H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Simon Coleman, Mike Crang, eds. *Tourism: Between Place and Performance.* New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002. x + 246 pp. $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57181-746-4; $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-745-7.

Reviewed by John C. Ehrhardt (Independent Scholar)

Published on H-Business (July, 2003)

Reevaluating Tourism, Reinventing Tourism Studies

Reevaluating Tourism, Reinventing Tourism Studies

This book is a collection of scholarly essays on tourism, a research topic currently in vogue in the social sciences. The authors of this volume seek to "examine how tourism shapes particular sites and how activities become scripted in certain locations" (p. 1). The overarching argument emphasizes the dynamic and creative nature of both "place" (the tourist destination) and "performance" (the activities of tourists and locals). The research represented by the essays is innovative and the conclusions reached by some of the contributors are quite interesting. However, those outside anthropology, sociology, cultural geography, and literary studies will likely find this book tough going due to its specialized references and jargon.

The introduction to the volume, written by the editors, attempts to frame the work in the context of theory and the literature. The introduction is well-grounded not only in the theories of and literature on tourism, but in more basic ideas and works on the fundamentally constructed nature of culture. Thus, the editors succeed reasonably in their goal.

The rest of the book is divided into four sections. The first section, "The Place of Nature," deals largely with constructed landscapes. A somewhat laborious essay by Claudia Bell and John Lyall examines how accelerated movement has transformed tourism. The authors seem to argue that today's technologies of movement, from aircraft to video cameras, both inspire and facilitate new forms of consumption as tourists "accelerate through an increasingly compressed and hyperinscribed space" (p. 21). Nature has been repackaged, and experiences once considered sublime, such as halting to take in a scenic but static vista, are giving way to movement-oriented experiences like bungee jumping. Mark Neuman's stimulating and straightforward piece explores the genesis of the landscape of the Grand Canyon in the American imagination. From the 1870s, Neuman tells us, American painters and writers invented and idealized the spectacular landscape of the canyon as part of the national identity-building of the era. From around the turn of the century, the canyon has been recreated again and again as technological innovations have insulated canyon viewers from real time and space. In a neo-Marxist critique, Fraser MacDonald examines the ways in which tourism has reconstituted the Scottish Highlands as picturesque and filled with "heritage." The most interesting element of MacDonald's essay is trash; that is to say, how depositing refuse in the landscape is one way in which his heroic Highlanders resist the commodification of their land and lives.

The book's second section, "Back to the City," unsurprisingly returns the reader from nature to the urban arena. An essay by Paola Filipucci looks at how modern, relatively affluent residents of Bassano, a town in northeast Italy, perform the local "flavor" and history as a way of "celebrat[ing] space and time as bodily, sensuous experiences" (p. 75). Filipucci finds that residents of Bassano do this both as a way of connecting with the town's imagined past and as a means of asserting their identity vis-=-vis tourists. Here, this reviewer is pleasantly reminded of the seminal book *The Invention of Tradition* by Hobsbawm and Ranger. Keith Ridler's interesting essay examines the holiday of Ferragsto in the Italian Alps as a spectacle for tourists. Ridler argues that the locals have engaged the commodification of culture as a way of constructing and defending local identity, not only in the face of tourists

but also in the face of the issues of the New Europe, a place in which the contentious matters of regional, national, pan-European, and global culture presently loom large. The essay by Penny Travlou studies how guidebooks have given tourists a particular, "historic" view of Athens, Greece. In this view, Athens' classical past leaps to the foreground, while the otherworldly places and people of the present fade into the hazy distance of an almost imperialistic tourist gaze. While Travlou's argument is not without merit, perhaps it underestimates the sophistication of the modern traveler. John Eade's selection, which ties in nicely with the essays by Filipucci and Ridler by emphasizing the agency of locals, looks at the results of attempts by tourists and their guides to create Spitalfields, a less frequently visited part of London. Adventurous tourists, hoping to find the historic and "real" world of Dickens and Jack the Ripper, instead encounter a fluid and contentious arena of shifting ethnicities, identities, loyalties, and ideologies. Tourists frequently find their search subverted or even attacked by an increasingly diverse local population.

The third section of the book has the label "Distanciated Places," which had this reviewer reaching for the dictionary without success. In the section, an almost humorous essay by Hazel Tucker probes the emergence of a Flintstones theme in the cave-riddled village of Goreme in central Turkey. Tourists come to the village hoping to take in a "real" premodern world of cave-bound dwellings and churches, but instead discover a theme park-like Flintstoneland. Tucker asserts that Goreme's residents, who resent the tourist intrusion but stand to profit from it, attempt to stage a quaint, premodern experience while, at the same time, ironically demonstrating their sophistication by engaging Western pop culture tongue-in-cheek. This essay is quite interesting, but might have been better if it had included less theory and more detail on the new Flintstone-ness of Goreme. Eve Meltzer's essay is an examination of the Wall Drug store in southwestern South Dakota, a veritable icon of tourism in the western United States. The essay seems somewhat contrived and excessively jargon-laden. At any rate, Meltzer's point seems to be that the very life of Wall Drug is in its thousands of advertisement signs, its aura, and, indeed, in the very process of getting there. Thus, in a sense, one can never really arrive at or connect with the genuine place. Charles Frueling Springwood's dense essay discusses a Japanese man's reproduction in rural Japan of the baseball diamond from the American film *Field of Dreams.* In this act, Springwood detects two processes: first, it is a form of "othering" America by imagining its bucolic rural landscape and values; second, doing so reflects both Japan's longing for its own rapidly vanishing traditional, rural self and its newer role of refashioning itself as a player in the cosmopolitan world of global consumer capitalism.

The fourth, shortest, and final section of the book, entitled "Bring It Back Home," returns the reader to the realm of theory. David Chaney's challenging essay seeks to supercede the concept of the tourist gaze (often traced back to John Urry) with the concept of the tourist glance. It seems that, in Chaney's estimation, the gaze (or the gaze model) is too contemplative, all-encompassing, masculine, and imperialistic. The tourist glance, by way of contrast, is more transient, incomplete, feminine, and egalitarian. Playing on the theme of fluidity, Chaney adds that the "authenticity" of the performances enacted in the tourist venue is not an either/or dichotomy, but rather a matter subject to interpretation and negotiation. The last essay, by David Crouch, is also challenging. In this highly theoretical piece, Crouch contends, quite reasonably, that tourism and tourists are less controlled and manipulated than many scholars and marketing experts would have us believe. For Crouch, tourism is a total experience, lived, felt, and remembered in all manner of ways and through all the tourist's senses. Often, unplanned and uncontrollable events or experiences–a strong odor, a stolen moment with a new acquaintance–are unexpectedly woven into our travels and memories of them.

It is, of course, difficult to impose complete continuity on a book containing twelve essays. However, one can draw out several general lessons from this collection. First, destinations ("places") are not static, but rather are fluid, created, imagined. Second, tourists are not unwitting dupes at the mercy of the tourism industry, but are instead active, and often unpredictable, agents in their own travel activities ("performances") and experiences. Third, locals are not helpless victims of the tourist gaze and the tourism industry, but are, in fact, creative, even subversive, actors in the drama that is tourism. Fourth, the total phenomenon of tourism may be generally less orchestrated and contrived than once thought. If one posits tourism as a cultural phenomenon, then these conclusions are quite reasonable in light of much of the currently important research in the humanities and social sciences.

Yet this collection is also subject to a couple of criticisms. For one, many of the essays therein are clouded with tortuous language that is unnecessary and often

gets in the way of assessing the essays' merit. The book may make perfect sense to scholars of tourism and other related fields, but those in many fields, including business and business history, will find the book trying. Another, less important criticism is that the editing could have been just a bit better. This reviewer noticed some misspellings and even an incomplete sentence.

These criticisms aside, many of the essays in this book are innovative, interesting, and thought- provoking. For many, reading the book will be informative and worth the effort.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-business

Citation: John C. Ehrhardt. Review of Coleman, Simon; Crang, Mike, eds., *Tourism: Between Place and Performance*. H-Business, H-Net Reviews. July, 2003.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7956

Copyright © 2003 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.