




Power and Representation in Anglo-American Travel Blogs and Travel Books about China

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Special issue ***New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals***

Ed. I-Chun Wang

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Abstract: In his article "Power and Representation in Anglo-American Travel Blogs and Travel Books about China" Stefano Calzati presents a comparative analysis between two travel books and two travel blogs written by Anglo-American travellers about China. The assumption is that travel books and travel blogs, being two differently mediated forms of travel writing, share some similarities: they are "autodiegetic narratives" and they bear a (cross)cultural potential. Through a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis I investigate how Anglo-American travel writers represent themselves and Chinese people as to what extent the definition of travel writing is medially affected; 2) to what extent the cross-cultural potential of travel writing is medially affected; and 3) how differences and similarities in appear in which Anglo American travellers represent themselves and the other.

Stefano CALZATI

Power and Representation in Anglo-American Travel Blogs and Travel Books about China

Following Paul Fussell's definition of travel writing as an "autobiographic narrative" recounting a factual "encounter with unfamiliar data" (203) we can affirm that travel books and travel blogs share a certain genre's affinity as they often take the form of "autodiegetic narratives" (Genette 245) recounting real journeys. Needless to say, such bare definition has been repeatedly criticized in particular with respect to the preposterous distinction between fact and fiction. The most radical critique comes from Jan Borm, according to whom travel writing "is not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel" (13). In this sense, I argue that comparing travel books and travel blogs — two differently mediated forms of travel writing — would help cast a new light on the literary status of travel writing. At the same time, an important aspect stressed by Fussell is that travel writing recounts an encounter with alterity. A journey is not a mere displacement in space but, as Carl Thompson notes, leads "to encounter difference and otherness" (4). In this sense, travel books and travel blogs inherently embed, to various degrees, a (cross)cultural potential; they are texts "whose main purpose is to introduce us to the other and that typically demonstrate an engagement between the Self and the world" (Blanton 3). As a consequence, it becomes interesting to investigate to what extent such (cross)cultural potential is medially affected, when passing from the page to the screen.

"Although travel blogs offer destination marketers a window into tourists' travel experiences ... research analyzing the content of online travel diaries is still in its infancy." (Banyai and Grover 268). Echoing this warning, the purpose of my analysis is to look at travel blogs' and travel books' content investigating what is the representation that Anglo-American travellers offer of themselves, as well as of the other encountered. Here, the notion of "representation" does not stand for mere textual description, but it is considered as discourse, that is, as a (mono or multi modal) construction within which relations of power — binding the traveller to the other — can be enlightened. Concerning the texts under exam, this means to characterize: 1) the "position of power" that travellers come to occupy within China—i.e. their knowledge of the country, of Mandarin language, of ethnical, geographical, or historical information, etc; 2) the "power gaze" they exert towards the other—i.e. self-reflexive, critical, politicized, etc.; 3) the extent to which possible similarities and differences lead to a definition of travel writing as a genre or as a literary form; 4) how the position of power and the power gaze are medially affected. As for the notion of "other", it mainly refers here to "Chinese people", but it also inevitably includes the broader context in which they are inscribed and how such context is represented. In this respect, I employ Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) as a methodology for conducting my analysis. In Giorgia Aiello's words, MCDA seeks "to analytically situate the linguistic or more broadly semiotic detail of any given case into its cultural and social context(s)" (462) and thus I address two levels of analysis: language and visual. As for the former, I look at: 1) what is being written (i.e., places, people, historical reflections, personal impressions, etc.); 2) how it is written (organization of the text, style, and narrative strategies). As for the latter, I investigate: 1) the type of images (drawing, pictures, maps, etc); 2) what is represented (subjects, landscapes, the traveller, etc.); 3) the position of the images in the text; and 4) their interrelation with language.

The books I selected are Colin Legerton's and Jacob Rawson's *Invisible China: A Journey through Ethnical Borderlands* (2009) and Rob Gofford's *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power* (2008). As for the blogs, I look at two texts hosted on the travel blog's platform *travelpod.com*: "Going Walkabout and Answering Some of my Questions about China..." (2005) by "robjstaples" and "All o'er China during Spring Festival Holiday" (2006) by "ataritouchme." The criteria for the selection of the texts were 1) the nationality of the travellers (US-American or British); the date of publication (not older than 10 years); and 3) the effective recounting of a proper journey. I focus on Anglo-American travel writers because after a survey both in print and online they result by far the most active Western travel writers about China. As for the date of publication — being China a country which is developing rapidly — I prefer to keep the analysis on a synchronic level without taking into account dated texts. Last, I focus on texts which recount a proper journey because travelling,

differently from other more stationary accounts, means "escaping one's inattentive familiarity with the everyday world, an undifferentiated background against which the forms momentarily separated from everyday preoccupations stand out" (Bourdieu 35). In this sense, a journey cannot help but make more visible the cultural differences between traveller and other, eventually stressing the cross-cultural potential of the account. Specifically about travel blogs, I concentrate on the platform *travelpod.com* because differently from personal pages, the platform offers a common ground to all bloggers in terms of structure and content allowed thus granting a greater uniformity of analysis and because differently from other platforms, it permits to browse already completed travel blogs while ranking them according to their popularity (visits and votes), a criterium which represents a sensitive indicator of the social feature of blogs.

Invisible China is a travelogue written by Colin Legerton and Jacob Rawson, two US-Americans who spent roughly five years in China studying Mandarin and completing their MA in Mandarin. They undertook their travel at the end of their stay with the explicit intention to get in contact with "people in towns and villages all around the borderlands of China" (14). The book opens with a map of China in which all the minorities encountered by the authors are localized. What is interesting is that the image is not a "proper" map, but a drawing in which distances are distorted and no points of reference are given. In this respect, it is possible to suggest that while a proper map would have likely responded to cartographic parameters thus offering a more objective representation of China, the choice of a drawing is responsible for creating a "subjective" spatial representation which is strictly dependent on the minorities who inhabit it. This impression of space-through-ethnicity is reinforced throughout the text in two ways: on the one hand, the travelogue is organized according to four regionally-defined chapters — Northeast, Southwest, Northwest, East — which follow the geographical development of the journey and on the other hand all chapters are anticipated by a map — in the same style as the introductory one — and that represents each region with the names of the minorities, the main cities or towns, and the foreign countries bordering the region. Far from being mere editing choices, these two expedients affect the very structure of the narration and reassert the idea that the representation of space-through-ethnicity dominates the experience of travel. In fact, this is confirmed by the substantial lack of temporal notations of any kind. We know, for example, that the journey lasts four months, but no indications of distances, nor extensive descriptions of the time of travel are given, thus freezing the spatial and ethnical representation of the other into a temporal void, which leaves the reader to confront a two-dimension alterity.

Following the map, the introduction to the book is crucial to derive the authors' self-representation and their position of power with respect to China. We discover that "after completing degrees in Chinese in 2005, we spent the next two years learning two of the country's most widely spoken minority languages Uyghur and Korean. Equipped with five years of intensive language and cultural training apiece, we set-off together on a four-month journey to autonomous counties and minority-populated villages. Due to the vastness of the country and its varying climates, we broke the trip into two legs in order to see each region's most pleasant season" (xi). From this passage, it emerges that Legerton and Rawson occupy a strong position of power within China. Indeed, they can both rely on a deep understanding of Mandarin, Uyghur, and Korean, as well as on a good knowledge of China's climate. Clearly, in many respects they still are foreigners, but these skills allow them to organize their journey thus making them appear as empowered and integrated subjects. Further, what is interesting is that apart from the introduction the authors' self-representation is almost completely elided from the narration. Albeit dealing with an autodiegetic narrative, Legerton and Rawson manage to limit their presence in the text through various strategies. At the level of content, we witness the complete omission of personal anecdotes. Emblematic, in this respect, is the information about the authors' nationality, which is revealed only when a woman who is hosting them expressly ask to describe the U.S. Similarly, the lack of subjective notations is evident: the authors prefer to maintain an objective and descriptive stance that rarely transcends the contingency of the experience (the only exception is in the "afterword" where they recount of the revolts occurred in Tibet, once they had already returned to the U.S.). As a consequence, the power they exert on the Other is mitigated as the authors avoid taking on a clear position of power for example through judgments or comparisons with other countries. At the level of narrative strategy, the most evident case of the erasure of the authors' self-

representation is in the report of dialogues which follows a fixed pattern: they are transcribed as direct speech when it is the autochthons to speak, while they are in the form of transposed speech when it is the authors' turn. As Gérard Genette notes, direct speech creates a sense of mimesis and proximity to the event, while a transposed speech follows the flux of the narration, keeping a greater distance with respect to the event (171-72). In the text, this has the effect to relegate the authors in the background almost as silenced observers, while to the Other a foreground position is granted, which stresses, again, how the narrative is ethnically-driven. It is in this light that the "authors' intent to provide a faithful account" (ix) of local minorities, takes shape. To dominate the book is, indeed, a tension towards objectivity and factuality which eventually confers upon it an ethnographic connotation. In this sense, scattered throughout the book are passages in which the authors' knowledge of China is tested and verified in the effort to offer (the impression of) an accurate representation of the Other: "Historically the Wa were seen as barbarians and feared by their neighbors on all sides. We offered a timid hallo as we passed an intimidating man. He told us that he was on his way out, but invited us to come back to his house later. We resolved to never again let historical prejudices shape our experience" (Legerton and Rawson 100).

My next aspect to analyze is the presence of images: in total, there are fifty pictures and they are all inserted together in the middle of the book and organized following the regionally-defined written chapters (each accompanied by a short caption). Both the position and the organization of pictures help create the idea of an account-per-images which is autonomous, rather than merely supportive of the written text. Moreover, the high quality of the pictures conveys what Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen call "contemporary naturalistic representation" (160), that is, a representation which portrays events and subjects mimetically as close as possible to "the real world." Here, this leads to stress even more the ethnographic connotation of the narrative as we derive the (artificial) perception of "how things really are." Producing a content symmetry with the written text, the majority of images portrays people within their native milieu (34 out of 50). Hence, the predominance of space-through-ethnicity is reaffirmed even visually. At the same time, although many pictures show episodes which find a correspondence in the narrated text, there are also images which, in a way, recount a different story. In particular, this is the case of those images (9 out of 50) in which the authors are portrayed, usually while being engaged with locals. On the one hand, these pictures reassert the authors' position of power, because both of them appear as fully integrated. On the other hand, the pictures carry a much mitigated power gaze as the two authors are always *intra pares* among others and do not exhibit any willingness to stand out. Therefore, even these pictures — albeit manifesting the authors' position of power —attune to the written text as they embed a diluted power gaze which is in line with the stated purpose of the authors to "learn directly from the minority people" (13). The main difference between images and written text is the presence of two pictures in which the two authors are portrayed alone while writing. Such images bear, indeed, a meta-connotative meaning which is completely absent in the text and which contributes, in a way, to represent the authors as (pseudo)ethnographers caught in the process of collating information.

China Road is a travelogue written by British journalist Rob Gifford. In the introduction we read that he "first came to China as a twenty-year-old student in 1987, to spend a year studying the Chinese language in Beijing" (xxii). After that, he becomes a journalist and for seven years he is correspondent from China for National Public Radio. In 2006, he has to leave China and he decides to undertake a journey along route 312 — "the Chinese Route 66" — before leaving the country. From this initial self-representation, it is possible to suggest that Gifford's position of power is comparable to that of Legerton and Rawson. While it is not the same, it is similar insofar they all are Western subjects who can fluently speak Mandarin and who lived in China for a fair amount of time, conferring upon them a certain degree of knowledge of the country. However, Gifford addresses China in a different way from Legerton and Rawson in that he reasserts his position of power throughout the text while also exerting a power gaze which bears an evident geopolitical connotation. In order to understand the power relations between Gifford's self-representation and the representation he gives of China, the first pages are illuminating: "This is a book about people such as Liu Qiang. Ordinary Chinese people caught up in extraordinary moment in time. In China, the common people, both rural and urban, are known as the *lao bai xing*, literally the "Old Hundred Names" ... Pushed by the timeless

poverty of the countryside and pulled by the bright lights of the cities, this army of migrants is fuelling the economic boom. I think the West needs to pay more attention to China's problems because I think there could well be a crunch coming in China. There is one big question in my own mind: which is it going to be for China, greatness or implosion?" (xix-xxi). Such dense passage is fruitful for my analysis in many respects: at the level of narrative strategy, we witness Gifford's self-inscription in the text through two expedients. On the one hand, he recurs twice to the formula "I think." This enunciation, while opening the path to personal statements, reasserts the autodiegetic nature of the narrative. In fact, differently from *Invisible China*, *China Road* is rich in highly-opinionated digressions about the history of China, its society, and its political power. On the other hand, Gifford quotes a Mandarin expression whose effect is to reaffirm his knowledge of Mandarin indirectly and his position of power with respect to China (again, such expedient is completely absent in *Invisible China*).

At the level of content, we come to know that the book is about "ordinary Chinese people" and Gifford confesses his willingness to meet as various people as possible: "truckers and hookers, yuppies and artists, the famer and the mobile-phone salesman" (xxi). However, instead of considering them as individuals, the Gifford inscribes the stories of these people within the broader context of "Old Hundred Names." In this respect, his power gaze towards the other is an all-embracing one: a gaze which tends to erase differences in favor of a global vision of Chinese people in connection with the crucial historical moment they are entrapped in. This is, indeed, the second important aspect emerging from the passage: the time of the journey — 2007 — plays a major role in the representation of the Other. Gifford is interested in reporting how the lives of Chinese people have been affected by the rampant economic growth the country is (still) experiencing. It is this same framed representation of time which allows Gifford to approach Chinese people according to two spatial coordinates: the first one configures the distinction between the countryside (timelessly poor) and the appealing city and the second one entails the comparison between China and the West. This latter opposition is, indeed, the leitmotif of the whole book and we already get a glimpse of it in the quoted passage when Gifford claims the necessity for the West to get involved with China's current situation. Put it differently, the travel book is aimed at a Western readership. Therefore, it is not by chance that Gifford relies on a Western view in his narration, a choice that, in turn, is responsible for affecting his self-representation.

Apart from the much generalized historical reconstruction of the narrative, what is important to stress is that Gifford applies to China's present a whole series of concepts uncritically such as "jury system," "individual freedom," "human rights," "monarch," etc., which are drawn from the history of the West. Gifford seems aware of this when he points out that it is not his intention "to criticize or condemn Chinese tradition, or to ask arrogantly why other cultures can't be like ours. There are many ways in which China was far ahead of Europe, in terms of technological development and prosperity. But for some reason their system never developed any real checks on state power, and since in the West these checks did emerge, it has become a point of real contention between the two sides." (105). The point is that, despite Gifford's attempt to mitigate his power gaze, such attempt fails in that it is based on notions like "prosperity" and "development" which are, again, Western dependent. In this respect, Gifford's travelogue seems to confirm Debbie Lisle's argument that "contemporary travel writing continues in the colonial tradition to reproduce a dominant Western civilisation" (3). The opposition West-China is reproduced not only at the level of content, but also at the level of narrative and in the way in which the book is organized. As for the former case, a good example is the report of dialogues. The text bears a strong dialogical connotation, but differently from Legerton and Rawson, Gifford manifests his own presence in the conversations by directly reporting his questions. The choice to report dialogues in the form of direct speech on both parts has two effects: on the one hand, the people involved in the conversation appear on the same level, thus stressing their mutual engagement and their equal relation and on the other hand it helps build the discursive opposition We/You, at the base of the greater opposition West-China: "'I know, you Westerners think that after capitalism, there will still be capitalism. We Chinese think that after this stage of capitalism, there might eventually be Communism.' I open my eyes wide. 'Really? You really believe that?' She nods" (27).

As for the book's structure, the travel is performed following route 312 from East to West as evoking the encounter between the two worlds. However, when the journey is transposed in the form

of written text, this linearity is eventually affected. The book, indeed, opens with the author who is almost at the end of the experience and who is about to recollect his previous weeks, from Shanghai to Xingxingxia. Michel Butor argues that "the very form of the described trip cannot be completely separated from the form of its description or the effects it produces: its transforming power" (82). In this sense, I suggest that Gifford's choice to overturn the linearity of the journey bears, in fact, a transforming power in that it allows him to look back at China from a Western perspective, occupying a symbolic tautological position at the closing edge of the narration.

"Going walkabout and answering some of my questions about China..." and "All o'er China during Spring Festival Holiday" are two travel blogs recounting travels in China by British blogger "robjstaples" and US-American blogger "ataritouchme." Since both blogs are hosted on the platform *travelpod.com*, their layout is the same: what differs is how the bloggers decided to use it. For this reason, my analysis is conducted in a parallel fashion thus facilitating the comparison intra-medium. By looking at the main pages of both blogs, it appears at first glance that the relationship between written language and images — which in travel books implies a domination of the former on the latter — is subverted. The page (re)presented on the screen relies on images, maps, charts, diagrams, and other visual devices which reduce the relevance and quantity of written words. In this sense, blogs confirm Kress's and Van Leeuwen's argument according to which, in the passage from the page to the screen, we witness a passage from how "the world is told" to how "the world is shown" (1). This passage calls, in turn, for a "new literacy" able to account for its "far-reaching shifts in relations of power" (1). More specifically, the greatest difference between text-on-the-page and text-on-the-screen is that the former, mainly relying on written language, is presupposed by the "logic of 'sequence in time'" while the latter, being extensively filled with images, is based on "a conceptual order, realized by spatial arrangements" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 40-41).

On the main pages we first note that the text occupies the central section of the screen following a vertical axis. Such structure is, in fact, typical of blogs (and websites in general) where, rather than turning the page, users are asked to scroll it. Just below the blog's title, we find a brief paragraph which functions as an introduction, either to the travel, or to the blog in general. Both paragraphs worth be mentioned because they contain useful information for defining Robjstaples and Ataritouchme's self-representations. "robjstaples" writes that "having had a lot of fun teaching in China, an opportunity arises to be free of responsibilities, pressures, plans etc. for the first time in a many years and to go and take a look at China, the good, the bad and the ugly and get out the expatriate bubble I'd landed in. What to write? Well, let's try this for size: 1. Write to amuse myself and learn about myself. 2. Assume most things are the same everywhere. 3. Observe the differences. These are the challenges and interest of cross-cultural relationships and travel. 4. Few if any people understand China, least of all me, and certainly not the Chinese! The mystery is the relative isolation of the culture. 5. The writer's discretion is final, always totally rational(honest) and mine alone!" (1).

We discover that "robjstaples" has worked as a teacher of English in China. While this could lead him to occupy a strong position of power, we also come to know that he "cannot understand Chinese." As a consequence, although he is not a complete foreigner in China, he appears as not fully integrated either. The awareness of occupying this hybrid position is what eventually urges "robjstaples" to "take a look at China." In this sense, his scope is similar to Legerton's and Rawson's willingness to encounter ethnic minorities, although the power gazes are different in the two texts. While the two US-Americans try to hide their presence in the text, "robjstaples" manifests an authoritative control over the text. At the level of narrative strategy, this is achieved by avoiding any report of dialogues, so that the blog appears as an uninterrupted narration in which the blogger never abandons the "I" on the page as in the spirit of personal diaries. At the level of content, it is possible to retrieve many personal reflections that often take the form of a comparison between East and West: "Maybe the Westerners are consciously challenging the [Chinese] propaganda or maybe they're misunderstanding the culture. Whilst the latter is undoubtedly true to some extent, if a brainwashing party machine has created a truth by which culture is defined then surely the culture must be propaganda ... Sometimes I argue with myself that I shouldn't see things in this stark China v. West way" (8). Similarly to Gifford, "robjstaples" takes on a Western perspective to look at China stressing the differences between this country and his own background. At the same time, it would be incorrect to argue that "robjstaples"'s

power gaze is similar to Gifford's because — rather than being presupposed by a macro geopolitical view — the former is a mix of cross-cultural and self-reflexive intents: "robjstaples"'s authoritative presence in the text supports a personal "discretion" which, by not pretending to transcend the contingency of travel, mitigates the blogger's power gaze. As he states, his goal is to "observe differences" and write "to amuse myself and learn about myself" claiming the complete honesty of the blog's content. The interplay between self-reflexive and cross-cultural stances is also behind "robjstaples"'s decision to stop in Yungguo in order "to bite the bullet and get off my lazy backside and apply myself to learning some Chinese for a while" so that he can possibly emerge as an empowered subject (8). Similarly, these same stances can be detected at the visual level. Pictures are either within the text or at the end of each entry: in both cases, however, they accompany the written language, rather than functioning as an alternative to it. Moreover, while the overwhelming majority of pictures (217 out of 266) portray landscapes (observation), 33 of them portray Chinese people (cross-cultural value) while 16 are images of the author in close-up (self-reflexive value). In this case, the relatively marginal presence of "robjstaples"'s pictures belittles the authoritative control exerted by the blogger over the written text.

As for "ataritouchme," he writes in the introductory paragraph that "No flying allowed or desired. Travels through China, Spring Festival Holiday 2006. I mainly created this blog for myself, to remember what I did, and for the people who asked to see pictures (none of which I took, by the way — Hannah took all of them)" (1). This brief statement manifests two opposite tendencies: on the one hand, similar to "robjstaples," "ataritouchme" declares the blog's eminent self-referentiality ("I mainly created the blog for myself") and on the other hand he argues that all pictures are "for the people who asked [them]," thus demonstrating an overture towards the reader. These opposite tendencies are resolved by the words in parenthesis in which he specifies that the person responsible for all the images is not him, but "Hannah." "ataritouchme"'s overture to the reader is, then, only apparent, as it does not really depend upon him, but upon his companion "Hannah." Moreover, it is likely for this reason that "ataritouchme" appears often in the images (12 out of 68), while "Hannah" appears only in two conveying a representation of herself more as an agent than as a real travel's companion. Such disparity finds its confirmation in the text which lacks of dialogues between the two, so that "ataritouchme" comes to embody the authoritative "I" throughout the blog in the same way as "robjstaples." The configuration of the narrative in the form of a personal diary is, indeed, the greatest similarity between the two blogs, despite some notable differences in terms of style: "robjstaples"'s entries are long and well-articulated approaching his blog to travel books' style whereas "ataritouchme"'s entries are short, bare in syntax, and rich in jargon, all features which convey a sense of diary informality, but also of carelessness. As for "ataritouchme"'s position of power, it must be noted that neither the introductory paragraph nor the other entries of the blog contain much information thus suggesting that the blogger prefers to hide his personal background using the blog only for notations strictly related to the journey (images included). In this sense, the erasure of his self-representation matches that of Legerton and Rawson, but while in this latter case such choice works for the maintenance of an objective stance, it responds to "ataritouchme"'s understanding of the blog as a testimony in order to "remember what I did."

Other differences in the bloggers' self-representations arise in the way in which they exploit the vertical column "About the author" which appears on the right side of the blogs' main page. Here, the bloggers have the possibility to represent themselves in three ways: with a name (written language), an image (visual mode), and stating their nationality (which is rendered both in words and with the image of the corresponding flag). "robjstaples" adopts a fictive name, he uses a close-up picture of himself, and he asserts his British nationality while "ataritouchme" recurs to a fictive name, uses an almost completely white picture of himself, and does not state his nationality. The choice to adopt a fictive name is common on the web, whose virtual dimension seems to invite the creation of alternative and/or multiple identities. The point is that such a tendency poses ethical problems in terms of the bloggers' credibility and their texts' accuracy thus questioning the already unstable distinction between facts and fiction, a matter that concerns travel writing as a genre. In the cases at hand, what the bloggers write is not contested nor criticized by other bloggers/readers (there are few comments on each blog and none of them is negative); on the contrary, the popularity of "robjstaples"

and "ataritouchme"'s blogs seems to work in the opposite direction, namely neutralizing possible doubts about the bloggers' credibility and their texts' accuracy. However, the extent to which popularity reflects accuracy and credibility is a matter of concern and calls for future investigation. As for the issue of nationality, while "robjstaples"'s decision to declare it matches Gifford's, "ataritouchme"'s denial to overtly state it is similar to Legerton's and Rawson's. Thus, in the latter cases it is possible to discover the travelers' nationality only indirectly, reading the book or the whole blog. What is possible to discern is that in both circumstances the choice not to declare the nationality contributes to build a self-representation of travelers which is disjoined by any well-identified cultural background, thus mitigating possible comparisons and limiting the cross-cultural potential of travel writing. Further, by clicking on the bloggers' names, we are sent to their personal pages, where we can acquire more information about them (i.e., number of countries visited, number of travel blogs written, etc.). This information contributes to the bloggers' self-representation and that consequently redefines their position of power with respect not as much to a specific travel experience, but with regard to the *travelpod.com* community. On a more general level, "robjstaples" and "ataritouchme" use their profiles on *travelpod.com* as personal spaces not exclusively for gathering and sharing travel narratives, but for broadly collecting memories of their lives. Put it differently, these personal spaces are intertextual and confer upon the bloggers' travel experiences an autobiographic connotation which transcends and augments travel writing.

Always on the main page and below the brief introductory paragraph, we find a timeline of the journey which is filled with knots symbolizing the entries of the blog. Passing over them with the cursor, the dates of publication and the places they refer to are shown and at each passage of the cursor appears a detailed map of China which helps contextualize the entry both geographically, as well as according to the development of the journey. Such animations, far from being mere aesthetic devices, have consequences on the way in which the journey is represented and the visually oriented representation of the journey acquires an effective spatial and temporal performativity insofar space and time interrelate shaping "the meaning and the way through which meaning is performed" (Butler 521). Through such animation the journey is at once temporally and cartographically represented via visual modalities producing a dynamic effect which mimics the journey's evolution and deconstructs the linearity of printed pages, so that "each successive [web]page may have a different reading path" (Kress and van Leeuwen 179). Such potentialities, resulting from the interactivity allowed by the web, are unique features of blogs as online texts and they mark a difference between travel books and travel blogs. Another feature is that below the timeline all blog's entries are listed in chronological order. By clicking on the title, the full content is displayed. In terms of layout, all entries conform to the main page presenting the map of the journey and the timeline. In this sense, their layout aligns to the spatial and temporal unifying principle of the whole blog. At the level of written language, however, this principle is denied as each entry tends to reproduce its own space-time dimension. This is produced by the fact that bloggers often recount in each entry self-enclosed episodes which are spatially and temporally autonomous with respect to previous and following entries: in blogs "each post makes sense in itself, but read together ... the posts tell a larger story. That story is usually partial and incomplete and does not form a narrative whole" (Walker-Rettberg 115). Both "robjstaples"'s and "ataritouchme"'s blogs lack, for example, notations concerning the time of travel, the traversing of space, or which meta-textually recollect past episodes were already narrated. In other words, the written text of these blogs configures a fixed space and it tends to reduce the representation of time while written entries represent finite and heterogeneous durations and it is up to the reader to (recreate) the unifying principle of the narrative. Hence, the written text of both blogs configure a space-time representation which is close to *Invisible China's*; however, while in the latter such representation joins an erasure of the travelers' self-representation thus creating the effect of an ethnographic account, in these blogs the authoritative presence of the travelers is reasserted throughout the text and recur to a narrative which avoids dialogues and is rich in personal notations more in the style of diaries.

In conclusion, in *Invisible China* the erasure of the authors' self-representation from the written text, together with the explicit goal to factually represent the other, shapes the narrative as an ethnographic study. This is also reinforced by images, despite the fact that their position and

organization tend to realize an alternative visual narrative rather than a supportive one. Thompson suggests that ethnographic accounts can be considered as travel writing by "taking a more expansive view of the genre" (32), thus going in the direction of Borm's definition of travel writing as a literary form. *China Road* bears, instead, an evident politicized power gaze mainly owing to Gifford's decision to represent himself as a Westerner. Despite his knowledge of China and Mandarin, his position of power is that of an outsider and from this stance he cannot help but look at the country from a Western perspective. The result is focus on China as a whole and on the macro-dynamics of interest to the Western reader rather than on the stories of single people, as in the case of Legerton and Rawson. For these reasons, Gifford's travelogue could be associated with journalistic reportage, thus calling for a further extension of travel writing's definition. The autobiographical in both blogs is relevant because such narratives take the form typical of personal diaries. This is due to the bloggers' choice to write subjective impressions on a daily basis and rarely transcending the contingency of the journey ("robjstaples") or recurring to informal language and bare syntax ("ataritouchme"). In this sense, my analysis shows that travel blogs share a greater homogeneity in terms of genre than travel books do. At the same time, the ways in which blogs "update" the genre is in the direction of a performative representation of travel, which is allowed by the web as an interactive virtual space. Blogs tend to re-enact the unfolding of the journey not only through the narrative, but also via interactive and visual elements. Last, concerning the cross-cultural potential of travel writing, the texts analyzed reassert the said potential to various degrees, but no definitive inferences can be drawn on the specificity of each medium. Thus the representation of the Other is achieved through competing strategies which can be found on both media. As for the authors' self-representation, on the one hand they do not present sensible differences between Britons and US-Americans and on the other hand each self-representation seems to respond more to the "personal" needs of the authors than to medially oriented logic, thus (still) conferring upon the writers the burden of choice despite the medium adopted.

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