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For the Other: An utopia completed by cyber tourism

Geographical distance has lost its importance in today's world. Nobody is worried that they might not be able to communicate with a person on a different continent. A product is delivered from a country to customers on a different continent if they click a button in their room. Networking companies have been quick to notice that cybernetic transnationality is no longer a dream, but a reality through the Internet. They have actively promoted this aspect through their advertisements. However, there is a deeper critical meaning under the idealistic pictures of the world seen through the lenses of the Internet. What underlying meaning do these advertisements deliver to what purpose?

In "Where Do You Want to Go Today? Cybernetic Tourism, the Internet, and Transnationality," Lisa Nakamura has critically analyzed several Internet advertisements and their underlying meanings. Nakamura largely divides her criticisms into two aspects. First, she points out that the networking companies are trying to link the Internet to democracy. Nakamura uses an example of an ad by "Anthem" to explain the ironies. The ad depicts various scenes which display an abundant array of diversity. The vivid images that show diversity in race,

age, and other physical features are the celebrated images of the American democracy. She proves that this ad is ironical because the beautifully depicted diversity is only shown to be erased and overcome. Nakamura points out that in this ad diversity has become a subject that needs to be erased and stripped of its importance for a truly democratic society, but has to be presented first in order to achieve that purpose. Next, she critically approaches the ads that link access to Internet to a new way of travel, cyber tourism. By analyzing several ads and the position white people hold in them, Nakamura argues that these ads focus on the Western user's privilege. She believes that these ads depict white upper class people as the privileged people who travel to exotic new places as tourists while feeling secure in their own technological systems as well as the seemingly omnipresent English language system. Throughout the article, she refers to these exotic new places with ethnic diversity using the term "the Other", which subtly supports her view of the blatant gap that exists between the privileged white and the rest. The Western users see this overly idealized picture of the exotic "Other", says Nakamura, and this picturesque image serves to entice Western people to this exotic nature of "the Other" which is far from the actual reality. Nakamura argues that the advantages the Internet offers as a form of travel are therefore strictly restricted in one direction, and the Western users are the sole beneficiaries. She concludes by stating that the utopia the advertisements offer does not include "the Other", it is an ideal world for the

Western society similar to the one Coca-Cola has created. Although Nakamura's analysis shows great insight on the implied negative aspects of the advertisements, her interpretations of these impacts have become less persuasive in today's world and she has failed to acknowledge the positive potential of cybernetic tourism.

Nakamura's critical analysis on the negative impact of ads that objectify and beautify the nature of the Other to entice Western people is no longer convincingly applicable in today's cyber world. An advertisement is only meaningful in its existence and also a subject of criticism if it is convincing, persuasive and effective. In contrast to ten years ago when her article was first published and the Internet was a relatively new finding in the world, the Internet is no longer a limited privilege to the upper class. People from different races and social status interact on the Internet. Vast amounts of video clips and photos are uploaded from all over the world, showing others an accurate representation of reality. This transnational sharing of information has slowly undermined the convincingness of the picturesque images featured to envision an Utopia. For example, although the ads depict a green lush rainforest to attract tourist, the people now know that this green exotic image is an artificial and inaccurate representation of the reality. The videos and photos showing the polluted rain forest as a result of rash development have quickly spread through the Internet over the last decade, significantly reducing the impact and persuasive effect of

the ads. As a result, Nakamura's analysis which highlights the negative implications of the ads that objectify and beautify "the Other" as a picturesque image to entice Western people, has become less persuasive than ten years ago because people have become more aware of the true reality through their own experience.

Although Nakamura has accurately captured the position upper class Western people hold in the ads as tourists, she has not discussed the positive impacts of cybernetic tourism. The privileged white people mentioned in her article, cannot be categorized and defined within the word tourist alone. A sincere interest concerning the outside world and the sentimental reflections that follow the experience are also part of being a tourist. The positive influence a keen interest for the outside world can have has already been proven in many cases. To illustrate, when the island Haiti was destroyed due to a disastrous earthquake two years ago, the pictures and uploaded videos showing the devastated island started a world wide movement to help those people. Haiti, originally a known tourist place would be one of the places defined as "the Other" in Nakamura's article. However, a desire to know the outside world has affected the tourists and changed their lives into an extension of "the Other". Cyber tourists are no longer passive tourists who stand aside and observe. Through cybernetic tourism, they share sadness and other emotions with the outside world. This sentimental bond often acts as a stimulant for the cybernetic tourists to act in the

actual reality to help fight injustice or help the fallen. Cybernetic tourism and its tourists are no longer indifferent privileged people who stay separated from the Other. The cyber tourists have proved over the decade that they can actively engage with the Other in a way which defies the hypothetical hierachial system that Nakamura used to define the relationship between tourists and the Other. Cyber tourism and its tourists have the ability and the potential to steer the world towards an Utopia that includes and is completed by the existence of the Other.

I have personally experienced the positive power of cybernetic tourism. Due to the rapid development of the media, people have become increasingly aware of the poor environments that third world countries and their people are in. My family, after seeing the devastating life that young children had to live through the Internet, decided to financially sponsor a child until she went to college and could support herself. We started as tourists browsing through the exotic parts of Asia that we have never been before. However, from the moment we witnessed the hardships of the young girl's life and decided to help her we were no longer privileged outsiders observing their lives. The cybernetic tourism has formed a real life bond between our family and the girl's life. "The other" became an extension of our lives and the line of distinction that Nakamura pointed out between the privileged and "the Other" had dissolved. My personal experience has led me to believe that Nakamura's argument which states that the cybernetic

tourism creates an Utopia only for the privileged has failed to see that indifference and neglect towards the Other can be more destructive.

To conclude, Nakamura's critical analysis on the Internet advertisements is very insightful and important because it shows various negative underlying meaning concerning race and inequality. Although her argument is very convincing I believe after ten years the persuasiveness concerning the negative impacts of the picturesque image of "the Other" has diminished compared to the past. Also, in reality cyber tourists do not remain as indifferent tourists whose main purpose is to observe and enjoy. In reality, the sincere interest for other parts of the world has great potential to positively change the dynamics of the relationship that usually define a tourist and a tourist site. Cybernetic tourism possesses the necessary potential and ability to create an Utopia "for the other", ultimately completing a world where the word the Other is no longer meaningful.