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## HOW CAN WE KNOW ABOUT TOURISM?

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### **Abstract**

The present short essay review not only explores the conceptual dichotomies of tourism applied research, but also distinguishes the difference between tourism, as a mere business and touring which exhibits the needs of discovering other places. The main thesis of this work is that ideology sorts people to different classes for the circulation and accumulation of capital. Tourism is one of the apparatuses that organize this class-sorting function. Again, from surface appearance, the main classes involved with tourism are the owners of the tourism firms, the capitalists, the workers in the tourism industry, the tourist proletariat, and the tourists, who appear as consumers of the tourist product. Setting aside the tourism capitalist for the moment, examine the tourism workers and the tourists more carefully. The tourism workers seem unexceptional. They are much like workers in any other mainly service industry.

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We can know about tourism by doing it, by observing it, by reading and viewing it—that is, we can know about in the same ways we know about any activity. The problem is that tourism, unlike say bicycle riding or singing has layers of mystification piled over its surfaces. Tourism is a business. This distinguishes it from *touring*, which has a long history. People have engaged in touring since ancient times and for different purposes. Alexander the Great toured for

conquest. Vikings toured for adventure (Korstanje 2012). Marco Polo toured for commerce. Tourism as a business coincided with the emergence of industrial capitalism and the triumph of the bourgeoisie in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thomas Cook's travel agency provides the archetype.

By the late nineteenth century tourism became an industry. It made a product and provided services which were sold in the market. Tourism produced commodities. There are various particular commodities that fall under the sobriquet, like the automobile industry which includes engines, batteries, tires, and so on. Also like the automobile industry, all those commodities can be summarized as one. The automobile industry sells cars. The tourism industry sells spectacle.

Writing in 1967, Guy Debord saw that commodities and spectacles had merged into a single continuum of social life. "The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. . . commodities are now *all* that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity" (Debord 1967: 29 ¶ 42). What had been contained within a larger whole, that of society, has taken it over, colonized it. There is nothing but commodities. Nothing escapes commodification. Debord is merely elaborating on Georg Lukacs.

The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume a decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness . . . . (Lukacs 1923: 86)

Commodities, of course, are a moment in the process of production under capitalism. They are a form of capital, along with money. When capital reaches the saturation point, when capital in its various forms becomes all there is to conceive, it turns into a global spectacle. "The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image" (Debord 1967: 24 ¶ 34). Both Debord and Lukacs were pointing to the condition under which people have become tourists in the world they make. But the dialectic of tourism reveals a complex role for tourists. They both consume and produce touristic spectacles. It is as if a worker in an automobile factory both produced the car and drove it, but *at the same time*.

Tourist attractions partake of the ideological apparatus as spectacles. That tourist attractions can function as ideological apparatuses and businesses, should not be surprising. Much of the culture industry does the same (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947). Louis Althusser lists these kinds of spectacles under the category of ideological state apparatuses (ISA) as "the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.)" (Althusser 1970: 143). That is, Althusser adds the state as the overarching control organization. Ideology is a framework for understanding the world and our experience of it. Ideologies are belief systems about what is. They are world-referencing reports offering public doctrines based on public evidence meant to be believed

because they are true. They make universal truth claims (Gouldner 1976: 33). Distinguishing between the state and one hand and privately owned businesses on the other may serve some analytic investigations, but for others they merge together as the same or part of the same organizational complex. A good example is the US military-industrial complex. The same holds true for the political establishment and the establishment news media. Tourism operates similarly.

Ideologies play in the field of meaning, which makes them culture bound. The meaning of a spectacle for one culture differs to some extent or other with its meaning for another culture. Their materiality, however, remains the same. Tourists live in a particular culture, but they often travel to another where their tourist destination is located. Moreover, the tourist attraction itself may have originated within yet another culture. Tourism centered on ruins of ancient civilizations serves as an example. The ruins were temples, palaces, tombs, and so on; which were integral to the ruling ideology of the past culture. They are sited in a modern culture that makes use of their location for its own ideology. They are visited by tourists from a third culture who bring their own meanings to help create the spectacle. These examples show the conjuncture of cultures, ideologies, individual subjectivities (the tourists), and materiality (the ruins).

[This] is what happens to the 'individuals' who live in ideology, i.e. in a determinate (religious, ethical, etc.) representation of the world whose imaginary distortion depends on their imaginary relation to the conditions of existence, in other words, in the last instance, to the relations of production and to class relations . . . I shall say that this imaginary relation is itself endowed with a material existence. (Althusser 1970: 166-7)

Althusser goes on to write that ideologies construct subjects, actors in social relations, by what he dubs interpellating individuals (173). That is, an ideology transforms individuals by recruiting them into a world view. Another term for this would be enculturation, since cultures are the material manifestation of ideologies. Consider tourists who travel between cultures, from their own home culture to another, a tourist destination. The tourists' destinations interpellate them. It confronts them with another world view. Sometimes the difference between the destination and the origin cultures are small, and sometimes the differences are great. When they are great, tourists experience culture shock. One of the services the tourism industry sells is culture shock mediation. By mediating culture shock, the industry takes part in the dialectic between tourists and attractions. Tourist attractions and destinations (the places where the attractions are located) interpellate tourists just as the tourists interpret and therefore partake in creating the spectacle of the attraction.

The foregoing dialectic involving the attraction in the destination which interpellates individual tourists into a different ideological subjectivity at the same time the tourists are interpreting—that is, giving meaning to—the spectacle of the attraction remains hidden by mystifications. It must remain hidden because revealing its process would confront tourists and workers in the tourists industry with a new consciousness. That consciousness would expose

these individuals as commodities themselves. That is, as subjects which are ideologically constructed, individuals act as commodities in the processes of capital. They become a moment in the circulation and transformations of capital as it takes its various forms. They do this through their labor as tourists. From surface appearance, tourists are mere consumers. They consume spectacle. Nonetheless, just like consumers of automobiles, they also contribute to the industry as a whole by what they do. Consumption is work, albeit unpaid. This unpaid labor plays a crucial role in capital accumulation because it transforms exchange value into use value. Were it not for the unpaid labor of consumption, value in the form of profit could not be realized. Moreover, since consumption contributes to the reproduction of the labor power of individuals, tourism as recreation plays an integral role in reproducing labor power. Therefore tourists as subjects contribute to reproducing their labor power which they must sell on the market. This is how tourists themselves are commodities; not as individuals, but as subjects.

Jean-Paul Sartre gave an example of a boxing match which illuminates tourist attractions in general. Boxing is a game or sport that pits two opponents who seek to subdue each other through violence. Accordingly “The violent ‘game’ *incarnates* the type of violence characterizing the society in question . . . the public combat is an embodiment, in front of everyone of the fundamental violence” (Sartre 1985:25). By fundamental violence, Sartre referred to his idea that violence lies at the heart of all social relations. Sartre went on for many pages to explicate his boxing example. He noted that the boxing match is not just the two opponents, but that it necessarily involves spectators who in fact make it a match. It also involves the political economy of the sport, the individual histories of the two boxers, and so on. He made great pains to point out that each punch incarnates the entire field of boxing in both its synchronic relations and diachronic: “hence *one* punch, like *one* dance, is indissolubly singular and universal” (40). “Every boxing match incarnates the whole of boxing as an incarnation of all fundamental violence . . . the fight encloses the fundamental violence within itself” (27). The boxers act as commodities, as all who labor in a capitalist system. In the ring “commodities clash as if they were men” (44). All who participate, the boxers, the fight official, and the audience participate in their commodified roles. “People are taking part in the public alienation of free actions. In this ambiguous event—the bout—the participants thus produce and grasp the reality of their own alienation” (45). Just as Sartre wrote of the alienation and commodification of all participants in boxing so tourism alienates and commodifies all participants. One of the ways it alienates and commodifies pertains to its role in ideology.

Ultimately, ideologies function to reproduce class relations. Ideology sorts people to different classes for the circulation and accumulation of capital. Tourism is one of the apparatuses that organizes this class-sorting function. Again, from surface appearance, the main classes involved with tourism are the owners of the tourism firms, the capitalists, the workers in the tourism industry, the tourist proletariat, and the tourists, who appear as consumers of the tourist product. Setting aside the tourism capitalist for the moment, examine the tourism workers and the tourists more carefully. The tourism workers seem unexceptional. They are much like

workers in any other mainly service industry. They work in accommodations, travel, attraction maintenance, and so on. The tourists, however, are more than they seem, and their class relations are the key to understanding their role in the process. Tourists are members of the bourgeoisie, and they mainly hail from the centers of global capitalism. Recently, tourists from the so-called emerging markets have become increasing consumers of tourism spectacle. According to the World Tourism Organization (2013), China became the biggest spender in tourism. Chinese tourists function as unpaid labor in circulating currencies, especially the conversion to US dollars. In order to see how tourists engage in reproducing class relations, it is necessary to look at them as part of a collective. In this case the collective is the world capitalist system.

As actors, subjects, in this system, individual tourists cease being individual buyers and sellers in a market. They “are now swept away and replaced by (or *augehoben*, lifted into) those of the collectivity, the only adequate ones for understanding anything concerning that ‘political animal’ we are” (Jameson 2011:53). Here, Frederic Jameson refers to chapter 13 in Marx’s *Capital Volume I* (1867). Instead of seeing tourists and workers in the tourist industry as separate and in different classes, tourism brings them together into a new dialectic. Marx explained how this occurs.

Moreover, the co-operation of wage-labourers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them. Their unification into one single productive body, and the establishment of a connection between their individual functions, lies outside their competence. These things are not their own act, but the act of the capital that brings them together and maintains them in that situation. Hence the interconnection between their various labours confronts them, *in the realm of ideas* [emphasis added], as a plan drawn up by the capitalist, and, in practice, as his authority, as the powerful will of a being outside them, who subjects their activity to his purpose. (Marx 1867: 449-450)

Subsequently, Marx refers to the “colossal effects of simple co-operation [as] . . . seen in the gigantic structures erected by the ancient Asiatics, Egyptians, Etruscans, etc.” (451). Of course today, those colossal effects are tourist attractions. What were once, when they were built, material manifestations of imperial ideologies, are now situated in a global capitalist system where they serve multiple, even competing ideologies, and in a sense employ tourists in their ideological endeavor.

In their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* Marx and Engels (1848) described to ineluctable globalization of capital. It took until the turn of the twenty-first century to make their insight palpable. These days, globalization has come to seem common place. Its full implications still escape most popular commentators. As noted above, Debord pointed to a world of spectacle. In our current world of spectacle, tourism is both a specific kind of business and a way to describe the general human condition. As a business, tourism’s most important role is circulating capital. In addition, national states use it to fill in gaps in their legitimizations. At this writing, the Russian government makes use of the winter Olympics in Sochi to build national,

legitimizing ideology. In the past and in the future other states have done and will do the same. This is as expected. Nonetheless, tourism as a human condition describes the fact of alienation for everybody the world over, precisely because capital has globalized. So, in answer to the question of how we can know tourism, it is to recognize our fundamental alienated state where we are but tourists in our own lives.

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