

## BOOK REVIEW

### The tourist gaze 3.0

*John Urry and Jonas Larsen, editors (2011). Sage publications*

This version of Urry's classic 'Tourist Gaze' is fresher, possibly because of the co-authorship of a younger scholar, and it is difficult to review in a mere 1,000 words. The book has been restructured and it includes interesting analyses of visuality, performances and the explosion of the digital world, all aspects undeniably linked to tourism. A third edition of any book, especially if the original unquestionably broadened the horizons of tourism studies is a major challenge. The volume has an appealing and ambitious goal: "This book is about how in different societies and especially within different social groups in diverse historical periods the tourist gaze changes and develops. We elaborate on processes by which the gaze is constructed and reinforced, and consider who or what (sic) authorises it, what its consequences are for the 'places' which are its object and how it interrelates with other social practices" (p.2). This objective is very welcome but, alas, it did not fulfil all my expectations. The book is structured into nine chapters, each of them having their own conclusions. However, the book has neither an introduction nor an epilogue. Either of these would have helped the reader to better understand the thread of the argument and given more coherence to the valuable content of the book.

In **chapter one**, 'theories', the book has a very useful summary of some of the well-known cast of tourism theories and theorists. Yet, it is questionable how the *objects* to be gazed upon (p.15-16) are arranged in the book. The categorization reminds me of Borges' *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*: there are objects "famous for being famous", they are unique such as the Forbidden City of Beijing or Ground Zero in New York; there are "particular signs" that responds to tourist "pre-established notions" such as the typical French *château*; there are "unfamiliar aspects of what previously been thought as familiar" such as museums where cultural artefacts of ordinary people are displayed; there are "ordinary aspects of social life being undertaken by people in unusual contexts" such as in "poor countries"; and,



finally, there are particular signs that mark objects as distinctive. However, it is not clear which are the ethnographic or theoretical foundations of this classification or what it might be useful for. This lack leads one to conclude that Cubans are using pre-communist American cars in a “reflexive process” to enter the global order as tourist destinations, without mentioning the merciless United States embargo against the island or any further ethnographic description to support this statement.

The **second chapter** is, I argue, typical of England-based scholarly production on tourism. In its eighteen pages it examines, for the thousandth time and lacking any comparison to other parts of the world, the development of tourism in Blackpool, Brighton and Scarborough because “this was the first mass tourism to occur” (p.32). For an updated edition it does not seem enough to state that “one precondition, then, for the rapid growth of seaside resorts in the later eighteenth and especially in the nineteenth century was space” (p. 33) or that a “further precondition for the growth of mass tourism was greatly improved transportation” (p. 36). For a third edition of such a brilliant and path breaking book as the 1990 edition of the *Tourist Gaze*, any scholar would have expected something other than all-purpose references to the increase in the economic welfare of ‘substantial parts of the working-class population’, the new patterns of work and the regularisation of the days of leisure in industrial England, the emergence of new railways companies or the Romantic shift towards emotions and intensity. Still, there is a short but very recommendable discussion on Perkins’ explanation of the emergence of tourism destinations. Strangely there is not a single reference to Thorstein Veblen (1899) in the whole book though his concept of “conspicuous consumption” is used. The concepts of the carnivalesque, penetration through orifices, and the grotesque body are presented as Shields’ ideas (p. 46-47) when they were thoroughly discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his 1940 doctoral thesis *The work of François Rabelais and the Popular Culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (published in 1965) yet no mention is made to him. Moreover, there is no reference to Pierre Bourdieu in a chapter about ‘social tone’, ‘distinction’ and ‘hierarchies’ of destinations, though this author is brought up later on. Some readings on other early coastal tourism developments in other parts of the world would surely have enlightened the discussion and helped the authors to further develop this central issue. I certainly doubt that the case of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> English tourism coastal development could be helpful at all to understand how Tourism, as the most sophisticated creation of capitalism, is currently moving to North-eastern Brazil, burning out the Croatian coast, promoting urbanising dynamics in Morocco, mixing historical memories in the hinterlands of the Spanish Costa del Sol, or blurring the edges between what belongs to Balinese culture and

what to tourist practices. I hope not to be misunderstood, but we must remember that in tourism development England is also an island and few generalizable scientific conclusions can be drawn from it.

The most interesting part of the **third chapter**, ‘economies’, might be the one related to the Web 2.0 and how the involvement of surfers in processes of production and consumption has changed the political economy of tourism flows. A more critical stance on this extended notion would have been most appreciated. And, as an anthropology-biased university teacher, I find it regrettably weak that the analysis of ‘social relations’ had been reduced to a mere subheading within this chapter. When such a fundamental topic is reduced to two pages, scholars tend to offer tokens as “the social impact of tourism practices thus depends upon the intersection of many processes [and] that distinctions between hosts and guests are increasingly fluid in mobile societies” (p. 64), or that one of the differences between tourism in the Mediterranean basin and North America is that in the latter case the car, the highway and the view through the windscreen and the commercial strip are central (p. 66). For a highly promoted third edition of a ground-breaking book the most important sociological variables deserve much more analysis. Besides, after so many studies on tourism it has been demonstrated that mass tourism is not an agent but a product of how capital uses contemporary technologies. Moreover, at least in those societies/destinations/cultures where tourism practices have been present for more than a generation, Tourism does not ‘impact’ and, consequently, such traditional theoretical models are no longer pertinent.

I like very much the **fourth chapter**, ‘working under the gaze’. It analyses many interesting aspects of the hospitality industry and how workers cope with tourists’ behaviours in different contexts. And **chapter five**, ‘changing tourist cultures’, faces the problem of definitions in the social sciences, especially, when dealing with such a phenomenon as tourism in the contemporary world. It is a very good chapter. The clear reference to Bourdieu here offers theoretical strength to the analysis. I wonder why the authors did not have recourse to this frame in their social analysis in previous chapters. **Chapter six**, ‘places, buildings and design’, is well structured around the notion of heritage. I do not agree very much with the sort of essentialism that emerges in some sentences but, still, is quite coherent with the general focus of the book on gaze and, consequently, on *objects*. It is interesting to see here how authors dodge the problem of defining tourism.

**Chapters seven**, ‘vision and photography’, and **chapter eight**, ‘performance’, are well developed. Merging both issues the authors have gone beyond the usual semiotic approach. Unfortunately the publisher did not pay

enough attention to the quality of the pictures. In a book centred on visuality, illustrations should be vivid and most but not all of them, lack density, brightness and contrast: the three main features that make a black & white picture worth looking at. Besides some weak framing (see figure 1.1 or 7.1), the pictures are plain and full of noise. Thanks to the potentialities of new software the pictures should have been treated accordingly. Nevertheless, authors should also have made detailed descriptions and refined the analysis if the original approach of this third version is on merging gazing, visuality, embodiments and performances, and the relationship between bodily sensations and technologies. I miss some form of kinetic analysis in some pictures, but I am aware that this is my very personal opinion. And **chapter nine**, ‘risk’, gives me the impression that it is the tribute social science must pay to look useful for the industry. Still, more attention should have been paid to the structure and general connections of this chapter with the others.

Regarding the bibliography it should be stressed that though the authors are capable of reading other languages there is not a single non-English reference. There is nothing I can do about this impoverishing scientific practice, but the lack of references in other languages in a ‘fresher’ third edition, is disappointingly noticeable.

Finally, I would like to add that the book does not clarify the social and cultural relationship between what is directly gazed upon and what it signifies. How do all these different ways of gazing on *objects* influence people’s practices, how do they use those objects being gazed upon: are they touched, are they considered to be mythical wishing dwells and for this reason coins are thrown in every single receptacle full of water, or are these *objects* ‘tourist objects’ because they are promoted as such or because they are gazed on by people who are away from home during their leisure time? Nevertheless this third edition is still a good starting point to enter the field of tourism studies.

***Antonio Miguel Nogués-Pedregal***

**Antonio Miguel Nogués-Pedregal** (amnogues@umh.es) is Head of the Department of Social and Human Sciences, Universitat Miguel Hernández, Elche, Alicante, 03202, Spain.