

17th Berlin Roundtables on Transnationality
Travel and Museums: Rethinking the Modern Experience

Not only is the modern world characterized by changing modes of production and transformation of the political sphere, it also entails a fundamental reshaping of culture in the broadest sense: its values and functions, its symbols, images, everyday practice, rituals, and so forth. Travel and museums are two sites in which the nature and extent of these changes can be seen and explored. Modern travel, as it developed in the 19th century in the form of tourism, is dependent upon technological innovation. It is also bound up with the modern search for individual and collective identity, and colonial political and economic endeavour. Similarly, the public museum has also been crucial to the formation of new political and social relations in the course of industrialization and nation-building.

As travel and tourism spread from the wealthy leisure classes in the 18th and 19th century to other social classes, their character also changed significantly. A similar transformation can be seen in the role of museums as an important destination for tourists and locals. The museum developed as a state-sponsored instrument of nation-building and imperial capitalist expansion but also operates within the post-industrial consumer market place, playing a role in the global branding of cities and regions in the fervid global competition for revenue—as exemplified by the so-called Bilbao-effect. In addition, modern tourism – and the museum by extension – is widely interpreted as secular journeying, a modern substitute for the religious pilgrimage. For Zygmunt Bauman “the tourist syndrome,” as a main characteristic of contemporary life, demonstrates the looseness of social and geographic ties with a particular locale, a “grazing behaviour” that seeks new experiences. In a world of short lived “consumption of pleasurable sensations,” the temporary character of the trip reflects the “frailty” of relationships (Bauman 1996).

At the same time, both institutions – tourism and the museum – bear the potential to develop curiosity and learning, to communicate across cultural, religious, ethnic, and national borders in an increasingly interconnected world. They are at the centre of post-modern debates on movement, on the inter-relationship between centres and peripheries, global flows and local cultures, social identities, and the negotiation of meanings.

The 17th Berlin Roundtables will focus on tourism and museums as two central sites that exemplify the manifold political and social shifts in modernity. In two workshops chaired by leading scholars in the field, we want to ask: why do we go to these places, how do we

determine where to go, and what does it mean to have been “there”? What do we learn, if we learn at all? How are these experiences shaped by class, gender, social or ethnic belonging? How have these cultural institutions developed over time and how does their historical legacy continue to affect contemporary practice? The conference calls for papers that explore the themes of these workshops through individual or comparative case-studies, as well as by addressing conceptual and methodological concerns on a purely theoretical level. The workshops are open to a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to tourism and museum studies, cultural and media studies, sociology, political science, anthropology, history, law, memory studies, and post-colonial studies.

Workshop 1 “Places to Go: Tracing Modernity in Travel and Tourism”

Chaired by Anne Gorsuch (University of British Columbia) and Dean MacCannell (University of California, Davis)

Travel, so bound to the myth of the Odyssey, has always been a tool to map the world. *The other*, the seemingly foreign fellow citizen, still serves as a source of fear and prejudice, and often provokes xenophobic outbreaks. However, the foreign world itself—exotic places or just places other than home—is positioned as the source of curiosity, the wish to escape, the desire for adventure, or at least the illusion that travel will, among other things, widen our horizons and make us more knowledgeable, wiser, more cosmopolitan, or in short: more at home in the modern world. The ideal of the modern global citizen is a well educated and well travelled person.

The way we experience travel, and in particular tourism, has become a signifier for modern life, a way to get away from work, from daily routines. Tourism has become a major tool for experiencing pleasure, and pleasure has become, as Dean MacCannell writes, “a new moral imperative” (MacCannell 2011: 51). As a consequence, modern individuals try to follow this new imperative in an ever growing variety of tourist adventures, such as learning tours, family heritage tourism, wellness and spiritual trips, backpacking, extreme tourism with dangerous sport activities, dark tourism. The old *grand tour* has turned into a mass movement of study abroad programs with large tourist components interwoven into academic life. Tours for all ages and lifestyles have been developed to cater to and develop new groups of travellers. What are the consequences of these new forms of tourism? What do they tell us about the modern experience? How do the modern and post-modern “ethics of sightseeing” evolve (MacCannell 2011)? What are the characteristics of the “tourist gazes” in relation to local

determinations (Urry/Larson 2011)? How is a scenery of authenticity created in a time of a permanent “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1973)?

At the same time, tourism cannot be reduced to a phenomenon specific to liberal democracies and their consumerism. The tourist experience was—and is—also part and parcel of Communist societies albeit marked by scarcity and state control (Gorsuch 2011). Within this framework, travel occupies an ambiguous position, functioning as a state-sponsored reward to loyal citizens as well as providing an opportunity for escape and resistance. In what ways does tourism under conditions of autocratic regimes express the *Zeitgeist*? And in what ways do political alliances and their legacies, e.g. the Cold War, influence travel behaviour today? With the economic ascendancy of many states in Asia, the Middle East and South America and the subsequent emergence of new upper and middle classes, new groups of tourists emerge. What do these tourists bring with them? How do they alter the tourist landscape?

The workshop seeks to trace tourist experiences as an expression of modernity within its cultural, political, economic and social frames. Why and where do we travel and what do we learn or not learn in doing so? To what extent is this experience predicated on trust and mistrust? How does travel affect identities and beliefs, including stereotypes and clichés? What do we perceive as authentic and why has the allegedly ‘real thing’ become so important? Why do we want to ‘go native’? What roles do institutions of travel like the media, travel agencies, and academia play in determining travel destinations and shaping of expectations?

Workshop 2 “The World on Display: Museums, Exhibitions, and Gardens”

Chaired by Sharon Macdonald (York University) and TBA

The emergence of the modern public museum, international exhibitions, zoos and botanical gardens are seen as crucial components in the formation of the modern state within the late 18th and early 19th century. As cultural institutions, they have facilitated the creation of a public sphere, the modern citizen and liberal democracy. They have promulgated national (bourgeois) identity, sought to enlighten the working-classes, legitimized political claims to power, advertised the never-ending progress of technology and civilization, and taught the virtues of the modern age (Bennett 1995; Yoshimi 1992).

Since then, a number of historical developments—including the breakdown of colonial empires and the end of the Cold War, the increasing global movement of goods and people, as well as technological innovations in telecommunication and transportation—have shifted the

context and functions of public exhibition spaces. Despite these changes, the popularity of the museum is by no means dwindling. On the contrary, the number of museums and visitors globally has continued to increase over recent decades. This urges us to question: what are the museum's – and related cultural institutions' (henceforth museums etc.) – new functions and how have exhibition spaces changed? What is the new museum experience?

In what has frequently been described as the “post-national age,” museums etc. document changing dynamics within the public sphere and state-citizen relations. While often still adhering to the framework of 19th century identity politics, they have also proven to be fertile grounds for articulating today's fragmented transcultural identities (Macdonald 2003, 2013). At the same time, exhibitions increasingly undermine this process of social self-reassurance by critically reflecting their own cultural contributions and the politics undergirding this work. This process includes putting the display technologies and spaces themselves into question, for example, reconfiguring outdoor areas into museum spaces. Furthermore, museums etc. have become opportunities for creating revenue in thriving urban centres as tourist destinations, as well as in regions where post-industrial capitalism has left an economic vacuum.

While expectations of generating economic growth have intensified, increasingly museums etc. are simultaneously placed under fiscal constraints. This process is accompanied by a strong push to further professionalize museum and related cultural work. One example of the economic imperative is the growing number of blockbuster exhibitions—or at least the advertisement thereof—heralding what some critics declare to be the epitome of consumerism and manifestation of the “Disneyization” of culture. At the same time, museum etc. visits increasingly reflect ethical concerns over human rights abuses and political or ethnic violence (Williams 2009), animal rights and the environment. Do these changes reflect fundamental changes in political life and social relations or just well-known patterns of social differentiation through cultural capital in a new guise (Bourdieu/Darbel 1991)?

This workshop seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of museums, exhibitions, zoos and botanical gardens within a wider social, cultural, and political framework. What economic, cultural, and social functions do they fulfil? How are they used politically? What kind of knowledge is channelled through these institutions and to what ends? Why do visitors come to these places, what do they experience, and how does this change their lives? To what extent do the historical residues of the 19th century still come into play and to what degree do today's museums etc. constitute a new space of cultural practice?

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