
The first stage of sight sacralization takes place when the sight is marked off from similar objects as worthy of preservation. This stage may be arrived at deductively from the model of the attraction

[tourist I sight I marker] attraction

or it may be arrived at inductively by empirical observation. Sights have markers. Sometimes an act of Congress is necessary, as in the official designation of a national park or historical shrine. This first stage can be called the *naming phase* of sight sacralization. Often, before the naming phase, a great deal of work goes into the authentication of the candidate for sacralization. Objects are x-rayed, baked, photographed with special equipment and examined by experts. Reports are filed testifying to the object's aesthetic, historical, monetary, recreational and social values.

Second is the *framing and elevation* phase. Elevation is the putting on display of an object – placement in a case, on a pedestal or opened up for visitation. Framing is the placement of an official boundary around the object. On a practical level, two types of framing occur: protecting and enhancing. Protection seems to have been the motive behind the decision recently taken at the Louvre to place the Mona Lisa (but none of the other paintings) behind glass. When spotlights are placed on a building or a painting, it is enhanced. Most efforts to protect a sacred object, such as hanging a silk cord in front of it, or putting extra guards on duty around it, can also be read as a kind of enhancement, so the distinction between protection and enhancement eventually breaks down. Tourists
before the Mona Lisa often remark: “Oh, it’s the only one with glass,” or “It must be the
most valuable, it has glass in front.” Advanced framing occurs with the rest of the world
is forced back from the object and the space in between is landscaped. Versailles and the
Washington Monument are “framed” in this way.

When the framing material that is used has itself entered the first stage of
sacralization (marking), a third stage has been entered. This stage can be called
enshrinement. The model here is Sainte Chapelle, the church built by Saint Louis as a
container for the "true Crown of Thorns" which he had purchased from Baldwin of
Constantinople. Sainte Chapelle is, of course, a tourist attraction in its own right.
Similarly, in the Gutenberg Museum, in Gutenberg, Germany, the original Gutenberg
Bible is displayed under special lights on a pedestal in a darkened enclosure in a larger
room. The walls of the larger room are hung with precious documents, including a
manuscript by Beethoven.

The next stage of sacralization is mechanical reproduction of the sacred object:
the creation of prints, photographs, models or effigies of the object which are themselves
valued and displayed. It is the mechanical reproduction phase of sacralization that is most
responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the true object. And he
is not disappointed. Alongside of the copies of it, it has to be The Real Thing.

The final stage of sight sacralization is social reproduction, as occurs when
groups, cities, and regions begin to name themselves after famous attractions.

Tourist attractions are not merely a collection of random material representations.
When they appear in itineraries, they have a moral claim on the tourist and, at the same
time, they tend toward universality, incorporating natural, social, historical and cultural domains in a single representation made possible by the tour. This morally enforced universality is the basis of a general system of classification of societal elements produced without conscious effort. No person or agency is officially responsible for the worldwide proliferation of tourist attractions. They have appeared naturally, each seeming to respond to localized causes.

Nevertheless, when they are considered as a totality, tourist attractions reveal themselves to be a taxonomy of structural elements. Interestingly, this natural taxonomic system contains the analytical classification of social structure currently in use by social scientists. A North American itinerary, for example, contains domestic, commercial and industrial establishments, occupations, public-service and transportation facilities, urban neighborhoods, communities and members of solidary (or, at least, identifiable) subgroups of American society. The specific attractions representing these structural categories would include the Empire State Building, an Edwardian house in Boston’s Back Bay, a Royal Canadian mounted policeman, a Mississippi River bridge, Grand Coulee Dam, an Indian totem pole, San Francisco’s Chinatown, a cable car, Tijuana, Indians, cowboys, an ante-bellum mansion, an Amish farm, Arlington National Cemetery, the Smithsonian Institution and Washington Cathedral.

Taken together, tourist attractions and the behavior surrounding them are, I think, one of the most complex and orderly of the several universal codes that constitute modern society, although not so complex and orderly as, for example, a language.

[...]
… Setting aside for the moment Marxist concerns for "use value," I want to suggest that society does not produce art: artists do. Society, for its part, can only produce the importance, "reality" or "originality" of a work of art by piling up representations of it alongside. Benjamin believed that the reproductions of the work of art are produced because the work has a socially based "aura" about it, the "aura" being a residue of its origins in a primordial ritual. He should have reversed his terms. The work becomes “authentic” only after the first copy of it is produced. The reproductions are the aura, and the ritual, far from being a point of origin, derives from the relationship between the original object and its socially constructed importance. I would argue that this is the structure of the attraction in modern society, including the artistic attractions, and the reason the Grand Canyon has a touristic “aura” about it even though it did no originate in ritual.

[...]

Modern society, originally quite closed up, is rapidly restructuring or institutionalizing the rights of outsiders (that is, of individuals not functionally connected to the operation) to look into its diverse aspects. Institutions are fitted with arenas, platforms and chambers set aside for the exclusive use of tourists. The courtroom is the most important institution in a democratic society. It was among the first to open to the outside and, I think, it will be among the first to close as the workings of society are increasingly revealed through the opening of other institutions to tourists. The New York Stock Exchange and Corning Glass factory have specifically designated visitors’ hours, entrances and galleries. Mental hospitals, army bases and grade schools stage periodic open houses where not mere work but Good Work is displayed. The men who make
pizza crusts by tossing the dough in the air often work in windows where they can be watched from the sidewalk. Construction companies cut peepholes into the fences around their work, nicely arranging the holes for sightseers of different heights. The becoming public of almost everything – a process that makes all men equal before the attraction – is a necessary part of the integrity of the modern social world.

**TOURIST DISTRICTS**

Distinctive local attractions contain (just behind, beside or embedded in the parts presented to the tourists) working offices, shops, services and facilities: often an entire urban structure is operating behind its touristic front. Some of these touristic urban areas are composed of touristic *districts*. Paris is “made up” of the Latin Quarter, Pigalle, Montparnasse, Montmartre; San Francisco is made up of the Haight Ashbury, the Barbary Coast and Chinatown; and London, of Soho, Piccadilly Circus, Blackfriars, Covent Gardens, the Strand. Less touristically developed areas have only one tourist district and are, therefore, sometimes upstaged by it: the Casbah, Beverly Hills, Greenwich Village. An urban sociologist or an ethnographer might point out that cities are composed of much more than their tourist areas, but this is obvious. Even tourists are aware of this. More important is the way the tourist attractions appear on a regional base as a model of social structure, beginning with “suggested” or “recommended” *communities, regions, and neighborhoods*, and extending to matters of detail, setting the tourist up with a matrix he can fill in (if he wishes) with his own discoveries of his own typical little *markets, towns restaurants, and people*. This touristic matrix assures that the social structure is recomposed via the tour, while always partial, is nevertheless not a skewed or warped representation of reality. Once on tour, only the individual
imagination can modify reality, and so long as the faculty of imagination is at rest, society appears such as it is.

[...]

...Under normal conditions of touristic development, no social establishment ultimately resists conversion into an attraction, not even *domestic establishments*. Selected homes in the “Society Hill” section of downtown Philadelphia are opened annually for touristic visitation. Visitors to Japan are routinely offered the chance to enter, observe and – to a limited degree – even participate in the households of middle-class families. Individual arrangements can be made with the French Ministry of Tourism to have coffee in a French home, and even to go for an afternoon drive in the country with a Frenchman of “approximately one’s own social station.”

[...]

**FRONT, BACK AND REALITY**

Paralleling a common sense division, Goffman analyzed a structural division of social establishments into what he terms *front* and *back regions*. The front is the meting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons, and the back is the place where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and to prepare. Examples of back regions are kitchens, boiler rooms, executive washrooms, and examples of front regions are reception offices and parlors. Although architectural arrangements are mobilized to support this division, it is primarily a *social* one, based on the type of social performance that is staged in a place, and on the social roles found
there. In Goffman’s own words:

Given a particular performance as the point of reference, we have distinguished three crucial roles on the basis of function: those who perform; those performed to; and outsiders who neither perform in the show nor observe it…(T)he three crucial roles mentioned could be described on the basis of the regions to which the role-player has access: performers appear in the front and back regions; the audience appears only in the front region; and the outsiders are excluded from both regions.²

The apparent, taken-for-granted reality of a social performance, according to Goffman’s theory, is not an unproblematical part of human behavior. Rather, it depends on structural arrangements like this division between front and back. A back region, closed to audiences and outsiders, allows concealment of props and activities that might discredit the performance out front. In other words, sustaining a firm sense of social reality requires some mystification.

[…]

BACK REGIONS AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

As yet unexplored is the function of back regions – their mere existence intimating their possible violation – in sustaining the common-sense polarity of social life: the putative “intimate and real” as against “show.” This division into front and back supports the popular beliefs regarding the relationship of truth to intimacy. In our society, intimacy and closeness are accorded much importance: they are seen as the core
of social solidarity and they are also thought by some to be morally superior to rationality
and distance in social relationships, and more “real.” Being “one of them,” or at one with
“them,” means, in part, being permitted to share back regions with “them.” This is a
sharing which allows one to see behind the others’ mere performances, to perceive and
accept the others for what they really are.

Touristic experience is circumscribed by the structural tendencies described here.
Sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get in with the
natives, and at the same time, they are deprecated for always failing to achieve these
goals. The term “tourist” is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems
content with his obviously inauthentic experiences.

The variety of understanding held out before tourists as an ideal is an authentic
and demystified experience of an aspect of some society or other person…

[...]  

STAGED AUTHENTICITY IN TOURIST SETTINGS

Tourists commonly take guided tours of social establishments because they
provide easy access to areas of the establishment ordinarily closed to outsiders. School
children’s tours of firehouses, banks, newspapers and dairies are called “educational”
because the inner operations of these important places are shown and explained in the
course of the tour. This kind of tour, and the experiences generated by it, provide an
interesting set of analytical problems. The tour is characterized by social organization
designed to reveal inner workings of the place; on tour, outsiders are allowed further in
than regular patrons; children are permitted to enter bank vaults to see a million dollars, allowed to touch cows’ udders, etc. At the same time, there is a staged quality to the proceedings that lends to them an aura of superficiality, albeit a superficiality not always perceived as such by the tourist, who is usually forgiving about these matters.

[...]  

CONCLUSION

    Daniel Boorstin calls places like American superhighways and the Istanbul Hilton "pseudo," a hopeful appellation that suggests that they are insubstantial or transitory, which they are not. It also suggests that somewhere in tourist settings there are real events accessible to intellectual elites, and perhaps there are. I have argued that a more helpful way of approaching the same facts is in terms of a modification of Erving Goffman's model of everyday life activities. Specifically, I have suggested that for the study of tourist settings front and back be treated as ideal poles of a continuum, poles linked by a series of front regions decorated to appear as back regions, and back regions set up to accommodate outsiders. I have suggested the term stage setting for these intermediary types of social space, but there is no need to be rigid about the matter of the name of this place, so long as its structural features and their influences on ideas are understood.

    I have claimed that the structure of this social space is intimately linked to touristic attitudes and I want to pursue this. The touristic way of getting in with the natives is to enter into a quest for authentic experiences, perceptions and insights. The quest for authenticity is marked off in stages in the passage from front to back. Movement from
stage to stage corresponds to growing touristic understanding. This continuum is sufficiently developed in some areas of the world that it appears as an infinite regression of stage sets. Once in this manifold, the tourist is trapped. His road does not end abruptly in some conversion process that transforms him into Boorstin's “traveler,” “working at something” as he breaks the bounds of all that is pseudo and penetrates, finally, into a real back region. Tourists make brave sorties out from their hotels, hoping, perhaps, for an authentic experience, but their paths can be traced in advance over small increments of what is for them increasingly apparent authenticity proffered by tourist settings. Adventurous tourists progress from stage to stage, always in the public eye, and greeted everywhere by their obliging hosts.

In highly developed tourist settings such as San Francisco and Switzerland, every detail of touristic experience can take on a showy, back-region aspect, at least for fleeting moments. Tourists enter tourist areas precisely because their experiences there will not, for them, be routine. The local people in the places they visit, by contrast, have long discounted the presence of tourists and go about their business as usual, even their tourist business, as best they can, treating tourists as a part of the regional scenery. Tourists often do see routine aspects of life as it is really lived in the places they visit, although few tourists express much interest in this. In the give-and-take of urban street life in tourist areas, the question of who watching whom and who is responding to whom can be as complex as it is in the give-and-take between ethnographers and their respondents. It is only when a person makes and effort to penetrate into the real life of the areas he visits that he ends up in the places especially designed to generate feelings of intimacy and experiences that can be talked about as “participation.” No one can “participate” in his
own life; he can only participate in the lives of others. And once tourists have entered
touristic space, there is no way out for them so long as they press their search for
authenticity. Near each tourist setting there are others like the last. Each one may be
visited, each one promises real and convincing shows of local life and culture. Even the
infamously clean Istanbul Hilton has not excluded all aspects of Turkish culture (the
cocktail waitresses wear harem pants, or did in 1968). For some Europeans I know, an
American superhighway is an attraction of the first rank, the more barren the better
because it is thereby more American.

Daniel Boorstin was the first to study these matters. His approach elevates to the
level of analysis a nostalgia for an earlier time with more clear-cut divisions between the
classes and simpler social values based on a programmatic back vs. front view of the true
and the false. This classic position is morally superior to the one presented here but it
cannot lead to the scientific study of society. Specifically, Boorstin’s and other
intellectual approaches do not help us to analyze the expansion of the tourist class under
modernization, or the development on an international scale of activities and social
structural arrangements made for tourists, social changes Boorstin himself documents.
Rather than confront the issues he raises, Boorstin only expresses a longstanding touristic
attitude, a pronounced dislike, bordering on hatred, for other tourists, an attitude that
turns man against man in a they are the tourists, I am not equation.³

---

¹ From my field notes.
For a discussion of this aspect of the intellectual approach to tourism, see O. Burgelin, “Le Tourisme jugé,” in *Vacances et tourisme*, a special edition of *Communications*, no. 10, 1967, pp. 65-97.