



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Chapter Title: 2 Staged Authenticity Today

Book Title: The Ethics of Sightseeing

Edition: 1

Book Author(s): Dean MacCannell

Published by: [University of California Press](#), (April 2011)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppn0n>

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Ethics of Sightseeing*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Staged Authenticity Today

A small town in the Peruvian Andes had no tourism until a local bar owner erected 86 five foot high stone phalluses in a field and someone made up a back-story a la Disney that in “ancient times young women who wanted to conceive sat on top of these stones and had beer poured over them.” Now tourists come from every continent to gaze on the stones and hear the story.

—*New York Times*, March 21, 2006

Tourism is the beta test version of emerging world culture. There is no other global sociocultural complex for which a plausible similar claim might be made. This chapter describes the viral spread of cultural forms devised for tourists out of tourism into every other part of society.

In the 1960s while still in graduate school I noticed a quirk of places that attracted tourists. This was before society became shot through with replicant forms like “neotraditionalism,” “the new urbanism,” and other “variations on a theme park”; before one could purchase a themed home in a themed town like Disney’s Celebration, Florida; before one could literally live in a corporate constructed fantasy.¹ The odd social engineering I found in tourist settings involved the pretentious revelation of “back region” procedures, even “secrets.” Guides regale tourists with tales of “authentic tradition,” factory visitors stroll along the line following the progress of product assembly, orchestras permit paid attendance at rehearsals, farms convert to bed-and-breakfasts and invite guests to participate in the harvest, morgues and sewers open for tourist visits. Tourists, for their part, are endlessly fascinated with “society’s id.” I called these and similar arrangements for tourists, “staged authenticity.”

Erik Cohen, Ed Bruner, John Urry, and others have accused me of overstating the case that tourists are on a quest for authenticity. They argue that not all tourists are upset about the shallowness of their lives or feel a need to seek glimpses of authenticity in the lives of others. In *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*, published in 2005, Bruner says the tourists he studied were “successful,” and “affluent,” and “quite secure about their own identity,” not alienated or anxious in ways my article seemed to suggest. I confess that criticism along these lines pains me, especially when it comes from colleagues I hold in high esteem. I thought I made it clear enough that not all tourists are driven by their desire to experience authenticity. Some are, but that was not my point. In my 1973 article “Staged Authenticity,” I wrote about a tourist who “clearly accepted the false back [regions] she found . . . and is relaxed about relating it.” And about other tourists who “see though the structure of tourist settings and laugh about it.” Today these individuals would be labeled “post-tourists,” but I prefer to continue to include them in the original designation, as tourists. The full title of my article was “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings.” It was not “A Study of Tourist Motivation.” It was patently about *places* that attract tourists and the transformational logic of Goffman’s spatial and normative front-back opposition into something else, something theoretically and ethnologically new. To critique “staged authenticity” on the grounds that not all tourists are searching for authenticity makes as much sense as criticizing a linguist who worked out a detail of grammar by saying not everyone speaks grammatically. I address this and several other misreadings of “staged authenticity” in my article “Why It Never Really Was about Authenticity,” *Society* 45:4 (August 2008): 334–37.

Revelation of back region secrets is no longer restricted, as it was in 1970, to arrangements made for tourists. In the United States and elsewhere it is escaping tourism and aggressively replicating itself in government, the workplace, neighborhoods and human relationships: neo-traditional design, politics by spectacle, relationship formation based on appearances, et cetera. The following provides a preliminary outline of staged authenticity in cultural arrangements beyond tourism and reviews implications of this relocation. The implications are not positive. My argument is that once staged authenticity becomes general it will take a huge ethical shove to put the human back into the social. The rest of this book is about specific points of entry for, and resistance to,

this push. The damage might be repaired at its source by a demand for tourist desire to make good on its productive potential.

GOFFMAN'S *FRONT* AND *BACK*

Today it is difficult to grasp the titillation, trespass, or violation resulting from a “peek behind the scenes” fifty years ago. Erving Goffman provided the most authoritative account of quotidian affairs up to that time in his 1959 *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He argued we must keep secrets from one another, and be able strategically to reveal our secrets, to function both socially and as human beings. He saw the social and the human as necessary to each other but not congruent. It is only by maintaining strategic control over our secrets that we are able to sort our associates into intimates, familiars, acquaintances, strangers, and enemies. What he discovered in *Presentation of Self* was a structural division in every social interaction, every institution and establishment, separating “front” from “back” in ways that facilitate expressions of humanity on the stage of the social. In what follows I will examine the fragile membrane guarding the back as described by Goffman, some consequences of its violation by tourists, and the social and human impacts of its putative removal across the board.

According to Goffman, “personal front” includes all the more or less official, publicly known, or knowable qualities of character, personality, and status. “Personal back” includes less desirable quirks and traits that we try to keep in check and reveal only to intimates: potentially discrediting secrets, medical conditions, prison records, and the like. The “front regions” of an establishment are those places where the routines and transactions necessary to its function occur. They are the meeting grounds of host and guest, professional and client, clerk and customer, et cetera. Formal norms govern appearances and behavior in the front. In the back, the local team of intimates can relax, blow off steam, tease and joke, and berate customers or the neighbors. In fact, we are normatively required to dramatize more relaxed standards in the back lest we threaten the intimacy and solidarity necessary to credible team performances out front. Should someone comport herself too formally in the back, she might be regarded as a spy for the management, or at least as an untrustworthy toady. In a strict Goffmanian frame, the implication is clear: any *actual* revealing of back region secrets, of the sort tourism promises, potentially undermines social structural supports for group solidarity and for expressions of human character and personality.

The idea for writing about the special status of back regions in tourism came to me as I watched a salad chef in an exclusive restaurant prepare an elaborate salad on a cart in view of guests who were about to eat it. It was likely a scene in a movie as I doubt, at age twenty-four, I had eaten in so fine a restaurant. I had recently sat in on an Introduction to Sociology course taught by Goffman at Berkeley, and read his *Presentation of Self*. While watching the salad preparation I thought, “Wait a minute, that’s supposed to be a back region activity.” I was beginning graduate school at Cornell and had already decided to study tourism. I wondered if a similar transposition of back to front occurred in other tourist contexts. My initial thoughts into this matter were set off by an empirical observation of a salad being prepared, an observation of a particular kind, one that did not fit into existing relevant theory, that is, by an anomaly.

Goffman was meticulous in explaining how much of our humanity hangs on the separation of front and back. Here is the reticent way he introduced the concept of back region in *The Presentation of Self*: “In order to appear in a steady moral light it is necessary for performers to ‘accentuate’ some facts while suppressing others. Accentuated facts make their appearance in the front region. It should be . . . clear that there may be another region—a ‘back region’ or ‘backstage’—where the suppressed facts make an appearance.”² For Goffman, as for Freud, behind every gesture or utterance there is something not revealed; a secret behind everything we think we know. But for Goffman, contra Freud, society dependably provides a myriad of microsettings for containing the dark side.³ His conceptual division of front and back regions is what allows us, as humans, to become spontaneously involved in the conduct of our affairs with an “effortless unawareness” of what is suppressed in order to maintain a moral definition of each social situation.⁴ Every performance, every self, is accompanied by mutual understanding that, at any moment, a discordant tone or even a discrediting revelation might make an unwanted appearance. That humans live their lives on both sides of the line between front and back is what gives our performances a tension and their distinctive colorations. Or, in Goffman’s words, “It is here [in the back region] that the capacity of a performance [out front] to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated.”⁵

FRONT AND BACK AS CONSTITUTIVE OF PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER

On a psychic plane, when a person's performance expresses "something beyond itself," the result is what we once called "personality" and sometimes "character." Goffman saw social life as a scaffold of opportunities to exhibit "dexterity, strength, knowledge, intelligence, courage, and self-control."⁶ And he saw life equally as the obverse, a barrage of chances to be clumsy, weak, foolish, cowardly, and sloppy. From the perspective of the participants involved, every social situation can take one of three turns: it might be an occasion to express something beyond oneself, an occasion to appear as one who is not a fully competent human being, or an occasion to avoid both these possibilities by hiding behind what Goffman derisively called the "surface of agreement," or "veneer of consensus."⁷ Every social role allows one to slavishly do one's duty and nothing more, or to exhibit some detachment and humanity. "If an individual is to show that he is a 'nice guy' or, by contrast, one much less nice than a human being need be, then it is through his using or not using role distance that this is likely to be done."⁸

Social structure, roles, rituals, and institutional arrangements are not merely ways of organizing the mutual affairs of humans. They also provide the staging and props for virtuoso expressions of human character and for the opposite kind of expression. Every encounter is an arena where the participants may put themselves out for better or worse, or hang back avoiding risk. Some exhibit poise and rise to the occasion, while others become flustered and embarrass themselves, or withdraw. In Goffman's words, "personal front and social setting provide precisely the field an individual needs to cut a figure in—a figure that romps, sulks, glides, or is indifferent."⁹

At stake when the barrier between front and back is taken down is every support social life once provided for tests of character. Staged authenticity, originally devised to attract the tourist gaze, is now ubiquitous.¹⁰ I suspect a reason tourists are derided for being "personality-less" and "characterless" is because they were first to inhabit the space of staged authenticity, to lack structural supports for expressions of personality and character. We take this for granted today as almost a right, but fifty years ago this kind of glimpse was unusual and both a violation and a privilege.

STAGED AUTHENTICITY IN TOURIST SETTINGS

The tourism research literature provides numerous examples of strategic back region revelations and staged back region activities, too many to be summarized here. In 1973 I published the concept of staged authenticity with some lightly ironic observations of school children's tours where they go to a farm, visit barns, and are invited to touch a cow's udder; or, at a bank, are let into the vault where they can see a big stack of money. I supplemented observations of tourist visits to back regions with descriptions of places constructed, especially for tourists, to appear as back regions. I did not harbor illusions that tourists gain access to the actual inner workings of the places they visit. I was intrigued by a new kind of space: front regions decorated to appear as back regions, or back regions functionally remade so they could be opened to outsiders. The first name I gave this space reflected my suspicion that it was a stratagem for making tourists feel special by seeming to let them in on what is going on. I was reading Herbert Marcuse at the time (everyone was) and I called these false back regions, spaces of "inauthentic demystification." To my graduate student ears this chimed nicely with "repressive de-sublimation," the term Marcuse invented for the capitalist practice of proffering sex and other titillations to workers so they would forget about making revolution.

Before publication, I eliminated qualifying prefixes and renamed my concept. "Inauthentic demystification" became "staged authenticity." Neither name suggests there is "real" or "actual" authenticity in social life, only that there are intentional arrangements, including architecture and décor for tourists, that imply tourists may experience, or at least glimpse, the "real" or the "actual." The dodge of the Peruvian Indians and their stone phallus attraction is ubiquitous in tourism: a fictional backstage is equal to an actual backstage. Staged authenticity does not involve authenticity in any philosophical register. It only involves the putative removal of barriers to perception between front and back regions, or between the present and the past. It names a structural shift authorizing the tourist to believe she can peer into everything.

STAGED AUTHENTICITY AND THE GAZE

When it was simply a matter of tourism I shrugged off concern about what staged authenticity might mean for society in general, and for what we once called "the human." Such concern can no longer be

deferred. What does it mean when an entire civilization is told that it can go everywhere, see everything, experience everything, do everything, and know everything when clearly it cannot? Goffman and Foucault (and eventually Lacan) are needed to approach the question. Here at the outset, it is necessary to signal the strangeness of this undertaking by acknowledging there can be no logical synthesis of Goffman, Foucault, and Lacan.

Goffman's subjects present themselves and act out their regard for one another on a symbolic stage. Interaction is structured by language and other symbolic arrangements including moral norms, operating in the microdetails of everyday life. What Goffman's subjects see in one another is shaped by their society and their group, especially their agreement to accept barriers to perception, permitting everyone to maintain back region privacy and intimate solidarities. The gaze that serves to define self and other and to shape human interaction is fully inscribed in a symbolic order. Goffman is congruent with Lacan on this matter. According to Lacan, both seeing and being seen occur under terms established by the symbolic. Lacan's visual field is interrupted by screens and mirrors, and by 360 degrees of vanishing points in which the viewing subject cannot avoid becoming an object of some other's gaze.

Foucault advocates something like a Goffman/Lacan version of the gaze but only to set it aside for a more radical formulation. In *The Birth of the Clinic* he argues that medical science is founded on the "purity of an unprejudiced gaze," a "gaze that has broken free of language to establish its own truth."¹¹ Foucault's gaze is independent of language and every other symbolic system. "The gaze will be fulfilled in its own truth and will have access to the truth of things if it rests on them in silence."¹² There is no place to hide.¹³ He emphatically insists that the gaze is non-dialectizable and rigorously protected from the equivocations of language: "Several observers never see the same fact in an identical way unless nature has really presented it to them in the same way."¹⁴

The difference between Goffman and Foucault cannot be satisfactorily resolved simply by noting that Goffman made empirical observations of everyday behavior, while Foucault is rigorously philosophical. I am about to argue the opposite: that Goffman's account is philosophically sound, while Foucault has more traction when it comes to empirical descriptions of the turn society took after these two masters wrote their last books, a turn I suggest we examine under the heading "the routinization of staged authenticity."

Foucault's assertion that "several observers never see the same fact in an identical way unless nature has really presented it to them in the

same way” constitutes an uncharacteristic philosophical slip on his part. Contra Foucault, several observers never see the same fact in an identical way unless they see it as given by a shared ideology. This strange lapse supports the entire edifice of Foucault’s theory of the gaze in *The Birth of the Clinic*. The only way several observers will ever see the same fact in the same way is if they do not actually see it, but think they see it the way they have been told to see it. The history of science, no less than the history of tourism, is a profusion of this misprision punctuated at intervals by observations that qualify as Foucauldian—pure and unprejudiced, but which quickly give rise to new orthodoxy and misprisions of their own. The possibility of a gaze that operates outside of language requires language for its enunciation.

Objections raised against Foucault’s theory of the gaze do not undermine its accuracy in accounting for our current social situation. Politics by spectacle, spin, and news leaks; show trials; surveillance in all its new manifestations, from ubiquitous CCTV to warrantless wiretaps and cell phones with GPS so parents can determine at every moment the exact geographic location of their children to within three feet; open plan house designs where even the bedrooms lack visual and aural separation; desire for fame and recognition trumping (or Trumping) all other desires; QuickTime underage masturbation on the web; frontal nudity in other popular entertainments; wardrobe malfunctions and similar famous exposures and exposés; all of the above and more constitute an avalanche of evidence that radical visibility is becoming the central organizing principle of social life. If the most compelling facts in this series flow from the growth of tourism it is because tourism operates on the principle that anyone has the right to see anything anywhere on the face of the earth.¹⁵ Goffman did not anticipate this. Foucault did. An examination of the tourist gaze from the double perspective of Goffman/Foucault reveals emergent paranoid structures at the level of society, or at least the so-called postmodern variants of society.

TOTAL VISIBILITY AND PARANOIA

A priori, a social dominant as large as tourism has psychic costs and/or benefits on a comparable scale. It is tricky to grasp the costs if they veer into paranoia. Lacan observed that it is always difficult to recognize paranoia because every description of it applies equally well to the normal.¹⁶ The paranoid subject is one for whom the world has begun to take on “meaning.” Paranoids know that “something is going on.” In

this, they are no different from normal subjects. A paranoid is certain there is a *real* meaning hidden behind the everyday accepted meanings of words and things. It is the paranoid's special mission to get at that truth. Again, this can be true for normals. Meanings are layered on one another just as Saussure taught. But normal certainty about the hidden meaning of things is provisional. For normals, as we conditionally grasp a meaning, there are always meanings that elude us. A normal person understands that she never really knows everything or the whole truth and is comfortable with temporary, conditional, and partial knowledge. The difference for the paranoid is *meaning has to be stopped*. Any gap in knowledge is unbearable. The paranoid has "got it." He can *see* what is going on. He *knows* what is behind this. We are back on the grounds of Foucault's gaze. "To *discover* . . . will no longer be to *read* an essential coherence beneath a state of disorder, but to push a little farther back the foamy line of language, to make it encroach upon that sandy region that is still open to the clarity of perception."¹⁷ Paranoid structures emerge at precisely those points where there is no longer any possibility of a dialectic: known-unknown, seen-unseen, recognized-misrecognized, front-back.

Paranoia involves an identification with the other's truth, or the truth of the other, as the ultimate object of undeniable desire. It is a radical form of the mental conditions for tourist desire. A fragile ego resists being eaten alive by its own primitive jealousies. It identifies with what is great and desirable beyond all questioning—God, the truth, the secret of the universe. The field of paranoia is visibility without limits. Total visibility is requisite for the free play of ego's paranoid fantasies, permitting ego to engage in a kind of insane bricolage, constructing a world for itself composed of weighty and important symbols, something like a perfect and complete tourist world with no gaps between the attractions.

Lacan summarized Freud's mad judge Schreber's descent into insanity in terms similar to a description of a wondrous trip to a new destination, as an irruption in the real of something one has never known.¹⁸ Schreber's paranoia involved a radical submersion of natural, sexual, and social categories to the point of forcing a virtual reshaping of the world. There could be no more precise an account of applying Foucault's "pure" and "unprejudiced" gaze to every domain of life. The singular difference is that German supreme court appointee Schreber never believed in the reality of his hallucinations. He knew God had not selected him to be His lover. But he was certain his hallucinatory sexual

liaisons with God concerned his mental condition and implicated him in their awful unreality.¹⁹ It is only so-called normal people who are privileged to believe in the reality of their fantasies. How else does a tourist justify his quest to “see everything on the face of the earth,” or, as recently occurred, explain paying twenty million dollars to gaze down upon the entire earth from a Russian space ship? Not even Schreber was that insane.

THE ROUTINIZATION OF STAGED AUTHENTICITY

Here is my preliminary assessment of the impact of the systematic removal of barriers to perception from every area of life, not just tourist contexts. What does it mean when these arrangements, originally made for tourists, are installed everywhere? This development appears as a wholesale replacement by paranoid structures of the serviceably functional social arrangements described by Goffman.

The Transformation of the Domestic Establishment

The houses Goffman knew—he called them “domestic establishments”—were the teletype of his front-back paradigm. The American middle class (and above) had two *front* rooms, the living room and the parlor. The parlor was used for weddings, funerals, birthdays, promotions, and retirements. Viewing the recently deceased in the parlor is what gave the living room its name as a residual formal space—for the living.

Today’s homes, at least the most desired ones, are marked by an aggressive removal of the walls, screens, and barriers that once separated front and back. The simplest statement of the design program would be, “eliminate the division between front and back region as much as possible.” New “open plans” allow for smooth traffic and visual flow. Living, family, dining, kitchen, study are all visually accessible to one another, mirroring the ethos of the new companionate marriages they are supposed to contain and friendship-based parent-child relations. Even some bedrooms have open balconies to spaces below.

What about bathrooms? Surely their classification as Goffmanian back regions is unambiguous. Anyone believing this has not studied upscale new construction, where bathrooms have become showplaces.

Some innocents celebrate the obliteration of barriers between front and back, as presaging a more open, honest, sharing society—relaxed, informal, and casual, where no one has secrets and everyone shares

In 1997 I visited friends who had built a home in the River Oaks neighborhood of Houston, not far from where indicted Enron CEO “Kenny Boy” Lay lived. The first thing they showed me was their “guest powder room.” It was a bit smaller than a three-car garage, finished in exotic stone, with European fixtures, and controllable recessed lighting. The main room had polychrome life-sized statues of domestic animals made by a Mexican artist. In several radiating chapels there were bidets, saunas, hot tubs, showers, exercise equipment, and a selection of toilets each with its library. This was as far from being a Goffmanian back region as any place I have seen, including the forecourt at Versailles. It was a urinary palace where one could sit, literally in the spotlight, on stage, and imagine oneself to be an A-list celebrity defecator. This “powder room” had been built not to meet the biological needs of my hosts or their guests. It had been built to be visited or toured (realtors and tour guides now use the same phrases); to be gazed upon by visitors to elicit response. My friends were quick to express solidarity with their guest by agreeing it was excessive and disgusting, but something they had to do to insure the future saleability of a house such as theirs in this particular neighborhood of Houston.

intimacies. A “sense of” solidarity was part of the allure of staged authenticity even in its tourist days. There is a contradiction here. On the one hand there is criticism of invasions of individual privacy in the new surveillance society. On the other, at the level of culture it is easy to document many ways in which the invasion is being welcomed, how humans are learning to stop worrying about losing their privacy and start loving it. A few clicks into any popular social networking site makes the point.

It should be evident I am not using Foucault’s panopticon concept in precisely the way it has been used, as a strategy of control by the state or other powerful agency. The processes I am trying to finger here are different from critical ideas about the power of the gaze. They are more akin to naïve narcissism in response to the Foucauldian gaze, that is, volunteering to become the object of the gaze of a power that is simultaneously feared and desired. This is the very definition of paranoia. Acceptance of paranoia as a generalized social form appears with the spread of staged authenticity beyond the confines of tourist settings. What we now have is a “grinning idiot,” “happy face” return of the gaze.

It is also perverted. Belief in an efficacious “California-style” intimacy and solidarity is a fantasy of the terminally gullible. Elimination of

“barriers to perception” does not mean that everything is now out in the open. It means the opposite. Tourism researchers figured this out over thirty years ago. The pretentious revelation of supposed back region secrets suggests that what still remains hidden is so appalling we cannot permit it to appear even behind the scenes, or joke about it backstage. A reading of Foucault and the perversions of visibility and power can get us into what is happening on the cultural stage, but we still need Goffman and Lacan to articulate a critique and get us out.²⁰

The question that intrigues me now, the analysis missing from my 1974 article on staged authenticity and all the debate and discussion it has engendered, is this: What are the implications of the loss of an everyday dialectic of front and back? What happens when there are no barriers to perception between front and back? What happens when everyday life is opened to a pure and implacable gaze? One hears sporadic complaints about the surveillance society, warrantless wiretaps, total information awareness, et cetera, but this development of culture has yet to be seriously examined. As these systems are being deployed supposedly against our civil liberties, our children are racing ahead of our governments to post nude pictures of themselves and graphic descriptions of their “private” affairs on the web.

The Replacement of Character by Appearance

The kinds of people we once called “personalities” are now referred to as “celebrities,” “superstars,” “media sensations,” and “A-list,” sidestepping questions about what they are famous or respected for. Asked what he wants to be, an American teen today may honestly answer, “famous.” Asked what he wants to be famous for, he can respond, “whatever, just famous.” In the new generic space of staged authenticity, in the place of “personality” we find raw ego. Performers still “accentuate some facts while suppressing others,” but compared to the risk of a return of the repressed, this is a paltry resource for the construction of character. The role of “personality” in social relationship formation is being taken over by physical appearances.

For some Generation Xers and Millennials, sex, dating, marriage, even conversations, occur only when individuals, based on mutual physical inspection, determine they are unlikely to find someone better looking to “hook up” with. A Hollywood informant told me that at a party he can predict with high accuracy who will leave with whom, and whom he should be “hitting on,” based solely on conventional hierarchies of ap-

pearance, or “cuteness.” Should a young person today discover a few days, or a few years, later that someone they “hooked up” with has a putrid personality or no personality at all, this may be regarded as merely unfortunate and might be overlooked if he or she is “cute” enough. Some individuals whose nuptials are announced in the “Society” pages of the *New York Times* evidently carried this ranking process to an extreme, marrying those who by appearance could be their twin, adding visual meaning to “a perfect match.”

Among the habitués of the space of staged authenticity, the closest thing to a “personality” is a narcissistic ego hiding behind bland pleasantries and lightly ironic cynicism about everything and everyone it meets. The egomimetic exception to this would be encounters with the very powerful or very beautiful who are, following the logic of paranoia, admired without qualification or reservation.

Psychological effects of a systemic loss of back regions are small compared to psychoanalytic implications. In another book, Goffman describes the “underlife” of an asylum as a thicket of back region opportunities to get around institutional definitions of mental illness.²¹ He terms the stratagems of inmates to construct alternative livable worlds for themselves, “secondary adjustments.” Where there is no back region or opportunity for convivial resistance to institutional definitions, there is no social space where the subject, even temporarily, can shake off the identity handed to it. The space of staged authenticity is like an asylum without an underlife. Society becomes a perfectly realized panoptic arrangement where there are only primary adjustments. This ideal was never achievable in the administration of asylums or prisons but it was designed and built into tourism and is now spreading to every other area of life.

The loss of back regions and an underlife is consequential in a mental institution where the official definition of the self of inmates is that they are crazy, and the only way for them to act otherwise is by means of unofficially sanctioned secondary adjustments in the underlife.²² In light of the forgoing, we need to ask what happens when opportunities for secondary adjustments are systematically removed from the world outside the asylum? What happens when everything that was once a societal secondary adjustment (gangster lifestyles, lost weekends, profit skimming, exercise addiction and other obsessive compulsive distractions, extramarital affairs, resume inflation, test cheating, dope dealing, dope taking, food fetishism, prostitution, heartless conning, slacking off and doing nothing—the list can be as long as anyone wants to make it and extended to such things as fanatical recycling and energy conservation),

what happens when everything that was once a secondary adjustment becomes merely another suburban lifestyle choice?

What to Wear?

In every voluntary movement between social situations a decision needs to be made about what to wear. When Goffman published *The Presentation of Self* in 1959, there were clear distinctions between formal, casual, and work attire, and situational norms governing which was appropriate. The most powerful attire sorting device was the division of establishments into front and back regions. In the 1950s, in our society's front regions, bourgeois men decorously wore suits and ties and women coordinated their shoes and handbags. The outdoor downtown areas of major American cities were public spaces then, as they are now, but they functioned as a kind of giant front stage, and had very different dress codes from today. Men wore dark suits and homburg hats between Labor Day and Easter, and light suits and Panama straws from Easter to Labor Day. Women wore dresses with skirts below the knee, nylons, heels, hats, and white gloves. Anything less would mark one as being from the wrong side of the tracks. The separation of front and back was so important in bourgeois circles that bras or panties coming in direct contact with the inside of a blouse or skirt was considered vulgar. Mediating layers of camisoles, slips, and girdles were marshaled against the possibility of tasteless back to front contamination. The lingerie sections of fine department stores sold a specialized item called a "breast petal," a daisy shaped padded pastie worn under the bra to guard against revelatory nipple stiffening becoming a visible feature of one's personal front.

Postmodernites with exposed belly buttons may have difficulty understanding that our immediate forebears took that much trouble maintaining the separation of back from front. We comfortably inhabit the space of staged authenticity and dress accordingly, that is, like tourists. In almost every setting, including the downtown areas of major cities, the clothes people wear are carefully selected to *seem* to be casual. The universal uniform is "dress-casual" clothing that can be purchased at the Gap and worn in the gap between front and back regions. The same expensive exercise outfits—composed of designer logo, matched sports shoes, sweatpants, and shirts—can be worn in public by suburban women and young inner city gangster males.

Everyone except the homeless dresses to appear both responsible and laid back. Some among the homeless have learned they can fit in by

wearing exercise outfits. We don't take formality seriously. Instead, we are seriously casual; even when we are "off stage," we wish to be worthy of an admiring glance. Radical liminality between the old formal-informal dichotomy makes sense in the space of staged authenticity. Making a show of back region informality and personal authenticity is found in every social niche. Lingerie departments no longer routinely stock breast petals. Instead, bra inserts with simulated stiff nipple contours have become available, the quintessence of staged authenticity today on a personal level.

What to Drive?

We still have work trucks and formal limousines reflecting the persistence of a geospatial front-back division. But neither the truck or the limo have symbolic cachet today. A limousine may be carrying drunken teenagers to an after-prom party or a captain of industry to a power lunch. The first choice today is a leather-lined, rosewood trimmed, four-wheel-drive SUV with Mark Levinson stereo, GPS, chrome magnesium wheels, low profile tires, and a clear coat of lacquer over metallic paint.²³ How does one explain this fabulous symbolic object, which began life as a utilitarian military vehicle? It is designed for highway cruising and for bouncing over stumps, off-road. It is found appropriate for trips to the opera or camping in the high Sierra. It is neither a work truck nor a luxury sedan but a perfect amalgam of both.

Everyone can desire to drive one: soccer moms, macho men, gangsta rappers, cops, liberals, CEOs, and plumbers. Porsche sells one that will climb a cliff in underdrive and, if you buy the turbo-charged option, is capable of making 160 miles per hour with five passengers and their luggage. You could be going nowhere or anywhere. Other than having money and a willingness to waste it, the purchase signifies positive nothingness; a large investment in maintaining zero specific identity, no purpose, and no direction. Its singular purpose is to move through space without disturbing the symbolic integration of staged authenticity.

PRE-TOURISTIC ORIGINS OF OUR POSTMODERN PANOPTIC EXISTENCE

According to Bentham

The most energetic theorization of the human effects of systematic removal of barriers to perception is Jeremy Bentham's writing on prison

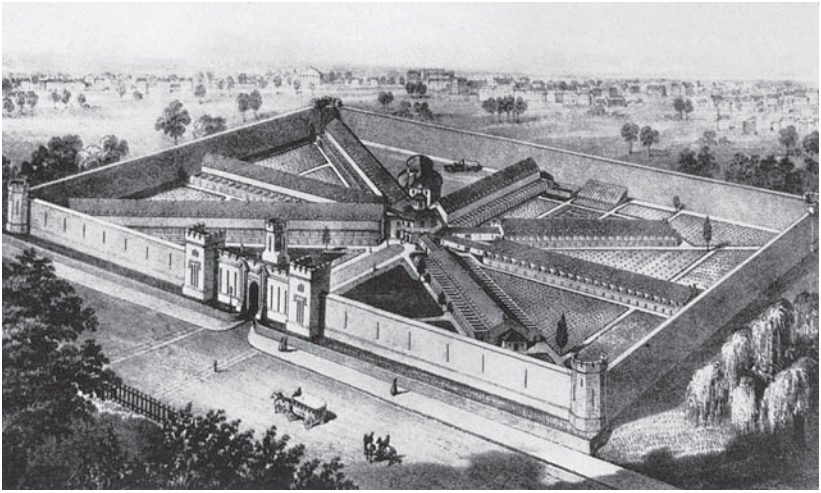


FIGURE 1. Early panopticon prison after Bentham's design.

reform and general philosophy. The routinization of staged authenticity as described in the last sections synthesizes Bentham's panopticon, his ideal of government as the promotion of the greatest happiness to the greatest number of citizens, and his dream of harmony of public and private interests. These themes did not come together as he wished in prison and other institutional reforms during his lifetime. Ironically, they came together in modern tourism.

All but forgotten about Bentham today is that the panopticon he proposed for prisons, schools, asylums, and factories was only a partial, and in his mind, wholly unsatisfactory realization of his social theories.²⁴ In moves that have become all too familiar, Bentham drew for his social engineering on evangelical Christianity and free market ideology. He was opposed to government having any role in matters susceptible to self-regulation by market forces. This applied especially to prisons, with their large reserves of underutilized cheap labor. He was infuriated that the Prisons Act of 1799 provided for staffing by state employees. He argued the Crown should appoint wardens to life terms, to be compensated only by hiring out the inmates to merchants, manufacturers, and farmers. The profit motive alone would suffice to ensure responsible custodial practices and maintain decent standards of diet, hygiene, and comfort for the inmates—that is, to maintain their sufficient physical fitness for maximum extraction of labor. To prevent any nonmarket irrationalities from destabilizing the system, Bentham said the wardens

should be able to pick their own successors on retirement. He was contemptuous of boards of directors or any other device that might second-guess the economic decisions of the wardens. His proposals did not resemble actual prisons, then or now. They were quite like the ideology of modern day corporations.

The panoptic principle was more radically enunciated by Bentham than by any modern interpreter of it, including Foucault. Bentham believed the prison should be designed so as to ensure more than the constant visibility of the prisoners to the wardens and guards. The design should guarantee *visibility of the whole of the prison to the whole of the outside world*. According to Bentham, total visibility is economical and progressive. The “impartial, humane, and vigilant” eyes of the public could be used to reduce the size of the custodial staff, enormously simplify prison architecture, and replace the cruelties of “iron fetters and fetid dungeons.”²⁵ Complete openness to the public would ensure decent conditions, block any tendency on the part of prison administration to become corrupt, and provide the most awful punishment imaginable for inmates. He sloganized his design as “a mill for grinding rogues honest.”²⁶ He further suggested the warden’s toilet should have a commanding view of the inmate population, ensuring that the warden “is *necessarily* obliged, as well as without trouble enabled, to give a look into the prison once a day at least, at uncertain and unexpected times.”²⁷

Foucault used Bentham’s panopticon not just for his theory of the gaze. He was also intrigued by nondialectical arrangements of power. (The recommendation for the warden’s toilet suggests that Bentham’s design is not aligned with Lacan’s principle of the reversal of the gaze.) In a panoptic setup, every individual becomes the source of his own subjugation. The prisoners, constantly visible, never know if they are being watched, so they must watch themselves all the time. Power, conformity, and productivity can increase together. Older, less sophisticated structures of power, based on forceful physical restraint, produce resistance that increases as force is applied. Panoptic power does not necessarily result in resistance, as we are currently finding out.

Bentham promised that if his prison was built he would *personally* keep an eye on the inmates and report them: “I will keep an unintermitted watch upon him, I will watch until I observe a transgression. I will minute it down. I will wait for another: I will note that down too. I will lie by for a whole day. . . . The next day I produce the list to him. You thought yourself undiscovered; you abused my indulgence: see how you were mistaken. . . . Learn from this, all of you, that in this house transgression never

can be safe.”²⁸ This assumes that the powerful preside forever. Not even the shock of death can restart the dialectic. Bentham did not insist his body be stuffed and mounted on a strategic overlook in the prison where he could continue his “unintermitted watch,” but the logic of the nondialectical gaze makes this gesture inevitable. His priorities shifted and he left his entire estate to the University of London with the provision that his stuffed and mounted remains be present at all future meetings of the board. The University has dutifully accommodated his wishes, keeping his stuffed body and shrunken head in a cabinet in the boardroom. There can be no escape from his supervision, and no back region refuge for Bentham, not even postmortem in a grave. It is a fitting parable for our times.

Bentham was thoroughgoing in his drive to set up a “system of superintendence, universal, unchargeable and uninterrupted, the most effectual and *indestructible* of all securities.”²⁹ Once tested in the prisons, the panoptic principle ought, according to Bentham, to apply to every other institutional sector. In a rhetorical move that anticipates, even defines modern tourism, Bentham writes, “I take it for granted as a matter of course . . . that the doors of all public establishments ought to be thrown wide open to the body of the curious at large—the great *open committee* of the tribunal of the world.”³⁰

Bentham’s works are foundational to law requiring transparency of functioning in democratic institutions. They were also resisted to the point that the panopticon was regarded as a failed project, especially by Bentham himself. We had to wait until the mid-twentieth century for his project to take root and grow in the myriad of microdetails of social life. The overall design of society increasingly resembles an endless series of mutually mirroring staged authenticities. As this arrangement approaches perfection, everything and everyone at home, at work, or at play—everyone up to good or no good, clothed or naked—is bathed in the same dim moral glow. Every secret is supposed to be out in the open where it can be revealed with little consequence. Every individual is supposed to cooperate in the fabrication of intimate “solidarities,” or at least to agree we should all share a “sense” of “community.” Entertainment is a “reality show,” another name for staged authenticity. An unqualified president is elected because he *appears* to be “presidential” and “authentic,” someone we would enjoy having a beer with. When this totalization completes itself we will have witnessed the replacement of society by a system of interfoliated paranoid structures. The best index of the progress of this development is found in the design of society’s

deepest, most horrific back region, its prisons, and the influence of prison design on the rest of society.

PASTEL PRISONS

Notably, after Bentham, prison design too has been extended to other social realms. The first panoptic prison was designed as a “telegraph pole,” a long central hall with transecting cellblocks that in plan view looked like the crossbars of a telegraph pole. The idea was to economize movement along the “pole” necessary to access all the blocks. This arrangement is now discontinued for prisons, but it has been adopted as the interior design program for most new homes in Disney’s town of Celebration, Florida and in other “neotraditional” house plans. It realizes better than other arrangements the contemporary requirements of openness, movement, and “flow.”

In the iconic panopticon prison design, cellblocks radiate from the guard station like spokes from the hub of a wheel. This is the design Disney adopted for the entire town of Celebration. Viewed from the air, the principal streets radiate out from the center on the plan of a panoptic prison or wagon wheel. And lest we fail to notice the connection, the “Preview Center” is a tall tower sitting at the point where all the major streets converge. It is not a guard tower, of course, but an annex of Celebration Realty. Prospective home buyers climb up, gaze upon the entire town, and “pick their neighborhood type.”

The current idiom of hip new urban projects plays up a kind of industrial back region appearance. Exposed brick interior walls, industrial steel stairs, and polished cement floors and counters, are de rigueur in industrial remodels and are also simulated in new infill construction. This ultra-utilitarian aesthetic is indistinguishable from stereotypical notions of jails. Under the regime of staged authenticity, our homes and towns increasingly resemble prisons.

For their part, new prisons take pains to distance themselves from utilitarian aesthetics, and from their past as oppressive, “fetid dungeons.” They reach for a kind of light and airy “signature architecture,” an upscale look. The illustrations in the remarkable book *The Architecture of Incarceration* are brightly beautiful and alluring.³¹ The Federal Correction Institution in Marianna, Florida (designed by Richard Nelson/Hansen Lind Meyer) to take one example, combines elegant symmetrical geometric forms (massive squares and triangles) of grey and white stone, red steel, and reflective glass. It resembles a large version of



FIGURE 2. “Give up hope all ye who enter here” (that you will ever again live in as nice a place). Jail in Dare County, Virginia. Photograph by Ed Massery. Reproduced by permission of Dare County Jail.

the bank that Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown designed in Celebration, except it is a stronger and more appealing design. Similarly, the Bartholomew County Jail in Columbus, Indiana (by Hisaka and Associates/Silver and Ziskind) is a larger and better version of the William Rawn–designed Celebration High School. The jail has energetic Moorish patterns of red brick framed by white stone and is topped by a giant steel mesh dome resembling the profile of a state capitol building.



FIGURE 3. Maison d'Arrêt d'Épinal, France. Courtesy of Guy Autran, architect.

State governments in the United States now spend more tax money housing felons than on colleges and universities. That money—as well as the accompanying talent, libido, and progressive thinking about the design of living space—is now fully invested in systems of incarceration. This is equally true for interiors as for exteriors. In *The Architecture of Incarcerations*, we find pool tables with pastel felts color coordinated with interior paint, glassed in atria with white gravel floors and mature trees, paisley-shaped interior planters made of chocolate colored polished concrete with matching ceramic tiles on the walls, et cetera. These elements are now the norm, not the exception, in new prison design.

None of this should be taken as support for those who grumble about “coddling” prisoners. Society’s ultimate and deepest back region

When I gave a talk at a university in Southern California in 2005, several students came forward and told me that the best dormitory on their campus was recently built by an important prison architect on the current model of prison architecture—and that the university touted this fact in their outreach to new students, who considered themselves to be fortunate to be housed there.

now may appear to be not merely presentable, but well-designed, aesthetically pleasing, even chic. Certainly ready for and worthy of anyone's gaze. Given the foregoing argument, this can only mean one thing: our prisons are actually more crowded, violent, and disease ridden than they have ever been.

It is time to bring Goffman and Lacan back into the discussion. The dialectic still operates within "total openness" and "visibility." The hidden remains the underlying motivation for the visible. As the visible expands, the hidden inexorably slips further from view and from consciousness. The beautiful images we have of prisons before they are occupied are masks for the unimaginable brutality and horror they will eventually contain. We gaze with admiration on the series of images in *Architecture of Incarceration*, while shadow figures of Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and an archipelago of extra-territorial torture sites dance just beyond the reach of consciousness. In sum, we have staged authenticity today.

As the realm of the visible grows it provides ever more protective cover for society's darkest impulses. This is the direction of sociocultural evolution where there is little ethical concern for what happens in the public domain. The following chapters are dedicated to ethical sightseeing, to piercing the veil of the visible, to taking responsibility for undoing the damage done behind the pretentious touristic screen of "what you see is what you get."