

Busman's Holiday—or the Best Surprise Is No Surprise

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Introduction

In *The Tourist* (1976), MacCannell argues that leisure and life-style have supplanted work as life's organizing principles. According to MacCannell, alienation from work has created a "transcendent consciousness" among the middle class. The possessors of this consciousness seek "authenticity" or meaning in leisure activities. Sight-seeing and international tourism are central in providing the necessary authenticity lacking at home or at work. This "search for authenticity" is in keeping with a larger sociological tradition concerned with what might be termed "protection against *anomie*." The concepts of protection against *anomie* and the "search for community" originated with Durkheim (1893) and have been used to explain a variety of phenomena, ranging from religious or ethnic affiliation to fringe political movements and membership in formal organizations. MacCannell carries this tradition to its logical conclusion, because, according to him, the search for community has come to include the entire world.¹

Yet, if alienation is at the heart of MacCannell's and others' explanations of middle-class tourism, what of the "alienated worker" from the other social classes? Certainly, more research has been conducted on the topic of alienation among the lower classes than the middle, as demonstrated by the fact that the alienated auto worker is something of a folk antihero. Dubin found that "the industrial workers' world is one in which work and the workplace are not central life interests for a vast majority" (1963:68). Clearly, then, the situation that may provoke travel is not bound by class.

This paper is, in part, stimulated by MacCannell's vague use of the term "middle class."² Through a combination of fieldwork and theory, it attempts to explore and explain the vacation and travel preferences of a working-class occupational group, the city bus drivers of Oakland, California. With an income of approximately \$20,000 a year [in 1977], including three to five weeks of paid vacation, Oakland city bus drivers can be considered middle-class and therefore might be expected to become international tourists.³ Furthermore, because of the low status of the bus driver's occupation, it is reasonable to assume that a certain measure of consumption is designed to compensate for this status inadequacy.⁴

Although many writers, including myself, have assumed a *prima facie* correlation between low status and alienation, this assumption was not supported by my study. Additionally, although I assumed that alienation (low status, poor working conditions) would combine with income (\$20,000 a year) to result in international tourism, my fieldwork indicated nothing of this sort. Thus, it soon became clear that a more comprehensive theory of social class, which considers both economic and noneconomic factors, is necessary to explain the particular nature of the "busman's holiday."

Many factors combine to form our conception of social class; these include income, occupation, residence, education, race, religion, social prestige, and the power to influence the actions of others and of oneself. While either objective or subjective criteria may be used, many theoreticians stress one at the expense of the other. Some, like Marx, emphasize objective economic factors, while others, like Weber, stress the importance of subjective social factors, such as status.⁵ In the context of this discussion, class assignments are made according to both objective and subjective criteria, as will be described below.

The bus drivers studied here earn considerably more than most of the occupations upon which the working-

class literature is based. However, several authors, including Berger (1960), Gans (1962), Wilensky (1966), Goldthorpe et al. (1967, 1969), Shostak (1969), and Le Masters (1975), have considered the so-called "affluent worker." Some of these authors have documented the failure of affluent blue-collar workers to adopt middle-class life-styles, a point that will be central to later discussion. A number of explanations have been forwarded for this "failure." For example, some authors have stressed the resiliency of working-class life-styles, the rejection of middle-class norms, and the atomizing effect of the suburbs (Berger 1960; Gans 1962; Goldthorpe et al. 1967, 1969). Others have pointed to the cohesive nature of working-class social reference groups and networks (Bott 1956; Gans 1962; Goldthorpe et al. 1967, 1969; Shostak 1969). Still others have stressed blue-collar workers' access to the market economy and their adjustment to the accompanying life chances (Gans 1962; Wilensky 1966; Levison 1974; Le Masters 1975).

The hypothesis suggested here is that intercultural and international tourism, as described by MacCannell, occur only when such tourism fits meaningfully with other class concerns. The significance and integration of the categories "work" and "leisure" for city bus drivers will be discussed in support of this hypothesis. In addition, MacCannell's concept of "authenticity" will be examined, as will the role that alienation plays in the lives of these individuals.

Methods

The fieldwork for this study was conducted at a restaurant adjacent to a city bus yard in Oakland, California. This restaurant is more than just a diner. Here, the drivers relax for long hours by eating, socializing, reading, and playing a variety of games. Games, including pool, cards, and pinball, are by far the most time-consuming activities. (See "Appendix I" for a more detailed discussion of the nature of the restaurant environment and the activities that take place in it.)

In terms of the entire Oakland bus driver population, several factors made the study population slightly unrepresentative of the population at large (Table 1). First, all of the informants were restaurant customers. It should be noted that the company "gilly room"—a recreation room with the dispatcher—is a place where most of the restaurant customers frequently spend time. This is guaranteed by the fact that company business, particularly picking up runs, is conducted in the gilly room. Although restaurant and gilly room regulars tend to frequent both environments, some individuals have decided preferences for one or the other. Because this study took place in the restaurant alone, drivers who prefer the gilly room and spend most of their time there are not represented. Second, all of the informants worked split shifts or had a run with a split in it. Drivers on split shifts work longer hours, generally twelve hours a day. Two reasons were cited by informants for their long hours: increased wages and the greater variety of runs available to split-shift workers. Finally, all of the informants worked during daytime hours. This prerogative comes with seniority and, in terms of this study, affected the number of women, in particular, represented in the sample.

Two methods of data collection were employed. The more restricted method consisted of formal interviewing. The interviews consisted primarily of collection of demographic information. Information of this sort was systematically gathered from nineteen drivers, who I considered to be good-to-excellent informants. This information is summarized in Table 2. As apparent from the table, the overwhelming majority of informants were registered Democrats, were married, owned a home, had a working spouse, had less than a high-school education, and came from a working-class background. In addition to these interviews, incomplete information was gathered from fourteen other informants, the majority of whom were black (making the racial breakdown in Table 1 somewhat artificial). A nodding acquaintance was established with the remaining thirty-five to fifty drivers, but no demographic information was collected from them.

The most important feature of these interviews was that they allowed me to enter into more significant "participant observation," the second and more valuable of the two methodologies. More than 100 hours of participant observation was undertaken. As may be expected, the quality and quantity of information gathered through participant observation increased after so-called "rapport" was established. This was achieved relatively quickly—perhaps as early as the fourth observation period, or after roughly twenty hours of fieldwork.

The forms of participant observation varied greatly. Long informal discussions were the most common and most productive form of participation. Drinking coffee and eating sandwiches from the grill were daily routines. Participation in the various forms of gambling was frequent. These included pinochle, thirty-one, pool, football and baseball lotteries, and "numbers," with stakes ranging from as little as ten cents a point in pinochle to five dollars a game in thirty-one.

Vacations and Travel: Preferences for Nature and Home

Travel and leisure ideals for the drivers studied here usually included the backdrop of "nature." Camping

Table 1. Sex and Race of Informants as Compared to Total Population of City Bus Drivers

	Total Population		Study Population	
	Black	White	Black	White
Males	34%	43%	22%	68%
Females	10%	5.5%	0%	10%

Table 2. Demographic Information on Informants

	White Females		Black Males		White Males		Totals	
Nbr of Informants	2		4		13		19	
Ave Years Service	0.67		7.75		10.1		7.7	
Educ Completed	12th Grade		11th Grade		10th Grade		11th Grade	
Political Affiliation	1 socialist	50%	3 Democrat	75%	9 Democrat	70%	Democrat	64%
	1 none	50%	1 none	25%	2 Republican	15%	Republican	10%
					2 none	15%	None	21%
							Socialist	5%
Marital Status	1 married	50%	2 married	50%	11 married	85%	married	75%
	1 divorced	50%	1 single	25%	2 separated	15%	separated	15%
			1 separated	25%			divorced	5%
							single	5%
Residence; Home Ownership	1 rent apt	50%	3 buy house	75%	10 buy house	77%	buying	74%
	1 buy house	50%	1 rent apt	25%	3 rent apts	23%	renting	26%
Spouse Employed	1	50%	2	50%	10	77%	68%	
Father's Occupation	1 mechanic		2 farmers		3 farmers		6 mechanic	33%
	2 skilled laborer		1 unskilled laborer		5 mechanics or driver		or driver	
			1 unknown		1 skilled laborer		5 farmers	28%
					1 unskilled laborer		2 skilled laborer	
					1 unknown		other than mechanic	
					2 semi-professional		or driver	11%
					(same father)		2 unknown	11%
							1 semi-professional	6%
Class Imagery	100% middle class		50% middle class 50% working class		100% middle class		90% middle class 10% working class	
Religion (some practice)	100% none		75% none 25% some		54% none 46% some		67% none 33% some	
Military Service	100% none		75% overseas 25% none		70% overseas 15% stateside 15% none		64% overseas 10% stateside 26% none	

Table 3. Last Vacation Taken

	Home	Relatives	Nature	Other
Exclusively	6	3	1	1
Combined with home	—	4	1	3
Combined with relatives	4	—	3	1
Combined with nature	3	2	—	2
Combined with other	3	1	2	—
TOTALS	16	10	7	7

and fishing were distantly followed by hunting as the most popular types of vacation-time leisure activities.

By viewing the bus driver's job, the reasons for the strongly stated preference among drivers for a limited form of "nature tourism" may become clear. First, the working conditions associated with bus driving are generally poor. Taken together, people, weather, noise, and traffic can make for a miserable day. Taken separately, people are the major cause of on-the-job stress. Fare dodgers, drunks, and "crazies," any of whom may be violent, can create serious problems for those doing the vehicle-maneuvering. Even drivers who say they enjoy the people they "haul" look forward eagerly to the next vacation.

Second, bus driving provides enough of its own on-the-job, urban sightseeing. As one informant stated: "It's a great job. You always know what's happening on the streets, plus you get to meet a lot of women." By being on the streets all day, drivers can keep abreast of urban fads and fashions, construction projects, and general city life. Although most drivers enjoy this aspect of the job, it can squelch the desire to sightsee while on vacation.

An examination of the type of nature tourism preferred by city bus drivers is informative. The three preferred activities, camping, fishing, and hunting, usually involve use of a camper or mobile home. Often, other families accompany that of the bus driver's, and a miniature community, bearing a striking resemblance to "home," is formed in the "wilderness." (According to Shostak [1969] and Cheek and Burch [1976], this is a distinctive working-class pattern.) These excursions into nature are usually taken within California. Occasionally, drivers will travel out of state to visit spectacular natural sights, such as the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone National Park, but this is the exception to the rule.

The style of camping is distinctly that of the "base-camp" variety. Trail hiking or river rafting are rarely undertaken. Furthermore, the distances traveled to reach camping destinations are not great. This is not surprising, given several studies that have shown that distances from home and the level of sophistication of the wilderness experience sought are positively correlated with length of education (Stone and Taves 1958; Cheek and Burch 1976).

Furthermore, although nature tourism is preferred by bus drivers, this preference often gives way to other alternatives. Table 3 provides a summary of drivers' reports of their last vacation. It shows that, while nature tourism was important, it was most frequently combined with "home-based" leisure. Indeed, home-based leisure was the predominant type found in this study. Thus, a three-week vacation would often consist of a five-day camping trip, two days of visiting relatives, a weekend in Reno, and eleven days at home. (According to other writers on the subject, the phenomenon of home-based leisure is common among the working class [Gans 1962; Goldthorpe et al. 1969; Shostak 1969; and Levison 1974].)

Perhaps the most interesting finding, however, was the number of informants who stayed at home during their entire vacation. The most common explanation given for this was lack of funds. In addition, home-repair projects were often cited—for example, "I had to paint the whole house, inside and out, this year." And working wives and the inability to synchronize vacations were also mentioned.

Vacations at home, however, were represented as positive experiences, especially when home improvements or hobbies were actively pursued. Indeed, several of the bus drivers who I met at the restaurant were on their vacations at the time. In fact, it was common to find drivers at the restaurant on their days off.

The Dislike of International Tourism

In contrast to this love of nature and home, the bus drivers interviewed for this study were virtually unanimous in their lack of desire to travel overseas as tourists. The expense involved was cited as the most significant obstacle. However, having traveled overseas in the armed forces, most of the men interviewed also said that they had no taste for the poverty and degradation they would expect to encounter outside of the US. Commonly told were the horror stories of men who had been stationed overseas in the service. One young black driver, speaking of his trip to Paris, said: "There's a lot of prejudice over there, especially from the Africans. They can tell you're American from the way you're dressed, and they don't like you for what you got . . . You gotta watch it at night in Paris. They'll come up behind you and knife you just because you're an American." Similarly, a white bus driver described an incident that had occurred in Casablanca: "I was in my civilian clothes just standing on the corner, and this guy walks right up to me and spits on me. All he said was, 'American!' and walked away." Other stories of being cheated in tourist traps by foreign predators abounded.

For these drivers, paying any amount to experience a more troubled and struggling world than their own is simply not worth it. However, to claim that expense, poverty, disease, crowding, and dislike of Americans keeps bus drivers away from international tourism would be to miss the point. Rather, the real reason for lack of interest in international travel is to be found in the oft-expressed sentiment that "There's plenty to see right here in the United States." As one driver stated: "I don't waste money on that kind of thing, [because] there's plenty to do right here."

This working-class pattern of favoring the familiar has been noted by Gans (1962). Shostak (1969) has also commented on the stressful nature of foreign travel for the blue-collar worker. Stress may be a contributing factor to the lack of interest in foreign travel among this group. For these bus drivers to travel without stress, great expense would have to be incurred in order to replicate the standards and familiarity of home. In absolute economic terms, international tourism is possible; however, it is viewed as impossible by these drivers, because other forms of travel promise to be less stressful and more satisfying.

There are two interesting footnotes to this discussion. The first involves the three bus drivers who regularly went abroad for their vacations. Of these three men, two were married to Mexican women and were currently involved in acquiring land in Mexico for retirement. The other driver and his wife were from Scotland, where they returned to visit relatives. The experiences of these three men demonstrate that international travel *is* economically feasible when sufficient motivation exists. However, it must also be noted that the activities described by these three drivers were family-oriented and working-class in character. In short, these drivers were not in search of novel cultural or international experiences.

The second point involves the difficulty many drivers had in describing what they did in their leisure time, or remembering what they did on their last vacation. This phenomenon has been described by Goldthorpe et al. (1969), who, in their studies of affluent blue-collar workers, found that gathering information on leisure was more difficult than for any other topic.

Among this group of bus drivers, it appears that this difficulty may be related to three factors: (1) the ample opportunity for leisure at work; (2) the real preference for home-based leisure; and (3) the opportunity for extra time off from work when it is desired.

With respect to the last factor, one informant said: "When I don't feel well I work, [and] when I feel good I hit the sick book." It is well known by drivers that the company does not go to the trouble of checking up on drivers who call in sick (as it did thirty years before). Company administrators do not care what the drivers do, as long as the buses roll on schedule, and there are always more than enough drivers willing to work overtime to cover the route of a sick driver. Drivers were also frank about taking a week of sick leave before or after a vacation to turn three weeks into four. Two drivers said they always took a week off at least once during the year whenever they felt like it.

Three to five weeks of paid vacation, the option to take more time off with or without pay, a work schedule with leisure activities built in, and a \$20,000 salary [in 1977] all go a long way toward alleviating alienation among these workers. A few drivers acknowledged the intrinsic rewards of the job, with statements such as, "That's why I'm in the transportation business!" or "It's a great job!," while the vast majority were more likely to respond with "It's a job."

Despite the last remark, my observations indicate that, by and large, these workers are not alienated. This is demonstrated by the significant number of men who return to the workplace on their vacations and days off. Although MacCannell has called the touristic return to workplaces "alienated leisure" (1976:57), he may have missed the point, for the alienation, if there is any, may be toward something other than work.

In addition, if we consider the long hours and the good-natured horseplay that typify interactions at work, we begin to appreciate the central place of work in these drivers' lives. On the whole, the situation is similar to that found by Le Masters in his study of "blue-collar aristocrats" (1975). To wit, these drivers know they have risen as far as they are likely to rise on the socioeconomic scale. Coming from working-class backgrounds, with modest levels of education, most know first-hand the practical limits of upward mobility. Therefore, instead of trying to adopt middle-class norms, including international tourism, these drivers choose to improve upon the style of life to which they are accustomed. This style of life does *not* include a concern for international travel. And, as a result, city bus drivers are not compelled to become international tourists.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is clear from this study that participant observation offers the best opportunity for understanding the quality and meaning of leisure activities among an occupational cohort. On the whole, empirical studies of leisure have not utilized participant observation, relying instead on formally structured interviews.⁶ As a result, such studies have tended to be excessively quantitative in nature—i.e., tabulating events, such as the number of hours of television viewed per day or the number of formal association meetings attended per month, rather than attempting to interpret the meaning of these events for participants.

As Bott (1957) has noted, data on social networks may be important for the understanding of leisure. In this study, data on social networks and their affect on leisure were largely lacking. Any data collected on this topic reflected only the drivers' perceptions, and brief discussions with drivers' wives toward the end of the fieldwork indicated that information on social networks from drivers' wives often differed from that of husbands. To under-

stand fully the social networks of city bus drivers, participant observation in the homes of these drivers and their friends would be required. However, this research was limited to a social setting at work. The influence of work upon leisure is an important topic of inquiry, but a thorough study of leisure cannot be restricted to the workplace.

In summary, we need more intensive investigations of the leisure-time activities and social networks outside of the workplace of such workers as Oakland city bus drivers. Such studies should emphasize participant observation, with special attention to the quality and meaning of leisure activities.

Conclusion

Not surprisingly, this study of city bus drivers reaches many of the same conclusions found throughout the literature on the working class. These bus drivers are well-paid, blue-collar workers who maintain a distinctive working-class life-style, despite income adequate to adopt middle-class ways. This finding supports those of others, who have concluded that increased income is more likely to result in an improved version of an old life-style rather than a brand new one. In short, class is a more reliable predictor of leisure preferences than income.

The workers described here place a premium on home-based leisure, including spending time with family. Television, do-it-yourself hobbies, home improvements, gardening, and visiting relatives are popular leisure preferences. Vacation preferences are decidedly in favor of a limited form of "nature tourism." Camping, fishing, and hunting are all popular choices for family vacations. In this respect, bus drivers fall squarely into the working-class pattern and tend to favor camping that includes all of the conveniences of home. Brief trips to nearby vacation sites, such as Reno or Lake Tahoe, comprise another popular leisure activity.

Despite these leisure ideals, many bus drivers end up spending their vacation time at home. This alternative is often attributed to inadequate funds for travel or the need to complete home improvement projects. Such "home vacations" are generally viewed as being positive experiences.

The tendency to return to the workplace during vacations and days off, along with the convivial social relations at work, is indicative of a low level of worker alienation. It has been suggested by this study that a low level of alienation preempts the desire to travel. Furthermore, the working-class pattern of preferring the familiar to the unknown has been suggested as the reason for the choice of domestic tourism over international travel.

Appendix I: Background on Work and Leisure

The jobs of Oakland bus drivers, unlike most other occupations, are structured with three- to four-hour breaks in the middle of the working day. It is impractical for the drivers who live in the suburbs to go home during this time. As a result, many nonworking hours are spent at the workplace.

The two major locations for spending this nonworking time are the "gilly room" provided by the company and a private restaurant adjacent to the yard. The activities performed in each are very similar, except that the company does not allow gambling while the restaurant does. The following brief discussion is limited to the restaurant setting.

Almost everyone who comes to the restaurant has something to eat. After eating, there are many opportunities to enter into one of the many forms of gambling, the second most popular activity in the restaurant. One corner of the room generally has a pinochle game in progress. Stakes are usually twenty-five cents a point, and winnings have been known to exceed thirty dollars a sitting (one to three hours in duration). Pinochle is primarily popular with the white drivers, although a few black drivers also participate.

The other card game played is thirty-one. Stakes have been as low as twenty-five cents a set (four games), but recently, one, two, and five dollar sets have been the norm. With the recent escalation of the ante, one can expect to win or lose five to twenty dollars per sitting. I once saw a driver win seventy-five dollars in five hours. Roughly an equal number of blacks and whites play thirty-one.

Pool is very popular with the drivers, and, as with the other games, "a little money makes it more interesting." The only type of pool played is a variant of snooker. Stakes range from one to twenty dollars per game. I have watched two drivers play head to head for four hours or more. During these marathons, a "balancing of fortunes" usually occurs; nonetheless, I have seen sixty dollars lost in one hour. Most stakes are for one to five dollars. Pool is more popular among the black drivers.

Pinball is the other ongoing activity at the restaurant. Although it is not precisely a form of gambling, it requires paying to play. Good play is rewarded with free games, and play is often lively. Pinball is a much less frequent activity than pool or cards, and it is more popular among white drivers.

Some regular customers never participate in any of these games. Many of the nonplayers, however, take an active part in kibitzing or coaching the players. Thus, almost everybody is part of the action.

In this occupation, it appears that time scheduling along with job characteristics are important determinants of the use of nonworking time. The drivers in this sample generally work twelve-hour days. A typical schedule

consists of arriving at work at 6:00 a.m., getting out of the yard by 7:00 a.m., and arriving back by 9:30 a.m. From 9:30 a.m. to 1:45 p.m., the driver does not work. Another run usually begins at 1:45 p.m., ending at 6:00 p.m. However, the actual driving time during the twelve hours can range from five and a half to nine and a half hours.

The nature of the work itself offers additional clues to how nonworking time is used. The job is routinized, and schedules have to be met at all times. Driving "hot" (ahead of schedule) is worse than being late, which is itself frowned upon. Thus, there is no "getting ahead" by working harder in order to take a breather. Most drivers say this part of the job creates tension and mental exhaustion.

For the drivers, then, the restaurant is a constant source of pleasurable activity. Gambling at pool or at card games predominates in the effort to relax and enjoy oneself. As one pool-playing informant said, "This is a thinking man's game. You know there's a lot of pressure on you out there. You gotta do something, or you'll go crazy. So I play pool."

The routinized nature of the job is also offset by the thought and planning gambling requires. In this way, drivers control their own destiny—something that their work does not allow. Deciding to bid a pinochle game from thirty-two to thirty-four or to use reverse English in pool requires thought and consideration of various outcomes. Thinking and planning are rewarded in gambling as they are not in the work situation.

Zola (1964:438) has observed that gambling is a form of communication that can serve as a bond between people, distinguishing insiders from outsiders. This could be a reason why female drivers use the restaurant only to eat. The women are not gamblers and they are therefore excluded from much of the activity in the restaurant. Women drivers often indicated that they had no desire to "throw away their hard-earned money." The men, on the other hand, were more likely to subscribe to the philosophy that "the next best thing to playing and winning is playing and losing."

Notes

1. For a discussion of tourism and *anomie*, see Dann (1977).
2. I once asked a group of students who had read *The Tourist* what MacCannell meant by "middle class" and not one had a ready explanation.
3. Distinguishing classes by income is not uncommon; employing 1970 figures, Levison states that "the most logical figure to use for dividing the upper middle class from the lower middle class is about \$15,000-\$16,000" (1974:102).
4. For a discussion of the low occupational status of bus drivers, see National Opinion Research Center (1953), especially pp. 411-14; Hodge (1964), especially p. 292; and Goldthorpe and Hope (1974:96-109).
5. Part One of Bendix and Lipset (1953:7-92) provides a concise theoretical discussion of social class.
6. For representative examples, see the questions in the interview schedules of Bott (1957:231-37); Berger (1960:127-36), especially pp. 129-30; Goldthorpe et al. (1969:203-24), especially pp. 213-16.

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