Tourism and Visual Culture

Volume 2 Methods and Cases

Edited by

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Peter Burns
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Introduction

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Volume 1 of this two-part work set out the case for tourism as '. . .part of the mass-mediated, post-industrial, postmodern society that has spawned tourists who seek instant gratification in the dreamscapes, landscapes, ethnoscapes, and heritagescapes created and provided by the tourism sector. . .'. In this sense, as Hollinshead (1999: 7) puts it with uncharacteristic clarity, 'tourism, often unsuspectingly, matters'. While tourism and the study of tourists have become a mature and discrete area of multidisciplinary study, there remains something of a struggle about finding suitable research instruments, methods and strategies to adequately capture and do justice to data. On the one hand, simplistic visitor arrivals or other statistical measures have no capacity to communicate the complex flavour of tourism as it infuses the cultures of both visitors and the visited. On the other hand, it has never been the intention of detailed qualitative studies of a particular micro-destination to create generalizations for wider applications. If the idea of research and publication is to create and disseminate knowledge, then a broad approach must be taken that encourages innovation and develops methods that allow nuanced descriptions of social phenomena (including travel and tourism) beyond the merely descriptive.

The idea of the senses, and especially the visual sense, being central to tourism is captured by Alain de Botton's thoughts about the corporeal act of being a tourist being overwhelmed by visual power:

> I stood on the corner of the Calle de Carretas and the Puerta del Sol, an undistinguished half-moon shaped junction, in the middle of which Carlos III (1759–88) sat astride a horse. Was a sunny day, and the crowds of tourists were stopping to take photographs and listen to guides. And I wondered, with mounting anxiety. What I was to do here, what I was to think?
>
> (de Botton, 2002: 108)

De Botton's thoughts about 'the art of travel' describe the confusion that sensory overload can bring about and reflect Urry's view that 'the centrality of the gaze to the tourist experience mirrors more generally the privileging of the eye over the other senses' (2003: 3). Lucy Lippard sets out to re-conceive tourist 'scapes by examining ways in which artists respond to environmental, cultural and political issues surrounding tourism.

> Across the [US] towns devastated by capital flight, technological shifts, or union busting make spectacle of themselves, desperately framing and reinventing their histories to make a picture appealing to those who might buy a hamburger, T-shirt, suntan lotion, Indian jewellery, a plastic seagull, a shell ashtray, or a boat ride. . . Everybody has to go someplace, so they can come here.
>
> (Lippard, 1999: 6)

Lippard's views feed into the assumptions underpinning both Urry's (2003) and Buzinde *et al.*'s (2006: 712) notion that tourism is 'a collection of idealised images which circumscribe the boundaries of experience and essentially direct the tourist gaze'. There are also distinct synergies with Selwyn's claims that in the:

> intellectual landscape [of social analysis], a much wider variety of social groups may find it possible to represent 'their' histories. In short, singular national history, 'scientifically' represented, is giving way to multiple histories, based on locality, class, gender, ethnicity, and so on, represented in multiple ways.
>
> (Selwyn, 1996: 5)

Thus the arena is set for qualitative methods to generate understanding and insight into the complex praxis of tourism. This volume addresses one particular aspect of qualitative research: visual methods. Just as technology has brought about significant changes to our daily use of (and exposure to) images, pictures and photographs, so these same technologies have enabled far wider access and ability to use visual methods in research. As Douglas Harper says 'images put a face on statistical data, but what do they add beyond that?' (2005: 748). Well, he provides some answers. He talks about images contextualizing, 'subjectively connect[ing] the viewer to the argument' (Harper, 2005). But here he goes on to say that images are 'secondary to the text' and are just being used as illustrations: '[t]he visual dimension is not integrated into the research' (2005: 749). What Harper calls for is 'sociological thinking [that] emerges directly from images rather than reinforcing and elaborating on word-based thinking' (2005: 749).

Tourism as a topic for visual studies has a rich but chaotic and somewhat accidental history. In a sense, the pace of these excursions into tourism has been forced by discipline-based scholars (most often anthropologists and sociologists) rather than subject-based academics. The result is that oftentimes tourism scholars find themselves following advances in our field rather than leading them.

The purpose of the present book is to provide detailed methodological examples that underpin the visual concepts provided in Volume 1. Aimed mainly at the tourism scholarly community, the intention is to build research capacity in visual methods by demonstrating their use and value in advancing knowledge and understanding of tourism beyond business and economics. Picking up on Hollinshead (1999) again:

> individual managers, developers, researchers in tourism and travel quickly engage in small and large games of cultural, social, environmental and historical cleansing, as they promote and project some socio-political universes and chastise or omit other possible contending worldviews.

What he is getting at is that part of that game playing involves choice, and, given that tourism is a largely visual phenomenon, these choices often involve still and moving images, graphics and other visual ephemera. What is left in and left out shifts from a matter of aesthetics to that of power. This power of visual images is something that is of great interest to social scientists. As Grady (2001: 84) points out, 'Quantitative sociologists have long known that the clearest way of organizing material is to lay tables and charts out in a sequence and then write an account that explains what is in each one, beginning with the first and ending with the last.' He goes on to say that 'the same applies to maps, photographs and film clips.' Grady makes much of ensuring that images are not used merely to illustrate a point. (Indeed, he says that treating images in such a way 'devalues the very thing that makes the image important as data, which is the simultaneity of the relations that exist between the various elements represented in the frame' (Grady, 2001: 86–87)).

> Mere illustration simplifies complex subjects, trivializes events and issues, and may induce a cognitive passivity that precludes the exercise of analytic reason. But used as a source of data, which must be assessed judiciously, examined carefully, and interpreted thoroughly, images provide a kind of material that encourages analysis.
>
> (Grady, 2001: 89)

In so far as tourism is concerned, Gillian Rose's admonition that 'we need to learn to interpret visual images because they are an important means through which social life happens' (Rose, 2007: xiii) becomes crystal clear when her thought is juxtaposed with Franklin's (2004) description of tourism as a 'relentless

force' that is 'reordering society' – a point made in the introduction to Volume 1 and repeated here.

Taking a general idea from anthropology, visual research can loosely be divided into two categories: participatory and researcher-generated data. Research tools for the former include visitor-employed photography (MacKay, 2004), such as giving disposable cameras, photo-elicitation, overseeing mind-mapping exercises, film diaries, problem-tree analysis and, one supposes, even self-generating responses within social networking spheres such as Facebook. The latter (researcher-generated material) draws on more traditional approaches, such as documentary film-making and photography. But, even though these may be familiar, Rose (2007) indicates that more understanding must be gained into the processes of analysing made media (she is talking mainly about photographs) as opposed to found or searched-for media. Behind both categories is the idea of creating, observing, reviewing, organizing and analysing visual data in order to communicate insights and outcomes in the scientific and public domain. Challenges that remain (as with most data that are not strictly quantitative) are how to manage the interpretative processes, the role of reflexivity and ethical issues (though Harper (2005) makes brilliant short work of the latter!).

Organization of the Book

The 17 chapters that make up this book can be divided into four separate but interconnected methodological categories: semiotics/symbolism; visual sociology/photo-elicitation; image analysis for destinations and marketing; and visual ethnography.

Semiotics/symbolism

Mary Scott's chapter on tourist art in Yucatán (Mexico) uses a wealth of visual data to create new insights and some strong conclusions about the comparisons between finely made carvings replicating the skills of the Mayans to hastily carved hybrids from cheaper materials designed for a wider audience. The images in this chapter include an artist as well as the artefacts, thus making a very symbolic connection between hosts and guests. In complete geographical contrast, Anja Saretzki uses her contemporary visual data on the Berlin Wall and environs as a means of making sense of how tourists 'read' Berlin. The images are startling in their appearance and create something of a cognitive dissonance as the 'anti-fascist protection rampart' morphs into the global urban landscape of graffiti and architectural detritus. In this chapter, the visual and textual data are treated as equal: semiotics making sense of the symbolism. Susan Ashley takes us from the streets into the seemingly calm world of the museum in her chapter on 'envisioning heritage'. However, as we soon learn, there are unintended visual impacts from an exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum on 'The Underground Railroad: next stop freedom'. The chapter highlights the sensitivities of planning such an exhibition and the difficulties encountered while trying to make textual interpretations of icons, objects and histories of marginalized minorities. Ashley talks about how the normative reference point (the default setting if you will) for museums in western culture is for the 'authentification and mediation of heritage'. Her chapter highlights the danger of curators being beguiled by new technology and efforts at new museum practices while not paying full attention to 'really understand[ing] the visual processes behind heritage mediations [and] the whole area of "representational processes" and "minority cultures"'. Elmira Djafarova and Hans-Christian Andersen's fascinating chapter of visual metaphors in tourism advertising is concerned with the visualization of tourism and travel images via the metaphorical patterns in advertising. It is based on the idea that growing competition from new information technology devices, legislation in advertising and tourism, and growing global markets put more pressure on advertisers to attract new consumers. What we learn from Djafarova and Andersen's chapter is that semiotics, through qualitative content analysis, helps to identify the patterns in the use of metaphors, which in turn sharpen our understanding of tourism representation. This is a reflection of increased levels of competence and experience of tourists in reading and interpreting images as part of a tourism advertising discourse. They go on to say that changes in the sociocultural

environment can affect the ways in which meta-
phors are used by advertisers to visualize tourism
products. Valentina Anzoise and Stefano Malat-
esta introduce us to the visual and tourist dimen-
sions of Trentino's borderscape. Drawing on the
politics of boundaries and borders, they use
visual evidence in the form of photos and bro-
chures to relocate a locality from the usual global
discussions back to its local borderscapes. The
images are treated as data, and a hybrid approach
is used 'to understand a field of social reality
where highly codified images have a strong
impact on people's perception'. Finally, Fusco
and Lombardi take an unusual approach to the
economic history of a touristic arena by claiming
that 'visual research is fundamental to under-
standing the Campi Flegrei' (a regional park with
volcanic and archaeological features situated to
the west of Naples in southern Italy). Their use of
a variety of visual evidence drives home the his-
tory of the area and its importance (and rise and
fall) as a site of leisure mobility. The visual data
in this chapter help identify a number of tradi-
tional themes/rhetorical conventions (topos) that
link classical and 20th-century histories.

Visual sociology/photo-elicitation

The four chapters that make up this section
each take a particular tourist space to mobilize
and test the method: Breda (the Netherlands),
Venice (Italy), St David's peninsula (Wales),
and Hadrian's Wall (England). The first of
these, Christa Barten and Rami Isaac's chapter,
'The Use of Visual Products in Relation to
Time–Space Behaviour of Cultural Tourists',
sets out ways in which cities can enhance their
visual products (advertising collateral, tourist
maps, etc.) to enrich the visitor experience
through identifying visitor space preferences
and analysing behaviour (frequency and length
of time spent at attractions, including informa-
tion sites). The chapter develops insights into
how tourists assemble the essential elements of
a day trip in quite different ways. The next
chapter, by Paolo Parmeggiani, is functionally
and intellectually rooted in visual sociology.
Taking Venice as its central case, the author
relies on a multi-method approach, combining
both still and moving digital image making

followed up with photo-elicitation interviews.
Linking his own fieldwork to Baudrillard's the-
ory of simulacra and simulation, Parmeggiani
makes the point that with the 'endless chain of
visual meta-productions' we are all semioti-
cians now. Nika Balomenou and Brian Garrod's
chapter on volunteer-employed photography
(VEP) takes a powerful but underused and
undervalued research technique. Indeed, there
is a growing body of scientific evidence to sug-
gest that participatory photographic techniques
such as VEP allow complex meanings to be
conveyed and permit study subjects to express
their views more efficiently and effectively.
They argue that this is because the medium of
photography is more sensitive to the multi-
dimensional nature of place experiences than is
written text or the spoken word. On this basis,
this visual method was used to investigate ten-
sions between locals and tourists in the touristic
area of St David's peninsula in the Pembroke-
shire Coast National Park in west Wales. The
growth of tourism in the area has led to there
being a ratio of 143 tourists to every resident,
and this has created tensions between the locals
and tourists. Local people were asked to photo-
graph aspects of the park that give them a sense
of attachment to place. They were also asked to
attempt to capture aspects of the area that they
did not particularly appreciate. Tourists, mean-
while, were asked to take photographs to illus-
trate why they chose to visit the park. They
were also asked to take photographs of aspects
they did not particularly appreciate if they hap-
pened to come across them. Participants were
asked to keep photo-diaries and to describe
what aspects of the park they would change if
they were given the opportunity, as well as to
explain why. Balomenou and Garrod end with
an overall critique of the methodology used.
Victoria Bell looks at how people approached
taking pictures of Hadrian's Wall. While fully
acknowledging their limitations, Bell draws up
a typology of photographic motivations as they
gazed on this 'iconic historical landscape'. She
uses a combination of reflexive photography
and the photo novella (concepts that are
explained in the chapter) to enable the research
participants to create narratives of their experi-
ence. Such auto-elicitation approaches have
great value in tourism research and provide
at least one of the means by which touristic

activities, performance and behaviour can be analysed, theorized and hence generalized.

Image analysis for destinations and marketing

Visitor destinations do not simply evolve. Most do not start out as tourist venues, but as economics, colonial guilt and immigration propaganda (i.e. attracting British and Irish immigrants) put pressure on what was then Van Diemen's Land, Tasmania has over 130 years' experience of using and manipulating images for place promotion. So the stage is set for Marian Walker's chapter on Tasmania and the use of tourism image concepts to explore the connection between identity and tourism. Her chapter demonstrates, via an original use of a tourism systems approach, the potential for tourism image as an approach to history and for 'uncovering holistic evolutionary aspects of tourism' by understanding images as 'social transcripts'. Albertine van Diepen and Elke Ennen make the point in their chapter that there is a continuing need to ensure that destinations do not lose their appeal for visitors. Landscapes, symbols, pasts and stories are potential resources for commodification. Van Diepen and Ennen suggest that this process plays a key role in the development of destinations as resources are transformed into marketable products. Cities select from the range of resources at their disposal, each with its own connotations, and attempt to construct an appealing and marketable visitor destination. Although the connection with the locality is often embedded, this is by no means necessarily the case. Their chapter identifies the symbolic meaning arising from three types of destinations: namely, city beaches, skating rinks and Easter and Christmas markets. They conclude that resources can be taken out of their original context without any loss of popularity. Perhaps this reduced context-boundness even adds to the popularity of visitor destinations. Iis Tussyadiah's chapter reminds us that destination marketers have always used mass media to communicate notions of tourism experiences to the general public and that images have been the bedrock of such activity. Images help define and direct tourism experiences for potential travellers. However, aside from representations promoted by

the official destination marketers, tourists can also get a representation of tourism experiences from images shared by travellers on personal online travel galleries. Her study finds similarities and differences between images used by destination marketers and images shared at the visit and post-visit stages by travellers and, most importantly, analyses how visitor-generated images provide value for their audiences. Tussyadiah suggests that visitors represent differentiated and specialized experiences through their images. Finally, for this section of the book, Gökçe Özdemir takes a more traditional approach to analysing destination brochure images for Istanbul. Quantitative content analysis is demonstrated here through the categorization of 162 images found in brochures. From this visual method, Özdemir is able to demonstrate the endeavours of the brochure producers (including the national tourism organization) in marking and making the destination conform to the tourist's stereotypical image of history and blue skies.

Visual ethnography

Three chapters make up the final section of the book. Ethnography has a long history of using visual methods as a main activity (such as in ethnographic documentaries) and of using still and moving images as visual data in a multi-method approach to fieldwork. However, more often than not, the focus is on indigenous populations, or populations at risk, sometimes even inadvertently stepping into the zone of voyeurism. Nissa Ramsay, however, chooses to investigate the seemingly banal activity of souvenir shopping, revealing a rich source of evidence that enables her to use the touristic topos of 'just looking' to move the tourist gaze debate somewhat further. Her videos (in which she looks beyond content and into aesthetic value) 'evoke how the meanings of objects are negotiated through their material qualities by tourists and sellers within particular encounters'. Such researcher-produced visual data add to our ability to gain insight into the relationships between seller and buyer, host and guest, Us and Other. Laura Gemini and Giovanni Artieri describe a complex visual project carried out by the Research Lab

for Advanced Communications (LaRiCA) at a popular family leisure park. They used visual methods, in this case photo-elicitation of family groups, to investigate the notion of collective identity. Following a relatively new theme in anthropology (Malaby, 2008), some of the focus is on 'play', which is of great interest to tourism scholars. Their research demonstrates that visual methods employed within an ethnographic framework can add to the 'thick descriptions' required to gain nuanced understanding of everyday life and play. The final chapter in the book, by Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, turns our attention to the compelling area of touristic representations and destination image making. However, rather than investigating this phenomenon through the lens of marketing, Bandyopadhyay takes inspiration from May Louise Pratt's seminal paper 'Imperial Eyes' (1992) to locate contemporary media practice in their colonial/postcolonial contexts. Using visual data to enrich reflexive fieldwork, Bandyopadhyay tells of alienation and Othering as being rife in a space where, allegedly, 'the fun never stops'.

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