

## Research Note

# From 'Artistic Ape' to Tourist: How the Evolution of Art Mirrors that of Tourism

Keith Kay Hin TAN

*Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Malaysia*

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the connection between art and tourism by showing how both disciplines have been subject to a similar evolution over nevertheless dissimilar periods of history. It focuses on the work of artist-researcher Desmond Morris whose works have been celebrated as explaining the effects of evolution on human behaviour. Focusing on the production of art as an essential aspect of the human condition, Morris' latest work re-connects his studies on zoology and evolution to his own origins as an artist by suggesting that historical art was strongly influenced by society, whereas modern art more strongly influences it instead. By explaining the parallel argument about tourism creating its own authenticity and how the motivations and desires of tourists and artists are often similar, this paper shows that the production and appreciation of art blurs the boundaries between tangible and intangible heritage, concluding that rather than a purely service-driven industry, tourism is in fact a creative medium in its own right which will benefit from a greater level of cross-disciplinary education, collaboration and research than is currently the norm.

**Keywords:** Artistic evolution, authenticity, identity, art and tourism, cultural producer, curating experiences

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## Introduction

Desmond Morris' major work on the evolution of human behaviour, *The Naked Ape: A zoologist's study of the human animal* began a series of studies that placed him at the forefront of the 20th century's most influential writers about the evolution of human behaviour, and indeed what 'being human' essentially means. Listed by TIME magazine as amongst the most influential non-fiction works of the 20th century, *The*

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Correspondence: Keith Tan Kay Hin, Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Malaysia. Email: KeithKayHin.Tan@taylors.edu.my

*Naked Ape* also exemplified Morris' skill in writing that appealed beyond the realm of academia to the 'common person', whose evolution from 'ape' to complex, 'modern' urbanite was the very subject of his writing.

Whereas Morris' writings on human evolution are eminent in academic and popular circles, his early career as a lecturer in fine arts and an artist in his own right are less well known, although they had profound later effect on the way he perceived human evolution. Only after the publication of *The Artistic Ape* (2013) has Morris himself paid homage to his early artistic motivations via a chronological study of how art has been a mirror to the human (and even non-human) condition over 'three million years'.

Focusing on two areas of human behaviour that have 'authenticity' at their core, this paper highlights the under-researched connection between the evolution of art and the evolution of tourism. It focuses on the artist's need to reflect authenticity and the tourist's search for authentic experiences (Chhabra, 2010; Chhabra, Healy & Sills, 2003). By studying Morris' writing in *The Artistic Ape* and drawing connections to recent scholarly research on tourism, this paper shows how the motivations and desires of tourists and artists are often similar, which suggests that individuals, industries and academics from both disciplines will benefit from a greater level of cross-disciplinary education, collaboration and research than is currently the norm.

### **Prehistoric Art**

Whereas Bataille (1955) identified the Lascaux cave paintings in France as amongst the most influential early examples of prehistoric art, Morris suggested that a wider geographical and social study of art raised the importance of other prehistoric sites to similar importance, showing how, even in the study of prehistory, a Western-centric bias can still affect perceptions of importance and even academic outcome (White, 2009). One of the great 'equalizers' identified by Morris was however the significance of prehistoric art, regardless of location, as 'markers of identity' suggesting ownership of specific places by particular tribes or cultures.

Whereas the languages, technologies and civilization of these early ancestors can, by the 21<sup>st</sup> century's advanced standards, be described as 'primitive', Morris nevertheless describes their art as something that can still be appreciated by contemporary eyes because the best examples were at the true forefront of early peoples' lives. The reproduction of ancient art for tourism from places as remote as Lascaux, Sub-Saharan Africa, the American Midwest and aboriginal Australia shows the enduring strength of artistic expression via 'neo-primitive art' representing not just people and place, but also time.

### Tribal Art

Not only did Morris describe tribal societies as 'disappearing rapidly', he also identified tourism as particularly responsible for the 'corruption' of tribal cultures, suggesting that "*tribespeople have little respect for foreign collectors of their art and often do only as much as is required to make a quick sale. The enormous effort that was put into creating their art for ritual purposes is no longer in evidence*" (Morris, 2013, p. 100).

This agrees with the tourism premise that "*we generally treasure relics more for being old-fashioned than old*" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 127), indicating that the lack of respect that artists have for tourists is in fact reciprocal. Rather than damaging the evolution of both art and tourism, writers such as Sternberg (1997) argued that because the main aim of tourism is to 'create' an experience, the growth of tourism in fact offers a new market for people in creative disciplines that would otherwise not exist.

The changeability of even representative, tribal art in response to tourism suggests that art is not merely a 'tangible entity', but rather is composed of tangible objects embodied with many intangible qualities. In this respect, intangible heritage, as represented through art is most certainly a living and changeable entity, with a capacity to constantly adapt itself in response to the historical evolution of its host community (Lenzerini, 2011).

### Heritage Art

Morris differentiated 'ancient' and 'traditional' art by grouping the former around historically advanced, yet now vanished civilizations like ancient Egypt and Angkor whilst suggesting that the artistic productions of medieval Europe began many of the 'traditions' which continue to affect the principles of art and design to this day. This separation, whilst useful in a pure study of art, can be collapsed when the connections between tourism and art are identified, since writers like Pretes (2003) singled out heritage attractions as 'hegemonic cultural producers' whilst Light (2007) identified domestic tourism as a tool for both 'nation-building' and 'social solidarity'.

Because art has been acknowledged to be as much a 'producer' of culture (via tribal art) and 'produced' by popular culture (via tourism), ancient and traditional art can in fact be grouped under the wider umbrella of 'heritage art' which continues to affect the development of art and tourism patterns today. This definition of heritage art therefore treats it as a resource that can be transformed not only into different products (souvenirs, clothes, replicas) but also services, even if this prevents its unchanged transfer from one generation to the next (Garcia-Canclini, 1995).

### Modern Art

Unlike the historical ‘eras’ of artistic development already described, Morris identified ‘Modern Art’ as a reaction to the development of the camera. Whereas this invention removed one of the most important roles that art (and especially painting) had played from ancient times until the late 19th century, photography also ‘freed’ the artist from the constraints of needing to document reality and society, much in the same way the increasing acceptability of ‘narrative-based’ research and oral histories have freed up the historiographical researcher from being merely a recorder of history to being an active participant in historical research engaging in ‘knowledge production’ (Villaverde, Helyar & Kincheloe, 2006).

This freedom to create new knowledge, techniques and rationales means that, in the words of Morris (2013, p. 174), “...when viewed as a whole, the art of the 20th century is a bewildering mixture of styles and short-lived movements.” This can be interpreted as much as a commentary on the state of tourism as it is on art, since, as argued by Bauman (1998), tourism is a metaphor for modern, contemporary societies and individual consumers who lack a bond or commitment to the places they visit.

Franklin (2007) went further by suggesting that tourism is one of the main catalysts producing a culture shaping a more mobile, flexible and individualised world. This ‘new culture’ of individuality replacing the ‘old culture’ of community was likewise reflected in the art world by the rise of ‘pop-art’ after the Second World War, which Morris described as a rebellion against traditional subjects. Various derivatives of popular art, such as event art (rebellious against traditional techniques) or super-realist art (competing with the camera) are now used in advertising and branding to ‘elevate’ the visibility of products or services above that of the competition in the same way that cities, districts and even countries have begun to market themselves as ‘tourism products’ seeking to deliver unique experiences to their clients (tourists).

Indeed, tourism has been identified as one of the most important ingredients for the creation of economically and culturally successful urban regions. Florida (2003) suggested that beyond attracting tourists and the ‘creative classes’, cities seeking success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will in fact require partial reconfiguration so that they themselves take on the likeness of tourist destinations, where people can be made aware of the “*possibilities of life*” (Florida, 2003, p. 188).

Whereas writers such as Eisner (2002) admitted that although works of art do not ensure that an elevated sense of experience will occur, they nevertheless increase the probability that they will, because by providing conditions for ‘awakening to the surrounding world’, art provides a ‘way of knowing’ which liberates both its producers and its consumers from the literal world, allowing them instead to experience vicariously what they cannot experience directly.

## Conclusion

Domestic and international tourism continue to be among the foremost vehicles for cultural exchange throughout the world. When that tourism centres around heritage sites, it provides a personal experience not only of that which has survived from the past via a focus on tangible heritage, but also of the contemporary life and society of others via a celebration of intangible heritage.

Whereas the existence of these two different types of heritage is widely acknowledged in tourism studies, there have been few attempts in the past to identify a bridge that links the two together, particularly in a way that the modern, 'disconnected' tourist can relate to. This study on the evolution of art and its parallels in tourism shows that the production and appreciation of art blurs the boundaries between the tangible and the intangible, because the process of artistic creation and its inspiration is as important as the finished product itself.

This suggests that rather than a purely service-driven industry, tourism is in fact a creative medium in its own right, because it creates and curates experiences for its customers much as art galleries create and curate experiences for their patrons. This will have profound impact on the way tourism education is delivered in the future.

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