DE BEAUVOIR AT THE BEACH

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ABSTRACT

"De Beauvoir at the Beach" is an exploration of intentions and ethics in tourism. Centered on the existential ethics of Simone de Beauvoir, and incorporating anecdotes from her extensive travels, it asks the reader questions about their travel choices, and explores various popular options for their next vacation, both traditional and more modern.

The first section begins to lay out the foundations of existentialism and post-modernism, the idea behind Sartre's "existence precedes essence" as well as Baudrillard's concept of simulacra. The work bounces back and forth between philosophy explainers and tourism experiences in Paris and New York, finding their confluence in the idea of a "city syndrome," where a tourist is disoriented by the disparity between their idea of a city and its actual reality.

Then it touches upon Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* and some of the archetypes of behavior she outlines therein, and how they relate to travel. It applies these foundations throughout the following sections, looking at different types of tourism and how they might relate to these concepts from post-war French philosophy: theme parks and simulation, voluntourism and bad faith, poverty and death tourism and the subject/object problems of existentialism. It is written in many ways as a conversation with the reader about their hypothetical next vacation, why they are making those choices, and encouraging them to look deeper at their motivations, as well as how their actions affect those subjects and objects that are being toured.

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DARKNESS IN THE CENTER OF TOWN

A Tale of Two Cities

A man has travelled back in time, but he'll soon learn it was not far enough. He arrives in Paris on a red eye from Tokyo. He came to see a place that for decades served as the epicenter of Western culture, where great minds sipped café crèmes and filled Moleskine notebooks on sidewalk cafés. He wanted to smell the baguettes and listen to the bicycle bells lightly jingling along the bumpy cobblestones as their slender riders pedaled to work. Where did they work? He probably had not thought much about it specifically, but one always imagines Parisians at work as artists or confectioners, writers or actors. Not cogs in an economic engine like the one back home, but bouncing balls and tumbling dominoes in the Rube Goldberg machine of the "creative class." For all the cafés he had dreamt up, his thoughts never wandered to the fact that many Parisians were likely waiters and dishwashers, busboys and delivery drivers. The tourism books, the films, the advertisements had all played up this magical place with models twirling Chanel handbags under the Eiffel Tower. Here one could delve into café society, share champagne with young actresses in a salon and discuss art and politics and sex. Here one could be free of oppressive work schedules, hectic commutes, and conservative mindsets. And it was all there for the taking, just a plane ticket away.

But as he wanders "gay Paris" he finds the streets smell of diesel and piss; the café patrons are pudgy and their cigarettes are electronic. The three months of sporadic French lessons and that phone app his sister recommended have allowed him to form some barely comprehensible questions, but he cannot understand the responses. He finds himself lost. Alone. No slim intellectuals hauling home baguettes on their bikes, only disgruntled cabbies, harried commuters and loud American tourists kitted out like war reporters, cameras and

fanny packs dangling about their bodies, dressed in sun hats and cargo shorts. He feels dizzy. He sits down at the café table nearest him on the sidewalk. As the waiter approaches to greet him in French spoken with the haste of a man who says the same ten sentences all day, the man from Tokyo gags a bit, raises a hand in apology, and lurches across the pavement to throw up his airline food in a convenient trash can. His heart races. He is panicking. A few pedestrians stop to check on him. More French, this time slower; he still doesn't understand. They try English, which he speaks a little, and he asks which way it is back to his hotel. His sense of direction rarely fails him like this. He returns to the hotel and sets up an appointment with one of the few Japanese-speaking doctors in Paris. The doctor will recognize his affliction right away: "Paris Syndrome."

Six decades or so earlier, not even three years after the liberation of Paris, an excited Simone de Beauvoir left that same French city and headed for New York City. At the time one must imagine what contrasts she imagined to see. Her own life had been defined by the war for years, her culture brought low by Nazi occupation, her food robbed of taste by the all-consuming war. Ersatz coffee and butter eaten in freezing basements at secret, life-or-death resistance meetings. Cafés dark and closed or filled with smiling Nazi officers.

America, though, was largely immune from the direct effects of the war. Food shortages, sure, blackouts on the coasts even, but New York didn't see a single bullet while London and Paris were under siege. The recovery was quicker across the pond, and the Americans kept exporting films shot in the dark alleys of New York or the sunny hills of Hollywood. American soldiers were saviors who marched into Paris and rid Europe of the Nazi threat, "those men whose helmets and uniforms meant deliverance."[1] They told stories of this new country, maybe, with as much truth as any twenty-year-old soldier hoping to get laid can muster. What was it like, my modern mind wonders, the image one could build of a

place without access to any kind of fact-checking. Stories and films, books and newspapers all stack little clues to what life is like there, but there was no clearinghouse of real information. Perhaps if you wanted to travel to ten different libraries you might find some population data, some climate data, maybe even a diary of some important person who once lived there, photos of architecture. But the gaps were so big, especially in the wake of the war, that you would only have a sketchy outline until you got there. Sometimes, despite the relatively recent arrival of the information age, I think we forget about those gaps, the ones once mortared with our imaginations but are now filled by *Google* results and *Wikipedia* articles. I can walk the streets of Paris or New York right now, through photos and webcams, *YouTube* videos and tourist blogs. Of course I am limited by my own ability to research and my own prejudices, but I am also limited by what the city wants to show me. The image projected may not be the truth of one's actual experience therein.

The young de Beauvoir did not, however, encounter New York to fits of dizziness and disorientation, but with fascination. She, like all of us, had built her image of this foreign place from media: "For a long time movies represented America for me…" she wrote in her travelogue *America Day by Day,* "...but now I'm in America and nothing can represent it anymore."[2] This willingness to let go of expectation, to concede your image of a place, or a person, to its actuality is paramount in de Beauvoir's idea of tourism. Perhaps it was easier when the gaps were so big, when you didn't have an *Atlas Obscura* article about each object you encountered, or a guide book to maximize your intake of historical landmarks and cultural totems.

To some extent these staples of tourism—guides, advertisements, and magazines (also blogs!)—fetishize a place, objectify it into something built for your enjoyment as a tourist. The cafés in Paris did not get built so some American could come over and feel

French; Times Square, for all its tourist bonafides, still houses many non-tourist-centered businesses (eh hem, *The New York Times*). The train stations and restaurants would all exist if you were not there on vacation. Historical landmarks were not built with future visitors in mind, although the unfortunately relevant exception to this would be the Eiffel Tower, built for the World's Fair in 1889. Walking the streets of New York, having arrived at night in the quiet of winter, Simone de Beauvoir confronted the disparity between what New York might be, what she may have thought it to be, and what it actually was. She was not comforted by it, but she wasn't disturbed by it either; she simply acknowledged it for what it was: not her. This city was not her, nor was it *hers*; it was itself. She was okay with that:

> There is no place for me on these sidewalks. This strange world where I've landed by surprise was not waiting for me. It was full without me, it *is* full without me. It is a world where I am not: I grasp it in my perfect absence.[3]

Paris Syndrome

Our fictional Japanese amalgam was diagnosed with Paris Syndrome, which in truth is more of an urban legend than a medical condition; but its premise is so delectable to the bourgeois tourist class that you can read about it in all their favorite publications: *The Atlantic, The New Yorker,* and the *BBC* (which in America is classy because we've mistakenly associated English accents with sophistication). The syndrome isn't fake, per say, as it was discovered and named by a Japanese doctor in Paris, Dr. Hiroaki Ota, in the late 1980s, and has been published about a couple of times in French and Japanese medical journals. The most recent paper, from 2004, in *Nervure* (I also have not heard of it) cites some sixty-three cases over a fifteen-year period, which isn't exactly an epidemic. Symptoms are what a layman might refer to as "freakouts": panic attacks, violent outbursts, fits of paranoia, disassociation, et cetera, and only seem to affect Japanese tourists.[4] These are brought on,

apparently, by the dysphoria of encountering a Paris nothing like the one you imagined, a difficult language barrier, and a population notoriously snooty toward tourists. Your perfect vacation is ruined by the reality of what is an actual functioning city, and not a theme park, because actual cities are kind of crappy sometimes. Public transit is crowded and people smell bad, streets are dirty, things are closed for construction, lines are long—this is the reality of, well, everywhere. But you thought it would be different here.

The people who experience Paris Syndrome generally have some underlying mental instability. Think about the plot of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, but replace Diane Lane with an overworked, unmarried thirty-something Japanese woman with mild depression whose mother just won't stop harassing her about grandkids, and instead of a villa in Italy she's in a hotel on the Left Bank, which looked a lot nicer in the pictures, on a block that might have been hip when Hemingway lived there but now is just a bunch of tourists taking pictures of places Hemingway got drunk. She may have imagined a horse-drawn carriage rolling into Versailles, but instead it is an ambulance removing a dehydrated tourist. This escape to Parisian paradise was a big, desperate bet, made for happiness, but she ended up rolling snake eyes. She freaks out. Her big moment is ruined.

Strangely enough, Paris Syndrome is just one of many "city syndromes." The oldest seems to be Stendhal Syndrome, which relates to Florence, Italy, and is the opposite of Paris Syndrome, in that the tourists' symptoms are brought on by everything being too beautiful and great. They are overwhelmed by the art and architecture, and they just can't handle the aesthetic onslaught. It is named for a French novelist who first described his experience with this back in the early 1800s. Jerusalem Syndrome is the religious version of these conditions, in which people travel to the holy city in search of some kind of religious epiphany, and they find it in a big way. The origins of Jerusalem syndrome isn't that people are unfulfilled by

their experience, but rather that their delusion of religious transcendence grows into insanity. The description of the most severe cases is quite absurd: "They then devise toga-like garments from white hotel linens, and, shouting out hymns or passages from the Bible, proceed to a holy site, where they deliver confused and rambling sermons."[5] A couple of thousand years ago these entrepreneurial oracles might have been successful, but today this type of behavior generally ends with a trip to the psychiatrist's office.

A skeptic might concern themselves with the validity of these illnesses. They aren't in the *DSM*, they aren't showing up in big peer-reviewed studies in *The Lancet*. But the purpose here is not to adjudicate the medical science behind these syndromes, but rather explore the dynamic that is at their foundation: the expectation of a tourist (or religious, in the case of Jerusalem) experience versus its reality. The disorienting difference between how something is and how it is perceived might be considered a dysphoria, but for Simone de Beauvoir, it was transcendence. This definition she owed to her life partner and fellow philosophy enthusiast, Jean-Paul Sartre, whose philosophy is most famous for the relation between existence and essence, between what is and what can be.[i]

Being and Frenchness

Jean-Paul Sartre is considered to be the father of existentialist philosophy. He released his lengthy "essay" *Being and Nothingness* in 1943, and it laid out the ontology of existentialism, the idea of humans having "radical freedom" and implored us all to live in good faith, to be authentic individuals. It took a painful six hundred pages to do this, however, and so it isn't exactly the best pocket field-guide to carry with you on your next vacation. Thankfully we've had enough time in between for people to pull out the core of his

[i] Also for generally being pretty depressing, some of his more famous quotations being "Hell is other people" and "All human actions are equivalent and all are on principle doomed to failure."

work and boil it down into catchy phrases like, "existence precedes essence." But what does that even mean?

Existence, in Sartre's view, is the facticity of what we are. I am a man; I speak English; I have blue eyes; I am sitting in my room. These are indisputable facts, as much as anything can be indisputable in philosophy. Sartre was not concerned about whether I was my physical body or my thinking mind; he was not concerned whether this room actually existed or was simply my nerve endings deceiving me into believing it existed. It was as if he was screaming at so many prior philosophers, "The room just exists, okay? And there is a guy in it. Move on! Just get over it, Descartes." We exist, then, each as a "being-in-itself." There is no otherworldly essence of "me," my purpose and meaning are not a package deal with my cells and thoughts. I am. Okay, so now what?

This is where it gets slightly confusing, but stick with me. We also have a "being-for-itself." This is different than the "being-in-itself" because it is not factual. Sartre describes this as a "negation" of the being-in-itself, but it is a bit easier, in my opinion, to think of it as a goal. I am sitting in this room, I exist, and that is the being-in-itself, but the being-for-itself is the "now what?" I create a goal, which negates the facticity of what I am right now—if I am just here in this room sitting, then a goal to go make coffee creates this absence of me making coffee, which I need to fulfill with the action of making the coffee. I then transcend my existence (just, you know, sitting and breathing or whatever) because I have created meaning in my life. My purpose, my essence, is now that of a coffee maker. The main takeaway here is that my essence was mine to create. Unlike many previous philosophies that relied on a god, or a mysterious metaphysical idea of a person, in Sartre's mind we are all free to make our own essence. This "radical freedom," as he called it, is obvious if you think about it for a second. Right now punch yourself in the face, write a novel, call your ex-

boyfriend.[ii] You can choose to do or not to do it, right? You may say "I can't do this because…" but you are only making excuses. Unless the facticity of your existence truly prohibits you from an action (a severe physical disability, perhaps), you are truly free to do whatever you want. It may be hard, there may be consequences, but there is nothing stopping you from trying. The action of trying is how you transcend your mere existence.

There is a third being, however, the "being-for-others." This is the show, the superego, the facade. Sartre refers to a phenomenon he called "the gaze" in which we alter our behavior when we feel ourselves being watched. His famous example is leering through a keyhole, his gaze unknown to the people inside the apartment, who act as if they are not being watched (because they do not know he is watching), and Sartre himself feels no eyes are on him either. But a shadow falls upon him, a creaky footstep perhaps behind him in the hallway, and he immediately feels the change, as he is now being watched, his shameful behavior is brought to the forefront of his consciousness. Advertising, cinema, magazine profiles, Instagram photos: these are the purest distillation of the being-for-others. My sister lives in New York, works on 42nd Street where the streets smell of urine all summer and are covered in frozen gray sludge all winter. She doesn't note this in her Instagram photos of *Playbills*. The Japanese travel agents don't bring up the crowded metros and hordes of tourists. Expectations are thusly set high for tourists, which leads to a disparity of experience and, perhaps, a disorienting disappointment. Except, of course, when someone is looking for dirty streets and unfriendly locals a part of their experience, but we will get to that later on.

"My desire is nothing but a myth—New York which is everywhere and nowhere," de Beauvoir writes, noting this disconnect between her imagined city and the city-in-itself. I believe she didn't suffer from any city syndrome, as most of us don't when traveling, because

[ii] Editor's Note: These are all exactly the same thing.

she knew that New York could never be exactly as any one individual pictured it.[6] She had studied the work of Edmund Husserl, whose philosophy of phenomenology is at the core of existentialism. It is the basis of that "this exists, get over it" attitude found in Sartre's work. Husserl gave us all a handy little trick to dim our expectations of any given person, place, or thing, and he called it "eidetic reduction." It is a logic problem, in which you must think of what things any given object would be destroyed without, and then you know those things are part of that object's essence. Could Paris, for example, exist without the Eiffel Tower? Of course; it did for hundreds of years. Could Paris exist without sidewalk cafés? Certainly the nature of how people eat or drink could change a bit. But can Paris exist without Parisians? Could Paris exist without delivery vehicles, without construction? Here we can see the failure of those affected by Paris Syndrome, they weigh heavily the very things that are not inherently indispensable to Paris existing, and avoid thinking of the things that are. Paris is a city, and to be a city you need people, and those people need to get to work, those jobs need buildings, those people need cars. Paris is not the Louvre, it isn't a collection of landmarks for photographing, it isn't Colonial Williamsburg, full of actors pretending to be from another time to satisfy your nostalgia.

Most of us know this, and perform this reduction subconsciously. New York, despite being a prime tourist destination, does not have a syndrome. It is an overwhelming city at times, it is crowded, hot in the summer, the metro system is unintuitive at first, second, and third glance. But its reputation is for toughness, not elegance, and its history is shorter than that of Paris, Jerusalem, or Florence. "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere" doesn't call up the image of a tourist experience free of difficulty. While these old Mediterranean nations have millennia of history to fill our brains with some idyllic mise-en-scène, New York only has a few hundred years. When you travel to a foreign land, you

probably realize it will be full of foreigners, and that they are generally not there to serve you, or interact with you, or act a certain way to fulfill your idea of their culture. You don't need Husserl's logic to reach this conclusion; you just need to think beyond yourself momentarily. It isn't always that easy, though, because we are constantly being tricked. At the core, remember, we have no essence; we have to make it ourselves. Our being-for-itself is the things we choose to direct ourselves towards, the actions we choose to take, and so on. New York, Paris, these are not individuals, and they cannot take actions or make choices. So why does it seem like every city has some kind of personality? Certainly the Portland city council isn't deciding to start more indie folk bands, the mayor of New York isn't requiring a gruff demeanor from citizens. Why, then, can something which cannot have a being-for-itself somehow have this coherent being-for-others? The answer is two-fold: firstly, the essence of a city is false, and anyone who has spent a lot of time in a city they thought they knew from the outside will be able to attest to this. A city (or any other place) is a diverse mix of people, history, geography, and language, and it changes as all those things do over time. It doesn't stay still, its definition is forever changing, its "essence" constantly in motion. Secondly, there is a large enough portion of the population willing to go along, to some extent, with the city's image or images, its popular conceptions in the zeitgeist. This is the vast conspiracy underlying how we see the world, in which you are most certainly a conspirator: the simulacrum.

My Milkshake Brings all the Baudrillard

Let us first dismiss the marketers, because their motivations are all too simple and uninteresting. Of course Famous Jim's New York Tours will play up the New Yorkiness of New York, I mean fagettaboutit. The Eiffel Tower and narrow streets full of bicycles and sidewalk cafés and beautiful models are going to be on your airport posters. Paris, je t'aime. I

love New York. Come visit the beautiful coast of (cough) New Jersey. "Virginia is for lovers," a slogan ironically brought to you by the state on the wrong side of Loving v. Virginia, the Supreme Court case that legalized interracial marriage. Slogans made to lure you so that your tourism dollars make it to the right place. These aren't simulators, but deceivers. Allow me to elaborate, with the help of Jean Baudrillard.

Baudrillard was a French philosopher and he also had glasses and wore a lot of wool sweaters but he smoked cigarettes and Jean-Paul Sartre smoked a pipe so that's how you can keep them straight. Baudrillard was a post-modernist whose most famous piece, "Simulacra and Simulation," taught us all that everything is fake. His idea is that we're in this echo chamber of perception, but that the reverberations are distortions, and each echo gets us further from reality. We aren't lying, really, the way a marketer might deceive you into thinking the Jersey Shore is pristine or your chicken is "all natural," because we don't know the truth and then decide to conceal it. Instead, we simulate what we think is true, and it becomes our truth. Our truth, in other words, is fiat currency; there is nothing solid behind it, no gold standard to back it up. He lays it out the process in four steps:

1) It is the reflection of a basic reality.

2) It masks and perverts a basic reality.

3) It masks the absence of a basic reality.

4) It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.[7]

New York and Paris both have reputations for an unfriendliness to tourists. Perhaps the origins of this, going back centuries, was the stark difference between these cities' modernity (the first two subways in the world) and the agrarian life of the other ninety-plus percent of the population in those days. Easy to see how they would be considered a busy, hustling city of unfriendly people to the small town peasants who visited. But then it

becomes a stereotype, an image, a catchphrase: "I'm walking here." It perverts the reality. Then there is the masking of basic reality, as over time everyone forgets where this comes from; it just "is" that these Parisians and New Yorkers are rude. Maybe you make up a reason. It doesn't really matter. The people in these cities may internalize this, although the areas around them are becoming less agrarian, moving faster, are better educated. The contrast no longer holds that the rural and suburban tourists live such different lives from the city dwellers. But people who move there adopt this idea, that their New Yorkness, their Parisiennement, it is partly about how they present themselves to tourists. Maybe they are actually from a small town, and are not in a hurry, and are not generally rude, but their habit becomes to be snippy from watching those around them. The instinct of the tourist becomes to avoid contact with the locals. All of these actions are based on this illusion of a city/tourist dichotomy, the origins of which are entirely invisible to those currently perpetrating them. Maybe people who are naturally gruff might migrate to these cities, as they see the culture there as one they will can relate to. The prophecy becomes self-fulfilling.

Now this is just one element, common to our two target cities, of what people perceive as their essence. Layer on top of this all the other ideas of New York and Paris and see what, if any, true base reality you can attach to them. Sometimes it seems easy, because you can attach them to actual happenings, people's actions, et cetera. But, if these events are people acting based on the very distortions we're trying to clarify, those actions cannot serve as the base reality. Baudrillard calls to mind the image of a Mobius strip, constantly spiraling back into itself, when he describes this "hyper-reality."[8] Like fiat currency, "New York" and "Paris" only exist because people buy into the idea of them. Collectively we all allow ourselves some amount of unquestioned truths about the city and base our actions on those to the extent that each city is only a simulation of its true self, with everyone acting as they

think they should—simulating the life of a Parisian, projecting the persona of a New Yorker. All of these echoes of behaviors come together into architecture or businesses or experiences that "feel like New York" but which are not, in reality, New York.

Unpacking the simulacrum to its original base truths is not a feasible or useful goal as a tourist, but realizing that there is no "true" Paris, New York, or Jersey Shore (which is nicer than you think!) is helpful in avoiding these city syndrome type reactions, these crippling shocks to the consciousness. Much like in existentialism, if we remove the idea of a true, preordained essence, we are left with the facticity of the city and its potential. The city-in-itself is really there to experience, its streets and buildings, transportation and food, its people. But as an individual looking for a worthwhile experience, you must transcend that city-in-itself by creating a purpose. This is all to say that the true Paris is whatever you want it to be, within the confines of its physical existence. If you want Paris to be an intellectual experience, then go read in a café, sit among the ghosts of your favorite thinkers on the Left Bank. If you want romance in the city of lights, bring your partner, or put yourself out there and find someone new with whom to stroll the lovely gardens and parks. None of this is to say that you will always succeed, or that your tasks will be easy, but you cannot expect a place to give you its essence simply because you arrived there. The idea behind Paris syndrome is that Paris will simply pass its energy into you, that you will somehow, by passively lingering upon its streets, find a satisfaction in your life, a second wind, or a belief where there was a crisis of faith, but none of those things come to pass. That is because the city is nothing to you without your transcendence of its facticity, it is just concrete and air. The only Paris that can help you is the one you create for yourself.

The Implication

You get to carve out your own meaning wherever you are: at your job, at home, and on vacation. The possibilities are technically endless, but the reality of the consequences often forces us to limit them quite severely. As de Beauvoir writes, "[I]f God does not exist, man's faults are inexpiable."[9] Sure, you could rob that bank, but you might end up in jail and you find jail to be quite unpleasant. You could run away to be a surf bum in Hawai'i but your child would starve in your absence. Without delving too deep into what is an "authentic" life, suffice to say that most of us make compromises with our absolute freedom on a day-to-day basis so as to maintain some level of comfort and stability. We go to work at a job we may not entirely enjoy so that we can have a home and food, so that we can support our family and/or pay for our Netflix subscription. When our boss is being a jerk, we do not tell him how we feel, and indeed we suppress our authentic selves in order to keep our paychecks coming. We simulate what a good employee is, what a good friend is, what a good citizen is, sometimes because it is the choice we truly want to make with our freedom, and sometimes because it is the expedient choice, the choice that limits disruption in our lives.

It is easy for dead French intellectuals to judge us for these choices from their heady tomes. Just go run away and be an artist! Go travel the world! Live your best life—you are naturally imbued with a radical freedom! Don't submit to the drudgery of a bullshit job just to buy things you don't need. "There is no more obnoxious way to punish a man than to force him to perform acts which make no sense to him…"[10] de Beauvoir notes, and strikes a chord with any modern cubicle monkey filling out the same spreadsheet for the hundredth time. If only it were that easy for most people to break free of the monotony. Because of the circumstances most of us live in, it may be unfair to judge the choices people make to survive, and I won't, because this is not an inquiry into how one might live a fulfilling and

truly free life. When you take time off, however, when you have the means to step outside of your day-to-day life and divorce yourself from these freedom-stunting obligations, you experience a glimpse at the world Sartre and de Beauvoir want us all to live in. That is why vacations, why tourism and travel are such great moments to consider one's existential transcendence. You are not obligated to go to work, presumably your bills are paid for the week, or month (looking at you, Europeans). You are free to do whatever you want, so now what? A vacation may be the only time many people can get to this unadulterated being-for-itself origin point. Here is an opportunity to truly transcend your existence…

...so what do you do?

The Sub-Man

There's a line in David Mamet's *State and Main* where the character Annie quips, "You always make your own fun. If you don't make it yourself, it ain't fun, it's entertainment."[11] We toss the words around interchangeably because language is fluid and prescriptivist grammar is the worst, but separating them here provides us with a useful dichotomy within the context of our existential paradigm. Fun is your creation; it is you projecting beyond your mere existence to make a project of your own enjoyment. Entertainment is inactive: you are simply absorbing pleasures; you consume but you do not create. Fun is acting in a play, entertainment is attending it. A little simple, but it mostly lines up. There is nothing inherently wrong or immoral, of course, with being entertained, nor is there anything particularly ethical or moral about it. Its core value is that it is passive. If you intend to use philosophy to choose whether or not to go to the movies, or even which movie to see, I assure you that you are wasting your time. Even our protagonist Simone and her companion Jean-Paul spent many hours at the cinema watching not just art-house French films, but classic American Westerns and detective noirs. They also did a lot of other things, though.

What does this have to do with tourism? Well, if you look at popular tourist destinations, the themes become immediately apparent. You have the cultural centers: New York, Rome, Paris, Barcelona, San Francisco. Then there are the beaches: Miami, Myrtle Beach, Jamaica, Cancun, and so on. And finally you have the entertainment destinations: Las Vegas, Orlando, Branson. Cities chosen for history and cultural amenities, beaches chosen for their natural beauty and pleasant climate, and then some random places where someone

has constructed for you a play area, as one might place a child's swing set in the backyard of any given house.

If you count Disney's separate sections, there are over a dozen amusement parks in Orlando, Florida. Many, doubling down on the entertainment aspect, are themed after films. Harry Potter World, Disney's Hollywood Studios, Universal Studios. These places are jammed full of shows, rides, games, food and beverage, and offer packages that ensure you may never have to actively make a decision. The child's swing set analogy is not entirely my own, but belongs partially to de Beauvoir, who believed children were metaphysically privileged, that since their decisions were largely inconsequential, their lives sheltered, that they "escaped the anguish of freedom." They are only partially free, but also they are almost entirely free of consequence, in a "state of security by virtue of [their] very insignificance."[12] They love Harry Potter World; that is fine, it is made for them.

The ethical quandary arises when adults do not transcend this state of affairs. Those adults who do not move beyond this childhood state, who do not consider their freedom and act upon it, de Beauvoir calls these the "sub-men." These are the thoughtless people out there living wholly unexamined lives, coasting along on metaphysical cruise control. "His acts are never positive choices, only flights. He cannot prevent himself from being a presence in the world, but he maintains this presence on the place of bare facticity."[13] In the credits, after this world is over, these are your "bar patron #4" type characters—they add nothing to the plot, they simply fill in the background.

Now now; put the torches down, Hufflepuffs! The assertion here is not that going to Harry Potter World makes you some kind of sub-human devoid of thought or morality. These archetypes de Beauvoir creates are about the totality of your choices. No reasonable person can be expected to make existentially significant choices all the time, it would be

tiresome. At a certain point you just have to decide between the bagel and the muffin and it doesn't matter *that* much. The idea here is that seeking out simple entertainments is the choice a sub-man would make. You could, of course, be a human rights lawyer or a doctor in a free clinic and you just want to relax and drink a butter beer on your vacation. You aren't a sub-man, but you are taking a sub-man vacation. On the whole you'll probably be fine, but it doesn't matter because no one is keeping score. There is no God, right, so do whatever you want. Existentialism may frame a certain lifestyle as less ethical than another, but it doesn't mete out punishments for it. In the end, those who spend much of their lives as sub-men often get off scot-free because they never consider the consequences of their actions (or inactions) and are thusly able to extricate themselves from that painful freedom that the rest of us deal with on a daily basis.

And so you can see how after days and weeks and years of projecting out a negation of our being in order to transcend the mere facticity of our existence we might get tired and want a break. I don't believe there was a single philosopher who said that living an ethical life was easy, that examining one's decisions is without pain. The sub-man as an archetype is on a permanent vacation from existential distress, which actually sounds kind of nice. In the big picture of ethical actions though—which for de Beauvoir was a picture full of Nazis and Communists, concentration camps and secret freedom fighters—she saw the sub-man as a dangerous phenomenon:

> He [the sub-man] is thereby left to take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world. He will proclaim certain opinions; he will take shelter behind a label; and to hide his indifference he will readily abandon himself to verbal outbursts or even physical violence. . . he is more readily anti-Semitic, anti-clerical, or anti-

> republican. Thus…the sub-man is not a harmless creature. He realizes himself in the world as a blind uncontrolled force which anybody can get control of.[14]

The ranks of the Nazi horde were filled with sub-men! We must avoid this path at all costs, you scream, flailing at low-hanging ethical fruit, donating to IndieGoGos with reckless abandon. Slow down, though. Let us consider the respite offered by temporarily adopting the path of the sub-man in a safe context. Like indulging in hallucinogens, the environment is key to a good experience.

If you are, say, making a career decision in 1930s Germany, putting some thought into the consequences of your actions may be useful. Hannah Arendt notes in "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil" that Adolf Eichmann was considered by most psychologists who examined him to be a typical, everyday guy. Adolf Eichmann, a Willy Loman-type vacuum oil salesman who became a middle-manager of the Holocaust, stumbled into the role by simply not thinking. "A leaf in the whirlwind of the time," as Arendt calls him, he took a decent-paying government job and worked his way up to facilitating genocide.[15] Passivity of thought in such a context is dangerous, but if you're just thinking about where to go for a week or two, and you're going to be constrained not only by time but by location, you won't end up doing too much damage. Maybe it is valuable to let Mickey take control for a bit, send you on a guided tour of a zoo (simulated nature!) or provide you a list of the best rides (free adrenaline!). Disney World, Harry Potter World, Sea World, they make decisions for you, taking control of your passive mind, and allow you to exist without transcendence in an enjoyable and safe environment.

This is the nature of the sub-man: vulnerable, controllable, childlike. There is obviously a demand for this in modern Western culture, as these parks market not only to families and children, but adults as well. Seeking a return to childhood innocence, free (but

actually kind of expensive) joy divorced from consequences is a wonderful way to spend a week or two, but there is a reason why de Beauvoir loathes and pities the sub-man, who "makes his way across a world deprived of meaning toward a death which merely confirms his long negation of himself."[16] Try to spend a month or more at a theme park, or indulging in the revelry of Las Vegas casinos and shows. Even if it weren't prohibitively expensive to do so, you would at some point confront its emptiness. Disney, Universal, Vegas, they will all claim they have thousands of activities and restaurants available, so many that you could never get bored. But I assure you, you will get bored. You will get tired of the simulations, which are so brazen they may not even be considered simulacra: the plaster boulders, the scale models of world heritage sites, the Italian restaurants with tiny canals and gondolas built right into them. What is an oasis of relaxation soon reveals itself to be a desert of purpose. You, the purposeful vacationer, who puts great thought into using the petty crumbs of PTO handed to you by your capitalist overlords, you are better than this. You take this seriously.

The Serious Man

Be careful with that, though. If we see purposelessness and gullibility as the flaw in the sub-man, we react accordingly to ballast ourselves with purpose and dogma. A person who does not actualize themselves by transcending their freedom is a waste, and so you actualize the shit out of yourself. You find that purpose and you devote yourself to it. This purpose could be anything: money, curing cancer, religious evangelism. A serious man could be a philanthropist, an aid worker. He could also be a dictator. What de Beauvoir says they have in common is simple: "The serious man gets rid of his freedom by claiming to subordinate it to values. . . ."[17] These values aim at some objective, be it world domination, world peace, or the high score at Big Buck Hunter, and that initial, specific objective is the

only thing that matters. This is a rejection of freedom, because each choice no longer is made in freedom, but simply a result of one prior choice. What you eat is decided by your religious practice, as is who you marry, what you wear, et cetera. In the military everything you do is for your cause, your country, and the military is full of serious men.

When you subordinate the project of yourself to an objective, you are putting essence before existence. You are striving towards an idea of yourself you've pre-formed. Think of how our culture praises this. Some kid who grows up saying I want to be an astronaut who actually follows through with it—there's your feel-good news article. Every actor's story about slinging cocktails and appetizers for a decade before getting their big break, forgoing other opportunities because they knew they'd make it. That striving, that work ethic, that subordination of everything to a goal is practically baked into the American Dream, insofar as that cake has any pieces left. Half of it is bootstraps bullshit to encourage hustle among the proletariat and to keep everyone in line, but some of it checks out. Just enough of it, for some, to keep them from questioning. De Beauvoir believes the serious man to be in denial of his knowing that his values are wrong and need to be examined, that he "must mask the movement by which he gives them to himself, like the mythomaniac who while reading a love-letter pretends to forget that she has sent it to herself."[18]

How does one fall into the category of a "serious tourist" then? Try too hard at one thing. Try to find the perfect beach, try to see as many landmarks as possible, try to avoid well-toured sites like the plague. Try to maximize some element of your trip at the expense of all others. Like the sufferers of Paris Syndrome, you must avoid throwing yourself wholly at some idea or some object, if not because it sets you up for disappointment, because it usurps your ability to make real choices. Reflecting back on her travels, de Beauvoir notes her own folly in respect to this seriousness: "I had promised myself that one day I would

traverse France, perhaps even the whole world, so thoroughly that I left not one field of thicket unvisited."[19] She dismissed it later, however, with the benefit of hindsight she realized that her goal was absurd.

There are times where this seriousness works, of course. If your vacation is climbing Mount Rainier, then all of your decisions will be subordinate to the goal of summiting the mountain. Whimsy is a tough sell on an icy slope, but this example is unusually clear. Take the more convoluted idea of trying to relax, though, and you'll see how the serious man is vulnerable to paradox. If you devote your whole week at the beach to relaxing, you may find yourself less relaxed than ever. The pressure mounts; the relaxation began at nine in the morning and you're barely even relaxed yet. Bringing it back to our fun/entertainment dichotomy, if the sub-man suffers because he does not create his own fun, the serious man suffers because the creation of fun disallows him from enjoying any entertainment. Like that overzealous teacher insisting that this group mathematics exercise will "be a blast," the forcing of fun upon a person is rarely fun, even if you're forcing it upon yourself.

At this point you are likely frustrated. The idea of existential ethics was to create a purpose for oneself and pursue it. Now this criticism of the serious man implies that you shouldn't do that? The idea is that the serious man makes a decision once, and then continuously denies his freedom, using that choice as an excuse. The idea of radical freedom is one of constant renewal. In each moment your status between existing and being remains ambiguous, and you must reaffirm it by making yourself a lack of being. You have to, in moments which are admittedly ill-defined temporally, make active decisions about what you will do in a manner unrestricted by dogma or outside influence. That's true freedom. To decide you are one thing and make all subsequent decisions in service to that thing is almost as bad as never deciding to be anything, like the sub-man. In de Beauvoir's mind, while the

sub-man may have filled the ballot box and the infantry for the Nazis, the officer's lounge was full of serious men.

The Adventurer

The serious man, you might imagine, loves an itinerary. Maps! Timelines! "Not me," you scream at these pages. "I am a free spirit, a goddamn leaf on the wind—do you not follow my Insta?" You, the seeker of the exotic, you the errant meanderer of foreign streets and small mountain towns, you the (holds back vomit) *wanderlust,* you are not the serious man. You even have the poster "Not all those who wander are lost," so everyone knows that your home is wherever you unlace your boots that night. Simone and you are probably kindred spirits in some ways (you just call her Simone), who herself got lost on a number of occasions. Once, upon a foggy mountain pass in the middle of the night during one of her Alpine sojourns in 1938, Simone became a bit lost and disoriented. She gave up on her initial goal of making it through the pass and decided to return from whence she came, but found the village on the wrong side of her. It was a different village. Her reaction was nonplussed, "There was a much more comfortable hotel than in the first one, so I had an immense dinner." [20] She would wander into small alpine towns and inquire about sleeping in a barn for the night. New villages, new people, no reservations—just adventure.

The archetype of the adventurer could be summarized neatly with the cliché that it is not the destination which matters, but the journey itself. "He [the adventurer] throws himself into his undertakings with zest, into exploration, conquest, war, speculation, love, politics, but he does not attach himself to the end at which he aims; only to his conquest."[21] The adventurer is a collector of experiences, not results, a sport hunter who doesn't need or yearn for sustenance, but lives for the chase. In de Beauvoir's framework the adventurer is pretty close to a righteous person. They are constantly renewing their lack of being,

projecting themselves into new goals and defining their own existence through actions. Where they fall short, however, is in failing to consider the objectives of their goals, they neglect to consider others, they neglect to consider the world and how their actions affect it. "If existentialism were solipsistic…" de Beauvoir admits, "…it would have to regard the adventurer as its perfect hero."[22] Transcend, sure, but remember the universe does not have you at its center. The existentialists were so defensive of this critique, Sartre published a lecture titled *Existentialism is a Humanism* as a book (it may be his more accessible philosophical work).

When you're out there adventuring, you either have to look around and consider the world, or fall victim to becoming either a serious man or a nihilist. An adventurer who treats the people and places along the way as mere stepping stones to some sort of goal, acknowledging other beings only insofar as they are useful to their journey, well that is a literal too serious. An adventurer who is entirely aimless, a mere adrenaline junky, they risk becoming too nihilistic. They are not a sub-man in that they do recognize their own freedom, but they don't know what to do with it other than milk it for amusement regardless of consequence.

But if you thread the needle, ending somewhere in between the nihilism of Bodhi from *Point Break*, surfing big waves and robbing banks, and the seriousness of Hernan Cortez, an adventurous spirit whose serious tendencies led to genocide in Nueva España, there is something to be said for the adventurer. The adventurer makes their own fun, the adventurer takes advantage of their freedom, the adventurer keeps an open mind. There is fun to be had, excitement, impulsivity. "To save my energy on the highway I would thumb lifts from cars or trucks; when I was clambering over rocks in the mountains, or sliding down screes, I would work out short cuts, so that each expedition was a work of art in

itself," de Beauvoir wrote with pride.[23] "[I]f I had once asked myself what the point of it all was, I would have destroyed the whole carefully contrived edifice that elevated my pleasure to the level of sacred obligations,"[24] she concludes, realizing that her adventures lurched toward the plight of the serious man, but so long as she avoided ascribing them with a clear objective, she might continue walking the path of the adventurer.

Of course, there is the person we all hate on social media who seems to be on an endless adventure. Pictures atop canyon walls, tours of Iceland's ring road, them and their partner in impeccably selected outdoor sporting gear, a Patagonia fleece ad starring some person you knew from high school. Is this the adventurer we should seek to be? How the hell do they even afford this lifestyle? The adventurer "needs fortune, leisure, and enjoyment, and he will take these goods as supreme ends in order to be prepared to remain free in regard to any end."[25] The adventurer, in neglecting the plight of others, finds themselves complacent in regards to the greater politics of the world. Sure your old friend smiling in front of the custom red cedar cabinetry inside their Mercedes Sprinter van plops some woke hashtag next to "vanlife," but their lifestyle relies on the status quo. Perhaps that is the frustrating part for the rest of us toiling masses as we observe these rarified few, the interesting wanderers on their never-ending journeys: it is built upon our backs. "It is not a matter of chance," de Beauvoir declares, "but a dialectical necessity which leads the adventurer to be complacent regarding all regimes which defend the privilege of a class or a party. . . ."[26] They seem to preach freedom, and minimalism, but that $50,000 van is coming from somewhere, and the sponsorship from whatever camp chair they're sitting in is about you buying that chair. Most people who live in vans do not do so out of choice, they are not minimalists to declutter their hectic lives, they are homeless. They are poor. They are the people whose wages have not kept up with real estate prices, while that Instagram model's

apartment his parents bought for him appreciates 10% a year, empty, as he "roughs it" in $100 flannel shirts, snapping perfect photos beneath El Capitan.

That's the issue with adventuring, it is too solipsistic to be a moral pursuit. If you spend some time adventuring as an escape, the issue is less prescient but still relevant. It is important to remember that the people you interact with along your travels are not objects, but are beings with their own freedom, their own existence, struggling to create their own meaning in the world. If you take it too seriously, you start to see people as means to an end, as the serious man does, you see others as experiences for you and in that way you hurt their ability to transcend themselves. You keep them right where they are, in their small mountain town or quaint native village, because that's what makes the adventure feel real to you. The only thing that separates this attitude from nihilism is the goal of the adventure, of your experience. If the solipsistic adventurer cares about one thing (themself) the nihilist cares about nothing, in many ways simply a less ignorant sub-man, "They exist and they know it."[27] The nihilist is not who you want to be, on vacation or otherwise. Even for a few weeks, the complete erasure of other beings' significance is dangerous. The nihilist is how the beach is littered with trash after Fourth of July weekend.

This is not a complete ontology of existentialist archetypes, but a survey of common attitudes, which we can employ to examine how and why we travel and our approach to the places and people we experience in those travels. What can be said for wishing to be entertained, controlled, guided, to abdicate one's freedom for a bit? Is the purpose of travel to relax? To reinvent one's self? To see the world through a stranger's eyes, eyes with which you share little in common? Maybe you're trying to challenge yourself physically, to wring some adrenaline from your cubicle-aged body.

THRALL OF THE WILD

You will never be as hardcore as Simone de Beauvoir. Sure you're spending your time off climbing some massif, skiing some black diamond or swimming with sharks, but you do so with the comforts of our modern world. When de Beauvoir was living and teaching in Marseilles, she laughed about her co-workers adorning heavy boots to hike the coastal mountains on the weekends; she clambered up them alone in espadrilles with a picnic basket like a day in the park. You climb 1000' in Tom's and let me know how it goes. During the occupation she and Sartre would go on multi-day bike tours, sometimes smuggling themselves across into free zones, sometimes recruiting for the resistance, always—like the rest of France at the time—short on food. Imagine biking fifty miles to a town if you didn't know it would even have bread there (because Nazis ate it all), sleeping empty-stomached in some stranger's barn. In the late '30s she was doing solo hikes in the Alps, coming across fascist Italian troops on the border.[28] Yea, but that zipline you did with your mom does sound like it was really crazy.

You and your mom are onto something, though. Adventure—or the simulated adventure that's available for purchase—is a growing category of travel. It jumped up 65% per year between 2009 and 2013, and is projected to be a $1.3 billion industry in the next five years.[29] Before you imagine everyone parachuting into the Amazon and cutting their way out with a machete, it might behoove us to glance at the Adventure Travel Trade Association's definition of what "adventure travel" is: "Any tourist activity that includes at least two of the following: activity; a cultural exchange or interaction; engagement with nature."[30] [31]

To this extent, boogie-boarding on a beach might be considered adventure travel, if you have to drive a ways to get there. But the nature of adventure travel is to seek new experiences as a way to transcend; you are the adventurer and you make choices to embrace

the new. The world of adventure travel was full of existential adventurers: Percy Fawcett (an explorer who died searching for a lost city in Brazil), Sir Edmund Hillary, Sir Ernest Shackleton and so on. These are problematic figures for the reasons mentioned earlier: they were ethnocentric, colonialist, privileged men who saw natives and foreign lands as things to conquer for their own edification and glory. But at their core they were still adventuring, they were making their own fun, building a project from whole cloth. They went off the map; they put themselves in danger.

This desire isn't gone; in the ATTA's survey of adventure tourists they found that 35% of respondents agreed that "physical danger (real or perceived) plays a large role in adventure travel." "Risk" scored even higher with 44% saying it played a large role.[32] With these kinds of intentions, though, one might assume the field of participants might be shrinking. Who wants to spend good money and rare free time to put themselves in danger? A certain subset always will, of course, but like de Beauvoir's co-workers, lacing up their studded boots for climbs that could be done in sandals, these adventure tourists are participating in simulations of real adventures. They put on the costumes and play at being Shackleton or Hillary.

Take for example this profile in *Skift*, another trade magazine, detailing the increase in "solo luxury adventure tourism," noting that travelers in their 50s and 60s are opting into adventure tourism more than ever.[33] Of course this luxury "solo" tourism involves a group, a guide, someone else cooking your meals, and so forth. The luxury tourism company profiled, Abercrombie and Kent, has a tab on their website for private jet tours. Could we consider this to be adventure travel? At what point does this simply become entertainment and is no longer fun, no longer built of your own efforts? Let's take a look at de Beauvoir's adventuring for some perspective:

> I got off at La Chaise-Dieu in the Haute-Loire, and walked solidly for three weeks, keeping away from main roads and taking short cuts through woods and field. Every peak was a challenge. Eagerly my eyes drank in the magnificent scenery-lakes, waterfalls, hidden glades, and valleys. There was not a thought in my head: I simply walked and stared. I carried all my possessions on my back, I had no idea where I would sleep each night, and I was still on the move when the first star pricked out in the sky. . . Sometimes as I strode over the brow of a hill, to find it utterly deserted—no people there, and even the light draining away—I would feel as though I had brushed the edge of that ungraspable emptiness which every man-made embellishment is designed to conceal. [34]

Here she is, on a solo hike, cutting through the thick brush of simulacra, trying to find that bare existence which seems forever veiled by these "man-made embellishments." Is this not the essence of adventure? To strip oneself of the typical objectives and concerns, concentrating on that frontier, that precipice of something more, whether or not it is an actual precipice. You can see how it becomes addicting, how it can never truly be fulfilled, but always pursued, even at great personal cost. Simone de Beauvoir was certainly not the only one to try to touch upon this thing that drives one to risky travels, to the most isolated places or dangerous activities: Thoreau, Edward Abbey, and John Muir all spoke of the allure of the wilderness in similar fashions. What for Thoreau or Muir, though, was a vast and untamed wilderness, for us now is a map, a GPS file, a free satellite image one mere click away. Half of the dirt roads de Beauvoir walked are likely paved now, adorned with houses and guide shops—France has twenty million more people these days and they had to go somewhere. Can this transcendence through adventure be found in the information age, in the era of late capitalism? That's a big question most people don't have time to think about.

Perhaps, a better way to look at this might be to assess to what extent can one buy an adventure experience— can purchase fun—before it becomes entertainment. If everything has been colonized, commodified and packaged for you, with little left off the map, where can you find the most freedom as an adventure tourist?

A simple trick for deciding whether you are adventuring, or merely experiencing a simulation, is to ask if you will at any point be making a decision on your journey. Consider this: if you are guided up a mountain by a firm that brings the guide, the gear, the maps, creates the itinerary, et cetera, at what point are you transcending your existence and renewing that transcendence? That isn't to say that summiting a mountain with a guide is any less of a transcendence than summiting it yourself alone if your goal is simply to get to the top, but to simply get to the top is not an *adventurous* goal. The adventurer transcends extemporaneously, calls audibles, seeks the most interesting path at each turn. A company tasked with keeping a dozen city-slickers safe on a wilderness journey is not interested in the interesting in the purest sense, but striking a balance of safety with enough excitement to justify the cost. The more you lean on others to map your adventure, the more you lean towards entertainment, to the realm of the sub-man. Again, like going to a theme park, this is a totally justifiable activity for a couple weeks. Who has the time to learn mountaineering, kiteboarding, deep-sea fishing, or the like before they go on vacation? Sometimes you want to do the thing, and how you get there is a matter of convenience. This is fine, but it is certainly not *adventurous*.

Going too far in the other direction, however, can be dangerous. Not recommended for amateurs. Take the story of Christopher McCandless, chronicled by Jon Krakauer in *Into the Wild*. McCandless gave up his worldly possessions, roamed and hiked across the country, and eventually died in remote Alaska, trying to live off of the land in some of the harshest

land America has to offer. It was the 1990s, so of course there were plenty of resources available, which put McCandless more in line with Edward Abbey or your uncle who goes hunting in his pickup truck than Thoreau, but he eschewed the safety net of modernity. Krakauer writes, "In 1992, however, there were no more blank spots on the map—not in Alaska, not anywhere. But Chris, with his idiosyncratic logic, came up with an elegant solution to this dilemma: He simply got rid of the map."[35] He didn't bring a map—which could have saved his life—just to create a truer wilderness for himself. This is the spirit of a true adventurer, in the term's more typical usage. But looking at it through de Beauvoir's archetypes, he is more of a serious man. This was a devotion to the purity of the journey—for McCandless it was dogmatic—and he died for it. The existential adventurer is more wont to pivot, to find new adventures, where this young man entrenched himself in the one idea of this adventure.

Still, there is romance in this idea. On the Stampede Trail outside of Fairbanks, Alaska, there is a bus, hauled in by a construction company in the '60s, in which McCandless spent his last days.[36] The iconic "magic" bus is on book jackets, the movie poster, articles about the wayward traveler, and is inseparable from the public's image of him. Of course, with the popularity of the book and the subsequent film adaptation, the bus became a tourist destination. The issue with this for our would-be adventurers is that the bus was never meant to be a tourist destination. In their attempts to find adventure in the footsteps of this romantic figure, many of these tourists did not heed his lessons. This place was indeed remote, this bus left for hardened trappers and hunters of the great North, not some hiking enthusiasts on a quick vacation. A Swiss woman drowned in 2010 crossing the same intense river that blocked McCandless from escaping the wild when he was starving; dozens other have been rescued by Alaska State Troopers and helpful locals.[37] What are these people

searching for? It isn't *their* adventure. Is it death tourism? Some kind of leather tramp shrine for those who believe in a certain kind of freedom? It is in many ways ironic that these folks use their freedom to follow the tracks of a ghost, the ghost of a man who advocated finding your own path.

The Alaskan locals never had much sympathy for McCandless, judging from quotes in Krakauer's book. They generally agree his great flaw was hubris, thinking he knew better, ignoring local advice, and now his story has encouraged a whole slew of new, inexperienced tourists to wander out to the wild and get themselves lost. Many have advocated for moving the bus into town, or destroying it all together, as it has become more of a hassle and a hazard than a convenience. For the pilgrims going out to visit it, they would consider this an offense, that the authenticity of the experience would be tainted by making it easier to access. This is the essential conflict of the modern adventurer we touched upon earlier: at what point does the ease of access, does the pre-plannedness of a trip detract from the adventure? Funnily enough there is a simulacrum of the magic bus already in town, the one built for the movie. Few would be satisfied just seeing that, however, knowing they had come this far and the real one was within reach.

This desire to push further into the untamed brings to mind an expression among skiers: "Earn your turns." It refers to backcountry skiing, where one hikes up a mountain and skis (or snowboards) down it. Most skiing is done with lifts providing transportation up the mountain, which is faster, more convenient, and obviously much easier than hiking a snowy mountainside. But there you are, with all the others at the ski resort, on all the same, well-worn trails, making the same two or three decisions on the way down as the trails fork off one another. Your potential for adventure is limited, but not entirely absent. In the backcountry, though, the trails are often nonexistent, and in that way they are infinite. You

draw your own lines between the trees, following the natural contours of a snow-covered glade in the deep winter quiet. You'll hike for a couple of hours at least, and the descent will be much shorter than that. It's a repugnant ratio to your average resort-goer, but one that gets to the heart of the adventurer. It isn't about the objective so much as the journey, your transcendence is found in the efforts you make to get there, the split-second choices you make on the way down. It isn't about skiing, exactly, but about finding your own way. It is about knowing each decision, going up and going down, was wholly your own.

Once I climbed Mount Mansfield, Vermont's highest peak and home to some great backcountry skiing, with my girlfriend at the time. It was summer, but there were still pockets of snow in the well-shaded spots under north-facing overhangs—regardless, we weren't there to ski. It isn't a climb so much as a hike, somewhere in the middle of the pack as far as high-points in the United States, 4393' in elevation, nothing compared to the peaks west of the Mississippi. As we approached the summit, our trail crossed paths with a small parking lot not far below the mountain's subtle peak. I was immediately admonished for neglecting to mention this road, which brings you nearly the entire way up the mountain. Miles of hiking, thousands of feet in elevation gain, black flies, muddy boots—it all could have been avoided. Did I know about the road? Of course I did, I was born and raised in the shadow that very mountain. But what would have been the point of driving up there? We were two able-bodied adults, it was a pleasant enough day, and the trails were in fine condition. We would have avoided any challenges, any decisions to be made in the moment in front of flooded paths or downed trees. There were not any challenges—the paths were clear just like the weather—but the idea was that we had opened ourselves up to the potential of adventure. Do you think the people who drove to the summit enjoyed it as much? They got there quicker, cleaner, less tired and sweaty. Were they able to take the same

photos? Sure. But the parking lot, the road, the clean tourists in flip flops takes you out of the moment after miles of thickly wooded trails, that smooth asphalt feels wrong after hours of finding your footing on slick granite and deep mud.

The kneejerk reaction is to bemoan a mountain made into a commodity by ease of access. The toll road isn't all evil, of course. Think of the people with disabilities who get to enjoy that beautiful view now. Consider the access it gives search and rescue teams to help out stranded hikers, possibly saving lives. The question of access always looms large when considering our remote places, our adventurous wilderness, especially as the industry grows. Edward Abbey wrote in *Desert Solitaire,* a memoir from his time as a desert park ranger, "There is no compelling reason, for example, why tourists need to drive their automobiles to the very brink of the Grand Canyon's south rim. They could *walk* that last mile."[38] He dismisses, perhaps too easily, the concerns of the elderly and disabled, urging that the preservation of these natural places is more important that this small minority's access to them. Unspoken within this argument is the fact that Abbey (and his ilk) would lose out on what they like about these places—the potential for adventure. Not only does access remove the naturalistic purity of a place (either real or perceived), but it decreases that potential for adventure, for being able to, or even being forced to transcend yourself in pursuit of your journey. That is core to what many outdoor enthusiasts believe in and enjoy about nature, as Abbey phrases it, "the pleasures of actually operating their own limbs and senses in a varied, spontaneous, voluntary style."[39] It becomes more difficult to blaze your own trail when there is a highway rolling out in front of you at every turn.

There is room of course, for appreciating the natural world outside of outdoor sports and adventuring. One can leave some nature difficult to access for the die-hard adventurers and set aside other bits as entertainments for the less danger-inclined. Indeed, as our world

has become more about screens, about motorized transit, glowing signs, beeps and boops, vibrations in your pants notifying you of mundane updates in your friends' lives, people are more and more seeking nature immersion as a respite, especially when that immersion is easy to access. That access creates its own dilemmas. The most popular parks, like Yosemite, must limit access to attractions. Permit applications must be filled out. Lines waited in. You seek an authentic escape from modernity but still must pass through its gates to arrive there.[40]

This is the simulation of nature, of wilderness. It never existed, not in the era of man. The Wilderness Act of 1963 declared America's wilderness areas to be "untrammeled by man," but these were places indigenous peoples had been managing for centuries.[41] Hunting, controlled burns, trail-clearing: there are few places on earth that haven't been touched by such ancient human practices. If all you seek is an escape from modernity, you could simply turn off your devices, sit on a couch with a book. But there is romance and adventure out there in the elements. Although they are not truly wild, they are still less forgiving than your living room. The simulation is only as valuable as your understanding of it and intentions toward it. If you mean to find yourself in a true state of nature, a primordial Hobbesian ooze from which you might create yourself anew, good luck with that. If you mean to extract yourself from connectivity to find peace, I ask again: why even make the drive? But if you wish to experience the simulation because you enjoy its trappings, its trees and hills, its smells and sounds, perhaps then you can find what you're looking for.

There is a risk, however, in touring nature as an object. Like our adventurer who means to conquer a mountain, you end up buying an experience rather than creating it. Similarly, if you treat nature as one might a painting—observing it for its beauty, delving into its meaning, et cetera—you neglect your complicity in its destruction. I would argue that

now, more than ever, as humans increase in population, as production of consumer products soars and our energy demands burn more and more fuel, nature and the environment as it has existed for millennia is moving towards death. Not a true death, of course, but a transformation so great it might be considered a death and rebirth. And because it moves toward death, like us, it is more subject than object. Your interaction with it is not the same as your interaction with a rollercoaster or a sculpture. The very act of touring it has an effect on it. We can see this happening in the most popular National Parks: the slippery route up Half Dome becoming worn by throngs of tourists, the bears of Yellowstone more readily foraging in trashcans at campsites than fields and brambles.

Nature tourism, then, cannot be separated from other tourist activities. If existentialism teaches us anything it is that there is not really a "purer" thing because essence is subordinate to existence. You can try to get to purity, but will always be limited by reality, by facticity, by the being-in-itself. Although one might want to believe in the purity of nature, it is just as wrapped in simulation as a city (but not quite as much as a theme park). Layers of history and perspective make you think some stretch of forest is wild, when in fact it has been tamed again and again, burned and cleared and planted by humans as long as humans were around. As with New York or Paris, the nature you seek is irrelevant to the authenticity of your journey. Each person commands from within themselves their own essence, and you can do that regardless of your environment. So the question you must ask yourself is if an environment gives you the opportunity to make decisions for yourself freely. I would argue that nature presents many of these opportunities, the same way a city does. Sure there are trails and roads and pre-made itineraries, but there is a vastness which allows for flexibility and improvisation. That is the core of adventuring, solipsistic as it may be sometimes.

The other important thing to keep in mind is that you cannot simply exist in nature, or any environment, without affecting it. Just because there are trees and streams and mountains more ancient than gods doesn't mean your actions are irrelevant to them. The same way you should respect the people whose city you tour, respecting the natural locations you visit is also important. When you treat a mountain as something to conquer, as a status symbol, it ends up trashed. Noted status symbol Mount Everest has become covered in garbage over the years.[42] This is the nihilism of the adventurer, the negation of the outside world which allows you to transcend yourself a little, but at the expense of others' freedom. It is a fine line to walk, though, between neglecting the consideration of others and basing your actions too heavily upon it. Performative tourism lies at the other end of the spectrum from the adventurer, and as our lives become more and more visible through online media, the urge to make choices based on how others will perceive them is perhaps more prevalent than ever.

THE PHONE ALSO GAZES INTO YOU

There is this image I have of an old TV show, one I'm unable to place more specifically, likely because it was a trope of its era. The dutiful wife, adorned in her frilled apron, steps into the living room of that impossibly-large-on-the-inside Hollywood studio ranch, leaving behind a casserole or a pie. She calls for her husband's attention to inform him that the neighbors—the Johnsons, or the Thompsons, or something similarly bland—have just returned from Hawaii, or the Grand Canyon, or somewhere. They've invited us over, she'll say, to see their photos. The husband, who is always the curmudgeonly anti-social type, looks at his precariously attractive wife and moans out something like "Do we have to?" or "If I have to sit through another one of their damn slide shows, Debbie! I swear last time they showed us a hundred pictures of the same broken down building." The wife, playing the straight man, will reply, "It was Greece, honey, those were ruins." The setup for: "The only thing ruined was my night off!" Cue laugh track. Cut to commercial.

The reason I bring this up, is that it highlights both the timelessness of our desire to show our tourist exploits to others, and the spectrum of reactions to it. In this classic scenario the wife, typically the more extroverted character, enjoys the fantasy of this trip, the bonding with her neighbors. The husband in these shows always seems in some kind of semi-rivalry with his male neighbor, feuds over loaned tools or lawn décor, but often at the core is some kind of class conflict. Like on *All in the Family*, where working-class Archie Bunker has the entrepreneurial George Jefferson next door, which created conflict not only on a class but a racial level, the male hero needs a readily available foil. The slide show for the vacationers is in many ways a performance of class: look at the fancy trip we can afford. In the sexist framework of the time, the wife took on the role of the dreamer, viewing the

slideshow as a goal. She wanted to go to Greece, to get tan, to sip wine on the beach! The husband, however, was defensive. His ability to create a good life for his family was being challenged by this display of fanciness. *You think you're better than me? You're putting fancy ideas into my wife's head!* This spoke to the fragility of men in that role as the head-of-household and sole source of income, and how much of their identity was tied up in that ability to provide.

But what were the motivations of the family showing the slides? Did the richer man take secret pride in demonstrating that, yes, he was indeed better than his working-class neighbor? Of course. There is always a little "look what I have and you don't" in any kind of show-and-tell, from demonstrating the spring-loaded rockets on your new Transformer to your kindergarten class up to that selfie from your honeymoon on the Amalfi Coast. Where we differ from our sitcom husband, however, is that now our lives are inundated with these performances. As I write this now, Instagram has one billion active users,[43] Facebook 1.52 billion,[44] and although not notoriously a haven for vacation photos, and even sad lowly Twitter has 126 million log on daily.[45] These numbers will likely grow as time goes on, even if they shift to new apps and formats. We carry these neighborly slideshows in our pockets. I woke up this morning and immediately scrolled through Instagram. What did I see? A beautiful former classmate in the California mountains, a bike tourist in South America, a massive dinner laid out at a friend's house for a party I was not at. That was thirty seconds and practically zero effort on my part. The slideshow has come to us without punchline, and we absorb it daily. The torture is self-inflicted.

Everyone is now able to, with little effort and no formal invitation, show you their travel photos. Each person you know, some you don't, people on hashtags you follow, your sister-in-law's second cousin, they all are able to whisper in your ear, "Look at how cool I am, the things I do; my life is awesome."

In the article "Have Smart Phones Destroyed a Generation," Jean M. Twenge traces the patterns between social media use and a feeling of isolation, of being left out, among adolescents:

> What's the connection between smartphones and the apparent psychological distress this generation is experiencing? For all their power to link kids day and night, social media also exacerbate the age-old teen concern about being left out. Today's teens may go to fewer parties and spend less time together in person, but when they do congregate, they document their hangouts relentlessly—on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook. Those not invited to come along are keenly aware of it. Accordingly, the number of teens who feel left out has reached all-time highs across age groups. Like the increase in loneliness, the upswing in feeling left out has been swift and significant.[46]

It is easy to extrapolate, however, that this phenomenon is not limited to teens. Although the pain of adolescence and the (at the time) seemingly high stakes of a middle and high school social life may exacerbate the issue, adults aren't any better off. What is true for you feeling left out of Kyler's party last Friday night when you're fifteen is still true of you being stuck working a double while your former college roommate blows up your Insta feed with pictures of themself feeding baby kangaroos in Australia. You probably aren't innocent in this either, as when that double is over you're going to post mad pics of having a great time at the bar after work or your weekend excursion. The internet is an arms race of performative fun, and travel photos are the Tsar Bombas, the biggest warheads out there.[iii]

Jean-Paul Sartre—you know, de Beauvoir's nerdy boyfriend who also dabbled in philosophy—would argue that all of these performances are an example of "bad faith" or, in

[iii] Except, for a certain subset of the population, wedding photos.

the original French, *mauvaise fois*. This is not to say they are lies, or in the more common usage of the term, a false motive (as in "to argue in bad faith") but rather that they are a self-deception, in this case one which is collective and recursive. In our absorption of images and accounts of a happy, authentic, interesting tourist experience, we build an internal concept of what that is, and then perform an impression of it. But in performing that we demonstrate for others that same concept, who internalize its values and tropes, imitating it in their own performances. Like the simulacrum, it is a cycle which builds upon itself. No one involved is doing this consciously, though. Sartre distinguishes a liar or an actor from one who is simply in bad faith:

> Thus there is no difficulty in holding that the liar must make the project of the lie in entire clarity and that he must possess a complete comprehension of the lie and of the truth which he is altering…. The situation can not [sic] be the same for bad faith…. To be sure, the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth. Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth.[47]

Sartre, playing into the cliché of the French intellectual, uses a waiter in a café to demonstrate his concept. Since the bustling French café of Sartre's day is but a dream to us now, I will translate the example in modern American culture: You're at a Chili's. Your server is just a little too enthusiastic about the southwestern eggrolls; his flowing movement around the Sam Adams banner with a tray of sweet, smoky ribs is a bit too quick, too precise, too smooth. His wrist flicks up the pitcher with a theatrical aspect as he gifts your plastic cup with its third unsolicited refill of Sprite. Why is this dude so into working at Chili's? The question does indeed boggle the mind. But Sartre, lifting his gaze up from his

white spinach queso, presents you with an answer: "He is playing, he is amusing himself."[48] Sartre believes the waiter has ignored his freedom in order to perform for the public this ideal of a waiter. "This is what they want," the waiter thinks, "a swift and smiling vector upon which cheese and ribs are brought to them."

This is a neglecting of your freedom, of your ability to transcend. When one subordinates their ability to make choices to an identity (Chili's server), then one puts essence in front of existence. Now, a person considering the sit-down-casual dining needs of others isn't an existential faux-pas. Remember that de Beauvoir asserts that existentialism is not solipsistic, and that the freedom of others must be considered, otherwise any given selfish decision could be considered a worthy transcendence of one's mere facticity. Where the Chili's server goes wrong is not delivering ribs and making polite conversation—that is his job—but in the performative aspect of this idea of a server. It isn't even just the performance, but the consideration of it. Sartre says that you are in bad faith the second you consider acting in bad faith, the second you believe (put faith in) this ideal you intend to act out.[49] You are acting not for other people's freedom, but for other people's complacency and comfort. You want them to be comfortable with you as a server, you don't want their Chicken Crispers to be tainted with your freedom—"A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer,"[50] Sartre declares in what one assumes is a quote from his comment card at the local supermarché.

So when we look at this outside of the Chili's, and in the context of your luxurious vacation, you are performing that ultimate bourgeois ideal: happiness. In early photography people did not smile, partly due to long exposure times (it was hard to hold a smile) but also because of what photography was: an immortalization. Photographs were not easily reproducible, nor were they easily distributed. A photograph was often taken before a soldier

went off to war, or even of a dead body, as a means of remembrance. They were taken as portraits were painted, and kept in a home, with family. But as photography became performative, as prints became easy to duplicate, cheap and durable enough to mail out in Christmas cards, as we created slide projectors and so on, the smiling family became the ideal photograph. Advertisers were probably in this somewhere, photographing happy people next to their products, then people became their own advertisements, photographing themselves happily next to their car, their barbeque, or standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon. If you weren't happy, why take the photo?

Now, your expensive pocket rectangle can take an infinite number of photos, viewable with no delay, and it gives you access to everyone else's. So you go on vacation, and you see something beautiful and you take a picture of it. No big deal, you want to remember it. But the second that thought intrudes about posting it, about retaking it so your hair looks better, or reframing it so that your cool new bike is in the shot, Sartre argues you are acting in bad faith. You have turned what is a good faith experience (your decision to travel, to see something beautiful, to adventure, etc.) and altered it in the service of some ideal, some false essence of what people believe it should look like. You've stopped trying to be happy and begun selling the idea of happiness to yourself and others. It isn't conscious. Sartre argues it cannot be. The advertiser who tells his models to smile in the photo while they hold a bag of pretzels knows those pretzels aren't making them happy. The models know they aren't happy, they are acting, they are lying to us so we will buy more pretzels. This is a deception in which the deceivers are conscious of the truth. When you try to build an image of happiness true to this Instagram ideal of a happy, fun, interesting vacation, you may not be thinking, "Oh man let's make this look more fun than it is." Indeed you are probably just modeling your behavior in attempt to increase the fun you're having, but this effort is in bad

faith. This is not a truly free decision based on your circumstances in the moment, but a decision based on what others expect. You are playing at being happy, even if you are actually happy. This happiness is devalued by the fact it was not arrived at through transcendence, through creating a negation of your existence and fulfilling it.

But that's Sartre kind of being an asshole. For a communist, he was extremely harsh on all these workmen living in bad faith, ignoring their freedom while he lived his radically free life or whatever. Cutting through the pretension, the question here might be if you need other people to see you are enjoying your vacation in order to enjoy your vacation. Nolen Gertz in *Nihilism and Technology* writes, "My concern over techno-optimism was less about whether we are wrong to seek technological solutions to our problems and more about whether we are wrong to see so much of life *as problems*."[51] What *is* the problem that Instagram or Facebook solved for your travels? That it was difficult to disseminate photos of your interesting trip to friends and family? This is the "pics or it didn't happen" era. The ability to communicate with such rapidity has only sped up the escalation of the simulacrum, allowing our bad faith efforts to echo in this new, vast chamber. While we solved some problem of getting information out there, we have created an environment in which advertisements are often indistinguishable from your friends' photos. That lie the advertiser sold you about the happy Pinterest-approved apartment full of dangling mason jars and bookshelves of African hardwoods with books organized by (gasp) color, is now a reality in some acquaintance's feed. What does it say about us that now the most watched online persons aren't considered to be advertisers but are "influencers." They are still paid for product endorsements, but the frontier between this ideal sold to us of what our lives should be and the actual lives of people we know becomes blurrier every day, making the ability to recognize our own bad faith decisions even harder. The gaze is no longer a bystander's

glance down the hallway but a vast network of cameras; fiber optic cable is the glass through which everyone watches everyone else.

These tools, over-solving problems which barely existed at their invention, cause problems of their own. Twenge again notes that if social media is supposed to be enjoyable, it is doing a terrible job. While the causation is trickier, she finds that screen-based activities all correlate with increased sadness and non-screen ones greater happiness.[52] Although these arguments can end up seeming like Lewis Black standup bits from ten years ago, the data seems to lean towards staring at your phone/tablet/laptop a little less to increase your happiness. In a study of Facebook use in the American Journal of Epidemiology comes to similar conclusions, that even clicking "like" on your friend's sweet #vanlife pics actually decreases your happiness, satisfaction and even your physical well-being.[53]

Social media is a simulacrum, it presents a hyper-reality that realistically cannot and does not have basis in the actual world. Like Disney World or Las Vegas, it is presenting you with exactly what you want if you've put no thought into your wants, if you've failed to exercise your radical freedom of choice. If the research above has a familiar aspect to them, maybe it is because social media creates its own type of Paris Syndrome. The tourist bureau's marketing department is now crowdsourced. You are presented with images of happy trips to beautiful locales, seemingly authentic dives into rural village cultures through volunteer work, but really you are looking at pictures. Your mind wants to build these backstories and lofty ideals, and the people posting are happy to help you in their captions and hashtags, their thirty-second videos that your mind treats like a twelve-hour Ken Burns documentary series. That's just you filling in the blanks of the ideal they are presenting to you in bad faith.

Sartre stands up at the Chili's, because for some reason this Chili's has a comedy night. "Any of y'all out there making some bad faith decisions? C'mon, you know who you

are." The crowd chuckles, preparing for his signature bit. "You might be in bad faith if you make choices based not on your own freedom but based on what other people expect of you!" Everyone laughs. "You might be in bad faith if instead of considering the freedom of others when exercising your freedom, you consider their comfort!" Uproarious laughter. "Alright, thanks everyone. I'm going to Disney World!" They laugh uncomfortably. This seems out of character. But maybe it isn't.

Consider Sartre at Disney World, though: why would he be there? To relax and enjoy himself, to step outside his little intellectual realm in Paris, maybe to try a churro. He takes a photo and posts it to his friends (literally via post; he still has a flip phone). Is this effort in bad faith? Well, he certainly isn't playing into the ideal of an intellectual, of a philosopher, into the version of Jean-Paul Sartre that currently exists in the zeitgeist. But the photo? Maybe it is innocent, just sending it back to Simone and Albert (Camus), to let them know he is well. It would be odd to brag about such non-intellectual exploits to his friends. He has merely decided to skip out on a few days' worth of intense intellectual decision making, and live a brief moment as a sub-man, ignoring his freedom. This isn't in bad faith, as the decision was not made to serve the expectations and comfort of others, to serve some ideal. The decision was made because Sartre wanted to relax, and he concluded that his relaxation for this time period would not intrude upon the freedom of others, and indeed might energize him to more vigorously pursue his projects in the future. His zeal for freedom is refortified on the drop down Splash Mountain.

This exercise in absurdity is meant to demonstrate that none of this philosophy is meant to be prescriptive to or judgmental of your specific vacation choices. One only needs to be more considerate of the choices they make and why they are making them, but in doing so it is unlikely entire categories of travel will be forgone. Making a decision freely—

one that is useful to you, does not hinder anyone else's freedom, isn't made to comfort or conform to the whims of others, and ideally allows you to transcend yourself—is always the goal. But that being said, lining all those things up is pretty hard, especially if you aren't flying solo. Arguably it is better to take a trip in good faith that lacks transcendence (the sub-man's journey to the theme park, for example) than to take a trip made in bad faith, because in bad faith one cannot truly transcend one's facticity, nor can the decision be considered truly free. A trip in bad faith may be a noble effort that increases the freedom of others, of course, like volunteering in the developing world. But if its origins are in bad faith virtue signaling, then you will likely not be as satisfied by your efforts as one would if the decision were made from a place of absolute freedom.

VOLUNTEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS

If you lost a bet and had to talk to a philosopher, they would tell you there are three major schools of ethics. Immediately. Probably right after "hello." Before ordering coffee, or maybe while ordering coffee, so the barista is forced to listen as well. Those big three are: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Notice the distinct absence of existential ethics. It didn't make the list, but it is still young.[iv] Consequentialism goes hand-in-hand with utilitarianism. It posits that the moral value of an action is based upon its results. More good (or utility) is better, and more bad is worse. If you kill one man to save a hundred, that is good. Net value of ninety-nine. Consequentialism involves math ("utilitarian calculus" is the catchy nickname often given to its ponderings and calculations) and like anything involving math is quite easily distorted to justify whatever you want to do. "Lies, damned lies and statistics," the saying goes. You can get into some real Machiavellian equations when you justify things with math. Consider climate change, a global phenomenon where people are a major factor. Would you save more lives in the long run if you eliminated two-thirds of the population now, a population running air conditioners and burning fuel, tossing plastic bottles into rivers, and so on? At what point in the timeline do you consider that massive die-off to be warranted? Don't think about it; it isn't worth it. This is supposed to be about taking vacations!

Deontology, on the other hand, would never allow such corruptions of the data. Popularized by rock-star philosopher Immanuel Kant, a man who literally did the same (boring) thing every day of his life,[v] deontology is all about rules. Kant had his "categorical

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[iv] Virtue ethics goes back at least a couple millennia, so it may be a few lifetimes before existentialist ethics gets its due.

[v] Kant had a daily routine which he allegedly broke only once, to go buy a newspaper, because the French Revolution had just begun and he wanted to see what all the ruckus was about.

imperative," which boils down to "if it is right to do all the time, do it." Every action must conform to, then, some universal ethical rule. Killing is always bad, so you can't kill people to save other people. This includes, of course, the mass genocide proposed above which, while perhaps saving us all from climate change, would still be—you know—genocide. Adhering to the rule is more important, by and large, than the consequences of your adherence. Our legal system generally works like this, although it adds a touch of consequentialism in for good measure. Unless in grave physical danger, you can't murder someone. In many instances you may be charged even if you were in danger. If you steal to feed your family, you stole, and they can and will arrest you. If you steal food because you "like stealin' stuff," you will also be arrested. The result of the former scenario is a net good—the grocer lost a few dollars they didn't really need, but your family lives another day—but the rule was nonetheless broken, and so it is deontologically similar to the latter scenario. In punishments, the judge often considers the utilitarian end of these things, but typically only within the spectrum of allowable punishment under our laws. He doesn't let people go because they stole to feed their family, but he may punish them less severely than Stealy McThieverson, the happy bandit. The idea is that the rule needs to be universal because if everyone stole to feed their families, the grocer would ultimately be out of business, then who would they even steal from? Plus, the grocer would then have to turn to a life of crime, and he's a mild-mannered man who will never make it on the streets—they'll eat him alive out there. Those, however, are consequentialist arguments. The deontologist doesn't even need to get that far: the rule was broken and so you are bad. Don't ask me how they come up with these rules, or decide which ones are the best; that isn't what you're here for.

The third and oldest school of ethics, Ethics Classic, is virtue ethics. Virtues are character traits, the cardinal points of your internal moral compass. You are good because you do what a good person does, this concept of goodness being a bit more viscous than in our other ethical schools, more prone to place and time-based normativity.[54] Virtues are more tied to essence than existence, in a way which is problematic for our existential framework. Of course, this is an incredible oversimplification of virtue ethics, but we didn't make this journey to explore that. We came here to look at a related concept: virtue signaling.

Since virtues are something which relates to one's character, one's essence, and are considered to be good, we—humans, natural attention-seekers—want to demonstrate our goodness, our virtues, to the world. There is a social value in it, and we are social creatures. And so we signal that we are good by being polite, by helping people out, by posting mindful and grateful statements to social media on holidays. Let me be part of your group because I am a good person. A good person volunteers at a soup kitchen, for example. Maybe this isn't the most effective form of altruism from a consequentialist standpoint, and maybe it isn't strictly necessary under a deontological framework, but as a culture we generally accept that volunteering to help hungry people get food is "good" and "virtuous."

You, then, as a good and virtuous person, disgusted by the opulence of Disney World, the self-centeredness of adventuring, and the narcissism of Instagrammable van journeys, you decide to use your vacation to give back. These days there are a variety of packages available to bolster your virtuous spirit in any given part of the developing world (a term which feels a bit problematic). Voluntourism, as these journeys are referred to, is a growth industry, with over one and a half million participating in trips annually (according to

a 2014 study), and estimates from billions to hundreds of billions of dollars being spent by tourists on these experiences each year.[55] [56]

The idea of these trips, at its core, is fairly simple. A service of some kind connects individuals from wealthier nations or areas to volunteer opportunities in poorer and less developed regions. You fly into Guatemala, say, and a guide in a van drives you out to a rural village, where you are provided with some tools and supplies and build a schoolhouse for a couple of weeks. You teach English to young children in Africa, or plant trees and count turtles on the Galapagos Islands.[57] It is important here to separate these activities from more structured, long-term development initiatives like the Peace Corps, where people spend years on ongoing projects, receive greater training opportunities, and tend to be funded from government or non-profit sources. Colleen McGloin and Nichole Georgeou distinguish neatly between the two in their article "'Looks Good on Your CV': The Sociology of Voluntourism Recruitment in Higher Education":

> Voluntourism is an economic activity driven by profit occurring within an unregulated industry and operating without any accreditation process. Monies are paid to a tour operator whose business is based in the Global North and who profits from sending others to developing countries and communities. This distinction [from international development volunteering] is crucial as voluntourism companies have appropriated the language of humanitarian development in order to trade on the idea that they send people to 'help' others in dire need of assistance.[58]

In other words, a voluntourism tour operator is selling you the idea of these trips as effective and moral interventions which will help the lives of the less fortunate. It's the same way Disney sells you light-hearted fun and relaxation, or Abercrombie and Kent sells you adventure and excitement. Beauvoir's philosophy was all about creating your own meaning,

about transcending yourself, about helping increase the freedom of others, and it doesn't disallow intermediaries. Paying a service to help you actualize the projects you created for yourself, in good faith, is not inherently wrong. Nothing is *inherently* wrong, but Simone, like any good friend, asks us to dig a bit deeper into our intentions before we go making big decisions (like where to spend our precious vacation days).

Consider the question, as simple as it is, at the heart of your choices: What result would you like to come of this? These goals we set for ourselves, these projects we make of our lives, these are what make us us—we cannot set them on autopilot. You are thinking about voluntourism for your next vacation…why? Do you have a specific area of the world about which you care deeply and want to help solve a problem there? In our hypothetical Guatemalan village, perhaps, you wish the children there to be educated because of your firm belief in education and its ability to produce freedom and transcendence, to pull people out of abject poverty, and so on. So you buy the package, you buy the flights, you go build them a school.

But wait, you just skipped a couple of steps. Are you experienced in construction, engineering or architecture? Do you bring with you a skillset unavailable locally? Given the exchange rate and purchasing power disparities, does the cost of your flight justify your value to this project of building a schoolhouse? We won't go down this road too far, but here Peter Singer's concept of "effective altruism" (a form of consequentialism/utilitarianism) comes into play quite heavily—doing the most good, most efficiently. Unless you're some kind of rock star school-builder, though, the cost of your flights, housing, meals, etc. far outweighs the value you add to the project. A thousand-dollars in the hands of a local contractor could probably purchase a good amount of materials and labor in Guatemala, but you spent it on a flight, so you could deliver your one

semester of woodshop's worth of skills and experience to this village. Not to mention you're working for free, so the money, which is now lining the pockets of Delta's shareholders, could have been injected into the local economy through the hiring of contractors and construction workers.

After this utilitarian calculus, look at the question again: What result would you like to come of this? If it is the school being built, just send money. If it is the children being educated, just send money. If it is to stimulate the local economy—you guessed it—just send money. But you want to get on that plane! Why? What is the actual result you want, the actual project you're thrusting yourself into as a means of transcendence? It is a tough question to answer for someone else, but it often is about yourself, and is often made in bad faith. The difference between you building a school by sending money to Guatemala and you building a school by hammering nails in Guatemala is *your* experience. If your goal is to get the school built, with no consideration for yourself, you wouldn't waste time and money flying down there. But you want to experience something: a different world, a visceral feeling of altruism, or maybe some penance for a life of squandered privilege. You want to signal your virtue. This trip is, ultimately, about *you.* As Simone put it once, if a child wants to climb a tree and an adult then hoists them up onto a branch, that child will be disappointed.[59] They wanted to *climb* the tree, not be in it. Likewise, you want to save someone, not see them saved.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir ultimately advocates for actions which increase the freedom of others. Your actions, then, should increase the ability of others to transcend their mere facticity, to be able to live the lives they want to live. Always acknowledge that other people are free, and not objects to aid in your freedom. Drawing upon another ethical giant, Kant put it this way in his second formulation of the categorical imperative: "Act in

such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."[60] In voluntourism, there is always the risk of treating the people you intend to help as means to an end, thus neglecting their subjectivity and their freedom. When you use helping others as a means to build yourself up, you must approach this in good faith, where the intention is first and foremost to help the others, and not to signal virtue on your part through them. When you must travel to this rural village to build the school yourself, so that you can gain joy from these children's smiles and show your friends pictures of you with these rural villagers, you reduce them to objects.

Ethics is a road of loose dirt: lean too far in any given direction and you'll skid out. Push hard towards consequentialism and you can get to that ends-justify-the-means-no-matter-what situation where anything is permissible if the happiness math adds up. Deontology may leave you inflexible in times when flexibility is entirely warranted and necessary, unable to steer into the skid. Virtue ethics may be too tied in with the zeitgeist, too normative, ending up more conformist than righteous. Beauvoir herself was critical of universal or normative ethics: "The universal spirit is voiceless, and every man who claims to speak in its name only lends it his own voice," she wrote in her essay *Phyrrus and Cineas*.[61] No one can speak to universality, as we all speak from a point of subjectivity. Of course, Existential ethics is a baby in this field, with less than a century of thought behind it, but it is as flawed as any of the others. Devoting oneself wholly to the freedom of others is a rule, and though a broadly constructed one, it is not far from Kant's imperatives and may suffer similar issues in application. Dr. Skye Cleary, *Blog of the APA*[vi] editor and Columbia University professor, notes that "Existentialism, it's not a life hack, because it's much more

[vi] American Philosophical Association.

descriptive than prescriptive. Which is why often the existential philosophers…published diaries, and wrote novels and plays."[62] Even in embracing the freedom of others as the ethical gold standard, Beauvoir notes that there is no pure subject, that we are ambiguous in our relations to one another.[63] It is a good idea, then, to embrace the techniques of Beauvoir, Camus, and Sartre by grounding ourselves in lived experiences and avoid spending too long staring into the abyss of ethical theories, rules, and imperatives. Although voluntourism is a new—I daresay post-modern—phenomenon, our existentialist guru had some applicable experiences during her tour of China in 1955.

With the defeat of fascism at the end of World War II, France, like much of the world, was caught between the two remaining politico-economic paradigms: American-style capitalism, and Soviet-style communism. Simone de Beauvoir, like Sartre and many of her other compatriots, fell very much on the side of communism. At this time much of the horrors suffered under Stalin in the USSR were not widely known outside of it, and the principles of Marxism lined up far more with the idea of radical freedom than those of winner-take-all capitalism. If man were truly to be free, the existentialists thought, he would need to be equal, unconcerned for his basic needs so that he might create a unique project of his life. Capitalism is based on the objectification of people, their efforts become a commodity for markets to buy and sell—remember Sartre's comment on a grocer who dreams being offensive to their customers? Although the capitalists had greater freedom of the press, of movement, of expression, the working people were often reduced to "wage-slavery," subjected to the whims of their under-regulated employers, and thus were not truly free. Suffice to say both sides in the Cold War had incredible blind spots to their own flaws, the U.S. and segregation, colonialism, and its worship of the dollar; the USSR and China on

their totalitarian control, restriction of the press, and imprisonment of dissidents.[vii] But this was early days, two years before Sputnik, when the socialist and communist political parties (the SFIO and PCF) together held a majority in the French National Assembly.[64] News of the USSR's gulags had already driven apart former BFFs Sartre and Albert Camus, but idealism for a functioning communist republic ran deep in Beauvoir, and so she went to China to write a book on the progress the Chinese had made towards the noble goals of worker equality, peaceful proletarian dictatorship, and so on. Perhaps, in light of Russia's human rights record, China was the communist nation which could lead the world. Paid for by the Chinese government, with a provided translator, Beauvoir notes that she was certainly not in a position of pure objectivity, but claims to try her best to present an honest opinion.[65] In many ways, she fails. But in that failure she is able to demonstrate the pitfalls of ostensibly altruistic, mission-driven tourism.

What, exactly, were Mademoiselle de Beauvoir's intentions when she went to China? On the surface, and if you asked her at the time, she might have said to report on the progress of the revolution there. Revolution, that is, in the Marxist sense: the slow journey from imperial hellscape to communist utopia. She may have had journalistic ideas of objectivity and, at a time when not much was known about China to outsiders, an informative living history of the place. But the work never reads true. Whether she knew its flaws and willingly deceived her publishers and readership or—fallible like all of us—took up this project in bad faith, we can't know with certainty, but the signs point to deception. Although she mostly stands by the work in her autobiography,[66] in her letters she is quoted as saying she only took on the project for the money ("hasty journalism . . . of no value

[vii] The U.S. also practiced similar techniques of quelling dissent during the McCarthy period and beyond.

whatsoever . . . a dishonest undertaking"),[67] but her communist allegiances also may have something to say here. She was ambiguous by her own definition, constantly flowing between facticity and transcendence, between philosopher and journalist, advocate and observer. But what was the project into which she thrust herself? Was it to help the French, and Europeans more broadly, see the light of communism? Or was it to actually explore the value of this new form of government? Often she writes as if she doesn't know,[viii] and comes off as a bad-faith apologist for the Chinese regime:

> As for the "indoctrination" of the children, they are, certainly, taught to love their country, to want to serve it, to respect the current ethic, and they are educated in the ideology that corresponds to the regime under which they live; and is it not the same in every other country? If Chinese educators are more convincing than their American colleagues, this, it would seem to me, ought rather to be set down to their credit than as villainy.[68]

She ties herself in knots trying to deal with the problems of Chinese totalitarianism, believing the authoritarian aspects to be the pieces which would fade as communist revolution came into full view. But, as we know from the vantage point of sixty-odd years later, the communist ideal is what faded from view while the control of the press, oppression of dissidents, and single-party rule marched on. Capitalist values and bourgeois excesses replaced that Marxist spirit, but the oppression remains. Was Beauvoir made blind by idealism, by a deep hope for a functional Marxist government? That would be acting in bad faith, lying to herself about the "transitional" state of things in China, about the sacrifices

[viii] But, once again, she did know: it was for money to go visit her boyfriend in America, Nelson Algren.

necessary now for a better future. Did she earnestly believe a view of China's progress could push Europe in a more egalitarian, socialist/communist direction?

Forever advocates for radical freedom, it is hard not to see Beauvoir and Sartre's later tours of China and Cuba in a sad light. Not as well-known at the time, but certainly known, were the repressive natures of these single-party governments. After fighting Nazis and intellectually whomping upon the restrictive tenets of fascism, they found themselves complicit in propaganda for regimes using similar tactics to restrict opposition and maintain power. In particular, one must wonder what Beauvoir, a bisexual woman, thought of Cuba's forced labor camps for homosexuals. These were ostensibly efforts to support the proletarian cause, but in reality were mostly to bolster their own status and get free vacations—these journeys don't seem to comply with their very own ethical ideals. You must be careful not to fall into your own version of this trap. Setting about to cure the world's ills through a tourist experience may only reinforce them. The framework under which one believes that a middle or upper-class individual from a wealthy nation is the means by which some poorer people or culture will be saved from poverty and starvation is the same one under which colonialists operated. Were the early colonialists not on a mission to "save" the "savage" indigenous people of the Americas? To show them the light when it came to agriculture and religion? Of course they also came for the gold and the land. A dramatic comparison, perhaps, the two frameworks share some commonality. You voluntour to help the people, a little, but the primary idea is that *you* get something out of it.

So then what? Does someone have to fully commit to two years in the Peace Corps to make any difference in the lives of the global poor? Of course not, because you can give them money, and that is highly effective**.** *GiveWell,* which studies and ranks charities by efficacy using in-depth research and economic modeling, shows that the most effective use

of a dollar tends to be just buying medicine or basic things (like mosquito nets or water filters) for people in Africa.[69] For donations in the single-digits you could provide vitamin supplements which would prevent a child from going blind—the actual gift of sight.[70] But you're trying to wrap a vacation into this, an experience for yourself, and so it becomes ever more fraught. Although we're approaching this examination through an existential framework, not a utilitarian one, the numbers are astounding in their contrast. If your project is to make the world a better place for others, you might reconsider volunteering (at least in distant, foreign lands). If it is to better yourself through seeing poverty, experiencing a world outside your own relatively sheltered and privileged one, your desire is quite common.

"Poverty tourism," or more colloquially, "poorism," is the act of touring areas of extreme or unique poverty in the world. In the same arena as voluntourism, poverty tourism is generally even briefer in its duration, involves little actual action or intervention into the lives of the local residents, and is more about learning or observing than giving back. Examples of the form include things like slum tours in Rio de Janeiro, gang tours in Los Angeles, or the post-Katrina hurricane tours (now banned) that once meandered through New Orleans' Ninth Ward.[71] In their paper "Poverty Tourism and the Problem of Consent," Evan Selinger, Keving Outterson, and Kyle Powys Whyte discuss some criteria by which we might define poverty tourism: "The driving purpose is for tourists to observe poverty personally . . . Tourists believe that the activities will provide an authentic experience of poverty . . . Planning specific activities does not involve meaningful collaboration and consent between residents and tourists."[72] In that last category we can see a clear distinction between voluntourism (involving collaboration between residents and tourists and is centered on development or education work) and poverty tourism (which does not involve any action on the part of the tourist).

In fact, its passive nature may relegate poverty tourism to the realm of entertainment, where the subjects of the tour (residents of the impoverished area) are treated as objects to be observed to elicit some feeling from the tourist. Of course, the operators who sell these tours will emphasize that the experience is about education, about experiencing an authentic look at often maligned people. Take this copy from *Brazil Expedition's* website for their favela tour in Rio de Janeiro:

> Our favela tour is a non-intrusive tour, respecting the comunity [sic] and the people living in the favela. We focus on a genuine experience, aiming to educate our guests about the favelas which are such a big part of life in Rio.[73]

"Genuine experience" and "education" are recurring themes in this style of tourism. The crux of the issue becomes where we draw the line between voyeurism and education, between an effort in good faith to learn about and subsequently help the downtrodden of the world versus simply observing them in their natural habitat as a means of collecting an experience, like some kind of human safari. Selinger and company conclude that the best examples of poverty tourism involve the active consent of the toured, who are engaged with in a collaborative manner and compensated by the tour operator for their time.[74] This is, in some ways, a self-defeating technique. The best poverty tourism would ultimately help the local community overcome poverty, but in doing so would reduce the perceived authenticity to the tourists. A compensated set of locals, brought out of dire conditions by the tourism revenue, might be considered more along the lines of paid actors, the whole experience becoming tamer, more of a zoo than a safari. But this is the only solution which takes into account the freedom and subjectivity of those being toured. Otherwise they are just being treated as animals, as objects.

In her travels, Simone de Beauvoir always sought out the poorer parts of town for some kind of authentic experience of place, but she felt conflicted about it:

> In Casablanca we soon became bored with the European quarter, and went off in search of the native shantytown, which we found only too easily. Conditions here were more frightful than in the very worst of the Athens slums, and the French were responsible for it. We picked our way through this wilderness hurriedly, feeling very ashamed of ourselves.[75]

Although not on a guided tour, and so not being sold poverty tourism, she could not entirely justify her voyeurism to herself when her complicity in it became obvious. She had seen similar slums in Spain and Greece, but she felt this one more viscerally, perhaps due to the French being directly responsible for it, perhaps due to the extreme extent of poverty visible. Later in her travels through the United States, Beauvoir takes a trip through the outskirts of Savannah, touring the slums of the Jim Crow South. She takes advantage of her position outside of the United States to use these images of poverty as a jumping off point for an argument against segregation and racism in the United States.[76]

Perhaps the line we should draw somewhere in here is between tourism and journalism, much as we try to draw the line between voyeurism and education—they make decent parallels. Her journalism was the project she thrust herself into, giving meaning to her observations of poverty in the United States. Her end goal was to demonstrate to the French, and Europeans more broadly, what the United States was like in the aftermath of the war, and so to avoid an exploration of racism and segregation and its related poverty (as a French expatriate in New York actually asked her to do!) would have been disingenuous. She expressed no sickness, no shame on this journey as she had in Morocco. That may have been due to her lack of involvement in the issue—as a Frenchwoman she had no say in the

goings-on of the American South but was in some ways complicit in Moroccan poverty, since it was at the time a French protectorate. It may also have been because she clearly engaged in advocacy to better the lives of the impoverished and segregated people there. Her journalism was activism. We saw no similar reaction in Morocco, no call to arms. In Morocco her project was unclear; in America she had purpose. Intentionality is at the heart of transcendence.

Poverty tourism, then, in its most benevolent form, must be part of a greater objective, undertaken with specific intentionality. Throughout this work the goal has been to avoid being prescriptive, avoid harsh judgments and advocate for greater intentionality in decisions more so than guide what those decisions are. Here, however, the ethical implications are clear: one cannot tour the current and active suffering of people as one tours a museum or takes in a show. If your end goal is not to help people achieve greater freedom, to improve the conditions of their lives so that they might have greater ability to transcend themselves, then it may be best to just leave them alone. There is no shame in sitting on a beach, riding a rollercoaster, or visiting a museum. If that doesn't seem authentic, or edgy, or "woke," then so be it—without digging painfully deep into the economics of it, these entertainments are largely existentially harmless. The objectification of others to serve your own experience is simply worse than the sub-man's vacation; it is a false transcendence built on the backs of people less fortunate than yourself. Like the life of the adventurer, it belies an acceptance of the status quo, not in a passive way, but an active one. In touring poverty, you are touring your own privilege, and if that isn't coupled with some kind of altruistic action which acknowledges the subjectivity and freedom of the toured, it is simply a revelry. You are dancing on a grave of those yet unburied.

But what if they're dead?

MEMORIAL FRAY

You're on your front porch in Boulder, Colorado, two fingers deep into a marijuana cigarette when your roommate comes running out, Krakauer in hand, with an idea. "The bus! It's still there. We gotta go," he exclaims as you exhale. You pause, your mind—meandering now from the effects of a fine legal sativa—travels up to those northern woods, back to a movie theater in college, to a comfy couch in your parent's house where you first devoured *Into the Wild*. You answer—what, in hindsight, wasn't even a question—in the affirmative. You *must* go.

We've been here before. The "magic bus," the place where that wayward youth Christopher McCandless died, is a shrine to a lesser saint. The idea of a pilgrimage is not a new one; people have for millennia journeyed to death sites, to relics, to battlefields. What drives this urge to visit the sites of great tragedy and death? Unlike voluntourism and poverty tourism, it is hard to glean an easy justification of aid or even "awareness." In the time of peak religion, saints may have been more like celebrities than one could fathom today, and perhaps seeing the death shroud of a famous religious figure was not unlike visiting Jimi Hendrix's guitars at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Perhaps McCandless (and Hendrix) are merely saints in a godless world, people whose transcendence was so powerful the public yearns to get closer to it, if only superficially, to see if they might touch it, feel it, or learn it. Sometimes this can feel hollow. Who among us hasn't, at some museum, seen an artifact from an idol of ours and shrugged? "Oh, wow, uhh…Jim Morrison's shirt is…sure is something. Glad we came," you mumble as your companions nod passively in agreement. Sure, everyone knows that The Doors are overrated, but the question remains: what are you doing standing in front of this old shirt?

Don't dwell on that question too long. Instead let's journey back east from Cleveland and its musical relics, to New York City. The term "ground zero" refers to the initial point of detonation of a bomb, typically a large or nuclear bomb, something akin to the epicenter of an earthquake. If you type "ground zero" into a popular and ubiquitous search engine it will show that definition to you in one corner of the screen, but devote most of the results page to a map of Lower Manhattan. There you will find the 9/11 Memorial, constructed in the years following the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. It is, in a city full of almost everything you could imagine a tourist wanting, one of the more popular tourist destinations in New York.[77] Around the area you can buy souvenirs, tourists take pictures of themselves. They smile, although they may be thoughtfully engaged with the history and impact of where they are—you always smile in photos, after all. Something about the whole thing feels a little off, but you don't know what. Is it an exploitation of the dead? Is it possible to ignore the freedom of someone who no longer has freedom, or facticity, because their life has ended?

Perhaps it feels strange because you are being sold something which seems like it shouldn't be sold. John Lennon[ix] and Malcolm Foley touch on this in their book *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster:*

> In labelling some of these phenomena as 'Dark Tourism' we intend to signify a fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster and atrocity are being handled by those who offer associated tourism 'products'. In particular, we aim to show that 'dark tourism' is both a product of the circumstances of the late modern world and a significant influence upon these circumstances.[78]

[ix] No, not *that* John Lennon, whose memorial section of Central Park, Strawberry Fields, is a major death-tourism destination.

We're all just late-capitalism girls and we're living in a late-capitalism world. Experiences are products, brands are personalities, CEOs are gurus; subscribe to a meditation app if it stresses you out. Being sold something, whether a loaf of bread or an all-inclusive resort package, is not inherently bad. But if we approach things with an existentialist mindset, we must remember that our choices and projects are the makeup of our being-for-itself, and you cannot simply buy your life. Choosing to purchase a sweet vintage convertible does not make you cool.[x] Choosing to visit the 9/11 Memorial does not make you noble, or some kind of verifiable and honorable patriot. There is a temptation in these times, absent of gods, to find our meaning in the things and experiences we select and pay for. But compared to the limitless possibilities of radical freedom, our choices are actually quite limited if we're only looking at what the market offers. When we try to buy ourselves transcendence, we're ordering it off of the existential kids' menu.

Within this limited selection of experiences for sale, the tourist cannot be faulted for choosing something in the death tourism section. The appeal of it, after all, seems to be based in a search for authenticity. So many tourist experiences are hyper-real dreamscapes built for tourists: theme parks, beach resorts, spas—passive or visceral pleasures. Others grasp at authenticity of experience, like with guided adventures in mountain climbing, but those endeavors are largely solipsistic. The more alternative-minded might lunge full-force at an authentic experience and end up on their face, as we saw in voluntourism and poverty tourism, the ethical quandary of which is that it must minimize the freedom of the toured in order to serve the transcendence of the tourists. But death tourism carries with it the gravity

[x] Apologies to all middle-aged dads out there browsing Craigslist ads for that dream Camaro.

of extreme poverty, the authenticity of knowing this event didn't happen for-you,[xi] and the hint of altruism and bigger thinking that waives any criticisms of narcissism or solipsism. How can your vacation to Amsterdam be frivolous when you went to the Anne Frank house, right? When touring the dead, is there even an "other" to consider? At Gettysburg, in Lower Manhattan, on a beach at Normandy, are we limiting the freedom of others, expanding it, or neither? Sartre begs us to remember that "I cannot set my own freedom as a goal without also setting the freedom of others as a goal."[79] Who, though, has the power to free the dead?

Outside of the context of relics and pilgrimages, of simple memorials, what we think of as death and dark tourism today is largely a post-modern phenomenon. Tour Medellin with a former Pablo Escobar hitman,[80] or spend a night in a decommissioned KGB prison in Latvia among the souls of the tortured and executed Soviet prisoners.[81] Whether new in style or old, though, the concept remains the same: you tour historical suffering and death. Is that okay, then, since the dead—as they say—can't complain? When touching upon the horrors of the Second World War, Simone de Beauvoir addresses the fraught considerations of the dead as subjects:

> Horror is sometimes self-destructive before the photographs of the charnel-houses of Buchenwald and Dachau and of the ditches strewn with bones; it takes on the aspect of indifference; that decomposed, that animal flesh seems so essentially doomed to decay that one can no longer even regret that it has fulfilled its destiny; it is when a man is alive that his death appears to be an outrage, but a corpse has the stupid tranquility of trees and stones: those who have done it say that it is easy to

[xi] Although site amenities are built for tourists, the actual grounds of death or tragedy were not chosen for that purpose in the way Disney just bought up the middle of Florida one day to build a theme park.

> walk on a corpse and still easier to walk over a pile of corpses . . . In order to remain capable of perceiving man through these humiliated bodies one had to be sustained by political faith, intellectual pride, or Christian charity.[82]

Death is the ultimate obstacle to transcendence. Without the benefit of life one is trapped in the bare facticity of their body, which Beauvoir compares to the inanimation of trees and stones. The aphorism—oft associated with Joseph Stalin but probably never uttered by him—that "[o]ne death is a tragedy, a million is a statistic," is not the concept behind this passage, but rather it implies each *death* is a tragedy (no matter how many there are) but the *dead* are not tragic. It is the transition from a subject, a being-for-itself, to merely an object that is sad. After that, Beauvoir claims, it is only through some project of your own that you can maintain the perception of the corpse as a person, an effort which may be in bad faith. At the 9/11 Memorial one can mourn the dead, certainly, but one must also acknowledge that their posthumous essence was attributed to them by others for their own projects: by the Bush Administration to justify wars; by contractors and developers to justify construction of the memorial and its infrastructure; by xenophobes to advocate anti-Muslim politics. The problem with the dead is that anyone can lay claim to their essence, because they are not able to themselves dispute these claims. In other, and more obvious, words: the problem with the dead is how dead they are. If you take the existentialist route, you can only define the dead by what they did in life, by the projects they thrust themselves into, the ways they tried to transcend themselves when they still could.

None of this, of course, precludes a fine, existentially ethical reason for visiting the sites of the dead, of tragedy. Like with poverty tourism, there is certainly a method by which the voyeurism and fetishism of touristing has the potential to take a back seat to education and moral action. For example: on an island in Puget Sound, not too long ago, I walked

down a ramp toward a dock at a local memorial. There, over seven decades ago, the Japanese American residents of Bainbridge Island walked the same path, were put into boats and shipped off to internment camps. The rain was that slow drizzle, more like an overly ambitious fog than a rain, which dominates the winter weather in the Northwest. On my right was a creek lined with stands of slight, infant bamboo under towering firs. On my left was a wall, stretching the length of the path made of wooden planks, with a tō-style roof overhanging its edges. On the wall were names and pictures, stories of families who were forced from their homes by the government. One stood out: the high school's baseball coach, knowing some of his players would be leaving in a few days (families were given a week to prepare), played all the Japanese American kids for the entire game, regardless of ability—they lost 15-2. I am not sure why that was the most effective story to me, but the pure Americanness of baseball surely played a role. Those kids weren't foreign interlopers and spies, they were regular American teens. The photos on the wall were not daguerreotypes, not blurred or faded. They were crisp, their composition modern, the haircuts of tearful people saying goodbye were the same as those in a family photo album or an old movie. This history is not ancient, these photos tell me; many of these people are still alive. "Nidoto Nai Yōni" is written on a placard affixed to a stone: "Let it not happen again." At the bottom of the ramp, I stared out across the rows of fishing boats and pleasure craft and tried to picture the scene, that despondent parade, over two-hundred people marched onto boats, unsure of what lay ahead, their freedom stripped with no justification. And I felt something. I felt motivated to do something, or change something, whether donating to some relevant cause or just not staying quiet the next time someone makes a casually xenophobic comment. The design was quite effective in its impact.

That was the value of this brief visit; it wasn't in some claim to authenticity, nor necessarily a new revelation of the importance of freedom. The value of it was in a reminder of that which should drive all of our projects, the freedom of others. The tourism of death or tragedy that has already transpired allows one to consider the other with a level of authenticity without worry of objectifying them. The dead have no subjective concerns, no freedom, and so in touring them you escape the issues involved with touring the impoverished. But yet, in touring the dead we are still touring humanity, we are giving consideration to those beyond ourselves, and in doing this we avoid the pitfalls of solipsistic adventuring. The tour operators and memorial designers hold some responsibility, of course, for maintaining a strong emphasis on education and avoiding obscene commodification of the dead or sites of tragedy. We can't, however, call the act of operating tours in these areas wrong or immoral under the same reasoning we might criticize operators conducting tours of slums. In a global capitalist economy, it is wholly unfair to criticize the commodification of an object (like the dead or a sacred site) any more than one would criticize the commodification of any other object.[83] We can criticize the commodification of living people in any context, because they are subjects, radically free in their own right. It becomes difficult, however, to separate criticisms of a vendor near Ground Zero selling a "Never Forget" t-shirt or FDNY hat from any other criticisms of capitalism. Is this vendor taking their fair share of the profits from their labor? Is the memorial taking away parking from locals? Taking up key real estate which could be used for a school or grocery store? Adversely affecting the environment? Any one of these questions could be (and has been) asked of a theme restaurant or any other tourist attraction in the city. It can be asked of any new business or development of any kind. Some level of exploitation is inherent in a

capitalist society; if no one has an advantage over anyone else you couldn't really have profits. Someone is always trying to extract *more*.

The real gold people dig for in these mountains—be they the hills of voluntourism, death tourism, or poverty tourism—is cultural capital. What the tourist is buying in photographs, stories, souvenirs, and so on, is status.[84] You're buying satisfaction for yourself, and signals for others, which you may use for various projects like attracting a mate, getting into college, or making other people at parties feel bad about their vacation to Harry Potter World. Perhaps one could assume that by taking trips such as these, investing time and money into the exploration of the world's most dire problems will inspire others to do the same. "Awareness" is a tricky concept. Sure, people can't help with a problem if they don't know about it, but taking up the cause of letting others know about it seems like a cop out to actually helping solve the problem. As Christian Lander puts it, in his what now feels like a one-hundred-year-old text but is actually a ten-year-old blog,[xii] *Stuff White People Like*:

> This belief [in awareness] allows them to feel that sweet self-satisfaction without actually having to solve anything or face any difficult challenges . . . What makes this even more appealing for white people is that you can raise "awareness" through expensive dinners, parties, marathons, selling t-shirts, fashion shows, concerts, eating at restaurants and bracelets . . . stuff they like, EXCEPT now they can feel better about making a difference.[85]

Essentially, awareness is about minimal lifestyle changes and maximum virtue signaling. It is that guy at a party saying, "I went to the Holocaust Museum and oh my god, we can't let Nazis become a thing again." Followed by, "Oh, the protest this weekend? I actually have yoga class at that time." The most effectively designed sites of death tourism, as I

[xii] Each calendar year is approximately ten internet-years. Blogs age faster than dogs.

experienced on Bainbridge Island, should actually spur someone to action to prevent future tragedies, to change the way they consider their actions and lifestyle, as a well-designed poverty tourism program would seek to eliminate poverty. In the case of death-tourism, however, there is no paradox to your participation because the past is pure facticity. Fighting discrimination, genocide, or needless violence today does not erase the significance of the past, no matter how successful. We could all hold hands and sing around the fire, the whole world in harmony, and if anything that would make sites of dark and death tourism more important and desirable. Important because they would remind people not to become complacent, and desirable because in a peace-filled world, humans will seek to explore darkness for its novelty.

So, if we take the idea that well-constructed death tourism is about education, and that education's goal is to prevent future deaths, abuses, or tragedies of a similar vein to those that are being toured, then we find that the project of constructing death tourist sites is seemingly less fraught than touring them. But that is not to say the tourists must abide by the intentions of the site-creators. Beauvoir realized that, because the other is a subject in their own right, we can never truly know what will become of our projects once we act upon them in the world. "So an action thrown into the world is not propagated infinitely like a wave in classical physics," she writes in *Pyhrrus and Cineas*. "Everything that comes from the hands of man is immediately taken away by the ebb and flow of history, remolded by each new minute, and gives rise around it to a thousand unexpected eddies."[86]

When you visit a memorial, and you see a pond or a pool, are you reflecting upon what you've seen? If you see intentionally placed trees, are you considering the persistence of time and the act of renewal and rebirth? No? Well you should be.[87] Intentional landscape and design elements at modern memorials are designed to elicit specific reactions from visitors;

they are pored over in the planning process by designers, bureaucrats, and victims prior to construction. But anything not accompanied by truly specific signage will be open to interpretation. Even elements of a site with detailed explanations are still ultimately interpreted by visitors within their own subjectivity. This is the problem of being in the world: your projects are constantly distorted within the subjectivity of others; they are bumped and dented by their projects as well. What can be said about the two men who went out of their way to photograph themselves giving a Nazi salute in Buchenwald?[88] They were assholes—like all Nazis. Can we jump to the same conclusion about Mr. Confederate Flag T-shirt when he pulls up to Gettysburg National Military Park on his Harley and starts wandering, reading plaques, and engaging with sites in an otherwise identical fashion to any average tourist?

Radical freedom, of course, means that Nazi asshole and Confederate Flag asshole are perfectly within their rights to interpret any site as they'd like. One could spend pages dissecting the bad faith and other errors in transcendence that have led to these people to support ideologies which condone genocide and slavery, but that's a painful exercise for someone else to undergo. Everyone is free, and as such we must accept that a lot of people will screw up, either for a moment or a lifetime. De Beauvoir's philosophy was sensitive to forgiveness, moreso than some of her existentialist contemporaries. She believed the ambiguity of our situations often led us astray, or penned us into a choice we never wanted to make, but our ability to transcend left us constantly able to change and be better. Our mistakes are mere facticity, our futures are the pure potential to transcend them.[89] As we considered with the sub-man, you cannot be faulted for letting down your existential guard for a bit and taking a vacation that requires little thought, which creates no transcendence and relies on visceral pleasures. So we can certainly chill out about people snapping smiling

selfies at memorials, or misinterpreting landscaping that is symbolic as simply being landscaping. But at a certain point The Dude cannot abide, and that chillness must end. Not because the dead are being affected—the dead are objects—but the living. Here in the living world there is reason to stop the misappropriation of the object for nefarious means, for anti-Semitic, anti-Islam, neo-Confederate or (insert your favorite hate group here) purposes. When dark tourism serves to glorify darkness, it is no longer as harmless as a trip to the beach.

Death tourism, dark tourism, how do we even separate these from other types of tourism? Why is it different than going to the beach? A century ago people would picnic in cemeteries among their dead relatives, now a somber face is expected inside those gates. If your family, your ancestors, were affected by some tragedy like the Holocaust and you go visit an interpretive site relating to that, is that heritage tourism, or dark tourism? Those who engage in tourist studies also use the term "thanatourism" to describe death tourism, and keep it separated from the more general "dark tourism." *Thanatos* was the equivalent to the grim reaper in Greek mythology, death incarnate. Dark tourism may touch upon any type of crime, tragedy, or generally macabre happenings, but thanatourism is specifically about death.[90]

Our desire to engage with death is innate, it is our greatest fear and greatest question, but also our greatest certainty. In touring death, though, one can't help but wonder if that engagement is synthetic. Tourism is about experiences: experiences which create feelings inside you, stimulate your mind, and engage your physical body. When you travel to a pre-interpreted, pre-made site, or are guided through a natural site, you give up some of your freedom to whomever created that experience for you. If you go to Disney World, you subordinate your freedom to the concept of fun and entertainment of the park's designers.

"Give me fun," you say to them, and then they entertain you (for a hefty fee). Synthesized fun—entertainment—that is what you're buying. When you're guided up a mountain you are buying that simulated adventure, that exhilaration, and when you build a school for orphans in some impoverished village you're buying the feeling of being virtuous. Tourism experiences are quick means of synthesizing feelings by subordinating freedom to a guide or interpreter of some kind. Death tourism, then, is no different. Staring into the abyss is daunting, but tempting, and so the abyss is more easily sold with signage guides explaining to you just how you should feel about it. Visiting sites is certainly a marvelous way to learn about events, tragic or otherwise. Tour guides are often useful and educational. You'll never meet a stronger advocate for historical interpretation placards and signs than myself. But until you actually engage on your own with the death you are touring, you are simply playing at reverence, as our Chili's waiter played at service.

Allow me some room to elaborate. If you tour Ground Zero, and just kind of wander around, read some signs, take some pictures, and so on, are you really creating your own project in the world, your own being-for-itself? We come back around to the same fun vs. entertainment debate from earlier, except this time the entertainment is mournful and pensive, instead of a bright and flashy rollercoaster ride. This has been referred to as the "negative sublime."[91] This is much like a breathtaking panorama from a mountain you climbed, or the feeling of overwhelming excitement walking through the gates of a park designed perfectly and wholly to entertain you, this is the same feeling, in many ways, of standing beneath the Eiffel Tower or the Taj Mahal and marveling at humanity's accomplishments. It is the same but negative, an evil twin. To look out at the Great Wall of China and contemplate the capacity of man to work together to build something is not so far separated from gazing at the piles of shoes at the Holocaust museum and contemplating the

capacity of man to work together to destroy something. However, while jumping off of Splash Mountain and just shrugging and saying, "Cool ride, bro," may be acceptable, the same flippancy seems detestable in the shadow of great human suffering. Snap a view pictures of a view of some of the most majestic mountains in the world and rarely think of it again, certainly not critically, and we can write you off as a harmless sub-man, perhaps a solipsistic adventurer. Not with death tourism, though. The double-edged sword of death tourism is that while it carries with it more inherent gravity—it appears to be an authentic engagement with something important in the world in a way that theme parks or mountain climbing don't—it then becomes a more fraught choice for someone who does not wish to truly engage with it. The sub-man at the theme park we do not concern ourselves with, as he is harmless and complacent and full of churros, but the sub-man in 1930s Germany we do. Death tourism sits in the middle of these two extremes. Failure to fully engage with tragedy and death can lead to a passive acceptance of such things. "That's just the way things go," you might say. "These horrible things have always happened." As de Beauvoir puts it, "I would distrust a humanism which was too indifferent to the efforts of the men of former times; if the disclosure of being achieved by our ancestors does not at all move us, why be so interested in that which is taking place today; why wish so ardently for future realizations?"[92] If we are to learn from the past, we must engage the understanding of it as a project in good faith, and if we ignore the past we do so at our own peril.

So you cross the river and hike the Stampede Trail and here you are, at a bus in the middle of the woods in Alaska. What end are you angling at with this trip, what project are you fulfilling? When the local gas station attendant asks you why you're visiting, how do you tell her "I am drawn to the death place of a young man I never knew?" How do you explain that you believe the most interesting part of her hamlet, her region, is just a place where

somebody died? Not her gas station, of course, not the restaurants or farms or even the natural beauty either—by the time you get to Fairbanks you would have passed hundreds of miles of it, after all. You are there because the hardships of the land, coupled with a stubborn, idealistic young man's choices created some kind of legend and you were attracted to that. You're there, perhaps, because embracing death alongside nature felt more authentic than just backpacking through a national park. Up until now, though, you never considered the people who you are touring, the ones who remain alive. While touring the dead does concern itself less directly with objectifying others than, say, poverty tourism, one cannot fully extract the site or history from the people currently there.

Take, for example, David Farrier's travels on his *Netflix* show, *Dark Tourist.* In Colombia he tours the tragic past of Medellin's drug business with a former Pablo Escobar hitman, and he rides around to sites of famous crimes with a former (corrupt) police officer. Speaking with two tourists from New York, Farrier asks them their opinion of Popeye, the famous Escobar hitman, and they necessarily dodge the question. "I just want to know the history…" one answers, either unable to find the words or unable to admit that he has some kind of infatuation with this violence and tragedy (12:20). Farrier goes on to act out a mock execution with Popeye, gently challenging him about his past crimes. He is visibly uncomfortable with this type of tourism, but he's standing there in pineapple shorts profiting from it, and—intentionally or otherwise—advertising it (15:00). This may be one of the most heinous examples of thanatourism, where the perpetrator actually profits from the commodification of their crimes. What compensation do the families of those killed by Popeye and others like him during the Escobar years get from these reenactments? What less thoughtful people have stood beside this former hitman, clad in cheap straw hats and (like Farrier) pink pineapple shorts and fetishized violence?

The trap of death tourism may be that what you are touring seems to be a pure object. The dead have no subjectivity; they are now trapped in the facts of their past. But this doesn't mean that there is no subject affected by your actions. There are people whose freedom and transcendence you may be impeding or assisting in these towns or elsewhere, people whose lives were intertwined with those of the victims, whose lives are precariously stacked on these historical foundations. Remember back to de Beauvoir's metaphor of the ripples in a pond. We are not alone in the world and our actions always bounce off of the actions of others, as others' actions reflect off of our own. Imagine watching the YouTube channel of the man who murdered your sister or mother, as he advertises his murder tours of his murders.

Touring something without explicit intentions of refuting it easily becomes a tacit endorsement of the thing itself. An ill-prepared trip to the Magic Bus is a tacit endorsement of the same poor planning, ego, and idealism which killed Christopher McCandless. Passive acceptance, tacit endorsement: these are things one needs to avoid when traveling in such dangerous realms. If you do not wish to think critically, surrender yourself to the relatively harmless pleasures of the visceral. Lay on the beach with a detective novel. Ride a rollercoaster. But if you aren't setting your goals with the freedom and subjectivity of others in mind, if you don't have the desire to consider your actions and their intentions in each moment, it may be best to avoid the fraught sites of tragedy, the murder tours, the geography of human suffering, which deserves more than just a quick photo and a faux-sincere caption. There is a long history of touring the sites of death, graves, the macabre, and so we cannot expect it to go away in this time, this era of peak everything. Nor can we expect that misinterpretation will disappear, that neo-Nazis will stop visiting Auschwitz, or jingoists won't use the 9/11 Memorial to reinforce their xenophobia. But you can always put

a little more thought into how and where you travel, into what your motivations are, and how your actions affect others. You never tour objects; even when touring death, you push your projects out into the world of the other, who is changed by them. Take that responsibility seriously, especially when in the fraught realm of death and tragedy.

THE ETERNAL RETURN HOME

You travel because you want to feel something you couldn't feel at home. Maybe that's a way of finding meaning, of defining yourself outside the boundaries of your day-to-day life. This search for meaning is important; it is the praxis of existentialism. You don't get a pre-made meaning in life. But trying to find it on a treasure map of tourist sites isn't the way to go about it. You can travel to graves, take hikes, visit memorials, ride rollercoasters, sit on the beach, but you won't find meaning at any of these places. The existentialist doesn't find meaning, the existentialist manufactures it. The existentialist creates an absence and fills it. Everything that already is, already is. You must imagine something that isn't and make it be, whether that's an action, a feeling in yourself, an object.

In our daily lives, in the busyness with which we clutter them, we often do not find the space to critically think about our actions. An ever-deepening view into how the world is connected can be paralyzing, with each action having worldwide reverberations. We live in our facticity, in our circumstances, in the structures which confine us both physically and mentally: governments, economies, languages. The bills have to be paid so the heat stays on in the winter, and the body must be fed. So we go to work, in whatever capacity, to further our existence. We transcend in some moments, in some choices we truly move beyond this facticity, or bad-faith acting out of roles. We create our identity here and there, in the evenings and weekends when the guards aren't watching, or maybe even in bold moments of freedom in the conference room, in remarks to a customer who doesn't seem like they'd mind a bit of authenticity. Some people get it; they don't need their grocer to be entirely a grocer. Some people, however, do not. They would like to speak to your manager.

Our greatest opportunities to build ourselves and our essences from whole cloth are those times when we step outside of familiar routine and structure. When the world is open

to us to explore freely (budget permitting). In these moments our choices may seem to have lesser consequences—whether we go to the beach or go skiing, to Harry Potter World or Las Vegas—but their weight may indeed be greater. We know we must compromise our values at times for survival, and who hasn't worked some terrible job for a terrible boss at a terrible company at some point? Who hasn't pretended to enjoy a task they loathe with their whole being simply for that paycheck, to pay their rent or medical bills? Simone de Beauvoir knew this, and so she titled her ethical treatise *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. We are not purely one thing; we are never really a blank slate. Forever ambiguous, we are constantly pulled between facticity and transcendence, between subject and object, between motherhood and daughterhood, patriotism and individualism, and so on.[93] She wasn't a perfect example of ethical behavior, in her extensive travels or in her personal life: she seduced young students, took propaganda tours funded by totalitarian regimes, wrote ill-considered pieces simply for the money. But she traveled, and she never stopped traveling, really. Bike trips, backpacking, international sojourns, urban exploring—this queen of existentialism saw more of the world than most of us ever will. One must consider that she was onto something there, whether or not she ever made the connection explicitly, and regardless of how flawed she may have been.

The purpose of this exploration of travel, meaning, intention, and simulation has not been to shame people for their choice of vacation. After all, the heart of it is the existentialist belief in each person creating their own self. Don't let me influence your actions or you may end up living in bad faith, pretending to be something you are not. If you want to go to Disney World every year, do that—just do it consciously. We are all flawed, and we are all tired. We are all torn between the immense gravities of myriad responsibilities to ourselves and others. The purpose of this has been to investigate how to travel more authentically for

yourself, to make your own being-for-itself without undue influence from others. There are limitations to this, of course, in that you do not want to create yourself at the expense of others. You can't just fly off to a private island and hunt people for sport. The best actions, in the opinion of Mademoiselle de Beauvoir, expand the freedom of others, but we don't always have the ability to do those things and sometimes we might just not want to. That's okay. You're just a person, not a floating ball of being-in-itself which can take the form of pure goodness and virtue. De Beauvoir wasn't either.

We all can—of our own free will—go to Disneyland, go to Vegas, sit on the beach, build houses in Haiti, or whatever. We just need to go into these activities with our eyes open. Some are simulations and simulacra. Some of these simulacra have something beneath them, as in New York or Paris, where you can find a deeper reality beneath the *for-tourists* aspects of this vast and complex cities. Or in nature, where beyond the parks and trails something wild and pure lurks in the hidden places, so far from being *for-you* that it will eat you alive. Some do not, of course, like the theme parks where everything is built for you, the casinos in which every last detail has been constructed to take more of your money.

But there is an honesty in these hyper-realities as well. Disney knows it isn't real, it sells you a fantasy. Las Vegas was built on the blank slate of cheap desert for one reason, and it continues as a mecca of indulgence to this day, stuffing itself full of gambling and showgirls, buffets and nightclubs. It is young and simple compared to Paris, to a mountain range, to the impossibly complex history of poverty and the people living in it. That is its appeal. These places require little thought, they are designed to turn your thoughts off, and that's okay. The sub-man—the unthinking, non-transcendent archetype—is fine in small doses and controlled environments. If you decide, however, to move beyond relaxation into transcendence, into projects and goals and thrusting your being out into the world, well then

you must think a lot more. De Beauvoir implores us to consider the other, that one must "concern himself in each case with finding a balance between the goal and its means."[94] You cannot tour a place without affecting its residents, since they are not objects. While you may be presented with simulations of poverty (poorism), of altruism (voluntourism), ecology (ecotourism), and death (thanatourism), you must remember that these simulations are draped over the realities of actual people. These people are not in costume, these creeks and mountains are not built of foam and repainted periodically by a union contractor. In these realms you must think more deeply about your intentions and the effects of your actions. For you it is just a vacation, but for the people and places you tour it is their facticity, it is part of the structures which will augment or limit their ability to be free.

So you have to make some choices about your next trip. That's great—who you are is simply a series of choices, and these are some of the more fun ones to make. A good idea to keep in mind, not as any kind of universal truth, but as an exercise in critical thought and deep intentionality, is that of eternal return. The idea of eternal return is that our universe plays itself out indefinitely, over and over again, the same way. Nietzsche referred to this as the "eternal recurrence of the same," that our lives would play on repeat endlessly, and so each decision must be made as if we'd have to relive it ad infinitum.[95] Although Nietzsche isn't exactly an existentialist, his technique works. Absent a deity, absent a universal morality, in order to live in good faith we must make decisions authentic to ourselves. You are the person who must face your own history directly every day.

If you imagine that moment after your vacation, that breath of satisfaction and relief as you lie down again in your own bed, surrounded by comforting familiarities, try to think of where you just went and what you just did that left you so satisfied. This is a breath you will take a hundred million times, again and again. Was it an indulgence? Was it something

relatively altruistic? On your eternal return home, for the umpteen-thousandth go-around will you still be satisfied? Will you still feel as if you made a decision for yourself, and not to please others? Will you feel that those you met on your trip were not harmed by your visit, and maybe were even helped by it? The first couple times are easy, but in this exercise your trip recurs eternally, and so you must be thoughtful about it, intentional. Each person creates their own meaning, their own essence, through their actions. It is meaning which must be constantly fought for in the battle of ambiguity.[96] Do not act as if, as they say these days, you only live once (YOLO!). Act as if you must return home again and again from each voyage—your best and your worst ones alike—and face a self you are entirely responsible for, as de Beauvoir did:

> It's gray outside. Paris seems numbed; the streets are dark and morose, the shop windows laughable. Over there in the night, a vast continent [America] is sparkling. I'm going to have to become reacquainted with France and climb back into my own skin.[97]

While they are opportunities, perhaps, to escape your facticity, vacations and tourism are not an escape from the self, but moments to more purely define the self. The more time one spends in a set of circumstances the more those circumstances tend to define you, to pressure you into living in bad faith. The old cliché of "finding oneself" on vacation rings true because removing the major structures which constrain you day-to-day allows you to make freer decisions. Use the immense freedom and privilege of travel to make that self into someone you truly wish to be. Look in the mirror upon your return home and, hopefully, see a more authentic you—the self you'd be happy seeing again and again on your eternal returns home.

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The goal of this piece, in a very broad sense, is to connect some dots between philosophy and your actual life. By sectioning off a small and perhaps less significant piece of life—tourism and travel—I felt it would be more accessible and actionable than exploring, say, how to raise your children ethically, or a narrow exploration of some bit of Simone de Beauvoir's ethical philosophy expanded to dozens of pages. I am not specifically trained in philosophy, a field today dominated in academia by analytical philosophers. I didn't want to dissect the metaphysics of phenomenology piece by piece in a meandering proof. The idea here is to relate the theoretical to the practical—a praxis of sorts. Graduate Liberal Studies is interdisciplinary, and so to study one thing in isolation under a magnifying glass did not seem appropriate. But at the same time, I did not want to present a survey of existentialism or tourism. I tried to find a middle ground for scope that would remain relatable and within my knowledge, which could pull from a number of my courses in the program.

Existentialism, and the various writings which fall under that label (plays, essays, novels, philosophical treatises), seems due for a revival. We may think we live in interesting times: an ascendant right-wing government, intra-party division on the left, new technologies and science appearing each day to further confuse us. The world seems more complex, yet smaller. But none of this is new, of course, these are the same things the French existentialists were dealing with in the '40s and '50s. Nuclear bombs, Nazis, Communists, World War. The stakes were much higher then—they literally stared down the barrels of Nazi rifles—their ideas, however, are universal. I wanted to bring the concepts of radical freedom and personal responsibility to the modern reader in a fun way, without diving too deep into creating some system of modern ethics. This piece takes a small part of modern

life, tourism and travel, and works within that to discuss the idea of being painfully free, of consequence, of trying to transcend yourself. In travel we are allowed choices we aren't on a day to day basis, and one of the greatest critiques of Sartre, especially, is that he dismissed how hard it was for regular people to simply drop the act (see his rant on waiters). That "bad faith" act kept their children fed and their homes warm. But if you had a brief bit of time, which some of us do, to escape the conditions under which you toil simply to keep yourself fed and clothed, what would you do then? Escape responsibility completely? Seek the visceral? Seek the altruistic? Why? These are the questions I sought to explore in this piece, taking the time when we are the least constrained and asking the reader to consider their actions within those moments, rather than their lives more wholly.

A modest undertaking, obviously, compared to a more universal exploration of existentialism or ethics, but also more approachable. My design was to utilize colloquial tone, humor, and modern references to engage readers unfamiliar with philosophy in the subject. The French café is moved to a Chili's, Sartre visits Disney, et cetera. I also wanted to demonstrate that this is hard, that travel should be fun as well as existentially engaging, and that no one is perfect. Through the travelogues of Simone de Beauvoir, I wanted to weave in the actual travel of one of the key existentialist philosophers with the ethics. No, every trip she made wasn't some ethical pilgrimage to the shrine of ethics. Sometimes she just went for fun hikes. But in exploring why that is enjoyable, while it may be an acceptable choice, why it might not, I wanted to give the reader something to chew on when planning their next vacation. The goal was to avoid shaming people about their choices as much as possible, but instead encouraging them to think them through in good faith, and not make prescribed choices simply because they'd seen others do those things.

The piece accomplishes three things: an introduction to existentialism, a short cataloging of some of Simone de Beauvoir's travels, and an exploration of post-modern travel. I came to be fascinated by existentialism a few years ago after reading *At the Existentialist Café* by Sarah Bakewell. The book was a broad survey of the origins of the philosophy and the intertwined lives of its most famous philosophers, mostly set in France and Germany between World War I until the post-WWII era. I looked further into the subject and found that the idea of existentialism, of being free to do anything, but ultimately responsible for everything you do, such a refreshing philosophy. Most of the philosophy I had learned up until that point was tedious metaphysics, or epistemology, most of it ancient and—while important—largely inapplicable to my day-to-day life. From there I began devouring the work of Sartre and Camus, both Nobel Laureates (although Sartre famously refused the prize), but was truly blown away by the writing of Simone de Beauvoir. I was reading *The Mandarins* in 2017, and it felt like it had been written a year prior. An early sex scene, so deeply feminist, so deeply awkward, felt like the proto-version of the then-viral "Cat Person" essay by Kristen Roupenian. There were internal battles between leftist friends about whether or not to go full communist, debates which read like all of those between the Bernie and Clinton supporters from the seemingly never-ending 2016 primary. There was the question of violence against Nazis, both in the context of post WWII vengeance in *The Mandarins* and in the public punching of Richard Spencer, an infamous modern Nazi. The text felt so fresh, it was hard not to keep drawing connections to our modern problems. This is where the first hint of the thesis came to be. I had to shelve an idea to adapt the novel into a television series, if only for my lack of screenwriting experience and weak French language skills. This is where I made the transition into something a bit more in my experience, something I'd been working on during my time in GLS—creative nonfiction.

That was because, in addition to her skillful prose, de Beauvoir's life was fascinating: rubbing elbows with countless famed authors, philosophers, visiting Fidel Castro in Cuba, Maoist China, post-war California—and she logged almost all of it in her autobiographies. There would be plenty of real life material, plenty of research from which to draw these connections between the life and work of this woman and what is happening now. With this rich and vast oeuvre to pull from, I considered what angle to take. I am not a biographer, nor a historian, and anyway Mme. de Beauvoir did a fine job cataloging her life for us already. Nor am I a trained philosopher (although I consider myself a capable amateur), and tackling a full-on examination of her philosophy and ethics was not a project I felt qualified or motivated to undertake. One thing which seemed to set her apart from other philosophers, apart from the availability of autobiographical texts, was her extensive travels. I travel as often as I can and have a fascination with the question of how does one travel well? On trips with family, in groups of six or more we find ourselves falling into clichéd tourism: sightseeing, eating at large popular restaurants with plenty of tables and huge menus, roaming the streets in a tight pack like predators on the hunt for the weakest and slowest bits of culture. By myself, or with my partner, it is more like espionage. Trying to blend in, to find the secret hole-in-the-wall, the location of which the locals don't want you to know. Trying to interact with the people of the area and—if ever so briefly—live the life you imagine they live. Is one of these better than the other? Not necessarily. I am also quick to question the effort put into either, and whether it is a bad faith one, either questing to collect iconic pictures or establishing oneself as the anti-tourist, the authentic traveler. These are dilemmas I have considered on many trips; they haunt me while I plan my next vacation.

Perhaps this is because vacation days, at least for Americans, may be the most precious form of compensation we receive. Money is generally more freely given by

employers, health insurance to some extent is required by law, especially for full-time employees, but vacation is purely discretionary. We take less vacation than most other developed nations. What we're being sold, what we're being told to do on these vacations, is something worth considering. The growing popularity of travel trends—like voluntourism—demonstrate a desire to do something more than simply lounge at the beach or take in a show. Ecotourism represents some desire, either to see something which is dying before it goes, or to escape a modernity and connectivity which makes many people uncomfortable. Regardless of how they choose to do it, it is clear that a lot of people want to use their time meaningfully. Existentialist philosophy is a perfect framework for this search for meaning in that it allows you to create your own meaning. In fact, the only meaning, the only purpose you have, is to create your own.

So I delved into these questions of motivation: Why do we travel? Why do we say we make the choices we make, and why do we actually make them? The idea of bad faith—Sartre's notion that we play at being someone we are not for the added ease of going with the grain in society, to please others, or to make money—plays heavily in this exploration. So much of what we do is an abandonment of our "true" selves, but it is also a fact of life. Simone de Beauvoir was more nuanced; she believed life to be a bit more ambiguous. Her ethics supposed that we were constantly torn between authenticity and bad faith, between the mere existence of ourselves and our ability to transcend it. In this I found inspiration to walk a path not of intellectual criticism, but of a call to introspection. It would have been simple to write up all the reasons going to Disney World is a waste of time and money, how you're being tricked by marketers from an early age to fetishize some stack of fake rocks and animatronic singing characters. Probably would have been fun, too! But the reality is that some people truly do want to experience those things. What do they have to say for

themselves, then, when they are caught up in a conversation with someone who is spending their vacations volunteering in the developing world? Voluntourism, I believe, is just as easy to critique as theme-parking, or beach holidays. Everything is ripe for criticism if you try hard enough, of course. The idea here was not to critique from the outside, but to force the reader to question their own motivations by applying some level of philosophical analysis. I chose existentialism because it works better than something like utilitarianism, which (and it is mentioned in the piece) with its almost mathematical framework, would probably consider all vacations to be selfish and wasteful. With apologies to Peter Singer, the most famous proponent of this kind of ethical behavior, we won't all be "effective altruists" looking for the best happiness/suffering reduction value for our dollar. In maintaining the accessibility of the piece, I had to also maintain the idea that you can't be some pure bright ball of ethical light guiding the way. Looking at de Beauvoir in her own travels helped to highlight this, as she was not a perfect person, not a theory, but an actual flawed human who did things in a flawed world. From her we are able to both look at what theoretically would be ideal and what practically can happen.

She not only traveled extensively, but also led a life which was at times counter to her own ethical system. This was good. The idea that one could craft a narrative around a perfect character who never made mistakes is insane and bound to bore. De Beauvoir seduced young students, she wrote crap books for the money, she strung along lovers, she lied, she lived in bad faith at times. She did all the things we all do, she did them all over the world, and she wrote about them for our benefit. Against her we can compare our will to adventure, seemingly now softened by modern conveniences. Against her we can stack our desire for authenticity, and our attempts to find in it in the most impoverished parts of a city, versus simply indulging our true desires to lounge at the beach or visit a theme park.

Thusly, there is the argument to be made that a person who truly wants to go to Universal Studios (and does it unapologetically) may be living a freer, more authentic life than a person who goes on a museum tour of New York and hates it, but aims to build some kind of social capital or intellectual résumé. Depending on who you cohort with and your value system, your street cred could be another person's embarrassment. But what matters most is what your idea of embarrassment or happiness is to you, what your actual desires are, what your motivations are. Whether you visit Elvis's house in Tennessee or Neruda's in Chile, or nobody's house at all, you just should be aware of the reasons why you're doing it. There may be a connection between this and the trend towards mindfulness, but in keeping the scope relatively narrow I did not delve into other philosophical schools, and stayed pretty narrowly in France around WWII, with some variances within the modern Western canon. As I expand, perhaps a look at the influence of Eastern thought on people (meditation, mindfulness, and their respective marketing/apps/proliferation in the West) and how it relates to existentialist thought might be worth a brief tangent.

This train of thought was not insignificant in the creation of this piece. One of the major influences on me in this exploration was my experience in Dr. Foulks-McGuire's GLS course on Buddhism, where I worked on a final paper concerning Right Livelihood and the idea of ethical economic development centered on people, not profits. So much of the course surrounded the history and practice of that religion in a traditional sense, but we were challenged to expand on that in our final projects. So many of my classmates and I, rather than narrowing on sects or practice, tried to widen into the modern world, into applications. I asked the question whether these ideas could be applied in the economy, and I reviewed a classmate's paper who looked at politics. The same question we all asked ourselves about trigonometry in high school—when am I ever going to use this?—reappears again and again

with each new thing we learn, especially when these things are as broad-reaching as ethics and religion.

Some things we don't have to "use" in so much as the term has come to mean something like "apply in a way which makes me more money." Something that I didn't explore in the Right Livelihood project, but might make it into its expansion, is the idea of offsets. Carbon offsets might be the most well-known example of this idea, where one purchases a carbon offset to compensate for the carbon they exude doing some activity. My favorite online book reseller allows you to carbon-offset your shipping for a few cents each book, for example. Another famous example might be the Catholic Church selling indulgences. The idea is that you did the bad thing, but you're giving money to something that will make it even, whether some kind of carbon sink like trees, or rectifying your sinful deeds with your God. If we allowed for ethical offsets in tourism, for example, you could go hunt rare zebras, throw litter down everywhere, treat the locals like sub-humans, fly each way in a giant empty jet, and then just throw a bunch of money at some charities which help poor African villagers and stop poachers and develop solar plane technology and so on. Then the ethical questions are all answered for you and the solution is money, so you don't really need to "use" ethics at all, you can just "use" that trigonometry to model mutual funds or something. Defining things by their ability to create income is a common trap, becoming more and more common in colleges. I didn't want to fall into this narrow idea of praxis.

This is why I jumped the economic ship which I had climbed aboard researching Right Livelihood. My work in the course Horror and Philosophy informed my voyage to "De Beauvoir at the Beach" as well, especially in its application of theory to art. I have long been a fan of horror movies, of scary stories, urban legends and creepy histories. In this course we applied philosophical concepts to the art I'd been enjoying for years. This is how

you "use" something, I thought. To enhance one's appreciation and understanding of art, of the world, of anything. The work I did in there improved my critical thinking about the universal human concepts beneath what scares us, and how those same fears and concepts keep popping up again and again. The praxis of this was mostly in my own mind, though. I was appreciating horror with greater depth, able to articulate my thoughts about it more clearly, able to draw more lines between things relating to the art I was consuming, but it was the other side of the spectrum from Right Livelihood. Art and economics were at opposite ends of each other in their perceived actionability.

In what seems now like a triangulation, but wasn't conscious at the time, I started thinking a lot about tourism as this space in which people aren't quite so free as when they create art, but aren't quite so constrained as when they go to work. This was, for a while, a question about environment and ecotourism. It was new and shiny, this trending urge to experience some kind of natural indulgence as the environment changes rapidly all around us. I had long been interested in how people relate to nature, especially the idea of "wilderness," which I wrote about in the Contemporary Issues in Liberal Studies course for my final paper. Another thing running through my mind at the time was Timothy Morton's book *Hyperobjects,* which talked about the idea of climate change as a "hyperobject," something so vast and viscous that touches everything, such that our interaction with it is both ubiquitous and also nearly impossible to perceive on a daily basis. This idea was fascinating, as was our reactions to what must be some kind of subconscious knowledge of the world changing. Ecotourism, I thought, might be like visiting the bedside of a dying loved one, someone you know is sick but refuse to talk about. Of course, the idea of flying somewhere to appreciate the environment brought in some of the hypocrisies and contradictions which I later would confront when talking about "bad faith." This was a path

shown to me by Dr. Patty Turrisi, who in one of our discussions about possible final projects brought up the idea of bad faith in tourism—probably just to calm me down as I was ranting about the world ending and people renting treehouses on the coast of Central America. Long had I struggled to get very deep into my copy of *Being and Nothingness* before giving up. I had truly begun to believe the urban legend that the book's mass popularity was indeed due to its ability to substitute for a 1kg weight (quality metal products being quite hard to come by due to the war).[xiii] But I dove back into it and saw exactly what she was saying. Tourism was rife with performance and false altruism. The next line was easy to draw, as I had just been reading some of Simone de Beauvoir's work, and it was known to me that her life was well-documented and her travels extensive. The rest is what this manuscript became, connecting a variety of dots between existentialism and choices in tourism, between travel in the past and travel now, between the actions of a woman and her philosophy. And although I believe I stayed fairly on track with my original goals at the outset, the crafting of the piece tended to draw more lines outward than connect them. In my mind now, this piece is an octopus, maybe even Cthulu, reaching tentacles out in all directions, hungry for more.

The first and most rich subject, which is not touched upon much in the piece, is the question of late capitalism. The term is de mode at the moment, but it certainly taps into something about the contemporary age when brands' social media accounts argue with each other as if they are people, where someone will try to sell you bags of juice for some "juicer" that connects to WiFi for hundreds of dollars.[xiv] The first adjective that tends to come to

[xiii] Jeffries, Stuart. "Left Bank by Agnes Poirier – Existentialism, Jazz and the Miracle of Paris in the 1940s." *The Guardian,* 11 July 2018.
[xiv] Lowrey, Annie. "Why the Phrase 'Late Capitalism' is Suddenly Everywhere." *The Atlantic,* 1 May 2017.

mind is "absurd." And when one is writing a paper about existentialism and starts thinking about the absurdity of some of the activities and marketing out there, in tourism in other areas, one cannot help but think about Albert Camus, who regularly denied being an existentialist and called himself an "absurdist." There is a strong line which ties Camus and his idea of embracing the absurd, transcending it by investing yourself in something (no matter how ridiculous it may seem) and the menu of late-capitalist tourist offerings. To be overly reductive and poorly researched (which is why this section never made it into the project), if the simulacrum is all we have, perhaps the best way to live a fulfilling life is to just give the simulacrum a big ol' hug. Camus, while not the autobiographer de Beauvoir was, also has diaries translated into English which are ripe for perusal and likely contain some insights into his travels. There is an entire line here which, due to the time constraints of the final project, I was unable to pursue, but would seemingly mesh well with the rest of the piece.

The rest of the pieces are there, but some of them are only hinted out. For example, there is the #vanlife section, with its overly simplified line, "Most people who live in vans do not do so out of choice, they are not minimalists to declutter their hectic lives, they are homeless." This skims over what is a deep question concerning status and lifestyle, class in America, and why what was once considered a dirtbag lifestyle has been co-opted by Instagram models. I'm currently fifty pages into Jessica Bruder's *Nomadland*, profiling vehicle-dwellers in America, many of whom are senior citizens. Poor older folks living off the grid because it is cheaper, and rich young people living off the grid because it looks cool? Where are the connections here? And more importantly, what is the timeline as we go from 2007's market crash when all the news stories about living in vans were sad human-interest pieces to the current hashtag trends? How did homelessness get co-opted by the Coachella

set? There is a lot to be said about the imagery of the American highway as it pertains to a certain cultural zeitgeist of freedom. Existentialism, being very much centered on freedom, will certainly braid nicely with this line of development. This will also bring in concepts from another Liberal Studies course, Class Narratives, taught by Erin Sroka. Less about the political philosophy or structuralist background of class and more about the lived experience of it, what I learned will be extremely useful in considering the class implications of tourism not just abroad, but domestically. These things were touched on a bit, in the section on poverty tourism and elsewhere, but there is a lot more to explore in where and how one travels works as a class and status signifier, as well as the experiences of those who serve tourists.

Ultimately, I'd like to expand this into a book-length manuscript for submission. Certainly it needs a bit of work to get there. The two additional lines of development above would add some pages, but there is also a lot of research and detail to be added. First and foremost, I would like to add more first-person experiences to the piece. I think the description of the Japanese American Exclusion Memorial worked well to bring the reader into the concepts the project investigates. I don't want this to become a novelization of a travel show, but the detail with which one can describe a scene or experience is vastly improved by being there, and it would seem a disservice to readers to provide only second-hand knowledge and borrowed insights.

That being said, though, I would also like to build out my primary sources with supplemental research. Simone de Beauvoir climbed a mountain, or went on a bike tour, but what did that look like? What kind of bike did she ride, how heavy was it (spoilers: probably very heavy), what were the roads like then, what kind of food were restaurants serving? What was the headline in the newspapers the day she arrived? All of her experiences that I touch

on in the project could use a bit of historical context in one way or another to center the reader in the time and place. Lacking context, the tendency is to envision an experience similar to one we might have now, but the world was quite different back then. I'd love to be able to travel to some of these places and get some direct injections of imagery and experience for contrast, so the historical research will also serve to differentiate the travel of her time from that of my own. It could also be useful to contrast her experiences, as cataloged in her autobiographies and travelogues, with modern equivalents in travel blogs. If I was able to track down similar places and experiences, I would be able to provide a direct comparison between not only the way we traveled in the past versus now, but the way people thought about and shared those experiences.

This additional research will also fill in some holes I noticed forming, especially in writing about death tourism. Taking just a piece of the overall project and boiling it down to a manageable size is quite the endeavor. Something deeply human, like death, like touring the dead, could include not only modern forays into the macabre but go back to the pyramids. That isn't to say each investigation into what seem to be popular trends in post-modern tourism needs to be painstakingly traced back to its roots in history, but rather that I felt as if I risked overlooking something glaring and important in the history of these things without time to do those deep historical dives. The bolder the claim you make to something's novelty, the greater the chance you will be proven wrong by history. I would like to add some tangents about the creation of Disney World and its early days, and discuss its theme park predecessors. I'd like to dive into pilgrimages and early tourism, back when it was pretty much only the domain of the wealthy, and look a bit at how that transitioned to be more widely available.

Within that line there is something I wish to include a bit more of, which I mentioned in this project's proposal but was unable to fully flesh out in the scope of this current draft: the class divides in tourism. There is the history of the vacation day and the weekend, which wouldn't take up too much space, but could add greatly needed perspective. In a piece about the inherent freedom of a vacation, I should really expand on the dichotomy between those jobs that provide adequate time off and those that don't. This wraps around into the late-capitalism discussion, into the communist ideals of Sartre and de Beauvoir, and into the history of travel. What did labor laws mandating time off do for the tourist industry? These are questions which I did not have the time or space to answer these past two semesters. There are depths to be sounded, for example, in sections of de Beauvoir's autobiography detailing her trips to Morocco and Greece and her quests for authentic experiences, avoiding tourists and seeking the authentic in the poorer parts of town. These experiences are touched upon, but could be analyzed more thoroughly against her expressed ideas of class and societal structure, as well as Sartre's.

While looking to the larger scale, though, I must try not to forget about something left over from the original concept: sections as standalone articles. There are a few parts of this piece which, if given the right edits, could be submitted for publication as short-form works of either creative non-fiction or (with some cleaning up) academic pieces. I particularly think there is something quite timely in the section on social media and van life, which if (as I mentioned prior) tied in with late-capitalism, is just full of hot topics for modern readership. The same goes for the idea of touring nature as both a simulation and a death bed visit. The imminence of global climate change looms large in the modern psyche (again referencing Morton's *Hyperobjects),* and bears consideration not only in the context of the efficiency of our appliances and methods of commuting, but in our indulgences. As is

emphasized throughout the piece, your vacations are great place to start critically thinking about your behavior and its consequences, because it is an area where you have great control and freedom.

There are also the aspects of this piece which are more timeless, but in some ways are evergreen. The search for authenticity in our lives, the idea of defining ourselves by our actions—these are not new concepts but neither do they age much in our post-post-modern era. The idea of being conscious, mindful, or transcendent has been repackaged a dozen different ways but continues to move off the shelves because the desire for it is innately human. The idea of a city's essence being a mirage or simulation ties in nicely with your own narrative, being one as well. We make up stories about ourselves, about others, connecting the dots of reality with fictional lines that eventually overwhelm them. I think with some work the beginning of this piece could be crafted into a particularly interesting standalone piece, looking at Sartre, de Beauvoir and Baudrillard, city syndromes and our tendency to build false narratives.

Of course in looking at submission, unlike publication as a book, I have concerns about the tone of the piece. In striving to find some middle ground between academic and colloquial writing, I wonder if these sections miss the mark for a number of journals. This was an intentional goal, however, from the inception of the project. I wanted to have fun with the reader in lines like "Now now; put the torches down, Hufflepuffs!" I was seeking to have a playful conversation, to maintain a casual tone, and did so through the near-constant use of second-person and first-person plural. End notes took up the role of traditional academic citations, leaving footnotes around for the occasional amusing aside.

Switching to a more traditional academic phrasing in some instances might be beneficial when cutting out sections for submission, but I have concerns about its effect on

tone. Take a simple sentence, for example, like: "If your vacation is climbing Mount Rainier, then all of your decisions will be subordinate to the goal of summiting the mountain." Now flip it around to "If one's vacation is climbing Mount Rainier, then all of one's decisions will be subordinate to the goal of summiting the mountain." A bit stuffier, perhaps, but not a big deal. The problem comes, however, when things get a bit more technical. Take this sentence, "You have to, in moments which are admittedly ill-defined temporally, make active decisions about what you will do in a manner unrestricted by dogma or outside influence." If I were to go about replacing "you" and "yours" with "one" and "one's", by the end of it the reader would be drifting off. By utilizing the second person, it helps the reader stay engaged, to remain in the idea that this is about their actions which they can and will take.

The stodgy academic tone of yore just tends to scream "this is a highly theoretical idea." It also steals the most fun transitions from the piece, like one of my personal favorites: "'The serious man, you might imagine, loves an itinerary. Maps! Timelines! 'Not me,' you scream at these pages. 'I am a free spirit, a goddamn leaf on the wind—do you not follow my Insta?'" So intertwined in the writing is the fun I was having speaking with the imagined reader, I think the move going forward for submissions would be to find appropriate journals rather than tailor the piece to a more academic audience. It isn't a by-the-numbers academic paper, nor is it a purple prose and metaphor-laden personal essay, but I'm certain there is somebody out there looking for mildly entertaining non-fiction.

Daring to make claim to the most obvious revelation a student could have, I will say this: the final project has been a learning experience. The work itself wasn't daunting at first, with a forty-page requirement, only a bit longer than the twenty-five pages or so I clacked out on some ancient Dell to complete my bachelor's degree. When I began researching, however, and diving into the subject matter, the real obstacles became apparent. The lower

limit was not the primary concern, as often it had been with assignments given by instructors. No, at the point I became my own boss the problem became the ever-increasing upper limit of the subject matter. I read thousands of pages of de Beauvoir's work, listened to hours of podcasts on existentialist philosophy, dug through countless articles on the internet which led to nowhere. The amount of things I spent hours learning only to realize they weren't going to make it into the piece is astounding. But yet the scope kept growing and creeping.

An observant de Beauvoir scholar might note that my piece lacks references to two of her most profound works: *The Second Sex* and *The Coming of Age*. That is another 1,800 pages of research in total which I have not yet had a chance to dissect and relate to this project. I had them in mind, they weren't forgotten, but at a certain point I had to reign myself in. The scale of this thing was always going to be more than forty pages, but at a certain point it needed to be finished. Like de Beauvoir writing those two deeply researched works of history and philosophy, I found myself buried in a mountain of books. Unlike her, I also had to go to work every day.

In working through these issues of scheduling and scale, I discovered my sweet spot in the mornings before the day took hold. Much of this project has been written between six and eight o'clock, sometimes running until noon on the weekends. Otherwise, the day tended to add its voice to the already cacophonous echoes of ideas and connections I was trying to organize. The greatest take away from this experience has been to just sit down and do the work: read that chapter again if you need to, find some new book, stack the research high and wide like cordwood, but just keep sitting down and doing the work. I was never overwhelmed when typing or reading, only when staring at the piles of books and listening to the taunting silence of an unused keyboard. I tried my best to remember that because of

the interdisciplinary nature of the program and the project, I didn't have to read everything, and my subject didn't have to wander and spread and branch, but that it had the privilege of doing so. After all, in a different life I could have been submitting seventy pages on the metabolism of one microscopic bacteria. The reason I'm at the keyboard surrounded by these stacks of books is because I enjoy the work, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the Graduate Liberal Studies Program and appreciate what it, as well as this project, have taught me about myself.