

Olsen, J. 'Through White Eyes: The packaging of people and places in the world of the travel brochure', *Cultural Studies from Birmingham* 2:1 (1998) accessed online at <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/bccsr/issueL/olsen.htm> (extracts)

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The holiday brochure is a significant element of popular culture which has become so naturalized within society as a way to fill 'leisure time' that its existence as a constructed commodity is largely ignored. Certainly, the travel brochure, with its eloquent marketing philosophy, perpetuates a certain 'way of seeing' (Berger 1972). This makes it important to explore how these 'ways of seeing' are constantly naturalized and re-naturalized within our psyche....

The tourist industry and the role of the brochure in the 20th century In contemporary society the tourist industry operates according to a systematic structure which views a holiday as a commodity that must be sold to ensure economic survival. The image is vital to the sale of the commodity and the key to successful imagery lies in the enticing pages of the tourist brochure. Travel brochure imagery appears to operate on different levels; On the one hand the brochure needs to present itself as a geographical manual, detailing potential holiday destinations. On the other hand, as Burns and Holden (1995:111) suggest, 'the operator aims to reaffirm to the consumer through sophisticated brochure imagery that the holiday on offer can address the perceived needs of the tourist.' Thus, the photograph must accentuate the emotional expectation of the holiday – be it quality

family time, a romantic break for two or the opportunity for exotic social encounters. What needs to be questioned is whether or not these realist representations in the brochure offer little more than an arbitrary configuration of the ability of the various technological processes and discourses of knowledge to materially produce 'reality' and 'emotional satisfaction'. If the tourist brochure constructs a version of reality through surface images then it is useful to employ the term postmodernism to explore this fascinating space.

DECONSTRUCTION: 20<sup>th</sup> century brochures-two goals 1. Providing information 2 answer to tourists' needs (selling a product)

The postmodern characteristics of the travel brochure Postmodern styles and the tourist industry have much in common. It is possible to view the tourist brochure as a constant and frequently contradictory flow of consumer images and spectacles which are often fragmented and overemphasized in order to create a heightened, intense surface style. Brochure photography tends to promote a plurality of meaning, encompassing instantaneity, pastiche, time and space compression, and elements from different historical periods which all serve to blur the distinctions between both social and cultural and subject and image.

Image: colour, size, font

Fragmentation and diversification Postmodernism is anti-elitist and based on popular pleasures. I suggest that travel brochures adhere to this through the fragmentation of the boundaries between high and popular culture. This fragmentation and diversification may also extend to reality itself. The tourist brochure can promote fabricated images as reality and I suggest this is in accordance with what the tour operators perceive the desires within the tourist imagination to be. Thus, as Albers and James (1988:136) note, 'tourists rely on stereotyped photographs as measures for their own visualization.' The postmodern fragmentation of boundaries and frontiers between countries is also characterized by the travel brochure due to its 'pick and mix' format. The consumer can simultaneously experience not only the delights of Tunisia and Turkey at a flick of the page but also view the same standardized sun, sand, and sea image in virtually every location. The ubiquity of these photographic representations constitutes a shrinkage of physical space and a compression of time. The world, according to the travel brochure may, thus, be semiotically appropriated and consumed without leaving the comfort of the armchair. These postmodernist tendencies may be both empowering in that they allow for an increase in the amount and speed of cultural exchange and also enlightening in that they allocate greater freedom to the consumer to explore the world with the greatest of ease. Travel brochures allow us to travel in our armchairs...travel brochures standardize images.

Tourist brochures propose what people want to see.

Postcolonialism, Orientalism, and historical frameworks of power

I suggest that Orientalism continues to manifest itself in contemporary society. In my view, Western popular cultural texts, such as travel brochures, partake in the perpetuation of Orientalist imagery. Said (1993:229) explains; 'When you can no longer assume that Britannia will rule the waves forever, you have to reconceive reality as something that can be held together by you the artist, in history rather than in geography. Spatiality becomes, ironically, the characteristic of an aesthetic rather than of political domination.' Certainly, within the world of the travel brochure, there remains a powerful nostalgic feeling toward earlier colonial periods.

... Historical legacies of power are also reformulated through contextual exclusion and inclusion of the native holiday-making is depicted as white, heterosexual, and nuclear. The black Britons or indigenous tourists simply do not exist. However, the tourist brochure has the power to include the Other according to its own marketing strategy. Although it must emphasise the contrast between the local and the tourist in order to invoke the idea that the holiday will place the tourist in a position of lavish superiority, it must also address the image of the demonised Other as perpetuated

by the majority of the Western press.

Travel brochures perpetuate otherization. Africa and Asia as 'exotic'; target: white, heterosexual, individuals or families. Accentuating the us/them concept by otherising the locals.

Figure 10 is startling in that the model who is dressed in exotic clothing, in order (I suggest), to represent the destination of Thailand, is Western. This may suggest a perpetuation of a kind of 'safety' within this strange foreign land. Paradoxically, the image provides the fantasy that the reality of the holiday will be intrinsically linked with what is familiar within the Western imagination, thus, distorting the boundaries of fantasy and reality.

Certainly, these images tend to call upon subconscious colonial knowledges; however, most disturbingly, I suggest that the frameworks of power manifest in the images extend beyond unhistorical legacies of geographical domination and serve to reformulate Orientalist, sexual mythologies concerning the dominating of the erotic, exotic female who is often fantasized and objectified under the tourist gaze.

Example of a western woman dressed up as an Asian: the target feels safer (familiar)- + woman (sexualized and exotic)

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### TaskB2.4.3



Olsen makes a number of assertions concerning the tourist brochure. From your experience (and/or analysis) of such brochures, do you agree with the following points?

➤ 'Holiday making is depicted as white, heterosexual, and nuclear.'

- 'The postmodern fragmentation of boundaries and frontiers between countries is characterized by the travel brochure.'
- 'Within the world of the travel brochure there remains a powerful nostalgic feeling toward earlier colonial periods.'

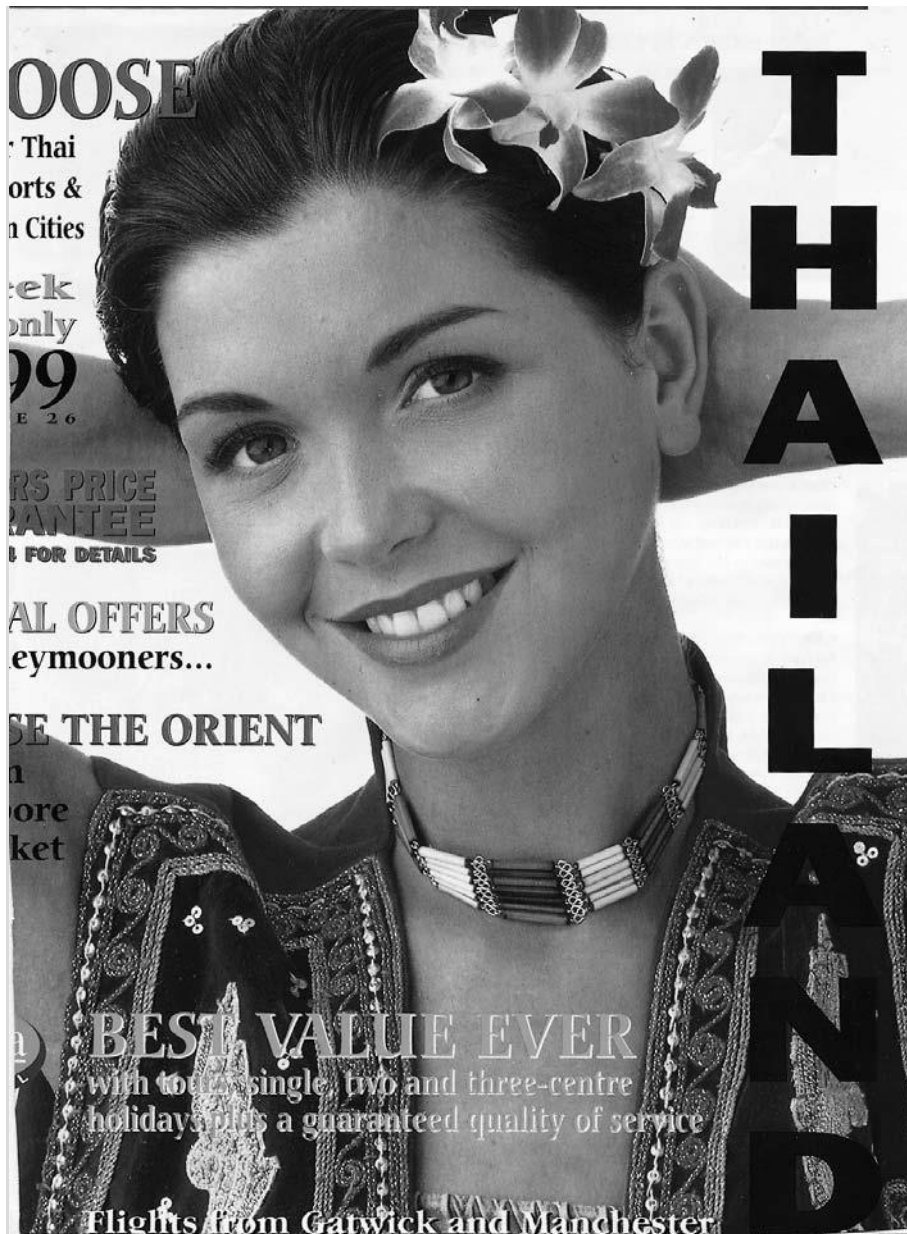


Figure 10 A photograph from a tourist brochure for Thailand



#### Task B2.4.4

The points made by Olsen relate as much to what has been written about tourism itself, as to the tourist brochure, particularly ‘the contrast between the local and tourist’ with the tourist being placed in ‘a position of lavish superiority’ and the objectification of locals ‘under the tourist gaze’.

➤ How far do you believe that tourism perpetuates such contrast, division, and objectification? ➤  
 Do you have personal experience of such contrast, division, and objectification as a tourist or of being ‘under the tourist gaze’?

#### Commentary

while postmodernists emphasize the ‘fragmentation’ and ‘diversification’ of the world, the mass media are characterized by increasing merger and homogenization.

TEXT B2.5.1

Parody of heart of darkness

C. Hope

**Hope, C. (1996) *Darkest England*, London: Macmillan (extracts)**

It was an awesome journey, that expedition into the heart of London. As you travel you might be like the event inier creatures who live on a water-spider, floating haphazardly down a stream. You feel you are in the world as it was in its primeval beginnings. Every so often we would stop at stations and a group of young warriors, male and female, would board in a kind of explosion, a whirl of white limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling.

I was delighted to have a chance to note the peculiar characteristics of the natives as we rolled slowly southward. The females are notable for the small development of the mammary organs. Few have small waists. Both sexes pierce their ears. Some of the young warriors cut their hair, as do those of the peace tribe, so that it commands their heads like an axe-blade, which they colour with a variety of strong hues. Often they employ scarification, and amongst the most popular of the clan-marks is a stippled line along the temporal lobes from the external edges of the eyebrows to the middle of the cheeks or the lower jaws.

With each stop, a fresh invasion. The chants went up anew, and I felt as if prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? Their cries were incomprehensible. My friend interpreted for me, saying that some commented on the failures of the French, or the deformities of foreigners generally. I should not be in the least bit afraid, as this was a perfectly normal practice – bands of sport lovers travelling abroad to support their country.

Love of country among these young men was unashamed, as they repeatedly chanted the beloved name of their sceptred isle, which they pronounced with a curious double beat, accentuating both syllables, ENG-LAND! ENG-LAND! Many carried flags. Not only was the proud standard waved at every opportunity, but many of them had made clothes of the national emblem and wore it as a shirt, or as a scarf or even as trousers. Some flew the flag on the tips of their stout black boots, or had tattooed tiny eaglets on each knuckle. One fine young buck, clearly a super-patriot, had emblazoned the beloved red, white and blue on his shaved skull, and the precious emblem flew wonderfully against the granite gleam of bone. Another had taken matters a step further and, perhaps because he was a great singer, he bellowed out 'God Save the Queen' in a rough baritone, showing, as he did so, that each of his teeth had been stained red, white and blue.

This display of what we might call dental patriotism impressed me deeply.

Nonetheless, I had to confide in my mentor that the sight left me secretly appalled, as a sane man would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in the madhouse. On catching sight of me, they became very excited. Some leaped from their seats, lifting their arms and scratching in their armpits as if troubled by furious itching; some threw monkey nuts in an artillery barrage of shells, ending with a large banana which struck me on the forehead to the accompaniment of loud cheers. They howled, they leapt and spun and made horrid faces. Ugly? Yes, it was ugly enough, but I felt in me a faint response to the terrible frankness of that noise. It was something that we, so far from the night of the First Ages, find so hard to comprehend, that someone from another part of the world should be traditionally saluted with fruit and nuts.

Conrad, J. (1902) *Heart of Darkness*, London: Penguin, 96

TEXT B2.5.2  
J. Conrad

When next day we left at noon, the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies. I steamed up a bit, then swung downstream, and two thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air. In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendant tail – something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany.

US vs THEM: how he describes the people he sees (exotic, primitive, weird)  
How these people would describe his boat

### Task B2.5.3

How does the description of the 'natives' in Text B2.5.2 compare to the description of the 'natives' in Text B2.5.1?

In what ways is there intertextuality between Texts B2.5.1 and B2.5.2?