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Indiana Jones and the Mysterious Maya:
Mapping Performances and Representations
Between the Tourist and the Maya in the Mayan Riviera

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a guidebook to the complex networks of representations in the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and Cobá Mayan Village tours in Mexico's Mayan Riviera. Sold to tourists as opportunities to encounter an authentic Mayan culture and explore the ancient ruins at Cobá, these excursions exemplify the crossroads at which touristic and Western scientific discourses construct a Mayan Other, and can therefore be scrutinized as staged post-colonial encounters mediated by scriptural and performative economies: the Museum of Maya Culture (Castaneda) and the scenario of discovery (Taylor). Tourist and Maya are not discrete identities but rather inter-related performances: the Maya become mysterious and jungle-connected while the tourist plays the modernized adventurer/discoverer. However, the tours' foundations ultimately crumble due to uncanny and partial representations. As the roles and narratives that present the Maya as indigenous Other fracture, so too do those that construct the tourist as authoritative consumer of cultural differentiation.

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Introduction

A Guidebook to Touring the Maya

The Mayan Riviera or “Riviera Maya” is a tourist destination and resort mecca etched out of the jungle located in the state of Quintana Roo and along the east coast of the Yucatán Peninsula in Southern Mexico. Once a swath of small fishing communities, the Mayan Riviera has, over the past decade, become one of the world’s most trendy and popular tourist spots with hundreds of thousands of vacationers flocking to the region for its white sand beaches, its warm, turquoise waters, its thick green jungle, and the ancient Mayan ruins that are scattered throughout the region. The Mayan Riviera traditionally starts in the city of Playa del Carmen and stretches sixty kilometers south to the town of Tulum. Tourism in the area has become so popular that, in 2004, a roughly sixty-kilometer stretch of the Riviera (from Playa del Carmen to Tulum) counted 23,502 hotels and in 2006 that number had increased to 30,705, with no end of development in sight (Miller Llana). Visiting tourists can choose from a variety of lodging options: small beach huts, mid-size beach houses and condos, and massive resort complexes with thousands of rooms that include food and alcohol as part of the stay. These all-inclusive resorts, mostly owned by large international (mostly European) companies, account for a large percentage of the total tourist accommodations in the area (Miller Llana).

The high-traffic and big business Mayan Riviera is the focus of this thesis: specifically how the tourist industry produces, represents and stages the Maya within the practices and regimens of tourist excursions. As an observer and consumer—as a tourist—of their culture, I use autobiographical accounts of such tours to demonstrate how the concepts of an *authentic* and *real* Maya are highly problematic. In the tourist mecca of the Riviera Maya, such terms exist largely as marketing claims: their primary purpose is to assign both cultural capital to

specific tour or excursion. However, as I will discuss later, these terms are also caught up in the larger processes of Western discursive practice's desire for a uniform and hastily defined exotic Other.

The Riviera Maya is named after the collection of indigenous peoples who have traditionally and historically inhabited the region, and whose ancestors left monuments of their heritage behind in the form of ruins and archaeological sites. As a destination, the Mayan Riviera came into tourist nomenclature in the late 1990s when the Playa del Carmen Hotel Association came up with the term for marketing and promotion purposes (Geddes Gonzales 51). The re-imagining of what used to be called the Cancún-Tulum corridor references the sunny and chic French Riviera and combines this image with the region's Mayan heritage and culture (Geddes Gonzales 51). This renaming capitalizes on one of the region's biggest tourist draws: Mayan heritage and history—what ethnographer and anthropologist Quetzil E. Castañeda calls “Maya civilization”. More than a mere “sun destination”¹, the Riviera Maya presents the vacationer with the bonus experience of engaging with and learning about this civilization. In a poll conducted of tourists in the Riviera Maya, “archaeological ruins” placed second behind “sun and sand” both in a list of reasons why tourists traveled to the Riviera Maya and in a list of destinations that tourists visited there (Torres 102-104). While bringing a vibrant economy to a previously poor region, this exploding tourist-based industry has also had a massive impact on the contemporary Yucatec Maya. Not only have these local indigenous groups had to negotiate the recent influx of Mexican national labourers seeking work, but they have also had to deal with the expansion of land and the increased numbers of jobs dedicated to facilitating the tourist industry. More importantly however, with the increase in tourist attention towards the historical and archaeological Maya, these

1. To use a term coined by vacation package carriers such as Sunquest, Signature Vacations and Air Canada Vacations.

local Yucatec Maya have had to contend with being a part of the destination in destination tourism.

This research project took root in December 2005 during a trip to the Mayan Riviera, where I participated in a purification/cleansing ceremony, performed by a Mayan priest or shaman, which took place in the middle of the jungle. This specific experience was part of the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour, a package tour—offered through our resort—that consisted of a trip to the Cobá Mayan ruins, a hike through the jungle landscape, paddling on a isolated lake, zip-lining through the jungle brush, eating Mayan food in a Mayan village, rappelling off a cliff side, and exploring and swimming in a cenote (a cave leading to an underground freshwater river). The purification ceremony was performed at the mouth of the cenote; cenotes, our guide told us, are considered a sacred space by the local Maya, and we therefore needed to be blessed—cleansed—by a Mayan priest before entering into one.

The priest, using our guide as a translator, asked our group to stand in a circle. While burning incense in a homemade torch and speaking incantations, he proceeded to cleanse each individual in our tour group by allowing the incense smoke to billow over our bodies. He cleansed each participant one at a time until he had gone around the full circle and cleansed the guide too. Lastly he joined the circle and recited a chant in the local Yucatec language, and we were free to enter into the sacred cenote.

Throughout the ceremony, some of my fellow tour group members photographed and video-recorded this act. For me, seeing this seemingly sacred ceremony videotaped and photographed by a group of sweaty North American tourists brought the realities of tourism (back) into the frame: this was all a part of a package tour after all. This ceremony was just a part of the adventure-based activities that preceded it, just a part of the exotic fun. Certainly these Maya,

living several centuries after the Maya of old who constructed monumental cities and worshiped the underworld, no longer believed in the sacredness of the underwater river ways. Certainly this ceremony was just a theatrical presentation whipped up to imbue the tour with a sense of magic and mystery, and maybe a tad of spiritual significance. Or was it?

While my initial reaction was to think that the ceremony was a falsehood—that it was a performance used to add a hint of indigenous exoticism to the adventure tour—there was also a nagging suspicion that this ceremony was also, in some way, real. That is, that the ceremony, regardless of being enacted for tourists, and, moreover, this cenote itself, still held some sort of spiritual/ritualistic/symbolic significance to the local peoples.

I wondered, long after I returned to Canada, which elements of this Mayan ritual were authentic (held actual cultural value to those enacting the ritual) and which were performed—manufactured for my, the tourist's, benefit. Is it possible that the ritual could be both? At the same time I asked myself, what if any, performances or roles were we tourists performing while the Mayan priest enacted this ritual cleansing? Who was performing what and for whom?

This idea of culture and ritual on display, particularly the task of exploring notions of cultural authenticity and cultural theatricality, piqued my interest. Moreover, the notion of tourism as a performative mode also seemed intriguing: if this ceremony was an example of theatre at the crossroads of culture (Pavis), what would it mean if both cultures meeting at this particular intersection were already inherently performed—were already a theatre?

In February 2008, I participated in a second excursion—the Cobá Mayan Village tour—that similarly featured a visit to the Cobá ruins, a tour of a supposedly authentic Mayan village, and a swim in a cenote. As part of the tour, we visited the households of two contemporary Maya families, walking through

their living spaces and witnessing how they live their everyday lives. During the tour, I asked our guide what the difference was between the two Mayan villages featured in each of the tours. Our guide stated that the other village, the one we visited as part of the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour, was not a real Mayan village—that it was inauthentic because it exists only thanks to tourism dollars and tourist interest and the Maya who live there make their living off the tourist industry. The guide's statements raised questions of authenticity and inauthenticity, real Maya and touristic Maya. This, in turn, made me question what, exactly, the Maya mean to tourists: what is the difference between a real and a fake Maya, an authentic Maya and a touristic Maya when all the tourist sees and experiences during a tour is *the* Maya? If both tourist and Maya are in fact performative modalities, does the cultural exchange between them only occur on a theatricalized level—is the interaction between tourist and Maya essentially a commoditized spectacle?

This leads me to a discussion on how notions of realness, authenticity, reproduction, kitsch, theatricality and performance apply to the Maya and Maya culture and to the tourist and tourist culture. These terms are all highly problematic, but they do play a large role in how the Maya are both presented and sold as a touristic experience in the region. Throughout my thesis I will talk about the contemporary Maya, the ancient Maya, the authentic Maya, Mayan culture and civilization, and the touristic Maya. While each of these concepts is complex, I will nevertheless provide here a brief guidebook to my usage of the term Maya within this thesis.

By contemporary Maya, I am referring to the indigenous peoples who currently inhabit the Yucatán Peninsula. I also refer to these Maya as the Yucatec Maya, named after the language they speak. The prefix Yucatec delineates theirs

from other Mayan dialects such as K'iche' and Itza' Maya². When I speak of the ancient Maya, I refer to the pre-Columbian peoples and cultures that lived in the Yucatán Peninsula (and into Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador to the south) and whose past has largely been pieced together, written and interpreted by Western archaeology. The ancient Maya constructed the large monuments that are now the archaeological ruins that dot the land, first claimed by the jungle before being recovered and restored by archaeologists starting in the nineteenth century.

Mayan culture and Mayan civilization are two terms with meanings that constantly slip and slide between each other. As much as possible I try to use Mayan culture to refer to the culture of the contemporary Yucatec Maya. Mayan civilization, on the other hand, is the culture of the ancient Maya (but also sometimes that of the contemporary Maya) as extrapolated, read, interpreted and ultimately invented by a number of ethnographic, archaeological, linguistic and touristic practices over time. Throughout the regimens of the two tours I participated in, however, Mayan civilization often came to stand in for Mayan culture, and Mayan culture was always in the shadow of Mayan civilization. Both tours, in order to present participants with a coherent representation of Mayan culture, often blended and blurred images of the current and ancient Maya. Thus the two terms occasionally become interchangeable. Adding to the complexity of Mayan culture, as I will extrapolate in Chapter One, is the debate as to whether any Mayan culture does, or can, exist at all.

Given the slippage between Mayan culture and Mayan civilization, notions of a *real* or an *authentic* Mayan culture (or identity) are also problematic. For now, it is best to summarize the authentic and the real as representations that are sign relations structured in contrast to their opposites. They are essentially

2. According to the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (an organization that tracks usage of the Mayan language in Guatemala), there are 21 different Maya languages currently in use in that country alone. I could not find a specific number for Mexico.

markers naming and denoting the realness and authenticity of a/the Maya in contrast to markers of a/the inauthentic (and often touristic) Maya. These markers are not pure descriptives of genuine otherness but serve to imbue the Maya experienced in these two tours with a value of cultural capital, a concept I will explore further in Chapter Four.

Likewise, the touristic, or inauthentic Maya, are representations of the—mostly ancient—Maya that have, through the process of commoditization, become ubiquitous markers of Mayan exoticism. These representations mostly appear on (often kitschy) tourist products—a Mayan hieroglyph on a shot glass, a Mayan calendar on a leather canvas, a map of the Mayan gods on a shirt (all products that I have actually purchased). The touristic Maya are not confined to products, however, and can also appear in the form of theatrical performance: a collection of performers dressed in ancient Mayan attire, faces painted, banging on log drums, that greeted me as a prelude to the “Mexico Espectacular” performance at Xcaret is but one example³.

It follows that Mayan culture and Mayan identity are increasingly difficult concepts to pin down, particularly when examining how both are represented within the broader frameworks of anthropology and destination tourism. The word Maya itself has become an umbrella term used to describe a disparate and spatially diverse number of people who reside in Mexico’s southern states, Guatemala, el Salvador, Belize and Honduras. It also refers to both the ancient Maya and these contemporary indigenous populations. In Mexico’s Yucatán and in Belize it has become a part of these tourist zone’s cultural imaginary, and representations of Maya culture in the land and in the ruins serve as the basis of many tourist excursions. Such destinations are contact zones between

3. The “Xcaret Mexico Espectacular” is a multimedia theatre, dance and music performance held daily at the Xcaret tourist park, which celebrates Mexico’s rich and diverse cultural history, with a slight focus on Mayan cultural heritage.

these problematic representations of the Maya and the tourists who seek out and experience the Maya as a homogenous whole.

My methodology uses a post-colonial performance studies approach incorporating an anthropological and sociological perspective (as well as a critique on anthropological practice) to examine how, within the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours, the Maya and the tourist are essentially performed roles guided and mediated by a performative and scriptural economy. In his seminal book *In the Museum of Maya Culture*, anthropologist and archaeologist Quetzil E. Castañeda explores the archaeological ruins of Chichen Itzá and the nearby town of Pisté as sites of both scientific and touristic fascination. While I approach the Maya from a touristic perspective, Castañeda examines the Maya from both an anthropological perspective and from the perspective of a Yucateco, someone native to the region. I employ Castañeda's notion that the Maya are a Western invention, produced, staged and performed through the scriptural economy of discursive practice, as well as his notion that ruin-sites are museum spaces. In *Archive and the Repertoire*, performance studies scholar Diana Taylor discusses the history of colonial performatives and performances in Central America with a partial focus on indigenous representations in colonial practices. In particular, she illustrates how, in the colonization and conquest of Mesoamerica, Western discursive practice came to overwrite and subsume non-Western, non-discursive knowledge encoded in performance. She scrutinizes how contemporary cultural and colonial encounters reiterate this same basic pattern: privileging Western discursive knowledge. In order to problematize Western authority, she examines the important role of performance and performatives in this conquest and colonization. I use Taylor's argument that the colonial encounters of conquest and contemporary colonial encounters are actually performative frameworks, scenarios, that (re)activate and

(re)enact European scientific understanding and its formulation of a familiar but exotic Other.

Working from these two epistemological frameworks, I employ the language of tourism—maps, tours, guidebooks—to examine how the scriptural economy of the museum and the performative economy of the scenario write, cast and perform both the identities of tourist and Maya. If, as Michel de Certeau argues, our travels through a place ultimately shape and narrate our everyday lives (while these narratives in turn impact our travels), then practices and terms of travel can also be used as tropes for human knowledge and experience. Here our narrativized tours through the museum spaces of Mayan ruins become travels through places that produce knowledge. Additionally, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests in *Destination Culture*, sites of cultural performance and exhibition (museums) are theatres that frame and stage knowledge. I use her exploration into panoptical and panoramic—in situ and in context—display, as techniques that stage and represent discursive knowledge, to understand how each tour performs its representation of the Maya: a process that establishes ontological positions of authority for the tourist and subservience for the Maya. Finally, using Homi Bhabha's post-colonial examination of colonizer-colonized relations, I scrutinize the ways in which this dynamic of cultural authority and subservience is but itself a performance: (re)presentations of cultural differentiation fashioned simultaneously and always in relation to each other.

This study is a unique approach into examining the relationships, understandings, performances and economies that occur betwixt and between tourists and Maya in the Mayan Riviera, notably within the context of a multi-million dollar tourist industry. One field that does examine tourist and Maya relations (not surprisingly) is anthropology. These studies often, but not always, focus on anthropologists' own influences in shaping and defining touristic

representations of the Maya. Castañeda is one example; similarly, ethnographer Laurie Kroshus Medina examines how a Mayan village in Belize (located near archaeological ruins visited by tourists) uses archaeological interpretations of the ancient Maya to produce a new Mayan identity in order to respond to touristic demands for an essentialized representation of Mayan culture. Most research into tourism and the tourist industry as modern and contemporary phenomenon comes from sociology. John Urry provides a valuable structural approach from which to study the effects of the tourist industry, separating tourism into two groups: the gazer (tourist) and gazee (everything—people and places—gazed at). Bærenholdt et al., on the other hand, examine how tourists perform and shape the spaces that they visit and travel, through producing an imaginary, hyperreal touristic space. However, this examination only introduces tourists as performers in a phenomenological sense: following Husserl, here the tourist's performance of space is largely experiential and mobility oriented. Performance studies analyses to date have focused on performances of the tourist and on the Maya as individual groups, but seldom do they scrutinize both groups in relation to each other. Jonathan Culler, for instance, examines the tourist as a viewer and consumer of signs. Tamara Underiner, on the other hand, explores the manner in which the contemporary Maya in Mayan Mexico (the Yucatán, Tabasco and Chiapas) present and perform their own cultural identity in the form of theatrical productions. While Underiner does touch on the tourist's role within these theatrical representations (often the audience) she does not scrutinize the tourist's own performativity. This study bridges these gaps and examines the manner in which the tourist performs their own touristness. Here I scrutinize the tourist as a performance: a (re)activated, replicated and (re)enacted cultural representation staged and mediated by underlying scriptural and performative economies. By approaching the tourist and these two tours—and all of tourism for that matter—

as performances, this study aims to bring to light and integrate certain invisible scripts and structures, enactments and stagings, roles and positions that act as frameworks for these touristic and colonial encounters.

As mentioned above, maps, tours and guidebooks are tools that tourists use in order to better understand, orient themselves within and travel through the places that they visit. At the same time, a researcher can use maps, tours and guidebooks to better understand, orient oneself within and travel through the dense network of relations that are post-colonial encounters. Used as tropes of knowledge and experience—performance and culture—maps, tours and guidebooks better clarify how tourism works as a meaning-making process and how the *scenario of discovery* and the *Museum of Maya Culture*, terms I will describe in detail in Chapter One, act as scriptural and performative economies that govern and mediate tourist and Maya encounters.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau examines the ways in which the events that make up our everyday life—both our quotidian and extraordinary experiences—are, in fact, stories about travel and the events contained within. Here he links human experience with tools of human mobility—tours and maps. In addition, de Certeau posits that humans describe our daily experiences in regards to travel, arrivals and departures, and he illustrates how these stories of our travels, these travelogues, in turn shape and frame the places we move through (119-130). Human travels through space take on the attributes of narratives, and “we thus have a structure of the travel story: stories of journeys and actions are marked out by the ‘citation’ of the places that result from them or authorize them” (120). Thus, our traveling through and interacting with this space becomes the travelogue that is everyday life (117). Castañeda uses de Certeau’s framework to examine how our travels and our tours ultimately shape and inform our perception of everyday life while our everyday life simultaneously shapes our

travels: “he [de Certeau] notices that the spatial anchorage of the everyday world is narratively mapped out as everyday life is itself” (Castañeda 2).

To describe how we ‘write’ these travelogues that are our everyday lives, de Certeau uses two terms synonymous with tourism: tours and maps. While both are used by the tourist, they also act as discursive elements; they are, essentially, ways in which we experience and gain knowledge about the world. For the tourist, maps help to navigate our way through and to understand geographically the places/locations/sites we visit. Maps are often, but not always, a bird’s-eye view of a place, illustrating the many pre-existing routes, pathways and roads within and between destinations. Maps can be blueprints both of routes between places—roadmaps—or pathways within a place—a map of a specific site. Whereas there are numerous possible routes and pathways that link together several locations and cut through certain sites of interest, these routes and pathways are not formalized or archived until they are mapped out and blueprinted through previous travels and tours. Accordingly, maps are models of how people move through a space; as such, they are “models of totalized and totalizing knowledge based on the primacy or premise of an all-seeing, objectivist eye and a summary composite of multiple sources/experiences” (Castañeda 2). Discursively speaking, maps are blueprints of experience: “they are representations of the known that exhibit accumulated and objectified knowledge derived from individual tours, whether quotidian or scientific” (Castañeda 2-3). As such, maps organize and structure our knowledge of a space: we understand a place not through the unlimited routes and pathways that cut through it but by how these routes, paths and sites are mapped out and spatially related.

Tours, on the other hand, follow previously traveled paths that have already been mapped out and archived. For the tourist, tours are specific modes of moving through and between sites along pre-existing routes and paths while

encountering, interacting and negotiating these sites according to predetermined itineraries and structures. Tours not only refer to how tourists move through a place, but how they interact with the variable people, sites, stories and events that make that place a touristic space. In short, “a tour is simply an organized series of acts of going, doing, seeing, saying, consuming, and exchanging in defined space” (Castañeda 2). This toured experience is then archived as a set of knowledge further cementing that specific route’s status as a tour and that particular tour as a route on the map. By looking at tours discursively, as a mode of knowledge of and about the world, “tours rely on these activities and on the partiality of individual subjectivities: tours exemplify subjective and intersubjective knowledge motivated and produced in experience as experience” (Castañeda 2). In this way, tours are not only ways of producing knowledge about a place but they are, themselves, a *kind* of knowledge.

If a tour is the knowledge of a place (or a route/path) based on personal, subjective experience and a map is the blueprint and archive of several of these experiences, both maps and tours are essentially meaning-making devices that produce, create, authorize and hierarchize knowledge. Discursively, maps “correspond to strategies of power and places, whereas tours are composed of tactics oriented to the momentary use of space” (Castañeda 3). While separate entities, maps and tours are both heavily dependent on each other: maps consist of archived tours while tours consist of the routes archived and blueprinted on a map. A tour would not exist were it not for the map illustrating the tour’s route while the map would not exist were it not for the tour’s discovering and experiencing certain routes and paths. In other words, “not only are maps models of and for tours (i.e., behavior), but tours are models of and for maps” (Castañeda 2).

A guidebook negotiates this slippage between the objective, all-knowing knowledge demonstrated by a map and the individualizing experience created vis-

à-vis a tour by combining both kinds of knowledge. For tourists, the guidebook lists sites of importance within a destination, indicates pre-existing paths and roads, provides various maps, recommends certain tours, and offers accounts from previous travelers. The guidebook here is a form of archived and experiential encapsulated knowledge: “Derived from the multiple ‘goings,’ ‘doings,’ ‘seeings,’ and ‘sayings’ of multiple subjects, guidebooks present a composite and summarized knowledge” (Castañeda 3). However, since guidebooks consist of knowledge presented by both maps and tours, guidebooks essentially both produce and present the slippage and sliding between map and tour. In this way, the guidebook is not only a presenter but is also simultaneously the producer of that knowledge. At the same time, the guidebook frames the tourists’ engagement with a place and ‘writes’ their travel experiences: guidebooks “it would seem, have always and only been a sort of hypertext” (Castañeda 2). The guidebook then, is essentially a script that mediates touristic experience, a dynamic I will explore further in Chapter One.

This thesis is a guidebook to—simultaneously a map and a tour of—the dense pilings of representations, mobilities, discourses, knowledges, displays, markers and performances present within the discursive and cultural interstices and intersections of the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours. These excursions offer tourists access to an authentic and real contemporary Mayan culture in addition to the experience of exploring the relics (ruins) of the ancient Maya; as such, these tours exemplify the points at which touristic and scientific practice meet the Maya. I argue that these meetings are governed by a scriptural economy—the *Museum of Maya Culture*—and a performative economy—the *scenario of discovery*—that shape, mediate, structure and guide these encounters. By examining these tours as performances, I will demonstrate that these two cultural formations—tourist and Maya—are actually

inter-related performatives: that during the tourist encounter, the Maya are always already cast in relation to the tourist's performative identity while the tourist's is always already shaped by the Maya's. In the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour and the Cobá Mayan Village tour, both tourist and Maya are roles created, enacted and performed according to the scripts, texts and representations of these two discursive and epistemological economies.

In my first chapter, I introduce some of the problems and challenges of examining both tourists and the Maya as cultural representations and performed constructs within the hyper-commercial and post-colonial tourism zone of the Mayan Riviera. I focus here on two specific tours—the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour⁴ and the Cobá Mayan Village tour—that I participated in during two separate visits to the Riviera Maya, the first in December 2005 and the second in February 2008. Using Bhabha's post-colonial studies as a basis, I scrutinize how cultures are discursive formations, representations of perceived cultural difference activated and performed at these points of cultural (and colonial) contact. I then outline the numerous problems inherent in using the word "Maya" as a descriptor and problematize the notion of the tourist as a simple traveler, gazer and consumer. I discuss how the two tours are scenarios—performative frameworks—that structure and stricture these post-colonial encounters and, in turn, shape and mediate our discursive understandings of the Maya. Moving on, I describe how ethnographic and touristic engagement with the Maya is and has been mediated by an underlying scriptural economy. Here I detail the Museum of Maya Culture, the apparatus of Western discursive practice that generates, displays and consumes (scientific and touristic) knowledge of the Maya. Lastly, I outline my own subject position and illustrate how the use of autobiographical information is crucial (but also problematic) in touristic performance analysis.

4. Now called the Maya Encounter.

My second chapter explores the scriptural and performative economies that guide and mediate the identities, positions, roles and relations of the Maya and the tourist with a specific focus on both tours' visits to the archaeological ruins of Cobá. I scrutinize how the Museum of Maya Culture acts as a strategy that produces museum representations and displays of the (ancient) Maya. By looking at both tours' prescribed stops within and excursions through the Cobá ruins, I contend that the ruins are themselves a museum. I analyze three primary exhibits within the tour of Cobá that represent the Maya as the ancient, the *uncivilized*, the mysterious and the undiscovered. Firstly, the tour of Cobá creates a temporal relation of difference between the modern tourist and the ancient Maya. Secondly, notions of mystery and ambiguity are imbued in and mapped out on the Cobá ruins through the presentation of problematic representations of the Maya. Thirdly, the Cobá ruins, carved out of the jungle, come to represent the role of the unknown, enabling the tourist to take on the role of adventurer and explorer. The ruins function as a space in which touristic discovery can occur and the performative roles of the Maya as ancient and mysterious and the tourist as the modernized adventurer are negotiated.

My third chapter examines how the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour continues to reenact and reiterate narratives of adventure and discovery throughout the numerous adventure-based activities that make up the tour. Here the activities centered in and around the town of Pac-Chén act establish an exotic setting by framing touristic mobilities as adventures in the thick, wild and remote Yucatán jungle. The tour then provides participants with the opportunity to encounter and experience Mayan culture through participation in the aforementioned purification ceremony and by exploring and swimming in the cenote. In this way, the tour produces an essentialized Mayan alterity and (conversely) an essentialized touristic familiarity cast in opposition to each other.

My fourth and final chapter maps out the complex relationships between the representations of authenticity and inauthenticity and between the Maya and the tourist that occur in the Cobá Mayan Village tour. Here I scrutinize two independent apparati that mediate and produce the roles of exotic Mayan Other and familiar tour-goer. First is the method by which the tour performs the (re)presentation of an *authentic* Maya, and the second is the tour's production of a *theatre of the quotidian* whereby Mayan daily life is presented as proof of their exotic alterity. I illustrate how these apparati also organize a panoptical viewer-viewee dynamic between tourist visitor and Mayan household, a relationship that also delineates the tourist's position of cultural authority (and supremacy) over the Maya. This relationship, however, is ultimately only a (re)enactment within the scenario: as the performances, roles, scripts and narratives that uphold the Maya as an authentic indigenous Other ultimately fracture and break down under their own partialities and inaccuracies, so too do those that construct the tourist as explorer/discoverer, as panoptical gazer, and as authoritative consumer of cultural differentiation.

This project scrutinizes the scripts and performances that underlie the colonial encounters between tourist and Maya in the Mayan Riviera. Using Bhabha's post-colonial approach as a starting point, here we unearth and traverse the representations and performances that arise within these touristic and ultimately colonial encounters. Bhabha reminds us that it is important to look underneath and between the performances of colonial representations:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular

or communal— that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (2)

In the end, this study attempts to do precisely this: or, more specifically, to analyze the *performative spaces* between tourist and Maya within the context of these two tours: “It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha 2). Here we find that both tourist and Maya are essentially imagined communities, representations forged in the processes of cultural differentiation and staged as cultures.

Chapter 1

Mapping out the Tourist, the Maya and Performance in the Riviera Maya

My analysis into the performances and representations between the tourist and the Maya is anchored within the context of the Riviera Maya's increased tourist volume and the explosion of culture based tourism that I outlined in my introduction. There is a wide variety of types and modes of tourism prevalent in the Yucatán Peninsula and the Riviera Maya: eco-, dive- and aqua- themed excursions, backpacking and timeshares are but a few examples listed in Mexico's official tourism webpage (*Visitmexico.com*). This study focuses on destination tourism, the mode of tourist travel featured most prominently in the Yucatán. Here, destination tourism involves the traveler paying a vacation charter company for a vacation package—which (often but not always) includes flight, accommodations in one of the numerous all-inclusive resorts that dot the coastline, food and drinks all bundled together. There is also a wide variety of tourists: a demographic report sponsored by the Caribbean Tourism Association from 2007 lists travelers from outside Mexico as making up 93 percent of the visitors to the region. Visitors from the United States were by far the largest tourist component marking 77 percent, Europe was second with 10 percent and Canada Third with 6 percent (*Onecaribbean.org*). Interestingly, the report excludes Mexicans from its list of tourists visiting the region. This study focuses on destination tourism as an activity participated in by (largely middle class) North American travelers.

Both the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours are run through local companies that provide a variety of excursions for visitors from the region to choose from. These two tours—like numerous others of their kind— are offered to visitors as additional activities to their vacation package;

often these smaller local tour operators have contracts with the larger international charter companies to organize, run and operate specific tours through each of the resorts. Both of these two tours are, essentially, an economic interaction: an interested tourist pays the tour operators money and in exchange gets to explore the ancient ruins of Cobá and meet the contemporary Maya face to face. However, this encounter is much more than a simple financial transaction—tour-services supplied for money tendered—and is much more complicated than the tourist *seeing/meeting* the Maya. Rather, while the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours operate according to a financial economy, there are also performative and scriptural economies at work within these touristic (and ultimately colonial) encounters. These are the strategies and apparatus of knowledge, power, display and representation that frame, mediate and control the discursive and spatial practices of both tourist and Maya. Consequently, these two tours—and ultimately all tourism in the region—are complex networks of cultural differentiation and negotiation: a piling of cultural representations, performances and displays that govern and frame touristic and colonial experience.

I contest that the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours are essentially reactivated and reenacted scenarios of discovery—performative frameworks—in which the Maya are represented and identified as the mysterious, exotic Other while the tourist plays the role of Western, privileged explorer. Moreover, within the framework of the tour, these two cultural formations—that of the tourist and that of the Maya—are roles created, enacted and performed according to a scriptural and performative economy that names and highlights the so-called authenticity of the Maya while simultaneously occluding the role of the tourist (and the tour) in shaping and framing this authenticity. This study is not an ethnography of the Maya culture nor is it an ethnography of tourist culture. Instead this investigation is an analysis of the

dense stratigraphy of identities, roles, performances and narratives that occur within the spaces and interstices of cultural negotiation that result in the moment when the tourist and the Maya meet as a part of these two specific tours.

Performance studies is a guidebook to and of performance. Performance studies can be used to scrutinize and examine the performances of tourists precisely because it, as a field, recognizes that performance is simultaneously a purveyor of knowledge *and* a lens through which this knowledge can be scrutinized. Performance is often seen as a conveyor of culture, including cultural memory, knowledge and experience. According to Diana Taylor, anthropologists such as Turner, Singer, Goffman and Geertz—all of whom have had a large impact on performance studies—look at performances as ways of epistemological meaning-making and embodied knowledge (2003: 7). For them, culture is a ‘script’ of behaviours, moods, attitudes and actions which societies (and the individuals that inhabit them) perform. This script, then, becomes a way in which the anthropologist can read culture (Schechner 24-30). The fact that people perform and play out this cultural script as they go about their daily and ritualistic lives becomes known as ‘the dramaturgical model’ to approaching cultural study (Taylor 2003: 7-8). Noted symbolic anthropologist Clifford Geertz linked culture to maps and tours when he imagined cultures to be models of and for behaviour (qtd. in Castañeda 2). In this sense, our culture is mapped out by our everyday performances; performance here is representative of culture, while culture is representative of performance. That is, we (re)enact our culture in our everyday and extraordinary lives and these enactments are always scripted by our culture. This idea is backed up by Richard Schechner’s notion that performance can be best described as the “restoration of behavior,” or “restored behavior,” or “twice behaved behavior”: that behavior “which can be repeated, rehearsed, and above all *recreated*” (Schechner 34). Restored behavior can be exactly that precisely

because it has already been mapped out: it exists as a model of and for itself.

Diana Taylor furthers this notion by stating “performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” through “bracket[ed]” or “framed” behavior—actions, moods and attitudes (2003: 2-3). Performances, seen this way, offer a window into understanding culture as they are essentially enactments of embodied knowledge.

Crucially, performance studies provides us with one key paradox behind restored behavior. According to Joseph Roach, this paradox lies “in the phenomenon of repetition itself: no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance” (46). Thus, performances can be looked at not as models of behaviour and therefore of culture, but as mere representations of previous representations of behaviour. This wrinkle enables performance studies to establish what Roach calls “genealogies of performance,” which “document the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representations” (48). This opens the door into looking at how performances not only act to purvey and transmit knowledge but how they represent this knowledge. Moreover, by examining knowledge as a representation, “performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by ‘knowledge’” (Taylor 2003: 16). According to Taylor, performance studies is an avenue in which embodied knowledge can be used to decenter logocentric Western discursive practice while simultaneously acknowledging other (Western and non-Western) forms of knowledge:

Part of what performance and performance studies allows us to *do*, then, is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge. The repertoire, on a very practical level, expands the traditional archive

used by academic departments in the humanities. (26)

Taylor here argues that knowledge is encoded in our bodies: in our movements, in our habits, in our restored behaviours, in our everyday practice. Moreover, by embracing this repertoire of embodied knowledge, performance studies can turn the looking glass in on itself, breaking down discursive barriers essentially reformatting performance as a practice and as an approach and an episteme. Performance studies, then, enables us to reframe how we scrutinize performances and look not only at performance as performance, but at our own epistemological and ideological positions examining performances.

The Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours are both tours by general understanding of the word in that the tour operators spirit tourists to specific locations and then allow them to explore these locations according to prearranged itineraries. Both tours offer the participants the opportunity to see and explore the archaeological site of Cobá— allowing the participant to get a taste of historic Mayan culture—and visit an *authentic* Mayan village and encounter *authentic* Maya peoples. In addition to the cultural tourism part of the tour, the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour, as the name suggests, involves several ‘adventure’ themed activities such as kayaking, hiking through the dense jungle landscape, zip-lining through the jungle canopy, and rappelling down a jungle cliff. The Cobá Mayan Village tour, on the other hand, focuses more on cultural tourism by allowing participants to take an in-depth (and somewhat voyeuristic) look into how the traditional⁵ Maya live. Both tours offer participants the chance to swim in a cenote and thus to experience personally

5. Traditional here refers to the ‘modern Maya’ who have supposedly, we’re told, inherited their customs and beliefs from their ‘ancient Maya’ predecessors (*Cobámayanvillage.com*).

Mayan sacred space⁶. Additionally, both tours feed participants what is called traditionally prepared Mayan food. Importantly, both tours are hosted by a tour guide⁷—a culture broker—who provides participants with information on the sites (archaeological information regarding the reconstructed site of Cobá for example) and on both past and contemporary Maya peoples (cultural beliefs, customs, living situations, diet, etc). The guides, who speak enough Yucatec Maya to communicate with the Mayan villagers, also act as intermediaries between the tour participants and the Maya we come into contact with along the tour. The tours are, in short, a narrativized and mediated experience; they are specific routes both within and between sites/sights in which certain information and certain stories are shared. As such, regardless of the numerous individual tourists participating, each participant's overall experience or impression of the Mayan Other is, it can be argued, ostensibly similar.

These tours can be examined as *scenarios* in which certain roles, identities and stories are reenacted and played out between the tour-participant and the Maya. A scenario, according to Diana Taylor, is “a sketch or outline of the plot of the play, giving particulars of the scenes, situations, etc” (2003: 28). The scenario is a set of given circumstances that tells performers, agents and spectators not only what to act but also *how* to act. Additionally, scenarios are imaginary productions: “culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality” (Taylor 2003: 13). The scenario, then, is both a performance and the mode of performance: it

6. Mexico houses one of the largest underground freshwater systems in the world. Cenotes are both the caves that provide access to this underground freshwater system and the underground rivers and caverns themselves. Cenotes, often referred to as entry points to the Maya's afterlife by both archaeological and touristic literature, are considered to hold significant spiritual importance to both the modern and ancient Maya peoples.

7. The guide of the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure Tour was a young man, originally from Mexico City, who moved to the region in search of a lucrative, tourism-based job. The guide of the Cobá Mayan Village Tour was of born in the region and considered himself (he self identified as) both Mexican (mestizo) and Maya.

is a “portable framework” in which “meaning-making paradigms [. . .] structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” (Taylor 2003: 28).

The scenario, like performance, is a meaning-making device that structures our participation in and understanding of it by organizing its own actions according to underlying scriptural and performative economies that it, in turn, strengthens:

Simultaneously *setup* and *action*, scenarios frame and activate social dramas. The setup lays out the range of possibilities; all the elements are there: encounter, conflict, resolution, and dénouement, for example. These elements, of course, are themselves the product of economic, political, and social structures that they, in turn, tend to reproduce. (Taylor 2003: 28)

Scenarios frame the action but also tell us what contents to receive and how to receive them: they are caught up in the very system that produces them.

Scenarios, then, are simultaneously the modes of production and reception *and* the thing being produced and received. I will further explore the scenario as a performative framework of and for colonial encounters later in this chapter and in Chapter Two.

Both the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours are a series of colonial encounters in a post-colonial transnational tourist zone. Such transnational, inter-cultural encounters involve the necessary fixing and capturing of cultural hybridities forming/constructing (and ultimately writing) cultures based on differences in cultural representation. Hybridity here “refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to cultural mixed-ness” (Huddart 7). According to Bhabha, hybridity is an ongoing process—in fact, “there are no cultures that come together leading to hybrid forms; instead, cultures are the consequence of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities” (Huddart 7-8).

Whereas the cultural sphere is actually an ever-changing flux along cultural borders and a continual give-and-take process, colonial discourses, in their attempt to classify and define each other (and the other) often set up distinctions between pure cultures. Therefore, colonial power works “to divide the world into self and other, in order to justify the material inequalities central to colonial rule” (Huddart 8). Cultural identities, then, are representations forged through the “liminal” negotiation of differences between race, class, gender and cultural traditions: “It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha 2). As such, cultural identities, what Bhabha calls “the representation of difference,” cannot and must not “be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition” (Bhabha 3).

Instead, Bhabha suggests that cultural identity involves the continual and concomitant encountering and exchanging of cultural performances that in turn produce a recognition, or (mis)recognition—a representation—of cultural difference (3-5). Cultural identities are performed: “Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively” (Bhabha 3). In this sense, cultural identities are representations of cultural difference fixed through and written by colonial discourses and Western discursive practice: “It is the process of the *fixation* of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations” (Bhabha 91). Similarly, the nature of tourism and the discursive knowledge that underlies it creates a “general tourist scenario that situates all locals as performers of a sort” (Underiner 2005: 1), or, in other words, “They [the locals] are part of what travelers come to ‘look at,’ in both theatricalized representations and, even

better, in everyday life” (Underiner 2005: 1-2). Similar to Bhabha’s notion that the “colonizer” and the “colonized” cannot be viewed as separate, independently defined entities, in regards to these tours, neither can “tourist” and “Maya” represent the “pure” tourist and the “pure” Maya. Rather, the tours, as scenarios of discovery, establish a space in which the opposing, fixed and constructed cultural identities of the tourist and the Maya, marked and defined vis-à-vis their representational difference to each other, are imprinted on the bodies involved. As Bhabha illustrates, the identities of the tourist and the Maya are not discrete, homogenous and hermetically sealed cultural formations; rather each is complex combination of both heterogeneous and homogenizing discourses, knowledges, representations and performances which have historically garnered and continue to garner significance in relation to each other and to other heterogeneous discourses, representations and ideologies.

The word Maya is itself highly problematic and holds several different meanings to the numerous forces that stake claims upon the Maya peoples and culture. The term Maya has historically and archaeologically been used to describe a collection of similar ethnic groups who organized their calendar in a specific way:

“Maya” or “Mayan” referred collectively to those people of northern Yucatán (the Xiu, the Itza, and others) that organized their society, polity, history, landscape, and so forth on a calendrical system in which the *may* (Yucatec Maya for “hoof” as well as a period of 260 turns or years composed of 360 days) was the privileged unit for calculating time. (Castañeda 13)

Through continuous usage—largely by non-Maya interlocutors—“Maya” became an ascriptive term “used to designate heterogeneous peoples and societies that nonetheless shared certain religious, historical, aesthetic, social and linguistic

forms in a geopolitical place called Mesoamerica” (Castañeda 13). In this way, the contemporary indigenous peoples of the Yucatán Peninsula are called Maya—specifically the Yucatec Maya—precisely because this ascriptive term has been applied to them.

Problems with Mayan cultural representation and determination do not end here however: within a contemporary Mexican nationalist context, these Mayans are simultaneously rendered visible and invisible on a national scale. As part of an attempt to contemporize, (re)construct and homogenize Mexicans’ modern national identity, Mexico has incorporated its pre-Columbian history into a contemporary cultural pastiche: “one with an Indian soul, a mestizo body, and a civilized future” (Underiner 1998: 351). Paradoxically, whereas Mexico’s indigenous past has been incorporated into its national image, Mexico’s indigenous populations have been “subject to ongoing programs aimed at assimilating them into the Mexican imaginary” (Underiner 1998: 351). Further complicating the situation, Mayan claims to autonomy have been and still are met with violence, creating yet another paradox in Maya culture:

Mayans are valued for providing labor and products for Mexico’s hoped-for global markets; they are abused and often killed if, *as Maya*, they call for equity in matters of land, health, education, nutrition, self-determination, and representative democracy.

(Underiner 1998: 351)

As such, as a part of the contemporary Mexican nation state, Mayan cultural identity is both celebrated but hidden as part of a more marketable Mexican culture. And although the Maya peoples play a valuable role within the Riviera Maya’s tourist economy, their attempts at self-determination have been rejected by the Mexican government, which has sometimes used military force to squash

Mayan attempts at cultural and political autonomy⁸.

Interestingly, this process of obscuration is also echoed in the (largely Western) discursive processes that attempt to describe and define the Maya. Approaching culture from a constructivist point of view, many ethnographers and anthropologists view contemporary Mayan culture and identity not as authentic or historical, but as derived from this culture's "interactions with powerful non-Maya forces" (Kroshus Medina 356). From this approach, contemporary Mayan culture is the result of the commoditization of traditional ethnic practices shaped for tourist (and ethnographic) consumption (Kroshus Medina 355-356). "[T]ouristic commoditization," the Mayan display of cultural products and practices in exchange for money, "results in the emergence of a culture distinct from the traditional practice of 'tourees' and [is] less authentic by virtue of being both 'staged' and a commodity" (Kroshus Medina 354). In this way, modern ethnographers and archaeologists have discursively limited contemporary Mayan culture to a byproduct of the tourism industry's increased commoditization of and attention towards the ancient Maya. Interestingly and conspicuously absent from these anthropological discussions, however, is the contemporary Maya people's own point of view.

Further problematizing the cultural and ethnographic formation of the Maya, Quetzil E. Castañeda (who was born in the Yucatán) suggests that anthropologists themselves, in addition to tourists, have essentially fixed and constructed a Mayan identity and culture that has gone on to represent the Maya in a global, discursive context. This is the Museum of Maya Culture. The examiners and namers of the Maya are implicated in the identifying and naming process:

8. A recent notable example was the Zapatista Uprising of 1994, which, while based in Chiapas, reached the Yucatán Peninsula with many locals taking the side of the Zapatistas over the Mexican government. Another example is the Caste War of Yucatán, which lasted between 1847 and 1901.

Castañeda asserts that, over the course of the 20th century, archaeologists ‘invented’ the Mayan ruins of Chichen Itzá through excavations and reconstruction of the ancient city. Simultaneously, they gave birth to a narrative of ‘ancient Maya culture’ through their publications. These twin products—Mayan ruins and ancient Maya culture—attracted tourism to this region. Subsequently, a range of other actors became involved in this collaborative production. (Kroshus Medina 357)

Castañeda further deconstructs Mayan identity by stating, “‘Mayan culture’ and ‘Mayan civilization’ are contested terms that have no essential entity outside of the complex histories of sociopolitical struggles” inherent in the region (13). Nevertheless, these categories of Maya, Maya culture and Maya civilization are not at all empty. Tamara Underiner reminds us that, regardless of the fact that Mayan culture and Mayan identity can be seen as “largely the result of discursive practices aimed at satisfying Western desire, or, later, constructing a [. . .] Mexican nation-state [. . .], it does not follow that the term is irrelevant for the people so designated” (Underiner 1998: 351). It follows that Maya culture and identity are deeply problematic terms, yet we—as tourists and as researchers—cannot escape from using them. Regardless of whether the Maya peoples and Maya culture are entirely authentic or whether they are entirely invented, they do exist; while they may not be *really* there, they are still *real*. Furthering Bhabha’s notion that cultures exist only in the representations of cultural difference present in the spaces of cultural negotiation, Castañeda reminds us that all cultures are not really there, but have come into being by and through the Western discursive practices that study them:

“Cultures” are very real, but have become real: this category of Western thought emerged in the anthropological discourses of

the 19th century and became progressively rooted in the material world as the totalizing frame of reference through which much or all social life is experienced and constituted. In other words, anthropology has invented culture because it has been foremost in using this category as the central idiom to think about and experience otherness. (14)

Castañeda therefore posits that the culture and identity of the Maya as experienced by and through Western discursive practices—whether that be tourism or academic research—is itself a product of these practices. At the same time, Castañeda scrutinizes the notion that (Western) anthropologists are able to read and critique the culture of other's from a privileged, neutral (and cultureless) position. Here the Museum of Maya Culture reminds us that it is the staggers, the curators of the museum, that ultimately control the knowledge it displays. Therefore the Yucatec peoples described as Maya live and exist in the Yucatán, but Mayan culture is largely invented and reiterated as a discursive formation by the museum that examines and studies it.

Accordingly, both politics (local indigenous and Mexican national) and anthropology have laid claims to Mayan identity and culture, essentially shaping the Maya into what it is that the tourists experience when they interact with and encounter the Maya peoples of the Yucatán Peninsula. In this way, the term Maya is highly problematic yet it follows that we cannot proceed without using it. This study takes as its point of departure this notion that anthropologists and tourists have essentially created and fixed the very Mayan identity that they scrutinize and (as tourists) experience—that there is no there *there*. That is, while there may be a culture unique and specific to the Yucatec Maya, the *Mayan civilization* we experience as Western discursive tour-goers—whether researchers or tourists—is

the product of our historical and contemporary observations through meetings, encounters, negotiations and studies of this cultural Other.

There is also no easy way to define a tourist. This is partly due to the multiplicity of different kinds of tourists and the multiple kinds of tourism that exist in today's world—eco tourism, backpacking, timeshares, cruises, destination tourism, food tourism, culture tourism, adventure tourism, etc. However, there is also no generally understood classifying or determining factor that makes a person a tourist. Generally speaking, the tourist is often seen as an actor of tourism, as someone who participates in extraordinary, non-quotidian travel. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who “travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four (24) hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” (14). John Urry, a sociologist who specializes in tourism and tourist mobilities, argues that the tourist experience is largely mediated by sight: looking, viewing and seeing play a large role in a tourist's experiences. Moreover, not only is the act of gazing the central act of tourism, gazing, in fact, constitutes tourism. For Urry, the tourist experience *is* the tourist gaze (1-4). Tourists view, understand and ultimately consume their destination precisely because the gaze is “constructed in relationship to its opposite” (Urry 44). The tourist is also someone who engages with signs. Jonathan Culler views tourism as a practice of semiotic agency rather than dismissing the tourist as a passive consumer of otherfied places. According to Culler, “the tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself” (156). In this way, the tourist sees “a Frenchman [as] an example of a Frenchman, a restaurant in the Quarter Latin [as] an example of a Latin Quarter restaurant, signifying ‘Latin Quarter Restaurantness’” (Culler 155-156). The tourist here is assigned an agential role: it is the tourist who travels, who tours, who visits, who gazes

and who ultimately consumes what he/she sees. In a sense then, the tourist is a consumer of signs and of exoticized, othered places formed via the tourist gaze.

I believe that there is more at work in tourism than the simple agency of traveling, touring, gazing and consuming—particularly when divisions between the quotidian and the extraordinary are continually blurred in our everyday, postmodern world. Sociologist Dean MacCannell has argued that “to be a tourist” is the structure of being and alienation that the modern world capitalist system provides (qtd. in Castañeda 19). This would mean that we are all tourists, touring through our everyday lives, an idea de Certeau posits in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and would blur the line between traveler and tourist as we are always both.

The primary difference between tourist and traveler is the notion of performance: here being a tourist is a performative—a role—while being traveler is a designation of mobility. A traveler enacts either quotidian or extraordinary mobilities, while a tourist, on the other hand, (re)enacts and (re)performs a series of already existing narratives within a (pre)defined space. Accordingly, the tourist is not *just* a liminal modality or a designation of mobility but also a performative practice and the performance itself. In short, all tourists are travelers but not all travelers are tourists. The tourist, then, is simultaneously an agent of travel and also a performed identity that acts as a meaning-making (epistemological) process: but one that, as I will discuss later, hides and disappears in its own role within this process.

Furthermore, I argue that the tourist in the Riviera Maya is a performed cultural construct organized and mediated by the performative and scriptural economies of Western discursive practice that (always already) arrange the tourist as a cultural formation in opposition to an exotic Other (here played by the (contemporary) indigenous Maya). In this way the tourist is both a performer and a performance governed by a scenario that fixes and binds representations

of familiarity and alterity, transforming these representational traits into concrete identities of self and other. Here the tourist is a role that represents and stands in for the tourist in opposition to the Maya standing in for and representing the mysterious Maya. In other words, a tourist is only a tourist in the drama of opposition to the exotic Other.

Alternatively speaking, the Yucatec Maya become the mysterious Maya only in the drama of opposition to the tourist; there is an apparent antagonistic relationship between tourist and Maya. After all, in order for the drama of discovery within the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours to play itself out, there needs to be an unfamiliar and unknown entity that requires or demands discovering. That is, in order for the Western civilized tourist to discover and to encounter the authentic, exotic Maya, the Maya needs to be constructed and staged as something extraordinary, unfamiliar and unknown. This dichotic association, according to Bhabha, parallels traditional colonizer-colonized relations that are inherent in and a product of Western discursive museum knowledge: “If cultures are taken to have stable, discrete identities, then the divisions between cultures can always become *antagonistic*” (qtd. in Huddart 6). In this way, the cultural identities of the tourist and the Maya occur through the fixing and construction of cultural hybridities determined through the negotiation—the (mis)recognition—of representational cultural difference. These post-colonial encounters occur in narrativized spaces, what de Certeau calls “practiced places” (117). Here the encounters between tourist and Maya are crossroads between a trans-national tourist culture and a museum culture that does not necessarily exist but is nonetheless *there*. They are post-colonial hybridities precisely because they involve the fixing of trans-cultural fluidity in a way that always produces underlying tensions: “The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a third space—where

the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (Bhabha 218).

At the centre of these two tours and acting as the scriptural and performative economies that govern and mediate tourist and Maya interactions and encounters, is the *scenario of discovery*. Scenarios, as discussed earlier, are frames that allow us to read and interpret certain experiences: here a framework that arranges and structures mimetic and metonymic representations of culture and cultural difference. However, scenarios are also the performances and scripts—the setup and the action—that in turn mediate how this experience is produced. In a sense, scenarios are a kind of guidebook to, of and for (touristic) experience. Additionally, the scenario is caught up in the repetition (with a difference)—what Bhabha would call the mimicry—of cultural representations as the scenario’s “portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats” and “[t]he scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes” (Taylor 2003: 28). The scenario, then, is a kind of touristic knowledge: it is a process that makes and configures meaning while simultaneously mediating tourist experience. Whereas tourist bodies produce the spaces (and the relations within these spaces) as they move through a place, this movement and their relations are narratively shaped—guided—by an overarching tourist knowledge that both produces and presents—scripts—these experiences as *toured* experience. Moreover, in the case of tourists visiting the Maya Riviera, this touristic knowledge—while maybe not the same as—is similar to (and certainly influenced by) already produced ethnographic and archaeological knowledge of the Maya. Ethnography, therefore, acts as and provides a framework through which tourists can engage with and understand Maya culture.

The problem here is that ethnography not only acts as a guidebook, it is, by its very nature, a guidebook that presents itself as knowledge about the

object of its study—a culture—while this knowledge is actually the product of ethnography’s own Western discursive processes. According to Castañeda, ethnographies “function to reveal a truth about a society” (4). These truths, he notes, are “always already there; they are *posited as there* hidden in the cultural reality that is to be explored and discovered by the authorial ethnographer” (4). The ethnographer discovers, explores and maps out certain elements within the text that is culture, rendering these elements a truth regarding that culture. An ethnographic study is thus understood as a collection of maps, mapping out a specific culture, created by the many tours of that culture taken by numerous ethnographers (Castañeda 4-5). If modern views on culture are the historical product and synthesis of multiple ethnographies—if they are the conglomeration of numerous culture maps and tours—then the notion that ethnography is a guidebook “reverses the process: knowledge is already totalized and can thereby dictate and chart the truths already known, experienced, and located in their proper place” (Castañeda 3). In this manner, ethnographic knowledge is not so much objective, omniscient truth of the object of its study but a manufactured truth based on ethnography’s own knowledge making processes:

This is not divine truth, but the profane truth, in general, of anthropological knowledge: the knowledge of otherness testifies not only to the existence of the Other, properly located in history, but to the truths of the given theoretical-analytical model that is deployed against the Other by the ethnographer according to the methodological rules of replication and reproduction of truths.

(Castañeda 4)

Ethnography therefore produces the very truths it seeks to map out. In other words, “Invention is culture. And culture is invention” (Wagner 35). Therefore, ethnographic discourse is a guidebook because it provides a composite and

summarized knowledge of a culture that is actually a product of itself: “From this angle, guidebooks are indeed ethnographies and ethnographies are guidebooks” (Castañeda 4). Consequentially, ethnography as a discursive field frames and shapes the object of its study in much the same way that the guidebook frames and shapes a tourist’s travels. Better said, ethnographic knowledge is always already touristic knowledge and touristic knowledge is always already ethnographic knowledge.

In this way, ethnographies studying the Maya, like touristic knowledge, are also scenarios—they are both (cultural) guidebooks that follow the scriptural and performative economy formed by Western discursive practices. The Museum of Maya Culture is a “strategic orchestration of both knowledge of the Maya and of the production of this knowledge; it is an apparatus [. . .] through which Maya culture is invented and is continuously reinvented in text” (98). Maya culture, then, is itself a museum, an archive of Western (ethnographic) discourse’s attempts to ‘fix,’ map out and narrate Maya culture and society. This Museum of Maya Culture is the underlying scriptural economy that governs and mediates the identities, roles, interactions and relations between tourist and Maya in the Riviera Maya: it is the script that operates alongside the scenario of discovery.

Museums are the information banks and information factories of dominant discursive practices; they function to produce and present knowledge. Museums have traditionally been thought of as presenting a teleological and totalizing vision about the world presented vis-à-vis the exhibition and display of artifacts and materials deemed to hold intrinsic knowledge value. They are, as Castañeda suggests, “a *place* envisioned as coincident with systematic and true ordering of the exhaustive knowledge of the Universe” under the “muse of total history of nature” (11). In this sense, museums are apparati—they are factories of and for knowledge. However, more than mere archives of material and data, museums are

also an archive of an ultimately mediated and controlled knowledge: “museums preserve (a particular) history, (certain) traditions, and (dominant) values” while simultaneously celebrating and commemorating this knowledge (Taylor 2003: 66). The museum is therefore a power broker that decides what is and what is not knowledge in addition to what is and what is not worth knowing. As such, museums stage and perform discursive and often colonial authority: “the monumentality of most museums emphasizes the discrepancy in power between society that can contain all others and those represented only by remains, the shreds and fragments salvaged in miniature displays” (Taylor 2003: 66). In this manner a museum is a *theatre of knowledge* that authorizes power and mediates how knowledge is itself represented, presented and displayed, a concept that I will analyze with more detail in Chapter Two.

It follows that the Museum of Maya Culture is simultaneously a theatre of knowledge—a drama of the specimen and of display—and a factory that produces knowledge and information regarding Maya culture. The Museum of Maya Culture has largely been written (into existence) through ethnographic and archaeological study of the numerous ruins spread throughout the Mayan world. The ruins, as they are excavated and interpreted, are also invented: “even before they are written in guidebooks, the remains [. . .] are already textualized as data; like an exhibit for a court case, each artifact must be documented in a multiplicity of texts to become (archaeological) evidence” (Castañeda 155). In this way, the ruins are a “palimpsest on which ‘Maya’ is continuously read, written, rewritten, and overwritten by diverse practices in multiple texts of heterogeneous media” (98). With each new discovery and each new interpretation, anthropologists continuously (re)invent Maya culture. Therefore these ruins are “a representation of the ancient city, constructed through the techniques of early twentieth-century archaeological science” (104). Anthropologists use previous ethnographies

and archaeological guides—the Museum of Maya Culture—to orient and steer their own research. This is how the Maya ruins (Castañeda uses Chichen Itzá as a primary example), are first “invented as a museum in ruins,” before they “became a factory of knowledge” in which “the product was Maya culture and the industry was Maya studies, one field within the professionalized discipline of [Western] anthropology” (131). Accordingly, through the discursive practice of anthropology writing and invention, the museum forms Maya culture into a fixed, stable entity that is both easily readable, and easily produced, a condition of cultural commodity. It is this commoditized culture that tourists experience and engage with when encountering the Maya peoples.

Accordingly, the Museum of Maya Culture as experienced by the tourist is a multifarious process of continual reinvention and production with numerous agents and brokers that stake their claim on the Maya. First are the archaeologists who “read and write Maya culture in their practices of excavation and restoration, thereby reinventing the spatial text of artifacts-exhibits and the place of the museum as a strategic order of things” (Castañeda 128). Tour companies then take this invention and celebrate particular elements to sell tours and excursions to travelers. Tour guides also take the cultural scripts written by anthropologists and translate them for the tourist industry, producing new meanings. Tourists “combine this new cultural text with the images and representations established in touristic literature” as they are “already familiarized with, if not steeped in, the signs of Maya culture via the publicity campaigns and propaganda” associated with the tourism industry (129). Here, “the tourist spectacle of the Maya is inscribed in the sacred artifact of archaeological reconstruction” (153). Moreover, *artisanos* and *vendedores* also produce a Mayan culture in the forms of souvenirs, handicrafts and artifacts that “the tourist can sign—sign as in signature and signal—the text of Maya culture that they invent” (129). At the same time, images

and representations of the Maya on a Mexican national and anthropologic context are curated by Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Institute of Anthropology and History), a governmental organization founded in 1939 to research and preserve Mexico's heritage. Additionally, trans-national media companies produce their own representations of the Maya based on these anthropological texts and touristic representations but also on hyperreal tropes and narratives of violence and exotic ambiguity. These heterogeneous forces are always at play at these Mayan sites and in these tours and always work to capture, display and homogenize Mayan identity.

By taking a performance studies approach to examining the encounters that take place during the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours we can see that both tourist and Maya are theatricalized identities—performatives and performances—that are constructed and represented vis-à-vis their relationship to each other within the framework of the scenario/museum. The rest of this thesis is an exploration into the many representations, displays, artifacts, mobilities and relations that comprise these two tours.

Because I am using two specific tours that I participated in as examples of the discovery scenario in action, I feel the need here to outline my own position within this research project. I consider my role within the first tour as pure tourist. This second time I came to the Mayan Riviera with the intention of scrutinizing both Mayan and tourist performance and questioning notions of authenticity—in a sense, I participated in the second tour as a reflective investigator. It is important to note, however, that I am, as a Western researcher, not free from the bounds of the Museum of Maya Culture; I am part of the discursive practice that stakes its claim on the Maya. Additionally, I was always already, through the course of my research, a tourist. This is precisely because Western discursive research *is* a kind of tourism, and tourism is always a kind of research. The inclusion of my

account as a researcher and as a tourist is essential. In order to understand how the Museum of Maya Culture shapes touristic performance, I will narrate the two tours that I participated in; I will essentially use autobiographic testimony as evidence. This is apropos precisely because, as a researcher, I could never, at any point, step out of my tourist position and provide a completely objective, non-touristified account of either tour. To pretend otherwise would not only be a false pretense but would be ethically wrong. More importantly, though, using firsthand information reflects the multitude of disparate forces at work within a colonial encounter and within touristic performance as a whole. Therefore, this autobiographical text can be understood in two ways: first, as a (re)writing, (re) enactment and (re)performance of the original tours and colonial encounters; and, second, as a “contact zone” of or a crossroads between “the heterogeneous discourses and vectors of power that the text articulates as its referent, product, context, practice, and event” (Castañeda 55). Here, my tour experiences are located at and themselves form the intersections at which the tourism industry, Western archaeological and ethnographic practice, Mexican national identity and museums of knowledge all meet. Moreover, this entire project can be looked at in two ways: first, as a performance analysis of the encounter between Maya and tourist in which a scenario of discovery is (re)written, (re)enacted and (re) performed according to the knowledge factory of the museum; and, second, as a guidebook to the incredibly dense and complicated networks of performance, knowledge and discursive practices found within tourist-Maya encounters in the Riviera Maya.

Chapter 2
“This City of Fables”: Staging Scientific Inquiry
in the Cobá Ruins

All stops on the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours exist within the framework of the tourist experiencing an *authentic* Maya peoples and an *authentic* Mayan culture. These encounters between tourist and Maya are scenarios of discovery whereby a modernized Western, objective, scientific tourist explorer discovers and/or encounters a mysterious and ultimately unknown Mayan Other. As scenarios, these tours mediate tourist encounters with the Maya by writing narratives of familiarity and unfamiliarity, known and unknown; scripting the roles of tourist discoverer and exotic Maya; and fixing constructs of authenticity, the real, and the inauthentic, the spectacle. Accordingly these two tours ultimately frame and stage both tourist and Maya in contrast with each other: ancient and contemporary Maya become the *mysterious Maya* and, at the same time, tour participants are cast in the role of the adventurer/discoverer. Both identities are formulated in context with and in contrast to each other: the Maya represent touristic and scientific narratives of mystery and ambiguity while tourists identify with notions of familiarity and estrangement. These tours thus present and articulate the Maya as an essentialized, staged pastiche combining Western (romantic and scientific) notions of the unknown, the unexplored and the undiscovered formed as an opposable identity to the tourist’s own self-identification with civilization and modernity.

When I speak of the scriptural and performative economies at work within the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours I employ the word “economies” intentionally. I use the term firstly, in part, because at the centre of each encounter is an economic or financial transaction: the tour participant *pays* the tour operator for—buys entry to—the experience of meeting

and seeing both ancient and contemporary Maya culture in much the same way that a theatre spectator purchases a ticket in order to see a play. However, to continue the theatre analogy, economy can come to mean something more integral to the theatrical event itself: the social structures and strictures that surround and mediate our experiences of it. Like the spectator watching a play, there are a set of given circumstances in these two tours—rules, regulations, expectations, beliefs, etc.—that both tour and tour-goer are (expected) to follow. When used this way, the word *economy* refers to these spoken and unspoken, negotiated and unnegotiated contracts that ultimately frame the tourist’s experience of the event. After all, the word economy comes from the ancient Greek word *oikonomia*, a combination of the *oikos*, which translates as “house,” and *nomos*, meaning “custom” or “law”). *Oikonomia*, then, means “management of a household, administration,” or more appropriately “rules of the house(hold)” (Harper). It is this understanding of the word that I intend to unpack and explore here.

Quetzil E Castañeda employs Michel de Certeau’s concept of *scriptural economy* to explore “the (re)invention of an Other, specifically, the ‘Maya’” by scrutinizing “the production of knowledge about this entity [. . .] and the dissemination of such knowledge in and through [. . .] the Museum of Mayan Culture” (10). According to de Certeau, writing is a “triumphal *conquista* of the economy, that has, since the beginning of the ‘modern age’ given itself the name of writing” (131). De Certeau describes writing as “the concrete activity that consists in constructing, on its own, blank space (*un espace propre*)—the page—a text that has the power over the exteriority from which it has been isolated” (134). Writing, then, is always an act of creation that starts from a blank slate and imposes the will/power/authority of the writer. For de Certeau, the practice of writing and the creation of scripts, texts and narratives are the result of Western (discursive) knowledge’s ambition to “compose its history” overtop of others

(and the Other's), "and thus to compose history itself" (133). Writing is therefore a strategy, machinery and apparatus of knowledge and power, and scriptural economies are the rules and regulations—the frameworks—that guide them. In his study of tourist-Maya interactions, Casteneda employs this understanding of the scriptural economy as a "master trope by which to excavate the power/knowledge relations that inhabit [. . .] the Museum of Mayan Culture" (11).

Similar to and on top of the scriptural economy that underlies the discursive invention, iteration and representation of the Maya within these tourist encounters, I propose that there is also a performative economy at work. Whereas the scriptural economy refers to the textual and discursive realms of cultural negotiation, the performative economy, while interrelated to and entwined with the scriptural economy, refers to the nondiscursive visual, auditory and sensual fields of human experience that exist outside of Western logocentrism. Following Diana Taylor's usage of the word, I use performative here precisely because of the problematic nature of performance itself:

One of the problems in using performance, and its misleading cognates performative and performativity, comes from the extraordinary broad range of behaviors it covers, from the discrete dance, to technologically mediated performance, to conventional cultural behavior. [. . .] This multilayeredness indicates the deep interconnections of all these systems of intelligibility and the productive frictions among them. (Taylor 2003: 6)

Here the multiplicity of meanings that "performance" covers opens the term up to other, different possibilities. Performance, after all, is on one hand an "Ontological affirmation," or "To say that something *is* a performance," validates it as such (Taylor 2003: 3). On the other hand performance also constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events *as*

performance” (Taylor 2003: 3). In this way, the *is/as* of performance “underlines the understanding of performance as simultaneously ‘real’ and ‘constructed,’ as practices that bring together what have historically been kept separate, as discrete, supposedly free-standing, ontological and epistemological discourses” (Taylor 2003: 3). Performance and performativity then, while caught up and bound to discursive regimes—from Austin where the “performative points to language that acts” to Butler where “it goes the opposite direction, subsuming subjectivity and cultural agency into normative discursive practice” (Taylor 2003: 5-6)—can still refer to other possibilities of knowledge and experience. In fact, it must do so: “it is vital to signal the performatic, digital and visual fields as separate from, though always embroiled with, the discursive one so privileged by Western logocentrism” (Taylor 2003: 6). In this sense, all that is and can be considered performance, performatives and performativity are caught up in a deep network of interrelations; one of performance’s strengths (and wherein lies its greatest potential) is its recognition of the wide a variety of behaviours, meanings and significances that underlies the experiences and processes of cultural negotiation.

The performative economy that underlies and guides the processes and practices of cultural negotiation and differentiation within these two tours is the *scenario of discovery*, a term outlined and explored by Diana Taylor. According to Taylor, the scenario of discovery is widespread in our Western discursive attempts to read, interpret and understand the (culture/representation of the) Other, particularly in the colonial encounters in and around Central America. Here the scenario has organized and formed Western notions of exoticness and Otherness, allowing us to believe in the notion that Otherness is possible:

The scenario transports us [. . .] from here to an exotic “there,” transfers the not-ours to ours, transfers the Other’s systems of communication into the one we claim to understand, transforms

past enactments (earlier discovery scenarios) into future outcomes (usually loss of native lands). In doing so, the scenario simultaneously constructs the wild object and the viewing subject—producing a “we” and “our” as it produces a “them.” (2003: 53-54)

The scenario of discovery is a way in which we orient and construct our own identities in relation to those of another: as we view and shape our own positions within a space, we simultaneously view and shape other people’s positions in relation to our own, thus casting them as “them”, as “there”, as “exotic”, and as “other”. The scenario of discovery here is the travelogue that shapes, defines and mediates our movements and interactions within the space it produces—not only are our own positions defined but so too are those the other bodies occupying that space.

Taylor illustrates this scenario, or this drama of discovery using the example of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of the Americas (2003: 54-62). Taylor asks how it is possible for someone to discover the *New World* when it was clearly already inhabited and settled by a multitude of diverse populations. Scrutinizing the notion that the Amerindians were an undiscovered people and the Americas an “undiscovered” place, Taylor asks the important question: “*Undiscovered by Whom?*” (2003: 61). Similarly, the naming of the Americas as “The New World” by Europeans begs the question: New according to whom?

Within the context of the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and Cobá Mayan Village tours, the notion of discovery takes on a different form but is still fashioned on Western civilization’s desire to understand (and ultimately write) the Other. Discovery here, while still based on traditional colonizer-colonized relations, is not about European exploration, uncovering and conquest of a new land. Rather, this touristic discovery is centered on exploring and meeting

an *authentic* Maya—that is, encountering an authentic Mayan people in a real Mayan space. However, the terms authentic and real here are not descriptors of an ethnographic status, nor are they indicators of cultural purity in a region pervaded by touristic kitsch and consumerism; instead they are notions of alterity cast and staged as characteristics unknown, unfamiliar and mysterious to the tourist (and to science). As these tours frame the participants as the modernized, technological and mobile tourist discoverer, they simultaneously cast the Maya with antagonistic traits: the ancient (and even primitive), mysterious and non-transient Other. Moreover, the scenario of discovery represents the Maya, vis-à-vis their associations with their ancient past and their connectivity to the land, as possessing mysterious and magical characteristics. This reactivated scenario is also fueled by Western (scientific discourse’s) desire to understand the unfamiliar: “Mystery, then, configures a discursive formation in which the scientific will to know shapes Maya alterity as a mirror other to Western civilization” (Castañeda 141). These qualities are written into and onto the Maya and construct the Maya “as inherently contradictory and anomalous: noncivilized civilization” (Castañeda 140). What the participant discovers is but a representation of this scientific desire to know the Maya and is formed and performed in opposition to the tourist’s own position as discoverer. Within this performance the roles of observer and observed, explorer and explored are set:

The native is the show; the civilized observer the privileged spectator. We, those viewers who look through the eyes of the explorer, are (like the explorer) positioned safely outside the frame, free to define, theorize, and debate their (never our) societies. These “encounters” with the native create us as audiences just as much as the violence of definition creates them, the primitives. (Taylor 2003: 64)

The tourist, through the scenario, thus perceives the Maya as “a special variety of cultural alterity that speaks some fundamental truth to ‘modern man’ about what it is to be civilized and to have civilization” (Castañeda 148).

The archaeological ruins of Cobá, deep within the jungle, act as both a pretext to and setting in which this drama of discovery takes place. Cobá is a large component of both the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours as is signified in its presence in the names of both tours. That the visit to and tour of Cobá is the first destination on both tours’ itineraries is a strategic mechanism. It, being the participant’s introduction to Mayan culture, inscribes the rest of the tour with the representations of alterity produced and presented at/in the ruins, specifically, that of the Maya as discursively unknown and mysterious (to Western scientific practice): “both guidebook and tour reinscribe the ruins as a mystic writing pad through their spatializing enactments and discursive practices of anthropological [and touristic] knowledge” (Castañeda 153). As (Western) archaeological processes interpret and restore these ruins as the Mayan site of Cobá, they simultaneously invent and narrate the ruins as a space of scientific intrigue. The tours of these sites are therefore reactivated scenarios of the Western desire to know—to interpret, restore and ultimately invent—the (ancient Mayan) Other.

Cobá, located in a dense jungle setting about 35 kilometers from the coast, is situated upon a series of five lakes which most likely gave the once prominent Maya centre its name: Cobá means “ruffled waters” in Yucatec Maya (*Lonelyplanet.com*). Cobá is a massive archaeological zone with ruins that lie scattered over an area of about 80 square kilometers, most of which have yet to be surveyed by archaeologists (Barr). At its historical prominence, between 800 and 1000 CE, Cobá is estimated to have contained a population between forty and sixty thousand people (Barr). Currently the Cobá ruins consist of a selection

of smaller restored pyramids, two restored ballgame courts, some crumbling and largely unrestored roadways (known as *sacbeob* or *sacbe* if referred to in the singular, these roadways connected the Maya population centers of old), and the highlight of the site: the Nohoch Mul pyramid that, at a height of 138 feet, is the tallest pyramid in the Yucatán Peninsula. Visitors can take in these various sites by walking or biking through well-manicured jungle paths or by taking a “Mayan Taxi” (a local pedaling the tourist around on a bicycle-rickshaw). While most of the ruins are off-limits or restrict tourist access, tourists are able to (at the time of writing) explore the front of and climb to the top of the Nohoch Mul pyramid. Nohoch Mul itself is only partially restored: the front of the pyramid, which contains the steps leading up to the top and a ceremonial area on the side, as well as the multiple levels that typify Meso-American pyramids, has been largely (re)constructed, while the two sides and the back remain covered by jungle brush.

Both tour visits to Cobá begin with participants being dropped off (of the tour bus or van—depending on the tour) at the town of Cobá that lies on the outskirts of the ruins. Upon entering the archaeological area through the front gates, the tourists are led on a path through the jungle. The first exhibit that tourists come across is a series of ruins known as the Cobá Group of buildings—which consists of “a 105-step pyramid, called the Church; a room with a corbel arch; and [two] ball courts similar to those found in many pre-Columbian cities” (Barr). This building group demarcates the beginning not only of Cobá as ancient ruins, but of Cobá as an interactive exhibit of discovery: these half-restored vestiges instantly set this place as an imaginary space outside of the participant’s quotidian—and even their touristic—lives. In both of the tours that I participated in, the tour guide stopped our group within this building cluster and allowed a local Maya guide at the site to discuss the history of the city of Cobá. These local guides, with the help of visual aides—images, maps and diagrams—showed us

layouts of both the ancient city and the modern ruins and described the Cobá Group of buildings as a market or commercial centre of the ancient city. One image showed an artistic recreation of what this area would/could have looked like during Cobá's heyday. Another figure placed Cobá historically, marking its rise, prominence and fall, all prior to colonial contact. Here the images and narrations display Mayan heritage—the ruins—in context, serving both to inform tourists about Cobá's (and the Maya's) historical past, and to explicitly indicate Cobá's antiquity.

At the same time that tour-goers experience these buildings as inherently of the past, tour-goers additionally *already* see these buildings as unexplored objects with unknown and mysterious origins—as artifacts awaiting discovery and interpretation. This is because the ruins themselves are invented as such by the anthropological and archaeological processes that read the site as Mayan. Here these practices literally staged the ruins as they uncovered them from the jungle, (re)constructed them, and interpreted these ruins as Mayan:

This city of fables is inscribed on the scrub forest of the imagination as well as carved out of the effervescent limestone of Yucatán. First invented by Mayas over many centuries, refashioned by the colonial and criollo imagination, and then later reconstructed by archaeologists according to their early twentieth-century vision. (Castañeda 97)

Cobá is thus an elaborate and complex (re)construction in which the staging of the ruins is always already controlled by the stagers. Accordingly, this representation of Cobá on display—the Cobá that we tourists get to visit and experience—is a simulacrum: it “is a life-size scale-model replica of ‘itself’” (Castañeda 104). Castañeda calls this Western discursive (re)construction and invention of Mayan culture in the form of ruins “Mayan Civilization.” Cobá is therefore a museum

exhibit that (re)presents and performs Mayan civilization as an uncovered, unrestored, uncharted and unknown artifact. In this way, the Cobá ruins are not only a historical artifact of scientific inquiry but also a site that produces and performs Mayan culture as a similar discursive formation of mysterious alterity.

In both the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours, each guide noted for the tour participants several engineering and architectural feats accomplished by the Maya of the past. For example, the guides explained to our group the Maya people's use of a corbel arch: "The gracefully tapering corbel arch, seen throughout ancient Mayan cities, needed no keystone, unlike other structures of the same era that would have collapsed without one" (Barr). They also mentioned the construction of numerous *sacbeob* or roadways that would have connected the city of Cobá with other Mayan cities in the region. These roadways were always straight—not even bending more than zero degrees over relatively long distances (one *sacbe* is measured to be sixty kilometers in length and others are thought to have been over one hundred)—and were all at relatively the same level: varying between one to three feet off the ground and in one area raising a remarkable 21 feet off the jungle floor below—a remarkable engineering feat given the Yucatán's rough terrain (Barr). However, while highlighting the impressive feats of the ancient Mayan architects and engineers, the guides' narrations also echoed the scientific puzzlement inherent in modern (re)constructions of Maya culture: the guides then noted that all these construction projects, the arches, the temples, the pyramids and the *sacbeob*, were completed *without* the use of metal tools. In other words, these ancient Maya built huge and complex projects without the use of other *advanced* technology such as bronze or iron working⁹. Here narratives of scientific mystery and intrigue took the form of contradictory and conflating representations of Mayan culture.

9. Technologies that Western societies have used since 3000 and 1200 BCE respectively.

The guides implicitly and explicitly offered other examples illustrating the Maya's mysterious (scientifically odd and even *freakish*) nature throughout our tour through the site. When our group stood at the Cobá Group of buildings, the local guide discussed the complexities of ancient Mayan society and economics, outlining the numerous different castes and hierarchies that made up the social system and articulating the dense networks of trade that made up Cobá's economy. The guide then also noted the ancient Maya practice of head binding, in which parents would artificially flatten and elongate the craniums of their offspring by binding their heads between two pieces of wood and then tightening. He used photos of deformed skulls, some looking almost alien-like, to illustrate how this was done and its effects. To further confound and complicate our notions of Mayan civility and cultural achievements, we stood, minutes later, at a restored ball court where our guide explained the Maya's use of human sacrifice¹⁰. Here the tours present the ancient Maya at one moment technologically advanced and at the same time primitive, their society at once complex and civilized but also savage and inhuman. Additionally, one of the most significant characterizations of the Maya as mysterious that our tours highlighted was the unknown reason why these large Mayan centres were entirely abandoned by the time of European contact and conquest. During both tours, the guides noted that scientists—archaeologists, ethnographers, etc.—have yet to determine a cause for the crumbling of this society. Here discursive representations of mystery are thus configured in the forms of these mysterious ruins and in the inherently contradictory and puzzling ancient culture that lived there. The tour of Cobá

10. The Mayan ball game involved two teams attempting to put a large rubber ball through two hoops on each horizontal side of a rectangular pitch. Players were not allowed to use their hands or feet so players would have to knock the ball into the hoop using their shoulders, upper legs, hips and head. Our guide told us that the losing teams were sacrificed to the Mayan gods and that there are murals at other Mayan sites depicting the winning team's captain also being sacrificed. The game portion of this sporting event is reenacted as part of the daily "Mexico Espectacular" show at Xcaret.

and the narration and images presented by our guides serve not to answer these questions but function as an apparatus that asks them.

It is important to note here that I use these vague and unspecific terms—mysterious and unknown—to describe the Cobá ruins and Mayan civilization intentionally. This is because the imprecision of the words is exactly the point: if we could pinpoint why they are unknown or the manner in which they are mysterious, it would undermine the Maya’s representation as an exotic and unfamiliar Other. Imprecision here is indicative of Western practice’s ultimate desire to formulate the Other as an unknowable known according to the scenario of discovery: that while we can read and interpret this exotic alterity, it must always remain strange and exotic. Where I can, I do use more specific descriptives to characterize certain images and representations. Nevertheless these words are always haunted by configurations of scientific mystery: it is exactly this imprecision of definition that renders the Maya exotic.

These vague terms are also apropos here because they characterize the Maya as an imaginary figure produced and replicated by the numerous (largely Western) mediatized images and representations of Mayan culture and heritage. For example, the Maya peoples have been heavily discussed and featured in the transnational media—blogs, literature, magazine articles, television shows and even movies—establishing a “basic” horizon of understanding about Maya culture¹¹. For example, many Maya-focused television shows and *National Geographic* features highlight their complex population centers and building

11. Here are just a couple of examples. Of magazines, *National Geographic* has featured several articles dedicated to the Maya (Garrett’s “La Ruta Maya” (1989) and Gugliotta’s “The Maya Glory and Ruin” (2007) are two examples that attempt to piece together the Mayans’ past). The History Television program *Digging for the Truth*—a documentary that explores anthropological and archaeological mysteries—devoted an episode to the Maya in 2005. Lastly, Mel Gibson’s 2006 hyper-violent film *Apocalypto* is set in the Maya world immediately prior to first contact with Europeans (an event that happens at the end of the film). Interestingly enough, the Maya have, as of this writing, been back in the Western public’s spotlight in regards to the year 2012 being the end of the Mayan calendar. By no means do the examples end here, however; one could write an entire dissertation on the mediatized representation of Maya in our contemporary culture.

projects, but at the same time they also focus on the Maya's practice of human sacrifice. They illustrate the Maya's advanced system of calculus and discuss how the Maya built such large monuments having never invented metal tools (Barr). Other reproductions feed into this vague sense of the Maya as historically ambiguous: "The Maya did not have cities, but empty ceremonial centers, they did not have true *settled* architecture, but extensive and shifting swidden agriculture. They did not have true phonetic writing, but pictographic writing" (Castañeda 140). These synthetic (re)productions, which echo scientific (re)productions, contain numerous conflated and contradictory representations that reinforce the vague characterization of the Maya as inherently mysterious and paradoxical. The representation of the Maya as both civil and uncivil, scientifically advanced yet technologically primitive, in turn feeds the Maya as mysterious characterization; it is this imaginary construction of wonder that powers these tours as scenarios of discovery.

The Cobá ruins' (and Mayan civilization's) construction as scientific inquiry personified can be seen in the tour operators' own advertisements and in tourist information and literature on the region. These touristic and marketable images of the Maya and of the Cobá ruins—found in postcards, guidebooks, Internet sites, advertisements, among others—often characterize both as ancient and steeped in history. "Your encounter with the Maya culture starts with a 1,500 year-old historical journey to the ancestral city of Cobá," states *Alltournative.com*, the website for the Cobá Mayan Adventure tour. The operators of the Cobá Mayan Village tour claim, "This historical journey takes you for a walk though lush tropical jungle to discover the ancient city of Cobá," (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). Lonely Planet's online guidebook of the Mayan Riviera contains a section on the Cobá ruins, noting that Cobá reached its peak between 800 and 1000 CE, much earlier than Chichen Itzá and Tulum, the two other major ruin sites in the

region (*Lonelyplanet.com*). Such descriptions not only report Cobá's and Mayan civilization's ancient character, but are also indicative of how media replicates and repeats these characterizations.

Additionally, narratives of exploration and discovery—of Cobá as a pristine place still to be explored, as an image of remote and untouched ruins—are echoed in the guidebooks and tourism websites that focus on the region. The website *Differentworlds.com* tells readers that “Cobá is beautiful and mysterious” and that “only a small fraction of the many structures in this vast site have been excavated and this, together with the remoteness and jungle setting, contribute to the feeling of exploring new ground.” Moreover, to stress the notion of discovery and exploration, *Differentworlds.com* invokes the image of a fictional but well known adventurer and archaeologist: “Bring a hat and imagine you're Indiana Jones.” *Lonely Planet*, a widely read and very popular hallmark of tourist and traveler guidebooks, also invokes the image of Indiana Jones and the idea of discovery: “Cobá is ‘cool’ because you feel like you're in an *Indiana Jones* flick” (*Lonelyplanet.com*). This pop-culture reference not only presents (and sells) Cobá as an exciting and mysterious destination but is also indicative of how deeply narratives of adventure and mystery are ingrained into the site. Not only do these guidebooks report on the experience of discovery and exploration that Cobá instills in the tourist, they also help to construct them. Read by participants prior to visiting Cobá, these representations reactivate these narratives: within this drama of discovery the tourist is/becomes the character of Indiana Jones, the archaeologist exploring the dense jungle landscape and discovering the remote, seldom seen ancient Maya ruins, whose secrets are yet to be revealed.

Given this synthetic and imaginary horizon of knowledge, within my tours of Cobá, the Maya were always already a people and culture of contradiction and puzzlement. In this way the ruins are a staged setting in which the scientific,

the cultural unknown is produced and performed and where these synthetic (and mediatized) reproductions of Mayan ambiguity combine with the tour guide's images, narrations and descriptions of the Cobá ruins and of the ancient Maya. The *mysterious Maya* is therefore a discursive formation, an essentialized and staged pastiche combining Western (romantic and scientific) notions of the unknowable, the unexplored and the to be discovered—the exotic—producing a vague cultural imaginary.

At the same time as staging the modernly (re)constructed ruins of Cobá as ancient and by showing Mayan civilization as inherently mysterious and unknowable, the museum exhibit of Cobá also folds contemporary Mayan culture into its representational display. During both of my tours of Cobá, the guide drew several continuities between the Maya way of life then and the Maya way of life now. One example is how the ancient Maya constructed their houses (called *palapas*) using wooden frames, wood paneled siding and thatched roofs, and how the current indigenous Maya peoples continue to do so¹². The guide also pointed out that both the ancient Maya and the contemporary Maya use swidden agriculture on top of growing/cultivating their own fruit and herbs in order to maintain a subsistence living. Interestingly, while these examples were cited during the tour of Cobá, they were later, in the Cobá Mayan Village tour, actually displayed and showed to our group¹³. Additionally, the local guide's presence in the tour performed these historical congruencies because the guide was himself

12. Interestingly, our first visit to the Riviera Maya and to Cobá was during December 2005 following Hurricane Katrina, which hit the Yucatán Peninsula before heading north for continental America. With the hurricane's damage still clearly visible, our tour guide offered a utilitarian reason why the Maya continue to use houses made of wood and thatch. According to him, houses made from brick and cinder cone are enclosed spaces that, in the event of a hurricane, allow pressure to build up inside them, eventually causing their structure to fail: blowing the roof off the house or, worse, knocking down the house itself. The palapa, on the other hand, because of the openings in the wood paneling, enables air to enter and exit as it needs, allowing the structure to remain standing. In this way, our tour guide argued, despite seeming like a primitive or old-fashioned housing structure, the palapa is better adapted to the Yucatán's extreme weather patterns than a house built from more contemporary materials.

13. I will cover this encounter in Chapter Four.

a Yucatec Maya. Here, we tourists saw a contemporary living Mayan placed amongst the museum diorama of these ancient ruins. Here not only were we told/informed about the connectivity between ancient and modern Maya but we were also (objective) observers of it as it was performed before us.

The above representations of Mayan ancientness and scientific ambiguity are further reinforced as they are staged in the site itself: natural elements such as trees and jungle brush not only signify and convey Cobá as an ancient jungle wilderness—as a Mayan space—but they also set the scene in which exploration and discovery are possible. Cobá as a display of exotic space—as a representation—is therefore more than the sum of the “physical remains of ancient buildings and artifacts that have been excavated, restored, and reconstructed in a scientific calculation,” but is also “the trees selectively left standing, discarded stones, paths, weeds, tourist stands, rest areas, waste disposal sites, and boundary marking roads and milpas [fields]” (Castañeda 98). Accordingly, at Cobá, as at other archaeologically (re)constructed and restored ruin sites, the presence and absence of trees, brush and jungle is just as important in the site’s staging as the ruin structures. Here the actions of the site’s maintenance workers—their clearing of brush, their upkeep of the jungle pathways, their removal of dead or dying trees—constantly shape Cobá as a stage. The end result is a meticulously rehearsed and constructed set: the dense foliage and thick brush reinforce Cobá’s scene of ruination and its remote location. At the same time, the dense jungle covering much of the archaeological site gives it a sense of incompleteness, of non-finality, which, in turn, opens up potentialities—in the tourist’s eye—of discovery. Materially, these crumbling, partially restored ruins are displayed (and read) as more exotic, more pristine because they are contextualized in and by their jungle surroundings. The ruins here have yet to give away their secrets: they remain unanalyzed, uninterpreted and even undiscovered.

Completing this display are the archaeological processes visible and invisible—seen and unseen—at the site’s numerous excavations and restorations. Other prominent Mayan ruins in the Yucatán commonly visited by tourists, such as Chichen Itzá and Tulum, are largely restored; the buildings that make up these sites have, for the most part, been reconstructed (although not entirely) and the jungle that once encroached upon them has been cleared away revealing a vast collection of buildings on what would appear to be a jungle plain. These more developed and (re)constructed sites present the visitor with an idea of what these centres would have been like in their heyday: cleared of trees and full of people. Cobá, on the other hand, remains largely overgrown and mostly unrestored. Here tourists read this lack of restoration, the amount of jungle overgrowth and the wealth of unrestored mounds as proof of Cobá’s scientifically unknowable status: the lack of visible and partially restored structures stages Cobá’s remoteness, exoticness and pristine nature (read as non-development or underdevelopment by the tourism industry). The thick and dense jungle that encroaches on the Cobá site combined with the ruins yet to be restored, and the partially (re)constructed buildings that poke their way out of the jungle, all stage Cobá as a site in which exploration is possible

The Cobá ruins are not only stages in which the drama of discovery can occur, they are also a staging of the Maya’s ambiguous, contradictory and ultimately unknown heritage. Nowhere is this more apparent than at the climax (both literally and figuratively) of the tour: a climb up the Nohoch Mul pyramid. The Nohoch Mul pyramid is the image most closely associated with the Cobá ruins: its sharp steps and jungle covered backside are featured prominently in tourist guidebooks, advertising brochures and tourist/travel literature. Visitors are permitted to climb the 120¹⁴ very steep steps to the top, where they can take in,

14. Some web sites report that Nohoch Mul has 124 steps. I use the figure of 120 because it is more often reported.

panoramically and panoptically, the totality of the Cobá ruins (the jungle, lakes and ruin structures that make up the site) thereby perceiving Mayan civilization as a mysterious and undisturbed whole. This totalizing view both completes the staging of Cobá as a site of exploration and discovery and reinforces the casting of Mayan culture as an essentialized pastiche.

During my first excursion to Cobá, after an initial tour of the Cobá Group of buildings, the guides let group members wander around the site largely self-guided: this allowed my immediate fellow participants—my father, brother and girlfriend—to visit a series of ruins off the main *sacbe* between the Cobá Group and the Nohoch Mul Group of structures. These ruins consisted of a couple of restored ballcourts, a largely restored (smaller) pyramid closed off to exploration, numerous crumbling *sacbeob* and walls, and mounds still covered by jungle. Several placeholders describing the nature of the structures were always located nearby. Often these informative displays highlighted information uncovered by archaeology in addition to discussing points of scientific puzzlement. A display commenting on a *sacbe*, for example, not only touted the roadway's tremendous feat of engineering—with networks stretching several hundreds of kilometers—but also decried the fact that many of these now seemingly lead to nowhere—to a yet to be discovered site. Area by area, elements of scientific mystery were placed alongside points of scientific fact staging a consistent representation of an always mysterious Cobá. However, the totality of this site as a space of Mayan mystery and wonder was brought most clearly into focus at the top of the Nohoch Mul pyramid. After climbing to the top, I was rewarded with a view of the ruins and the jungle that I had not seen before. Rather than seeing merely one site at a time or a collection of ruins within one building group, I was able to see the entirety of Cobá (as unearthed and (re)constructed by archaeologists), as a complete staging of Mayan remote, wild and ancient alterity.

This all-encompassing, panoptical view both characterizes the Maya as an ancient peoples and culture steeped in history *and* ties contemporary Maya peoples and their jungle landscape by placing both contemporary Maya peoples and ancient Mayan structures in the same context. At the top of Nohoch Mul, tourists situate themselves against this ancient, pre-Columbian backdrop (and, very often, gaze at it through the camera lens). The antiquity of the site is seen as a whole: there are no modern structures here, and even the town of Cobá, which has a few small modern amenities, is hidden from view by the jungle. This act, the tourist's "vision"—of seeing and viewing the site panoramically and panoptically—combined with the tour's narration by the guides, structure and textualize the ruins (and also the Maya) as ancient and as "of the past":

The tourist, physically directed to the ruins, interprets the received explanation, thereby transforming the visible into the intelligible. Alongside this reading, other texts are invented: representations of Maya culture are mostly cast in the form of a discourse of "encounter with the Maya or Maya culture." These texts are forged in discursive practices that derive from the history of travel. (Castañeda, 129)

Cobá the archaeological site, devoid of many of the contemporary and modernized creature comforts familiar to the tourist, is essentially staged as an exoticized and mystical place outside of contemporary time in which "stories of the Mayan temples and the ball game court come alive with the magic of the past" (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). The tour of Cobá introduces tourists to an assemblage of ancient and contemporary Maya: first through the images, history and stories told by the local tour guide, then through linkages and connections made both by the Cobá tour guide and by his placement within the ruins, and lastly by permitting the tourist to gaze at the entirety of these ruins as an

essentialized image of antiquity (specifically in opposition to the notions of modernity experienced by the tourist in their quotidian lives, or their experience of the resorts they stay at while in the Yucatán). From the top of Nohoch Mul the ruins' staging in the surrounding jungle, the lack of anything "modern" within this display, and the guided and unguided narrations that describe them as such all establish Cobá as a theatrical display of Mayan alterity and mystery. Tour participants thereby come to associate (and conflate) the contemporary Yucatec Maya people and culture they will experience later (during the Cobá Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours) with the images and notions of the Maya experienced at the ruins of Cobá.

Chapter 3

Indiana Jones and the Mysterious Maya: Reenacting Discovery in the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure Tour

The Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour continues the narratives of adventure and discovery first set and staged in the Cobá ruins. Here the tour participant's encounter with the Maya—with a contemporary Mayan community and current Mayan culture—is effectively staged as a series of adventure activities in which the encounter with the mysterious Maya is part of the drama of discovery. The tour itself is scripted as an interactive installation in which the tourist is the museum-goer and the Mayan world (the jungle, the cenote, the village and the villagers) is the exhibit: the representation and display of the mysterious Mayan jungle world frames the participant's adventurous activities. The result is a museum display in three parts (or a theatre production in three acts): the tour moves from encounters with nature, to encounters with Mayan culture, to encounters with Maya people in a way that stages these three elements as an interrelated representation of mysterious Mayan culture. These three stagings (land, culture and people) represent and produce the Maya as a character of the jungle wilderness; like the European *discovery* of Mesoamerica, the Mayans here are but part of the landscape—the setting—objects to be explored and encountered in the reenactment of discovery. In this way, the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour is a museum exhibit—a theatre of knowledge and a drama of discovery—that stages and reenacts Western dramas of adventure, exploration and ultimately conquest of an unexplored land of which the Maya are a part.

In order to examine the manner in which the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure Tour stages and reenacts the performance of European discovery, it is useful to examine the tour's individual activities as individual museum exhibits that make up a larger interactive installation. Museums are a theatre of

knowledge: “Exhibitions are fundamentally theatrical, for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 3). At the same time, the manner in which the museum stages its display is also a theatrical act because within museum representation, “Objects are the actors and knowledge animates them” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 3). Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett defines two distinct approaches by which museums stage (and represent) objects: in situ display and in context display. In situ display “entails metonymy and mimesis: the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be re-created” (20). Objects within these displays, are but fragments of a bigger picture that stand in for and represent that a whole. However, the in situ museum display only masquerades as a “slice of life lifted from the everyday world and inserted into the museum gallery” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 20). In actuality, in situ display is caught up in a system of both representation and presentation of knowledge: “Representational conventions guide mimetic displays, despite the illusion of a close fit, if not identity, between the representation and that which is represented” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 21). As such, “those who construct the display also constitute the subject” (20).

The in context display, on the other hand, stages objects that are set, or contextualized, by their relationships to the other objects around them and the information—texts, images, sounds—staged alongside these objects. Often objects displayed in context are multimodal, that is, they are given significance by several forms of media staged together:

Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts, diagrams, commentary delivered via earphones, explanatory audiovisual programs, docents conducting tours, booklets and catalogues, educational programs, lectures and performances.

Objects are also set in context by means of other objects, often in

relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical relationships. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 21)

In context displays thereby provide status and meaning only through particular techniques of arrangement, placement, setting and resetting. The power of these stagings however, comes from the infographic, that is both the visual and textual, nature of the display: more than offering a mimetic and metonymic performance of the world, in context displays offer an *objective*, scientific vantage point from which to approach the object on display. In context displays therefore produce hierarchies of knowledge and (cultural) authority in us, the viewing subject and objective observer, and them, the displayed objects:

“In context approaches exert strong cognitive control over the object, asserting the power of classification and arrangement to order large numbers of artifacts from diverse cultural and historical settings and to position them in relation to one another” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 21).

In this way, the artifacts exhibited by a museum are effectively animated and rendered meaningful—made into objects—precisely by their method of display; but it is the displays and the act of displaying that construct and control that object’s meaning. In other words, artifacts represented as objects in a museum gain their significance not through their very existence, but through the fact that they are *on display* and *how* they are displayed—that is, how they are staged and performed. We can therefore scrutinize not only the objects on display but the manner in which these displays arrange/perform their knowledge—hence the idea that museums *are* a theatre of knowledge.

The Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour is run by Alltournative, a company whose business practices center on supporting a local Mayan Riviera

population—Pac-Chén—that would otherwise not have access to tourism-based dollars. According to *Alltournative.com*, “In 1999 the Mayas of the isolated jungle community of Pac-Chén were on the brink of selling off their natural heritage in the face of an extremely bleak economic future” when a group recognizing the potential of adventure- and eco- tourism in the area (Alltournative) laid the groundwork for a “sustainable development” based touristic program that would benefit both parties. The Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour is but one of several excursions offered by Alltournative with these localized development goals in mind, and the nearby ruins of Cobá are an added feature of such tours.

The itinerary of the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour that I partook in started with, a visit to the Cobá ruins followed by lunch nearby at a roadside cafeteria style restaurant on the edges of the nearby town site. After that, we traveled to the outskirts of Pac-Chén and participated in the series of adventure activities located there. We then traveled into Pac-Chén itself where we rappelled down the cliff side of a jungle ravine cutting its way right through the village. For the last part of the tour, we ate local food cooked for us by the villagers and visited some nearby houses that had been converted into handicraft shops. The adventure activities were hosted and supervised by men from the village (paid by Alltournative and through tourists’ gratuities). Once done, we were then whisked back to our hotels, but not before a stop at Alltournative’s headquarters where we could purchase goods ranging from locally made crafts, to local food products to tourist kitsch. In addition to myself, our tour group consisted of my father, my brother, my partner and an American family of four adults and four children. Our Alltournative tour guide, Emiliano, a twenty-something man from Mexico City who had moved to the Yucatán and who spoke almost fluent English, ferried us between destinations in a fourteen-passenger van.

While I have already discussed how the Cobá ruins act as a multimodal staging of/performance of Mayan mystery and intrigue, it is still important to note some of the details that are specific to the particular tour of Cobá offered by Alltournative. Curiously, this visit of Cobá was much less rigidly structured than the one that comprised part of the Cobá Mayan Village tour. For example, after our initial guided tour of the Cobá Group, Emiliano provided us with an overview of the site, and we were pretty much left to our own regimens and permitted to explore the ruins as we pleased within certain time constraints. While I think that the tour company's decision to allow participants to tour—discover—the ruins on our own accord was largely based on convenience, I believe that this choice (whether intentional or not) also caters into the tour's adventure theme. Rather than seeming like rigid and pre-set tour itinerary, our unsupervised travels within Cobá allowed us to explore and discover the site of our own volition—we were the ones discovering. The agential (and active) role here played by tourists—becoming Indiana Jones—continued throughout the whole tour; participants were encouraged to *buy into* or maintain this performance as they hiked through the jungle, swam in an underground river, rappelled down a cliff and encountered an indigenous shaman.

After Cobá, the first museum installation—the first act—that comprises the drama of exploration and discovery in the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour involves the series of adventure-themed activities located in the Pac-Chén vicinity (but not in the town itself). Here the journeys in and through a thick, hot, humid jungle present the tour participant with a series of in situ representations of Mayan wilderness. These interactive displays—the tour participant hikes, climbs, paddles and flies through the jungle after all—not only explicate the savage jungle scene as set and setting, but they also reenact the narratives of Western adventure and exploration inherent in European conquest and discovery.

After lunch, we traveled for about 45 minutes to the jungle surrounding the village of Pac-Chén. Our van pulled into a clearing that acted as a parking lot and as a staging area for our next group of activities. We climbed out and, the oppressive heat of the jungle bearing down on us, followed our guide along a narrow path that snaked its way through the jungle to the top of a hill where the first adventure activity was staged. There we were harnessed in and suspended on a jungle zip-line, a wire on a slight decline, and cast through the jungle foliage and then over a crystal-clear lake at a rapid velocity. As soon as each participant had ridden down the zip-line, we were paired up and assigned kayaks. Once we had all assembled, Emiliano led us on a paddle across the very lake we had just zip-lined over. Paddling through the reeds while howler monkeys cried overhead gave our group a direct encounter with this jungle topography: we were criss-crossing over and through the harsh terrain faced by the explorers of the past. After paddling the span of the lake we ditched our kayaks at an embankment and climbed up into the jungle. Here we started a twenty to thirty-minute hike through the jungle brush—throughout which our guide pointed out certain geographic and botanical factoids about the Yucatán’s jungle—this is a rubber tree, that one a gum tree, these flowers help to heal cuts. The scorching heat and high humidity made the hike seem much longer than perhaps it was. The hike, while interesting and to a certain extent fun, was not a pleasant stroll through the woods. Rather it was an arduous hike over undulating terrain, the path not well manicured but a trail of rough dirt, covered rock, vines and branches dangling overhead which we would occasionally have to duck under. The oppressive heat and humidity beating down on me, from my perspective, this scramble highlighted not only the foreignness but also the hostility of the jungle. In a way, this trek was reminiscent of the travels of the conquistadors several centuries ago: a bunch of sweaty, sunburned Westerners hiking our way through an unknown landscape. Here the hostility

of the environment reinforced the point that *this was their*—the Maya’s—place; tourists, Westerners, do not belong here.

These adventure-themed activities (following after our exploration of Cobá) are all nature-centric and involve touristic travels within and through the omnipresent jungle landscape. Our guided movements through the jungle, by their very nature, reenact the explorations and adventures of previous explorers: what the tour-goer perceives and what we do during these components of the tour is always contextualized by the jungle’s exotic in situ staging. The (Mayan) jungle plays the exotic and hostile backdrop to adventure and it is our toured mobilities— via zip-line, kayak or on our own feet—through the harsh landscape that reactivates and reperforms this narrative. These reenactments of adventure and exploration are animated in the tour group’s travels precisely because these tours *are* through a jungle. In this way, the jungle is not just a museum exhibit, presenting direct proof of the landscape’s alterity, but an interactive exhibit—a staging—of this alterity: without the wild and exotic jungle, no adventure or discovery is possible. Therefore, the tourist sees and experiences the jungle, animated by the adventure tour, as a representation—a formation—of alterity and assigns the landscape uncharted, unfamiliar and exotic characteristics ripe for touristic exploration.

The second interactive exhibit, the second act, of the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour is also set in the exotic and unforgiving landscape but changes the focus of its display to the representation of the magical and spiritual realm of (ancient and current) Mayan culture. This takes place before and in the entranceway to the Mayan otherworld: a cenote. Mayan spirituality here is a performance of Mayan culture and is represented in two ways: first through a cleansing ritual that tourists witness and/or partake in (which I described in my introduction), and later through the revelation of the cenote itself as a form

of Mayan sacred place. Staged in situ and in context with each other, both the cleansing ritual and the cenote itself become representative objects—metonymic fragments—of Mayan culture that the adventuring tourist gets to encounter.

Typically a cenote is a sinkhole with exposed edges leading down to the waterways below, but cenotes do appear in other formations—as caves, as pits and as cracks in the bedrock that lead down to underground waterways. As Quetzil E. Castañeda explains, the ancient Maya viewed this subterranean network as a relay to and from their spiritual underworld: “As portals to the underworld and the ancestral deities and heroes, these liminal topoi are populated by spirits, sacred beings, beauty, dangers, winds, and magical powers” (266). As access points to the Mayan gods, cenotes also acted as sites of human sacrifice and human remains have been found in many of the Yucatán’s underground cave systems. The spiritual significance of cenotes to the Maya peoples in addition to the wealth of archaeological investigation have made these cave systems important images and sites within the Riviera Maya. The cenote, states Castañeda, “figure[s] prominently in the imagining of Yucatán and of the Maya, not only from the academic fetishization of the problem of water in a riverless landscape, but as the home of Chak, the rain god” (266). Consequentially, cenotes and their spiritual significance are highlighted in touristic discourses, and the chance to explore, spelunk and swim in a cenote has become a significant part of many tourist-excursions. This Western fetishization of the cenote combined with their spiritual significance to the Maya, means cenotes have become sites that perform Mayan spirituality and stages upon which Mayan culture is performed.

Our group’s hike through the jungle ended at a circular clearing at the top of a hill where a fire burned in the center and two Mayan villagers greeted us. This was, aside from the guide we met at Cobá, the first face-to-face meeting with a *real* Mayan that we had during the tour. A small cave opening up out of

the ground at the far end of the clearing indicated the entrance to the cenote. Emiliano asked us to gather around the fire in a circle and told us that before being permitted into the cenote (to enter their sacred space) our group had to be cleansed and purified by a Mayan priest. The Mayan shaman blessed and cleansed each of the members of our group one at a time: the priest, dressed in contemporary clothes it should be noted, allowed the thick but sweet smoke from a torch of burning incense to drape over our torsos and limbs, all the while reciting chants. Here our group was not only witness to this display of Mayan spiritual practice, but we were participants in it as well.

Once the Mayan priest or *medicine man* (a term used by our guide) had purified our group, we were permitted entry into the cenote itself. The small mouth of the cave grew into to a much larger subterranean cavern, its limestone walls decorated with numerous stalactites and stalagmites. A wooden staircase, lit by dim electric lights, led down to a large pool of cold and inviting water below. Small openings peppered across the cenote's ceiling cast small pillars of light down into the pool which, when combined with the small amount of man-made lighting, illuminated the subterranean features of the cave. The water level in the pool below was abnormally high due to the heavy rains brought by Hurricane Katrina. The man-made and natural lighting from above made the pool of water seem like the top of an endless abyss, and no bottom of the cavern was discernable. While swimming, I could imagine just how the Maya came to understand the cenotes as both the beginning of and the end of life itself. We knew from our tour of Cobá that the Ancient Maya used cenotes as places of worship and as sites of sacrifice. Could it be that the ancient Maya worshipped in this very cave? Did they commit acts of human sacrifice here? We knew that the cenote was still a place of Mayan spirituality. Was this chamber alive with the souls, the spirits of the past?

This in situ display of Mayan culture is composed of multiple performances and stagings. First is the supposedly named “traditional Maya purification ceremony” (*Alltournative.com*) in which the Mayan priest performs an exotic spiritual practice. The second is the tourist performing the part of fellow spiritual practitioner, taking part in and observing this spiritual initiation ceremony along with the Mayan priest. At the same time, the tourist, having completed the adventure themed activities through the wild and hostile jungle, here also performs the role of the objective, scientific witness/discoverer of this unfamiliar and exotic cultural practice—including, as I note below, documenting this ritual. Underlying this whole encounter, of course, are the scriptural and performative economies that ultimately structure, script and enact the performative roles of the tourist and Maya. This particular encounter, then, is a complex and layered series of cultural performances and representations that can now be examined further.

I noticed that while the priest carried out his rite, our American tour companions took photographs and videos of his performance. Rather than looking at the ceremony as it was happening in real time, they instead watched the ceremony as it occurred through their video-recorders’ and cameras’ viewfinder. Likewise, while in the cenote, I took pictures of the stunning calcite formations that dropped down from the cave’s ceiling, of the light casting its rays through the water and of the blackness of the abyss leading to nowhere. I also took pictures of my tour companions under the water as evidence that they had swum in a cenote. Using our cameras, both my American tour companions and I were, in turn, capturing and archiving a record of this Mayan spirituality and exoticism.

By staging Mayan culture first as enacted in the body of a Mayan spiritual practitioner and then as embodied in a sacred place, the tour fixes and casts Mayan alterity as intrinsically (and spiritually) connected to and a part of the land.

While the tour participants are a part of this spiritual cleansing ceremony—the ones being initiated—they are also the Western, objective observers of this rite. That is, they are never fully committed to this performance since they must always play the part of scientific explorer. This can be seen in the simple act of archiving this Mayan performance through the use of a camera or video camera. This form of surveillance acts as an apparatus to capture the museum display—it fixes the gaze—thereby structuring the view seen through the viewfinder as a panoramic, and in-context representation of Mayan spiritual mystery. This not only places the ritual and the cenote into a photographic two-dimensional image, it, more importantly, places the Mayan body against a foreign backdrop, structuring—or reinforcing—both as inherently Other: “The Pure Maya is trapped in a museum diorama as the philosophical-theocratic savage” (Castañeda 171). The dioramic image captured by the tourist—Mayan spiritual practice in a Mayan landscape—presents this Mayan spiritual practitioner as proof of a real, authentic Mayan spirituality.

It is important to note that during this ceremony our guide was silent and made no attempt to translate the priest’s words. Before the ceremony, Emiliano described the ritual as a “cleansing,” a standard custom for anyone who enters a cenote, be it Maya or tourist, but this was the only explanation that our tour group received. Whether intentional or not, the lack of interpretation or translation during the ceremony helped stage and highlight the ritual’s exotic, mysterious and sacred nature. It also reinforced this ceremony’s sense of authenticity: to explain the ritual, to narrativize it, would be to eliminate its liminal power. It is also important to point out that the Mayan priest also blessed Emiliano since he also entered the cenote with us and swam in its cool waters. The Mayan shaman and his assistant, on the other hand, did not enter the cenote. This made Emiliano one of us: he was, like us, an outsider, a witness to this indigenous spirituality.

The “mystic cenote,” as it is called at *Alltournative.com*, is an imagined, produced space, inscribed with notions of Mayan sacredness by a series of Western imaginings and interpretations, it also performs this sacredness in the physical features of the cave. These Western imaginings have a long history: numerous archaeological excavations of cenotes have produced a record of these sites as places for both human sacrifice and human burial. For example, Quetzil E. Castañeda notes that, concurrent with the initial excavations of Chichen Itzá, archaeologist E. H. Thompson dredged the nearby “Sacred Cenote” between 1904 and 1910, turning up numerous Mayan artifacts and bones which were then displayed in American museums—notably the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University (111-114). Recent excavations have continued to focus on Mayan artifacts and human remains, always marking the cenote’s dual use as a site of sacrifice and burial (Vesilind). According to these archaeologists, the Maya would send offerings in times of drought or hardship to Chaac¹⁵, their god of rain (and water). These offerings took numerous forms, from pieces of jewelry, food, clay vessels and polished stones to victims of human sacrifice (Romey). This archaeological record is also supported in the historical record, as noted by Bishop Diego de Landa in his report on the Yucatán, originally published in 1566:

Into this well it was their custom to cast living men as a sacrifice to the Gods in times of drought; and it was their belief that they did not die, although they never saw them any more. They also threw in many other things of precious stone and articles which they highly prized. (qtd. in Romey)

Accordingly our Western discursive record has always imagined and interpreted these caves as sites of Mayan burial and sacrifice and as gateways to the Mayan

15. Alternative spelling of Chaac are Chac, Chak and in classic Mayan, Chaahc.

otherworld. Tourism has taken these Western imaginings and established an industry around encountering these sacred and otherworldly Mayan spaces: they have become part of complicated imagery that makes up the Mayan Riviera.

Here a piling of discourses has rendered these sinkholes, caves and caverns part of the Mayan experience, and, for the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour participants, the cenote becomes a site, a stage, in which to encounter and discover the magical and spiritual world of the Maya. For tour goers, the simple act of swimming is not only a negotiation of an unfamiliar and wholly remarkable place, but it also the reenactment of Western discursive practice's excavation and exploration of these spaces. In this way, the purification ceremony we tourists participated in prior to even entering the cenote acts as prologue that casts our belief that this cenote, and all cenotes, were and are sacred Mayan spaces. When added to the fact that the tour participant is already performing the role of adventurer, the cenote itself is always already a space of magical Mayan alterity. Here our actions in the cenote—climbing down the rickety staircase, swimming in the water, seeing the otherworldly rock formations—“becomes an art of mapping the surfaces of features” of this mystical Mayan cavern (Castañeda 171). Swimming, which operates very much in contrast to the ancient Maya's use of the cenote, becomes a safe way to tourists to encounter this Mayan spiritual realm. Moreover, swimming in the cenote's waters beckons to very specific *Christian* tradition and initiation ceremony—baptism. Whether intentionally staged as such or not, tour participants could perceive the act of swimming in the cenote as a hybridized initiation ceremony as the tourist is blessed with the mystical and sacred waters of the mysterious Maya. It is this imaginary construction of the cenote as a mystical place, and the Western fetishization of this exotic spirituality that enables tour-goers to play the role of adventurer/discoverer.

The third exhibit or act of the tour stages Mayan culture and the jungle

as intertwined parts of a larger, Mayan world. This part of the tour starts off with yet another adventure-themed activity—rappelling down a cliff into a pool of water below—but rather than taking place in the jungle, it takes place in the centre of Pac-Chén. Immediately following this activity is a dinner of Mayan food prepared and served by the village’s women. The first event displays the Maya people’s inherent connection to their natural environment (and also stages the natural environment’s inherent connection to the Maya). The second installation continues this motif by making tour participants actual (literal) consumers of this relationship as they eat the food made from local, indigenous ingredients. Both activities, however, also serve as reenactments of the Western adventurer’s mastery over the hostile and savage Mayan environment, ultimately completing the tour’s narrative script.

After we visited the cenote, our guide Emiliano drove us into the town of Pac-Chén, a village made up of numerous palapas. Encircled by the jungle surroundings, a large ravine even cut right through the middle of the village, water trickling along the bottom of it, some collecting in large pools and some flowing through. We disembarked from the van and made our way over to the ravine’s edge, about 15 meters from where we parked. The ravine itself was mostly overgrown with vegetation, and while most of the sides had eroded with age, their crumbling walls leading gently down to the bottom, parts of the ravine were still characterized by overhangs and cliffs in which lead straight to the bottom. We stopped at a caldera shaped cliff about 15 to 20 meters high, dropping down to a pool of water below. At the top, a wooden structure had been set up overreaching the cliff, dangling ropes down. Near this wooden construction was a palapa, which contained harnesses of differing sizes available for our use. Emiliano briefed us on the techniques of rappelling while we got outfitted with our harnesses (with help from some of the village’s men). We would each rappel

down this cliff in turn and be caught at the bottom by two villagers awaiting our arrival, one standing in the water and another in a plastic, two-seat kayak. The first villager would make sure that we landed sturdily in the boat, and the second villager would paddle us to a landing nearby where we would climb a steep slope back up. There we could visit a series of palapas in the main square and peruse the crafts made and sold by the local villagers as we waited for dinner to begin.

While rappelling down the cliff into a pool of turquoise water was a fun and adrenaline producing experience, what I remember most vividly from this activity was my view from the bottom of the ravine looking up to the Mayan village above. Here I could see the roofs of these palapas poking out of the thick jungle surroundings and the ravine as it cut its way through the village. In a sense, at the bottom of this ravine, I was able to see the museum exhibit—the stage—of Pac-Chén in context; that is, I was able to see the people and culture that comprised this exotic jungle setting panoramically, as a totalizing but also hierarchizing whole. The timing of this event as one of the last activities of our tour appropriately—although perhaps not purposefully—linked both the exploration and adventure aspects of the nature and wilderness focused activities with the spiritual and cultural aspects at the cenote. That is, it staged the adventure aspects from the first act of the tour *in context* with the cultural aspects of the second act by performing both nature-adventure and exotic culture in the village of Pac-Chén.

By rappelling down the cliff in the middle of Pac-Chén, the tour literally appropriates Mayan space and refashions it as (Western) adventured space. The act of rappelling down a cliff is in no way a Mayan tradition or a part of contemporary (or even ancient) Mayan culture. Rather, rappelling is largely a (Western) activity associated with adventure and fitness pursuits: mountain climbing, ice climbing, cliff jumping. This interactive installation takes a Western

adventure/fitness activity and places it into a larger narrative of jungle venturing. The act of rappelling restages the explorations of the European conquistadors and recycles it in this modernized adventure context: here the tourists literally descend upon the middle of the village. Another interesting thing to note is that rappelling down a cliff is significantly easier than climbing up. Here the tours use the act of rappelling because it fulfills its adventure role and has a certain element of danger or risk, but does not require any expertise and requires very little physical effort: it is adventure easily accomplished.

Emiliano led us to a large wooden gazebo in the village's square with wooden picnic tables and a serving counter. He then introduced us to the women of the village who had prepared our meal. Emiliano revealed to us that, while the men helped out with the running and the facilitation of the tour, their wives remained in the village preparing the meal for the tour's final component and this way all villagers benefited from the tour's regimen. Emiliano introduced and described each dish briefly and also acted as an intermediary between our group and the Mayan women had we any questions for them. The meal itself consisted of many Mexican food staples: rice, beans, tortillas, which appeared mostly as sides, and all of which, Emiliano reported, were grown and made locally. The main dishes were pork, chicken and beef—not exactly exotic meats—but again they were seasoned with local herbs and spices and prepared using traditional Mayan techniques¹⁶. Interestingly, rather than providing a breakdown of ingredients or an overview of Mayan cooking practices, Emiliano often focused on how we as strangers to the region (and non-Mexicans) might respond to it: when describing a spicy green sauce, he told us, “It burns going in, and it burns going out.” Perhaps he did not know or was not interested in these cooking

16. Emiliano told us that the food was prepared using traditional ingredients and cooking techniques specific to the Maya of this region. Although I'm sure that the ingredients were all locally sourced—grown in and around Pac-Chén—determining to what extent the preparation and cooking techniques were *authentically* Mayan is a more difficult problem.

techniques, but it is interesting to note that this meal was not explicitly staged as an informative/infographic display of Mayan culture.

Either way, Emiliano's overview is still a part of this third interactive exhibition and, implicitly, it is still part of the tour's overall performance of Mayan alterity. This is because the food, regardless of the apparatus and techniques of display, still performs the role of Mayan culture and we, as dinner guests, became literal consumers of this exhibit. The food prepared, cooked and served by the women villagers using local herbs, peppers, fruits and spices, became objective proof of the Mayan villagers' ties to their land. Here they had used ingredients found in the same hostile and savage (but also beautiful) environment that we had hiked, paddled, zip-lined and rappelled through. They, the Maya, had adapted to this harsh environment and even used it to their advantage, making a full and delicious meal. Moreover, the dinner, while serving up Mayan culture as food, also acted as a meeting point between us tourist interlopers and the Mayan Villagers. That is, while our group was sitting in the town square's gazebo and eating the food, we were always in the presence of these women and we were able to talk and ask them questions (through Emiliano as translator). Here their language and their traditional colourful dress combined with the food they served, when staged in the context to their village and the wild jungle surrounding it, always cast these villagers as the exotic Maya. Whether intentionally or not, these Mayan women were playing the characters of the *mysterious Mayan women*. Here our vantage point from the middle of Pac-Chén had a similar panoramic and totalizing effect to my perspective from the bottom of the ravine: it put into perspective, it displayed in context the mysterious Maya culture and hostile Mayan landscape.

There is, however, a more ominous side to this third and final act whereby our activities about and around the village of Pac-Chén also structure and fix

colonial relations between the Mayan Other and the tourist adventurer. I mention above that the views from the bottom of the ravine and from the centre of the village stage that village and the Maya who inhabit it *in context* with the jungle that surrounds them. I use this description deliberately because in context displays both stage and hierarchize the cultural status and authority of those viewing the display or performance and those being viewed. The tourist, here, always plays the role of adventurer, encounterer and objective observer of these numerous representations of Mayan alterity: that is, throughout the tour, they are provided with these in-context stagings of the imaginary and hyperreal mysterious Mayan world. Throughout the tour, participants get to see this staged setting from in context and panoramic perspectives: first from the top of Nohoch Mul in Cobá, then from the bottom of the ravine in Pac-Chén, and lastly from the center of the village. Here the tour stages the character of the Maya as an essentialized native body, at home with and belonging to nature, at the same time that it writes the tourist as an objective observer to this cultural alterity by granting the tour participant the authority to explore and witness this unfamiliar and indigenous world.

This representation is partly accomplished through mobilities: while the tourists are highly mobile and move from exhibit to exhibit, the Maya, it seems, are always stuck in their spot, helping and assisting us as we go about our adventurous activities but never moving along with us or touring alongside us. The Mayan shaman, after all, did not swim in the cenote with us, and the women of the village did not eat dinner with us. In the end, we were the ones travelling through, exploring and adventuring through their land. This establishes a paradoxical status of the tourist whereby the tourist both performer and spectator—a performer reenacting the narratives of discovery and a spectator and a witness to the Maya's exotic jungle sedentary life. That is, we the tourists had

the cultural agency to explore and discover the strange and exotic Mayan world, of which Mayan culture and Mayan people are a part. Accordingly, this tour stages and we as tourists perform and/or reenact the colonial Western narratives of exploration, discovery and ultimately conquest. However, as I will point out in Chapter Four, this colonizer-colonized relationship between tour-goer and Mayan Other is itself but a performance; moreover I will discuss how this staged relationship ultimately breaks down under the weight of the tourist's colonial ambivalence and the scenario's partial representation of alterity.

Chapter 4

“This Palapa Has a Flatscreen!”: Mapping the roles of Tourist and Maya in the Cobá Mayan Village Tour

Whereas the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour frames Mayan alterity as the mysterious and mystical Maya by employing certain tourist as adventurer/explorer narratives, the Cobá Mayan Village tour represents the Maya as authentically real by placing Mayan otherness and tourist familiarity in context with each other—it places these two performances in the same framework. In this instance, the Mayan Village and its inhabitants become an interactive museum display that stages the holistic, exotic and mysterious everyday world of the contemporary Maya. This cultural identity is contrasted with that of the tourist, who not only tours as a technologized, ephemeral and modern(ized) visitor, but is also the one granted tour-goer/exhibit-viewer status. Here the tourist’s non-quotidian travels and touristic state-of-being are framed and structured in contrast to the representation of Mayan alterity through the display of their exotic everyday life.

The Cobá Mayan Village tour writes a discovery narrative into the tourist’s encounter with and experiences of the everyday exotic Mayan existence presented to them. Discovery takes the form of the (usually North American) tour-participant seeing, witnessing and experiencing a wholly new and unfamiliar way of living on a highly intimate, detailed (and voyeuristic) scale: a rare peek into the lives of the *real* Maya. The interaction between tourist and Maya constructs both as opposable identities. Here the exotic, everyday Maya and the familiar but ephemeral tourist are constructed vis-à-vis the performance of Mayan quotidian life as holistic, simplistic and all-natural and through the tour-goer’s interaction with and response to this representation.

First started in 1994, the Cobá Mayan Village tour—operated by a

company of the same name—aims at “taking visitors to the Mexican Caribbean on an un-forgettable [sic] journey to discover the natural beauty, culture, and history of the Mayan world” (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). This journey begins with a tour of the Cobá ruins, followed by a meal at one of the many buffet style restaurants-cum-artifact vendors that have popped up in the ruins’ general vicinity. After this meal, participants are transported to the eponymous “Mayan Village,” located close to the coastline but further south than Tulum. The village itself is not as large as the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour’s Pac-Chén; rather it is a collection of palapas belonging to two separate Mayan families, spaced apart by about one hundred or so meters of jungle. The tour consists of participants walking through and viewing the series of palapas, animal pens, small fruit and vegetable plantations, and herb and flower gardens that compose each of these two familial spaces. The guide, meanwhile, describes the structure of the palapas, discusses daily Mayan life and work habits—what and how they eat, etc.—essentially telling the tour-goer what it is like to be, or to live as the contemporary indigenous *real* Maya in the geopolitical state of Quintana Roo. The visit to the Mayan village ends with the group thanking the two families and giving gifts of cookies to the children before leaving on the bus. The final item on the itinerary is a stop at a local cenote allowing the group the chance to swim or dip their feet in its cool waters before the group is then driven back to their respective hotels, and the tour ends.

There are two interdependent apparatuses of representation at work within the Cobá Mayan Village tour that guide and mediate both the display of Mayan alterity and the tour-group’s encounters with this exotic otherness. The first apparatus is the method by which the tour produces and maintains its (re)presentation of the *authentic* Maya. Here the twin notions of what I call the *authentically real* and the *really authentic* Maya are constructed and

seen in comparison to other inauthentic, fictitious and kitschy—touristite—representations of the Maya found throughout the region. This tour showcases these markers of and for Mayan authenticity through its display of cultural difference, while coevally, inauthentic “kitschy” characterizations are written onto Mayan representations associated with tourists and tourism. The result is a performative economy in which representations of authenticity come to mark cultural/exotic capital: authentic representations of the Maya are more valuable, more rare and more unique than the inauthentic and touristy representations. The second apparatus at work is the manner in which the tour produces what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls the “theatre of the quotidian” whereby Mayan daily life is presented as an example of—as proof of—the Maya’s exotic otherness. Through this staging, the tour spotlights the pronounced difference between tourist and Maya producing the effect of authenticity: *these* Maya are real because their daily life is, to us, exotic. In this way, the Mayan village is authentically real precisely because it *shows* and *performs* Mayan quotidian life; alternatively, the life and habits of the Maya that the tour-participants witness are their quotidian, everyday existence precisely because this Mayan village is really authentic—or the tourist perceives their performance of everyday life as authentic.

At the same time, this village is an in situ theatre of the quotidian that stages a secondary performance positioning the tourist as a passive (museum) spectator and the Maya as cultural artifact. Here the Maya’s liveness is transformed into inanimateness and become objects signifying their own exotic indigeneity: “Human displays teeter-totter on a kind of semiotic seesaw, equipoised between the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 35). The tourist, on the other hand, is assigned the secondary role as the witness to Mayan daily life and the viewer of these inanimate displays. The tour thus (re)enacts a colonizer-colonized relationship

between those who have the authority to view (voyeuristically) and do so, and those whose private lives are infiltrated. Nevertheless, these ontological characterizations are still a performance. The culturally authoritative tourist and the Maya as a fetishized object are simultaneously fashioned in the fixing of cultural hybridities; here tour-goer as adventurer, as spectator and as voyeuristic observer/visitor are characterizations created at the same time as those of the Maya as everyday exotic, as ancient culture and as sedentary Indian.

I will first discuss the manner in which the Cobá Mayan Village tour, as a theatre of the quotidian, produces Mayan everyday life as a spectacle with the Maya as performers and the tourist as spectator. The theatre of the quotidian is a culture's or a person's everyday life staged for an audience: through this display/performance, "one man's life is another man's spectacle"—a paradox Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls a "genre error" (47). In the Cobá Mayan Village Tour, the scenario of discovery positions the Maya as the performer and their daily life the performance, and places the tourist outside this frame¹⁷. In this way, the "spectacle of everyday life" is a cultural exhibition/theatre presentation that "produce[s] the quotidian as spectacle [...] by building the role of the observer into the structure of events that, left to their own devices, are not subject to formal viewing" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 47).

In the Cobá Mayan Village tour the tourist's encounter with the Maya, which offers a rare look into Mayan day-to-day living, is certainly the focus and main selling point, as indicated by the tour's name. The tour company bills the tour as a Mayan-insider experience, promising tour-goers the chance to meet, experience and witness an authentic Maya people and culture. Here the realness and authenticity of the Maya's quotidian life are highlighted, and the presumably rare opportunity to view such dwellings, traditions and living practices is

17. This is again paradoxical as the tour participant is literally walking through the "frame" or the living quarters at the same time as they are outside it.

packaged and sold as a life-altering experience:

The visit to a real Mayan village, considered by many to be the highlight of the day, is an unforgettable experience. Witness ancient traditions and Mayan cultural heritage still present in today's world. Mayan families welcome you into their homes, showing you aspects of their daily life such as construction, hunting, animals, agriculture, cuisine, religion, weaving and embroidery. [. . .] The contact with the Mayan people opens your heart and your mind, as you discover a world most are unfamiliar with. This experience inspires us to question and reevaluate the way we look at ourselves in relation to the rest of the world.

(Cobámayanvillage.com)

The ideological positioning of the tourist and the Maya that results from this staging—and this genre error for that matter—can only occur in the hybridized space of the scenario. Accordingly, Mayan quotidian life becomes spectacle—becomes the focus of this tour—precisely because it is positioned as the performance of everyday life and the tour-participants are positioned as the audience. In this process, the positional difference between the tourist spectator and the Maya performer simultaneously constructs and reinforces the ontological difference between the gazing “I” and the gazed-at, exotic “them”:

The everyday lives of others are perceptible precisely because what they take for granted is *not* what we take for granted, and the more different we are from each other, the more intense the effect, for the exotic is the place where nothing is utterly ordinary.

(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 48)

In other words, the tour strengthens the oppositional difference between viewer and display. This positioning also highlights the gap between cultural performers

and cultural representation. In this manner, the representation of Mayan life is actually just that: a representation created in, by and for the tour. Paradoxically, this representation takes place in, on and around the actual, non-tourized spaces of the (Yucatec) Mayan villagers. The tour here scripts and performs its own productions of Mayan alterity onto and over these spaces ultimately (re)producing them anew.

The Cobá Mayan Village tour I participated in operates on a larger scale than the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour. My tour group this time around consisted of about 40 mostly English-speaking Canadian participants (there was a small contingent from Quebec), and my immediate tour partner was my girlfriend. We traveled in a large air-conditioned tour bus complete with a bathroom and televisions that introduced the tour and tour company while we were in transit. Our guide spoke Spanish, English and French as well as Yucatec Maya.

This tour presents Mayan life as sedentary, localized, holistic, remote and isolated; after our group departed from the post-Cobá lunch, our tour bus rolled along a narrow roadway that snaked its way through the jungle topography. The village, as far as I could tell, was located near but not along the coast and away from any major tourist developments. On the trip there, our tour bus would occasionally pass by a random collection of brick and wooden structures or a ranch cut out of the landscape but, for the most part, the bus was surrounded by tropical brush and savannah. An occasional car would pass by us, but otherwise we were alone on this jungle roadway. After traveling a significant distance, our bus pulled into a small gravel cul-de-sac marking the entrance to the Mayan Village. Greeting us was the sight of a palapa under construction: a group of men had assembled its skeleton, large logs acting as the frame and smaller logs acting as crossbeams that shaped the structure's steep roof. One man sat on the top of the semi-built palapa connecting the crossbeams to the top ridge. Our guide pointed

out that all work was being done by hand, the Maya men using hammers and handsaws, shovels and axes to build this new structure.

As a site/sight, this opening view of the village is the first exhibit that constructs and displays Mayan alterity by staging it in context with tourist modernity. The tour-participant, upon exiting the comfort of the air-conditioned tour bus, is immediately greeted with not only the heat and humidity of the jungle, but also the enactment of a different and relatively old style of construction that, while familiar, is certainly rarely employed at home. Another marker of alterity is the jungle surroundings, the dense brush enclosing the site and seemingly cutting it off from the outside world; the long and winding bus trip to the village almost acts as a pre-text, each twist and turn through the jungle highlighting this location's remoteness. The Maya themselves, while present in this interactive diorama, remain in the backdrop. Here the Mayan placed on top of the palapa under construction does not represent a Mayan individual but rather acts as an indicator of Mayan traditional building practice. He is playing but a part of this representation of Mayan indigeneity but not acting as the primary representation of it. Our tour group, however, operated with the knowledge that, after we viewed this village, we would return to the conveniences of our respective resorts and, ultimately, our technologically pervasive and modernized homes, far removed from this small and isolated community without electricity or running water. Part of being a tourist and of touring is the ephemeral and transient experience: this is particularly true of the package resort deals that largely operate on a one or two-week length of stay. Thus, the tourist's quotidian, non-touristy life remains a backstory to their touristic existence and an oppositional force to that of the Mayan existence showcased here. In this manner, upon the tourists' arrival and at the point where our group stepped off the bus, the tour had already structured a difference between the tour-goer and the Mayan display as both an essential and

an essentialized condition—an instant differentiation between the tourist “I”—myself and our group—and the Maya “them.”

The second apparatus of display at work within the Cobá Mayan Village tour is the tour’s performance of an *authentically real* display of everyday Mayan living, representing it in contrast to the artifice and inauthenticity complicit with and inherent in the tourist industry. The tour is advertised as an opportunity for participants to “get to know and understand *the real Mexico* in the *Mayan world*” (*Cobámayanvillage.com*, my emphasis). Here the tour’s marketing literature has already named these Maya as a genuine authentic-other by labeling them “real.” The tour reinforces these statements in its guided narration: in transit to the village on our tour bus our guide made sure to mention that *this* particular village was a real Mayan village and that the communities used in other tours were not—they were, in short tourist creations. It is possible that our guide was taking a dig at certain Mayan centers such as Pac-Chén, that have reengineered their daily practices in order to benefit from the tourist economy. Perhaps our guide’s comment can be chalked up to mere advertising—it was in his best interest, after all, to sell this particular village as more real than others. Regardless of his intentions, what is important here is that our guide made a concerted effort to paint this particular village as real and authentic and as different from other “less real” villages in the area. Explicit in these statements and in the tour’s advertising is the notion that in the Riviera Maya there exists authentic and inauthentic, real and fictional, actual and touristy versions of the Maya and Mexico. For there to be a “Mayan world” there must by contrast be a touristy world; in order for there to be a “real Mexico,” there must also be a fake one. However, the terms *authentic Maya* and *real Mexico* are but signposts: they are a self-fulfilling characterization created by and staged in the tour.

This display of authenticity (and inauthenticity)—and the rhetoric around it used by our guide and by the tour’s brochures and website—are all structured within the larger scenario of discovery. Here the search for an authentic (other) culture is at the heart of tourism and the tourist industry since, according to Jonathan Culler, “The idea of seeing the real [place], something unspoiled, how the natives really work or live, is a major touristic *topos*” (161). Discovery here takes the form of the tourist’s quest for an authentic culture: “tourists are largely motivated by a ‘quest for authenticity,’ which is fundamentally a search for cultural difference” (Kroshus Medina 354). The tourist’s quest for authenticity operates both as a framework of and a frame for establishing authentic and inauthentic machinations of otherness as structured by Western discursive practice: “the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristy, is a powerful semiotic operator within tourism” (Culler 161). Consequentially, an object can only be defined as authentic, after all, if there is something inauthentic, to compare it to. Therefore notions of authenticity and inauthenticity only hold meaning in relation to each other: “The authentic is not something unmarked or undifferentiated; authenticity is a sign relation” (Culler 163). Here “the *authentic* is a usage perceived as a sign of that usage, and tourism is in large measure a quest for such signs” (Culler 162). Conversely, the inauthentic and the fictitious can only be marked as such because they are not authentic and real.

The Cobá Mayan Village tour caters to this touristic topos of unspoiled authenticity by establishing itself as an encounter of “the real Mexico” and a “Mayan world,” terms which demarcate the tour’s fidelity to the real (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). Here the touring of an authentically real Mayan village in a really authentic Mexican backdrop can be contrasted with their opposites:

the unreal, touristy Mexico and the fantasy Mayan world¹⁸. In this way the Cobá Mayan Village tour stages this (specific) Mayan village as authentically real—that it is “the real Mexico”—at the same time it implies that other areas and experiences in the Yucatán are fake, false and inauthentic. According to *Cobámayanvillage.com*, this “real Mexico” is located away from the tourist meccas of Cancún, Playa del Carmen and the resorts dotting the Mayan Riviera, and exists only in the small living centers cut out of the jungle, reachable only by rarely traveled dirt roads. Adding to the village’s remote and isolated staging is the fact that it is never named for the tour participants, nor is it marked on a map. Here this tiny village gains an even more real and authentic status precisely because in order to visit it, we—our tour group—literally had to travel off the map: if the village isn’t even marked in our guidebooks, then this village must not be touristic and must therefore be a real and unique experience. The tour shows tour-goers both a real Mexican space and an authentic Mayan village in contrast to the touristy representations of Mexico and Mayaness inherent in the resorts and tourist centers they have left behind. That this village is set in the jungle away from the suburban and boutique styled resorts and golf and country clubs along the coastline reinforces its status as the “real Mexico.”

At the same time, this tour’s *rare* access to the authentic and real Maya imbues the experience with a type of cultural capital. The Cobá Mayan Village tour clearly markets and packages its encounter with the Maya as a rare and unique experience, using phrases such as “as you discover a world most are unfamiliar with” (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). However there is also a contradictory nature to this representation: although perhaps unfamiliar to the tourist, these encounters are not rare when we consider that the tour operates numerous times

18. The Mayan villages which our tour guide dismissed as non-real constructions of Mayan villages created by and for the tourist industry are one example. Another example is the recreation of an (ancient) Mayan village and the performance of the ancient ball game at the X-caret eco- and tourism- park, a place I’ve heard referred to as “Mexico Disney.”

throughout the week and continuously throughout the year. Nevertheless the tour is still billed and presented as such. Accordingly, “rare” and “unique” are signposts and markers—different descriptors—of touristic notions of authenticity that lend additional cultural capital to the tour. These markers always occur in the moment, always telling the tourist that this precise experience is unique and this exact moment is rare. Like the theatre spectator who views a show in that moment, this touristic event is seen and viewed as unique experiences precisely because they occur in that moment, and they have no other frame of reference other than their own presentation.

Given the multiplicity of Mayan representations, performances and products inherent in the region, the use of the word rare to describe the “real Mexico” and the “authentic Mayan Village” indicates instead the rarity of these real and authentic representations in this hyperreal resort mecca. By billing these encounters with the real Maya as rare, the tour assigns a certain value to its representations of the Maya while downplaying/disparaging the representations of other tours or places. In this way, the tour produces and assigns more cultural value, or capital, to its own representations of Mayan alterity. Tourists then pay for the experience, which is more monetarily valuable precisely because it *is* rare and unique.

The touristic desire to find and experience the authentic, the unspoiled and the untarnished—typified here by the Maya’s exoticism—is part of tourism’s (and Western discursive practice’s) desire to define the “us” and the “them” within hybridized space. Here our quest for authenticity is also an escape from touristic falsity, a characterization we apply to our touristic selves. This process is, according to Culler, inherently part of the nature of tourism and of being a tourist: “To be a tourist is in part to dislike tourists (both other tourists and the fact that one is oneself a tourist). [. . .] Tourists can always find someone more touristy

than themselves to sneer at” (158)¹⁹. The tour represents and constructs the exotic Maya by staging *them* as real and authentic, a process that simultaneously establishes a sense of commonality in us, the tourist, by marking *us* as inauthentic and touristy²⁰. Accordingly, an opposing dynamic—a sign relationship—between Maya and tourist is established by the tour’s production of both the representation of an authentically real Maya, and the images of a fake, touristy Maya. The tourist, therefore, confronting an experience thought to be “authentic” has already constructed the fiction of authenticity around it thereby rendering that experience inauthentically authentic, a notion that is inherently paradoxical:

To be truly satisfying the sight needs to be certified, marked as authentic. Without these markers, it could not be experienced as authentic [. . .]. The dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes. (Culler 169)

In other words, the experience of engaging with the authentic Maya is only authentic because the tourist, enacting the tour, constructs it that way.

At the same time, the relationship between authenticity and the inauthentic is also structured vis-à-vis the staging and performance of cultural differences in which estranged, alien and unfamiliar cultural elements are seen as markers for authenticity. Tourists read cultural difference along the binaries of culture/nature,

19. From my personal experiences on the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour, my immediate group and I assigned the role of sneered-at to our American co-participants who uttered phrases such as “Why don’t they just get jobs,” and “They’re so primitive,” referring to the Mayan villagers.

20. Perhaps marked by the tourists’ use of costumes—including but not limited to colourful “Hawaiian style” shirts, sun hats, sunglasses—the appearance of our sun-burnt faces, our use of guidebooks and tourism-related brochures, our constant application of sunscreen, and our use of equipment such as digital and video cameras that are designed to capture memorable moments and scenes but not create them.

modern/ancient, West/the rest, everyday/exotic: “tourists interpret such difference as an indicator of less contamination by contemporary capitalism and thus greater authenticity in relations among people and between people and nature” (Kroshus Medina 354). The tour performs this cultural difference, in the form of the Mayan village, which allows participants to “discover a world most are unfamiliar with” (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). Authenticity demarcates not the village’s realness or non-touristness but actually its exotic staging.

Take as an example my tour-group’s introduction to this village and to its inhabitants: after disembarking the modern and comfortable tour bus, we were instantly standing in the middle of a clearing, a section of dirt and bedrock, surrounded by a number of wood and thatch palapas (including the one that was under construction). Many of us carried cameras, and some carried video cameras. The Mayan men building the palapa, meanwhile, carried hammers and handsaws; later we would see the women displaying textiles hand woven using a homemade, archaic-looking loom. Our tour group, that very morning, woke up in resort hotels furnished with televisions, air-conditioning, electricity, swimming pools, running water and a buffet of “international cuisine” (from sushi to pizza to fajitas) while the Maya of this village cooked their food over an open fire and had no running water. We arrived in a massive tour bus, but the Maya of this village had no vehicles that we could see, save for a couple of bikes leaning against a tree²¹. The Maya, as we saw them once we got off the bus and toured the first collection of palapas belonging to one of the families, were both contemporary people of the jungle and relics of the Mayans past: they showed us the “ancient traditions and Mayan cultural heritage still present in today’s world” (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). At the same time, our tour group represented everything the Maya were

21. It is possible and quite plausible that these Mayan villages had access to a vehicle, but given that some of the men were away that afternoon (our guide mentioned that typically the men fish or work in construction) it is possible that the vehicle was simply not there at the time. Nevertheless, the fact that a vehicle was not there when our tour bus arrived is important.

not: we stayed in high-end resort hotels; used complex photographic and digital technology; traveled by bus, by car, by plane; and had, as tourists, no ancient or old traditions—since a part of modern tourism is to break/escape from quotidian practice and tradition. We would return soon to the hotels (and eventually back home) while the Mayan families would continue to live and exist in the jungle, in the same clearing cut out from the bush. These differences all further reinforced our guide's words that this village was real these villagers the real Maya.

While Culler sees the authentic and the inauthentic as interrelated signs within a system of touristic symbolisms, Quetzil E. Castañeda, looking at the Riviera Maya in particular, furthers this analysis by positing the authentic indigeneity of the Maya as a simulacrum, as “representations based on a constructed image that can only approximate an original that is absolutely not there, that is lost” (104). Accordingly, since the authentic, original Maya is not only lost, and since the “pristine and authentic original never existed,” all displays and performances of the Maya—and thus of the tourist—operate according to a “representational system” which is “ruled by specific criteria and logics of authenticity” (105). The Mayan Village is a (produced) hyperreal space that simulates this authentic Mayan culture and identity only when experienced by the tourist. This isn't to say that there is no Maya or Mayan culture *there*, but it does indicate that the Mayan peoples and culture as an authentic and genuine formation only exists within the framework of this tour: “the real Mexico” is only accessible by purchase and through this specific tour. Authenticity here becomes a way in which tour-participants can read the simulation of Mayan culture.

The tour performs the simulation of Mayan authenticity in the form of Mayan everyday life—the theatre of the quotidian. This staging produces an exotic otherness through the tour's panoptical and voyeuristic methods of display which ultimately position the tourist as surveyor—meant here in the sense of

Foucault's surveillance²²: "In its more problematic manifestations, the panoptic mode has the quality of peep show and surveillance" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 55). Thus the tour establishes a positional dynamic between those who are able to see and view freely and those who are seen and gazed-at. At the same time, the Maya are positioned as museum specimen, the object on display whose performance of quotidian indigeneity symbolizes both an authentically real Otherness and exoticism itself.

Each of the two Mayan families' mothers seemed young, about mid to late-twenties, although at no point during the tour were we told their actual age. Each family had a relatively large number of children²³, aged infant to late-preteen/early teen. The children followed us around the village, often playing amongst themselves but at the same time always watching our group's actions and movements. Some of the children even posed for photographs, almost as if they had been briefed in some of the qualities of good tourist photography: one particular girl, for instance, sat and modeled—for lack of a better term—in the doorway of one of the palapas, framed on each side by the doorway's edges. Numerous members of our group, myself included, took photos. Upon our entrance to each family's space, our guide would yell out a greeting in Yucatec to the family, indicating that the tour of their homes had begun. This act of calling out is similar to a stage-manager calling "places" prior to the beginning of a theatrical performance or even a film director yelling "Action!" prior to the shooting of a scene. At the same time, this call out (or warning) tells the tourist that *this show* is about to begin.

22. According to Foucault, when a medical doctor treats a patient, the medic visits the patient and is permitted to gaze from a position of power and ease at the patient, whose ideological position is of "social powerlessness dis-ease, the gazed at" (qtd. in Urry, 1990: 46). Similarly, when a tourist visits a tourist destination, the tourist visits the touree and is permitted to gaze from a position of power and ease at the unfamiliar place and people, whose ideological position is of social powerlessness and exoticness.

23. I can't remember the exact number of children each family had but a guess would be towards one family having eight children and the other having six or seven.

After witnessing the palapa being constructed, we entered the first family's home. Inside was a large space with no interior walls; this was their living, sleeping and working space, all at once. To the left was the kitchen area, indicated as such by the table peppered with various pots, pans and utensils. Beside the table sat a pot of water, heating over the hot coals of a fire. The fire itself was not isolated or separated from the rest of the house and it gave the palapa a distinctively smoky smell. A number of stumps had been assembled as stools around another table, showing where the family ate their food. On the right side of the palapa was the family's living and working space. Here, our guide said, the mother uses a primitive loom to weave a hammock. Our guide also told us that, during the day, while the fathers are out fishing or working construction jobs, the women of the households use this space to weave hammocks, blankets and other textiles that they then sell to various *vendedores* (vendors) who, in turn, sell them to tourists. At night, the family reconditions the space for sleep by using hammocks, hung from the rafters, as beds. Indeed, as we walked through this dwelling, some hammocks were stashed above, overtop of the cross-beams.

Here the panoptic mode of representation seems "benign" in that it "takes the form of hospitality, a host welcoming a guest to enter a private sphere" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 55). This "benign" form of panoptic display is illustrated in the language from the tour's website which portrays this encounter as *invitational*: to repeat the quote from the tour's website cited above: "Mayan families *welcome you into their homes*, showing you aspects of their daily life such as construction, hunting, animals, agriculture, cuisine, religion, weaving and embroidery" (*Cobámayanvillage.com*, my emphasis). The tour group's invitation to walk literally through the living spaces of the Mayan families gives the tour-goer the authority to view—it positions them as a spectator authorized to gaze at—Mayan alterity while relegating the Maya to the role of the live specimen.

Our tour group then moved on to the second Mayan family's living arrangements, located further into the jungle. This dwelling area seemed even more traditional than the first one we visited: Whereas the first family's space existed largely in a clearing, there seemed less distinction between living space and jungle space in the second family's territory. Further adding to the scene of traditional village life were the numerous chickens and hens that clambered around the grounds. Additionally, the palapas here were smaller than the previous family's and that there were fewer of them²⁴. As we made our way to their main palapa, our guide pointed out the orange and *limon* (lime) trees that dotted their land and herbs and flowers growing out of planters refashioned from tree stumps. While some of the children had followed us from the first settlement to the second—or had already made their way there while we were touring the inside of their house—a couple of new faces greeted us: about three children belonging to the second family had climbed into a small tree to view our arrival. After watching our group for a while, they continued playing, climbing and dangling from the branches. Again several members of our group, myself included, took photos of these Maya children playing in the trees.

Our group, led by our guide, then entered into the large palapa dedicated to the family's sleeping (and working) arrangements. Much like the first family's palapa, this one had a series of hammocks hanging over the crossbeams, ready to be used come nighttime. Our guide pointed out a hammock or blanket, half finished, and currently being worked on by the family's matriarch. Attached to this main room was a smaller alcove that exited to the back constructed out of wood and old, discarded cardboard. This was the family's kitchen, consisting of their stove: an open pit of coal, over which hung a large cauldron of food, and around which sat numerous pots and pans lying surreptitiously on the floor. On

24. The first family we visited had three larger palapas and one under construction while the second family had only two.

the other side stood a small but modern kitchen table, upon which sat a dish rack full of dishes and utensils drying in the air. The floor of the kitchen, like that of the main palapa, was dirt and bedrock. No trace of gas, power or running water was evident here, and while there were traces of modernity present in the table and in some of the dishes, pots and pans in the kitchen, as a display of Mayan daily life, one could imagine this scene—this particular living area—as not too different from those of the Maya’s past.

This tour takes a panoptical slant towards museum display: the “panoptic approach offers the chance to see without being seen, to penetrate interior recesses, to violate intimacy” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 55). Whereas at Cobá and in Pac-Chén participants are able to view the Mayan world panoramically, forming and (re)informing a totalizing view of their alterity, the Mayan Village tour presents a panoptic and voyeuristic proof of the Mayan Other that occludes the tourist from the meaning-making process: “In contrast with the panoramic perspective of all-encompassing classifications, in-situ approaches to the display of the quotidian work in a panoptic mode whereby the viewer sees without himself being visible” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 54). This turns the performance of Mayan everyday living into a *live/interactive* museum display—albeit one that is nevertheless still a performance. By fashioning Mayan quotidian life as the museum object, the tour erases the apparatus of cultural representation from the frame and removes the status of cultural performer from the Maya, rendering them instead a cultural artifact (object signifying cultural difference):

Live displays, whether re-creations of daily activities or staged as formal performances, also create the illusion that the activities you watch are being done rather than represented, a practice that creates the effect of authenticity, or realness. The impression is one of unmediated [or authentic] encounter. Semiotically, live displays

make the status of the performer problematic, for people become signs themselves. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 55)

The Maya here are no longer cultural performers but objects signifying a *real* and *authentic* Mayan alterity. On the other hand, the tour-goer's own position as spectator/witness to the performance of Mayan quotidian life is also obscured and the participant becomes a producer and consumer of museum display. In this way, the Cobá Mayan Village tour erases the positions of *both* the Mayan as a performer of culture and the tourist as audience spectator and instead fashions these two identities as museum/tour-goer and museum object. This reverses the cultural agency inherent in the original dynamic: the Maya change from the ones performing and displaying to the ones being displayed and staged by the tour's mechanisms; likewise the tourist changes from witness/spectator to museum-goer, actively producing and consuming these displays.

Within this tour, the act of gazing—and the question of who is looking at whom—denotes and marks positions of cultural authority. Here the ability to look panoptically and/or panoramically authorizes the cultural supremacy of the tour participants, who are not only free to move as they please and experience the Mayan village as an interactive exhibit, but also have the financial means to do it: “Domination depends on maintaining a unidirectional gaze and stages the lack of reciprocity and mutual understanding inherent in discovery” (Taylor 2003: 64). As mentioned above, this structure of cultural domination takes the benign forms of “being invited” to witness the day to day lives of the real, actual Maya and to encounter, explore and experience the mysterious and ancient Mayan jungle world. While benign in nature, the tour is ultimately built around our authority and unlimited access to view the Mayan peoples and their world. The crux here is that our authority and access are not granted through invitation but through monetary transaction: they are bough—cultural authority purchased through

financial superiority. Moreover, we, as tour-goers, ultimately know that we are in this superior position because we enact it in our tourist mobilities. In both tours, tour participants are always the ones on the move: they are always mobile (and often motorized). At each stop, we are allowed to view these various Mayan sites, whether the Cobá ruins, a cenote or the living area of the Mayan household. We are permitted to walk through the house of a Mayan family and blessed and cleansed in order to swim and experience the sacred underground Mayan world of the cenote. We understand that we are ultimately infiltrators entering into the private living and sacred spaces of the Maya.

Further heightening our position of cultural authority is the fact that we were allowed to photograph these sights/sites and archive our (touristic) experiences there. We were, in the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour, able to take photographs and record video during the Mayan purification ceremony—perhaps disrupting its original purpose, perhaps not. In the Cobá Mayan Village tour, we photographed the women assembling a hammock and the children playing in a tree. The Mayans on the other hand, during both tours, did not take pictures of us, did not swim in the cenote alongside us, and did not eat with us (when we had dinner in Pac-Chén). Rather, they showcased their cultural and positional difference by performing the purification ceremony, cooking us dinner, showing us their houses and simply by *performing* for us the infiltrators/spectators. Moreover, the Maya were always relegated to and staged in that place: while we were free to move from exhibit to exhibit, from tourist mecca to Mayan village, from tour bus to the top of Nohoch Mul, the Maya were always portrayed as set in that place and in that time. Always in these tour displays and touristic encounters, “the ‘primitive’ body as object reaffirms the cultural supremacy and authority of the viewing subject, the one who is free to come and go (while the native stays fixed in place and time), the one who sees, interprets, and records”

(Taylor 2003: 64). Accordingly, the tourists' supposed fixed gaze—always at and on the Maya—follows the diachronic panoptical gaze of domination inherent within colonizer-colonized encounters.

However, it is important to note that this touristic cultural supremacy, like that of the colonizer over the colonized, is in fact also a performance: a (re) enactment of cultural positioning scripted by the tour's narrativized spaces and by the tourist's desire to understand and know the exotic Maya. This, in turn, feeds back into the tour in the form of reified and rearticulated knowledge regarding the perception of cultural difference and the representation of the Maya as Other(ed). This transformation happens at the moment of cultural differentiation, what Homi Bhabha calls the moment of cultural enunciation in which cultural identities are fixed and formed but at the same time so too are irreconcilable tensions between these two positions:

It is the very authority of culture as a knowledge of referential truth which is at issue in the concept and moment of *enunciation*. The enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance. (Bhabha 51)

It is the (Western) tourists' demands for an identifiable, readable and ultimately reliable Other that formulates and fixes their notion of the mysterious Maya, and it is this cultural representation—a product of Western desire—that is *staged* in these tours. The tour authorizes this position of cultural authority and at the same time authors the Maya's position of Othered object. However, because

these colonial encounters homogenize cultural identities, the tour also produces an underlying tension between the gazer and gazed at in which the dominance of the gazer is prevalent but not total, allowing for moments of cultural (representational) breakdown and the fracturing of this gaze.

The crux, the wrinkle, of this tourist and Maya dynamic—the encounter between spectator and performer, gazer and gazed-at, the us and the them—is that it is founded primarily upon an ambivalence—the same ambivalence that Homi Bhabha states is at the center of the relationship between colonizer and colonized (86). In the case of the Cobá Mayan Village tour, what the tour-goer takes to be a real, live example of Mayan quotidian life is actually only a spectacle that mimics these Maya’s non-toured everyday living. The Maya’s performance of their authentically real quotidian existence—what these tours stage as Mayan—operates primarily on a mimic and mimetic level in which the presentation of Mayan culture, Mayan community and Mayan life is repeated *almost the same, but not quite*, for tourist viewings. Here the process of cultural homogenization—what Bhabha calls a “discourse of mimicry” and the “desire for a reformed, recognizable Other”—is always “constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86). The Maya’s presentation of their daily life, day after day, for tour groups is essentially mimetic as it repeats but always changes. Accordingly they repeat and reconstruct their own exoticness in a way that is “*almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 122). Here tour participants overlook these representational slippages that appear in the forms of presentational incongruencies due to the touristic desire to maintain a fixed gaze/experience of the exotic Other:

Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the

inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers. (Bhabha 86)

In this way, not only do tour participants (mis)recognize spectacle as real life, but they also ambivalently (mis)read the tour’s showcasing of cultural differentiation as absolute proof cultural authenticity. Here the desire to cast, see and receive the Maya as really authentic overlooks the fact that no such designation exists: “The desire to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry—through a process of writing and repetition—is the final irony of partial representation” (Bhabha, 88).

Another ambivalence emerges in the fact that the tour-participants are always cast as the ones viewing the Maya, experiencing the Mayan world and exploring the real Mexico without recognizing their own role in this performance. Tourists are all willing to see the Maya in the role of the local inhabitant, the jungle dweller, the ancient culture—both example of indigeneity and the proof of cultural alterity—but they never acknowledge that these representations only occur in the frame of the tour. Here the scenario foregrounds the Maya’s role of the cultural Other and occludes the tourist’s equal part in this process of cultural differentiation: “Their present, as well as their presence, is deferred by the scenario” (Taylor 2003: 60-61). This positional dynamic is itself a construction, fashioned both by the tour and through the scriptural and performative economies that govern it: “Not only is the artifact-image a function of the visibility, legibility, and intelligibility that is effected by the scriptural economy of the writing pad, but *so is the general field of vision* within this and any museum tourist attraction” (Castañeda 125). The irony here, of course, is that while the tourist is assigned a particular authority to view, see and survey, it exists only within the framework that is the scenario of discovery; this cultural superiority/supremacy is itself

manufactured within the process of cultural differentiation. As Bhaba states, “The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation” (50-51). In this manner, not only are all fields of vision, all viewing and gazing, effectively staged and performed within the tour itself but so too are all the images, identities and displays produced by this view. Colonial ambivalence comes into play here because the tour itself relies on the constant reification and replication of the same (familiar) cultural identities and colonial positions though out its itinerary in order to maintain its performance/production of cultural domination and panoptical positioning. In this way, tour goers must always experience the authentically real Maya and the really authentic Mayan village as a semblance staging the Maya’s ancient and mysterious past and their sedentary, primitive present.

When elements of the tour do not fall into these categories—when the binarized dynamic between the familiar “us” and the exotic “them” is no longer exact or intact—the tour necessarily covers these representational breakdowns in the form of blind spots (formed within or under the guise of colonial ambivalence). Whereas the Mayan village and the Maya who inhabit it are supposed to represent an exotic alterity, certain elements of their presentation, parts of this tour, did not fit this bill. For example, while introducing our tour group to the Mayan families that made up the village, our guide told us that these two families subsisted largely autonomously. They grew, cultivated or caught what they needed to eat, they constructed their own houses from materials found in the jungle, they wove textiles that they used as clothes or for sleeping, and they remained largely uninfluenced/unaffected by the crass commercialism found in the tourist region north of them. At the same time, however, we knew that his statement was not, and could not, be true. Numerous elements in the village

did not fit the guide's description of an entirely self-supported and untouched Mayan population: rather than the traditional thatch roofing found on palapas, this particular palapa, belonging to the first family we visited, used corrugated metal sheets. Additionally, while the women of the village wore homemade clothing, the men working on the palapa simply wore jeans and t-shirts; the children too wore clothes branded with popular contemporary North American children's characters such as Spongebob Squarepants and Spiderman. Nevertheless, our tour group was willing to forgive these contradictions or ignore them—they were, perhaps, just narrative error, a mistake made by our guide.

We were able to erase from vision these contradictory and problematic images thanks to the panoptical view afforded to us in the tour; such a view/vision by its very nature is able to cover-up—adapt to—the slippages inherent in the representation of authenticity. Bhabha reminds us, after all, that such a “synchronic panoptical vision of domination” (a concept taken from Foucault) operates in terms of fixed identities, yet is continually forced to acknowledge but at the same time overlook change: “The look is on the side of the diachronic, that constant slipping of identity—perhaps talking of sides is to needlessly polarize the situation, for they are locked together in an economy” (Huddart 67). This shift in the synchronic panoptical view in order to accommodate slippage in representation is part of how the scenario of discovery structures our understandings within the tour:

The framework allows for occlusions; by positioning our perspective, it promotes certain views while helping to disappear others. [For instance, within a scenario of tourism] we might be encouraged to overlook the displacement and disappearance of native peoples, gender exploitation, environmental impact, and so on. (Taylor 2003: 28)

Thus the blind spot is established as a corrective mechanism that reformats the scenario of discovery. It is this very process of promoting certain views and certain sites while overlooking and hiding others that Diana Taylor calls “percepticide”: “social blinding” or “a form of killing or numbing through the senses” (2005: 244).

However, while the touristic diachronic panoptical vision can occlude the breakdowns in and slippage of the display of the Maya in the form of a blind spot, this blind spot is also the point of an irreconcilable tension between the representations of familiar tourist and Mayan Other. Here the gaze is not only returned back at the tourist resulting in a temporary breakdown in representation but it also implicates the tourist within the scenario, within the performance: “The look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (Bhabha, 89). Through the oppositional/returned gaze, the Maya, in this case, become what Slavoj Žižek describes as “parallax objects” and what Lacan refers to as “*L’objet petit a*” (qtd. in Žižek 17). Parallax objects are objects that “tickle” the subject, objects that disrupt and reverse the gazer-gazed-at roles within colonial scenarios:

At its most radical the object is *that which objects*, that which disturbs the smooth running of things. Thus the paradox is that roles are reversed (in terms of the standard notion of the active subject working on the passive object): the subject is defined by a fundamental passivity, and it is the object from which the movement comes—which does the tickling. (Žižek 17)

Within the tour, this moment of gaze disruption, these moments of fracture, ultimately break down the representation of the Maya as an authentically real indigenous Other which, by consequence, also breaks down the scenario as a

performative framework. These uncanny moments are not—and can not be—masked through percepticide or occluded from the touristic viewpoint because they are not simple incongruencies in display but rather the tour’s—and ultimately Western discursive practice’s—failure to represent and stage the Maya as a genuine, ancient, sedentary, mysterious and exotic, indigenous Other.

One particular moment, illustrative of this fracture in representation, came within the Cobá Mayan Village tour when our group was visiting the second family’s living area. This precise instance occurred when a number of our group members witnessed a scene that did not fit within our (imaginary) image of Mayan pastoral, jungle living. After seeing the family’s kitchen, where a pot sat cooking over the open fire, we exited to the back area of the family’s living space, what would amount to our backyard. At the center of this area was an animal pen housing two pig-like animals and, at the back, several banana trees with unripe fruit hanging from their branches. This part of the village—the palapa, the kitchen and the yard—composed an image of localized jungle living, with no evidence, no trace of typically Western comforts. However, on our way back to the front area, one group of participants turned back through the main palapa, and another group, including myself and my partner, went around its perimeter. There, on the other side of the yard, was another palapa with a pole attached to it upon which sat a solar panel²⁵. We decided to take a peek inside this palapa. Inside, a modern flatscreen television sat on a table opposite a series of couches. Beside it sat a DVD player and on the shelving unit behind the table was a large music and CD player. “Well, this throws it,” stated one of my fellow participants upon taking in this scene, referring obviously to this image of modernity that didn’t quite fit in with the rest of the tour.

25. According to the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour guide, Emiliano, the Mexican government does provide some indigenous communities with solar panels; the presence of the panel however was not alluded to or foregrounded in the guided narrative of this tour.

This precise moment underlines the manner in which the scenario of discovery, the colonial encounter between tourist and Maya, confirms no one truth factor or objective proof of alterity but is rather a scripted performance of these two identities. The idea of discovery—exploring the mysterious unknown and encountering/witnessing authentic indigeneity—is (re)activated and (re)enacted:

The drama of discovery and display of native bodies—then and now—serves various functions. The indigenous bodies perform a “truth” factor; they “prove” the material facticity of an Other and authenticate the discoverer/missionary/ anthropologist’s perspective, in terms of both geographic and ideological positioning. [. . .] The native body serves, not as proof of alterity, but merely as the space on which the battles for truth, value, and power are fought by competing dominant groups.

(Taylor 2003: 63)

In this way, the Cobá Mayan Village tour stages, marks and characterizes both the authentic and the inauthentic, as received by the tour-goer, based on prior representations and understandings (of both tourist and Maya) produced by the scriptural economy underneath (Western) touristic and ethnographic discursive knowledge. It then (re)enacts this representation according to a performative economy by staging an authentically real Mayan village and really authentic Mayan families: “The scenario thus bridges past and future as well as the here and the there. It’s never for the first time and never for the last, yet it continues to be constantly reactivated in the *now* of performance” (Taylor 2003: 58). The perspective shaped by the tourist gaze when the tourist “meets” and “looks at” the Maya Other is a kind of parallax: the tourist is so caught up in seeing/viewing the difference between him/her—the subject—and the Maya—the object—that they do not realize that this difference *is* itself the object.

“This throws it” is an interesting comment precisely because it responds, not to the tour’s false display of the Maya peoples but rather to our own (touristic) perception of the Maya as this incredibly exotic, sedentary, ancient people who live off and in the jungle landscape. In the process of touring, watching, witnessing and encountering the Maya, the tour essentially fixed and performed the character of the Maya as this exotic, unknown and unknowable Other opposite to the tour-goer’s own adventurous and scientifically inquisitive character—their Indiana Jones. This imaginary Maya is seen as a cultural throwback to the Maya of the past, the ancient Maya who constructed the ruins at Cobá, Tulum and Chichen Itzá. What is being “thrown” here is not the Maya villagers’ status as real and authentic Maya, but rather the performance of these authentic and ancient Maya, untouched by our modern Western globalized culture. At this moment, the scenario of discovery breaks down and the tour is exposed as the performative construct it is.

The obvious—and yet paradoxically hidden and overlooked—fact of the matter is, however, that these Mayan villagers and the Yucatec Maya who inhabit the region are not like this artificially created representation of alterity. The tour works to foreground these cultural constructs and identities since, in order for the paying tour participant to discover something “unfamiliar to most” the Maya cannot be similar to the tourists: they cannot be modern (*Cobámayanvillage.com*). Although the television and the powered recreation room was not cut off from the tour, it certainly was not highlighted either: in fact, our guide ignored it, and we only happened to witness it because we walked past it and intruded into the space. We were, in a sense, akin to the theatre spectator catching a glimpse of the backstage, seeing actors in costume and makeup but not in character. Moreover, this was a glimpse that altered my perception of the rest of the show. After witnessing this modern and technologically advanced setup, I noticed a

second solar panel attached to the main palapa, one that I had walked past on my way to the main palapa but had not observed, perhaps a case of percepticide. This moment of representational fracture—this image of the ancient Maya that did not work according to the rules of the scenario—resulted in a change in my perspective and the displacement of my diachronic gaze. At this instance the tour participant—me—became the ticklish (and tickled) subject. At the same time the Maya were parallax objects since “*L’objet petit a* can thus be defined as a pure parallax object: it is not only that its contours change with the shift of the subject: *it exists—its presence can be discerned—only when the landscape is viewed from a certain perspective*” (Žižek 18).

The last stop on the Cobá Mayan Village tour’s itinerary was a cooling swim in a nearby cenote. This particular cenote was not the underground cavern featured in the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour but an open pit, with crystal clear water and rock cliffs towering above roughly half of its circumference; although we had to travel by tour bus to get there, it was located closer to a main road, and we did not have to trek far through the jungle. Like in the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour, a Mayan priest blessed and cleansed our group prior to our entering the cenote. A point of contrast, however, is that no attention was diverted or paid to his doing so: the guide did not make mention of this act, and the tour participants could probably only guess as to his actions. The guide instead focused his narration on the cultural importance of the cenote to the Maya people, perhaps reforming the touristic representation of Mayan alterity.

Although unintentional, the Cobá Mayan Village tour’s problematic display and representation of the Maya as a form of cultural alterity indicates the failure of Western discursive knowledge—specifically touristic knowledge—to dominate the field of vision that makes up the tour as a form of cultural practice. Through the Cobá Mayan Village tour’s representation and replication of

Mayan alterity, the Maya come to be seen as *real* and *authentic*. At the same time, the tourist is imbued with a sense of cultural inauthenticity that is shaped in opposition to the Maya's exotic character. The tour then stages both these cultural constructions—the Maya's authenticity and the tourist's artificiality—within a larger narrative of touring Mayan quotidian life which, in turn, is always already inscribed as symbolically exotic and mysterious. The problem, however, is that “the illusion of authenticity is offered as just that—an illusion, a glimpse, more importantly a theatricalized, aestheticized glimpse—but not an unmediated encounter with local life” (Underiner 2005: 8). This encounter is always mediated, it is always performed—framed and structured by the representations of authenticity and inauthenticity activated and enacted within the scenario. In this way, the position of panoptic surveyor that is placed upon the tourist and authorizes the tour participant to view and see Mayan life—is itself an enactment, a performative. Here the tourist, while in the position of authority and authorization, is ultimately unable to control the scenario discursively, positionally or representationally. This is because they are a part of the scenario themselves. They can never get up and leave or disrupt the show because they themselves *are* the show. The tourist, in an act of colonial ambivalence, ignores this obvious mediation in the forms of percepticide and blind spots. However, these blind spots are also sites/spaces of representational fracture, which can cause a rupture in the Maya's semblance as an exotic, ancient and mysterious Other. This breakdown also reveals the tour itself as a performative framework; the tourist's position as the panoptic gazer and authoritative viewer is also exposed as a mere performance, a role we are allowed because we paid for this experience.

Here the Maya peoples we encountered were only exotic, indigenous and authentic because we, to quote Bhabha again, “hastily” made them so. That

is, Western anthropology has established a whole, homogenized Mayan identity which the tourist industry has appropriated for its own purposes: first in order to market the area as a destination and later to capitalize on the West's fascination with this mysterious culture through offering encounters with its remnants (Geddes Gonzales 53). However, the partialities and incongruencies within the tours' representational display can ultimately fracture these homogenizing forces and expose the tours as the performative structures they are. Here the representational tensions between tourist and Maya not only reveal the tour as a scenario but also (re)foreground the Mayan Riviera as a simulated tourist economy. This process can also cause us to question our own identity within this touristscape and, for a moment, we perceive the heterogeneous forces behind our own tourist modality and see our own status as a transnational, hyperreal, post-capitalist consumer/traveler.

Conclusion

“Here, then, we explore travel as an art of culture by which communities are fashioned and by which imagined communities are traversed as cultures.”

—Quitzel E. Castañeda 260

Both the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure and the Cobá Mayan Village tours are carefully rehearsed, staged and executed encounters with Mayan culture. Whereas the Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour places this Maya encounter within a larger narrative of action and adventure, the Cobá Mayan Village tour offers participants an intimate and personal, unmediated encounter with the day-to-day existence of the contemporary Maya. That both tours offer participants the chance to encounter the Maya is key. At the heart of these encounters is a financial exchange: the tour-participant pays the tour operator money and in exchange they receive a unique and interesting touristic experience—Maya civilization and culture. In this way, the tourist is akin to the spectator who purchases a ticket but here the show is the Maya, a people and culture with a long history of archaeological fascination and (more) recent history of touristic fetishization. These tours are a part of the region’s tourist economy and tourism industry but, at the same time, they are also colonial encounters: both tours package themselves as meetings with the exotic Maya in which a system of cultural exchange occurs. This is a cultural economy of sorts whereby representations and knowledge of the self and of the Other, of the *us* and of the *them*, are both produced and exchanged within the tour.

Similar to a theatre spectator who expects a certain amount of value for his money and holds certain assumptions about the show, the tour participant also expects the excursion to adhere to certain unspoken guidelines and rules. Here the

tour-goer expects the tour to deliver on its promise to showcase both ancient and contemporary Mayan culture. The tourist expects this culture to be authentic and real: no touristy (Disneyesque) reproductions of a Mayan village here. The tourist expects the tour to be exciting and “cool”, and involve an entertaining series of activities (*Lonelyplanet.com*). The tour is cultural capital: we want to be educated by the ruins, we want to learn about the Maya, we want to experience cultural alterity, we want to fancy ourselves as well-traveled, we want to “sneer at” those poor tourists who only sit on the beach and drink their free margaritas. We, the tourists, want to see something new, something unfamiliar, something thrilling, and this is the experience that we pay for—this is what our ticket gets us. At the same time, the tour-goer is expected to follow specific rules and regulations of behaviour that also shape and guide how they perceive the play/tour. The tour-participant must not go off the map, must not climb a pyramid that is off limits, must follow the group, must return to the tour van or bus at a set time, and must adhere to the tour’s itinerary. There are also other sets of heuristic circumstances, encoded knowledges and epistemological frameworks that underlie each excursion. These are also part of an economy: a “rules of the house(hold)” that governs and mediates all experiences, travels, scripts and performances inside.

This thesis ultimately aims to map out and tour these underlying structures in addition to the tourist’s assumptions—to scrutinize and expose the stagings, performances, narratives, displays and identities that comprise the tour experience. Here, these take the form of the scriptural economy, in which Maya culture and civilization become an imagined strategic order of Western knowledge, in addition to a performative economy in which the scenario of discovery reactivates, reenacts and (re)performs Western narratives of scientific inquiry, discovery and European conquest. Within these tours, both the tourist and the Maya are not hermeneutically sealed cultural formations but characterizations

shaped, scripted and staged at the moment of cultural differentiation. As Quetzil E. Castañeda states, “Maya culture and civilization do not refer primarily to some people out there, but to an effect of a scriptural economy” (173). In the act of restoring the old ruin structures and uncovering the buildings from the jungle overgrowth, Western anthropological and archaeological science has essentially invented these sites as Mayan ruins (and runes). Concomitantly, these practices have written Mayan culture into existence as a discursive formation always already defined by the desire to know and understand (the Other); the Museum of Maya Culture produces and displays these imaginary configurations of the Maya as characterizations of scientific mystery and intrigue. This imaginary cultural pastiche is then (re)produced and (re)presented in the ruins through the Museum’s staging of knowledge. Museum knowledge, embodied in the tour’s museum spaces, is reactivated and restaged in mobile tourist practices: “the Museum [. . .] is continuously reinvented as a sight, as texts, as photographs, as postcards, as tours, as souvenirs, as an encounter with the Maya, as memory of a culture and a civilization” (Castañeda 173). Therefore, this scriptural economy always already configures and controls representations, displays, images and texts that characterize the civilization and culture of both ancient and contemporary Maya.

The scenario of discovery is a meaning making performative economy that further mediates, guides, narrativizes and scripts, stages and performs the colonial encounter between tourist and Maya. It is a guidebook that activates and reactivates old narratives and experiences because, according to Taylor, “The scenario activates the new by conjuring up the old—the many other versions of the discovery scenario that endow it with affective and explanatory power” (2003: 54). European explorers perceived Mesoamerica as an undiscovered territory and the Amerindians a part of the exotic landscape, and thus ripe for exploration and colonization. Current tourists reactivate this narrative by believing the Maya to

be a mysterious, rare and unique culture ripe for touristic discovery/encounter; the scenario of discovery allows the Western traveler to think that an unmediated encounter with authentic Mayan exoticism is possible.

Cobá acts as both an introduction to Mayan civilization and as a pretext for the remainder of each tour: it combines representations of antiquity with Western scientific narratives of discovery and inquiry formed in opposition to the tourist's own performance of the Indiana Jones-esque adventurer. The tour stages an ancient and contemporary Mayan pastiche through the images, history and stories told by the local tour guide, through the historical connections made by the Mayan Cobá guide, by his placement within this frame, and lastly by allowing tour-goers to gaze at the entirety of these ruins as an essentialized image of antiquity. The processes of site maintenance and restoration and our toured travels make Cobá a meticulously rehearsed and carefully staged theatrical display of Mayan alterity. At the same time the tour-goer enacts/performs certain narratives that characterize and reinforce both their role as discoverer and the tour's representations of Mayan civilization.

The Cobá Mayan Jungle Adventure tour continues this narrative of adventure and discovery by staging the contemporary Maya as interrelated to the wild and savage jungle landscape. This tour takes the form of a museum exhibition in three parts—a theatrical production in three acts—that moves from the tourist's adventures in the jungle to their encounter with Mayan spirituality to their meeting with the Maya people that represents and produces the Maya as a part of the jungle and the jungle as a part of the Maya. This totalizing perspective stages the exotic Maya within the landscape: the Mayans here are objects to be explored in the (re)enactment of the European discovery. This tour therefore (re)stages and (re)performs the drama that is Western adventure, exploration and conquest of an unexplored land and an unknown culture.

The Cobá Mayan Village tour is marketed as a more intimate and personal encounter with Mayan alterity. The scenario of discovery here takes the form of the mobile and modern tourist encountering the rare and unfamiliar daily life of the Maya. This village and these Maya become authentically real through the tour's staging of the Maya's unfamiliar, holistic and sedentary quotidian life. This theatre of the quotidian juxtaposes the tourist's mobile and technologized travels, a staging that further demarcates cultural difference and foregrounds the Maya's authenticity. The tour reinforces this staged authenticity through the implication that other tours' and other touristy representations of the Maya are less real: contaminated by the tourist industry and therefore less pure. This tour thus becomes an in situ museum exhibit in which the tour participant is able to voyeuristically and panoptically tour the exotic quotidian life of the authentic Maya. The tour-participant overlooks the fact that this encounter with the real Maya—the Maya untouched by tourism—can only occur through the mechanisms of a tour: a paradox made comprehensible through the process of percepticide—not uncommon within performative situations—an intentional blinding of the senses but also an act of colonial ambivalence.

Both tours thus present and articulate the Maya as an essentialized, staged pastiche combining Western (romantic and scientific) notions of the unknown, the unexplored and the undiscovered formed as an opposable identity to the tourist's own self-identification with civilization and modernity. Moreover, as the scenario and the museum script the characters of the tourist and the Maya, they also produce and stage an ontological hierarchy that positions the tourist in a place of cultural superiority and the Maya in a place of subservience. These tours therefore enact and perform the traditional colonizer-colonized dynamic in the forms of museum-goer and museum display: the participant moves from site to site and from exhibit to exhibit always watching, witnessing and encountering

Mayan alterity. The Maya, on the other hand, are always the representation of scientific mystery, an embodiment of spiritual alterity, the exotic jungle dwellers, the ones facilitating the tour and the ones serving the food. This positional dynamic produces a panoptical gaze of domination that “depends on maintaining a unidirectional gaze and stages the lack of reciprocity and mutual understanding inherent in discovery” (Taylor 2003: 64). In this fashion, the narratives of discovery and adventure that are scripted into and underlie these tours are just that: performances that reenact and stage the Western discursive discovery, here reinforced by the positional dynamic of the tourist as mobile explorer and the Maya as ever-sedentary museum object.

However, this staging potentially fractures under the slippage of its own artifice, partialities and problematic representations. This occurs because the Maya, as a formation of discursive alterity, are always unfathomable and uncanny objects: parallax objects that ultimately “tickle” those viewing and gazing at them. Žižek reminds us that the Other is always a formulation of/in the self and that the point of cultural differentiation delineates not an object that exists “out there” but rather an object that exists only within our shifting perspective:

The paradox here is a very precise one: it is at the very point at which a pure difference emerges—a difference which is no longer a difference between two positively existing objects, but a minimal difference which divides one and the same object from itself—that this difference “as such” immediately coincides with an unfathomable object: in contrast to a mere difference between objects, *the pure difference is itself an object.* (18)

Here the Maya are always already a form of exotic alterity formed within and mediated by the tourists’ desire to know and understand this unfathomable Other, and the Maya that are staged and performed within this tour are a product of

this desire. Fissures in this problematic and partial representation appear first as blind spots in the tour-participants' panoptical view. Here, "the subject's gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its 'blind spot,' that which is 'in the object more than object itself', the point from which the object itself returns the gaze" (Žižek 17). At this point, the tour's problematic representations and stagings of Mayan alterity, which are first easily overlooked or ignored, eventually become too big to ignore—they tickle too much—and ultimately *throw* the entire performance.

The flatscreen television, the music player and the DVD player—all powered by solar panels—placed in the middle of a palapa do not fit in with our exoticized and fetishized notions of the Maya as a primitive, ancient, sedentary, spiritual culture symbiotically connected to the wild jungle landscape. This incongruent image breaks down our imaginary representation of the Maya, and ruptures the synchronic gaze of domination staged by the tours. Here the scenario of discovery fractures: how can we explore and discover these mysterious Maya when they really are not unfamiliar after all? How do we report the authentic cultural alterity of primitiveness when the Maya, like us, gather together as a family and watch the same films on DVD? At the same time, the scenario of discovery also describes why tourists *require* these tours to interact with and encounter the *authentic* Maya. The fact of the matter is that tourists do not require these tours to encounter the contemporary Yucatec Maya: we encounter them continuously in the massive, all-inclusive resorts—as the housekeepers, the maintenance workers, the waiters, the chefs—and all throughout the Riviera Maya—as construction workers, cab drivers, *vendedores* and others. But we do not see them as such because we require the tours to indicate, stage and perform the marked authenticity and the realness of Mayan alterity, a concept that is itself an imaginary creation.

Despite a recent economic slump, a series of hurricanes damaging the region and bad press from the swine flu epidemic, the tourist industry remains prominent in the Mayan Riviera. Here the several excursions available for tourists to purchase all act as interstices between multiple communities, economies, cultures, ideologies and discourses. Currently there are very few studies, performance-focused or otherwise, into the implications of tourism in the hyperreal resort mecca of the Mayan Riviera. Here genealogies of performance, museum and archive studies and post-colonial performance analysis employing autobiographical reportage can cut through and expose the numerous performative and representational displays, the identities performed and the cultures presented within the Mayan Riviera (and in the larger realm of destination tourism). However, we must be careful. Tours and the tourist industry have huge implications for the Yucatec Mayan populations, many of which depend on tourist dollars for income. During my first visit to the town of Cobá, our tour guide warned us not to give money to any of the local children who were begging or to buy any products that they hawked; doing so would train them to seek out money rather than go to school²⁶. Here the tourist industry has caused the local population to become dependent on our tourist dollars, perhaps keeping that population economically tied to the Cobá ruins and its many visitors. At the same time, I am forced to ask if we, as researchers, do the same thing? Do we contribute to the paradox that maybe, through our tourist and scientific practices, our imaginary representation of the Maya as a sedentary and localized people and culture becomes fact? Is it a combination of our economic and our discursive practices that not only portray these ancient and contemporary Maya populations as literally “stuck” to that place but also act to keep them there? Do we reiterate

26. While the villages we visited during our tours received money directly from the tour operators, these Mayans didn't receive money from our tour practices; they had to resort to begging and hawking cheap wares in order to make money from the tourist industry. The children do so at the cost of missing school.

and reproduce the Museum of Maya Culture? Although much more study into the Riviera Maya is necessary, we must always remind ourselves that we invent the knowledge we study. It is crucial to frame future research into tourist and Maya relations—as well as research into tourists and the tourist industry itself—as guidebooks, as both maps and tours of performance and knowledge, as I have done so here. Our autobiographical accounts are important precisely because they illustrate our dual roles of researcher and tourist: we, as tourists, always write and rewrite our own desires and knowledge onto the places and people we visit.

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