



STAGING TOURISM

Tourists as Performers

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Abstract: Metaphorically, tourists can be considered to enact a range of performances on distinct stages. Their enactions are distinguished according to various factors, including their competence, reflexivity, the extent to which they are directed and regulated, or participate in group or solo performances. Providing examples from research carried out at the Taj Mahal in India, particular attention is directed to the characteristics of the stages upon which tourists perform, with a distinction being drawn between “enclavic” and “heterogeneous” spaces. The paper explores particular modes of walking to convey the diversity of tourist performances and how they are formed. **Keywords:** performance, stage, direction, regulation, ritual, improvisation, enclavic and heterogeneous tourist space, walking. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: La mise en scène du tourisme: le touriste comme interprète. Métaphoriquement, on peut dire que les touristes jouent de nombreux rôles sur diverses estrades. Leurs interprétations se distinguent selon différents facteurs, y compris leur compétence, leur réflexivité et le degré auquel ils sont dirigés ou réglés ou qu'ils participent aux interprétations de groupe ou en solitaire. En citant des exemples de recherches réalisés au Taj Majal en Inde, on fait tout particulièrement attention aux caractéristiques des estrades sur lesquelles jouent les touristes, en faisant une distinction entre les espaces d'enclave et les espaces hétérogènes. L'article examine les différentes manières de marcher afin de communiquer la diversité d'interprétations touristiques et en quoi elles consistent. **Mots-clés:** interprétation, scène, direction, règlement, rituel, improvisation, espaces touristiques d'enclave et hétérogènes, marche à pied. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Theories of tourism have tended towards ethnocentrism, over-generalization, and functionalism. Certain tourists, places, and activities have thus been identified as defining tourism *per se*. Additionally, much energy has been expended on drawing up tourist typologies (Cohen 1979; Smith 1989). While such analyses can usefully identify regularities, it is essential that these be understood as varieties of practice rather than types of people. Moreover, there is a danger that such categorizations become reified as immutable. On the contrary, it is argued that tourism is a process which

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involves the ongoing (re)construction of praxis. In order to question such conceptions, the metaphor of this performance is used to establish a basis to examine diverse practices at tourism sites. Rather than suggesting that this is a separate realm in which a particular set of performances take place, it is contended that the whole of social life can be considered as performative, and that tourist performances exhibit continuities with enactments in other, non-tourist settings. Nevertheless, it is argued that particular dimensions of this performance can be explored according to time and space, social and spatial regulation, and issues of power. These performances are shaped by the constraints and opportunities that tour structures produce and are informed by the symbolic meanings and spatial organization of sites.

THEORIZING PERFORMANCE

It is argued that social life is thoroughly dramaturgical, built of roles according to social contexts (Geertz 1993; Goffman 1959). The strategic “stage-management” of impressions characterizes the ways in which people attempt to convey particular meanings and values in social settings on the “front-stage”, dropping their actor’s mask only when they reach the domestic safety of “backstage” regions. Inevitably, these instrumental actions are mannered, stylized, and recognizable. Following prevailing understandings about bodies, space, and time (Thrift 2000), and culturally coded patterns of behavior, grounded in habitus and the dispositions that evolve around class, gender, and ethnicity (Bourdieu 1984), social actors produce distinctive gaits, ways of speaking, dress and demeanor which articulate shared forms of understanding. In this way, social actors aim for coherence, so that their qualities can be understood as consistent and predictable (Chaney 1993:17). Social performances must be constantly reproduced so as to uphold a faithful impression and banish ambivalence and ambiguity, as Butler has explained in expounding upon the production of gendered bodies and selves (1989, 1993).

These performances may articulate a meta-social commentary which reproduces social norms and conventions (Geertz 1993) and they have also been described as a “discrete concretization of cultural assumptions” (Carlson 1996:16). Yet besides the management of the self, the codification of performances — what is “appropriate”, the order of action, who should participate — is frequently regulated by key personnel, who monitor and instruct participants and maintain key scripts. The wielding of cultural power to synthesize meaning and action through regulating performance constructs a common sense praxis and reaffirms cultural norms. Thus, authorities are apt to inculcate embodied habits through ritualistic performance to reinforce and re-encode hegemonic meanings. However, social performances may bypass or negotiate with normative rituals, by organizing a patchwork or bricolage of meanings and actions to generate new dramatic configurations (Schutz 1964:72–

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