

**Abstract**

The modern funeral is largely misunderstood and underexplored. There is little to no background research about it, and it is a complex topic. Thus alternative methods need to be looked into when examining the funeral industry. One such method is a comparison with the tourism industry. In this essay I compare the tourist with the mourner to better understand the mourner. This method proves to be both viable and practical for understanding the funeral industry. Tourism and funerals are very similar in many ways, from how they operate to what they desire. Through this simple comparison we can start to explore deeper and more complex aspects of the modern funeral. It also demonstrates that further research on the funeral industry is needed.

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The funeral industry is sadly underexplored. It is surprising how little we know about modern funerals or the funeral industry, especially considering how important and personal it is to most of us. Because of this most of us do not understand the modern funeral. While we may have attended a funeral we have not thought about what it is or know much about it. Due to a lack of research and understanding we need to explore alternative methods to examine the modern funeral. One such method would be through comparing the funeral industry to the tourism industry. I will demonstrate that this comparison is not only possible and practical but through this method we can begin understand the funeral industry, how it operates, the aims, the ideas and methods behind it and how we interact with it. A comparison with the tourism industry is not as counterintuitive as one would initially think. After all, tourism is a consumer good and a cultural activity. While there is a tourism industry tourism itself is a social phenomenon which cannot be restricted to the tourism industry. Tourism is a complex product with a very symbolic nature (Pagenstecher C., 2003, p. 1). It is quite reasonable to compare tourism and funerals as the two are so similar, from how they operate to the roles of those who participate in them. Because of this similarity and because tourism is so well researched it is a perfect way to develop a foundation and framework for exploring the funeral industry.

Unfortunately at this time “the mourner” is relatively undefined and unexplored. many would easily say it is simply ‘someone who attends a funeral’. It appears pretty obvious, that is what the mourner is. Yet this is too simple, too superficial. It does not encompass the mourner correctly or accurately. The undertaker who also attend a funeral are obviously not mourners. So if we now include the requirement that the mourner be related to or know the deceased we might be happy. Yet then what of those who attend a funeral but did not know the deceased. They are there to pay their respects, such as fellow members of a club? While they never met or knew the deceased they still wish to pay respect to a fellow. Or what of those who attend to support someone who did know the deceased? Even if we do find a way to cover all these the

idea of the mourner as simply one who attends a funeral is not sufficient. It prevents us from actually understanding the mourner. As in their role, their behaviour, their impact on the funeral industry and the funeral and so on. Despite the fact that mourning and funerals are an old topic they are very unexplored and undefined. Because of this we have no real understanding or concept of them. Many would only define the mourner by the simplest of definitions, perhaps adding an emotional element (such as think of the mourner as a sad person) but never take it further. As such it is difficult to make a new or deeper definition from basically new. It also means that it is difficult to make the mourner relevant as something other than a sad funeral attendant. Thus instead we should compare the mourner to something more understood and relevant to us. In this case I intend to draw a comparison between the mourner and the tourist. After all, tourism cannot simply be restricted to the tourism industry (Pagenstecher C., 2003, p. 1). Not only will I show how similar they are but in doing so I will develop a better understanding of the mourner and the funeral industry. Indeed, the tourism industry is perhaps the most similar to the funeral industry from an anthropological perspective.

Before we continue and explore the mourner we have to understand the tourist. Many would think they know what a tourist is, we have all been one, often on more than one occasion. We also experience tourists quite often, seeing them in the street or talking about them with others. Yet this does not mean we understand or know the tourist. In fact “the tourist” is a debated and questioned topic, with many different roles and definitions. A simple and easy definition of the tourist would be someone who travels for pleasure (Cohen E., 1979 p. 179; Stronza A., 1995, p. 265). But this definition is simplistic and superficial at best. Yet as soon as we delve deeper or expand this definition we encounter many different views and perspectives, some of which contradict each other (Broonstin, D., 1964; Crick M., 1995; Cohen E., 1979; MacCannell D., 1973; Pagenstecher C., 2003; Stronza A., 2001). Some contend the tourist and tourism to be a superficial contrived and false experience (Broonstin, D., 1964 p. 77-117). Others describe it as the modern search for authentic experiences (MacCannell D., 1973, p. 593). However it has also been shown that tourists and anthropologists have a lot in common. Both explore the ‘other’ and both are often outsiders when they enter a place or group. (Crick M.,

1995; Stronza A., 2001, p. 261).

As has been demonstrated by others there is often a dichotomous view when talking about the tourist and tourism. Literature on this subject tends to be broken into two types, that which looks at the origins of tourists and that which looks at the impact of tourism (Stronza A., 2001, p. 262). Unfortunately in doing so we are left with only half the picture, the studies on the origin of tourists look at the tourists while forgetting locals and other factors. While the studies on the impacts of tourism look too much at the locals and often overlook the tourists (Stronza A., 2001), p. 262, 277).

This is the same when talking about the tourist itself, many fall on one of two sides. Viewing the tourist as shallow viewer of fake and superficial things or as pursuers of the real and explorers of other cultures and sights (Cohen E., 1979 p. 179-180). Again this does not give us a complete picture and creates a simplistic and rigid understanding. It forgets that different tourists experience and see different things and have different desires and objectives (Cohen E., 1979 p. 180). After all, tourists are a variety of individuals and have different perceptions, experiences and desires (Pagenstecher C., 2003, p. 1). Indeed, we quickly see how complex the definitions and thoughts are around what a tourist is. The tourist can be seen as viewer of the fake or an explorer of the authentic. As someone who travels for fun or as someone who travels out of a need to 'renew' themselves. If we take "the tourist" out of a tourism (or more accurately traveling) context and framework we can gain a better understanding. By comparing the tourist to the mourner we can better understand both the tourist and mourner at the same time.

A way to understand the tourist is by defining the tourist, by developing different types of tourists. One such example is that of Cohen's (1979) five modes of tourists. Here Cohen aims to develop a phenomenological typology of tourist experiences. To do this Cohen looks at what the tourist seeks and why. He analyses the motivations and desires of the tourist to distinguish his five types of tourist (Cohen E., 1979 p. 183). The first one, the recreational mode, is of the typical modern tourist who travels as a form of entertainment and pleasure. For this type of

tourist the trip restores them both physically and mentally (Cohen E., 1979 p. 183-185). The second is the diversionary mode is of a tourist who is alienated from their world and seeks a distraction from this alienation. This type of tourist is not looking for a new world or meaning but simply to make the alienation they feel bearable (Cohen E., 1979 p. 185-186). The third is the experiential mode is when the tourist goes looking for meaning in the life of others. In other cultures and societies. This tourist believes there is meaning, but that it exists outside their own culture or society. In other words this is a tourist who seeks authenticity in the 'otherness' (Cohen E., 1979 p. 186-188). The fourth is the Experimental mode is of a the tourist who engages in the authentic life of others but does not commit to it. Instead they sample and compares from different alternatives (Cohen E., 1979 p. 189). The final one is the existential mode is of the tourist who finds meaning and authenticity in another place, but only while they are not there. This tourist lives in two worlds, either unwilling or unable to move permanently to where they feel like they belong (Cohen E., 1979 p. 189-193).

These five modes are questionable. It is quite obvious how one sided they are, as they only look at the tourist and never at the tourism industry. It has been shown that tourists and the tourism industry both influence each other (Pagenstecher C., 2003; Urry J., 2001). For Cohen to almost completely overlook the tourism industry is a bit of a simplification. Another issue is that these modes focus too much on authenticity of the tourist and the tourist experience. They focus on the tourist seeking meaning and authenticity. It is true that in exploring this idea Cohen does talk about types of tourists who do not seek or care for authenticity. Cohen all but completely ignores those who travel for fun and who do not feel alienated. Whilst these modes might not be perfect, they are thought out and well defined. There is no doubt that they assess and explore the desires and mind frame of tourists quite well. These modes also look at the impacts, albeit from a tourist only perspective. Even though they are not perfect, these modes are quite adequate for my purposes and assess different types of tourists quite well. Which I can then compare to mourners. From this I will show that even these five modes can easily be applied to the mourner.

The first mode, the recreational mode, is all about the tourist traveling as a recreational

experience. The tourist enjoys the trip because it “restores his physical and mental powers and endows him with a general sense of well-being” (Cohen E., 1979 p. 183). For the mourner this is a big part of the funeral. The restorative powers of funerals is something one should not doubt or refuse. Many mourners will confess that they feel much better, mentally and physically once the funeral is over. Or even after each stage of the funeral is dealt with. This is something one can see by attending a funeral. Once the coffin is lowered or gone for good there is a tension, a hesitation, just for a few moments, then an ease and relaxation falls on the mourners. A more specific way this can be quantified is by conversation, the type, amount and manner. At the start of the funeral mourners will talk, but they are uneasy, the sentences are usually shorter and simpler. Mourners do not delve into the personal lives of others and speak softer before the funeral start. At the other extreme once the funeral is over people interact very differently. The sentences get longer and are usually more personal. The information shared is more personal, more open and more descriptive once the funeral is finished. To doubt the restorative powers of a funeral is quite pointless to say the least. Indeed, the restoration of the living is perhaps the main reason we have funerals. to help deal with the loss and bring the mourners back to a better or more positive state. As tourists rest on a trip to restore themselves the mourners attend a funeral to be restored. Just as with this type of tourists this type of mourners are not concerned with the authenticity before them. It is explained that the recreational tourist is not seeking truth or authenticity, nor are they duped by the tourism industry. They in fact often participate in falseness, not only do they not seek authenticity but they are quite happy to experience the fake. This is because the recreational tourist might find the experiences on the trip to be fun or interesting but they are not personally significant. The experiences do not have a deep meaning or connection (Cohen E., 1979 p. 184). This is the same for most mourners. Actually, much of the funeral industry is a false front which is not questioned or doubted by mourners. An example is the way many funeral homes say they are “local” with offices in the area of the mourners. However this is not really the case, although technically true. WNBull Funerals had an ‘office’ in North Sydney and advertised as local to North Sydney. Yet nobody had ever worked in this office, it was little more than an empty shop front. Instead all work was done down at Newtown toward the middle of Sydney. Another example is of Simplicity Funerals, how they advertise as

having offices around the place to be local and near to people. They infer that the funerals and work are also done locally, however again this is not true. All the bodies in Sydney for Simplicity Funerals went to one of only three locations in Sydney. The company used “processing centres” as they were called. In both cases the ‘localness’ of the funeral home is quite important to many mourners, yet if they questioned it even slightly they would find the falseness.

We can also see this in the general way people know so little about the funeral industry, and how they never think about it. Nobody really wonders how the body went from the hospital to the coffin before them (unless something goes wrong). For many mourners the body simply floated its way to the funeral, while the truth behind the scenes would surprise these mourners. Take for example Simplicity Funerals and White Lady Funerals (or all InvoCare owned funeral homes for that matter). Mourners would think they paid a large amount to White Lady Funerals to have women only as the staff, that the body would only be handled by women and that behind the scenes they would be fancy and high quality at least compared to Simplicity Funerals. After all, White Lady Funerals are one of the most expensive in Sydney while Simplicity Funerals is one of the cheapest. The truth is that Simplicity Funerals and White lady Funerals use the same facilities, the same staff, the same equipment and the same procedures behind the funeral. From the people who pick up the body to the place where it is put in a coffin is all exactly the same for both companies. It is only on the funeral itself, the part the mourner sees, that there is a difference. If the mourner questioned the practices behind the scene, even for a moment, they would come to realise this. But many mourners do not care, as it is not what is important to them. The authenticity of how the funeral works, even down to the value they receive, does not impact on the restorative power of the funeral. The recreational tourist does not care for the authentic, nor do they question it (Cohen E., 1979 p. 184). But they get what they really want, the pleasure of the trip, which is quite legitimate. Furthermore this pleasure and restoration does not depend on the authenticity before them (Cohen E., 1979 p. 184, 185). Which is exactly the same for the mourner, the restoration they get from the funeral is quite legitimate, and it is what they really want. For both the mourner and the tourist the spectacle before them is fun and they

never question or doubt it.

The next mode Cohen talks about is the diversionary mode. It is when the tourist feels alienated from their world and seeks a distraction from this alienation. This type of tourist is not looking for a new world, or even meaning, but simply to make the alienation they feel bearable (Cohen E., 1979 p. 185-186). It is similar to the recreational model except that this tourist does not seek meaning, even a false meaning (Cohen E., 1979 p. 186). This is also the mode many with negative views of the modern mass tourist believe in, how the tourist is not a seeker of meaning or experience but just looking for a distraction, a diversion from their sense of loss and alienation (Cohen E., 1979 p. 186). This mode is just as applicable to many mourners. These mourners are not seeking a resolution to their loss, at least not from the funeral, but just looking to be distracted. They know the feeling they are experiencing cannot be alleviated by a funeral, yet they attend anyway. As a way to be distracted for a while and to make the feelings bearable. For the diversionary tourist travel is a means of “escape from the boredom and meaninglessness” into the “forgetfulness of vacation” (Cohen E., 1979 p. 185). And this is exactly what many mourner do on the funeral, for them the funeral is an escape and a way to make things bearable. For some the act of grieving is a distraction from grief but not a cure for grief.

The third mode Cohen discusses is the experiential mode. In this mode the tourist is looking for meaning outside of their own culture or society. This tourist is looking for meaning, but in other cultures and societies (Cohen E., 1979 p. 186). This tourist believes there is meaning, but that it exists outside their own culture or society. Cohen describes this as “a modern form of the essentially religious quest for authenticity” (Cohen E., 1979 p. 187). This mode is built upon the type of tourist MacCannell (1976) described. MacCannell states that the tourist turns elsewhere for meaning and authenticity. That the tourist is reminded of the reality somewhere else the more they live their lives (MacCannell D., 1976, p. 160). Because of this the main issue faced by this type of tourist is the question of whether the experience is real or not, is authentic or fake (Cohen E., 1979 p. 187). Again this translates to the mourner very easily. For the mourners who do seek authenticity and seek meaning and authenticity of a funeral they face a



big question. How can they tell if a funeral is authentic? If the mourner is looking for meaning an authenticity on a funeral then how can they know they got it? Unless one works for that funeral company and on that specific funeral there is little to no real way to know how real it is. Many tourists and many mourners are “victim of a sophisticated deception” (Cohen E., 1979 p. 187). It is all but impossible for a mourner to experience an authentic funeral. Other times the mourner is seeking meaning from the funeral, not simply as a way to deal with the death of someone, but as a way to define life and death. But this is an issue for two reasons.

The first can be understood by referring back to the tourist. The modern tourist seeks an ‘otherness’, it is the novelty and strangeness beyond the tourists own world that they desire (Cohen E., 1979 p. 188). Tourists are basically strangers in a foreign place (Crick M., 1995, p. 212). This is reminiscent of many mourners, how they see and think of the funeral as novel or strange ‘otherness’. The funeral is something which people do not generally experience or see on a regular basis, thus it is different, unusual and strange to the mourner. What to do, what is happening, where to stand and so on are all things many mourners do not know. The second is also understood by looking at the tourist. The tourist is always aware of their ‘otherness’, the experiential tourist is forever a stranger even when living in the society or culture they visit (Cohen E., 1979 p. 188). Again, this is the same for mourners. They might seek meaning or authenticity from the funeral but are reminded that the funeral is foreign and unrelated to their daily life. Because the funeral is so different, unusual, and because the mourner knows this they cannot find an applicable meaning in a funeral.

Another interesting similarity between the experiential tourist and the mourner is in their type of experience. Both seek a meaning, an authenticity, or an emotional, spiritual or mental nature yet their actual experience is quite physical and aesthetic (Cohen E., 1979 p. 188). The mourner looks for a non-physical meaning on funeral, be it mental or spiritual. Best understood with the way mourners discuss or look to some form of afterlife on funerals. Most funerals spend a lot of time discussing and focusing on the after life. On the traditional Catholic funeral they will talk of death as a birth, how it is the transition to “the next life”. Many items used on

Catholic funerals directly represent this, the pall (a white cloth placed over the coffin) represents the baptismal shroud worn by babies as they are baptised. A thurible (type of incense burner with white smoke) is used to represent the rise of the spirit or soul to heaven and the afterlife. The priest will sprinkle the coffin and the grave with three shakes of holy water to hallow it, and to represent the resurrection of Christ after three days. As one must not by now all this is very representative of a spiritual meaning and message, yet it is all very visual. The placing of a white pall, the rising or smoke or the sprinkling of water are all visual act. As was explained about the experiential tourist, they seek a non-physical meaning but primarily experience aesthetic and physical things (Cohen E., 1979 p. 188). Which is no different for the mourner. They seek the spiritual or emotional, but in doing so experience the visual and physical.

The fourth mode of Cohen's is the experimental mode. This mode is basically described as a type of tourist who aims to find meaning and authenticity in multiple cultures or societies. They do not stick to just one type and while they might participate they do not commit (Cohen E., 1979 p. 189). The experimental tourist is "in search of himself", insofar as in a trial and error process" this is an "essentially religious quest, but diffuse and without a clearly set goal" (Cohen E., 1979 p. 189). In the terms of the mourner this would happily describe mourners who can find meaning in multiple aspects of the funeral. That no one or singular part of the funeral has the meaning they are after, but rather the funeral as a whole with all aspects combined. As such many funerals have multiple aspects, the more to the funeral the more meaning and significance they can have for the mourner. The coffin cannot simply be buried or cremated, there needs to be a service at a separate location (be it a church or somewhere non-religious). The service itself will have different components, not simply a speech or two. The coffin will then be moved to the crematorium or cemetery where another service with multiple stages will take place. All in all the funeral will have many aspects to it, each of which is usually tied to another to give an overall message and meaning. The mourner cannot or will not settle on one single aspect. For the meaning and significance is not in one individual part but in all of them.

Finally the last mode is the existential mode. Basically the existential tourist is one who

lives in two worlds as they find their meaning in a world that they cannot or will not permanently join (Cohen E., 1979 p. 190). To explain this better Cohen uses the example of non-Jewish tourists who return to Israel to experience kibbutz every year while spending the rest of their time in another country, their home country (Cohen E., 1979 p. 190). Another example he uses is of African Americans visiting Africa to experience their roots and heritage (Cohen E., 1979 p. 192). However, as he states doing so can cause a loss of their meaning, that the meaning of the place is dependent on them not being there. So once they visit the place that they think holds meaning all meaning is lost. The desire for an experience or meaning is not a guarantee that they will get an experience or meaning (Cohen E., 1979 p. 192). In terms of the mourner this would explain those who think of the funeral as a significant way to understand and deal with death, their own death or the death of another. Many will argue that the funeral is place and the way they cope with grief. Some will say that not going to a funeral can leave them with unresolved grief and feelings. How if they had gone to the funeral they would have been able to understand and deal with the death better. Yet this is not always the case, in fact many say going to a funeral can create more grief or problems to deal with. That by attending the funeral they now felt worse than if they had not gone. At first one might find this a bit of a paradox. That many view the funeral as a place to deal with death positively and negatively at once. But if we use the existential tourist mode to understand it then this becomes quite clear. If we think of the mourner as an existential tourist then we can see how they apply a meaning of the funeral while not at the funeral. Yet once they attend, once they are at the funeral, the meaning they desired (the dealing with death) is not gained but actually lost. As Cohen says of the existential tourists, the meaning of the place is only there while the tourist is not at the place (Cohen E., 1979 p. 191). Furthermore just as the existential tourist does not see or find meaning in their world or culture the existential mourner finds meaning only at or from the funeral.

This is not to say that these five modes are definitive or exclusive. Both tourists and mourners will move through the modes, or exist in multiple modes at a single time. Hence the tourist or mourner do not exist as a single type, there is no 'tourist type' (Cohen E., 1979 p. 180). By now something one should have noticed is the "other" or "otherness" popping up when

discussing the tourist. All of the modes discussed above reference the “other”. This “otherness” is actually a rather common and important idea when talking about the tourist. That the tourist seeks to see and experience the other, the unusual, the novel, the strange. Tourists study and collect the ‘other’, both literally and metaphorically (Crick M., 1995, p. 207). The desire for the other is actually a rather significant part of the definition of tourist for many (Broonstin, D., 1964; Crick M., 1995, p. 207; Cohen E., 1979, p. 179; MacCannell D., 1973; Pagenstecher C., 2003; Stronza A., 2001, p. 265). Thus it is an important aspect of the tourist that should be discussed and a part we can easily apply to the mourner.

The tourist is a stranger in the other’s land, desiring, seeing and experiencing otherness (Cohen E., 1979 p. 188; Crick M., 1995, p. 212). Which is exactly the same for most mourners. Mourners actively seek and desire the otherness of the funeral. Many will, like the recreational tourist or the diversionary tourist, use the otherness at the funeral as a way to deal with or distract them from death. For this mourner the funeral is a place outside the real world, it is a place they can go to, one they can temporarily visit to understand and deal with death. Take for example the clothing worn to funerals. It is usually quite specific and special (depending on the individual culture and society). Formal and dark clothing is worn, clothing rarely worn outside of special events. This clothing the mourners wear is different, unusual, from what they normally wear regularly. Or take funeral specific places such as Waverley Cemetery. Mourners expect a certain look and atmosphere from Waverley. For it to be calm, quiet, restful and historic. Despite the fact that it is an open and active cemetery with modern graves being sold all the time no modern graves are built. Old fashioned historic gravestones and graves are always used at Waverley Cemetery. The sandstone and marble graves are what mourners expect and want to see here. An old style not used anymore in other aspects of life. Certain behaviour is also expected at this cemetery. Mourners desire quiet, stillness and a generally peaceful and isolated atmosphere. Despite the fact the cemetery is in a busy area with a recreational walkway down one side and a busy bowls club just behind a wall. The behaviour mourners want at Waverley Cemetery is unlike how we would normally behave. Many of us would not be so quiet or slow outside of the cemetery.

The mourner wants to experience the other, and feels like an outsider when on a funeral. Most mourners do not know their way around cemeteries or crematoriums. These places are quite literally unknown and strange places. Places that are physically and mentally separated from the rest of the world. The tourist is constantly aware of their 'otherness', the experiential tourist is forever a stranger even when living in the society or culture they visit (Cohen E., 1979 p. 188).

Taking this further the mourner does not want the otherness of a funeral to blur with the reality of their daily lives. Funerals and regular activity are separate and should remain as such. One way we see this is at Waverley Cemetery in Sydney. A recreational walkway runs along the back of the cemetery, and for a short stretch the walkway the the cemetery blur, they mix with each other physically. This walkway is popular with joggers and walkers, yet they all but never step into the cemetery. Rather they cling to the walkway, actually hurrying along at the point where it blurs with the cemetery. While they stop regularly to look at the scenery or rest at other points on the walkway nobody stops or pauses where it meets the cemetery. Recreational walking and a cemetery might mix physically but people do not let the two mix mentally. Thus Waverley Cemetery remains an other, a strange place not to visit unless on a funeral or to visit a grave, despite the convenient walkway, it being a shortcut to buses and it being such a scenic place. This separation of the 'other' on a funeral and daily life is the same with clothing worn on funerals. How some would consider it strange or wrong to wear funeral style clothing when not at a funeral.

Mourners want 'the other' while on a funeral, this is what they want to experience. But they also do not wish to mix this otherness of the funeral with daily life or activities. Much like the tourist desires the other, but does not bring this otherness home or incorporate it into their lives (Cohen E., 1979; Crick M., 1995).

### **Conclusion**

Due to a lack of information and research on the modern funeral industry understanding the modern funeral is difficult. So alternative methods of research need to be considered, one of the more promising is by comparing the funeral industry to the tourism industry. Through this we seen discover that the modern funeral is very similar to tourism, in how they operate, interact with others and so on. This can be seen through a comparison between the mourner and the tourist. That definitions and distinctions of the tourist are easily applicable to the mourner. These same definitions and distinctions can also explain the mourners behaviour, as in what they seek and why and then be used to examine the interactions between the mourner and funeral industry. By looking at the tourist we gain a deeper understanding of the mourner and of the modern funeral. From this simple comparison we are able to start to dig deeper into the mourner and the modern funeral. As in what they really are, what they seek or desire, how they interact and so on. This was demonstrated with the exploration of 'otherness'. From comparing the tourist and the mourner the idea of 'otherness' arose and remained constant between both. That both the mourner and tourist seek and desire an 'other' unlike their daily lives. Furthermore the mourner does not want the other to contaminate or mix with the daily and separates the otherness of the funeral from the daily both physically and mentally.

This proves that comparing the funeral industry to the tourism industry is both a viable

and practical method to better understand funerals. It also makes it clear that more research is needed on the modern funeral industry.

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