled” (Miller and Shepherd 14, emphasis mine). In effect, there is something about the medium, its existence at the crossroads of several discourses, that creates a

need, and thus an expectation, that some aspect of the self be “cultivated” and demonstrated and therefore validated in the digital space.

The directed discussion of identity which follows relates to its inclusion in the genre of contemporary digital travel narrative as a genre feature, with each publication discussed serving as a type of case study, both of identity and the genre itself. Identity in this sense is not something behind the scenes or subdued, that which an author does or has in a private-space, veiled from the audience but rather a rhetorical structure, represented on the page through careful discursive implementation. So when discussing these inclusions what is really being addressed is Bakhtin’s conception of the chronotope and how it relates to, in Freedman’s words, knowing “when and where it is appropriate to do and say certain things, and to know that to do and say them at inappropriate places and times is to run the risk of having them ruled out” (59).

While genres can facilitate speech and create reciprocity, they can also limit speech: it is important to notice, especially in the rhetoric of travel, all that cannot be said and all that is omitted. While Bakhtin acknowledges speech-will as a *part* of the entrance into a discourse, there are some aspects of genre-fluency that exist outside the realm of direct human will but somehow lurk in this fourth quadrant, where ideology conditions appropriate utterance and appropriate response.

The works selected for discussion in this chapter are those which seem to represent an aspect of identity as tolerated as a feature of the genre. They are certainly not the only works that deal with identity or deal with identity in a similar way—every current publication of digital travel writing engages with identity and many share similar politics in that regard. These may not even be the best examples of a particular style or

feature—even while that is largely a matter of subjective opinion, there is no reason to think that any of these would necessarily be a contender for that prize.

What all of these five publications accomplish, and indeed this is the reason they are chosen for discussion, is the creation of a distinct and accessible example, or *type*, of the way identity functions as a shared characteristic of the contemporary genre of digital travel writing.

The first work discussed, *WhereDidSheGoThisTime?* is an excellent example of prototypical travel writing within the genre and has all of the features necessary to place it thus. In addition to checking all the boxes, Philipa's work expressly navigates the curious linguistic politics of home that are highlighted while abroad. Next, the *NomadicBoys* travel publication, while not the only work that deals with sexual identity as performed abroad, sets the stage for professionalism and a tongue-in-cheek playfulness. In addition to exploring the complicated politics of performative sexuality abroad, Sebastien and Stefan are courageous travelers individually and both are incredibly nice and very willing to speak openly about their adventures. *OneikaTheTraveler* is both professional and disciplined, her prose having made the leap out of the digital and into the print genre—she demonstrates a mastery of both which cannot always be assumed. Further, she addresses the politics of race while abroad in a way that de-emphasizes hackneyed debates at home in favor of curious and often fun idiosyncrasies of racial identity abroad. What results is a detailed, accessible, and open work that showcases how profoundly impactful travel can be.

Shifting gears slightly, Atreyee Gupta's *BespokeTraveler* demonstrates how both antecedents have a profound impact of the extant genre. While it is easy to emphasize

the digital in all this, Gupta's work allows for an appreciation of the poetics of the genre often attributed solely to the written work; it is an important example, not just of the digital genre specifically, but of how genre functions more generally. Of course no study would be complete without a discussion of *NomadicMatt*, the indefatigable voice of the white, male vagabonding experience—he has used his privilege to establish a travel empire that has afforded his transformation from muddy backpacker to CEO of an entire network of travel resources. His work, while questionably neutral, could serve as an inspirational guide for anyone considering long-term travel—and this is one of the most important, if oft-misunderstood, objectives of the genre. And Nomadic Matt, in his expansive reach, has outsourced many independent guides, helping to promote the genre by encouraging new writers. Among these, Vikram and Ishwinder of *EmptyRucksackTraveler*, provide some insight into the identity of the traveling couple abroad and the impact that the forgotten identity category of *nationality* can have on the travel experience. Inadvertently, they also provide a way of understanding how the genre, at times, collapses under the weight of its status as a social and public use apparatus. And lastly, Kristen Addis' *BeMyTravelMuse* publication, in collaboration with Nomadic Matt, exemplifies the important category of *solo* and *female* digital travel writing that fills the internet, highlighting a unique aspect of that particular identity. Like Matt, issues of problematic neutrality are raised as Kristen positions herself as the everyday girl, an ideologically empty vessel, traveling the world; her work is both telling and troubling.

None of this is to say that all these writers are the same and approach or even commodify their identities in the same way. Quite the opposite, all the writers included

do very different things with their symbolic identity, textually engaging with it to various ends. As stated, some explore their nationality and their language, understanding their travels as opposed to a particular place—they may hold to that location, its language and behaviors, as a way to anchor long periods of absence to something more stable. Other writers look towards their sexuality and the way that that performance changes the travel experience in various parts of the world. And still others rely on a combination of gender, race, or socioeconomic status to both define what a particular experience may be like, both in an effort towards editorial direction and the establishment of an audience. But each, regardless of approach or position, demonstrates very specific rhetorical choices relating to identity to the degree that it functions as a device or style within the genre itself. These writers are all familiar with their medium—they have an awareness of what can be said, when, and to whom, both within the genre and the greater chronotope. They use this agility to various ends but all interact with and position their identity. And, though not comprehensive, each work is analyzed for its deliberate or passive deployment of this characteristic.

WhereDidSheGoThisTime?: Traveling with the Language of Home

Philipa D'Oliveira opens her publication with the following: "I always wondered why birds stay in the same place when they can fly anywhere on Earth. Then I asked myself the same question..." She then repeats this, as above, but in Portuguese, her native language. Philipa is a young, solo, female, Portuguese traveler who has been traveling for, at the moment of writing, 633 days and counting. She writes in English and

Portuguese; a significant decision as many travelers whose first language is not English still speak, and write, mostly in English while abroad unless with someone from their own country. The brief list above (young, solo, female, Portuguese) may seem insignificant or perhaps irrelevant to the writing itself, but in fact the identity of the author, even in list-form, is crucial to both the substance of the digital publication, with its underlying objectives and assumptions, and the audience, intended or otherwise. And Philipa's work, even with its diverse inclusions and novel authorial decisions, is included here as an example of the subjective "I" of identity—she is the traveling subject that enjoys, reacts, and responds. Philipa's subjectivity is further reinforced by her participation in the community of travelers as those abroad tend to ask each other certain pertinent questions relating to home country, time abroad, travel-relationship status (not necessarily romantic), and destination—curiously, a person's name is often secondary to other markers of identity.

As mentioned in the second chapter, much of this exploration into the genre of digital travel publication requires a type of ethnomethodology—there is no genre without the community of travelers that enact its discourses prior to formal composition of any sort. As such, it is important to note that many of the values most important to travelers, even as a face-to-face community, translate, though in different ways, into stylistic variation within the rhetoric itself. In their article, "Genre Systems: Structuring Interaction through Communicative Norms" Wanda Orlikowski and JoAnne Yates write, "Like individual genres, genre systems too are organizing structures within a community, providing expectations about the purpose, content, form, participants, time, and place of communicative interaction..." (Orlikowski 4). Identity practices, as they form a type of

social semiotic in the community, are one particular system incorporated into the broader genre—this is likely why they feature so prominently in the written and visual rhetoric.

So there is something about travel that restructures identity even before any writing occurs. As Bawarshi adds, “Genres have this generative power because they carry with them social motives—socially sanctioned ways of ‘appropriately’ recognizing and behaving within certain situations—that we as social actors internalize as intentions and then enact rhetorically as social practices.” (Bawarshi 168) Perhaps the contact with the so drastically foreign and uncomfortable places one in closer contact with the contingency of his or her own symbolic identity. Maybe it is simply having to answer the same questions, day in and day out, that turns identity into something very deliberately, even ritualistically, adopted and practiced; after all, there are no friends, family, or coworkers to *recognize* the traveler and thus lubricate social discourse. Likely, it is a combination of these things. There is uncertainty in travel and this includes, paradoxically, an uncertainty with self—what is so rehearsed and normal in ones’ own language and space, is suddenly radically altered. It can be easy to not recognize oneself after prolonged periods away which is often why, after these periods of absence, upon return families and friends notice a spectrum of changes in the traveler that they perhaps don’t see in themselves. Some, like Philipa, find this change intoxicating. Philipa writes, “Traveling is a brutality. It forces you to trust strangers and to lose sight of all that familiar comfort of home and friends. You are constantly off balance. And that’s essentially what makes it so addictive.” This intoxication is likely why her subjective engagement with her travels is her primary emphasis in her work.

Certainly some of the emphasis on identity relates to the trend towards identity politics in liberal democracy—there is, in certain arenas, a celebrationist trend which seems to reduce identity for easy display and consumption. Some of the identity-driven language within digital travel writing can be seen within influencer culture as well as commercial marketing surrounding lifestyle trends. An example of this can be found in the “About” section of Philipa’s publication which is located at the top of the main page in an easy to read, organic, almost written-by-hand font. She writes, “Our planet is simply wonderful and I want to show you the amazing things I'm seeing along the way. All pictures and stories come through my sight, heart and soul...” In other words, she brings a “touch” of who she is, and how she writes, through all of her travels.

Not uncommonly, Philipa details how this push to travel began in her life—for many, the thought of vacating life’s quotidian pressures in exchange for a different kind of life, full of change and uncertainty, is both at once appealing and impossible. It presents as the type of thing that *other* people do: other people who have time, other people who are young, other people who have few responsibilities, other people who have money... This is a standard problem with partisan audiences: those reading the publication are, theoretically, those already primed for travel which would mean that most of these sites are simply communicating amongst themselves, with their own kind. In fact, many travel writers, when asked, will admit that they were inspired to create their “blog” through contact with another blog while searching for travel inspiration.

If this is true classically, through written work, it goes double or triple or quadruple for YouTube and amateur videography or documentary—almost all, and perhaps indeed all, amateur videographers were inspired by work they had already

viewed on YouTube. Philipa does not have an active YouTube, but she is quite accessible through her page (she has a specific section called “Talk To Me” where she will directly interact with readers) and also through her social media accounts, which favor Instagram over Facebook.

Almost all digital travel publications have a similar About section—often, the impetus to travel, and possibly even to write, is narrativized in a way very similar to what Philipa does. A publication without such a section would be noted for the absence—readers want to be able to look through the screen to see the author—as mentioned, there is the expectation of this type of ostensible transparency within the space of the discourse. Many readers are likely sorted out at this stage: having visited the About section first, they make a careful determination on whether or not to continue reading, whether a particular author’s presentation and purpose relates to their need as audience. Recalling Miller’s assertion regarding the social structuring of “objective need,” this is the place within the rhetorical structure of the work where the audience and author must agree on generic participation.

Philipa’s “About” section accomplishes several things. Primarily, its an introduction—the travel world has moved away from neutral guides (*Fodor’s* or *Lonely Planet*) except for very specific neutral information (train schedules or *maybe* hostels). Writing about travel, the writing done digitally, requires a personal touch outside of basic visually rhetorical design elements which, as discussed in the prior chapter, was not an ordinary feature of the genre. Second, it allows for a non-travel audience to connect a bit with her experience. She explains the origin of her travel instincts and provides some anecdotes about her childhood, her family, and early simple travels through the Iberian

Peninsula. Philipa seems to speak to those readers who are of that “this is for other people” variety—in creating a greater connection, she helps them begin the imaginative relationship with the places she goes and the ways she gets there. Above all, travel begins in the mind: it starts with this tiny seed of imagination and is fed through reading and viewing various articulations of the experience. The rhetoric then that follows from this is meant to be of possibility and inclusion, thus allowing readers to borrow and occupy her subjective fantasy for a time.

Finally, and quite indirectly, Philipa’s bio serves to clarify what exactly she means by travel. This cannot be ignored yet, among travel writers generally, very little attention is often paid to the clarification of terms. For Philipa, and for others, travel is first an attitude about the world. As she concludes at the bottom of her welcome page, “To Travel is to Live.” This is an oft-repeated mantra—travel is, in itself, a way of approaching the world that, like a religion or really any dogma, has particular behaviors and assumptions attached. As will be addressed directly later, and also like a religion, these assumptions can create problems. Secondary to this, travel is presented as an *extended* process. In fact, she explains that after her work at university was done, she moved to Brazil for two years—this is undocumented in her website (ie. no photos, journal entries as it came prior to the inaugural publication), and not discussed as “travel,” presumably because her intention was to stay and live and work in Brazil. She then goes on to explain that “life drove” her to Iceland where the idea for the website began in 2016, and where she then lived for sixteen months. And since that time, she explains, she has been traveling all over the world: “From November 2018 to March 2019 I’ve hopped on dozens of trains, buses, boats and few flights while

exploring Southeast Asia. It was the best trip of my life so far! Started in Russia and went all the way south, finishing it in the Philippines...” Further, she explains that during this trip she has made “some money around England and Germany and spending it on flight/bus/train tickets and petrol...”

For the average American, it is hard to define exactly what is going on here but it probably doesn't sound like a reasonable definition of travel. For Philipa, the “travel” began after leaving Brazil, ostensibly when documentation of said adventures began, and continued throughout intermittent periods of employment—in other words, at times she stayed in one place to earn money as she could to fund more travel. From her explication given above, it is not clear that there was any real itinerary and the reader is not given much background into what she was doing in Brazil or what inspired the move to Iceland and the proceeding travel. This is not a two-week cruise down the Rhine River or even a four week backpacking excursion through the summer Dolomites—this is an extended period of absence from one's home punctuated by peripatetic engagement in a variety of landscapes and cultures.

And it is this type of travel, commonly, that fills the annals of the internet and is largely the substance of digital travel publication. The economic situation of these publications will be addressed at a later time but, for now, it is important to note that the travel that Philipa is engaged in is reasonably commonplace among digital travel writers across a variety of backgrounds—it is a key component of their identity as traveler. These travelers will stay in one place for extended periods of time for financial or personal or even romantic reasons and that they, eventually, will move on, usually when prompted by the narratives of other travelers or simple boredom. They may at times team

up only to dissolve these unions later as paths diverge. Interestingly, *home* truly is defined only by the negative—it can be part identity or part language, but more than anything it is noted for its conspicuous absence, the place where a traveler is *not*. In this way, participants in this activity can begin to be seen as a type of community—often these areas where long-term travelers congregate are called “backpacker enclaves”—these can be hostels or towns or entire economies that cater to the constant and interminable migration of foreigners who stay for days and weeks and months. Rolf Potts, the digital writer *cum* traditional travel journalist famously labelled this trend “vagabonding.” It is these travelers that most often contribute to the genre of digital travel writing today and, while many travel with laptops and can record long video clips from their internationally-SIM-carded phone, their progenitors were the greasy backpackers with paper maps typing up blogs in internet cafés from Cape Town to Krakow in the mid to late 1990’s. In fact, it was these early digital writers which created the cultural image of the travel blog and it is the departure from this nascent form that marks the contributors to the genre in the millennial generation.

But again, these writers are, in overwhelming number, “vagabonders” who are really something like amateur professional travelers. And due to this tendency, regular contributions to these sites can be spotty—some writers produce content regardless, either for themselves or other publications, while others wait to engage in new adventures before documenting, editing, and presenting their work. Philipa makes a number of decisions in this area that are worth stressing. For one, and this is not actually especially common, she has a very conversational, even narrative, tone which fits with her subjective emphasis. She writes as if writing a letter to a friend: it isn’t quite a story and

it isn't quite a journal entry and it isn't quite a guide. Her photos and descriptions could *inspire* travel but likely wouldn't be successful in *guiding* it with some exception perhaps of the on the ground details she discusses such as the travel time needed actually between places and the dodgy bus or train service. So in this way, her work can be seen as a supplement, but really reads more as a documentation of her adventures rather a clear resource. This of course doesn't make her work less valuable or more valuable—it is simply an articulation of the genre.

She also continues her writing, always, in both an adept English and natural Portuguese. Considering that she could easily just use English as most of her readership would be fluent if not native, this decision on her part to remain effectively bilingual throughout is significant, being specifically a concern of identity rather than rhetorical efficacy. Although she doesn't come right out and address this, her continual use of her native language is likely more for herself than a Portuguese-speaking audience. It presents as a way to keep her identity, her ethnicity, close at hand through her adventures. Philipa is a member of a very unique organization: the *Associação de Bloggers de Viagem Portugueses*. Translated, this organization's mission is to “tell stories of travel with professionalism and ethics”—this is one of the only organizations of its kind in that it is devoted, within the confines of a linguistic-nationality, to supporting the art of responsible digital travel publication. Further, at various points, such as in her discussion of her travels through the Hong Kong islands, Philipa mentions how a particular setting reminds her of her grandmother's village in Portugal. This frequent tethering of unfamiliar landscapes to familiar, emotional experience is important on two levels: first, it draws humanity closer together by foregrounding commonalities over differences, and

second, it protects against a potential loss of identity through constant engagement with different, perhaps even antagonistic, *modus vivendi*.

Because of her prose choice, her structure is also floating—while this would make specific researching (ie. for a bit of detail on a location or clarification) challenging, it does make for very accessible digital wandering. In fact, her visual rhetoric mirrors her language admirably. An audience can click on particular sections based on the tab “Where do you want to go?” and thus explore her adventures or, as pictures flash by across the screen unobtrusively, they can be clicked on and this redirects to the attendant prose. Philipa writes in her entry about Jerioacorara, Brazil dated June 6, 2017, “Throw back September 2014. You'll realize this blog has no chronological order - I'm following my thoughts and this time they took me back to Brazil, to this specific paradise...” She peppers her entry, again very subjective and conversational, with quality, though often decontextualized, photographs (she explains that her blog is powered by Canon and GoPro on the front portal). Philipa uses photography to supplement her own narration—rather than a guide, where the photographs are connected to a particular experience in a neutral way, her pictures are personal, staged, and even artistic. She does not even necessarily caption them directly, but lets them circulate around her prose. This is important because, for Philipa, even the deployment of ostensibly neutral images relating to travel are used as a complement to her subjective experience. Even image has a relationship to identity here, as if she is letting the reader listen to her thoughts and see through her eyes.

Further, she demonstrates her passion for Brazil; clearly this “throwback” is from during the time when she first moved abroad and thus predates her tumble into the

traveler's life and the website itself. She writes, "Besides being a huge paradise to which Mother Nature was super generous and wide, its natives are kind, friendly and above all HAPPY. It's true that this land is still considered a 3rd world country, it has been in infinite political fights and you don't feel safe all the time - but this is something you forget because the friends you've made and the things you've seen bring stronger memories and feelings. In Brazil I started dancing, I started singing in the middle of the street, I stopped caring about stupid things - my mind and soul made a huge upgrade..." Her subjective experience of Brazil is likely somewhat conditioned on her mastery of the native tongue and the length of time spent there—this may not translate to all travels; while English-speakers certainly exist working within the tourist economy, it could be harder to find these individuals in the type of less-touristic areas that largely feature in her blog post.

The expressly spiritual language is also important to recognize, not only because it is a subjectively formative component of identity, but also because it is a marketable rhetorical device for this type of travel writing. The same language she uses for her experience in Brazil could be equally well-deployed for any modern and fashionable non-deistic spiritual trend. Try our CBD oil... "I stopped caring about stupid things..." come to our hot yoga class, "my mind and soul made a huge upgrade..." and so forth. This is not to say that she is being disingenuous, but rather that this type of language is already prevalent in contemporary liberal marketing where subjective experiences and spiritual awakenings and the like are often used as *objective* testimonial to support a particular economy. Travel is inherently not immune to this—in fact, this trend of multiculturalism may be indebted directly to travel writing as the original celebration of diversity.

Embedded in this, too, is a part of her identity. Though certainly her phrasing could have come from a traveler of any gender, it is youthful in its outlook and engagement. It would be easy to assume that, in reality, most of these texts have a youthful audience in their sights and, while this is true for what is probably the majority, it is not true for all. However, there are some important features to note here about the ability to travel, the ethos of an age, and perhaps youth more generally, especially as experienced by the millennial generation. It is a fact, verified both by substantial personal experience and generally validated by research and commonsense, that many long-term travelers are younger, and most of those are from Europe, Australia and, in specific cases, Israel. Many are either just finishing at university and taking some time, or about to begin university and taking between six months and a year depending. This places them between eighteen and twenty-five years old. In 2018, *Forbes Magazine* released a series of articles that looked at the relationship Millennials have to travel. They concluded that Millennials are changing the travel economy as they overwhelmingly look to travel as part of a healthy, balanced life. While the Millennial Generation, at least in the States where the category truly thrives, are criticized for seeking an equitable work-life balance, their attitudes towards the rest of the world seems far more open in a way that is similar to European attitudes. While the writers discussed come from diverse backgrounds and don't necessarily adopt the mantle of "millennial", it is nonetheless a component of their identity practices, even if only in an abstract or ideological sense.

Of these long-term travelers, some travelers are well-funded, either by their parents or their own work, and many of these well-funded youth come from northern European countries where the economy is more productive generally—Australians too generally fit this mix. And for these travelers, the intent, again *usually*, is to return home after an extended period seeing the world as they hope to participate fruitfully in their countries' respective economies and live by their countries' expected norms. This is not always the case, but generally it is true. Likely this is the progeny of the “grand tour experience” where members of European gentry, in their youth post-public school, were expected to travel the continent, ostensibly to build productive relationships and learn the language. As the middle class grew along with their discretionary income, certain new possibilities were available: one of these was extended leisure-based travel. Now, as then, young people in their early adulthood form the majority of extended travelers.

Most of those that document their experiences do so more informally. The app *PolarSteps - Travel Tracker* is making this very easy and accessible—it is the first app to combine the informal written documentation of travel with the photography and general route. A Dutch traveler named Fökke, who I met at a homestay while doing the Ha Giang loop on motorbike in North Vietnam, showed me his profile, photographs, and various entries—he also showed me his followers, most of whom were friends and family from back home who were anxious to see where his adventures would take him and that he was safe. It is easier seen than explained but it amounts to an almost blog-like interface that allows for posting images similar to Instagram and travel tracking like GoogleMaps. Its a synthetic platform through which friends and family can follow travels through accurate updates based on a mobile devices' location, photography, and

regular entries with details at the user's discretion. It is possible to see this app as indicating where the genre is evolving and it would make sense—fewer and fewer travelers would see the need for web-development when so many people are able to establish successful accounts on established platforms like YouTube and Instagram. PolarSteps is an iteration of social media that is more specialized—in this sense, it indicates that there is still that “objectivized social need” for travel writing that establishes the exigency of the genre. In any case, it is fairly groundbreaking and quite popular for travelers from Europe but hasn't seen much attention in the States, possibly because the type of travel that young Europeans do is not especially common, with gap years or breaks being seen as wasteful and the world outside being presented, quite frankly, as unfriendly or even openly hostile.

As stated above, the millennial generation is pushing back against this but, even where this is true, ideas about travel, what it is and is not or what it can and cannot be, are more limited in the United States where it is often reduced to the potted experience of very brief study-abroad trips that are, for the most part, substantially overpriced when considering the budget on which a European student travels the world for months on end. So even when the first group does document travel in some formal way for the presentation to others, the imagined audience is usually just friends and family and this limits the scope of their rhetorical project—as such, work of this nature, while valuable and representative of an area that is inspiring people to compose with word and image, is not included in the scope of this project.

There is another group however, more often from southern Europe, that is less connected to life at home—in many of these countries, probably as is the case with

Philipa's initial exit from Portugal, a brain-drain is occurring whereby young, educated citizens are not able to find successful employment. In these cases, post-university young people will be more willing to leave for extended periods of time, as likely friends and family have already had to do, and equally willing to relocate semi-permanently. If there is no work at home, and as long as linguistic or physical borders are generally open, there is no imperative for a young person *not* to leave home, see the world, and perhaps make a go of it elsewhere. Though Philipa makes no mention of this directly, it is certainly plausible—if so, there would be good reason for her to turn her travels into a profit whether through the type of website she runs or more direct employment in some aspect of a region's tourist economy. In Vietnam, for example, foreigners tend to stay and work in tourism as obtaining a visa for such purposes is fairly relaxed—this is being supplemented by an incredibly young and burgeoning Vietnamese population, many of whom speak English and have the intention of working in and around the travel industry.

In the case of Philipa, some things are left out. Certainly her English is quite good and she admits to having complete a degree at a university in Portugal. Her prose is youthful and social, making her more relatable to a younger population. She is also somewhat conscious of her own identity politics, at least in as much as she self-represents in her journals: she mentions home regularly and posts in two languages which again is unusual. She also uses a more sentimental language generally, not so much in flowery descriptions of landscapes or hyperbolic elaboration of cultural artifacts, but rather regarding her own subjective engagement with her travels and thus herself. None of this is to be critical in any way of her work—it is an admirable rhetorical construction that exceeds many others. It is highly legible and navigable, with an interface which,

although youthful, allows for a meandering perusal of her adventures and misadventures; certainly people have used her work as a springboard into their own voyages.

Another great feature of her work is the “Bucket List” section—she notes all the places she has ever wanted to visit. Those she has visited have checks, those that she hasn’t are left unmarked, of which there are, in her words, an “ambitious” amount. The fact that she doesn’t focus on collecting places or checking-off experiences is important and is a good feature of travel writing more generally: no one sees everything on their bucket list in this life. But keeping a running count of places visited, whether linked to specific guides or narrations or not, is a common device across various digital travel publications and for obvious reasons. As mentioned however, Philipa’s avoidance of a simple “listicle” here is unique and likely the unintended benefit of her almost-stream-of-consciousness style. Well-known digital travel writer Drew Binsky is currently making a go of collecting every country—at the time of this writing, he has been to something like 170 countries worldwide, some of which require extreme negotiating and rule-bending to enter, including Yemen and Syria. While impressive and well-documented on his website, Instagram, and YouTube channel, this collecting of countries seems to be less about travel and the cultures encountered and more about himself and the obsession with travel as an object of cultural capital. This is always a risk for this type of travel.

To validate her spiritualism a bit, she is spot-on when she notes that travel is about all the experiences that happen that couldn’t have been anticipated. A real highlight of her work is the discussion, in some detail, of her time spent in Russia—it stands out both for the content, which is specific, and for the location, as Russia is not the normal go to for the pre/post-uni travel set. She makes the country seem far more

accessible than perhaps anyone in the west would believe and this is an accomplishment.

Before leaving her work behind, it is important to note how Philipa's writing relates to the genre itself beyond the subjective exploration of identity, where those two things are even distinguishable. To begin with, visual rhetoric is incredibly important—there is, nearly without fail, a visual component to a work of digital travel writing, and in some cases the works can be almost entirely visual. *Where did she go this time?* is actually about average in this area, though Philipa labels her work a photographic blog. As mentioned, her placement of image and text is deeply personal, generated to help her readers connect to her personal experience and expressed through her nearly stream-of-consciousness prose. This unique deployment of the genre represents the nuances of what Anne Freadman calls "Uptake." For many readers not familiar with this digital travel publication, it may be hard to see clearly how these features distinguish something specific—they may simply look like incidental bits of biographical detail. But in fact Philipa is deploying these practices within a system that expects identity to be participated in alongside more traditional explanatory or geographical or photographic apparatus. She is playing by a set of rules that she is paradoxically both restricted by and generating. Readers of the genre, the ostensible audience, would expect this as a feature—if her work were sterilized in this way, if issues of ethnicity or gender or language were removed, it would be a conspicuous absence for a genre that demands them. Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin write, "For writers to make things happen, that is, to publish, to exert an influence on the field, to be cited, and so forth, they must know how to strategically use their understanding of genre" (477). Identity exists in this matrix as an element of that situated cognition. This is not to say that all works must

select these same features, as Bawarshi and others note, genres are plastic, permitting variations on a theme improvisationally without losing systemic consistency. But acknowledgment of authorial identity, as participated in and performed, in some direct way is an expectation of the genre as it exists as social tool.

Philipa, in addressing this exigency and expectation, does a number of things. For one, she provides a youthful language that appreciates the world as an open space. While not reducible exactly, this is a phenomenon that those raised with widespread digital access seem to share: the world simply feels more accessible because a substantial portion of the lifeworld is shared digitally without regard for language barriers or official borders. Her youthfulness is instantiated in her approach to the world generally and this is seen through her inclusive, conversational, and even accessible, almost-epistolary style. Second, she represents herself simultaneously as a woman, as a *Portuguese* woman, educated, and bilingual—her decision to write in both languages seems to represent her intuitive understanding of the globalism that surrounds contemporary travel. The fact that she allies herself with a very specific organization of travel writers supports this. As mentioned above, many travelers exchange English as a type of “basic” language, only using their native tongues when encountering another native speaker. Philipa understands this, keeps her native tongue vital and active, but really fashions her work in English, ostensibly to reach a much wider audience. Gender, nationality, and primary language are relatively stable identity categories and they feature very prominently across Philipa’s work—for this reason, *Where did she go this time?* is a more-straightforward vehicle for appreciating genre first for its inclusions, or utterances, and only later for the greater intricacies it embraces and assimilates.

Not all identity categories affect the travel experience, and thus the travel writing, in the same way. This can change based on destination—in certain parts of the world, gender and sexuality still condition day-to-day power relations in confusing or harmful ways. For some travelers, the very act of performing identity is courageous. The enduring *Nomadic Boys* digital travel publication is one of the most well-known digital travel publications which addresses expressly the experiences of the gay male travel. In their work, the identity of the authors, which features highly, is entirely inseparable from the content and the audience; in fact, it could be said that their identities as openly gay men is the entire substance of the work with that identity being explored through travel.

NomadicBoys: The Impact of Sexual Identity on Travel

NomadicBoys is discussed here for the ways it demonstrates how sexuality, in performance and power-relations, has immediate significance for travel writing. Interestingly, in the last several months the subtitle, “One Love, Endless Adventures” has been added, highlighting how the language of the blog has shifted, whether in response to recent Pride demonstrations around the globe or as an independent rhetorical choice, to emphasize the relationship as much as the travel itself. In fact, in their “About” subsection, Stefan and Sebastien clarify that there really is no travel apart from their relationship. They write, “our relationship is our gift to each other” and further explain how it was only after they met at “London’s GAY bar” and started dating seriously, that they both realized the relative “comfort” of their lives was becoming, in fact, unsettling. They summarize the period between this awareness and actually traveling, stating “So we

started saving and planning for several years for a big trip and in June 2014 we were off...” While they do not elaborate on their motivation for writing, they do address the fact that they have turned travel and travel writing, specifically in the realm of LGBT travel experiences, into their full-time profession. What is also clear, although the reader doesn’t get specific dates, is that they set out to travel for a period of time together, as a couple, and only later made the decision to document their adventures and publish them for an audience.

Individually, Stefan is Greek and Sebastien is French and, while they really co-habitate this digital space as two sides of a singular constructed identity, a part of their narrative begins in their 20s, both living as expats in London, both professionals at that time, and both involved, in some way, in the gay scene in London. As a reader, this is all we get. Even their individual Instagram accounts identify either as “one half” of @nomadicboys, their primary account. Their YouTube has similar content, all of which emphasizing their relationship specifically and the experience of being a gay male couple and traveling the world. So rather than dealing with a single author, using a pronoun of “she” or “he,” the couple, going by “they” is really the place-holder for the single identity of the author. For the reader, the two are indistinguishable from each other but rather a part of the same author-process—the title reinforces this, emphasizing their coupling and the travel experience rather than individuals with separate identities. Of course, this is a rhetorical function of the writing itself and not meant to be representative of their lived experience outside the documentation contained in their digital text.

Further, the “male” part of their identity is somewhat subdued—they neither emphasize it or disavow it, though most of their content focuses on the inclusiveness of

the LGBT community generally. This raises the important issue of community-specificity which is also one of the problems when examining the unique overlap of genre systems. Amy Devitt defines genre systems as “sets of genres interacting to achieve an overarching function within an activity system.” Bawarshi adds, “Genre systems do not just sequence activities; they also sequence how we relate to and assign roles to one another, how we define the limits of our agency, how we come to know and learn, and how we construct, value, and experience ourselves in social time and space...” (90). In *NomadicBoys* two communities interact in such a way that it is difficult to say whether it is a publication about the male homosexual experience that deals with issues of travel or whether it is a travel publication that embraces the male homosexual experience. This is the type of complication one would expect when dealing with a shared genre-feature, such as identity, where an inclusion can be shared by various sets in a system. Both possible interpretations contain the same features—the question then becomes what features are used to define the genre.

Orlikowsky and Yates, in their work on genre systems write, “A genre established within a particular community serves as an institutionalized template for social interaction -- an organizing structure -- that influences the ongoing communicative action of members through their use of it within and across their community.” For one not integrated into the male homosexual discourse community, some of the information could remain inaccessible—yet for someone familiar with the discourse community of long-term traveler, many of the devices and content-inclusions are natural and easily understood. It is probably not expressly important that their work be decidedly in one camp or the other and certainly for treatment here, it is considered first a work of digital

travel writing—to this end, this is largely a decision left to those who are participating as an audience within a genre system. What their publication highlights however, in this capacity, is how crucial the characteristic of identity truly is to these works; in the case of *NomadicBoys*, it is a type of cypher that allows the entire expanse of their work to be interpreted and understood.

Regardless, their publication does important work and obviously addresses a specific shared social need in addition to the travel itself. Their visual content focuses on the male gay community for obvious reasons—their travel resources section, a good place to start for any cisgendered straight male interested in getting a sense of how different identities experience travel, notes travel books such as *Spartan* and eZines like *ManAboutWorld* which cater to an exclusively male homosexual solo travel experience. This is a strong example of how sub-genres and related discourse communities function: it is possible that an individual well-acquainted with the LGBT community who stumbled across Sebastien and Stefan's publication would have no expectation that a subject-position of transgender or lesbian would be addressed directly in a blog that deals with gay travel. It would appear that *their* identity is not representative of *all* LGBT issues, especially regarding travel and religio-political acceptability, but rather specifically of the male homosexual experience. Again, maybe this needs no further clarification for invested parties. For an audience not inducted into the discourse community, there are some features which remain inaccessible or simply unknown.

In a published section on their travel to Lebanon, itself interesting as the Middle East is a fascinating and often fear-inducing cultural adventure for those of western origin, they comment directly on some of their struggles regarding transposing their

identity as a gay, male monogamous couple across different cultures. Further, they have a separate section of their page dealing directly with the Middle East entitled “5 most gay friendly Arab countries.” They write, “Being openly gay in the Arab world is certainly not an easy feat! If it doesn’t land you a jail sentence(!) or even a death penalty(!!), the huge stigma attached to it will likely compromise your job prospects, alienate your family, or worse, make you the target of some pretty nasty homophobic violent crimes...” They also explain how, when booking rooms or even in public, they have to curtail their openly homosexual behavior, requesting double beds and maintaining a suitable distance at all times. In their words, gay travel in the Arab world demands a “return to the closet” that is not common in other areas. In fact, as their entire publication is written for a gay audience, each area of the world is rated on a gay-friendly scale, the Arab world being the only place which is openly hostile. This again reiterates how structural their identities are for the writing which follows the travel.

Despite issues of cultural contact, both Sebastien and Stefan value Lebanon for its friendliness and accommodations. While the *Spartacus* guide apparently ranks it low in terms of safety for gay travel, they write, “By Arab standards, you just can't beat the gay scene of Beirut, which even has the largest gay club in the Arab world, called POSH...” In the section where they discuss some of their travels in Lebanon explicitly, they explain how it is advisable to disguise the VPN on one’s phone in an effort to deter governmental spying on homosexual online activity—while the laws, again according to Stefan and Sebastien, aren’t expressly anti-gay, there is room for interpretation within a specific law that forbids sexual activity which goes against “the laws of nature.” Apparently, this has been interpreted, and still is interpreted in many cases, as being explicitly anti-gay, both

by judges upholding the laws and the gay community. They recommend not using gay dating apps or being very careful; even with caution, upon leaving the country both were banned from ever returning, though it is unclear if that relates to something they did in the country or, as is more likely, to their high-visibility gay online presence that now ostensibly markets Lebanon as a type of gay travel destination. Once again, it seems travel writing, and dominant feature of identity, has real and material consequences.

Even if the ban related to the homosexual content of their publication, it means that there was some degree of surveillance from the start. In critical studies that deal with heteronormativity, it is the freedom from having to consider this possibility that designates privilege. This alone may be enough grounds for an expressly gay travel guide as it seems there are concerns that would not even be considered by other travelers of different sexual orientations or even genders, as will be discussed later in this section. In their work identity functions as a feature on two levels—first, it is simply an expectation of appropriateness when deploying the genre and second, it constructs an audience and relates to social exigency.

Interestingly, Philipa doesn't reference the experience of a woman traveling solo abroad—while it should be assumed that travel-conflicts arise which have gender at their origin, she does not address these directly either because she has not experienced them (unlikely) or because it is not the focus of her project. In either case, it is a notable omission. In addressing various perspectives, including hostility, towards male homosexuality throughout the world, Stefan and Sebastien are able to really encapsulate some of the profound antagonisms of travel. Though they do “closet” some of their behavior, they maintain a fidelity to the overall scope of their work and, if their Instagram

is any indicator, their sexuality is not so closeted as to presume that they are a straight male couple traveling together but rather that they are simply being respectful of native cultures which, admittedly, is an important component of any travel experience regardless of identity politics or performativity.

Also, Stefan and Sebastien provide a great deal of information on their publication which could be considered supplemental to *any* travel experience. While a straight male solo traveler may not necessarily come to the blog looking for inspiration, if they did, they would likely find some tips and some guidance that could be quite useful. And this goes as well for any particular identity category: there is advice (some sponsored apparently, though more about this later) about travel insurance, VPN disguising (useful if access to forbidden media is required and this can include just Netflix in some countries), personal safety and security provided by companies like *CloseCircle*, and general sightseeing advice such as the use of the *GetYourGuide* portal, an incredibly useful crowd-sourced local tourism application. So as much as they stress their particular identity, what emerges also behind this is the identity of travelers generally, and thus the curious cross-over, discussed above, of discourse communities and their genre systems. The activities they stress, for the most part, have a universal aspect: travelers love food, sunsets, hikes, the ocean, markets, temples, and so forth. They tend to navigate complicated cultural relationships. They may be more perceptive. These are features of the identity of the *traveler* so, as much as the publications want to trade in identity *qua* difference, they also highlight the insistent truth that, as humans moving through unfamiliar and foreign settings, we often have more in common than than not.

Another key component of *NomadicBoys* is the guide-like quality of the work. Beyond general advice like that mentioned above, there is a structured and applicable device on the minutiae that really forms the bulk of extended foreign travel. They discuss finding hostels, getting cabs, arriving to the center of Beirut from the airport, and so forth. Again, in the Beirut section, they list a number of features, some of them linked, which could be of interest to any traveler. They write, “It's all about the delicious food here. The Lebanese cuisine is world famous for good reason...” They continue by identifying Hamra Street as the “the famous artery of Beirut with tight narrow roads lined with cafes and shops...” but also mention the Gustav Innocation Sucre which is “one of the most highly rated pastry shops in Lebanon, which you need to check out. It's extremely gay friendly and another popular gem for the LGBTQ community in Beirut – you'll see lots of rainbow cakes on offer here...” And who doesn't like rainbow cakes?

They proceed by giving a brief synopsis of the popular sights, like the Corniche or the Pigeon Rocks of Rouche where, according to the myth, Perseus killed the sea monster to save Andromeda. It is a bulleted list, again with some links, which is simple and straightforward if perhaps a bit visually simplistic. There are certainly digital publications that maximize to a greater extent the full potential of visual control that can be maintained when presenting travel-related information, even when invoking the related genre of the travel guide. Yet as far as it goes, it is more thorough than the carefully contrived, and more visually appealing, work of Philipa. But again, Philipa states that her work is subjective and visually-dominant by labelling it a “photographic blog” when Sebastien and Stefan emphasize their personal love for each other as it relates

to the progress of LGBT rights throughout the world. In many ways, they see themselves as ambassadors of this cause: to their absolute credit, they do not avoid places which could cause discomfort, but, as in the case of Iran, actively seek to overcome those fears and respectfully try to explore the role that their identity has in other cultures.

Oneika the Traveler: Race at Home and Abroad

When talking of the balancing of identity between self and other when traveling abroad, it is impossible not mention the work of Oneika Raymond, or *Oneika the Traveler* as she goes by on various personal and social publications. It doesn't take more than a glance to note that Oneika's work is sophisticated—so sophisticated in fact that she has contributed to CNN and the Huffington Post and been included or mentioned dozens of times in collections of interest-specific blogs. Audience is a key component of identity, especially the rhetorically-constructed audience of travel writing. The prior two works discussed had a concept of an audience reasonably well-built in to the substance of the publication itself. Though Philipa did not come directly out and clarify her rhetorical intentions in this light as do Stefan and Sebastien, it becomes fairly clear the type of reader who would gravitate towards her work, her style, and her emphasis in traveling. Philipa's work could be labeled personal and *inspirational*: not a guide, as such, but a jumping off point where a reader could say "I could do this!" The writing of Stefan and Sebastien is more *informative* but also *encouraging* albeit with a singular emphasis: their work seems to say "travel for this group *is* possible and easier than you think!" But not all digital travel publication is this direct, or even this easily interpretable.

The writing of Oneika, largely due to her diverse interests and tightly-practiced prose, falls into the latter category—it is somewhat more difficult to conceptualize the audience or reduce it to a simple issue of identity *qua* purpose. While she emphasizes the solo female travel experience, and even offers some advice for traveling moms, her audience seems largely based on her identity as a black woman specifically. While it is possible that a reader would find Oneika through some mention of her in other works, it is also possible that she simply appeared in a list of black travel writers, of which there are several floating around on Google.

Oneika's professionalism is not an explicit judgment but only a comment on her stylistic decisions. Her content is meticulously detailed and supplemented and the visual design of her work is as clear as it is impactful. She blends different fonts, custom graphics, multiple points of access, including a superscript menu bar that has, in addition to quick links to all her social media outlets, also a search function which is in and of itself is unusual. A search for "Ethiopia" brings up a series of articles, in all of which Ethiopia has been tagged in some way. Her articles, true to her journalistic imperative, have very specific themes and she relates her travel experience to the purpose of the article. Thus, they are not so much guides to a particular place but more like editorials related to travel generally and, as such, any one article may mention an experience in any number of locations. While some do emphasize travel in a particular part of the world, there is usually a broader intention which sutures her work together. In this vein, her work resembles a digital *Condé Nast* more than a typical travel guide or journal. Oneika has been engaging in travel and its economy in some form for years—in one section she even showcases all her Canadian passports, making it clear that she has been in the game

for quite some time. Certainly her professional and journalistic approach would have grown over the years during her traveling (and living and working) abroad—where once she likely designed her own website, it seems that now she has a webmaster, though this is not clarified explicitly.

Regardless of her accessibility and the general quality of her reporting, she does emphasize her experience as a black woman and directs much, but not all, of her content towards this specific area. Oneika is included in this study because of her intersectionality: being black, being a black female, and being a black female solo traveler, all while deploying a practiced rhetorical authority. To this end, Oneika gives her readers several navigational options including “Where I’ve Been” listing places visited, the “Life and Style” section which reads like similarly-labelled sections of popular magazines and an “Opinion” section comprised of mostly editorial work on variety of topics including food, romance, politics, working abroad, and a very self-reflective piece entitled “Are travel blogs a form of propaganda?” which will be addressed further on directly.

But most importantly for the purposes here, is the section entitled “Traveling While Black.” This section is filled with content that relates to black, and specifically black female, travelers. It is not glossed or gestural, but a nuanced investigation into the complexities of “melanin” related travel. One article, “Are African-Americans treated better than Africans abroad?”, which again will be discussed directly, deals with deeper complexities of race and racism that can arise through travel. Further, none of these sections is mutually exclusive—many are cross-listed through a variety of tags as they may deal with similar or related issues. The effect is that of a pleasant wander through

topically related, and linked, prose in a mixture of strictly thematic reportage and well-researched opinion. And, while her work is certainly tied to a complexity of identities (black, female, Canadian, American/New Yorker) which she navigates with admirable transparency, it does not feel reserved for those particular categories. While it is possible that her audience *could* be more divided along gender lines, her various comment sections make it clear that this is not effectively the case. In essence, her work is welcoming, even when addressing issues that may not relate directly to a reader's particular identity.

There are often two ways that identity is deployed as a characteristic in travel writing. The first relates to caution or impediments—these seek to structure travel around some type of conflict that identity politics may create generally or in specific host countries. The second, and probably less common, emphasizes the importance of travel for self-understanding as relates to a unique identity-experience. One is more *negative* and the other is more *positive*, at least in the construction of identity abroad and its rhetorical use as a characteristic of the genre. Oneika is generally more positive. She writes, “As a black travel blogger with a decent following, I am routinely asked about African-American friendly countries; I frequently field questions from other melanin-blessed travelers about the best countries for black people to visit.” While certainly it would be easy, and even sensible, to detail the struggles faced abroad when traveling as a solo female or solo black female, she turns towards some of the more positive experiences of her identity abroad in her article, “10 Countries Every Black Woman Should Visit.” She lists a variety of countries across continents including Brazil, Thailand, South Africa, the UAE, Ethiopia, and Japan. When discussing each one, she

mentions something specific that may resonate with her black female followers. For example, she notes the welcoming Thai people and jokes that a black female traveler may get called “Michelle Obama.” She continues noting that Ethiopia is “definitely an opportunity for a black woman to ‘know thyself’”. In the UAE as in France, the atmosphere is perfect for self-care and indulgence and Tanzania is “prerequisite for any African-American hoping to understand a bit more about their roots.” There are an abundance of solo female blogs, many of which note, as did *NomadicBoys*, areas of the world where a particular type of traveler can encounter some problems. Most end with a disclaimer like, “but with the right attitude and careful preparation travel to _____ can be rewarding.” This is not disingenuous and certainly this is almost always the case. But it is refreshing to see a travel writer invert the paradigm to discuss places, some unexpected, like Japan’s hip-hop and dancehall reggae culture, where a particular type of traveler may feel especially rewarded for their identifications. In other words, hers is an emphasis on a type of shared identification and affirmation, for something that connects different cultures, rather than on points of antagonism or difference. This type of specificity goes further than simple “Its a Small World” platitudes and notes some ways that the African culture still resonates with African-American culture and the way that African-American culture has shaped popular culture in Asian countries.

Yet in many digital travel writing publications, the underlying questions usually surround what the experience is abroad for a member of a certain identity group. In other words, what is it about being a member of a particular group that contributes to variations in the travel experience. While some digital travel publications confront this directly, most background it in preference of other ambitions; in the case of Oneika, there is

evidence of both. Even still, no other web publication seems to confront the question more directly than she does in her article “What being Black and Abroad means to me.” Even in the title, there is significance. Again, *Abroad* (ie. Traveler or travel writer,) is a part of the identity here that isn’t jeopardized, but rather supplemented by her identification as *Black*. Oneika also doesn’t purport to have a full understanding or to speak for all Black people or all Black travelers; she clarifies, as she does with her experiences above, that this is what her particular understanding is of the intersectionality of these two identities. She discusses a few particulars in depth.

Primarily, and in a fashion similar to the Nomadic Boys, she discusses the Black Traveler and the Black Travel movement. She states, “I’ve written ad nauseam about how mainstream travel media is almost entirely devoid of black faces, voices, and perspectives— and how this, in turn, shapes and perpetuates the notion that black people don’t travel.” She continues, explaining, “The phenomenon known as the Black Travel Movement is the definition of being the change we want to see. I love it, am proud of it, and support it with my whole heart.” So in addition to some things a black traveler might be prepared to expect, she also devotes some attention to small organizations devoted to supporting black travel more generally, whether in groups or as individuals. But as far as nuances of the experience, she addresses a range of possibilities from being “profiled” in airports when dealing with security or being regarded as a “celebrity” in areas that don’t have much encounter with people of African descent. Above all, she says there is an experience of being “Othered” when traveling; if travel likely results in this process for everyone, the experience for the Black Traveler would then be doubled, a type of double-alienation experienced abroad rather than at home. Oneika explains, “It means fielding

curious questions about your appearance, skin color and hair texture, and constantly refuting conjectures or stereotypes (about things like your prowess on the dance floor or athletic ability) based solely on the skin you occupy.” She also adds some features she feels give the Black Traveler extra responsibility, whether asked for or not, such as having to be “representative” of the entire race of people of African descent or having to be “role model” to black people, young and old, who may have never before considered the possibility of travel for someone with their skin color. And of course she adds that travel can be the opportunity to come into contact with a personal history, while learning more about the various cultures being explored.

As should be obvious by now, Oneika has a very nuanced and reflective approach towards conceptions and representations of identity, certainly grown and developed over time with a life of travel. Her capacity for equanimous detail is unmatched and, while her work doesn’t portend to contain strict guides or narratives, it does a great deal to encourage travel while offering a thematic and journalistic bit of prose. It is no wonder that her work falls into that more professionalized area of digital travel rhetoric. She has certainly over the years had the benefit of an editor, at least when publishing for other print outlets, and the web design demonstrates a strong, even salaried, ability with digital rhetoric and news media. The important take away from a publication like *Oneika the Traveller*, is how substantially an identity, which at least *feels* so stable in one place, can be shifted when transposed—what in one setting is a limitation may turn in to a freedom, as a reimagination of an identity abroad changes those coordinates at home. While a traveler certainly cannot leave themselves and their beliefs and prejudices at home, the other side of that is, as travelers often find, they are curiously not themselves in various

places—the understanding of that mercurial “I” is always moving about in the midst of unfamiliar place, custom, and symbol. Through a more metacognitive lens, and combined with a journalistic inclination towards fairness and truth, Oneika is able to capture some of the intricacies of this process and represent the travel experience, as it relates to identity, in a more holistic way than has been heretofore seen. If she misses the mark at any point, it is in perhaps not enough self-disclosure on her own background—although she does acknowledge her own “privilege” in certain articles, it is possible she homogenizes a very fluid identity category. Her work may have more resonance within a certain socioeconomic group than she openly confesses, thus making her ostensible project less inclusive than it may seem at first glance. Of course, she does a better job than most at hinting at areas where she is uncertain or unaware and this demonstrates a very conscious understanding of rhetorical development.

Because the canon of digital travel publication is so large and so accessible through popular and professional portals alike, and because of the image-saturation that sustains contemporary *episteme*, fascination can quickly supersede preparation. Oneika clarifies her position here, “For example, when I tell you how I didn’t suffer any racial discrimination in Russia in one breath (Russia has a documented history of racism against Black people), in the next I’ll tell you there are many extenuating factors that don’t allow me to draw an accurate conclusion. (The fact I was only there for 10 days, or the fact that I stuck to the tourist trail in the cosmopolitan cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg being a couple of them). . . .” In a gesture that emphasizes her identity as a woman, she then adds, “And even though I was mugged and harassed in Egypt, I wrote about my reluctance to paint the country with the same broad brush. For what happened was unique to me— so

many people have travelled the country without incident. As a result, I would never want to actively dissuade someone from traveling somewhere based on my personal experience.” As a conclusion, she encourages her audience to seek multiple sources from multiple voices across multiple platforms in an effort to recognize the real risks that one is taking and perhaps even dispel the imaginary ones.

While these ethical concerns are vital for digital travel publication, and are often its very significant blindspot, the crucial takeaway from this meta-commentary on her role in the genre is that Oneika considers the actual position of a travel writer as an identity, apart from additional attributes. When asking questions of responsibility, she must confront what a travel writer fundamentally is and it is this question, perhaps even more than the genre, that is incredibly murky. Obviously travel writers are treated with some type of authority and this authority is earned through travel, most substantially (and commonly) by number of countries visited and overall length of travel. A user that goes by the name “Hazel Joy” commented on the article: “I use several lines of resources when choosing a destination and one of those is the viewpoint of female travel bloggers from a variety of countries, yours included. One has to be mindful of the bravado in posts as well - few in the paradisiacal world of blogging have bad experiences! However, my first port of call is always my own government's travel advice.” Though intending to clarify her own experiences as a female solo traveler, what really comes through from Hazel Joy’s response is that travel writing is a popular medium and, while quite subjective, subject to its own device, hyperbole, and internal markings of status.

“Hazel Joy” also touches on a point mentioned above regarding the unfavorability, within the genre and the contemporary neoliberal ethos, of mentioning

anything that could be (mis)construed as intolerant. In a field, like digital travel writing, so dependent on likes, shares, reposts, and followers, writing a narrative, however true, about sexual harassment in Egypt could be grounds for accusations of prejudice, unfairness, or simple inaccuracy. Thus the “controversy climate” and “cancel culture” which exists, both in the contemporary political sphere and especially in digital social platforms, encourages, if not direct dishonesty, either careful omission of less than favorable experiences or a maladroit apology rhetoric. Upon careful reflection, it is hard to imagine how these world travelers can span the globe for months or years without a single bad thing to say about a country, an area, a culture, and so forth when a commuter in the Philadelphia area cannot hardly make it to work in the morning without slandering the entire demographic of people living east of the Appalachian Mountains. But again, there is always a difference between private sentiment and public disapprobation—in a media-saturated surveillance culture, combatting the latter must be an active and consistent effort. The risk of becoming a travel-writing-reprobate with one slip of the tongue is very real.

Oneika feels an uncommon sense of responsibility for her identity as a travel writer *alone*, without and qualifiers or modifiers. She writes, “One of the things I’ve been thinking about lately is my responsibility as a travel blogger...” She acknowledges that both professionally and privately, people seek out her thoughts on an issue as if they were, or could be, detached from her own particular position. She clarifies, in no uncertain language, that she writes, “opinions based on my race (I’ve written loads about how travelling while Black is different), gender, age, cumulative life experience, and socio-economic status, both past and present...” She explains that her recent travels to

Brazil, and the writing that resulted, prompted her to rethink the obligation she has as a member of an important identity community. She continues, “And, despite damning evidence that Brazil can be unsafe, I felt completely comfortable. My girlfriends and I trolled the streets at night, brandished our cell phones and fancy DSLR cameras in broad daylight, and took local taxis without issue...never at any moment during my 9-day stay did I feel my well-being to be compromised. I returned home feeling vindicated and invincible...” Because of her singular experience in Brazil, she wrote a social media post to this effect only to stumble across a viral YouTube video from a well-known blogger who had been shot during Carnival in her hometown of Rio de Janeiro.

This experience drew Oneika’s attention to an ethical conflict which is always nagging just beneath the surface of travel writing, specifically synecdochical value that singular voices have for an entire cannon and the resulting confirmation bias that tends to exist among the more adventurous travel set. As Oneika writes, “I never want to spread false information or alternative facts. Ever the stickler, I always take care to specify that what I write and say is reflective of my *personal* experience, and I’m well aware that my experiences are tempered by who I am and the lens through which I see the world.” Most digital travel writing does not come with these disclaimers. In fact, a good deal of travel writing normalizes experience for the consumption of the reader, making it seem like many cultures are so similar as to be a virtual free-for-all for the free-spirited. The idea persists among travelers that the world is their oyster, that they are free to go anywhere, that the only thing that separates the have-seens from the have-not-seens is a degree of willingness. And while some communities are incalculably welcoming to a respectful foreigner, to wander into situations without the caution one would even use at home is

reckless and carries risks for both traveler and host and can, as is the case with Egypt, lead to wildfire-like stereotypes crippling an already struggling economy which relies so heavily on its cultural treasures and tourism industry.

What this really designates is the compounded impact of identity on the genre. Oneika is not only paying attention to her identity as *black*, but equally to that of *woman*. In fact, in a separate article about romantic relationships and travel, she further emphasizes her heterosexual (and at that time, *solo*) identity. The transparency of her prose, probably a result of more formal training in journalism, allows for identity as a feature to be observed on multiple levels—further, it is impossible to conceive of the genre without it. If one were to view identity as incidental to the genre itself, the result would be simply a digital guide book with disembodied image and explanatory text, not much different than an encyclopedia entry on a place or culture. Identity is what gives these publications, in various degrees, their narration and development—other characteristics very often operate around this singular feature, allowing it to determine rhetorically how image is placed, contextualized, or narrated. The fact that Oneika steps through the screen and draws uncomfortable attention to her identity as Travel Writer only emphasizes how indispensable identity is to the very fabric of the genre—it may be the key defining characteristic of the contemporary age.

Bespoke Traveler: The Poetics of the Traveling Self

It would be nice if all digital travel writing publications were as cohesive and direct as Oneika's—again, her's is at the highly professional end of a broad spectrum. The next digital travel publication is different than the previous three and, in some ways,

more difficult to discuss. That said, Atreyee Gupta's work, *Bespoke Traveler*, deserves some attention, both for its diversions from previous models and her stated purpose. It doesn't take much digital wandering through her publication to realize that her objectives are different—borrowing from more literary models, Gupta is a story-teller and, as such, her work embraces a variety of devices that are more commonly found in the literary, and print, modes of the genre rather than the common tropes of digital expression.

It is for these reasons that her work is discussed here and, because her purpose is explicitly laid out, it is worth quoting at length: “At *Bespoke Traveler* I present experiences beyond the ordinary that you can integrate into your excursions. I am an ever curious wanderer, constantly immersing in complexities of culture, history, and philosophy around the world...Travel is what you make of it. In this blog, each journey is tailored to provide a correlation between universal touchstones and unique perspectives. My narratives delve past listicles to seek pivotal lessons and provide nuanced truths about environmental issues, artistic motifs, and social topics.” It is an ambitious objective that resembles, at least in spirit, Philipa's project—yet Gupta's work borrows from the literary in ways that Philipa's does not, demonstrating the unique pastiche of at least two antecedents that digital travel writing embraces. Gupta's project engages with travel rhetoric on a variety of levels, weaving detail from her own travels, many of which are funded by donation and the profits from her limited print publications, creative re-telling, and photography. In this way it represents a stylistic decision that, while still included in the greater genre, is different from other iterations that maintain a different relationship with the chronotope.

Interestingly, Gupta does not especially emphasize *her* identity, at least not in such a way that conditions her writing in the ways noted in prior publications—as such, her identity isn't used overtly in imagining the audience. But, it does factor into her overall intention, as she makes the uncommon move to structure her poetics towards the identities encountered through travel. She states, “I write about ways our shifting perceptions alter our layered identities. I examine how we connect: individually, in society, with nature and place. I use creative nonfiction, prose, and poetry as tools to weave immersive narratives at the crossroads of science, history, and philosophy.” Again, an ambitious project yet, if her meaning is taken literally, she intends to write mostly about how her understanding of herself varies depending on the cultures she interacts with, and how travel is causing her to re-examine her assumptions and position.

It is possible that this interpretation is generous but even so, this is certainly one of only a few publications that explicitly implicates “shifting” and “layered” identities in the entire process of travel and travel rhetoric. And while this isn't the type of content that necessarily draws prospective travelers, her writing *about* travel, or with travel as a part of the central conflict, seems to have found a decent market as she has either collaborated with, or been featured in, several literary and travel publications. While it is easy to believe that the “romantic” or “sensational” aspects of travel do not drive the digital economy, it is important to see that those features of the genre, so dominant in prior iterations, still function as preserved tropes within a digital space.

What is really being explored through Gupta's work is the nature of the Genre Set, that body of writing which someone in a particular role is apt to produce. Primarily, as Orlikowski and Yates note, writers within a genre tend to operate out of habit and thus

pull from previously established (and accepted) characteristics of the genre; in the case of Gupta and the others, identity would be one of these characteristics, but Gupta adds to this by using features common a literary genre. In any case, the inclusions facilitate communication and provide entrance into the discourse. Several scholars have provided strong examples for how this functions in various sites. Engeström and Cole, for example, use the Activity System of a first-year writing classroom, which includes all participants and objects and texts, to understand “mediational means,” or how motivated communication is accomplished through adoption of sanctioned features within a Genre Set—these could be essays, syllabi, texts...anything that is expected of that environment and without which that system would feel (and likely be) incomplete. Anthony Paré famously pulled from the immense volume of texts generated within the hospital social work system—these can include countless forms and reports and memos. While Gupta’s work is different from Oneika’s, it still fits within the Genre Set—it has features, aside from the digital medium, which are seen as proper to the genre in some way even though they are perhaps employed differently. This is an example of how heteroglossia within a genre appears *in situ*—variation is not only tolerated, but expected in complex matrices of motivated human communication.

The main portal of Gupta’s site is built like a checkerboard of linked images—each of these images relates to an attached story within one of several sub-genres including “Exploration,” “Culture,” and “Food”. The design actually resembles several digital-only literary magazines currently in publication—it is fairly common practice in this area to have regular photographic content tied to traditional print media, whether prose or poetry. Given the direction of her work, the decision to borrow from that trend

is well-suited, all the more so as the photographs are her own property and related to the prose in some way.

It should be added that the economy impinges on the experience here—where a literary magazine is endowed, Gupta’s work is ambiguously self-sustaining. What becomes obvious is that her publication generates revenue, to some extent, through advertisement and data-extraction. She certainly is not the only one doing this, far from it—it is only mentioned here because the pop-ups and “Privacy & Cookies” alerts so interject into the enjoyment of the experience as to be disruptive. Though the economics of these works will be explored directly in the following chapter, it is worth mentioning that there can be at times no way of successfully extrapolating the two. This goes double for anything embracing digital aesthetics within a public genre because the commodification is always already built into the medium itself—while travel writing always generated revenue, its transposition into the digital space shifted those economies in interesting ways. Frederic Jameson writes, “With the elimination of an institutionalized social status for the cultural producer and the opening of the work of art itself to commodification, the older generic specifications are transformed into a brand-name system against which any authentic expression must necessarily struggle” (107). And for a publication that deals so directly with artistic device, the inclusion of various extra-literary advertisements at random is destabilizing but likely points to the deformation of aesthetics within globalization. Here, it disrupts the readers experience in a way that wouldn’t happen in print—this is, of course, a liability of genre intersectionality, or in Freadman’s terminology, “Uptake”. What is proper, or even anticipated and tolerated in one genre may not be so easily adaptable when deployed in

another space. It is possible that, if Gupta's work was non-literary, such as a guide portal with links to various sites and maps and travel resources, that the cookies and pop-ups would go largely un-noticed as they do in countless other similarly-sponsored websites. Because the content is not expressly compatible, the effect is dissociating. While peripheral to the overall project here, it is important to note that, just because genres do contact and their systems overlap, resulting in borrowing or *shared memory*, doesn't mean that everything is a proper, or even beneficial, fit. This isn't a question of privilege or preference, but an interesting feature of the way that genres function socially.

On the opposite side of this observation, however, is Gupta's engagement with the comment section of her page—this is something that is not especially common to digital literary publications and, depending on the size of the digital travel publication, it can also be unmoderated or unattended. And considering genre is effectively social, especially as it exists in new media and public genres, it is interesting to see readers contributing to the archive of content—as any traveler worth his salt knows, the reviews and comments section of *Expedia* is often more valuable than official copy, not because any one voice is an accurate representation of an experience, but because it is possible to find some truth in the aggregate. For Gupta's work, the space of the comments becomes inseparable from the prose itself which, while an uncommon pairing, seems to increase the efficacy of her work and reinforce her stated purpose relating to multiple voices and identity.

One of her recent articles, tagged as "Exploration" and entitled "Reckonings at Joshua Tree," is a good example of this. Gupta writes, "I've never understood the magic of this reserve and I still don't. My L.A. friends swoon about it. They declare it's a

sanctuary of energy...but, I can't share in their enthusiasm....Joshua Tree seems...soulless...a setting under the human thumb of entertainment.” She narrates her walk through the park, describing the characters she meets including a “blond actor” who is smoking despite possible risks to the park via wildfire and “ladies in diaphanous gowns performing for photo shoots.” Though she tries to get in touch with what her friends feel for this place, there is an obstacle for Gupta and she leaves “puzzled” over why she isn't “feeling the enchantment.” This section is what essentially amounts to the rising action of a creative nonfiction piece—though she perhaps tortures the experience a bit to extract meaning, she does touch on one of the interesting variables to the travel experience, which is also uniquely one of the obstacles to enjoyment of it: expectation.

She continues with some explanation, “The malady of hype has a long and troubled history as does our human penchant for turning everything into conspicuous consumption...Hidden under the tsunami of adoration is the dark side of privilege, impulse, and information dissemination; there are costs, heavy and unseen. I've been guilty of it, wanted to be a part of it, resented being left out of the phenomenon.” Her observations here are certainly accurate and there are deep, psychoanalytic implications for the guilt she feels at not-enjoying or not-enjoying-sufficiently. There is a temptation, when so many “travel sights” are packaged, potted, and sold for more travelers, to simply ratify the standard assessment of it, ie. it is spectacular, incredible, simply beyond belief. To think differently, in a sense, is to betray ones culture or identity as *traveler*—in many cases, the expectation of a particular part of a trip can cause the actual event to never quite live up to that expectation. This is true in life generally, but in travel the object of desire is heavily impacted by constant fantasy and imagination; the consummation of

every photograph, story, and daydream by the traveler is far more sublime than the actual place could ever be. So while Gupta demonstrates an appreciable poetics, it feels contrived and a bit anachronistic, resembling the turn towards sentimentalism that characterized much early travel writing through the Romantic and into the Victorian age.

Rather than elaborate on her aversion to Joshua Tree, or even to plumb it more, she reduces her experience to a more palatable version: “There are homes, multiple, where we belong. We sense this when our feet first touches the sand, or as we wander the woods, or hear a certain song; maybe we arrive at the knowledge following decades of resistance. Often we only realize it long after our stay has become a faint dream. There are other places, however, where we’re forever strangers — uncomfortable, fearful, intimidated...” This may be an abdication really, the avoidance of making any real contribution by simply saying, essentially, “but to each his own.” What it does highlight is the polyphony of voices that construct discourses on travel. It can be tempting to want to think that any one of these is right, truthful. The reality though, as far as the genre is concerned, is far more complex: these spaces are truly structured by subjective experience and ideological motivations too deep for complete understanding. While there are certain relatively stable facts (museum costs, cab fare), most about travel is variable and subject to a spectrum of interpretation. A comment on the post by a user, *bluebrightly*, reads, “It’s too bad you had such a hype-ridden experience. I went to Joshua Tree in March, 2014, when it was very quiet, hardly any people, and it was wonderful – to me anyway.” To which Gupta replied, “I’m so glad you liked your time in Joshua Tree. I’ve been thinking about how ironic it is that while I love to share places that are special to me with others, I don’t usually enjoy them in the company of multitudes.

Thanks so much for your understanding and wonderful comments.” Another user, *sunshinehawaii*, replies, “I’ve never really understood the hype around this place either. Just looks like a dusty landscape with some struggling trees lol.” Gupta responds, “Right?! And the same kind of trees too. I found the landscape in the greater Mojave much more interesting...” What is frequently alluded to, or stated outright by *Bespoke Traveler* and her followers, is the amount of people visiting a sight directly impacts the enjoyment of it.

This is a common trope, not so much for travel writers, as much of their stock-in-trade is essentially extolling people to explore places they’ve been whether or not they actually value these places, but for travelers generally. It is very common to hear something like the following around a communal hostel table, “oh yeah...that *used* to be great when I was there five years ago, but now its just crawling with *tourists*...” This is something like the “not-in-my-backyard” phenomenon in suburban development: when one person travels someplace, that is pure and sacred and genuine travel, but when other people go there they are ruining the experience and are just a bunch of *tourists*. In the comments Gupta mentions that she has found peace and wonder in places that are both famous and crawling with travelers and tourists alike, including Machu Picchu and Venice—really, in the end, each traveler is left to determine what is satisfying. In many cases, it is the desperate search for that *next* sublime moment that propels the engine of travel forward.

Significantly, Gupta confronts this very reality: travel is not exactly vacation and, at times, it can feel quite like work. In her article “What Shall I Do Now,” she writes, “I have come to this place to be bored. It is a little corner in the southwest of Sweden where

boats gently rock against the shingled shore. It is a landscape of barren beauty, where the summer sun lingers reluctant to bid farewell.” There is of course a fair bit of privilege in getting to travel halfway around the world, to a bucolic and serene fishing village, to be bored; many people are often bored on a far-smaller budget. Regardless, her point is well made when she writes: “There aren’t any monuments to dissect, no grand natural features to explore. I’m not on the hunt for any interesting stories...I’m looking to be mired in a repetitive cycle of quotidian tasks. I’m anticipating the moment when the excitement of observing the island’s single ferry docking will wear off.” There is a component of travel that is often not disclosed in digital travel writing, specifically those bits of time when, for whatever reason, be it romantic or financial, a traveler goes nowhere new and sees nothing different. They may even get used to their environment, have a regular coffee shop and grocery store. And when this happens, there is often not much to write about.

Many digital travel writers move about the globe for months or years; their publications are full of adventures based on continent and country and season. Yet, what is omitted are those periods of stasis, where there is no movement. It is not uncommon for a traveler, for example, to stay in a certain foreign country for a period of time to work, often in or around the travel industry, in an effort to stash some more money for travel. Of course Gupta seems to be taking a willful vacation *from* travel, while still curiously documenting her lack of “interesting stories”, but regardless it is a truth for the traveler that, at some point during prolonged bouts of rambling, they have to stay still.

She continues, “I’m doing nothing on purpose. I’m endeavoring to overcome my inner voice berating me for being unproductive...I’m carving out a linear portion in time’s infinite loop, devoting that slice to cognitive wandering, an uncomfortable session

with the space inside my brain. This will be another form of traveling, a journey into my interior landscapes.” These two ideas do not seem to fit, an apparent blindspot of her insight. The truth of travel is that the traveler brings him or herself with them on their travels; when a westerner travels, it seems effectively impossible that they abandon the western impulse to constantly do, work, and be seen. Even in Gupta’s apparently willful retreat from the world, a document is still produced which makes it visible, commodifies it, and maybe even justifies it in some way. The neoliberal language of self-care and self-discovery is used excessively and it sounds, in the end, more apologetic than celebratory, a type of traveler’s *mea culpa*, not so different than the earlier apologetics over not enjoying Joshua Tree. She concludes with similar internal contradiction: “I’m appreciating the disengagement, the not wanting. Who knows if I’ll devise grand schemes to fashion an empire or people the pages of my next book? The serpentine circuitry to that destination will be marvelous.” Fashioning an empire is hardly the quasi-eastern lack of desire that seems to be invoked and her poetics come off as transparent despite the use of a thesaurus.

The point is not to tease Gupta or make any less of her project: her work is quite worthy of the genre and, in many ways, has more in common with traditional travel writing than any other author heretofore mentioned. Further, in her emphasis on self-speech, she invokes the blogs of fifteen years ago when addressing some type of nervous dissatisfaction at the center of the human condition. She gives form to that enduring lie that perhaps somewhere else antimonies can be naturally resolved and replaced by an authenticity that is not possible in ones home. This leads to sensational, even spiritual, language surrounding places and cultures that can, at times, be colored more by the

individual traveler than the place—Leask called this device, as it manifested in early travel writing, “curiosity.” This is certainly exemplified in the Joshua Tree narrative: after having been exposed to more exotic locations, the mundane pleasures just aren’t imbued with that fetishistic quality that exceeds the sum of its parts, that magic excess. This can lead to reckless celebration and even commodification of foreign cultures—this has happened across time, the idea that these “primitive” societies have mastered the human condition, life, in a way that is not possible elsewhere in the “civilized” world.

Personal narrative, even creative nonfiction, allows for a close access to the real thinking and emotion behind travel, even when it betrays itself and this is where Gupta makes her greatest contribution to the understanding of identity as feature of the active genre. Almost all travelers who decide to hit the road for extended periods of time do it in response to one type of personal dissatisfaction or another. This relies on the hope that gratification is achieved in motion, other places, and foreign culture. If this is the expectation of travel, then only two things are possible and these two possibilities are often encountered in the publications themselves. First, a traveler may have all expectations met and the digital travel writer may share those expectations with others in the hopes that they find this to be true as well. This often happens informally as well, outside of written work. Second, a traveler will not have all expectations met and something will be left missing, dissatisfying, or incomplete. This also happens, but is less frequently detailed in travel writing. This could be due to the tendency of travelers to guard secrets (the *non*-touristy beach in Bali) or it could be the result of the unpopularity of not celebrating everything equally. In many cases expectations are not conveyed—as much travel writing in the past was built on personal, emotional responses

to the travel itself, it is refreshing to see a travel writer comment directly on their experience with some attention paid to linguistic device.

Gupta's work would appeal to the more literary scholars of travel writing and this is likely why she makes the choices she does when presenting her work visually and why her work has been absorbed into more traditional literary mediums and seems to communicate more strongly with those prior iterations of the genre. In the end, however, it is uncertain whether her ostensible attention to "perception" and "layered identity" is exactly what it seems—while there are admirable elements of self-reflection, there are just as many omissions and none of the articles featured go much deeper than a surface level salute to identity issues. There is an emphasis on complications of identity performance in unfamiliar spaces, but not in a way that feels developed enough to keep with her stated objective.

Another revelation of her work as concerns identity may be that a traveler does not lose him or herself from place to place—the struggles of "home" are carried on, even when being very willfully ignored or avoided. The takeaway then, perhaps, is that a traveler should do everything to draw their identity closer, experiencing all the subtle incongruities and bizarre obsessions and assumptions that give it shape, as it becomes ever more pronounced in contrast to the unfamiliarity of a foreign space. In fact, what Gupta may develop, though indirectly and unintentionally, is a written portrait or profile of the contemporary, millennial traveler. Her writings give insight into the mind of the long-term traveler: the expectations, fantasies, and ideologies that sustain that type of prolonged interaction with, and incursion into, foreign space. This identity is often elided in travel writing; if Oneika dealt with the *travel writer* as a type, Gupta seems to really

give her readers some insight into the thinking of the individual. Whether gay or straight, male or female, black or white, a *traveler* seems demonstrate some type of deep dissatisfaction with quotidian life or self that results in the fantasy that maybe, just maybe, some ontological truth can be found in either another foreign belief system or in the peripatetic wandering itself. Gupta seems to suggest that the psychology of the contemporary traveler is relatively stable, even homogenous, even when the individual evaluations or identity hallmarks are diverse.

What Gupta's work also provides is a tidy geological record of related and antecedent genres—elements of both digital and literary progenitors can be noted in the strata of her design and language. Primarily, her invocation of the “sensationalist” or “curiosity” trope of the Victorian explorers has a great deal in common with the writings of Burton or Livingstone—like them, Gupta is searching for satisfaction in the unknown, narrating all the while her subjective experience and interpretation of that quest. Second to this, her work demonstrates a fidelity to an earlier genre, specifically that of travel blog. Dated and themed entries, subjective personal language, and the cultivation of a digital self-through a type of language that resembles both stream-of-consciousness reflection and depersonalized ships logs. These are some of the exact features noted by Miller and Shepherd in their work of 2004. Thus Gupta's engagement with the feature of identity is poetic, rhetorical, and somewhat digital—essentially she is demonstrating a deployment of device afforded within the socially-mediated space of the genre.

Nomadic Matt: A Look at Privilege and Place

Despite the attention paid thus far to “diverse” identities, it would be a disservice to the study of the genre to elide discussions of identity pertaining to the white male solo (American) traveler, even if that would possibly be the fashionable thing to do. And even if being a white heterosexual male is privileged at home, it is worth some investigation to understand how that privilege is impacted (or not) by travel, as it certainly changes, at times quite hostilely, in various areas of the globe. Further, it is important to understand how that identity is performed and represented (or *not* represented) rhetorically in the genre.

The reality is that there are countless white male and white female solo digital travel publications and many of them share similar stories: a college graduate, unready for the “real world” takes time to travel, catches the travel “bug” and wants to make travel self-sustaining. The variable here is often that, instead of simply deciding to travel, a good number of these writers received their first real travel experience while engaged in some type of TESOL activity abroad, usually in an Asian country like China or South Korea. There is undoubtedly an element of privilege in these narratives: these are college graduates, potentially with little to no debt, who have made consistently good decisions and now meet the requirements, however minimal, needed to teach in countries where American-speaking-partners are sought. Many of these literate young people decide to document their experience, whether personally or semi-professionally and some decide to continue a semi-nomadic life going forward. But because there are so many publications that check this box, it is impossible to select a representative sample—most of the well-known contributors in this area are, at the very least, semi-pro. It is no surprise that the

millennial generation is technologically saturated—thus the writers from these age groups are often impressively good at web development, visual rhetoric, amateur videography, and social media construction and influencing. They understand the importance of varied content and visual presentation almost intuitively so their publications appear, and likely are, far more than simple travel guides or narrations. In the end, as pertains to discussions of identity, one particular writer who goes by the name Nomadic Matt emerged, not so much for his attention to his own identity (though this will be discussed for its conspicuous absence), but for his consideration of how various identity issues are impacted the travel experience.

Matt explains in his About section how he was not exposed to travel until later in life. He writes, “Growing up in Boston, I was never a big traveler. I didn’t take my first trip overseas until I was 23. Outside of a cruise and a college trip to Montreal, I had no travel experience. After college, I got a job and the standard American two-weeks-a-year vacation. I wanted to use that time to travel...” He continues explaining how it was his first trip to Costa Rica that “changed [his] life” and how it was that exposure that cause him to reconsider, not just his own lack of worldliness, but the value systems that he was participating in. The following year he went to Thailand—these two destinations are not usual first stops for nascent travelers. Typically, as the story goes, one is exposed to travel through road trips as a kid or perhaps a two or three week trip to the highlights of Europe: London, Paris, or perhaps Rome or Florence. Though Matt doesn’t elaborate on this, it is very likely that these early travel experiences pushed him in ways a European vacation would not. To be specific, both Costa Rica, in some degree, and Thailand are vastly culturally distinct from America and the west; while some things are relatable, the

entire way of life is radically different. Where in Berlin and Dublin a traveler from the west can feel largely acclimated in a matter of a few days, travel to more exotic locations is more disorienting—there is no possibility of understanding the language and even the most mundane tasks become potentially complicated adventures. So while it is very common to start with simpler destination and gradually increase risk-taking, as a traveler Matt was very much taught to swim with a shove off the deep end.

There is another thing that Matt would encounter in Thailand which is far less prevalent in today's Europe: backpackers. Where thirty years ago backpacking through Europe was still seen as adventurous, today it is considered tame and expensive—while certainly hostels still exist and backpackers do meander through capital and countryside, more and more travelers of the budget-variety are drawn to the margins, with South America and Southeast Asia being the most popular of all. Matt condenses the remainder of the story: "...in the wonderful city of Chiang Mai, I met five backpackers who showed me that I didn't have to be tied down to my job and that I didn't need to be rich to travel. Here were five people who were living my dream of traveling full-time. I wanted in. I wanted to do what they were doing. After that trip, I flew home, finished my MBA, quit my cubicle job, and, in July 2006, set out on an adventure around the world that continues to this day."

While it is not useful to poke fun, it is important to acknowledge the type of privilege which constitutes hegemony: middle class from the suburbs of a very expensive east coast city, college graduate, graduate school, white, male, business-orientation... The cards are stacked in Matt's favor, a reality which is made all the more clear by him not having to openly consider his privilege at all. In fact, concerns of privilege seem to

be largely kept at bay through a type of egalitarian neutrality when approaching an audience. There is a freedom that comes from a certain background—this type of freedom usually appears through questions of possibility or potential: anyone can be or do whatever they want by their own determination. Matt could *conceptualize* traveling even when not exposed to it as a kid, likely because of this language of *possibility* that surges through middle class schools and universities. Further, he sees the possibility of a life of travel, even low-budget travel, and can fully realize leaving a “safe” life of economic participation for a riskier life of low-budget travel. And this final leap of faith into that vagabond life is made all the easier by the safety net of white, male, educated suburban privilege on which he does not directly reflect or even acknowledge.

It amounts to access and, as evidenced by Oneika’s very deliberate project, some people need to be actively told that, yes, they can in fact do these things, while for other groups this potential is never called in to question. This is not because certain people are more or less capable or simply entitled, but more an example of how ideology works—dreams and fantasies, and thus possibilities, are always built with language. So privilege can be rethought: it is not that there are endless amounts of resources for people of certain backgrounds, though this may be the case, but that there is endless *play* and thus possibility in the realm of fantasy. When encountering a situation that seems attractive, it is easier for some people to ask, “well, why not me?” And it is this type of privilege that still functions as normativity and it is in this place that middle class, and especially white male middle class, values still dominate; even if the *physical* resources aren’t immediately there, the ideological access to the discourse is.

Matt saw an opportunity and had the preparation and background necessary to seize it—it is no wonder that he then pushed forward as an entrepreneur, crafting a business that could sustain a particular lifestyle and set of values. The closing remarks of the About section are worth quoting at length, as they provide some clarity to the discussion begun above: “Since then, I’ve traveled to close to 100 countries and territories, flown hundreds of thousands of miles, slept in all sorts of places, tried weird food (including fried maggots), made life long friends, learned multiple languages, and, most importantly, discovered that you don’t need to be rich to travel. It’s my mission now to help travelers like YOU to realize YOUR travel dreams the same way those five backpackers helped me realize mine. This website has been featured on major media sites time and time again because it’s the best budget advice out there. Our system here works. We’re going to make you a smarter traveler.”

Matt explains a few other things about his agenda which, while not tested, are certainly admirable. Though he has been featured in many notable publications and has employees, he emphasizes that he is not a vendor of travel experiences. If he or his team mention products, it is because they actually use them. He also clarifies that he or anyone contributing to his project must pay their own way and record experiences as they occur, such as where they stayed, ate, went, and how they travelled be it by plane or train or bus. Matt emphasizes the fidelity he maintains to his overall project which is, essentially, to promote the possibility of travel for all, regardless of resources, and to motivate people to seek travel experiences out even when they may feel like those types of adventures are reserved for someone else. He explains, “Everyday I wake up with one goal in mind: ‘How can I help other people travel better for less?’” While certainly privileged, it does

seem that his project is inclusive and, as far as he reveals, the policies of his business remain faithful to the spirit which gave birth to them.

Built into Matt's objective, as mentioned above, is a universal outreach and, judging by his "Testimonials" section, this largely proves true. Alex writes, "As a 19-year-old girl, leaving the country by myself did not seem possible. I had many fears. However, last Saturday, I came back from a solo trip to Panama..." Adrian B. adds "I am a prior Marine and current film student. I started following your blog a years or so ago and it has since then motivated me to chase my dreams on a level I never thought possible." And Terry S. states, "I am a 63 year old woman who just completed a four month solo trip to Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The information in your book was invaluable." Now while some of these testimonials may be curated, the volume of them, along with social media engagement, supports the fact that Matt's business is reaching a large audience and thus that the information he provides exceeds limitations of class, gender, or ethnicity.

Incidentally, Matt Kepness (@nomadicmatt) is Verified on Instagram as a "Public Figure"—his bio states "NYT Best Selling author of How to Travel the World on \$50 a Day" and explains that he has upcoming tour-dates related to the very recent publication of his book *Ten Years a Nomad*. Having a "Verified" status by Instagram or Twitter is not purchasable. It is a mark of digital cultural capital that can only be awarded. The qualifications necessary to be given the designations are indistinct but generally it is understood that there is some risk of impersonation of the public figure that requires other users to be able to identify clearly who is who they claim to be in the digital space. Regardless of the practicalities, the "little blue check" is highly sought by influencers and

has value in that culture. In the world of travel, Matt also has some high-profile followers including @andystevestravel, @scottscheapflights, @migrationology and even @americanair.

In reality, it would be easy to discuss Matt's work in the coming chapter dealing more directly with the economies where these digital travel publications operate. It is enough to say here that, in a traditional sense, it can be very unclear how all this content, most of it free including guides and YouTube mini-documentaries, generates revenue—in many ways, digital travel writers of this type have more in common with social media influencers than with traditional travel journalists like Bill Bryson or Pico Iyer. There is also the question of audience evaluation—if a readership does not have direct knowledge of how and where profits are generated, is that ethically honest? When buying a paperback book, a reader can understand intuitively that some profits go to the writer, but also to the publisher and editor and Amazon and so forth: this understanding is built in to the commodity of the book. But for a digital publication, especially one of this magnitude, it is far more murky and raises questions of what a contemporary audience can really expect relating to exposed labor relations and surplus.

Matt's number one section, even before the "About" area, on his publication is entitled "Travel Tips." Obviously, his fundamental tips and guides deal with the logistics of travel, including saving money, finding cheap airfare, and selecting the most useful travel gear—this is all valuable regardless of demographic. In the section titled, "Where I Find the Best Travel Deals," Matt provides helpful general tips such as, "Often I will book a flight and *then* figure out my plans. Since you can cancel a flight within 24 hours without incurring a fee, I lock in the deal and *then* figure out if I can make it work..." He

also provides a wealth of information about cheap travel mailing lists, such as ScottsCheapFlights.com as well as general search engines like *Momondo* which are incredibly useful for comparing fares globally across multiple platforms. He continues in the same way addressing general budget travel information, discussing frequent flier news and providing a list of detailed sources, about one of which, *Mommy Points*, he writes, “An informative resource for families who collect points and miles...” He adds information on Best Cruise Deals, Best Transportation Deals, and Where to Find the Best Hotel and Hostel Deals. Lending credibility to his overall project, he adds that common resources are often the best: *booking.com*, which is advertised regularly on all types of media, is in fact the best resource for locating multiple options for hotels at a variety of price-points.

This type of writing could be called “travel hacking”—certainly Matt’s emphasis on budget traveling restructures the nature of his guides. Yet, it is important to note that Matt’s work, at least as involves his particular digital content (his book is currently on order), is still a type of comprehensive multimodal guide. It has frequent links and references, in-text, to other resources, both internal and external. There is supplemental visual and video media for all written content. The rhetorical direction of all the writing is both encouraging and instructional. There is very little narrative or epistolary commentary on any particulars of the travel experience, almost no mention of subjective reaction or feelings, but mostly an emphasis on the material conditions and demands of the travel event itself. It may be, perhaps, the most financially-conscious contribution to the digital travel rhetoric space. It should also be said that the content has a mature presentation, if a bit cluttered, that would probably appeal to a more general audience, at

least in terms of age and technological exposure. This cannot be said of all similar publications in the genre: many seem like they would appeal to a particular age demographic, itself an underemphasized identity category, but one that is beginning to change the way an entire industry conceptualizes itself. It is possible that Matt's model, for example, represents a snapshot of what the future of world travel actually looks like.

Beneath that same heading, "Travel Tips," there are several sub-categories worth exploring. The first, "Travel Tips for Couples," is treated fairly by Matt when he writes, "Traveling as a couple is a lot different than traveling solo. As a solo traveler, I can't really relate as I'm single and haven't really traveled long-term with my significant other. So, since I want to give advice on this topic, I enlisted the help of my traveling couple friends to provide tips on how to travel well with your partner because the couple that travels together, stays together." There are some quick links to the right hand side of the brief intro given above; a quick scroll down the page shows some of the outsourced areas of interests and begins to identify the various couples who have volunteered their experience for the benefit of the publication.

Though ostensibly the information would be applicable regardless of age, gender, race, or sexual orientation of the couple, on first glance, there does not appear to be representation for homosexual couples—the only non-white couple are an Indian couple (actually from *and* living/working in India) who offer their experience under the title, "How this Indian couple navigated visas to travel the world." It is possible that Matt assembles information from couples who have volunteered and that any omission is simply the random result of homosexual or minority couples not volunteering to contribute—it would be inaccurate to say that this designates the general demographic of

the readership, though it could be an indicator in this direction. Further, it is impossible to determine if the apparent favoring of white, heteronormative couples is willful or even an example of subconscious privileging—even still, the obvious lack of homosexual or couples of color is troubling and possibly limits the audience of the blog as the under-represented may seek out resources that better suit their particular needs.

Empty Rucksack Travelers: A Cautionary Tale

Though relationship status is not often included as a marker of identity, in travel circles, it does carry similar significance. But more importantly for Vikram and Ishwinder, the Indian couple Matt links to, the issue of nationality arose as a factor which contributed to their ability to travel freely. As Matt notes, “As an American, it’s easy for me to travel the world. My dollar goes far (though not as far as it used to), and I only have to worry about visas to a few countries around the world...” It is easy to forget that *nationality*, far more than *ethnicity*, conditions global travel. While hyphenated identities may be important at home, at customs, whatever comes before “-American” is of little significance. The nationality determines exchange rates, and thus reasonable access to travel resources *qua* discretionary income. It also, as Matt notes, determines the availability of visas: for a Brit, traveling to Iran is completely possible yet for an American citizen, at least as of this moment, that would be complicated. The same obviously goes for Cuba—Europeans, especially the British, enjoy Cuba for its hospitality, food, and resorts; short of securing specific “educational” visas, traveling to Cuba for an American is still foreclosed.

Vikram, who runs his own travel publication with Ishwinder entitled *Empty*

Rucksack Travelers, states, “My visa has been rejected three times by Belgium, Spain, and United States, though Ishwinder has never had her visa rejected. Visa requirements are a necessary dimension we have to consider when we are planning to travel to a new country, and we can’t afford to be ignorant about it. Most times they require proof of funds, bank statements, income tax returns, return tickets, hotel bookings, and letters from employers, and some even ask for cover letters.” For a great deal of travel, as American citizens, there are no particular visa requirements. For other slightly more marginal travel destinations, there are gestural visa requirements, which basically means that anyone who takes the time to apply (and pay) gets approved. Then of course there are a few others which are exceedingly difficult for Americans to gain access to even at this time including Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, Iran, Libya, and Sudan. This is not to say that travelers do not go to these destinations but, depending on the geopolitical climate at the time, a visa may or may not be issued—even if it is, any country reserves the right to turn away a traveler at any time without recourse or explanation. And, despite popular wisdom and portrayal in film and television, there would be no access to an embassy and, even if there was, an embassy would not get involved in such simple travel affairs. In these situations, after spending a thousand dollars on non-refundable airfare only to be turned away at the gate, the only identity that would matter in the slightest would be that of American.

Vikram lays out many of the obstacles for Indians traveling abroad, including several countries that are known to be less-than-friendly. Interestingly, he also explains some obstacles at home, as the decision he and Ishwinder made is not especially common or well-accepted. He writes, “Indian society does not accept risk-taking, and that is what

traveling long term is: a big risk. Besides, if you are single, your family is preoccupied with getting you married. If you are married, there is a lot of societal expectation for you to have a baby. Spending time with family and being present at social functions is supremely important. So with so many preoccupations, travel takes a back seat." Many of these features are more common in countries that maintain a fairly traditional reliance on the family unit as the primary structural unit of society. In the west, this seems to be eroding somewhat, possibly due to the falling stock of organized, prescriptive religion and the difficulty of attaining gainful employment in one's hometown. Regardless, the pair are managing successful long-term travel and have even apparently branched out to develop their own digital travel publication which documents their adventures and which will be discussed in its own section shortly. Their final tip: "I wish we had known that traveling long term and not eating a proper diet could really affect your health in mysterious ways. Ishwinder suffered from a severe throat infection for four months and is still recovering from it." While their Q&A is included in Matt's "Couples" section, very little of their advice has anything to do with the realities of traveling as a couple, but what it does highlight regarding identity *and* nationality, the almost-forgotten identity-category, is likely far more important, especially as it denotes a strictly material reality of travel that cannot be overcome by any amount of money (usually) or tolerance.

One of the liabilities for digital travel rhetoric, and one of the reasons it is not often accepted as a deployment of the genre, is its relative ease of access: theoretically, everyone can do it. On the one hand, this is entirely a good thing: genres are, by their nature, neutral and, because of this, democratic. Bazerman writes that a public, through its use of a genre, "speaks and inscribes itself into existence" (34). While the more

popular iterations amount to a type of cultural orthodoxy, the diversions, and how they are used are, are equally valuable. As Miller and Shepherd noted regarding blogs, the continued inclusion within the digital, public space demands regular tending with updates, contributions, and content. If this was true in 2004, it is ubiquitous fifteen years later—influencer culture, those content creators on YouTube and Instagram, requires constant updating in order to stay relevant. Certainly public genres are valuable for their openness, but this same feature can also be a liability for the audience; because of the relative ease of development, the internet is littered with the detritus of failed travel projects. And *EmptyRucksackTravelers* is an important example of this reality.

To be fair, they do address their primary concern of encouraging travel for Indian nationals. They discuss at length, in a separate section entitled “South East Asia Visas,” the processes for obtaining visas, as an Indian, in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos among others. Yet, as Ish writes, “God and customs officials work in mysterious ways” and both, it seems, have policies that change with undisclosed regularity. Year to year, countries may adjust visa requirements slightly—this could be the result of geopolitical movements, internal changes of power, or nothing really specific at all. Regardless of the reason, a traveler needs to take responsibility for sourcing the most up-to-date material available; this is impossible to do from a publication which notes its last update somewhere around the end of 2014. This is also the last time Vicky or Ish responded to a comment on their page, even though there are comments as recent as March 2019.

A more careful review of their content reveals a struggling mastery of English, which Ish, the author, acknowledges, and a blog-like format which comes off as a little dated or amateurish in comparison to its mainstream peers. Most of their content is

quickly written, as almost a journal entry, and is based on the subjective evaluations of their travel destinations. It is neither a guide nor especially specific, though there is some general “get off the beaten path” advice.

These features are mentioned here for two reasons. Primarily, *EmptyRucksackTravelers* is missing two key features of digital travel rhetoric as a genre: regular updates to content and an envisioned audience that helps structure the rhetorical project. What their work is, or rather was, is the type of Wordpress blog that many travelers used to throw together to document their travels. Now, with the proliferation of social media outlets, and specifically apps like *PolarSteps*, it is far less common for someone to put the time in to learn the minimal html coding necessary to maintain a domain, even if Wordpress as a platform is widely accessible. The fact is that the travel world, especially the world of travel publication, trades on simplicity, access, and content—though still advanced in some areas, the maintenance of a web publication without abundant supplementary content, managerial networking such as internal and external links, and regular updates does not exactly fit the bill, mostly because it is not really created for an audience but rather more for personal documentation.

At one point, it seems like Vicky and Ish were moving in the direction of semi-professional travel—along the way, something happened that interrupted this goal. The problem, then, is again one of credibility—if a potential traveler stumbles across a site, but it is not well-maintained, there is no way to verify if information is accurate. Also, because there is an interactive component to these publications, the fact that there is no possibility to contact the authors or have meaningful dialog in comments is also a problem. These traits are reason enough to exclude *EmptyRucksackTravelers* from

inclusion with the genre as defined here, *even when* Nomadic Matt links to their site in his own valid publication as an example of those particular identity concerns among the travel community which he is unable to directly address. The reason for mentioning them is then two-fold: first, they are referenced directly by a verifiable publication which does paradigmatically meet generic expectations and second, they offer an opportunity to understand some failings of the genre and the potential risks for an audience, *even when* other markers of the genre are ostensibly met. Though they deal directly with identity, this alone is not sufficient for them to be appreciated as belonging to the extant genre. So while the visa information is useful, and their emphasis on identity is admirable, the project, for whatever reason, lost the discipline necessary to carry it out of an amateur category and into the professional realm of digital publication such as *NomadicMatt* or, his next collaborator, *BeMyTravelMuse*.

BeMyTravelMuse: Being “Basic” Abroad

Continuing under the Matt’s “Travel Tips” heading, readers will find the Solo Female subsection. Similar to his outsourcing in the last section, he writes: “Traveling the world as a solo female? Worried something might happen? Nervous? Think your friends and family might be right about the world “being dangerous”? Not sure where to begin? Fear not. Many women travel the world alone and end up fine. Since I can’t offer advice on this subject (since I’m a guy!), I brought on Kristin from *Be My Travel Muse* to share her tips, tricks, and advice on how to stay safe and crush it as a female traveler. (Plus, included here are some articles by other female travelers to give a more rounded opinion!)” Since Matt relies on Kristen Addis, who runs the *BeMyTravelMuse*

publication and is, in many respects, the other-half of Matt's solo, white, *male* traveler, it makes sense to turn directly to her publication for some insight.

In fact, in keeping with the intertextual and fundamentally dialogic nature of digital publications, both Kristen's work, as well as Vikram and Ishwinder's *EmptyRucksackTravelers* will be discussed side by side in keeping with the way these publications would be experienced *in situ*. One of the defining traits of digital travel writing, and what truly makes it valuable as part of a research process, is its expansive integration and collaboration across multiple networks and voices. Bazerman noted in "Systems of Genres and the Enactments of Social Intentions" how one utterance can open new pathways to multiple and varied responses, thus a Genre System, those "interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings," is comprised of multiple Sets and voices, and can expand to include diverse texts that all still operate within that cohesive space (131). It is communicative beyond measure and each utterance is very likely in direct and indirect contact with an entirely different matrix of meanings and sub-meanings across visual and written portals and labelled under a variety of tags.

These digital texts are also non-linear and there is no expectation of chronological fidelity: a reader perhaps never *finishes* a digital publication in the way that would be expected of a book but rather *finishes with* a publication as it provides the necessary information and links to more explicit resources. At times, a publication could just be a launch pad, providing a reader with the questions they couldn't articulate to begin with. Bazerman notes that genres demonstrate a type of "kairotic coordination," that indicates "shared participations within mutually recognized moments" (Constructing Experience 110). Kairotically, digital travel writers seem to respond adeptly to various pressure and

socially-situated needs, establishing their exigency first in that space and then engaging in various forms of Uptake. But it is far less easy to establish a clear chronotope for travel writing, especially considering that, in embracing some devices common to travel guides, there is little expectation of comprehensiveness or finality. Where Gupta's work, in deploying subjectivity as a type of narration, had a conceivable position in relation to space-time, Matt's and indeed most others do not—thus their work relies on intertextuality, both as relationships between writers, but also as simple hyperlinks that can take a reader to a different space with a different set of attributes within the genre. This inter-relatedness within sets and systems is simply a result of a medium that gives rhetorical agility, and kairotic responsiveness, back to the reader. Because of this, it only makes sense now to follow the thread and, perhaps, return to Nomadic Matt in due course.

Kristen's publication is specifically directed towards the solo female traveler and, though useful to that end, is not without a fair amount of pretentiousness. She writes, "I'm just a normal girl from Southern California who has been adventuring around the globe nonstop since September 2012...I was a dreamer. Somewhere along the way, however, I started to doubt my passions and instead went for a stable career. I worked as an investment banker for four years in Newport Beach, which burned me out and pushed me to make a change. So...I quit my job in mergers and acquisitions, sold my belongings and, armed with nothing but a carry-on bag and no company but my own, took a one-way flight to Bangkok. Seven years later I'm still traveling. Since then, I've hitchhiked solo across China, been invited to countless events by locals...and even became a Buddhist nun for 10 days." One phenomenon of the traveler, and certainly also the traveler writer,

is to collect experiences to regularly impress oneself or others; in many cases, it succeeds in the former and fails at the latter. The above passage, taken from her “About” section, seems designed to package and sell the type of experience “unadventurous” girls without a “trust fund” would be fantasizing about—to this end, perhaps it is successful. But it seems, especially in the high concentration of self-satisfied language, that this “normal girl” who has been a traveler for seven consecutive years has a blind spot in relation to her own privilege and the commodification of the cultures she penetrates.

She continues, “I came to realize over time that talking to locals, ditching guides and group tours, and always taking local transportation immersed me in the local culture and showed me the *real* parts of the countries I was visiting - things that *tourists* almost never get to see or understand. When other *travelers* took the *tourists* boats, *I* found my way onto the cargo ferries, when others would hire a car and driver, *I* hung out of the door of a moving train, and when others would take a bus, *I* hitchhiked” (emphasis mine). Again, in giving Kristen the benefit of the doubt, it is possible that she is trying to make her audience feel like they can do the same thing, that there’s really nothing to be scared of, that the world is their oyster, and so forth.

It should also be said that her language is a result of a very relevant identity category among the community of travelers and the genre they discursively facilitate: solo. This feature is the main reason for Kristen’s inclusion here—through her exhortations to travel she inadvertently establishes the identity of young females as based largely in fear and self-consciousness. Her interpretation of her audience, who she is very clearly *not like*, is unflattering and certainly incomplete.

But beyond a gendered interpretation, her language also speaks to an insistent

discomfort with the idea of being truly alone, especially in an environment that is unfamiliar. Solo travelers, while they don't have to ask anyone what to do or where to eat or what to see, have the added burden of making decisions and then being the sole responsible party for those decisions. It is a different type of experience, both liberating and restricting in different ways, and it is a feature the identity of the traveler, and thus the genre, which remains relatively stable across antecedents and medium.

Regardless, it is unlikely that her advice is wise, or even accurate. While beside the point here, it should be said that a healthy amount of caution and reticence, or at least self-awareness, when traveling can pay dividends. Kristen draws a line in the sand between her and the pejorative “tourists”—while she is bold and brave, even occupying a profound cultural and religious tradition and playing at being a nun for ten days, the average tourist is silly and does not regularly “hitchhike across China,” a feat that would be, at best, inadvisable given that the vast stretch of interior China is rural and speaks no English. The “About” section is heavy handed and even, frankly, arrogant and potentially harmful. Conceivably, Kristen is aware of her rhetorical choices in relation to her identity and, given her wide influence in her area, her work must generally be well-received by an audience—but the lack of humility and the ignorance of her own subjective position combine to form, at least on first glance, a portrait of a dangerous type of traveler and, as will be discussed later, one of the great ethical concerns in contemporary travel culture.

What becomes clear after leaving the About section and traveling around the rest of the publication is that Kristen's work is heavily sponsored and that much of the writing is now directed really towards marketing. While this is not an immediate concern, it has

to be mentioned now as the economic relationships impinge on the overall stated objective of her project. In the “Tours” section, Kristen offers a variety of small group guided adventures directed at young women. This is a bit ironic considering her bio tells readers to ditch guides and groups, to not be a tourist, and to travel the world solo; but again, that language is mostly used as a set up to solicit participants in her fairly standard travel tour service. She also has several print publications, including *Conquering Mountains: How to Solo Travel the World Fearlessly* and a travel memoir, both available through her site. There is also a “masterclass” available, likely taught by Kristen, on photojournalism—the testimonials included seem positive as does the syllabus for the class. Whether it is worth the \$297 dollars is a matter of opinion.

At this point, there are no visible outside advertisements on the page, meaning that Kristen’s revenue is generated solely from the *BMTM* product line of travel services—there may be some additional commission made when booking various flights or hotels through her portal, but that is not openly apparent. The reason this needs to be discussed here, however in brief, is to note how the shadowy digital labor practices can impact rhetorical design and impinge on the productive aspects of the genre. In fact, economic and identity concerns, when viewed slightly awry, seem to merge and blend: the audience, interpellated by the author’s own subjective apprehension of their identity, is then used directly to determine the marketing rhetoric and apparatus which are deployed. This is another aspect of how fluid and responsive the genre truly is.

Whether the intended audience would be dismayed by Kristen’s thinly-veiled marketing tactics is besides the point—the lack of disclosure jeopardizes the ostensibly magnanimous purpose. But Kristen’s work should not be singled out for this—

disguising surplus value and labor relations in altruistic rhetoric is as much the bread and butter of neoliberal global capitalism as it is part of how digital labor, especially in the age of social media saturation, functions. In effect, what is seen in many of these publications and is exemplified explicitly by Kristen's project, is another, less-destructive, side of the *fake news* phenomenon whereby facts are bought and sold and marketed to identity categories, the members of which perform the sorting themselves by opting in and out of various news groups, social groups, Facebook groups, and so on.

Exploring Kristen's purpose more generally, the "Solo Female Travel" section does seem to have a great deal of information, some of which is tied to individual destinations while some is developed more topically or editorially regarding safety or "25 Superpowers All Solo Female Travelers Have." Under the "20 Unexpectedly Awesome Destinations for Solo Female Travelers" Kirsten writes, "When I see lists like these I often just see suggestions for places women should travel to solo based on only one thing: safety. While crime stats are worth noting, they're not the defining factor for a great place for women to travel alone." She states that less-known destinations with welcoming locals and cultures or destinations that have some type of particular interest (surfing, hiking) can often be the easiest place to start and this guide, it seems, is designed for the first-time solo female traveler who is looking for ideas.

Kristen discusses a wide variety of possible destinations, touching on a variety of interests. Of Thailand, she writes, "The north of Thailand is cheaper, more laid back, and generally nicer to hang out in than the party islands to the south. I know that sounds impossible, but head up to Pai and you'll see exactly what I mean." When discussing her travels to Reykjavik she explains, "Iceland is ranked the #1 safest country in the world by

Vision of Humanity...Iceland's landscape is so unique and stunning, plus it's great for a road trip." In Vietnam, she mentions Phong Nha Ke Bang national park: "Phong Nha Ke Bang and surroundings in Vietnam is full of such friendly locals who smile and wave, and since there aren't many places to stay in town, most backpackers are all at the same hostel – Easy Tiger – where I met and devised a plan to motorbike around the park with 6 other guys the next day." And about Bologna, Italy she notes, "Though I already had a place to stay, I met people in Bologna via Craig's List just to hang out, and ended up with a mixed crowd of locals and students from all over the world. There's a nice history there, and I got fewer cat calls and purse-snatching attempts there since University towns tend to be a bit safer, people send their kids there after all." She continues by mentioning locations in Ireland, Africa, and South America and even includes Hawaii and the Philippines on her list. So while these guides are not comprehensive by any means, they do provide a nice jumping off point for a potential traveler who is in the very early, day-dreamy stage of their solo-female travel contemplations. She also lists several locations which are fairly close together so one could conceivably tie together destinations in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand for example. And for each destination, she gives her reasoning as to why it should be included on her list for solo female travelers—while many of these reasons have to do with relative safety, most seem to relate to experience and community.

In an adjacent section of her work, "Everything You Need to Know About Solo Female Travel," Kristen gives some basic, though very useful, insight into some of the nuances of solo travel and some of the key features that make it rewarding. While she directs this to females in particular, much of the information is universally valuable

regardless of gender or even of ones' "solo" status. She discusses the selection of the destination based, not only on interests, but on practical considerations such as budget and weather. In this section there are links to various other guides that detail some elements of this more thoroughly, including budget worksheets and specific location guides. To this, she adds packing information—it is important, especially for extended travel and backpacking, to be able to sort through "needs" and "wants" and then still remove things from the former list; Kristen provides some helpful information in this area as well which is, again, universally applicable. Regarding safety, Kristen provides some important tips for decision-making and experience. She writes, "Make up your own mind without anyone coercing you when it comes to anything you are doing or might not want to do" and "If/when it feels wrong, stop and leave. You're allowed to change your mind." To this she adds, "listen to your intuition." Placed along side some more encouraging words exhorting her readers to be open, well-intentioned, understanding of various cultures, and so on, her list of practical considerations for female solo travelers is well-developed and conveyed.

The principal consideration of solo travel, and perhaps especially of solo female travel, is safety. Significantly, Kristen outsources this section a bit to get some input from other solo female travelers—with a little editorial structuring, the entire section is mostly made up outside contributions. Some of these ideas are very basic such as giving loved ones a copy of an itinerary and staying in semi-regular contact, and being willing to pay a bit more for lodging to feel safe. Some are explicitly related to personal safety. Kristen writes, "In many countries, such as most of Europe, carrying mace or pepper spray is considered a concealed weapon. To get around this, I'd suggest using mosquito

spray instead...” A contributor, Britt, adds, ““Most crimes are crimes of opportunity so its really all about putting yourself in the ‘too hard’ basket. Hence, I carry a personal safety alarm...in my coat pocket that gives off a hell of a sound if I were to pull it.” Other tips relate to money concealment (a tampon applicator) and the carrying of a “dummy wallet” to give would-be robbers if pressured. Some other general advice, that is truly helpful, is to not arrive at a new destination late, seek out walking tours in all new cities to learn new surroundings safely, and to always bring a business card from the hotel or hostel along whenever out and about.

Kristen’s work, as it relates to identity and the genre of digital travel rhetoric, is complicated. It is part business—obviously a key component of her work is marketing both her tours and formal publications. It is also encouraging; she does provide genuinely helpful information for travelers and especially solo female travelers in a deliberate effort to encourage travel as part of personal growth: her section, “25 Superpowers” lists those things that solo travel provides including a variety of important life-skills. Kristen also runs a successful, and more traditional, blog which is written with a thematic and journalistic emphasis. She discusses a variety of topics including her own sobriety, the current controversy surrounding the migrant detention centers in the United States, and “9 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Backpacked for the First Time.” She regularly contributes to her content and while this particular section isn’t devoted to travel writing as such, she made the decision to include her travel guides, all well linked on an interactive map, in a separate section, thus separating her commentary on her travels from more practical information on the nature of traveling to the countries she has visited. Kristen, perhaps more than any writer discussed so far, represents the level of

heterogeneity that is embraced within digital travel rhetoric—the decisions that writers make are impacted and informed by countless factors. Though identity certainly dominates her objectives, much of her experience exceeds those limitations. And while the economic interests of her work risks offsetting her credibility, much of her content is available for free and her publication could be useful for anyone interested in travel.

Further, Kristen is certainly not an amateur—her visual presentation, while more cluttered and overstimulating than some, is professionally developed with mostly her own content. She is an influencer and is “verified” on various social media platforms, including YouTube where she regularly publishes video content. She has also, apparently, long since abandoned a more reflective, journalistic type of travel writing in favor of separating the experience into the editorial and the informative, a feature common to travel writers at a certain level. Yet, as relating to identity as a characteristic of the genre, there are two very important take-aways, and these relate to the categories, united for Kristen’s purpose, of *solo* and *female*.

First, and as mentioned above, the “relationship” status of a traveler matters, especially as perceived by other travelers—it thus impacts the writing of a digital travel publication. To reiterate, this is not necessarily an issue of romance or “coupling,” but rather one of experience. In any case, the designation of “solo” traveler has signficatory value and is a primary feature of identity. Second, it is important to note how Kristen homogenizes the experience of the “female” traveler. Clearly Kristen could not explicitly state that her work caters to white, middle class female travelers, but the first two categories seem to be obvious regardless of the omission. At the very least, it is problematic to think that Kristen’s experience of *female* travel is the same as, say,

Oneika's experience of *female* travel. This highlights one of the great failings of identity politics more generally—in the quest for diversity, it tends to reiterate homogeneity by subsidizing difference and eradicating socioeconomic concern. This is not to criticize Kristen directly—she provides some useful advice and certainly inspires nervous travelers to interact with the world more fearlessly. But in the end, it is not clear if the boxes she checks for her identity, and which thus structure much of the rhetorical presentation of the work, are as inclusive or equitable as she believes or as she would have her readers believe. But in the end, it is no wonder that Nomadic Matt made the decision to collaborate with her through his own work, a decision which emphasizes once again the high degree of transmission which characterizes, and is built in to, the digital space.

Final Thoughts on Discursive Identity in Digital Travel Writing

Because *NomadicMatt* is professional and has been consistently successful in a digital space and by those standards, its author, editor, and CEO Mathew Kepnes decided to make a leap into more traditional travel publication. His book, *Ten Years a Nomad*, had been on backorder pending its release—it arrived today. Matt, whose life revolved around travel, specifically long-term budget travel, reconsidered his idea of home in light of the years of experiences accumulated from living abroad. He writes, “For a decade I have lived a long, peripatetic life on the road. Three thousand nights. In more than ninety countries. In a thousand different cities. In hundreds of hostels. With countless people. For half a million miles on airplanes, and half a million more (I’ve added it up) on trains buses and tuk-tuks and cars and bicycles.” (1) His book is a reflective narrative,

not unlike the literary work of Paul Theroux or Peter Mayle, full of anecdotes, some sad and others celebratory, relating to a life always in motion.

To discuss a print work is to step outside the project a bit but it serves here a concluding thought. When considering that the publication of this print work would not have been possible without the digital travel writing that occurred prior, it is important to see it as part of a larger rhetorical process, especially when considering how genres exist on social, cognitive, and even material level. As an indirect example of this, Matt, in his book, offers a brief story of how he fell in love with his girlfriend, Charlotte. In Laung Prabang, Laos in 2015 Matt is having a drink at a local bowling alley when he is approached by another traveler. The conversation opens with, ““You’re Nomadic Matt, right?”” Matt confirms and the traveler continues, ““I love your blog, man. I’ve used it many times on my trip...There’s a girl in our group who also likes it, but she’s too shy to say so. She was the one that spotted you, actually...” (184)

So digital travel writing and publication matters. It matters to the people who pursue it, who take the risk, who confront fear and failure, and it matters to those people who have always wanted to travel but thought, for whatever reason, that it was a hobby reserved mostly for others. For those from the west, travel can be fear inducing—their is an illusion of familiar comfort and safety that propels global capitalism forward: stay, work, reproduce, consume. To leave that behind, is to confront both oneself and an entire system that will likely not understand the impulse. Kristen in her publication even goes so far as to offer advice on how to deal with the travel detractors and critics. Though digital travel publication is entrenched in often poorly disclosed economic practices and comes with no small amount of avoidance of ethical concerns on a number of levels, it

does capture some salient truths of the human condition which are pertinent to the contemporary moment. There seems to have always been a drive to move, to see, and to explore and, of course, then the obligation to use symbols in recording and sharing that experience. When discussing identity, the fact that such a large and diverse group of writers, only a small sample of which can be featured here, are out exploring and writing, largely free to rhetorically engage with their subject matter and audience as they choose, speaks to the durability of this project. While many may not understand themselves in this way, their concerns, and their self-representation and disclosure, as well as the obstacles to all of that, share more in common with their literary, explorer predecessors than not. Conventions for determining genre agility are not always so straightforward. The work of Philipa, Matt, Oneika and countless others, especially as they relate to identity, serves as an important example of how characteristics can manifest in disparate ways while still being faithful to generic convention.. But as the conversation turns towards more overtly economical apparatus, this mechanism becomes less obvious and the stakes of its understanding far greater.

CHAPTER 4

PATHWAYS OF PROFIT IN DIGITAL TRAVEL WRITING

It's hard to know where to begin when discussing digital economies. Some years ago the Oxford Economics group claimed that the integration of digital elements into nearly every aspect of economic production and labor heralded the start of "third wave capitalism." On the other side, with the rise of cryptocurrencies as a type of manipulation-free commodity, some are prophesying the end of capitalism and world banking, the enduring system of usury and managed interest rates that sustains many of the world's largest economies. Social media can be a gift, a platform for activism and awareness, and a curse: bullying, abuse, inappropriate, and even criminally grotesque, pictures and videos. And for others these free platforms are the source of considerable income: social media "influencer" is now a title which many aspire to attain, replete with the little blue check, unpurchasable for any amount, that designates that a person is important enough to be impersonated. There is a major global political figure who puts nearly every thought, no matter how undignified and impulsive, on Twitter, and Instagram is helping to excite a mass of people to storm a U.S. Government military compound in search of aliens. It's a bizarre time to be alive; new ethical concerns appear almost daily and, regardless of who is trying, in whatever capacity, to address them after the fact, it is impossible to get in front of the flood and contribute to the direction these "innovations" should take. And for anyone who takes time to ask, "who is profiting here?" the situation seems even more problematic.

Here the concern, at least regarding digital travel publication, is only with that last

area. The ethical implications of the genre will be addressed more directly elsewhere. For now, it is important to trace pathways of profit (how it is generated, from which sources, what is required, Etc.) and the labor practices that underlie this profit (how digital labor is quantified, if it can be, and how is surplus then generated). As in the chapter prior, this will be accomplished by examining, in detail, a series of publications that engage in digital economic and labor practices. This should not be taken as a comprehensive detailing of the entire expanse of digital economies, or as a commentary on these economies directly, but as a characteristic of the genre itself which is inseparable from more obvious inclusions of style or content.

Including economic features as an indicator of the genre itself is somewhat novel and requires some theoretical context to carry off. Mary Jo Reiff notes that public genres, those that are, within reason, open equally to adoption and deployment by broad segments of a population, are vastly understudied. She is not alone in this observation—Bawarshi summarized some of these public spaces in his seminal work as well. Dylan Dryer writes, “While existing studies have mapped the ways academic and workplace genre systems enable and delimit readers' and writers' mental and physical work, what is less well-understood at this time are the specific material conditions through which readers and writers are ‘taken up’ into social relations when they ‘uptake’ a genre” (Dryer 504). Digital travel publication is a relatively “open” genre—this does not only mean that it is open to individuals to take up, contribute to, and adapt to their purposes, but that it remains open to all sorts of ideological and economic imperatives which may condition the presentation or restructure the *generic* form. As Caroline Miller famously notes, “What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of

achieving our own ends...[but] what ends we may have..." (Miller 165). These ends are not necessarily restricted to singular objectives or even a singular audience—they can be layered intentions and can incorporate compensatory economic structures.

Even still, digital travel publication is an interesting case—it is an authentic and public genre that, while it bears relationship to similar works (guidebooks and literary travel narrative), truly seems to operate in its own independent space. Its proponents, or simply its users, often have little to no exposure to other earlier iterations of the genre: it would be surprising if any of the writers mentioned so far read *The Norton Book of Travel* or ever even heard of Paul Fussell, the man who would be their number one detractor. They do, however, have an authentic exposure to each other. Dryer writes, "Writing always 'takes place' in genres: textual forms already embedded in ways of knowing, established readerships, and routes of circulation that precede writers and in which such writers must take their 'place' (personal, institutional, 'authorial,' and so on)" (505). While Dryer is correct that writing occurs in spaces that already have deep relationships with other socially situated ways of understanding and engaging with the world, a less restrictive view adds something important to the understanding of digital travel writing. These writers, in many cases, are shareholders in a particular project: more than simply putting previously established manners of expression that condition particular outcomes, they participate in knowing and shaping their reality simultaneously, in what Anthony Giddens calls Structuration. If a popular digital travel writer does a thing, makes a move, it may take a while for that idea to gain traction, but if it does, if it is taken up and employed by other writers, it becomes a feature of the genre that spreads rapidly, especially compared to previous understandings of the historical development of

genres. If the device, whatever it may be, fails, it vanishes as it has no use value.

Years ago comment boards were omnipresent in digital travel writing, now not so much. Why? Likely because, given the stretching of digital travel writing across platforms that give readers direct access to writers (YouTube, Instagram, Twitter), the inclusion of comment boards or discussion boards on publications is superfluous, no longer necessary. And so now, while many popular travel publications do still have a comment board or two hanging around, they are not well-tended and there is no expectation that one be there as a part of the genre. The economies that feature so heavily as a feature of the genre did not originate in travel writing but as part of the digital age; most digital travel writers simply borrow practices from influencer culture or web development and adapt them in a way that serves their agenda. There is, at the core, little difference between the subsidizing of adventures in the past and those seen today. Early voyages were often sponsored by companies or families or even monarchies—there was an expectation that objects of value be brought back and that land be secured for funding to continue. In these exploratory iterations of the genre, the economics of the journey are present, if less obvious. To call *exploration* a feature of the genre as it existed in the 19th century is simply to emphasize the economics of the travel while using different terms: the exploration was not neutral but directly linked to vulgar economic support and ideological dissemination. In present digital travel writing, the economies are more obvious certainly but the motivation is often the same: funding travel and exploration.

Rather than simply something operative in the base, below the content and ideologies and multimedia rhetoric, commodification is a feature of the genre itself,

expected and anticipated in the same way as embedded video or identity performance. Contemporary writers within the genre are simply embracing the opportunities afforded by the cultural context of their work. At the time of Miller and Shepherd's study of the blog, digital economies were still in their infancy—"followers," were not yet considered a marker of cultural capital within that community and it had yet to generate direct revenue. In a similar way, digital advertising had not reached its insatiable zenith of pop-ups and click-bait and sponsorships. Berkenkotter calls this phenomenon whereby one aspect of a genre, such as advertising in a print magazine for instance, is gradually taken up in another "recontextualization" or "translation." Translation is likely the better term as it implies some amount of rhetorical communicative will on behalf of the translator—something is always lost, or sacrificed, in a translation just as something is preserved. For advertising in digital genres, this process started out slow but has now accelerated to become an anticipated feature of digital genres rather than an accessory or appendage. As Frederic Jameson clarifies regarding aesthetic genres, "It is not merely the performance situation, but the generic contract and institutions and traditional practices, which falls casualty to the gradual penetration of a market system and a money economy..." (107). In this respect, it is impossible to conceive of a genre that manifests digitally that somehow remains independent of market institutions—these economies are preserved in the very form of the genre itself and, as such, are considered a feature of the genre as it exists.

So in a similar way to the previous chapter, each individual work discussed displays the economic features of the genre in different though related ways. Again, it is important to see them as capturing the indispensable nature of economy as a feature of

the genre of digital travel writing rather than as *individual* elements in *particular* projects. Though every work discussed does something a little different in this regard, or does the same thing differently, there is no work within the genre that does not have some visible element of commodification built in to the structure of the publication.

The examination begins by looking at the *LittleGreyBox* publication—the work of Matt and Phoebe, Aussies both, serves as a nice, clear introduction to the type of digital labor practices that digital travel writing trades in. They also maintain an unusual amount of transparency as regards their profit-mechanism which allows for a more subtle investigation. Following this work, the publications *Indie Traveler* and *Indiana Jo*, while not related directly, will be discussed side by side. Both Marek and Jo make a turn towards brand/content coaching with their works and discuss the formative impact that digital analytics has on content generation and publication durability. Next, in an important turn, *Drew Binsky*, who is popular enough to use his own name as a brand, is addressed both for his mastery in the field of digital travel writing as well as the curious effect that celebrity has even in this relatively niche market. And finally, directly relating to this, there will be a prolonged exposition of several companies that have arisen in the past ten years to expressly coach both digital literacy generally and its particular impact on travel. These companies represent the marketing of the fantasy of travel which impacts every aspect of profit-generation.

LittleGreyBox: Multiple Pathways, Multiplied Profit

Phoebe and Matt's project, *LittleGreyBox*, is one of the more well-known digital travel publications and a good place to start looking at the economic conditions that many

of these publications have contact with—they are included here both for the various digital economies they tap into as well as their transparency with respect to that process. With just a quick glance around the site, it is easy to see that the work is managed at a professional level. The layout shows evidence of advanced web development—the aesthetic is minimalistic, with embedded photos and unique navigation menus with sophisticated intertextual links and drop-downs. It also is contributed to regularly which means the authors are continually generating content, both print and visual, and developing new ideas either for editorial work or more general travel guides. In other words, it is not a “ghost ship” publication like many that float around the reaches of the internet and this means that its information has a higher likelihood of both reliability and salability.

A simple scroll through the central portal (which switches automatically from linked photo to linked photo) reveals some current contributions including, “5 Powerful Lessons that Changed my Life,” “21 of the Best Things to do in Harajuku,” “5 of the BEST Luxury Resorts in Ubud Bali,” “Is Premium Economy Really Worth It? Here’s the Truth,” “The Best and Worst Places to Stay in Singapore,” and “Avoid These 11 Terribly Cruel Animal Tourism Experiences.” So even on first glance, their material is well-presented visually, in an advanced portal with easy and clean navigation. There are no pop-ups or more vulgar signs of sponsorship.

The navigation bar up top has some fairly common inclusions: there is a Destination section that lists various guides by continent and a travel section with general tips and hacks and so-forth. But here there are also some very uncommon inclusions as well. A section called “Brands and Bloggers” has a dropdown which reveals some

interesting features including “Blog Coaching,” “Brand Coaching,” and “Brand Advice.” This type of language is heavily indebted to contemporary social media rhetoric; many YouTubers, which includes *LittleGreyBox*, discuss these elements as the key to gaining influence. In fact, there is an entire economy relating to this where would-be social media stars pay others to teach them, in a type of MasterClass, how to be a social media star and “brand” themselves and design their “personal brand” Etc. While the underexposed wanderer of Phoebe and Matt’s publication may not see anything unique or alarming about this, what this language indicates is an attempt to enter into a digital economy in an effort to secure viewers and sponsorships and the coveted validation.

A quick check of their social media accounts reveal some interesting, though not incredibly uncommon, features as well. @matt_littlegreybox and @phoebe_littlegreybox both post frequently. The pictures are reasonably professional and well-staged. In their commentary, though, they allude to the fact that some forth-coming content is contingent on a “green light,” possibly from sponsors. If their work was entirely independent at this point, like some digital travel publication still in fact is, there would be no reason to require outside approval for upcoming posts or links. Further, their hashtags indicate a variety of sponsors, the most obvious, at least on recent posts, is @singaporeair. While it is certainly possible that Matt and Phoebe had a stellar experience with the airline and wanted to plug the company for its excellent customer service, it is also possible that the company is sponsoring their trip in some way or is even the cause for the trip itself—in this particular case, as an entire sequence of posts seem to emphasize that airline, direct sponsor intervention seems to be more likely.

Singapore Air, like many Southeast Asian airlines, is majority owned by the Singapore government. In recent years, many of these countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines) have tried to grow their GDP with tourism, often soliciting the help of independent travel writers for their direct access to, and intimate knowledge of, a western tourist economy. Essentially, these airlines will pay for a trip, including airfare and often accommodation, if a digital travel publication will come and do a story (implied *favorable*) on travel in that country—in this way, the “followers” of the publication will spread the idea to travel there to other people thus growing the travel sector quasi-organically over several years, whether the infrastructures (or even the citizens) of the country are prepared to handle that growth or not. One cannot begrudge a travel writer accepting free-trips; this is probably the dream of any traveler and perhaps just any person on the planet. But it does change the authenticity of the experience and there is no way to determine, in such a partnership, if the information being presented in the blog is actually faithful to the experience because a positive review is basically paid-for, explicitly or un-explicitly, in the contract.

On their YouTube channel *LittleGreyBox* has a section titled “Singapore Travel Guides” which, while not commenting directly on any sponsorships, does reveal a level of visual and audio production sophistication that usually designates a higher budget. There is mention in the videos of affiliation between travel groups—it seems that *LittleGreyBox* either runs or engages in guided tours of that part of the world, which is not much surprise as Australians (which Phoebe and Matt are) often travel in Asia. At the very least, Phoebe and Matt are producing content in multiple areas, following a tip that is often given to nascent social media influencers and branders: hit multiple

platforms, produce mixed media content, collaborate as often as possible to increase exposure, use hashtags liberally to reach a wider audience.

A return to the *LittleGreyBox* main site and a little more digging around reveals some additional insight. Again, if a traveler or potential-traveler was simply moving about the internet looking for inspiration or direction, it is likely that all of this would go completely unnoticed—in such a space, where indeed the visual is privileged, it is easy to hide obvious information in plain sight. And in the case of digital economies, audiences tend to expect some overt financial intrusion into the experience—this again speaks to digital economics being a feature of the genre itself: a work of digital travel writing would be subject to suspicion as an artifact if this aspect was not present. In any case, audiences tend to overlook the information which is not directly relevant in some way, even when it may contribute to the overall success or failure of their research—it is a type of rhetorical confirmation bias and one of the pit-falls of digital travel rhetoric generally: the visual elements often carry the entire weight of credibility so that other contributing factors disappear into the background of text and jargon.

In the “About” section, are several subheadings. The first of these, titled “Press,” showcases a not-unimpressive list of collaborations, one-offs, and side publications including *Discover*, *CNN*, *Mitsubishi*, and *The Huffington Post*. This section also lists awards, interviews, and references, with links to many of these outside, third-party sites. Clearly Matt and Phoebe have found some success in this area. The following section, “Work With Us,” contains the following as an introduction: “*Little Grey Box* isn’t just a website, it’s our business and the culmination of our dreams and creative passions. Phoebe is a writer and presenter and Matt is a videographer. Together, we create useful

travel guides, vibrant imagery and engaging, informative videos. Our content is aimed to inspire meaningful travel and help others plan their best adventure.” In this section they add to the list of publications and companies that have sought collaboration in some way including: *tripadvisor*, *lonely planet*, Singapore Airlines, *CNBC*, Amazing Thailand, and Wonderful Indonesia. In addition, they make direct mention of their audience-as-commodity. They claim to have a “total reach” of over 125,000 people with 60,000 “unique visitors” to their site every week. This is compounded by 50,000 social media followers. They also clarify that most of their audience, likely in descending order, is “from Australia, the US, and the UK.”

They claim that, “we don’t just want people to travel, we want them to travel well...” the language they use here really designates an appreciation of the audience as a type of resource, one they can use, clearly, to market themselves to other larger entities who are willing to essentially borrow their exposure to sell their own product. This is the type of reach which likely attracted Singapore Air—why waste money paying marketing departments to reach an audience when a publication already has that audience well-established? It is cheaper to give free airfare to a couple of people.

When an outside entity, be it a mainstream travel publication or a local tourism board for a country or region, visits this website as a potential partner or employer, they want to see how great the reach is across all platforms in order to establish value for the partnership. This is common practice amidst social media influencers and even professional and semi-professional athletes who obtain sponsorship from various companies—the companies require regular posts, regular mentions, and a certain breadth of audience exposure in order to maximize the influence. Whether the practice overall is

ethical or not, or even fair to consumers or not, is besides the point here; as a fairly new example of capitalism's expanse in developing markets, it is unregulated and certainly not going anywhere. And if a customer is buying underwear from Cristiano Ronaldo's Instagram plugs, they are signing up for whatever they get and they certainly do not care what type of atrocious labor practices in a third world country went in to producing said underwear: they are buying the *je ne sais quois*, that feeling of consumer satisfaction at wearing a famous person's underwear, rather than a piece of cloth that is going to smell bad and get thrown in the washer at the end of the day.

But if this type of practice is sustaining travel, and especially the type of travel that goes to great lengths to cloak itself in neoliberal jargon about equitability, the problem becomes one of deep contradiction and antagonism. If Phoebe and Matt are raving about Thailand and selling a reader on all types of excursions and spiritual experiences, it is now unclear whether that is a pre-packaged marketing routine prepared by Amazing Thailand or their authentic subjective experience of that travel. The audience really cannot know—and whether Phoebe and Matt's subjective experience is more reliable or desirable than the marketing of the Thai government is another issue entirely. And because of this, their next section, "Resources," is somewhat suspicious—though they say at various points that they only recommend what they've used, it doesn't clarify if they've *used* what they *recommend* because it was placed in their hands as part of a sponsorship arrangement.

A feature of their work that is interesting, and not frequently found in digital travel publication, is the "Disclosure" section—this really pulls them out of the strict publication realm and into the tourism economy more broadly. They open the section

with the following statement: “This website does accept forms of paid advertising, sponsorship, or paid topic insertions. This website may also accept free products, services, travel, event tickets and other forms of compensation from third parties.”

Generally speaking, the average traveler does not go digging for disclosures when doing some preliminary research online—if someone looking for ideas or even some guidance on possible travel in, say, Singapore came across *LittleGreyBox*, it is very likely that they would never visit the “Disclosure” section except on accident. Even if they did, it is possible that it would be effectively meaningless, having little to no impact on how the work is received or used as pop-ups and sponsorships were always already anticipated as a feature of the genre. And again, perhaps the compensation is *not* of vast concern and has little to no impact on content; what is of concern is that these economies and the labor practices that sustain them are largely invisible, making it nearly impossible to trace the potential impact they have on the quality and type of information presented.

In a move common for influencers and social media promoters, the publication also contains “affiliate links.” They explain, “This website may include ‘affiliate links,’ wherein we receive a small commission if you make a purchase using the link. However, all opinions are our own and we only endorse or link to products and services that we genuinely recommend.” Anyone who spends time on Instagram will see these types of promotions pop up from time to time; sometimes it occurs on a celebrity’s page and the “partnership” between the spokesperson and the product is more obvious. At other times, these sponsored advertisements occur in the basic layout of an influencer or meme-producers page and can often be linked in the account’s bio section. The basic idea is that these companies track traffic through other sites—when a purchase is made through

one of these click-bait advertisements, then the provider, the originator of the link, gets some type of compensation, usually in the form of monetary commission but also with the possibility of free products. Again, Phoebe and Matt claim to only link to products they actually endorse; maybe this is true and maybe it is not. If a company approached a digital travel writer offering free product or financial support in exchange for links, it is hard to imagine that writer, who really has limited recourse to financial solubility, turning down the offer on moral grounds. That said, Phoebe and Matt are a professional example of this type of writing and it seems they have a budget which exceeds more amateur iterations—perhaps they can afford to be more principled in this area.

When it comes to selecting a backpack or camera or guidebook, the impact on the traveler-reader is negligible. As Phoebe and Matt caution in this same section, a reader should do his or her own research before selecting any product or service to make sure it fits their needs. However, in some ways *LittleGreyBox* is functioning as a type of travel agent. This is a space that, with the disappearance of these brick-and-mortar businesses through the internet boom of the late 90's, that digital travel publication has come to fill. While they don't necessarily book the tours for customers, there is compensation implied if readers do make reservations through the site or select certain travel experiences that Phoebe and Matt mention. This recalls Kristen's more overt entanglement with these types of economies in *BeMyTravelMuse*—in that case, tours and guides were offered through the site itself, ostensibly run by that selfsame business.

This economy is visible mostly in the travel guides themselves. Phoebe and Matt have their travels grouped by continent, then country, and then further broken down into individual guides and editorials on their experience. The content is well-organized,

useful, detailed, and up-to-date. So regardless of the compensation, their work is still very valuable and, compared to some other similar publications, could more easily be used in actually developing and implementing travel plans—as this is not always the objective of digital travel publication, it is important to note that *LittleGreyBox* does trade more in this area. In the section under Vietnam entitled “You need to know about this luxury Halong Bay cruise!” they write, “We flew directly from Sydney to Hanoi with Vietnam Airlines and loved it! The airline offered great food and service as well as comfortable seats and a reliable service. Paradise Cruise operates a transfer service which picks guests up from Hanoi and drives them out to Halong Bay. Our transfer bus was super comfortable and luxurious, making the drive really easy. The distance from Hanoi to Halong Bay is around 180km and generally takes around 3 1/2 to 4 hours each way, depending on traffic. The driver will stop at the halfway point for a toilet, snack and rest break...” Each business above would link to an affiliate or off-site booking service.

As it happens, none of the services they are mentioning are especially uncommon, though Paradise Cruise does offer a more luxury experience. As they also discuss, this is their second time touring Halong Bay, the first time being through a budget company, and this latter experience is markedly improved. The budget companies, while cheap, are not especially eco-friendly and they are more party boats than relaxing tours. As Phoebe and Matt discuss, their boat was spacious and complete with a host of amenities, though perhaps not the most budget-friendly option. There are many services offering cruises, including pick-up from Hanoi with transportation and ferry costs to Halong Bay and most of them are reliable. Vietnam Airlines and a few other southeast Asian airlines do most of the flying in that area of the world—most travelers from Australia or coming from

other points in Vietnam would fly Vietnam Airlines.

So in this particular case, the sponsorship element likely does not have much impact on the actual travel experience itself—it does not seem as if any detail is altered in order to fit with the affiliate’s wishes. At the bottom of their guide, Phoebe and Matt include the following: “As always, our guides and content are completely free. If you found this post (or anything we do) useful, we’d be grateful if you considered using the affiliate links below. We’ll make a small commission at no extra cost to you. Rest assured, these are the services we love and use ourselves. Thank you in advance for your support!” Beneath this, they list a variety of sites that they ostensibly (and likely in actuality) use for making reservations. Agoda, Booking, Sky-scanner, and Uber are all household names amidst travel aficionados and there is no reason, if one were going to book hotels or flights, that they shouldn’t do so through the links provided in order to earn *LittleGreyBox* some commission. To their credit (and this is not always the case) Phoebe and Matt do seem to make an effort towards transparency. Their guides are thorough, helpful, and free and there is no clear reason to doubt that the services they suggest are the ones they would use regardless of sponsorship or affiliate commission. In fact, theirs is a rare case of openly owning the various economies that they operate within. This is only in considering their main site—they clearly generate revenue in other ways as paltry commissions would not support the level of videography and exposure they maintain. Since they supplement their publication with regular YouTube content, and since YouTube is the wild west of internet influencing and sponsorship, it is likely that they gain revenue in ways that remain undisclosed.

A return to the navigation drop down allows for a click through European destinations of which Germany is a stand out. Phoebe wrote an article, “16 Awesome things you absolutely need to do in Düsseldorf,” on her experiences in Western Germany during the course of a week—there is an embedded YouTube video, made up of edited clips and a soundtrack at the bottom of the page, that is also worth a watch. This guide is essentially what it states: a run-down of essential activities to do in the city and surrounding region, especially if there is only a little time available. There are only three clearly linked outside resources that may be commission-generating and two of these are tour services, one for the city itself and the other for a boat cruise on the Rhine. The third, and possibly the strongest sell of the three is for a hotel in Düsseldorf itself: “We were lucky enough to spend three incredible nights staying at Breidenbacher Hof in the heart of Düsseldorf. In all honesty, this hotel is one of the most genuinely luxurious I have ever had the pleasure of staying at, which is why it’s my top pick on the best place to stay in Düsseldorf...” Phoebe heaps more praise on the hotel here which could possibly indicate that the hotel had requested a (favorable) review—while *LittleGreyBox* claim that they review honestly, companies do not often request a review if there is a possibility that that review would come out negatively. Yet the majority of this guide is straightforward and details only the experience of the author, whether or not the average traveler could afford to duplicate that experience, business class flights and all.

A final spin through a separate section, entitled “Travel,” reveals drop-downs and articles. One of which, “Essential toiletry items every man needs for travel,” is a type of packing or shopping list of items and products that potentially make the travel life easier for men. Many blogs have very similar types of lists, though most often the packing lists

that are published are written exclusively for women, with some crossover (like backpacks or packing cubes, Etc.) between genders. Regardless of gender, these lists (and similar ones for photography supplies, videography supplies) almost always come with a pretty clear element of sponsorship—often the affiliate links go to individual company websites or the Amazon marketplace. For most of these products, there are countless alternatives available, but the ones given by the authors are somehow better or more suited to travel. As always, maybe this is true or maybe it isn't. Writers often go into some detail as to why the product they selected is somehow more suited to the adventure-set than other related products. The point here is really that this type of economic collaboration (between companies, between travel entities and booking sites, between specific products) is built into the structure of digital travel publication but somehow also enigmatically maintains some distance from content even when it is structurally inseparable from it. When purchasing a traditional travel narrative, the economy of the publication should not impinge on material contained therein—certainly the means of publication or purchase (that it came from Amazon by mail on discount for example) could not be included as a feature of the genre itself. But here, in the digital space generally, and certainly in these types of multimodal travel publications, it is inseparable and is a key, though deliberately backgrounded, inclusion of the genre itself.

To continue, Phoebe writes, “Matt had been struggling to find enough bench space in the bathroom when we travel. I tend to take over the entire area with my assortment of lotions, potions and magic bottles. Hence the marriage-saving gift of an awesome new toiletry bag. Having **a great toiletry bag** is always a good investment for travelers! Make sure you choose one with enough **zippable pockets** and **storage spots**

for all your goodies.” Each place where there is an underline above marks an affiliate link to an outside source, in this case to the “Korjo Hanging Travel Toiletry Bag” sold through the Australian site *Myer*. Admittedly, a hanging travel-bag could be a useful purchase for a traveler—Kristen recommends a similar product for women in her travel packing list distributed, oddly enough, by Nomadic Matt.

The theme of useful toiletries continues when Phoebe discusses the most obvious need: shaving. She writes, “There’s a whole world of male grooming products out there and when it comes to shaving, investing in an electric men’s shaver like these ones from brands like Philips can be a great idea for a few reasons. Firstly, **cutting down on disposable razors** is great for the environment but it also means you don’t have to worry about shaving cream or finding a sink full of water to get freshened up, making it easy and fast to stay dapper while you travel.” In this case, the advice reads more like a direct advertisement or infomercial. At the bottom, in italics, the reader gets the disclosure: “This post is sponsored by Philips however, all advice and insight remain objective and genuine. Thanks, Philips for sponsoring this post and allowing us to keep doing what we love!” Obviously Philips did not anticipate a negative review and they certainly provided Matt with a host of products to try so the review could be, or at least sound, authentic.

In discussing economic inclusions as a feature of the genre, it is important to emphasize how much of this writing is contingent on its self-perpetuation. This morning on Instagram, Phoebe posted about a collaboration between *LittleGreyBox*, Kate and Olly of *kotravellers*, Luke Merlin of *BackStreetNomad*, and Singapore Air. In the posting, Phoebe is flying business class from Australia to Singapore which is being used as a hub for a series of adventure travels being documented under their own website as well as the

hashtag #squadSQ. Not only is this trip sponsored in some degree by Singapore Air, a company that is certainly benefitting from this exposure and especially from the Aussie readership, it is also undertaken in direct collaboration with several other digital travel writers, each of whom runs their own publication with its own guides and editorials and compensatory practices (*BackStreetNomad* is really good!). The point is that the level of feedback within the genre itself, the constant and direct communication within that site, is unlike any other genre. Further, this is not an outside funded enterprise but an authentic, even spontaneous development with the real possibility for success and failure. Because of this internally-sustained nature, these works succeed or fail most often, not by their successful deployment of genre features concerning content or structure or audience, but on their successful navigation of the various economies that sustain digital publication of all types and of course the highly crowd-sourced nature of digital media profiles generally. In this way, the economy (likes/dislikes, follows, Etc.) conditions what can be said within the genre itself, in the most democratically liberating and paradoxically restrictive way possible. As Marek Bron, the Editor of *Indie Traveler*, writes, "...in reality, I spend a lot of my time thinking about relatively well-known destinations and things that are at least more or less on the beaten path. That's difficult to admit, as it doesn't seem quite so cool. But blogs like mine rely in large part on search engine traffic, and that means you often end up merely responding to what is popular." Like many operations which use digital labor to generate income, he spends most of his time working through the mundane travel topics because his existence within the genre is so contingent on his ability to track site traffic, often traced through Google Analytics.

So as stated above, there is no reason that digital travel writers should not receive compensation—even if that compensation is free travel. Who wouldn't want to visit exotic locations on a highly subsidized budget? While the original blog was largely as a personal journal of day-to-day activities, contemporary descendants have little in common with their progenitors. The digital travel writers of today aren't bloggers, though the term is still used interchangeably, and the thought of documenting one's adventures online is not what is drawing people to the field. If simple documentation was the goal, plenty of apps or social media portals could check that box fairly successfully—the fantasy of travel writing, what attracts new writers to it, is that nagging thought after that last great adventure, “man, wouldn't it be great to just travel the world for free and write about it?” The economics are always already present.

LittleGreyBox is one of the better, visually and written, digital travel publications out there—it certainly combines unique commentary, diverse locations, and useful guides in a way that promotes travel. There is no reason that they should not seek outside economic compensation if it allows them to continue producing meaningful content. They are also one of only a few publications that openly acknowledge sponsorship and collaboration. In the grey market of digital economics, there is really no regulation that could enforce them doing this. If they did not, it is very possible that no one would object. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, this means that all disclosures come from a sense of fidelity to the stated ambitions of their work. What their publication does provide is a quick and accurate summary of the various ways economies connect with this niche market and indeed the way these connections are built into the very structure of the genre in a way that does not seem to resemble any other type of media. These

features (affiliate links, sponsorship, recommended products or packing lists, and commission-based linking to outside booking services) dominate the scope of travel economies, even when pop-up advertisements aren't readily visible or are outright banned on a particular publication. It is common for most publications of a certain caliber to offer their own version of airline recommendation, booking service "hack" lists and travel resources, or packing lists. In fact, it is so ubiquitous as to be one of the underlying reasons that these economies can be considered a key component of the genre itself rather than an ancillary feature. In other words, in a nice honest package, *LittleGreyBox* provides a toolkit through which other similar works can be ethically evaluated and their economies successfully traced. Certainly they are faithful to the fantasy of self-sustaining and perpetual travel.

Indie Traveler and *Indiana Jo*: Brand Coach/Content Coach

Yet, as with any fantasy, the reality is more complicated and *complicating*. In fact, in many arenas, some quite profit-driven, resources have arisen designed to shape these fantasies into a reality. Some of these sites, which will be discussed further on, read like a type of get rich quick travel writing pyramid scheme. Others, written by successful travel writers, simply offer some advice for consideration. In continuing to look at digital economies, the next focus is on Marek Bron's own anti-commodity blog called *Indie Traveler* which uses its unwillingness to participate in common, suspicious compensatory practices as a rhetorical selling point for the validity of its content. As this publication, features an editorial on generating travel publications, Bron's work will be discussed alongside the similar work of Jo Fitzsimmos, the writer of *Indiana Jo*, in an

effort to get a better look at the rhetorical purpose that many writers come to the genre with and whether that purpose endures. Motivation, as a synonym for Bakhtinian speech-will, is a hallmark of genre systems for Miller and Shepherd, as well as Engeström and Cole, because this is what an individual writer contributes within the system—it is always a part of the utterance, regardless of uptake. In the case of digital travel publication, at least some aspect of this motivated discourse has its origin in economics, whether the generation of profit for continued travel or for some other purpose, regardless of whatever ideologies it invokes or processes it encourages.

Clarifying this, Marek admits that what drew him to writing a travel blog is the same thing that draws nearly everyone else. He writes, “I know that must sound like a dream (and it is), but if you’re thinking of becoming a travel blogger too, I do have a few words of caution. Gaining an audience, let alone earning money with a travel blog, is *not* easy. And I think it’s important to say this up front. Some bloggers seem to pitch travel blogging as some kind of easy cure for all of life’s problems. ‘Just quit your boring life, start a travel blog, and follow your dreams! Soon you’ll be riding a unicorn!’ Well, I think it’s better to have realistic expectations.” While he is being somewhat reductive, many travel writers *do* locate their success solely on their ingenuity and courage: because *they* were willing to simply throw away their old lives and get a camera and a chomebook, now they travel the world on someone else’s dime without a care in the world.

This is the fantasy that is packaged and sold to literally everyone who has ever entertained the idea of long-term travel and it endures probably because of its partial truths. The curious thing, regarding economy at least, is visible in the structure of the

fantasy itself. Often, when talking to travelers of all types, one hears the desire to travel *and* get paid for it, or to travel *and* do it for free as the result of some type of travel-related digital labor. Very rarely does anyone say that they simply wished they had access to a trust fund to pay for endless travel. Perhaps this is an insignificant detail, like the difference between winning the lottery (seems impossible) and becoming a professional athlete (seems possible through individual effort but is statistically less likely than winning the lottery). However, fantasy is not usually so simple and the fact remains that economic benefit, in some form, seems to be an intrinsic part of digital travel writing that comes just *after* the travel part and just *before* the writing. This indicates that the genre itself never really occupies that privileged position of *apart-ness* from mainstream life but is always, in Jameson's language, an aesthetic commodified. Simply put, to even develop a digital travel publication is to initiate participation in attendant economies and to duplicate related devices.

Marek continues, "Because of how search engines and social media work, the reality is you just won't capture an audience right away... That's why I always say you should start travel blogging because, above all else, it seems like a fun thing to do (which it is). And certainly, if you keep doing it for a while (at least a year), you can see where else it can take you." Again, Marek is fighting against the fantasy here. The tendency, from the outside, is to see successful travel writers, like Nomadic Matt, as having erupted spontaneously by sheer force of will to become immensely successful. People now view social media influencers or Soundcloud rappers in the same way: one or two out of millions make it, and those one or two become the representative sample of all that is possible. Their success is distilled down to something they have, by virtue of just being

them. What this obscures is something that Marek hints at: there are countless factors outside of an individual's control. It is impossible to trace them all: how does one afford the travel in order to write about it, what can one possibly contribute that is original, how can one afford the camera and the GoPros and the drones, where does one learn website design, and so on.

Interestingly, many of the biggest names in digital travel writing, and those who have expanded into print media, are those travelers who happened to be starting their adventures in the mid-2000s, just around the time that Miller and Shepherd were studying the blog phenomenon as a genre. At that point, as they mention, blogs were already on the decline—certain types of thematic “blogs” were still being written, but the genre had largely stabilized and its socially-mediated need was diminishing. Out of that was a blooming social media presence—this was the era of Facebook once it made the jump off of college campuses and into the hands of anyone with an email. YouTube was also in its nascent stages and the idea of sharing video and image was more appealing than standard text. And while early blogs always had embedded image, they were mostly a textual genre, borrowing from, as Miller and Shepherd clarify, ships logs and various other related media. The point is that the writers traveling (or the travelers writing) at this time were doing so a crucial confluence of factors, the absence of any one of which could have crippled their project, but the combined force of which helped them to establish what can now be considered the main-stream canon of the genre. Skill, even profound multimodal literacy, is only a part of the equation.

Marek continues, going deeper down the economic rabbit hole. He lists reasons for starting a travel blog, including “travel for free” and “build a portfolio” as well as

“earn direct income.” While he is circumspect as to how quickly (or indeed if) any of these things will actually happen, he writes, “you can even make a living directly from a blog through things like advertising, affiliate links, or product sales. This is what’s enabling me to make a six-figure income from *Indie Traveller* right now. Keep in mind you’ll first need a lot of visitors. The thing about using banner advertisements or affiliate links is that might make you barely anything for ages, and then suddenly quite a whole lot...” He adds, “A blog can also be a perfect launching pad for a freelance or consulting career. What better way to get gigs in travel writing, social media management, or WordPress consulting than having an amazing public showcase of your work?” And of course this is all distinct from simply traveling for free, about which he writes, “you *can* often stay for free in hotels, get free tours, or even get entire trips paid for you. Of course, that’s in exchange for useful publicity. That means you’ll need to work for it and give sponsors the exposure they’re expecting. But if you have a knack for personal branding and social media, you can get a lot of travel experiences for free.”

Starting a simple page to record day-to-day travel adventures is certainly a place to start—Indiana Jo, in her work on travel writing advice, says that this is a totally acceptable purpose for a traditional blog, even though there is no real audience. But the overwhelming majority of nascent travel writers are not inspired by the thought of putting their musings online—they want the James Bond glamour of being in exotic locations while getting paid. Jo explains the reality: “Pitching, writing, marketing, tweeting, chasing payments, balancing accounts, managing a website, planning travel routes, booking flights, spending 12 hours on a bus, finding accommodation, finding food, finding wi-fi, finding power, searching for a/c, taking a day tour, spending an afternoon at

a museum, spending half a day searching for contact lens solution, getting sick, needing an afternoon nap because you had a bad night's sleep on a night bus through the Andes, and occasionally...very, very occasionally, sampling the nightlife and taking a break to visit a beach.” In other words, nearly every travel writer that has any amount of visibility is not living the fantasy that others have and certainly not living the fantasy they once had of the work—at a fundamental level, there is no digital travel writing without economic gain at the genesis of the rhetorical purpose.

Marek continues by detailing the process of starting a publication—theoretically, before audience is conceived or words hit the page, certain things need to be in place to make anything else possible. He begins by offering some possibilities for securing a domain name, then continues by explain how to install WordPress and manipulate various themes and appearances. He adds, “...it's super important to have your own domain name. Even if you're just doing a blog for fun (for now). Here's why. Firstly, if your web address looks something like *http://mytravelblog.wordpress.com* it's hard to remember and looks amateurish. But the bigger problem? It's that you won't be building up any Domain Authority. Think of it this way: when Google sees that you're posting good content and getting links to your blog from other sites, it's kind of keeping score in the background.” Again before a single plane has been boarded or hostel stayed in, before the travel even exists, considerations are made as a result of economic conditions.

For these reasons, Marek emphasizes the attention needed to develop personal branding and a niche within the genre. He gently, though accurately, pokes fun when he observes that every variation of “nomadic” and “wandering” are already taken—he recommends something without the writers name that perhaps relates to the content in

some novel way. Like any good brand, think of representation; how does the name sound on the lips and what will the logo look like? He writes, “Let’s face it: there are many more travel blogs out there now than there were just 5 years ago. That’s why it *really* helps to stand out and to focus on underserved topics.” Indiana Jo adds, “So, yes, travel blogging absolutely is a crowded space. But, if you have a good niche, a determination to commit to your blog professionally and over the long-term, you should absolutely give it a try. It may not be a get rich quick scheme, the pay is terrible and the hours are even worse, but it’s absolutely and totally worth it.” Interestingly, both Marek and Jo only mention the actual writing indirectly in a sort of off-hand or gestural way. In past, mostly print, iterations of travel writing, the quality of the prose would be considered the main factor in determining the success of the writer and the success of the work. Yet, in this particular field, the best writing does not necessarily float to the top—in fact, much travel writing, even some contemporary print offerings, is, if not rudimentary, at least not expressly literary. For example, if there is device employed, it would be mostly trite and used in passing—there are few examples of extended metaphor and likely very little in the way of appreciable poetics.

The emphasis that Marek and Jo have for creating that particular niche may help explain the emphasis on identity in travel writing: reflecting back on *Nomadic Boys*, what better way to make fairly common travel experiences stand out than to emphasize the experience of a particular identity category or demographic in that space? While for many, travel to Thailand sounds exotic and foreign and complicated, for the travel set, especially the long-term travel set, Thailand is a beginner destination that has already been extensively mapped and plotted and plumbed for its experiential commodities.

There are countless guides to Thailand and most of them detail very similar experiences and many groups follow very similar routes simply because they are so well-trodden. So writing about Thailand will not impact traffic on Google and will not provide any useful search-terms or keywords that may draw traffic from more well-established sources. Yet, if a beginning digital travel writer thinks about possible Boolean operators, they may encounter ways to make a work pop. Thailand AND budget...no. Thailand AND solo...no. Thailand AND Jewish...well that may have some interesting appeal for travelers that include Jewish as part of their heritage and identity. Again, it is impossible to say what would make that experience distinct but, for travelers or potential travelers that share that identity, it may be more interesting to visit and patronize that particular site than to simply borrow a guide from, say, Nomadic Matt, even if Nomadic Matt's guides may be more well-researched and comprehensive. In an important inversion, even identity concerns are now represented in economic terms as a rhetorically deliberate choice based more in economics than in identity itself—while this is likely not the case for all digital publications that rely on identity, it is an inseparable facet of branding. Would Sebastien and Stefan each have a successful travel publication as a solo male traveler, or would they have a shared successful publication that did not emphasize the gay experience? While it is impossible to say definitively, the answer is likely no as there is nothing about the content or the guides that help it rise to the top of the computational pile.

Marek closes his discussion with a brief run-down of the various ways that he (and other digital travel writers) make money. He mentions Banner Ads dismissively—in reality, hardly anyone clicks on them and they mostly serve as a distraction. However,

he, and many others, use Mediavine as a nice substitute. Although he clarifies that a publication needs “at least 25,000 sessions a month,” Mediavine inserts ads but allows the owner of the site to manage presentation and veto ads at any time. Apparently, according to Marek and others, the pay is quite good and the people at Mediavine know the particular niche they have in the market and are unwilling to jeopardize that with nuisance and unrelated advertisement. The next example, which was discussed above, are Affiliate Links—these are likely the most common subsidy, especially for beginning travel writers. Marek explains, “These are special links that give you a commission if someone makes a purchase. For example, if you link to your favorite hotel on Booking.com with an affiliate link and someone decides to book there, you get a little kickback.” Realistically, almost all professional travelers use the same resources (SkyScanner, Booking, Expedia, Momondo, GetYourGuide, and so forth) so receiving a kickback from an embedded link does not likely pose any type of ethical concern—in fact, if a reader likes a particular site, and is going to book a trip using any one of these sites (which they will), they may as well link through another portal and help support independent travel writing.

Another source of income, and one that has been discussed earlier in this chapter, relates to product sales—these products aren’t necessarily from outside manufacturers but frequently products that the writer/owner has developed him or herself. Marek writes, “Another good way to monetize your blog can be through products that you’ve created yourself. Maybe you could write a book, create a course, or design custom merchandising that you can sell directly to your readers. (Need examples? Jodi at Legal Nomads sells beautiful bags and posters. Matt of Expert Vagabond sells prints of his photography. And

many Instagrammers sell their Adobe Lightroom presets enabling others to achieve a similar look.) If you just want to sell one or two products then Gumroad is a pretty awesome payment processor and hosting platform.” This relates to the next point Marek makes regarding indirect income or indirect benefits, specifically that most success in this area is contingent on a writer's ability to construct, market, and spread their brand: if a writer is able to successfully create a strong and relatable personal image, it is far more likely that he or she will be able to find beneficial partnerships relating to travel.

From this discussion, a few things become clear. Primarily, there is no digital travel writing without economic concern and, in fact, the economic concerns, real or fantastical, prefigure the actual writing or development of content within the genre. Second, digital travel writing is absolutely a product of a particular zeitgeist and reflects the values and developments, both social and technological, of that moment—like any genre, it is historically situated. Finally, a close analysis of economic factors problematizes a simple understanding of elements within the genre. For example, choices that may have at once appeared as purely rhetorical (ie. relating to audience and message) now may seem as having more to do with economic concerns. Though not a primary focus here, it is interesting to consider what implication this may have on Rhetorical Genre Studies more generally as certainly digital travel writing is not the only discourse to have influences that are disguised by the more obvious features of the genre. There is of course a reluctance to reduce rhetoric to economics but, with a glance backwards to the Enlightenment age which really marked the early stages of widespread travel along market-lines, there is some reason to say that the rhetoric at work in digital travel writing is nothing *but* economically situated and in fact travel itself, often seasoned

with spiritualist or orientalist language, is in fact a fundamentally economic endeavor with all the attendant concerns of power and hegemony that follow more overt capitalist machinery. If economics is viewed broadly, then it is really the study of *movement*: movement of people, movement of goods, movement of ideology. In this rendering, the movement for movement's sake that is travel is economic at its base. Thus there really should be no expectation that any utterance in the genre could exist independent of that influence.

Being aware, even on a very basic level, of the economic entanglements that structure the rhetoric of digital travel publications is something akin to being invited on set for the filming of a movie—while a cool experience by itself, it can disrupt the fantasy that film attempts to create. Even if it doesn't disturb film generally, it will certainly impact appreciation of that *particular* film. Yet the millennial generation came of age with technology and all its various intrusive and obscured-profit-making apparatus. While an older generation may be alarmed by intrusions into data by various social media enterprises, a younger generation just shrugs—its not news, not alarming, but rather simply part of the substance of this type of media. What is social media without intrusion, whether invited or not? It is the obscene supplement that has always been already built into the fabric of that type of digital self-representation. It is important to take note of these features of the genre here, be they of identity or economy, as a part of the critical analysis of the genre. But in actuality, where these *real* writers are generating *real* content for a *real* audience, these things may go largely unnoticed as simply part of the background of digital media. Of course these publications emphasize identity, but what doesn't anymore? Of course there are pop-ups and influencer jargon:

where is there not? The main concern here then, above all others, is to try to see these not as impediments to a pure genre (imagined), or impinging on a fantasy or projection of what the genre should be (again, imagined), but rather seeing these issues, which present initially as antagonistic, as characteristic of the genre as it exists. In turning to the next work, a relatively famous publication that has fingers in many pies, the task is to attempt to see it for what it is, as it is, while maintaining something like a neutrality towards its rhetorical considerations, engagements, and economies.

Drew Binsky: A Big Fish in a Big Pond

Drew Binsky is enough of a household name in the world of digital travel publication that he can afford to title his work after his name and avoid a particular niche angle and it is for his omnipresence and typification of the genre that he is discussed comprehensively here. *Wikipedia* calls him an “American YouTuber.” He boasts an impressive number of followers, particularly on Facebook and Instagram, and is influential both for potential travelers and current travel writers. His work is a combination of video and written material, the videos usually being the supplement to a particular guide. Though some of his guides are rudimentary, he does provide insight into the *culture* of a place rather than simply detailing a list of sights and, to his credit, he ventures to places that even intrepid travel journalists fear to tread. In what borders on obsession, Drew has almost been to every country on the planet, having travelled, at present to 184 out of 193 countries and 48 of the United States. None of the travel writers mentioned above have this extensive of a record—Drew has been to Iran, North Korea, and several other African countries that certainly required some serious visa

manipulation to get in to.

None of these accomplishments, however, should be considered the measure by which a work of travel writing is judged. Amidst the inducted, this collection of destinations is perhaps cultural capital—yet for the audience, who is visiting these publications for information and inspiration rather than entertainment, it is effectively meaningless. If a traveler is trying to get a sense of activities in Nova Scotia, they will search for the most comprehensive work by a writer on that particular trip—they don't really care that a writer has been to Micronesia and Gabon and Antarctica even though its not actually a country. In any case, Drew discloses his qualifications for a “trip.” They are: “It must have been at least 7 days long” and include, “at least 5 new destinations.” Regardless of whether or not this amounts to a qualification, Drew has been traveling the world and writing about it since he began a TEFL stint in South Korea in 2012.

This is the first mention of any TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) component in any of the publications discussed so far—this could be because this ready access to employment with minimal qualifications is a closely guarded secret or simply because the writers discussed, with the exception of Drew, have simply not had any TEFL experience. In fact, teaching abroad is often the first thing beginning travelers turn to as an option to fund their adventures as it gives the first long-term exposure to being away from home. In several occasions, a TEFL stint was the inciting event to a life of vagabond travel.

One of Drew's more popular articles, not surprisingly, is titled “How I Afford to Travel Full-Time.” In this article he lays out many of the ideas already discussed in previous publications. He begins, “First thing's first: *No*, I am not rich. *No*, I don't have

rich parents. And *No*, I don't have a huge savings account. *Yes*, I make all of my own money to fund my travels, through hard work, patience, taking advantages of opportunities and being a smart money spender." Obviously, as mentioned earlier, this is probably *the* frequently asked question for travel writers—it is almost as if the idea of continuing to travel is as important as any single trip.

Drew continues, being incredibly specific as to how he generates revenue at this point in time. He writes, "I primarily make money in 5 different ways" and of these five "travel blogging" and "sponsored trips" and "social media campaigns" come in a close second. A number of things he mentions, such as "teaching English" are not expressly discussed above, either because they were omitted by previous writers or because these were not adopted as potential sources of income. When he mentions "travel blogging" as a source of income, he essentially means Affiliate Marketing and Products. He does not passively generate income from views or likes—the only way to monetize this exposure is through sponsorship and this does not come easy. He describes his second source of income, "sponsored/press trips" thus: "A sponsored trip is when a tourism board invites me to their country and I promote my experience on my blog and social media channels." He explains that these are not very common as tourism offices usually do not have the money to pay him for his services on top of airfare, lodging, Etc. His most recent paid excursion was through the Germany tourism board and this is featured on his publication. As discussed earlier, a favorable review is expected and likely directly part of the contracted service.

Making money on "Social Media Campaigns" amounts to basic product placement and sponsorship of the variety usually seen with professional athletes and

celebrities. The fourth, “Snapchat Collaborations” is a little dated as Snapchat does not have the same social pull it did even a year ago. Drew explains how he would “take over” a social media campaign for an independent company through Snapchat and essentially create content for that company. Social media influencers and bloggers and YouTube personalities are all loosely termed “content creators”—the idea is that they are constantly generating something in an effort to keep their brand in the eyes of viewer, many of whom do not pay directly for that content. The financial benefit is when other companies or services recognize the reach that a content creator of whatever media has, and therefore contract that account to plug products or services in some way. Drew writes, “In the past, I’ve done Snapchat collaborations with Tripit, Lonely Planet, Bleacher Report, Germany Tourism and Yahoo Travel — but these opportunities are starting to die down as Instagram is taking over as the King of Social Media.” The last part is even more true now than when Drew wrote it—digital marketing has emerged as one of the popular majors offered in United States universities

Number five on Drew’s list is what he calls the “best way to find a job overseas” and it is also the most ethically concerning. As Drew is not the only one, by any means, who uses TEFL appointments in this way, his description of his experience is interesting. He writes, “teaching English is really the safest way to take that first big leap abroad, because it’s essentially risk free once you’ve locked in your job. Just think about it, you are literally getting paid to teach people your native language, which is so easy that it barely requires you to think... You are NOT required to speak the local language of whichever country you go to, and you are NOT required to have any previous teaching experience. I studied economics and entrepreneurship in college.”

To be fair, many of the countries that actively seek TEFL support (China, Vietnam, other Southeast Asian locations mostly), really want native English speakers, mostly Americans, to come for basic practice and rudimentary instruction. Essentially, this often amounts to conversation practice as many students have already learned elements of grammar and syntax in more formal schooling. The ethical concerns are really visible, however, in Drew's language. Emphasizing the lack of teaching experience, the minimal educational requirements, and that its "so easy it barely requires you to think" all seem to indicate a very parasitic relationship to a position that these countries take seriously. Potentially, Drew and others could say that this relationship is mutually beneficial, a type of symbiosis: these countries want native speakers to assist and post-undergrad students want a chance to live abroad. But what is drawing these students, obviously, is not a passion for teaching and working with foreign cultures but rather a chance to party in a foreign country for minimal reciprocation.

If this seems unreasonable, Drew's own narrative about his origins clarify the experience. He writes, "Two months after graduating college, I moved to South Korea to become an English teacher. When I was accepted for the job, I knew nothing about teaching (90% of my college classes were business related), but I saw teaching overseas as a great opportunity to live and work abroad...From the moment I stepped off the plane in Seoul, I was instantly hooked. It was my first time in Asia, and I was already in love with the foreign sights, smells and feels. During my 18 months living in Korea, I started my first travel blog – *The Hungry Partier* – which was a place for me to document my crazy travel experiences and party stories around the world. I was determined to grow a global audience from day 1, spending 40+ hours per week writing blog posts, networking

with other bloggers and growing my social media channels from the ground up. After 3 years of hard work and patience, I grew *The Hungry Partier* to 150K+ monthly readers and I had about 100K+ social media followers.” Now he explains that, as he matured, he realized that *The Hungry Partier* was not a good representation of who he was or his mission—perhaps he realized that this label was substantially limiting his audience or perhaps he really felt that he had out-grown this phase of his life. Incidentally, the website still exists and the writing is now outsourced to travelers who are willing and able to write party guides for various locations around the world.

The Hungry Partier is beside the point—any traveler who has ever spent time in a dorm hostel knows that this aspect of travel is a reality for a certain age group. What is clear is that the TEFL participation is treated with a minimum of concern and mostly seen as a throw-away occupation to fund a nice extended party away from home. Of course, Drew used this time to begin writing about his travels...but all this was branded to encourage more partying along with the advice to anyone graduating college to sign-up for a TEFL program and get paid to fool around in a foreign country. In reality, many of these countries are paying for an English instructor the best way they know how—in Vietnam, for example, where tourism is the fastest growing industry, apps like *GetYourGuide* are driving sectors of the economy that employ young people (a whopping 70% of the population) in fields relating to tourism. Largely these young people improve their English through contact with native speakers, many of who come over for TEFL work. So while there is reciprocity (these countries know that young college graduates would want to live abroad for a year or more) there is the expectation that they are at least somewhat competent to instruct English. But based on Drew’s synopsis, absolutely no

preparation is necessary and a TEFL instructor can basically just chat away in their native tongue. The economics and ethics relating to TEFL are not of direct concern here and the TEFL work Drew and others do does not seem to have a great deal of impact on inclusions within the genre. That said, since he mentions it so prominently, and because it is such a prominent feature in the lives of long-term travelers, it should not be skipped over as simple footnote in Drew's adventures.

The "About Drew" section continues, summarizing the time since he actively abandoned most of his work on *THP*. Drew writes, "I rebranded myself as my name, Drew Binsky, and launched this blog in August 2016. It's a more simplified, professional and personal website dedicated to sharing my lifestyle, travel tips and insights around the world. When I left Korea (Feb 2015), I set off to travel the world full-time, leveraging my blog and social media following to attract sponsors, which helped reduce my travel costs and keep me going. Over the last few years, I've gone on a 3 month solo backpacking trip in India, visited every country in Central/Eastern Europe, played golf in 19+ countries, visited Antarctica, had an inspiring trip through the Middle East including a 14 day trip to Iran, traveled all over Southeast Asia & the Pacific islands and I've lived in Hanoi, Manila and now I'm currently living in Bangkok." Notice that Drew, and many others like him, still use the term "blog" and "blogging" to describe their work. John M. Swales notes that this shared idea, even shared language, is the primary feature that establishes the existence of a genre. He writes, "The principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes." (72) Miller and Shepherd write, "That is, to the extent that the blog has become a widely understood and shared rhetorical convention, it

functions as a site of relative stability” (15). They also clarify that, when a group of writers adopt similar terms for their mediated communication, that is a good sign that what they are engaging in is in fact a genre. And Bazerman notes that this type of critical conversation leads to “the kinds of shared orientations to and shared participations within mutually recognized moments” (Constructing Experience 110). The point is not to establish this type of writing within the greater genre of blog, even while that language endures as a layover from earlier antecedents—as stated above, despite the colloquial use among participants, the blog as such no longer exists and is a relic of an earlier stage in digital literacy. The point here is to note, in Drew’s language, his orientation towards his material and his subject and the way that orientation is shared by all contributors and is directed towards commodification—it is this feature, as noted by Miller and Shepherd, that indicates very clearly that the conventions being adopted have their origin in a shared set of communicative features, or a genre.

Drew Binsky is not a blogger, regardless of what terms he chooses to identify with. In fact, it is clear that, since reinventing himself as a more stable and professional travel writer, his publication has taken a more deliberately professional turn. While there are still travel guides and thoughtful editorials (his “Top 10 Favorite Cities on Earth” and “Iran is NOT what you think!” are two standouts), it has the feel of a digital *curriculum vitae* in many respects. His portal page begins with direct mention of his influence; he gives actual up-to-date numbers of all followers across various platforms. Directly beneath that is a list of all collaborations and companies Drew has worked with over the years, including *GoPro*, *The Huffington Post*, *Lonely Planet* and *Visit California*. Continuing down the page, there are some links to current posts, both written and visual

through YouTube as well as a section titled “Work with me” that has a few reviews from people, professionals, who have worked with Drew in the past. Rather than being a portal designed for a particular readership, it feels like his page is more directed to securing outside contracts for his travel journalism and, while his page still has valuable tips for everyday budget travelers, his emphasis seems to be leaning towards more professional content production for outside media and tourism sources.

A quick turn to his “Press” section really demonstrates the “LinkedIn” nature of his work: he lays out his skill set (digital and print writing, branding) as well as his portfolio of current work in print media and television. So while some digital travel writers focus on some of the features of digital branding and affiliation, Drew seems to be using his influence to construct a portfolio of outside work in an effort to secure outside contracts for travel. Theoretically, this would provide a more stable income and allow him to not focus so much on being a brand ambassador and seeking partnerships, a process which he explains, at several points, takes a great deal of time and energy as it is often he who has to seek out these potential collaborations. This is not reducing his work to a type of résumé—his “travel tips” and “packing” sections are both immensely useful and his general guides give some advice on traveling to hard to reach places, but the outline of his work is tending towards his personal marketability. It should also be acknowledged that the majority of his regular content is video-based through his YouTube channel which has a respectable three-quarters of a million followers—the video on travel in Afghanistan is both well-produced and exceptionally interesting as is a recent Instagram production titled “How far can you get on \$10 in the Dominican Republic?”.

Part of entering and participating in a genre is learning its codes, moves, and relationships. In many areas of life, this happens organically and socially—this does not always mean it is a comfortable process. Many times beginning a new hobby, as interesting as it may be, carries with it the stress of being a novice, unfamiliar with the ways of communicating in that particular space. Other times, entering a genre is more formal—James Gee famously talks about the discourse of academic writing and the challenges students face when attempting to “try on” that role and then mimic various versions of it in a move towards mastery. This process of trying-on, attempting-through-mimesis, and self-revision are types of threshold events for genre-fluency. It takes time, exposure, and practice for a particular discourse, a genre, to become native—once it is native, it cognitively restructures the brain: once a person learns a new language to a near-fluent level, for example, it becomes effectively impossible to un-know that language or remember what it was like to not know it. This is similar to the epistemological observation made by T.S. Eliot when he observed that a new era arrives what something is intrinsically altered, paradoxically, about everything that came before it. It is this way with genre and genre fluency.

One could enter into this genre of Digital Travel Publication by extensive reading, communication, and personal trial and error—that is what many of the writers thus far discussed did as, over time, they learned more about their craft, both the writing and the digital elements, and combined it with a type of marketing only possible in their particular medium. Yet, because of the draw these writers (and their experiences) have on their readership and because of the fantasies they perpetuate and occupy, entire businesses have arisen, designed to effectively teach the genre, its adoption and

deployment, to novice students. To finish this chapter, it is important to turn away from the publications themselves and look towards the industry of education that has naturally sprung up in response to the incredible proliferation and population of the genre. This only reiterates that economic concerns are structurally inseparable from the genre. And the natural starting place, here as everywhere, is a Google search.

Selling the Fantasy: The Business of Genre Literacy

For one payment of \$99, *Superstar Blogging* will get a reader and traveler well on their way to an exciting career in travel publication. They ask, “Do you dream of literary success? Do you want to improve your blog, get a story published, or write that bestseller that is bursting to break free?” The answer is yes. They continue, “Are you looking to improve your writing? Break into the travel industry and land assignments that send you to far reaches of the globe?” Again, the answer is yes—being a travel writer, at least in the popular imagination, is something like being James Bond without the supervillains. Travel itself, even in the origins of the genre, may be one of the most heavily romanticized arenas of human experience—there’s a reason why the fantastical tales of African or South American exploration captured the attention of large and diverse audiences as late as the Edwardian era. To be able to write extensively about travel, have that travel sponsored and paid for by employers, and to get paid for the writing itself...this is the dream that continues to draw more and more people to field. And where it once felt impossible to navigate the world of editors and agents and publishing generally, the thought of being able to have full creative access through digital resources is highly appealing.

One could argue that the existence of this *Superstar Blogging* website, which is actually hosted by Nomadic Matt's domain, could denote that writers trying to come to this movement now are already too late. Once resources like this are packaged and marketed to the consumer, it is certainly likely that the authentic moment has passed. There are many ways that this could be true—some of the most well-known contemporary travel writers, having started in the early 2000s, made the switch from digital publication. At that time internet access wasn't exactly new, but it also hadn't reached the high-watermark yet. The thought of being able to self-publish online represented a new way of thinking about the world and media and access. During this time, travel writing was still being done in the internet cafés of the world, on streets near hostels in Bangkok and Shanghai and Hanoi. The initial heralding of new democratic and egalitarian access to information has passed; while these lofty ideas still exist in some form, much of that initial headiness has turned to distrust. Those coming to the genre now, either as a potential participant or just an avid researcher, would likely be struck with option-paralysis—while searching for commonalities in the identity of the writer or the marketing of the blog can help narrow the scope, there is admittedly limited variation in nearly every bit of digital travel writing that deals with Siem Riep and Angkor Wat.

To stand out in the crowd at this late hour, which is the necessary prerequisite to the type of success *Superstar Blogger* is selling, is more difficult by the day and, with so many of the digital travel writers discussed above having the head start on equipment (cameras, MacBooks, gear, free flights even) the odds are even more unfavorable. At the very least, it seems that someone trying to come to the genre should spend most of their

time traveling and reading, learning web design, and improving their drone piloting skills—the writing, is really just a small part of these publications and probably the least important. Any writing done should be done out of a sense of documentation and fun, rather than any expectation of compensation.

Not surprisingly, David Farley and the team of contributors to *Superstar Blogging* disagree with that assessment. The pitch continues: “We know that when the barrier to entry is low and *Buzzfeed*-style lists dominate the Internet while publications shutter, it can seem like there’s no hope of making it in the travel writing world. While there *is* a glut of potential writers, there’s still a dearth of *driven* ones. There’s quantity but not quality, and I want to show you how to break free from the crowd, find the big breaks, improve your writing, and make it in this industry. This course covers all aspects of travel writing. It will teach you how to craft the perfect story, improve your writing, self-edit, and enhance your research through video, writing samples, examples of edited work, and much more.” If nothing else has become clear about digital travel writing as a genre, it should at least be noted that “stories” as such are not very important. In fact, of all the works discussed, only Philipa’s, and perhaps Gupta’s, was expressly literary in any recognizable way. Some do rely on editorial or journalistic reporting more than guidebook-style detailing, but few contain hints of a conflict or a resolution one would expect from storytelling. While the list of publications discussed here is not comprehensive, it is representative—hours spent combing the internet for the most obscure bits of digital travel writing will still fail to reveal much in the way of deliberate story-telling.

In the midst of all this, one interesting trait does emerge. When running digital travel publications, travel writers seem to rely more on editorial and description—they detail their travels either with topical nonfiction or by particular location. However, when these same travel writers make the leap out of the digital space to print (Rolf Potts is a famous example but in the last six months Matt “Nomadic Matt” Kepnes and Lauren Juliff of *NeverEndingFootsteps* have both published offerings available on Amazon) they suddenly abandon past rhetorical approaches in favor of narrating their experience. Suddenly the wanderings and encounters have a cohesion relating to some particular type of conflict, usually of the man-vs-self variety, and the emphasis on *spaces*, the focus of the digital writing, is replaced by an emphasis on *time* of the chronological variety. Thus the chronotope the genre changes into a form that would be more anticipated in print.

Certainly some digital travel writers publish small guides and editorials for travel magazines but, when they step into that first book, or even that first published article in a traditional print magazine, which the type of writing *Superstar* is ostensibly supporting, the result has little in common with the digital genre. For whatever reason, the digital writers don’t publish their own guidebooks or collections of travel advice when they move into print—they largely construct narrativized accounts of their adventures in a way that mimics traditional, literary deployments of the genre. This speaks to a little-studied phenomenon by which medium directly and profoundly influences a genre: even though both print and digital borrow from the same nomenclature and share many features in common, something about the medium itself changes the socially-mediated rhetoric even on the level of kairotic agility.

In the fine print, the six-week course is designed to improve writing but the under-emphasized objective is to secure, or attempt to secure, publication as a freelance writer in various edited print publications. Whether this lines up with what many writers want to do is unclear—though it is impossible to be certain, based on the many many advice pages on “starting a blog,” it feels more likely that readers are drawn to digital iterations of the genre rather than publishing for *Condé Nast Traveler*—many millennials and GenZs, the majority of the demographic drawn to long-term travel to begin with, are likely unfamiliar with *Condé Nast* and are not interested in publications that are not mostly digital, visual, and “free.” What should be clear, at this point, is that, while the writing found in these digital publications is not *bad*, it lacks device and is largely rudimentary and descriptive with some small elements of subjective, almost chatty, commentary. This is not a criticism but rather an observation about the language that seems to populate the majority of the genre. A course to improve writing and generate narrative device and develop expository prose is not expressly useful in the digital space; again, it is certainly less useful than a course on web development and videography would be.

Regardless of what may be *useful*, selling a fantasy is easier. Another very popular resource called *The Travel Writing and Marketing Masterclass* offers this take:

Picture this:

It’s early evening and you’re luxuriating in a 5-star Balinese lifestyle resort. You’re reclining on a pristine white daybed with your partner, sipping a cocktail beside the gorgeous infinity pool. Maybe you spent the day wandering around a market and marveling at the colors, smells and sounds. Perhaps you were inspired by art galleries, found intriguing historical sites, enjoyed a bird’s eye view from a hot air balloon and took a dip in the crystal clear turquoise ocean.

Soon you’ll be heading over to the resort’s Michelin-starred restaurant, where you’ll dine on exquisite international cuisine in opulent beachside

surroundings. Tomorrow you'll be experiencing a bespoke aromatherapy spa treatment before boarding the hotel's VIP yacht for an unforgettable snorkeling and diving trip. And the best part? You're getting paid to do this.

This isn't an unachievable dream. I've been paid to travel the globe and stay in the most exclusive hotels and resorts for over nine years. My travel stories have appeared in more than 200 publications and I've earned thousands of dollars writing about the world's most luxurious destinations. Let me tell you, success feels fantastic – and I'm going to show you exactly how to do it.

That all sounds delightful—it is the basic form that every travel writing fantasy takes.

Details change, locations also, but the essential form of fantasy endures and is apparently just within anyone's grasp if they attend Roy Stevenson's masterclass where he apparently "gives away all the secrets." The description above is completely ridiculous on a number of levels—if someone pays to fly to Seattle or Hoi An, Vietnam (where these seminars are held) then they deserve to be fleeced for every penny they have.

This type of pitch is of the get-rich-quick variety: it reinforces some stereotypes about travel writing that probably have nothing to do with the genre or even journalism generally, and trades in hyperbole. What it does provide, indirectly, is some reinforcement for the status of "travel writer" in the popular imagination and also just for the category of *travel writer* more generally. In other words, *travel writer* is an actual thing: it is not simply a writer who travels, or a journalist that does a column here or there relating to travel, but an entire subsection of writing itself, theoretically replete with its own practices, assumptions, attitudes, and so forth. The reality of that identity has nothing to do with Roy Stevenson's transparent rip-off masterclass but his farce does effectively allow the recognition of that identity.

But what does that identity look like in terms of the type of writing being done in the digital space? Well for one, a careful glance back at all the works discussed will

show that there is no real mention of “luxuriating”, “Michelin-starred” anything, or even really of “partners.” The majority of travel writers, at least in the world of digital travel rhetoric, do this thing solo. They travel alone, on a thin budget, staying in off-the-beaten-path budget options. Their focus is not on the yacht-life of the Côte D’Azur but on the type of travel that can be sustained for extended periods by really anyone with a little ingenuity and patience. Fancy restaurants are not a commodity here—street food is. Even Anthony Bourdain, who had an endless budget and massive reach, spent most of his shows discussing the type of food that locals eat regularly for less than five dollars and sometimes way less. Trains, buses, and tuk-tuks are the evidence of a true travel experience—first-class flights and private limos from the airport are evidence of tourism. In fact, from a certain perspective, what Stevenson is discussing is really tourism writing—many of the publications he credits with accepting his work are a part of the tourism industry, not the travel lifestyle. Travel, and the writing that follows in the digital space, for better or worse seeks to move into authentic spaces with direct cultural contact. Though certainly there are elements of relaxation, even those are replete with a more fundamental understanding of how travel operates as opposed to mass tourism. What Stevenson’s work really highlights, at least for purposes here, is the originary concern of economic sustainability internal to the digital iteration of the genre.

Another contribution to this growing and lucrative educational market is Tim Leffel’s *Travel Writing Overdrive* and his book *Travel Writing 2.0*. His course is made up of several modules available online and of course his book as well—the whole package runs about \$178 with a “referral discount.” Tim’s approach is a bit different than the previous two courses in that it seeks to take a current writer and help them

improve their marketing and outreach. Tim writes, “The ranks of six-figure travel writers and bloggers are swelling like no time in history. Instead of this being a starving artist endeavor, a travel blog can now be the foundation of a platform that generates serious cash on a recurring basis. The landscape has shifted dramatically in the digital age, producing a larger batch of travel writers, bloggers, and book authors making a comfortable living. For those willing to do it right and put in the work, there’s no need to toil away for minimal money.” Tim is definitely right that the appeal of travel writing is perhaps broader than ever before and that the “landscape” of that writing has changed a great deal; many of the publications discussed above generate substantial revenue from what Tim would likely consider *non-traditional* sources. According to the brief syllabus, Tim’s course does focus, to some extent, on these income streams. Module three deals with, “where to look for low-hanging fruit for travel blogging income” and module nine addresses “vanity stats vs. money stats: what will really catapult your business forward.” Clearly Tim is trying to engage with the digital marketplace, at least gesturally.

For people who have published extensively in print, or that see journalism as mostly print-based and thus privileging the medium, it is likely hard to look at the wild west of digital travel rhetoric objectively. A professionally trained journalist who has studied extensively at universities and honed their craft over years of rejections, revisions, and crappy assignments probably sees this naïve and youthful *blog-o-sphere* as both immature and unsustainable. Regardless of his brief attempt at engaging with digital economies, Tim, as well as the other similar educational sites, still overwhelmingly favor narrative print publication. There is no mention, on any of these sites, of personal branding, social media exposure, likes, multimodal offerings, digital rhetorics, video

editing, or photography. While it can be tempting, especially for those who have received their formative education in the mainstream academy, to give knee-jerk privilege to prose, that is not the area where the bulk of this writing is taking place—it may not even be the area where the most profitable work is occurring. To attempt to build a career in travel writing out of nothing with simple written skill and resolve without any understanding of digital marketing and social media is tantamount to playing basketball in the local park hoping to be discovered by a passing scout—it would make a nice movie, but statistically its unlikely. Digital exposure *is* the way the world runs—to ignore it is simple and stubborn persistence in anachronism.

There are countless other services purporting to offer a thorough education in travel writing. Dave Fox, a former editor for Rick Steves, works with *Udemy*. Max Hartshorne, an experienced travel journalist, works with *GoNomad*. All one has to do is scroll down through a Google search to see all the resources available. While some give some good advice on style and syntax, most give more basic instruction such as “avoid clichés” and “have a unique perspective.” And even still, the focus is on constructing a narrative, creating chronological cohesion, and attracting readers—all of which would be great, except for the fact that this does not exactly apply to the genre as it exists in the digital space and as it is being used by both writers and readers. More relevant is the type of advice provided by Marek, Kristen, and Matt, much of it discussed above, regarding growing an audience, finding a voice, creating a niche, developing a brand, and patiently and faithfully documenting the travel experience for a consumer-audience. It is impossible to project what the average person who turns to Google with a search for “learn travel writing” or “travel writing how-to” is looking for. What is certain is that the

first part of travel writing is the *travel* and while many may not know exactly what that entails, they probably know that it is not Disney World or Royal Caribbean. Travel usually implies profound cultural unfamiliarity and distant geographies—for the average person, it can be hard to conceive, outside of pure fantasy, how that vision can be realized. Though certainly imperfect, digital travel publication seems to keep the *travel* at the center of the process; narrative, editorial, and subjective commentary seem to all revolve around accessibility which, generally, right or wrong, is considered a good thing.

From whatever angle it is viewed, economics remains a prominent generic feature of digital travel rhetoric. Digital labor practices generally are so prevalent and the reach of social media so vast that this type of income generation is hardly even noticed. But in travel writing, the representation of, and entanglement with, economics is visible at every stage in the process. From contemplating travel to structuring the fantasy, from influencer-esque content generation to sponsorship and affiliate links, there is no version of the genre as it exists which remains apart. This is not a criticism—like any other characteristic of a genre, it is just a simple fact, both for the authors who participate in it and the audience which expects it. This certainly relates to countless developments, both in digital technologies and the advanced capitalism which is a part of the zeitgeist.

Genre, for purposes here anyway, is understood as a fundamentally social category. While travel writing as creative nonfiction endures and has a small but stable audience, more and more travel writing, and especially that conducted in the digital space, is about actually facilitating travel, both for the readers *and* the writers. So in addition to adopting its own forms, stylistically and visually, it also has its own purpose and practice and economy. Neither iteration is privileged and certainly there is a

genealogy that binds—but digital travel rhetoric certainly operates by its own rules and these rules may not easily transfer to previous understandings and attitudes. On the surface, it all appears democratic and equitable; the neoliberal cloak safely obscures concerns both in privilege, cultural hegemony, and digital economics. It is these ethical considerations that form the substance of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

ETHICS AND AUTHENTICITY IN DIGITAL TRAVEL WRITING

On a recent trip to Vietnam I had the pleasure of arranging a drive and tour from Hoi An to Hue City while passing through Danang by way of the coastal road and the high pass. I was picked up, to my surprise, by an Australian girl, white, named Alyssa (pronounced *uh-lee-suh*) with her driver Duong. Duong, who grew up in this area and still has a family there, did not speak at all for the duration of our drive—he apparently spoke no English. He listened in resolute silence as this Australian girl told us about his country in a language he ostensibly couldn't understand. She took us to the Marble Mountain, a famous temple complex in Vietnam, and explained the significance of this cultural treasure—he purchased water for us from a local vendor and stayed with the car. His country, for us, was offered in her language, with her voice.

My deep concern over all of this is well-documented in my journal entry for that night. I recorded the following: “weird to see an Australian girl running the tour—said she works in tourism, starting in Greece tending bar before coming to Hoi An—started at a hostel first and moved on to giving tours...” She explained the visa process for working in country—she told me that Vietnam is very accommodating, though she had to travel some distance every few months to get it renewed. She also said that she started off as a vagabonder and was planning on keeping a “blog” but ended up staying in Greece too long. When she had to leave due to visa problems, although she stated that “like no one checks” on the islands, she came to southeast Asia because “its so cheap” and started working in a hostel before beginning work with the hostel owner's tour

company. The hostel owner was a young, white British male. Of course Alyssa seemed honest and even correct when she spoke about the welcoming and friendly character of the Vietnamese people—but Duong was a study in passiveness. It was impossible to tell for certain how he actually felt about the arrangement or his countries' policies toward young, opportunistic travelers-*cum*-travel industry workers but if the inequality was clear to me, it was certainly no less so to him.

I had the chance, fortunately, to ask these questions in the weeks after this: I did my homework and only solicited help from a local population, many of whom were young university students who were attempting to work in the travel industry. Ironically, these young people, who make up an overwhelming portion of Vietnam's population, may never be able to travel themselves—the pay for Vietnamese in the industry is low, especially when compared to the cost of international airfare, and, even if the societal values didn't have many young people looking towards family life in their early twenties, the communist-lite government makes it difficult for them to travel as there is a fear that they will get a taste of western life and western pay and not return.

This anecdote is the tip of an iceberg but serves as a good example of the types of concerns that arise, often cloaked behind the prolific narratives of easy cheap travel, welcoming locals, and delicious “street” food—most of the popularity surrounding travel in southeast Asia is the result of the digital travel writing that began in the late-1990's. In the twenty years since, there has been an “Epcotization” of once-authentic travel enclaves. Chiang Mai, the city which marks the start of the famous motorbike route in northern Thailand is populated by young white expats and the Khao San Road, the once-seedy backpacker slum in Bangkok has been requisitioned by the Thai government in an

effort to package it up for a broader tourism economy. This is the insistent *materiality* of travel writing—it is a feature which, though easily ignored, has endured with the genre through countless iterations. Whether the adventure narratives of *Boys Own* magazine or picture-heavy digital travelogues or professionally-crafted and evocative *Condé Nast* articles, travel writing initiates a movement of people and, as Catherine F. Schryer famously writes, these genres “deeply enact ideology” (122). Both rhetorically and materially this writing functions in an *ecological* way, and thus has a physical impact on the environment.

It is challenging, within a neoliberal aesthetic, to separate an artistic work, its interpretation and evaluation, from markets. Success is largely determined by its salability—and even in the production of art, labor relations are disguised and possession of the work becomes a cultural signifier in and of itself. Everything is reabsorbed into the market but in a way that is so overt as to be naturalized, not disturbing. Within this framework, interpretation of an art-product seems irrelevant as its value is always already established by exchange practices. To make a challenging situation worse for a digital aesthetic, the internet and related networking has managed to homogenize difference into more digestible, though commodified, packets. Thus the neoliberal experience of diversity is often simplified—it seems to function only to keep the mechanism of global capitalism, even global cultural imperialism, grinding away, with its proponents unaware that they are participating in a program that can cause great harm at the expense of the populations and cultures being celebrated. Further, within this ideology, as within capitalism more generally, there is no equation which allows for ethical self-consideration: the question is always if something *can* be done rather than if something

should. This type of concern is not an oversight for digital travel writing—in fact, some element of these ideological concerns is always built into the fabric of the publication, either through infrequent direct acknowledgment or, more often, very conspicuous ignorance. And as Todorov and Berrong note in their work, “the existence of certain genres in a society and their absence in another reveal a central ideology, and enable us to establish it with considerable certainty.” (164)

But the genre as it exists now goes beyond previous concerns. Where earlier travel writing was about exploration, orientalism, sensationalism, or curiosity, digital travel writing more often than not serves as a resource for *actual* travel by a lay population. The work done by these writers has material consequences and even the writers themselves actively contribute, often without acknowledgment, to problematic activities or policies. And in most cases, despite the glaring culpability, these concerns are willfully effaced, often beneath multiculturalist language. Yet, ethical dilemmas are preserved within the chronotope and are thus a feature of the genre and there are no substantial publications which do not manifest ethical issues at some level of the publication.

A Genre at the Crossroads

The genre of digital travel writing exists at the intersection of technological development and multicultural ideology—in many ways, it might be the most useful example of neoliberal aesthetics and artistic production available. For this reason, this chapter is devoted to exploring the relationship between the traveler-writer, their audience, and some of the ethical concerns that this rhetorical situation presents. Rather

than discussing an individual publication alone, each section of this chapter addresses a particular *type* of ethical concern, with the publications discussed clarifying some aspect of that concern.

The first subsection relates to place—Thailand is the prime example of a vagabonders paradise. It is often the first place the intrepid backpacker visits and it has become a beacon of safe exoticism around the world. This increased popularity, however, has not gone unnoticed by the Thai government and this will have untold consequences.

The second section looks a bit closer at an identity category which was not expressly discussed in the prior chapter; as most of these writers are from the millennial generation, some of the values they convey speak to a transitional geo-social moment. The millennial dollar, alongside the expansiveness of social media outlets, has caused the travel-related GDP in many countries to soar. Whether this is the blessing it is made out to be is discussed directly in the third section as travel-centric economies often fall into a chicken-egg deadlock.

The fourth section deals with one of the most important, yet most obscured, concerns of travel: ecology. Many travelers are the same people who drive a Prius at home and buy organic produce; it is very likely that their fascination with global travel more than negates any benefit of conscientiousness at home. This may be an impasse that the genre cannot honestly overcome.

The fifth section looks at the relationship between the author and the audience within the genre as well as the expectations of each—this relationship is troubled, not only by the public and digital nature of the genre, but by the ambiguous labor practices

that have real material consequences.

The last section of this chapter, and in the face of what has been a highly critical project, seeks to isolate that moment of truth that drives the traveler towards the margins. The attempt here is to, if not salvage, at least point to where the genre can be seen as performing a necessary and even favorable role in an otherwise suspicious atmosphere.

Thailand: The Vagabond's Mecca

In an article for *The Australian* published July 29, 2019, Richard Lloyd Parry writes, “For generations of young adventurers Khao San Road has been their first experience of travel abroad; a playground of grubby hostels, cheap booze, recreational drugs and banana pancakes.” He calls this area a “backpacker enclave” and he is not wrong. In fact, Bangkok is a type of symbol for long-term travel. It is the space that, in the imagination of the long-term travel set, especially those from Australia and Europe, signifies alterity and the freedom that this type of commodified experience brings a traveler. Popularized years ago through blogs, word-of-mouth, and the novel *The Beach*, later turned into the film starring Leonardo DiCaprio, this area is well-discovered—perhaps once the stalls and vendors were “authentic” and the cultural contact was direct or real or uncomfortable. Now, however, in the way of postmodern capitalism, the experience has been consumed and regurgitated, a simulacra, or even parody, of the original. This is the highly profitable “Epcotization” of travel and, while *travelers* think that this is just something *tourists* experience, the truth is that travelers today tend to find what they expect to find or rather what they have been instructed to find. The question then is this: is the experience generated just for them?

Thai PBS World released a direct message from the Thai government and the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Again, this is not an outside commentary from a foreign power, but the direct acknowledgement from the Thai government regarding their adaptation of travel as a resource for a broader audience. They state, “Bangkok’s famous Khao San Road, the backpacker capital of the world, will undergo a major transformation in about seven months, led by City Hall, with the aim of making this tourist mecca a *full-fledged tourist attraction*” (emphasis mine). Mercedes Hutton, of the *South China Morning Post*, added her two cents on the issue as well. She writes, “They say you can’t polish a turd, and nor should you want to. Leave Khao San Road for those who want it as it is, there’s plenty of Bangkok to go around.”

Clearly, rather than keep the tiny “backpackers enclave” available for the twenty-something budget traveler set, the Thai government wants to open that space up to a broader population. The cheap beer and marijuana and barbecued scorpions will still be sold, but it will be legislated, routinized, with vendors having to receive permits and with like goods being sold in certain areas. Though the Thai Government has been accused, even recently, of marketing (indirectly) their sex trafficking industry, it is likely that these elements will no longer be present (read *visible*) on the Road. Soft drugs and acceptable *foreign-ness* will be available certainly. But now this will be consumed by a much broader audience, thus generating revenue, not just for the vendors perhaps who are lucky enough to get permits, but also for the government who will certainly profit from all types of conspicuous and furtive involvement.

Without digital travel publication, which is the equivalent of global word-of-mouth, perhaps the Khao San Road would've stayed a popular but unregulated space for the backpackers who crash-land in Bangkok imagining that they are the first to arrive. Perhaps the fantasy of authentic cultural contact would remain undisturbed. It's not that past iterations of travel writing, even during the *Grand Tour* years were not recursive in this way, constantly reinvesting in the continuation of the process, but that now the phenomenon is so widespread as to be treated epistemologically, as a part of an age or generation. Humanist discourse helps this largely slide-by ignored, though perhaps willfully, by travelers but governments are noticing the untapped potential that this type of consumerism brings, even if the commodity is their own culture. Thailand is not the only place beginning to exert control on the micro-economies that spring up around organic travel, but it is one of the most pronounced and, as it is often the springboard into the type of southeast Asia travel that really represents the spirit of the gap year adventure, it is perhaps the first of the big dominos to fall.

There are a number of hurdles when examining the ethics of travel in the space of global capitalism, especially as it presents as a feature of a genre. For one, it is a huge issue no longer restrained to the leisure industry as such but rather pushing into global policy, geography, ecology, psychology, and economics—it is hard (and undesirable) to distill the conversation to a *singular* ethics. Secondary to this is the reality that, in many respects, the phenomenon can only really be discussed historically, as something past, however recent that past may be—it is unclear that an ethical discussion, even one that involved popular issues such as sustainability or identity politics, could have any impact on the future. It may only ever be retroactively commenting on itself. And finally,

though not of the least concern, is the placing of brackets for the discussion—it is impossible to discuss an overarching *ethics* as such without already making value determinations, largely subjective, on what one considers *travel* as opposed to *tourism* and so on. Further, the language of contemporary travel, especially the type represented in digital travel rhetoric, very comfortably obscures issues of privilege, cultural imperialism, latent colonialism, and the uncertainty over whether CBT (community-based tourism) is actually the sustainable and ameliorative practice that it is celebrated to be.

Even today, the reaction is mixed. In an article published for *The Telegraph* on July 29th, 2019, Tom Vater takes issue with the restructuring of Bangkok's Khao San Road—while he admits that it is cultural commodification at its finest, he still suggests that the redevelopment of this area may “kill its soul.” He writes, “...the 400m strip has been a party destination like no other in Southeast Asia, with more than a million annual visitors slumming it, often in a culturally insensitive manner and on a tight budget...” From a comfortable distance, it seems like perhaps it is the responsibility of the traveler is to leave a smaller footprint on the cultural fabric of a visited space. Yet, so many who backpack through Southeast Asia do so for the appeal of cheap accommodation and a level of permissiveness they will not find upon returning to London, Sydney, Stockholm, or Tel Aviv—it is often not so much about visiting Buddhist temples or talking to locals about their farming practices as it is about extracting every last bit of available diversion from a culture for as little money as humanly possible. This is, of course, not uniformly true but, for the majority, it is. And this group fills the spaces of these cities year after year, month after month, even during the rainy season though to lesser degrees, and it has

been happening for so long that local economies have developed around it. Young vagabonders will wander around Hanoi or Siem Reap wearing Asian rice hats and eating “street food” with impunity and are largely welcomed as they would be in no other part of the world—many long term backpackers, like the Australian Alyssa, decide to stay in these locations, perhaps working in the hostels or bars along Khao San Road or countless others like it in similarly popular destinations. But destinations get worn out.

This whole process may be starting to look uncomfortably familiar. Mary Louise Pratt, when talking about the trend of globalization, indicates that the movement of people, especially in these levels, may be a simply “imperial designed neoliberalism” (238). Of course any allegation of imperialism would be denied outright—it is unpleasant within the greater neoliberal project to be seen engaging in any program that is *transparently* extortive. But when talking about Thailand, the backpacker culture generally, and specifically the recent attention being paid to Khao San Road, it is difficult to ignore the reality of western cultural imperialism. Kiki, who writes as *TheBlondAbroad*, developed a lengthy, and quite accurate, guide to Bangkok. She writes, “Visiting the Chatuchak Weekend Market in Bangkok is *retail heaven*. As soon as I walked in I just about died from excitement! Anything you could possibly think of is sold at this market. So, if you wanna bring home a little somethin somethin, definitely plan on coming here. I grabbed some mango and sticky rice, put on my game face and got to work.” She explains further on that the market is visited by an enormous number of customers each year, 70% of whom are allegedly Thai. These markets typically sell all type of goods, from knock-off luxury items and football jerseys to local crafts, theoretically not made in factories but by hand by individual artists. Global capitalism

has a certain reciprocity and the digital expansiveness of contemporary life has only amplified its spread. It is incredible that, even in sites so vastly different in cultural or geographic or racial background, there is a type of cultural uniformity, at least in certain reference areas. At every street market in all of Asia, one can find a Louis Vuitton purse or a Ronaldo soccer jersey—the fodder of capitalism, the consumerist detritus, seems to precede the movement of people in a very explicitly ideological way.

But people too, in the form of travelers, bring their ideologies and fantasies to a culture. And travelers to Thailand, at least of a certain demographic, have expectations they want to be met and many of those expectations involve island partying, recreational drugs, and beach backpacker cabins. In his recent podcast, Rolf Potts, the famous travel-blogger-turned-traditional-travel-writer, discusses the impact that movies and popular culture have on travel. He notes how, on his initial visit to Thailand, the movie *The Beach* was being filmed and how, in the years since, countless young travelers have overrun Thai beaches to the point where the beach featured in the eponymous movie had to be closed. He also interviews Pegi Vail, a cultural anthropologist, on the impact that travel, specifically backpacker travel, has on indigenous travel. Vail states, “What changed in my travels was my own realization of what our impact is as travelers.” The pair go on to discuss the various ways that backpacker culture damages authentic sites and indigenous practices, many of these in ways mentioned above. Interestingly they also note how various works of popular travel media, including *Wild and Eat, Pray, Love* have influenced travelers and their expectations in deleterious ways.

And digital travel writing is at the forefront of creating these fantastical expectations and it does so with selective narration and image-saturation. Kiki, in her

publication, provides indirect examples of these phenomena when she writes, “To celebrate the commencement of our journey through Thailand we decided to give the backpacker bars a shot and go out to the main street to grab drinks. It was absolutely crazy packed with backpackers everywhere you looked. I’m never a fan of these situations and would prefer a local’s spot over a backpackers spot any day...” What she doesn’t realize is that Patong *was* once a “local’s spot” but “westerners” who had certain expectations of experiencing the “true culture” of Thailand moved in, spread the word probably through digital publications like Kiki’s, and an economy developed around housing these travelers and getting them proper drunk. Once a small location, now incredibly popular, it becomes a simulacra of the original, just designed to meet the expectations of the travelers that go there while many bemoan the lack of authentic “culture” and move off into other local areas in search of the next iteration of the travel fantasy. And so it goes as the evident blindspot of the discourse is perpetuated.

Every traveler, again mostly westerners, seems to want to get away from westerners to experience some part of a fantasy of a world that is not the west but they get most of their advice from westerners who are also trying to get away from westerners. It is a bizarre process but not a new one—in fact, viewed slightly awry, its fundamentally no different than the countless, more overtly orientalist enterprises that have plagued European history over the years. Its a social and psychological anxiety to feel that the *Other* has a greater, more free, more libidinally fulfilling access to their desire—this drives the exploratory process and fundamentally defers its attainment. It is no wonder that travelers obsess and invest in their diversion—it is also no wonder that every traveler who has experienced the profound satisfaction of being free from the expectations of

their own culture wants to continue to experience it for days or weeks or years on end. But the playing out of these adventures and fantasies, chasing this desire which is always to be found in the *next* destination or in the next shared story, cannot really be believed to come without a cost. When a society, now profiting from this western desire which is (as ever) centering on the east, realizes the potential profit, they construct an industry, even a basic one, to meet that desire.

Travelers, specifically long-term backpackers, go to Asia with expectations of libidinal satisfaction at a minimal price, in many cases treating people as commodities except in a very gestural way as in posing for pictures with “locals” for the benefit of blog or Instagram—they have their desire for cheap booze and massages and street food met, they often learn a word or two of the native language, and they culturally colonize an area and restructure the entire mode of production. When this reaches its terminal point, a government steps in to attempt to integrate the independent infrastructure that has arisen to meet the desire of these travelers into the economy of the state. Khao San Road and those renovations are the result of this: a culture now integrates the imagination of that culture into its portrayal of self—western travelers will come and they will find what they expect to find. It is no longer really clear in this global capitalist space what is authentic and what isn't but travelers, welcome or no, will continue to push on in search of that elusive *objet a*, often, as Kiki demonstrates, in the form of ostensible and unattainable “authenticity.”

The Millennial Moment

Travel, as *Forbes* and *Business Insider* and Yale University have recently addressed, is an enormous *objet a* of the millennial desire—it is their *white picket fence* and they spend more than any other group on travel even while their per capita income is, on average, lower than any other generation. Tara Cappel explains in a *Forbes* article, “Millennials don’t just see travel as something we do, we identify with it. We consider ourselves citizens of the world and we have an enthusiastic desire to immerse ourselves in another place and return rejuvenated, inspired, and ready for our next adventure. We are travelers.” This is not the vacation group, with two weeks off spent down-the-shore or visiting family in Wisconsin—for this generation, as is noted in the *Forbes* article in several places, travel is their birthright as they were born into a world, thanks to digital advances, that is more integrated, connected, and culturally homogenous than at any time in history. And where in the past the movement of goods and people was obvious (one could *see* the ships, *observe* the language and culture obstacles, even watch the militaristic colonialism occur) now it is diffuse, mired in digital economic practices and neoliberal ideological precedence. So talking about travel now is not simply talking about what people do with their ten days off a year, but rather talking about how an entire generation understands the world and their position in it. It is not enough to have an ethical conversation about travel *qua* commodity—the issue now is a psychological and ideological way of Being-in-the-world, in Heidegger’s terms, and the objects of desire that proceed from it. And if the *travel* part seems incidental, when economists look at an entire generation that would rather contribute money into a diffuse and largely unregulated market rather than into one’s own economy through usury and property

ownership, what they see is a dark cloud of uncertainty that has nothing to do with family trips to Disneyland.

Joszef Borocz, in his article “Travel-Capitalism: The Structure of Europe and the Advent of the Tourist” discusses the concept of tourism as it arose first in Europe in the late-Enlightenment age and the impact that it had on economic progress and privilege. In defining his objective, Borocz identifies a phenomenon he calls “leisure migration” which he calls a “type of trade in which the commodity... [which] was coterminous with the spatial completion of the modern world economy.” (709). Borocz rightly notes that there is a tendency, among historians as well as cultural philosophers, towards *Non Causa Pro Causa* reasoning— just because two phenomenon are happening near to each other, in time or space, does not mean that there is any particular causal relationship. Of course, it also doesn’t mean that there isn’t.

What Borocz really notes is how a confluence of factors created an entire class of people. They were not the aristocracy who did not have to either labor or really employ laborers and thus generated no surplus wealth beyond what they already had. It was also not the labor class, who were compensated meagerly for their efforts with paper money rather than having to physically labor to create goods to either consume themselves or to barter for fundamental consumables. This was the “middle” class: those who *employed* and benefitted from surplus and thus had a growing access to an income that wasn’t needed to run a household or survive or to really feed back directly into a business model. Travel became effectively what Bourdieu called “cultural capital”: not only does a certain *class* of people have access to travel but they can *communicate* those travels, subjectively, to a broader audience who is impressed by the pure curiosity and adventure

of the narrative. But this same process cannot be transposed onto the Millennial phenomenon. The travelers don't have expendable income—in fact, their situation is almost exactly the opposite. They also tend not to value consumables or Veblen goods, instantiating an entire economy of experience. Further they tend not to participate in stable artifices of global capitalism, eschewing property ownership and traditional retirement accounts. Here again, it seems, a class of travelers and writers has been created—the Millennial moment, and the shift towards quality of life consumerism, is a verifiable phenomenon but one whose origins are far more difficult to trace. As Pratt writes towards the end of her exploration into the genre, “Travelers still travel and travel books are still written and read, but the dramatic changes and accelerations of the last three decades require us to learn to think through mobility.” (238). This was written over a decade ago at a time when digital publication was less attached to a particular set of labor practices and the “blog” was still a dominant category—now globalization in the millennial era is coming to take on a different meaning.

The spread of people and cultural products and ideas and identities and values now happens faster than ever before and at great homogenizing levels. There is no separating these digital publications from the process of travel which proceeds them, from the cultural fantasy that drives them, or from the global capitalist mode of production that is the operative ethos of all of it. So while there is no need to comment ethically on the relationship between industrialization and the growth of the middle class leisure industry as it is largely *past tense*, there is a very real need to take a look at what terminal globalization and travel commodification may be doing to the social lifeworld and the role that these digital publications have in keeping the machine moving forward.

In the same way that Fussell's work mentions certain classes of writers, so too has *this* work mentioned a certain class of writer, not so much of race or demographic, though it could be argued that this too is a factor, but of age. And just as it is perhaps not Fussell's error in selection but rather an indication of those who were writing and those who were preserved, so too is the over-representation of those between twenty and thirty years of age here not related to a particular privileging of that group. Overwhelmingly, that is who is writing digital travel publications. There are outliers, some of whom are well known, but many of these, while they have a digital footprint, do not rely on their digital publication for income but rather use their digital work as a type of portfolio for publication in tradition travel journals or to obtain print book contracts. As Tara Cappell states, travel is the millennial's birthright, identity, and *modus vivendi* as "citizens of the world." One could easily replace "travel" with "technology" or "social media" or countless other hallmarks of digital globalization here and the result would be the same. As mentioned above, this logic is slippery but it may be worth the risk of fallacy to say that it is no accident, no twist of historical fate, that saw the popular drive to the margins of the explorable world occur in the same generation where, through the massive and rapid expanse of technology, the world got suddenly much much smaller.

In this scenario, it is absolutely no surprise that an entire generation saw potential where none had existed before: combining travel with digital resourcefulness has allowed many of this generation to successfully travel mostly for free. They were riding a great and unprecedented wave and this success blossomed into an industry which quickly replaced, or at least supplemented, previous modalities. Guidebooks (aside from the rudimentary *Lonely Planet* or *Rough Guides*), network or public travel programs, group

tours, travel agencies...all of these are effectively not in use any more for the generation that is spending by far the most money to circle the globe. And this group, with this vast economic fingerprint, is not visiting the traditional places like Paris and London but has moved so far into the margins that places like Bangkok are now mainstream enough to justify turning a small road of hostels and street vendors into a verifiable tourist destination.

This is the power of the millennial dollar and this is inseparable from the lengthy dialogs, discussions, personal guides, exhortations, videos, and narratives all generated as a profitable sector of digital travel writing. This writing makes everything seem possible: Iran? Countless guides exist. West Africa? Even more. Drew Binsky has a guide, complete with videos, for traveling in Afghanistan, a place he has been more than once. While many Americans still associate travel to Croatia or Bosnia with the Yugoslav Wars of the early 1990s or Vietnam with the horrible destruction of the Vietnam Wars of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, many travelers now, and also young people working in travel in those destinations, have no direct knowledge, or even concern about, those conflicts. In many ways, the world *feels* as open as a Google search, and with each place a travel writer visits and writes about digitally, the safer travelers feel to follow in those footsteps. While it may be years before American eighteen years olds are spending a summer in Syria, travel writers, many of whom not much older than that, are visiting these places and publishing independent guides, videos, and vignettes of their experiences in Damascus.

It becomes clear from the traveling that this generation is doing, and the writing they are generating organically through digital mediums, that people *can* travel to these

places; the problem may be that, because the focus is now so overwhelmingly on what *can* be done, and because digital innovation and social media makes the world *seem* so homogenous, authentic difference, or even danger, may be obscured. Kiki runs the *TheBlondAbroad* mentioned above as a very successful and very well-designed digital travel publication that focuses on solo (white?) female travel; yet, she doesn't give a great deal of background in her About section, preferring sparse, stock details about dissatisfaction with her career before eventually deciding to quit and travel the world. Again, in the world of digital travel writing, this is a common archetype—someone who is educated, started a career, and found it to be not what they were expecting and so saved enough money to jump ship. She writes, “Like many people, I was taught to go to college, get a job, get married, have kids and live happily ever after. Not once did I consider that chasing the societal idea of ‘success’ would lead me to an unfulfilling and unhappy life...” This is representative of the attitude that is troubling economists as millennials cannot be counted on to invest in the traditional system that largely sustained the United States financially and politically since World War 2. In fact, as the baby-boomer generation begins to decline, there is a great deal of uncertainty as to who will be controlling the rudder and which direction the ship will be pointed.

Millennials feel largely disenfranchised, literally tormented by Burke's negative, and as such, their voter turn-out is historically low, even though over 30% of the world's population is now under 30. Student debt is high, healthcare is a disaster, retirement is not in their vocabulary as saving is difficult if not impossible—buying a home, investing in the stock-market, and spending money on consumables, all the hallmark of a strong economy, are not really so much on the millennial radar. And neither is reproduction. So

with these real material obstacles, it is probably no wonder that the ethos is solipsistic generally and, while many digital travel writers within this age range write at length about their personal education and all that they've gained from travel and so on, it can be difficult to not see this as at least potentially disingenuous or self-serving. Whether the travel is making them, or anyone really, a better person is up for debate and will only be revealed in years to come—it is possible this is the new escapism, a way to jettison from a difficult and confusing reality. In this way, travel has become a type of religion-sans-dogma, the new opiate of the dissatisfied masses just like countless other socio-spiritual phenomenon placed on the shelves over the past decade. Where the movement of people was once based on the acquisition of physical resources, the language now seems to denote a more metaphysical process at work.

The Dark Side of Travel-based GDP

There is a question that insists beneath all these discussions: what responsibility do travelers, and especially travel writers, have when visiting and documenting these places? In some cases, there are initiatives to preserve fragile ecosystems, such as limiting tourists through registered companies in the Galapagos, but less often are there concerns about a particular culture, neighborhood, or region. And in sites where so much of an economy is driven by a single industry, it can be hard for governments to effectively ban or limit travel without incurring the wrath of its own people.

There are several possible results here. The first thing that could happen is nothing: backpackers will still come, regardless of the changes, though perhaps in greater numbers as now the destination has conceivably more press than before. These

backpackers, the intrepid travel writers among them anyway, will confess the lack of authenticity but they mostly know it will not be authentic going into it and go there anyway. There is reason to believe that this is the most probable as there is already some inclination in this direction.

Another possibility is that the changes made will increase the flow of tourists to the area, saturating the city in ways that could not have been predicted when the changes were implemented. Bangkok already has a cruise ship port and, on the tier of worst possible travel methods, this ranks as the absolute worst even above the ubiquitous tour bus. The problem with this type of travel, even aside from its ridiculously packaged travel experience and environmental impact, is the sheer population it contributes to various ports. Cruise ships are feckless, profit-motivated enterprises that pay top dollar to deposit witless tourists into locations for a potted and overpriced experience—certainly, if the changes are made to Khao San Road, buses will be collecting cruisers from the terminal and bringing them to the road so they can see the massage parlors (actual massages for the most part) and “cheap” bars, which will likely now be overpriced by Thai standards, and government-regulated knickknack vendors. Maybe backpackers will still stay in the hostels or maybe a different class of backpacker will be there or maybe the hostels will all but close, turning into mostly bars or restaurants or shops. Either way, there will be heavily-taxed refrigerator magnets available at every turn.

A third possibility is somewhere between these two or really a combination of both—this is what the reality has become for eastern Europe and specifically the Balkans. Islands, once small local communities, now have backpackers, the yachting set, and

enormous cruise ships packing harbors. Dubrovnik, once a quaint backwater in a forgotten and fairly inaccessible portion of Europe, went from being “discovered” by intrepid backpackers to having overpriced pizza and pasta shops and *Game of Thrones*-themed bric-a-brac on every corner and in every nook and cranny. Backpackers still go there (how can you not?) but the hostels are more expensive, replaced mostly by smaller home-stays to combat the larger hotel chains that have moved in—any real “traveler” or even enterprising tourist would want to stay the night: the cruise ships dump so many people in the small old city every day during peak season as to effectively make *daytime* walking in public impossible.

The expectations for travel there have changed—there is no longer any clear idea what authentic Croatian culture would be, at least in certain places. The country turned its beautiful coastline towards tourism and the result has been a startling jump in the GDP—and thanks to the internet, this has all happened in far less than twenty years. What once would have taken a generation to occur as word of mouth spread and print publications were passed around a very particular group of people, now takes literally only months. The genre of digital travel writing as it exists is *highly* dialogic; once one writer visits a place and writes or videos or blogs or posts about it, dozens more will follow with a great deal of authenticity rhetoric, effectively responding to what other writers have written about that site, colonizing it with language. Other backpackers will follow, some will decide to try their hand at travel writing, and they too will share narratives or travel guides or even just pictures, and in a short time, the resources will run dry as a place is effectively overrun with westerners and Chinese tour groups. In Dubrovnik, on a summer’s day, it could be very difficult to spot anyone who is Croatian at all.

When I went to Dubrovnik I elected to stay in a homestay—it was friendly, reasonable, and run by a middle aged woman who I found out only later had lost her husband to cancer some years earlier. She was very welcoming and full of useful advice on navigating the old town; when I arrived, though it was late-Spring and approaching peak season, she met me at the entrance to the city and walked with me to the house. When we had dinner a couple days later, and after a couple of glasses of wine, there was an honest conversation, one that I documented in my journal at the time. We discussed the changing demographic of the city—smaller older houses were being bought by investors, most of whom weren't Croatian, to turn into rental apartments. Her face clouded up, her eyes misty and averted. She said hesitantly, "Its nice that people want to come...but this is my home, you know?" She continued explaining how many of her friends, some who had lived in the walled city for years, couldn't bear the rapid change in fortune tourism had brought. Some sold willingly, others were displaced. "They raised families here. They cleared the bombs with their own hands. Now they are gone." The economy in Croatia has grown and many people have gotten quite rich on its transition into a verifiable destination, but the cultural, human costs are unclear. It is a beautiful country, and I would return in a heartbeat, but I don't know that I would go back to Dubrovnik: there's just too many *tourists*...

This all presents very negatively and with no satisfactory alternative—certainly travel cannot be reconciled simply to a destructive, cultural imperialist process. Anyone who has traveled even modestly can recognize the benefits in their day to day life: just having a broader understanding of a place when its mentioned on the news is valuable and having greater contact with humans of all backgrounds and beliefs contributes

towards a more unified conception of humanity and the issues facing humanity as a whole. But at the same time, leisure is not travel—the cultural hegemony of moving in a mass group of like people from place to place will perhaps not have any of the benefits listed above. Travel in groups is insulating and really prevents contact with any unfamiliar or uncomfortable aspect of travel which effectively is what makes travel, travel. But if one is looking for leisure, which is in many ways inseparable from travel, then the unfamiliar is not desired: most of Jamaica’s tourist economy is not composed of people staying in hostels in Kingston but rather in the enclave-resorts of Montego Bay or Ocho Rios. In large sections of Spain’s eastern coast, one hears more British English spoken than Spanish.

It is a complicated process overall, even more when there is a genre of writing which is impacting the flow of people and resources on a scale never before seen in human history. The travelers going to these places, those staying in home-stays in Vietnam or (for now) posting up on Khao San Road are not getting their information from Rick Steves or from reading *Afar* or *Travel +Leisure*—this is all coming from other travelers, like themselves really in background and experience, who are writing and documenting their own travels through multiple media outlets and with unique rhetorical intent. Examples like Dubrovnik and Bangkok abound: in countless “discovered” destinations around the world, the influx of money has caused the out-flux of culture and restraint. Once pristine areas are developed to draw an ever-increasing number of tourists. Airports or cruise ports are expanded, disturbing natural wildlife. With every destination a traveler writes about, the number of travelers who pass through there, cultural expectations and commodifying practice in tow, increases inestimably.

Whether it is desirable to curtail world travel, or world tourism, is a different conversation that is eclipsed by the reality that it may be effectively impossible. What remains then is the necessity to evaluate both the motives and means travel, both by the travelers themselves and the governments and cultures which host these vagabonders. Yet, capitalism leaves precious little space for this type of self-evaluation—if profit is being generated, both at a national and private level, there is little recourse to stop it. Governments can regulate cruise ships and ports, they can raise VAT taxes or limit hostel occupancy, but often this comes at the expense of their economy and the population which profits off the tourism industry. As mentioned, many Vietnamese students are studying tourism as a program at university in the hopes of working within the domestic industry—if the government were to limit backpackers and tax off-the-book homestays, an enormous population of young people would be out of work and thus discontent. There is no easy way out, not for the whole host of people and governments and businesses which profit off of the tourist economy, nor for all the people who identify with the wonderful process of travel. In the end, it is always better to see things as they are rather than through a more comfortable ideological filter. I do not plan to abandon or even limit my travels, but I cannot afford to see myself as innocent even when it would be easier to do so.

Travel and the Environment

It is interesting that a genre so indebted to a love of the natural world, which so deeply appeals to neoliberal virtue and cultural patronage, is actually rapidly contributing to the destruction of the planet in more ways than one—even more concerning is the conspicuous avoidance of the environmental implications of travel by writers within the genre. Anyone who pays the slightest attention to contemporary western political discourse knows that liberalism is inextricably bound to ecology. The fact that the environment is politicized in this partisan way is another issue—for purposes at hand, it is important to note that this obvious omission is an ethical slippage in an otherwise fairly stable rhetorical position. Of the countless publications explored for this project, only a few even gesture towards environmental concerns, some offering platitudes about not using plastic bags from stores or bringing water purification bottles to avoid plastic consumption. Not that this is inaccurate information but the advantage gained by not using plastic is not even a tiny drop in the bucket when looking at the carbon emissions generated by the travel industry.

Jack Miles, in an article for the *Washington Post* in 2017, writes "Minute by minute, mile by mile, nothing that we do causes greater or more easily avoidable harm to the environment than flying, which more often than not is optional or merely recreational." He is not wrong and the industry is well-aware of the damage done, which probably contributes to the amount of money they ear-mark for advertising campaigns, including the sponsorship of many of the travel writers discussed above. Jack makes a radical appeal: "So for the love of the Earth, our common home, our only home, start conducting more remote work meetings and training sessions virtually. Inform those jet-

setting friends that you won't attend their destination wedding in the tropics — you'll send a gift in the mail. Tell that conference organizer that while you're honored to be invited, you would prefer to participate in live online sessions instead. Start taking vacations by train or car, rather than flying to Paris or beyond. Explain to your ecological public interest group that the Galápagos will be much better off without you..."

Ecotourism, then, is effectively another marketing tool—while yes, certain “ecotour” groups may improve upon an already terrible situation by providing sustainable locally-sourced food which supports agriculture or staying in lodging that is powered by renewables like wind or solar, the fact remains that the most ecologically friendly thing a traveler can do is to stay home. Because this is not going to happen, eco-friendly tourism options are preferable. As is taking the train or even the bus whenever possible while traveling abroad or at home. But current climate catastrophes are nearing a terminal point—as capitalism really has no ethical provision for the curtailment of individual profit in pursuit of the common good of mankind, the only recourse would be if governments stepped in and legislated restrictions. And *if* this happened (a big unlikely if), recreational air travel is the lowest hanging fruit.

The problem is that the countries with the greatest discretionary income are also the worst ecological offenders, especially in this area. They are also the countries that are the most blindly capitalistic and the most unlikely to implement any reforms along these lines—in fact, these countries, in some cases, have powerful people that outright deny there even is any environmental risk at all. Josh Gabbatiss wrote in a recent article for the UK-based Independent, “Perhaps unsurprisingly, the countries causing the most harm were also among the largest in both wealth and size – with the US, China and Germany

topping the rankings. Air travel was the main culprit, and the researchers suggested the high-polluting industry would become increasingly problematic as the world gets richer and there is more demand for luxury travel.” It is also no surprise that the US, along with the UK, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia are the most common long-term travelers—nearly every digital travel publication comes from one of these areas and almost all are written in English as this type of writing (and travel actually) is certainly Anglophile.

Matt Karsten, who publishes the digital travel publication *Expert Vagabond*, is actually one of the only travel writers who acknowledges his own problematic position. His contribution is worth citing in length:

Travel is a selfish & environmentally destructive activity. Over 60% of US citizens do not have passports. Guess what? They are helping to protect the environment more than you are. This post isn't going to win me a lot of new friends. :) But our dirty little travel secret has to be exposed. It's for your own good. Living in denial isn't healthy. While I certainly haven't been traveling for very long, I've started to notice a trend in the *backpackers circuit*. Many from our group seem to consider themselves 'above-average' when it comes to general environmental & social awareness. A large percentage take pride in eating locally-grown organic food, volunteering in poor communities, and might make a scene if locals throw trash out a public bus window onto the street. That's great. I'm generally all for social & environmentally responsible behavior. But there's one little fact many seem to be blissfully ignorant about: Our personal travel addictions are creating more environmental & social destruction than our friends & family back home who don't travel very much. (sic)

Matt accurately captures the nature of the problem and the apparent blindspot—while he doesn't recognize his own culpability outside his personal travel (he is a writer who encourages travel), he does sum up the irony that there is a group of people who travel the world criticizing indigenous governments and populations for burning trash or not recycling when the flight to arrive in these locations did more damage to the

environment, on average, than a citizen of a developing country can do in a decade or longer. Perhaps it's the invisibility of the damage or the privilege of the west that obscures this footprint from view: throwing trash out the window of a car is visible, destroying the atmosphere while flying all over the planet, not so much. Part of travel is talking about travel—travelers often want to impress people with their level of cultural exposure, worldliness, and industriousness of character. There is an arrogance which Matt rightly notices in the backpacker set—they have it all figured out, while the *other* less-aware citizens of the earth slave at jobs and take care of families and are ignorant about all the troubles the world faces because they just stay at home. This sanctimonious “woke culture” is a nice, safe position that an admittance of contribution to the rapid deterioration of the environment may jeopardize.

Matt continues, “A round-the-world plane ticket consumes more fuel in one year than the same typical year of driving at home... Even one round-trip flight is more harmful. When you get to your destination, you will still use other forms of fossil-fuel based transportation...” A flight to Bangkok and back causes almost the same damage to the environment as *driving for a year*. As if this isn't quite enough, there is also the concern regarding these pristine ecological destinations that are under constant siege by travelers. Matt discusses Antarctica and the Galapagos as prime examples of this: “Animals are dying off in both these places as we speak. Our actions are causing extinctions... When people back home see your photos and hear your stories, a greater percentage of them will selfishly want to have the same first-hand experience as you...” While the ethical implications of travel generally is not the primary concern here, the ethical pitfalls for the genre is. This last part that Matt mentions regarding pictures and

the spread of *inspiration* marks one of the key problems of digital travel publication: travel writers never stop to think if they 1) should be visiting a place at all, as it is seen as their sacred right to do so and 2) if they should be encouraging others through video and writing to visit these places.

As this is being written, Greenland is falling into the same set of circumstances as the Galapagos and Antarctica—its fragile ecosystem is under threat and it is very possible that it will not exist in the same way in as little as fifty years. Also as this is written Drew Binsky is broadcasting through Instagram from Greenland. He writes, “HELLO #GREENLAND...I’ve finally stepped foot on one of the world’s biggest (and least densely population) islands and THIS PLACE IS SPECIAL.” (sic) Remember from Drew’s website that he is literally assembling countries for his collection—his Instagram account alone has 269,000 followers, every one of those potentially interested in traveling where he travels. If even half of those decided to visit Greenland, that would be the end of that “special” place. After he goes everywhere he wants to go, perhaps he will champion the environmental cause of implementing travel restrictions on these locations. Again, there is no visible ethic here aside from a very safe, very superficial indulgence of difference—for Drew, as for many, the project of travel is likely mostly about himself: his experiences, his feelings, his desire, his collection of countries, and perhaps just his self-satisfaction and bragging rights. His publication is, regardless of justification, designed to support his own adventures cost-free with little regard for what or whom is actually impacted by that process.

Matt, the *ExpertVagabond*, gives another example, this one actually concerning when governments become involved in the process. He writes, “In the 1920’s, the

Jordanian government tricked the Bedul into giving up ownership of their land in return for a guarantee of rights for their occupation & use...If all of us stopped traveling to sites like Petra to spend our money, there would be less incentive for governments to do this kind of thing. Is that realistically going to happen? No.” Matt’s level of honesty and his astute assessment of the situation is impressive. The situation he identifies in Jordan is reminiscent of what is currently underway in Thailand: it can be hard to predict what the next tourist-trend will be but, for whatever country it happens to fall on, there is limited time to capitalize on that popularity. He continues, “We travelers are a selfish & destructive bunch. As much as we protest to care about socially and environmentally responsible behavior, it’s only true to a point. While I don’t necessarily like it, I’m prepared to continue traveling. I selfishly want to see these places in person before they are wiped out. Because eventually, they will be.” Matt’s plea will likely fall on deaf ears, even his own. He is still traveling and his Instagram account is verified and has 151,000 followers. His blog destinations include Greenland, Central America, and the Middle East.

Matt is an unusual case in that he at least seems to have some degree of self-awareness and he attempts at sharing that reality with his audience, even when that revelation could impact his effectiveness. As far as an ethical traveler, Matt is about the best the genre has to offer—for many the cognitive dissonance between wanting to *save* the planet at home and wanting to *travel* the planet abroad results in the avoidance of troubling realities. But even in this best case scenario, where a travel writer is aware to at least some degree of the ethical responsibility he or she may have to indigenous cultures, societies, economies, and the environment, it still will not stop them from traveling or

publishing content designed to gain revenue for more travel and promote travel to those exact destinations that are currently under threat.

It's overly simplistic to reduce these conflicts and concerns to the travel industry or even to the spread of the genre into the digital space. The travel industry generally is better viewed as a micro-economy which simply represents some of the larger problems of global capitalism. It is hard to have much hope—a fact which makes the “if you can't beat them, join them” abdication so alluring: even if the planet is doomed and future generations have no hope of a safe, normal ecological existence, a single person can still travel and play and enjoy and consume with relative immunity. After all, in a system so overdetermined as to make everyone feel small and disenfranchised, to imagine that one person's actions can really make a difference is increasingly difficult.

Travel and travel writing is a representative slice of the same ethos that has caused, and is causing, and likely will continue to cause, untold destruction. Both the act and the genre have largely been beholden to economic expansion, ideology, and the reification of market capitalism— it is hard to find any type of movement of people or good that has not been followed by enslavement, pain, or oppression. Perhaps human kind is naturally exploitive, no good, destructive, especially in anonymity. And as a genre, digital travel writing is culpable in a process that can destroy authentic cultures, turning them into little more than grease for the wheels of global capitalism, and which may be having the worst impact on global warming and the ecological crisis.

Technological advances, such as the internet, which made the world smaller and instantly accessible, have allowed for greater and greater areas of the world to open to exploration by greater and greater numbers of people. And these societies and governments, again

falling under western pressure, have seen profit potential for opening up their societies to mass travel and tourism. Venice now spends a third of the year mostly submerged; cruise ships have wrecked its harbor more than once; what little remains of the indigenous population has called for the banning of cruise ships and mass commercial tourism. In light of this, nothing has changed. Nor in Dubrovnik. Nor in Santorini, which is now effectively overrun with an unsustainable amount of people year after year.

Ethical Issues at the Intersection of Author and Audience

Many of these ethical concerns are bigger than digital travel writing. But, in veiling its involvement in these destructive social and environmental practices, the genre does facilitate ethically problematic activity across the globe. The genre and indeed many of the sites of travel are saturated—already there is evidence to suggest that the heady days of independent digital travel publication are coming to an end. Certainly these websites and their YouTube supplements will generate likes and followers and then revenue through the means discussed earlier. But the writers themselves are beginning to outsource some content contribution. They may update old guides or add some relevant new links but the impetus to travel repeatedly to the same places just to review past advice and narrative is not there. While Rick Steves would, along with some local help, revisit locations throughout Europe to make sure his guidebooks are updated and relevant, his purpose was to create guidebooks for people traveling in Europe. It is important to remember that these travel writers, while they may *write* guides and lists and narratives (to a lesser extent), their purpose was always to *travel* first and then support that travel through self-publication. That is quite a different beast and certainly

challenges the idea that they would find it fun or enjoyable or even desirable to revisit past travels in order to maintain their archive. While some likely do, many publications, Nomadic Matt's for example, are more a collaborative space now, where contributors add content, with Matt's editorial skills and input, that help keep his business running. But the writing itself has gone elsewhere.

Rather than an abandonment, this really amounts to a change of author and audience—for discussions of genre, at least in the social and rhetorical sense, there is likely no greater site for ethical discussion than that curious contact zone between an author and their readers. What fills that space, of course, is all the content, the message, the raw communication, the symbols. But it is the author, with his or her particular position, and the audience with their expectations, that account for the success or failure of a rhetorical project—this is where a piece of discourse achieves its intent or falls short of the mark.

Deborah Brandt, in her work *The Rise of Writing*, looks at a certain type of writer, many born of innovations in communication and technology, who rely on writing as a profession without the privileging of reading as the dominant binary term. This is often writing that occurs to meet very particular purposes and it could be termed extra-academic, or even public, as it occurs in spaces that do not suffer from rigid distinctions and evaluations on what writing can and should accomplish. While she doesn't discuss digital travel writing in her work, she easily could, as it resembles several other inclusions in her project. The most obvious of these, and the one with the greatest exegetical potential, is that of the digital copywriter.

As clarified earlier in this work, *copy* has largely been changed to *content*, at least in the digital space. Companies don't want "copy writers" as such but rather "content managers" and influencers. In these situations, as Brandt rightly notes, the author is a placeholder only, devoid of positive substance. When a company-webpage is accessed, very often there are just words and images and links—the words don't have a proprietorship. Somehow, audiences have a general awareness that the company itself didn't write this stuff, but only consider the work passively: *copy is* written, *content is* generated. There is no subject in these equations and thus authority, literal authority, and labor practices are obscured by design.

One could argue that this is not the case with digital travel publication—the writers go to great lengths to foreground their own experience as populating the discourse. As discussed, they even heavily emphasize their discursive identity, at least as much as they want to condition it or disclose it online, often in an effort to develop the audience as well. This is all very true of the more obvious projects, often smaller and organic, like Philipa's work for example. Yet, in the larger works, the ones that really present more like entire enterprises, like Kristen's or perhaps Stefan and Sebastien, the authorial voice is there but it can be difficult to place the author. This could be due to the rhetorical objectives: Philipa's work is more personal, subjective, emotive while Kristen's is more didactic, expository, and, in a phrase, more like traditional copy. When someone opens a *Lonely Planet* guide the words are just there—it doesn't matter who wrote or or traveled or researched or edited. It simply *was* written. And as some of these digital travel publications grow in size and professionalism and discipline, the traits they borrow from more traditional, digitally-based enterprises shape their prose in a way that

obscures the position of the author. When this happens, the pendulum that marks rhetorical objective of the work swings towards the audience—the prose becomes more neutral, leaving the author in the background, in an effort to reach and impact a more diffuse audience. So while the author may exist in name, it again really becomes more of a placeholder, a neutral and passive spot. And in some of these works, where the name of the traveler is the name of the publication, it can be entirely impossible to tell if contributions were outsourced or not—in some of the larger publications, regular updates are offered by contributing writer-travelers and they may or may not be given credit. In all likelihood, everything would just be attributed to the company *qua* name-on-the-site.

Problematizing authority as well is the very general knowledge that everyone lies about themselves on the internet—it is safer not to trust anything one sees because, intrinsically, audiences now know that everything is conditioned specifically for them in accordance with the author's intent: everyone's life looks exotic on *Facebook*. This creates an interesting situation for the author-audience dynamic and one that does not seem to be quite the same for print media. Admittedly, the social media example does not exactly fit what these digital writers are doing but their work is so dependent on the visual and influencer-rhetoric of social media forms that, for the most part, the two can be understood as heavily integrated. In some cases, they are really almost identical. The concern is one of trust or, more specifically, the lack of it. A reasonable audience (probably most everyone who is asked) *expects* to be lied to on the internet—even people who view their friend's *Instagram* know that the reality is what exists outside the frame, beyond the digital space. On the other hand, the author doesn't really trust the audience with the truth either, and thus gives them a heavily redacted version of themselves, their

identity practices, their lives, their travels, and so on. So what occurs, at the initial level, is an ordinary lack of faith in the fidelity of the communicative process in digital spaces. With this being so obvious, it is no wonder that labor practices are often not disclosed and profit is so obscured. If there is no place in the reduction of the discourse that marks an initial truth, a starting point, there can be no real discussion of ethics in any meaningful way because it is difficult to tell what, if anything, the authors are remaining substantially faithful to.

This may account for why some of these writers are distancing themselves from a strictly digital medium. Many of those discussed started traveling (and writing) in their early twenties, and are now approaching their thirties or beyond. Their values have changed, in degrees, and it seems that, for many, they have started to seek a different type of credibility. In the last two years alone, somewhere in the neighborhood of a dozen “bloggers” have published creative non-fiction travel narratives or memoirs about their experiences. These are not guides—they are fully formed narrative constructions, usually based around a particular conflict and theme. Lauren Jullif’s work is about her transition from neurotic, unprepared girl into self-assured, confident woman through a series of travel misadventures and self-discovery. Matt’s work is about leaving a place only to find that it changes what home, and self, actually mean. While they are not overtly literary, like the work of Theroux or Iyer or Mayle for example, they may be moving in that direction. It would not be unreasonable to think that these writers, the ones who spent years traveling and running successful digital travel publications, will return to writing in a more traditional sense—while certainly more “bloggers” will begin publishing more traditional memoirs, it would be unsurprising to see further offerings

from Matt or Lauren that embrace the elements of their craft that could be classified simply as poetics. In other words, it is very possible that travel continues to impact their writing and that a love of travel writing continues to refine their work in more traditional ways.

There are other ways in which the identity of the writer impacts audience and consequently raises ethical concerns. As mentioned, the genre as it exists is quite youthful, literally and figuratively. The writing, sometimes quite overtly, tends to be directed towards young people, perhaps just out of college so in their early to mid-twenties, who have not yet settled into the unbreakable routines of contemporary western adult life. It is a type of *possibility* rhetoric—its general goal is inspiration, often for potential travelers who feel that, while exotic and long-term travel is enticing, it is reserved for a particular class of people of which they are not a part. This is not exhaustively true—many travelers who have been moving about the world for months or years rely on travel publications for inspiration or guidance. That said, many of these writers still address themselves more directly towards first-time travelers, including things like vaccine lists, packing lists, airfare search websites, product recommendations, and possible entry-level destinations, none of which is really appealing to a more experienced traveler.

Related to this, the audience is often presumed to be operating on a low budget and otherwise cut from the same cloth; much of the advice given is regarding how to stretch each dime to the fullest. While useful, this mentality does support somewhat exploitive economies—because of this emphasis, western travelers in Asia often quibble over pennies, expecting that they should pay almost nothing for services or goods. A

good example of the proliferation of this type of travel, and thus the creation of this type of traveler, is again Bangkok and the Khao San Road. Imprudent and rash travelers, especially ones that have been spoon-fed this expectation that their money can be stretched excessively in certain sites, become somewhat immune to the advantage they are taking over local communities and cultures. While it can easily (and rightly) be argued that these communities benefit from the tax free income that foreign traveler's cash provides, the excessive focus on this type of economy leads to problems like in Bangkok—the government comes to recognize that its culture is a commodity so it works to clean up the merchandising. This type of budget travel can also be a problem environmentally—rather than spend substantial money on a water purifier, travelers will buy plastic bottles for pennies. They will also eat the cheapest food possible, which often supports reprehensible farming practices. In fact, one of the best ways to reduce the carbon footprint of travelers is to *raise* the prices rather than lower them. This could keep this budget set, which is largely the audience of much digital travel writing and where many of these writers originate, out of rain forests and the Galapagos Islands and away from the Arctic and safaris.

The problem with this is two fold. Primarily, such exclusivism would disturb the enfranchising nature of the experience, making it just another another mundane signifier of status—as this happens, certainly the authenticity which is so valuable to these travelers would be gradually replaced with more culturally homogenous ersatz-experiences. The second aspect of this potential turn is the reality that cheap safaris spring always up to meet the needs of the less-privileged and these exist without concern for wildlife or ecosystems while more expensive safaris raise their prices almost

prohibitively. Even notwithstanding this reality, the split between the elite and the budget traveler is really a split in audience as concerns digital travel publication. Asia is so popular because of its relative safety and low expense. South America is less expensive, but its safety profile is far lower, as is its English language facility. Perhaps even more importantly is the flight expense—many budget world travelers are from Australia and the UK and it is much less expensive for these people to get to Bangkok than to Bogota. In the end, it is clear that simple exclusivity would not alter the ethos of either travelers or tourists and that such a simplistic solution could not easily reconcile ethical antagonisms within global travel.

So again, there is a reiteration of the binary—the audience of these publications is likely “travelers” as opposed to “tourists.” If one is scouring the internet for publications on obscure travel arrangements in more exotic or less-frequented locales, they are likely of the type who are willing to take a few risks. They may not be in the market for a vacation, as such, but rather an experience and, as it seems millennials are willing to spend more on the experience, regardless of whether somewhat contrived or no, it is pretty clear that most of this writing is being done with that audience in mind. Also too, the medium is a factor here—while the internet is mostly universal, it is more naturally traversable in the hands of someone who was essentially raised in it. Many of the apparatus (social media, sponsorship, embedded advertisement, links, YouTube, and so on) may be disruptive to a less-familiar audience where, to a younger audience, they are anticipated and go mostly un-noticed. For example, while earlier the economies surrounding these publications were discussed at length, this is probably the only space where such a conversation really occurs, especially concerning issues of credibility.

Sponsorship and influence and collaboration are so embedded in the millennial apprehension of technology and technological apparatus that they would pass by without click or notice, much the same as embedded video content or photo-documentation through Instagram. Though none of this is conclusive, or even *exclusive*, it is a pretty safe claim to say that these works are designed for a younger audience, traveling on a budget, with a fetish for “authenticity” as it is presented for the popular imagination through video and written content. And it is this audience that can restructure economies and generate unforeseen problems. If more proof is needed, one need only again return to the simulacra being embraced by the Thai government as it represents, on a very fundamental and vulgar economic level, the material reality of the situation.

And this reality again suggests that the genre of digital travel writing has reached the high water mark already: over the past fifteen years, countless new publications have been generated, all attempting to gain revenue and sponsorship in the ways discussed above, yet with few recent writers being able to rise to the levels of success seen by those who began their careers in that transitional moment of the early 2000s. Further, there are limited resources; cultures and economies and the natural environment have a finite ability to meet tourism-based needs. It can only go on for so long—even now, once remote sites are swarmed to the point of systemic collapse. Important conversations are already occurring at a governmental level on how international travel could be effectively restricted. And it is less and less likely that a travel publication will survive; for every one that does last a year or two or three, fifteen or twenty more fold after several months. There is a symbiotic, and problematic, relationship between travelers, their writing about their travels, and the cultures that sustain this incursion—if an element falls out of

balance, the situation which mediates the genre changes, perhaps causing a shift in style or abandonment all together. Places could effectively shut their doors or limit numbers, costs could rise with commodification, airfare could rise as fossil fuels become more expensive, wars and their refugees could cause visas to be revoked or with-held, or young people could start imagining a life without travel or writing, the digital representationality becoming a stand in for authenticity itself.

The travelers, who are the writers in the genre who perpetuate the audience and agenda, too are beginning to limit their own movement for a variety of reasons. Oneika, mentioned above, is backgrounding her work on the blog—her and her husband (another vagabonder) just had their first child, an occurrence which, in the best case scenario, will vastly alter the type of travel being done. Nomadic Matt? Well, he's the first to effectively retire—his empire is still intact, but he is settling down with his partner for a different kind of life. His book details this decision to step away from vagabonding, at least for a time. The point is that genres, like travel itself, can only proliferate so much before the cultural solution is fully saturated—there are limited resources, both economic and physical, and limited viewers. Perhaps the *situation* itself, that socially constructed need that incites generic invention, has effectively changed.

What also happens is that the novelty simply wears off—for some, travel to Bangkok sounds exotic or maybe even dangerous. In reality, it is safer than many hometown-USAs and everyone speaks English; these travel paths are now so well established that everything a traveler would ever need is readily available and probably for cheaper. It is considered now a fairly mundane travel experience and only really used as a jump-off into other locations. And as the novelty wears off, and as YouTube is

saturated by every variety of video, and as the profitability of this type of independent travel journalism decreases, likely the genre too will slowly fade to something less-innovative and more commonplace. The digital part isn't going anywhere and neither is the travel, but the wild wild west of travel blog *cum* digital travel publication is past its prime—what comes next in the genre is anyone's guess, but it will be something that serves a distinct social purpose in a changing global situation.

A Labor of Love

Rather than assume that each contributor to the genre is some ideological cyborg, acting out the productive mechanisms of global capitalism, it is important to look beneath the rhetoric to try to understand the initial event, that first motivation to leave security behind in favor of tenuous expectation. The true ethical consideration for understanding the genre and its participants on either side of the message, and the one that at least somewhat reconciles the many ideological pitfalls and problems, is this: does the work as it is experienced today remain faithful to that initial inspiration to travel and then to write?

It is better to be hopeful on this point and err on the side of faith, even when lived-experience of the contemporary world inspires mostly pessimism. Mewshaw writes, "Just as religious faith has lingered on long after the alleged death of God...people still do scuttle around the globe, reenacting rituals that were supposed to have died off ages ago." (2) Travel, and its writing, is an imperfect process full of corruption and defilement, but also of beauty and passion and truth. It is not perfect, but it is, in the end, born of something fundamentally human; imperfect and suffering and

sublime, but definitely human. It is no stretch, for lack of any other appropriate word, to reduce this substantive quality to the word love. Perhaps the writing comes from a desire to encourage others to seek the same opening of the world.

Alain Badiou in his ontology relies on a reconception of the term “situation” to describe the set of over-determined circumstances in which a particular *act* can erupt and present as a singularity—when this *Event* happens, truth and ethics can be measured by fidelity to it. The emergence of a new genre or the mutation of an earlier iteration in response to new situational need, is certainly a type of perceived singularity—its seems internally cohesive and reducible but is, in fact, immensely dialogic and complex. He writes, “I term *situation* any presented multiplicity...Every situation admits its own particular operator of the count-as-one. This is the most general definition of a *structure...*” (24 *Being and Event*). If digital travel writing is seen as multiplicity rather than totality or singularity, it can be easier to account for many of its features and conditions. For example, digital travel writing is invested in late global capitalism as well as neoliberal ideology. It is indebted to technological advances. It is equally subsumed in discourses regarding universal college education—most of its proponents have received a traditional preparatory higher education and have even been involved in careers before choosing travel. Digital travel writing is also unthinkable without social media, itself the marker of the millennial generation (think *MySpace* rather than *Facebook*). It would be easy to go on, adding more layers to this overdetermined social phenomenon—discount travel sites, deregulated international airfares, popular media such as produced by Anthony Bourdain in the early 2000s and so on. The point is that what presents as a *One*, this count-as-One, like the *genre* of Digital Travel Writing, what

gets treated as a *whole* for the purposes of this project, is actually a multiplicity of inter-related contingencies. And people's actions within it, author or audience, understood as rhetorically suitable by generic conventions, are contingent on the perceived stability of the One. These authors are producing texts within a certain set of ideological, historical, economic, geopolitical, and social contexts and the audience, in the abstract, has its origins in that same *situation*.

So when looking for an *ethics* that helps to explain the writer/reader relationship in this space, one must go as far back as possible to that productive spark. Badiou gives four places to start and he believes that ethics cannot be an ethics *of* but rather an ethics *to*—these four processes, where truth and therefore ethics are observed, are in Politics, Art, Science, and Love. And, while there is certainly reason to be critical of the genre of digital travel writing and the ideologies that its proponents enact, if there is any original point of inspiration that caused this genre to shift, proliferate, and endure, it would be certainly found in *Love*. Travel really comes from this—people travel out of love for the world, love for themselves, love for history and culture and progress. On a very basic level, it may come out of an very fundamental love of life itself. Michael Mewshaw writes, “Perhaps because immobility reminds us of that ultimate fact of life — i.e. Death — we remain eager to prove we’re still alive by moving around and rubbing up against our fellow travelers.” (3)

Maybe these people travel (and write) because they want to love more deeply, themselves and others, or find love in any of its truly sublime forms. At various times throughout the history of the genre, the deep experience of the world has been presented as intoxicating, much in the same way, and with the same language, as love. In fact, it

was this sublime love that really pushed the genre in the romantic age as it is seen in the poems of Wordsworth and Byron, whose works would be empty without the backdrop of human movement and it was certainly love that caused Lord Byron to exceed his role as a traveler and to stay, fight, and die for Greek independence. And despite very real political concerns, it is perhaps better to believe that each of these writers, those who struck out as vagabonds only to turn once again to language to capture and share their experience, did so originally out of a deep and curious and wild love for the world and its people.

For likely all the travel writers in the digital space, their work was born first out of a passion for learning. As the poet Theodore Roethke writes, "I learn by going where I have to go." And while their motivations, at least in their inceptions and forms, differ slightly, the basic theme is always the same: there was something dissatisfying in the fabric of quotidian repetition and obligation and a nagging thought that something more must be out there to find. The writing only came later, after the initial break was fully realized and the quest begun. There is usually a resistance to surrender: before one accepts a single place and a single career and a single person, it is important to see how the big this world really is. Many of these travelers actively seek to topple their native experience in an effort to visualize, not necessarily the one way of doing things that is fundamental to their ideological place, but a sense of wonder and possibility and potential.

Why does this matter? Principally, it is important to understand audiences and authors not in the abstract, permanent sense but as occupying a discursive position within a certain set of social practices. As discussed above, the authors of these texts are a type

of placeholder for a set of values and authority and the audience too, in its own way, represents a duplication of these values with certain expectations. All of this, this *particular* social exchange which is the genre, is not possible outside a *situation* or multiplicity. To attempt to compare the genre as it exists now with an older iteration doesn't make any sense because the practices that gave rise to the older social iteration are no longer extant—so while vestiges of colonialism or outright orientalism can be seen in contemporary digital writing, they cannot be said to be identical to those Dutch narratives surrounding the Hottentots and South African or Zimbabwean colonization. While history can be seen in this sublimative way as always containing the past within present experience, ethics cannot be a general category that is permanent and ontological.

Regardless of antinomies and antagonisms, it seems that the work being done in this genre is perfectly faithful to its articulation within its situation. Audience and author are conditioned—they represent shared value systems and an underlying ethos of dissatisfaction and changing social values. There is, also, despite the harmful effects of the process, an enduring love within travel and its documentation—there is something human and, whatever collateral damage and blindspots and economic expansion exists, these writers (and audiences) seem indebted to a love of exploration and alterity. In many cases, there is a true fidelity to this call to abandon unquestioned participation in western values and capitalist work ethic, abandon all the relative security and approbation of the Big Other, and strike out to see perhaps how the rest of the world lives and breathes and loves and plays. Above all, the genre is being used, by people, in a particular set of circumstances, to rhetorically situate and transmit values and information. It extolls and persuades and fuels fantasy and desire. It inspires fanatic

devotion and evangelism. It ignores its own special contribution to global issues of cultural imperialism and ecological destruction. But in the end, it serves a true social purpose to those that engage in it. Careful examination of the genre, its proponents, its discontents, its situation, and its values helps to hold the mirror up to a planet that is increasingly unable to see itself clearly, to unify, to self-conceptualize. Perhaps it is a vehicle to push against the deep and abiding alienation of the moment. And in this way, it is not hard to see it as an act of love.

CHAPTER 6

PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL AND FINAL THOUGHTS

There are few situations that so profoundly seem to demand writing as travel. Something about the experience of that profound alterity, the sublime experiential category, requires an externalization of the internal processes. As Mewshaw writes, “All writing is travel writing — even if the journey is entirely inward through the obscure bends and elbows of the mind, or even if it’s an intimate exploration of a body.” (6) Regardless of whether one agrees with this or not, people *are* writing. It is possible that, when understanding “writing” in this broader sense as “composing” rhetorically, more people are now “writing”, and for broader audiences, than ever before.

It is important to note that all of this is occurring in a younger population—perhaps the complaint that “students can’t write” is at least somewhat born of a misunderstanding about what writing effectively is. The reality is that writing with authorial intent towards a particular audience is alive and well—universities are not the sole proprietor of this skill set and are, in some ways, out of touch with the fullness of the written project. Digital travel writing represents a remarkable example of an organic written and visual movement where writers are making specific rhetorical choices in an effort to expand audiences and engage with particularly situated economies. This writing is crossing cultures and borders and appealing to a broad audience. Further, it has far-reaching ideological considerations as many of these travelers-turned-writers are responding to a fundamental dissatisfaction at the heart of terminal global capitalism and its attendant aesthetic of inauthenticity and accumulation. In light of all this, perhaps the

flames of engagement and global citizenship and literate genre manipulation are already in place in the age-demographic of the student population—students *want* to think and write and see and experience. This can be seen in their peers who are out in the world, exploring new places and possibilities, and documenting it. It is better, even if this is not always the case, to err on this side of the equation.

A Case for Critical Expressivism

There is reason to think that the often-discarded tradition of “expressivism” in university classrooms is worth a second look, if not its own particular renaissance. As Goldblatt notes, Expressivism has fallen out of favor—indeed it may have always been second fiddle to more popular discourse- or cognition-oriented models. It is easy to see why this is the case as the latter theoretical frames very-much favor measurability and university-centered ideology generally. Expressivism is too creative to be useful and as a modality, it has fallen victim too to a very black or white interpretation that penetrates the university generally: there is creativity, or creative writing, and there is academic work, or academic writing, but academic work cannot be creative and creative writing cannot be academic writing. This remains is a concerning obstacle. Is spontaneous and creative writing really so much of a threat?

Since the late 1980s with Berlin’s landmark essay “Rhetoric and ideology in the writing class,” the answer has been yes: expressivist models, or really any model that isn’t social-epistemic, amounts to a failure. It is worth being sympathetic with Berlin here especially since the objective of *this* project has been understanding a genre as a socio-ideological vessel. And on top of that, Berlin and many others are not wrong—

language is certainly ideological and discursive and social. But again, this just reinforces the binary which places expressivism as being *apart from* socially-situated pedagogies. Yet as Fulkerson observed in his study of 2005, this is not really the case— expressivism endures, “despite numerous poundings by the canons of postmodernism and resulting eulogies,” and often alongside socially or discursively-focused pedagogies (655).

This type of expressivism is being called “critical expressivism” or, as Sherrie Gradin puts it, “social expressivism.” On a basic level, social expressivism acknowledges that texts, and of course subjects, are produced within a variety of social and ideological matrices that have an inextricable impact on the type of work produced and the language used. Gradin writes, “In order to be effective citizens and effective rhetorical beings, student must first learn how to carry out the negotiation between self and world...” (xv). This requires an understanding of one’s own culture, beliefs, and identity and the unique articulations *and* interactions between that socially-structured self and the world, but in a way that is not an impediment to expressive writing.

Fundamentally, this sounds like travel. In contrast with the foreign, travelers often have to re-examine the personal. Patricia Webb Boyd writes, “Critical expressivism suggests that it is through individual experiences that commitments are made, stances are taken, responsibility is assumed and actions are advanced...Critical expressivists’ emphasis on individual experiences illustrates the importance that those experiences play in one’s interactions in the world...(108). This *is* the type of writing that forms the substance of the best digital travel writing: it relies on individual experience as evidence while understanding that self and experience in relation to vast social conditions, including the cultural and religious. It demonstrates an awareness of,

and expression of, the self in the context of an expansive social world of experience.

Thus distilled, digital travel writing is perhaps the best example available of this unity of pedagogical models that is forming this re-envisioning of expressivist pedagogy in practice.

Already, in many first-year writing classrooms, there has been a turn towards auto-ethnography in an effort to get students to actively comment on where they came from, what they believe, and how they practice that identity out in world. There has been some success as well, in similar settings, of allowing those personal narratives to expand outwards in search of “contact zones”—in this sense, rather than a point of power struggle, a contact zone can simply be the unfamiliar contact of one set of identity practices with an other. This can be somewhere as simple as a college classroom when the diversity experienced is as unfamiliar or as complex as stepping out of a cab in Tahir Square. Wherever a point of cultural contact can be explored, whatever causes a personal set of identity practices to be suddenly exposed as conditioned or social or simply not universal, that is an area worth explaining and writing about.

Exercises like these, what Jane Danielewicz calls “personal genres,” are strikingly close to contemporary digital travel writing and they can occur almost everywhere. The type of travel writing done in these spaces, even with its emphasis on the personal and digital, doesn’t require expensive airfare as much as an intrepid spirit. Simply going to a different area of town and being willing to interact with the neighborhood and eat the food and walk the streets is enough to begin an authentic and uncomfortable experience. Danielewicz writes, “we (and our cultures, communities, families) need such assertions of self, such articulation of differences, as a way to fight against the depersonalization

and homogenizing effects of globalization” (439). She sees this type of writing, which takes the personal out into the world for a genuine experience that demands writing, as a distinctly political act that seeks to actively explore the various causes of social injustice and inequality. This claim, which could be made about travel and travel writing generally, is the exact opposite of how many detractors frame the pit-falls of expressivism. There are allegations that it obscures the various sources of injustice and inequality by focusing on the personal yet the truth is that an extensive and thorough piece of personal writing will promote social connection and reflection, and even research evaluation and integration, by default—this type of awareness of self-in-the-world as an active participant has always already been built into the substance of expressivism but often remained perhaps poorly articulated or poorly plumbed for all its potential value in the classroom. Expressivist writing allows a student to authentically recognize social injustice by exploring their own experiences. Certainly this will not always be successful—some students will resist personal writing and reflection or balk at having to do this type of writing in a university as their expectations of academic writing may have been firmly established prior. But there is a greater chance that a student who comes upon an awareness of social conditions and difference organically will feel enfranchised or called to consider an opposing perspective. Further, the student who is willing to explore their own voice and investigate their own interests and passions in this way will produce better writing.

As Robert Yagelski states, “When we write, we enact a sense of ourselves as beings in the world. In this regard, writing both shapes and reflects our sense of who we are in relation to each other and the world around us” (8). The best travel writing

embraces this and the writers in the digital genre explore the *contact zone* habitually, plumbing it for meaning and sharing the results of that uncomfortable encounter. Further, in the Bakhtinian sense, writing is always already social anyway—there is no writing in a vacuum: students import all they've read and understood, anticipate responses, attempt to placate the graders, meet expectations, and, hopefully, find their own authentic voice in all of this. If writing is dialogic, as many social-epistemic theorists claim and as the project here fully supports, it is simply impossible to assert that expressivist texts are apart from that situation, existing in some personal space that remains uninfluenced by the lived social world. Critical expressivism provides a new strategy for envisioning threshold concepts and academic writing by giving students back the power they deserve over their own academic-creative output.

Digital travel writing is creative and demonstrates a nuanced understanding of composition and literacy. And while it is possible to criticize digital travel writers and perhaps their work for many things, it is impossible to say that these writers aren't disciplined, that they lack rhetorical presence, that they do not conceptualize an audience, that their work is haphazard, or un-researched. These features represent one of the ways that digital travel writing could be engaged with in a traditional first-year writing classroom: these texts can serve as examples of refined yet spontaneous prose that, while resembling more accepted forms of academic writing, demonstrate a motivated management of both voice and agency in addressing its subject matter. Rather than a castrated and decontextualized bit of process writing, most digital travel writing uses research and structure to support a concrete, and often persuasive, objective that is directed towards an audience.

The fact that the genre draws from popular visual and written media and has a presence across multiple platforms, allows students to conceptualize their writing as serving a purpose outside the politics of the classroom. It could also allow students to become more effective readers of both visual and written texts contemporaneously, judging the interaction between text and image and the successes or failures of each. While it is not uncommon to see traditional travel writing in first-year writing readers and textbooks, less often do these classrooms promote a nuanced literacy which intertwines both visual and written rhetorical fluency; ideally students would begin seeing composition as an act that *serves* writers rather than *earns* grades. The reality is that many of the values and metrics extolled in academic writing are being demonstrated in a genre that is certainly both social and expressivist in nature and which exists outside mainstream academic publication. This leaves some orthodox-institutional fears largely unrealized in practice.

Accessing Genre

Another way that digital travel writing could prove valuable in a writing classroom manifests at the level of genre itself. Genre, and generic literacy and manipulation, is a structural component of writing pedagogy which is often embraced in Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in Disciplines initiatives. The focus is frequently on helping students to begin identifying the conventions needed for successful writing in their potential fields. Second to this, genre is explored in some more basic or developmental writing courses as a less-specific catch-all for stylistic concerns within

academic writing, as well as in an effort to discuss the various types of texts students are often asked to produce, ie. personal narrative, informative, persuasive, and so on. Recent scholarship emphasizes genre as both a type of threshold concept and a metacognitive category through which humans successfully interpret like situations and deploy acceptable rhetorical tools based on that interpretation. Students are often given essays to read which theoretically represent a transposition of a classical rhetorical genre—some essays provide a defense or apology, others a celebratory or eulogizing scope, and still others make a sustained argument for a position.

But generic fluency exceeds these academic limitations—students who are able to read texts, both for their language and their fidelity to texts of that type, engage with a broader critical vocabulary. They also are able to reflect and comment on their lived experience, evaluating the texts they encounter every day in various situations. This is a pedagogy which fully embraces genre as a threshold concept and celebrates genre-mimesis as a step towards mastery. Allowing students a prolonged and dynamic engagement with like texts, helps them to begin assessing criteria of belonging, making arguments related to prototypicality and fidelity by pulling specific examples from the written and visual elements. This type of critical reading, which puts genre on center stage as a cognitive and social apparatus, is immensely valuable to academic and professional success, even beyond the production of texts. Incorporating digital travel writing into writing programs which already stress generic literacy and manipulation is a prescient move that appreciates the nuances of contemporary literacy and provides students with a up-to-date apparatus to evaluate the texts of their experience, both written and visual, and to see themselves as enfranchised participants in that rhetorical process.

An ideal version of this process would see freshman students given opportunities to study abroad programs which integrated writing assignments and writing curriculum credit. Currently, only a few universities offer a program that embraces travel writing, reflection, and research methods within the study abroad experience itself—they offer credit that counts towards fulfilling university writing requirements and this is structured for freshmen specifically. Of course, this type of experience is almost impossible at many universities—at small, liberal arts college, or perhaps even some smaller state schools, the study abroad office struggles to find enough students to run trips generally. Many such trips are cancelled for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is difficulty in securing funding. Many students do not have access to the extra resources necessary to fund a study abroad trip and many first-generation students have a hard time explaining to their families why they need to spend a semester (or even a week over spring break) out of the country.

So while in a perfect world experiential learning would dominate writing curriculums by providing students with first-hand contact with the uncomfortable and inspiring scenarios that often precede the very best thinking and writing, this is effectively impossible to implement on a broad scale. That said, the protracted discussion of digital travel writing above should have made clear that travel, at least in the experiential sense, is often more about attitude than about place. In fact, for the Millennial and Gen Z population, travel is a type of ethos, a way of being in the world which emphasizes curiosity and experience. Travel is not always about successively being able to see new things day after day, but frequently in being able to see the same

things in new ways. Travelers seek out unfamiliar or uncomfortable experiences, they eat in unfamiliar restaurants and try new foods, they see local shows, visit various museums or parks or battlefields. Fundamentally, the primary obstacle for many students would not be money or airfare or even a passport, but simple lack of imagination. Experiential learning does not require an enormous budget but only an intrepid spirit—assignments which ask students to be a traveler in their own lives can help them turn the mundane into the meaningful. Often something as simple as walking a different route to class can cause a new perspective that breaks with the quotidian routine—in fact, sometimes just simply sitting in a familiar location and simply being present is enough to cause discomfort and awareness. So regardless of the location, writing assignments that have an active component often allow students to explore their own subjective reality in contrast to the world around them—adding a visual component to this only compounds the aesthetic and rhetorical value as students work to deploy characteristics of the genre as they experience it.

Another way to incorporate this experiential aspect and nurture natural curiosity is to fully embrace the possibilities afforded by digital apparatus. It is certainly easy, and even fashionable, to criticize the digitization of the social world for being a terrible ersatz of reality, a vicious simulacrum that drains the sublimity that characterizes contact with the Real. And this is likely at least partly true—but the other side of this is the almost hackneyed, but equally true, idea that this digitization has made so much information (image, video, interpersonal contact through chat or social media, news, geography) immediately available to almost any audience. Because of this, it is possible that some of the deeper issues of travel, say the contact with different or even contradictory religions

or political systems, can be explored without having to physically go to these places. For example, assignments that focus on a contemporary place, especially one of interest to a student, can check a number of boxes. On a very basic level, the student is able to choose a location they have always had some interest in for whatever the reason: perhaps they always imagined going to Egypt or Paris, maybe their family comes from the Ukraine or Malaysia. The initial stages of the assignment allows them to engage with all types of material, visual and written, that helps to contextualize that contemporary space.

While they will certainly find interesting information of sights and geography and cities, but they will also find information on local customs and religions and recent conflicts—they may also find that the country or region they select has been in the news recently for any number of reasons. On YouTube they will find travel videos which give them a visual sense of the location and these will undoubtedly link to related travel publications as would images and video content posted on Instagram. So from an initial bit of genuine curiosity a student could “fall in” to the research process, following link after link to new, contradictory, controversial, or simply related content. It is very possible that, before the writing ever begins, the understanding of the chosen place, its people, and its culture has entirely changed. The student may encounter difficult social and political issues—when reading about Angkor Wat they may encounter the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, a genocide that is mostly ignored in American high school history classes.

This is the type of authentic learning through exposure that Bazerman notes resonates with the advanced Vygotskian cognitive development that genre study can truly provide. He writes, “Vygotsky’s view, however, posits that learning prepares the

learner for new stages of development, where at some point the learned material becomes more than the sum of its parts, but is rather added up, reorganized, and reintegrated at a different level, so it becomes seen in a different light. It enables reflection on knowledge, perception, and understanding from a new perspective” (284). Further, a student will have the opportunity to look at earlier, non-digital and more traditional writing done regarding these spaces and compare it to the work being done by digital travel writers. And what they will likely find is that, as Amy Devitt and others note, genre carries with it the weight of ideology and intent, socially situated, in whatever form it takes.

After doing some research, even without being able to physically travel to these places, a student or group of students will have the chance to construct a text relating to what they found: likely they would begin by mimicking aspects of the genre as they encountered them. It is very possible a text could take the form of a travel guide, but not without active decision-making regarding who the guide is directed towards. Will it contain images or words? Is it narrative or more informative, like a Wikipedia entry? It is possible that some reflection will even enter the project as a student may stumble across areas of social or cultural dissonance. They may also comment on current events as they encounter recent historical issues or economic developments. Trying on genres, especially when done in comparison to various contact points, can be difficult—the products could come out muddled and poorly formed. But the reward is that some authentic bit of learning, and writing, happens in the process. This may be through contact with the genre itself as certainly this type of exposition clarifies how genres work, their successes and internal antagonisms. Or it may come accidentally, through the research—suddenly a student, who just thought Tibet sounded cool, becomes aware of an

entire history of colonialism and injustice and struggle and then must establish their beliefs in relation to that. This authentic learning is the type that cannot really be taught overtly, though it can be encouraged, and it is also the type of learning that brings out the best writing. So with the access to genres and information afforded by digital globalization some interesting potentialities for the exploration of genre as it relates both to situated cognition and larger globalized interconnectivity emerge.

Charles Bazerman, in his chapter “Genre and Cognitive Development, Beyond Writing to Learn,” takes Writing to Learn initiatives as a starting point for a deeper, developmental-cognitive understanding of the role of writing *qua* genre fluency. Essentially, WTL pedagogies emphasize the role writing has in pushing through cognitive obstacles and embracing new trajectories of thinking that were once foreclosed. He writes, “As teachers we regularly work with this phenomenon. We notice when an assignment seems to bring out a higher level of thinking than we expect from a particular student. In fact we may design our writing assignments precisely to put students in a position where they need to combine information and ideas in ways new to them, or which requires them to consider issues from an unfamiliar stance.” The challenge then, rather than package a set of controversies or social justice concerns or ecological issues for easy student consumption and process-based student writing, is to create assignments that allow the student to stumble on these realities and inequities organically, thus beginning an authentic process of cognitive awakening and changing patterns of thought surrounding, not just a singularity, but a host of interrelated issues. From a certain perspective, this aim is embodied in travel: rather than conceive of social issues in the abstract, travelers seek out direct contact with unfamiliar in an effort to “combine ideas”

and “consider issues” organically. The writing which follows is a natural supplement to this process and it is this process in fact which likely motivates the writing. Writing to Learn pedagogies mirror experiential models and both can be seen as coming fully to fruition in travel writing with its unique synthesis of history, geography, and culture.

So what writing within a genre, or even encountering a pedagogy that embraces genre criticism and awareness, provides is a type of critical frame to begin looking at the broader network of ideological issues embedded in language. Bazerman writes, “The more precisely we learn how the symbols by which we live have come into place, how they function, whose interests they serve, and how we may exert leverage on them to reform the world, the more we may act meaningfully upon our social desires.” And as genres reinforce “norms” and “ideologies” and are a type of “rhetorical action,” in Devitt’s estimation, “then learners can gain rhetorical understanding by gaining access to the language and forms of genres” (341). This gives students a chance to understand the implications of the type of reading and writing they are doing and its relative instability and contingency. For example, a style of writing, such as the editorial, cannot really successfully be taught as a neutral vessel, but rather as a set of practices indebted to countless ideologies, not only in service directly to the political aims of the author or publication, but also related to freedom of the press and democracy and so forth. It can also demonstrate that a genre can be evaluated separately from content concerns—a student may disagree with the substance and intent of an editorial but, as an iteration of the genre itself, the writing may be entirely successful.

The benefits of studying, teaching, and adapting digital travel writing for use in the writing classroom can be reduced to several key points. First, travel writing exposes

students to the intricacies of genre as it is situated both socially and historically, by the people who have embraced it to accomplish very specific rhetorical purposes—in short, it is a tidy vessel for studying the implications of genre more generally and how it functions. Genre fluency is a fundamental component of many first-year writing programs regardless of underlying pedagogical imperatives and could be adopted in service to various program-specific ambitions. As such, it is universally useful.

Second, travel writing exposes students to authentic political, social, and cultural concerns and helps them relate those concerns to their own experience—an expressivist work can take on new life when it is juxtaposed with foreign belief systems, conflicts, and ideologies. The benefits of this are a *real* tolerance, not born of gestural political motivation, but of actual diachronic awareness of cultural participation. It can show students the type of expansiveness of thought necessary to truly engage with, understand, and comment on an issue.

Third, travel writing, especially digital travel writing, provides students with a relatable genre where people are writing and making rhetorical choices, and it makes those choices very visibly clear. Rhetoric, as its own topic, can be difficult to introduce in writing curriculum, especially at the developmental level—travel writing shifts the conversation subtly towards the decisions writers make when relating to an audience. This can bring out expressly rhetorical discussions in new and relatable ways.

Fourth, digital travel writing and its writers encourage a global citizenship—it is a rhetoric of possibility and it encourages, for better or worse, people to consider what their life would be like in close contact with radical alterity over extended periods of time—to this end, it promotes a more unified conception of the world and erodes all sorts of

exclusivist belief systems that see one's own ideology as right and proper and the rest of the world in degrees of error or departure. As Mark Twain famously wrote, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts." Students, and indeed the audience generally, are forced to confront their own belief systems for the socially-situated contingencies that they are.

Fifth, as all this fits with both critical expressivist and genre pedagogies to some extent, writing in and around travel encourages a synthetic and Vygotskian cognitive development where situations are understood as always social and related, never stable, and closely tied to a type of developmental history. Writing in this area allows students to adopt conventions and perhaps bend them in pursuit of fluency while encountering multiplicities of social, historical, and political issues in the settings where they actual present, rather than as abstract vessels for argument or exercise. Thus the writing generated has a far greater chance at promoting deep learning and securing a strong authorial voice in relationship to rhetorical concerns about purpose, audience, and form. And finally, though more as an aside, it touches on important developments in the fields of composition and rhetoric whereby multimodal and visual rhetorics are understood as key features of modern life—it provides students with some critical tools for assessing the potency and credibility of images while also allowing for creative composition in this area as well. Travel in many ways is not about seeing new places, but seeing every place as new, a unique confluence of culture and history, and this attitude does not require expensive study abroad or long-term nomadic adventures to cultivate.

Conclusion

As a final thought, it is important to summarize what has been said thus far and comment briefly on why it matters.

For one, travel writing, as a genre, has a long and dynamic history—it has been, often at one and the same time, responsible for some of the most elegant prose, including vast and evocative verbal landscapes, and involved in some of the most reprehensible practices man has ever inflicted on man. Like any genre, it is socially and historically placed and, as such, it has been drawn to the service of various ideologies. Motivations of exploration, colonialism, and science have driven the genre to the far reaches of the earth while an audience at home waited patiently for tales of adventure in new worlds. The writing changed, both with social technologies, like widespread literacy, and industrial technologies that made the movement of people faster and cheaper. Suddenly, travel was no longer reserved for the wealthy aristocrats but also for the general population who had so long pulled narratives from Africa and South America into the popular imagination.

One phenomenon that this work deliberately overlooks is migration—in fact, there have been several polemical discussions surrounding this area. Certainly there are some connections, but people moving to secure greater opportunities for their family or to flee a despotic regime at home should not be considered travelers. For the genre as a whole, it is a perpetual challenge to determine where to place these immigrant narratives in relation to more traditional travel writing and it can be difficult generally to sort out what should or should not be included in the space of travel writing and why.

Effectively, if a person moving from one space to another is documenting their travels with an emphasis on physical and geographic detail and subjective narration, it should not really matter their motivation and their work should likely fit the genre. In the end, it depends on how rigid the interpretation of “travel” really is—the genre is, as a ever, flexible and what has been considered travel has changed as often as the ideologies that surrounded it. Historically, there was a shift from exploratory to colonial, from overtly colonial to scientific, from scientific to mercantile, from mercantile to leisure, from leisure to conflict, conflict to subjectivity, and so on. As the stages of history and the mode of production shifted, ideologies followed and this directly influenced the iterations of the genre and the devices employed. And even though this is a reduction of vast and complicated historical processes, it is important to see how access to travel, and the interaction of the popular imagination with travel, impacted the writing that followed.

There is no surprise then that, in this moment of digitalization and globalization, the writing taking place represents much of the underlying ethos of that age. In a chapter above, there is an extended discussion of identity practices as they are seen in travel writing today. While some travel writers very much tailor their narratives and guides to their particular identity, others attempt to remain more neutral. Nonetheless, within the category of traveler generally, identity categories carry value. Questions like: “are you traveling solo?” or “what country are you from?” matter a great deal in the travel community—they help to establish identity within that community, create commonalities, and explain (stereotypically but not inaccurately) idiosyncrasies and destination selection as some nationalities or groups are more prone to go to certain locations.

Within these scripted identities, there is also an abiding, though perhaps subconscious, objective to reduce cultural difference to palatable or relatable levels. The digitalization of the world has created a type of false consciousness whereby, because in the digital space is so homogenous, the actual physical world of sensory experience is more similar than it is different or that the difference between cultures are only little pithy things to capture and joke about in travel misadventures and misunderstandings. And because so many developing economies rise to accommodate budget travelers, and because so many travelers decide to venture into developing countries, many of these sites of tourism have become complicit in this project. This is dark side of identity—of course it is valuable for everyone to feel comfortable in their own skin, but this should not be taken so far as to actively seek to eradicate authentic difference in favor of platitudinal neoliberal spiritualism. This trend in globalization already amounts to a type of cultural imperialism, largely the byproduct of a terminal capitalism, but the active invasion of western elements, with their particular sets of expectations and practices, thoughtlessly and often haphazardly into the margins is troubling. Much travel writing today encourages people, often young people to see the world—it is a genre mostly of inspiration and instruction but, as is often the case, there is very little attention paid to the ethical implications of the project.

Largely, this is because of the economies in which these travel writers operate. Digital economies generally are obscure, often deliberately so, and it can be unclear how companies or writers or influencers or whatever actually gain money from their online endeavors. Digital travel writing is no different—it is part publication, part business model, and part social media outlet. And each part comes with specific moves and

devices that make it profitable or not. The chapter above traced some of the ways that these things work and what impact they have on the genre.

The first concern, as always, is pop-ups and clickbait—while many travel writers steer away from these tools as they are disrupting to readers and generate ever-diminishing returns, some still use them. This is more rudimentary—it is the most easy source of funding to secure so, if a publication is still in its infancy, it is possible that it would have a less-scrupulous use of pop-ups. That said, there aren't too many new works being generated—much of the publication being done is at least five years old and often more than twice that. The high-water mark for the genre was reached somewhere around 2010 and, while the publications in existence are still profitable, the general decline, or at least shift, of the genre is notable. One need look no further than the app PolarSteps to recognize how mainstream these works now are. So again, there are not too many pop-ups or clickbait advertising.

Sponsorships, however, are alive and well and these work on a number of fronts: not only will products be mentioned, discussed, and sometimes actively sold through a travel site but these same products will be plugged on YouTube and social media Etc. So the exposure for a product, say the latest GoPro or a intra-Africa airline, will be perhaps tripled *and*, because of the nature of the collaboration, find itself presented to an audience that is already conditioned to use it. Really the collaboration with travel writers is a brilliant move for these companies and likely saves them tens of thousands of dollars in marketing as they do not have to research on how to reach their base audience—the audience is already well-established. Now many of these writers claim to actually use these products and services, which may be true, but there is no way to tell if they would

use them if they were not being compensated. If Camera A is rated 100 out of 100 and costs five thousand dollars, and Camera B is rated 90 out of 100 and *would* cost five thousand dollars but is in fact free as part of a sponsorship arrangement, most would probably take the free 90/100 camera and be grateful for it. Regardless of this, if a reader of a travel publication is going to need to purchase airfare or supplies anyway, there is no real need to not do so through a publication's platform, especially if the sponsorship and product-placement information is smartly presented in a non-intrusive way.

The ethics of travel writing, its ideologies and economies and oversights, was the substance of the chapter that followed. Rather than seek to provide answers for all the ethical concerns plaguing capitalism and digital travel writing and leisure migration generally, the objective was simply to highlight some areas where concerns exist and articulate several questions regarding the ethicality of this type of global travel. One of the major, if not *the* major, considerations when discussing travel must be the environmental impact. There is no way around it: travel is terrible for the environment and the world has reached what may be a point of no return regarding environmental damage and climate change. Capitalism and industrialization have had an immeasurably destructive impact on a relatively fragile ecosystem and the final result of this is, even now, looking to be cataclysmic. If air travel alone wasn't bad enough (it is), the cruise industry has one of the poorest records in existence when it comes to maintaining the integrity of our planet's oceans. Even still, people flock to these floating hotels only to be deposited in cities for several hours en mass.

This over-saturation is another ethical concern—often cultural sites will get so subsumed in an under-regulated travel economy that any shred of authenticity is now

gone. Venice is a great example of a beautiful miracle of human history and ingenuity that is going to (literally) disappear beneath the weight of its own popularity. As it stands, housing in Venice is exorbitant and many longtime residents have been forced to leave for the mainland. There are basically no jobs left other than tourism-related employment and many homes are being transformed into apartments for more tourists. As if climate change hadn't caused enough damage to the city, keeping it effectively underwater for weeks on end during the year, cruise ships cause regular damage to the harbor either by simply disrupting the water levels in the fragile lagoon or by crashing into the wharf. On top of this, as traditional craftsman leave, there is no one left to maintain the canals, bridges, and facades. Certainly everyone could agree that this majestic and special city is worth preserving and that tourism to this site should be drastically limited...but only after they get a chance to see it. This is the sanctimonious “not in my back yard” type of conservation of travel destinations—travel writers will lament the melting of Greenland's glacial deposits, denouncing travel to the fragile ecosystem, while standing on a boat attempting to dock on a glacier. The same can be said of Easter Island or the Galapagos or Plitvice National Park in Croatia.

Ecotourism, while helpful, is largely just another marketing tool—in reality, the impact those small changes make in comparison to the larger destructive forces at work is a trifle, the equivalent of shopping for organic vegetables at Whole Foods and loading them in the back of an SUV: it may make the consumer feel secure and justified in his or her purchase, but it does so by obscuring the reality. It is no surprise that over-traveling, ideological reductionism, and ecological catastrophe are all inter-related ethical problems—they are really all just cogs on the same economic wheel. And whether one

thinks this is all past the the point of no return or not, it is important to look at the implication that a genre of writing has on material conditions: as writers are promoting travel to pristine places, encouraging homogenization in the cities of the world, and creating an affect surrounding travel that encourages more travelers to take up the call, they are culpable in this ethical conversation. And while many do so out of, at least at their core, pure and faithful motives, there is a tendency to ignore the potential harm that these things cause, probably because it would be detrimental to their own pursuits and identities on a number of levels. If these writers were creating narratives, drafting short memoirs based in travel, and not actively recruiting or inspiring, perhaps their responsibility would be different. However, given that their agenda is so often to encourage, promote, and literally facilitate travel, it is impossible at this juncture to extract the genre itself from its material effects.

All of this matters for number of reasons. Primarily, people are writing: there is a need for writing, and it is a labor, thus it is not dying or disappearing the mire of digital technologies. In a broader sense, people are rhetorically composing in ways never before seen and this type of literacy is incredibly expansive. This marks a return of writing, perhaps even as separate from reading. Second, there is authentic genre mastery and adaptation taking place that involves an in-depth understanding of rhetorical structures, audience, and economics. By using experience, these writers are documenting the world, creating ethnographies and writing about neighborhoods and cultures and discourse communities. They are conveying expertise and finding an authentic voice within the genre. Third, all of this is occurring in a younger population—perhaps the complaint that “students can’t write” is at least somewhat born of a misunderstanding, or a fundamental

miscommunication, on what writing effectively is. Despite allegations to the contrary, there is no clear evidence that the stock of writing has fallen.

Travel is the history of mankind coming to know itself. It is an uncomfortable process, full of antagonisms and miscommunication and, at times, even violence. But it is also the stuff of the sublime. So often there is a beauty, either in the physical environment or in human contact, that simply exceeds language and demands, in Wordsworth's words, to be "recollected in tranquility." It is intoxicating and horribly frustrating—in having contact with something so unfamiliar, a traveler is often forced to see him or herself as unfamiliar too, a creation born of multiplicity rather than that unified, stable identity of home.

It says a great deal that, in the face of such beauty and suffering, so many travelers have turned to writing—often this was not because they wanted to convey a particular message to another, but because writing was the only way to convey what they were experiencing to themselves. This speaks to the fundamental nature of language—if man is a symbol using creature, psychologically-sutured together by words, then the contact zone is the place where this process has been played out, in full, time and time again. And with each historical development, the contact zone is restructured, filled with new travelers and new expectations and new unpredictable consequences and thus new writing. What the genre was two hundred years ago, it is not today, and what it is today, it will not be two hundred years from now. Yet the genre of travel writing still exists—its contributors still produce content and audiences still seek the publications out for inspiration or supplementation. Like everything else, a vast amount of that writing exists in a digital space.

Even still, the digital genre has likely passed its prime—technological developments and ecological concerns are causing this particular iteration to be slowly written out of existence. But this is not the final say for the broader genre: because there is something so natural about the desire to travel and see and document, there is little reason to think the genre of travel writing will ever really disappear.

EPILOGUE

I began this work by discussing my frequent travels to Greece and now as I conclude it I'm sitting in my uncle's house in the eastern suburbs of Athens and wondering how I can not at least remark on some recent developments. In the short week I've been here, concerns on several fronts have highlighted the significance that the movement of people still has on the material world—in fact, Greek national news has been awash in controversies which have a direct correlation to the work that this dissertation has done regarding a contemporary digital genre. And as genre trades in kairotic awareness and chronotopic assessment, I cannot help but see my small contribution as uncannily (and admittedly inadvertently) timely.

The north-eastern border Greece shares with Turkey is contentious and really typifies the ongoing anxiety and animosity that the two countries harbor towards one another. By one account, Erdogan is forcing migrants across the border from Turkey into Greece and has used his control in this area to attempt to extort money from the European Union. He implied that he will keep these refugees in Turkey only if the EU supports his policy; the implication is that the European Union would be willing to pay, directly or indirectly, to keep these migrants out. Military clashes between two countries are being fought in proxy with the bodies of refugees—stripped, sprayed with freezing water, hungry, and scared, these people are pushed forward by one country and back by another. They have travelled for miles and miles on foot with hardly a hope. Even still, this is neither travel as such nor immigration—time will tell if and where their troubles will end.

If this rising conflict demands half the attention of the national news, then the Corona Virus, or COVID-19, steals the other half. In what the CDC has now labelled a pandemic, this flu-like virus, resembling viral pneumonia, has spread quickly, only just behind the fear of the virus itself. People are wearing face-masks, keeping their distances, and being forcibly removed from social contact at concerts, schools, and public gatherings. At the same time, an article in *Business Insider* just this morning addressed the puzzling reality that millennials are taking advantage of the scare by securing cheap flights to Paris, Bermuda, and Thailand. Italy is on actual government-imposed lockdown, the stock market is crashing, and some travelers seize their moment to really see the world on the cheap. Only this morning did my uncle wake me by yelling up the stairs about my flight—the president of the United States is closing the border to the United States, preventing travelers of any type from coming into the country from Europe and China. For a moment, the fear was that I would not be able to get home, that I'd be stuck in Greece for another month or longer...

Greece is preventing the movement of refugees, Turkey pushes them onward regardless. Countries stop the movement of business and recreational travelers while young people gamble on cheap airfares to exotic destinations. Governments are bribed and blackmailed, the Roman coliseum is closed, disease and famine, fascination and fantasy—the movement of people, and the rhetoric which surrounds it, rhetoric of warning or exoticism, is incredibly prevalent at this moment on the world stage. And the materiality of this phenomenon is unquestionable.

Where does this leave me? Well, potentially stranded in Greece but hopefully also with a sense of responsibility. I am blessed to be able to sit here in a beautiful

country, writing on a nice laptop my thoughts on travel and what it means and does and how it is composed and represented. I am also grateful to be able to see what I want and learn where I can—watching news in foreign countries, or hearing how foreign cultures react to the conflicts which define our time, is now as ever eye-opening for me. I then have the responsibility to share this awareness, hopefully with students and friends and colleagues, in an attempt to open communication about difficult issues. Is it fair to talk about travel and omit refugees? Is it right that travel writers are going to Syria while its people are fleeing in waves across Europe? Should I talk about Greek islands, their beauty and timelessness, and ignore the refugee camps that exist on several? Buy stocks or sell? Fly or stay home? Fearless or foolhardy? I don't have answers. But then, travel has never given me any answers, only more questions. Or ways to think about the same questions, differently. And even now, as I sit here trying to put these questions in to thoughtful language, I realize how desperately language falls short. But that won't stop me, or really anyone else that has experienced the gifts of travel, from trying.

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