

2017

Mediating the Tourist Experience: From Brochures to Virtual Encounters

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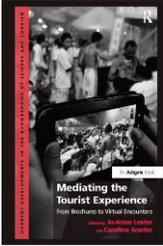
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Alley-Young, Gordon, "Mediating the Tourist Experience: From Brochures to Virtual Encounters" (2017). *CUNY Academic Works*.
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Mediating the Tourist Experience: From Brochures to Virtual Encounters. Edited by Jo-Anne Lester & Caroline Scarles. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. 276 pp. ISBN 9781409451068.

Co-editors Jo-Anne Lester, a Principal Lecturer in Tourism at the University of Brighton, and Caroline Scarles a Senior Lecturer in Tourism at the University of Surrey, have edited fourteen researched chapters sandwiched in-between an introductory chapter and a future directions chapter. Lester has previously co-edited two volumes on tourism and visual culture (Burns, Palmer, & Lester, 2010; Burns, Lester, & Bibbings, 2010). Scarles currently co-edits Ashgate's series *Current Developments in the Geographies of Leisure and Tourism*. This book is the seventh of eight titles in the series, and it features a range of scholars working in a variety of disciplines including Tourism, Hospitality, Leisure Studies, Geography, Cultural Studies, Anthropology, and Digital Media. The methodological approaches include fieldwork, content analysis, critical cultural readings, and market trend analysis.

While the introductory chapter is not as persuasive in arguing that this book is a necessary expansion of our knowledge on mediated tourism overall the book succeeds on the strength of its individually authored chapters. The editor's final summary chapter more effectively contextualizes the work and addresses how it speaks to gaps in the current scholarship. The fourteen contributed chapters analyze traditional (e.g., brochures, nature documentaries) and new (e.g., mobile maps, mobile digital video installations) media texts. The chapters are not pre-grouped though salient themes include how images discord with reality (e.g., Chapters four and seven), how film/television/narratives fuel tourism (e.g., Chapters two, nine, thirteen, and fourteen), how Web 2.0 shapes gaze/expectation (e.g., Chapters six, eight, ten, and fifteen), how tourists capture, re-envision, perform and fixate upon experiences (e.g., Chapters eleven through twelve) and colonialism/conservation (e.g., Chapters three and five).

Chapters ten to twelve are especially notable for critical scholars in Communication because of the depth of perspective they bring to bear on the topic. In Chapter ten, "Developing the E-Mediated Gaze," researcher Peter Robinson, explores a widening scope of potential tourist gazes that is possible as digital communications technology comes to permeate our everyday life. Robinson explores not only how individuals' use of mobile, mapping, tracking, and virtual technologies diversify the touristic gaze, but also how this multiply situates the tourist as a consumer, a producer, a marketer, and an authenticator of the travel experience and/or tourist site. Robinson's classification of the e-mediated gaze into five defined constitutive gazes is a useful tool for researchers whose focus is deconstructing participator and consumable phenomena. This chapter builds upon a previously published journal article by the author in which these gazes, with the exception of the aerial gaze, were not as clearly articulated as they are here (Robinson, 2012).

In Chapter eleven, “Souvenir or Reconstruir? Editing Experience and Mediating Memories of Learning to Dive,” Stephanie Merchant incorporates critical literature on memory and filmmaking into a critical reading of diving tour operators’ practice of creating souvenir DVDs of tourists first diving experiences. Merchant explores how tour operator’s filmic practices of using stock footage and camera angles and focuses intersect with tourists actual memories to create an experience that is not so much remembered and situated as it is reconstructed and adapted. Merchant’s criticism speaks to the criticism regularly leveled at the news media in their zeal to capture and reflect unfolding events for audiences. That said, one could argue that the chapter could be stronger by including more data in the form of interviews or field notes from the tourists who purchase, consume, and, as Merchant argues, integrate these DVD vacation images into their mental representations of lived experience.

Chapter twelve “The Mediation and Fetishization of the Travel Experience” by Michael Salmond evokes themes raised in both Chapters ten and eleven while providing a performative and digital-ethnographic consideration of the tourist performance. Salmond spotlights issues of voyeurism and othering in a way that speaks to Robinson’s work on gaze and also articulates the subjectivity and atrophy of memory, thus making a salient connection to Merchant’s work on reconstruir. What sets this chapter apart is that Salmond uses self-reflexivity to gain insight as both a media artist and as a tourist. Salmond’s videos are part travelogue and part critical text through which he deconstructs tourism phenomena such as so called authentic tourist experiences, constructed tourist settings, TV travel narratives, stay-cations, and fantasy travel venues. The challenge of this chapter is that the film work that Salmond, a digital artist from the UK now based in the US, describes and provides still photographs from in this chapter needs to be seen to be fully appreciated. I encourage readers to watch Salmond’s *Hybrid Journeys* that is both referenced in the chapter and available online (Salmond, 2007).

While this review details individual chapters, *Mediating the Tourist Experience* has content applicable to many a variety of Media, Culture and Communication scholars. Those in marketing will want to note these case studies of the perceived versus experienced image of four different tourist destinations as illustrated in Chapters three, four, seven and eight. Notable among these is Chapter three, Karen Wilkes’ “From the Landscape to the White Female Body” that reads the ideologies of colonialism in Caribbean luxury travel marketing texts. Meanwhile film and television scholars will appreciate the attention devoted to the framing/portrayal of place in Chapters two, five, thirteen, and fourteen. Among these, Chapter five, “The Effect of British Natural History Programs” by Susanna Curtin, is significant for tracing the commercial relationships between TV programming and the consumption of safari-type travel. Finally, new and digital media scholars might gravitate to the chapters addressing the online mediation of tourist experiences discussed earlier. Flaubert (1996) once said, “Travelling makes one modest – you see what a tiny place you occupy in the world” (p. 220). The same can be said of this book, for, by fostering multiple critical discourses on space and place as well as exploding the possible subject positionalities of local/native, tourist, and researcher, one is humbled to consider what new insights future technologies and thus tourism mediation inquiry could yield.

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