

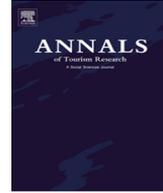


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Staging portraits: Tourism's panoptic photo-industry



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ABSTRACT

Shifting from representationally-oriented analysis of images to analysis of practices—the production, circulation and consumption of tourists' images, and from photos created by tourists to photos staged, produced and displayed by the industry, this article offers a qualitative, ethnographic study of tourism's visual culture. Through observations conducted on a cruise ship, the author offers up-close depiction of photo-taking routines, and of the public display of multiple images of vacationing tourists. The article critically accounts for tourists' desire to be photographed and portrayed by the industry in terms of visual surveillance (Foucault) under contemporary neoliberal visual regime. It is further argued that public displays of tourists' images create, through collective mediation/mediatization, a commercially assembled touristic collective or public.

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Introduction

From postcards through tourists' photography to digital imagery, the interface of modern tourism and modern visual regimes has offered a semiotically rich terrain, propelling a prolific visual turn in tourism studies. At least since John Urry's (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*, the turn towards the visual in tourism scholarship has explored the fruits of the lucrative synergy between the industries producing travel and industries producing imagery. The popular editions that followed *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry, 2002, and Urry & Larsen, 2011), are as influential as they are representative of the fertile reception

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visual-oriented research enjoys, and of the centrality of the concept of the gaze in and to the field of tourism studies. Although the first two editions did not deal with actual ways of seeing, they effectively acknowledged the pervasive role of visuality in tourism as a modern/western project, its historical circumstances, and the nature of visual power-relations surrounding leisure travel.

Indeed, the visual turn in tourism studies encompasses a constantly developing agenda, centering on the historical images and the mnemonic value of photos for both individuals and publics (from the breakthrough work by Adler, 1989, to the comprehensive discussions offered by Löfgren, 1999; Palmer, 2009; and Urry & Larsen, 2011). Critical elaborations expand on the oppressive and stereotypical visual representations of class, gender and ethnicity, on the relations between the gazes of hosts and tourists, and on the images of landscapes and peoples, which are re-produced and circulated by the industry in abundance. Visual scholars have to some degree also addressed the material and virtual media through which images variously circulate (Brickell, 2012; Garlick, 2002; Haldrup & Larsen, 2003; Lübbren & Crouch, 2003; Robinson & Picard, 2009; Scarles, 2009, 2013).

The discussion of meanings of images in tourism (and beyond) has been inspired by a number of celebrated works of cultural critics, such as Roland Barthes (1972, 1984), Susan Sontag (1990/1977), and Susan Stewart (1984). Specifically, Barthes' analysis of photographs has proved remarkable in terms of its contribution to the visual turn across the humanities and the social sciences, and in terms of shaping the visual debate around the *object of the photograph*. Consider the following illustrative description, which captures Barthes' appreciation of the rising significance of photographs in the 20th century. Barthes argues that photographs have become mnemonic devices, that capture intimate relationships and allow authentic biographical narratives, and with them personal and familial 'mythologies', to be told. Reflecting on an old family photo of his mother and uncle when they were young children, Barthes touchingly observes:

The brother and sister, united, as I knew, by the discord of their parents, who were soon to be divorced, had posed side by side, alone, under the palms of the Winter Garden (it was the house where my mother was born, in Chennevières-sur-Marne). I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother. . . I saw the kindness which had formed her being immediately and forever, without her having inherited it from anyone (Barthes, 1984, pp. 68–69).

The narrator, Barthes himself, captivates the reader by unraveling the historic meanings coded in the image. At stake are memory work and identity work, which illustrate how quotidian photographic images amount to rich semiotic objects. According to Barthes, photographs essentially offer a *point of departure*: a pregnant surface from which narratives can be launched, a fertile social soil for memories, identities, daydreams to grow on. Yet framing the visual inquiry around the object of the photograph has kept the research focus away from *the actual occasions* of phototaking. The specific details surrounding the *staging* of pictures and images, their circulation and mobility, and the agents involved in these processes have expectedly been too-easily overlooked.

Ethnography: from images to practices

While Barthes' view of photographs still inspires the bulk of the analysis of visual representation in tourism, scholars presently acknowledge the shortcomings of research that deals only with representations and which is limited to the visual contents of images. Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, and Urry (2007, p. 69) observe that, "[a]lthough photography is perhaps *the* emblematic tourist practice and tourist studies have been dominated by a visual paradigm ... tourist studies have produced little knowledge of *how* and *why* tourists are busy producing photographic images" (italics in original), and Feighery (2009, p. 162) laments that, "[m]uch of the scholarly work on photography in tourism is concerned primarily with the analysis of the content of photographic representations." Further, by taking a dual 'ethnographic/performative turn' to ocular cultures in tourism, the most recent edition of *The Tourist Gaze* attends also to performances and identities, and to the embodied and spatialized dimensions of actual practices of seeing and photographing (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In short, an ethnographic critique notes the scarcity of up-close studies exploring actual occasions of phototaking, and the array of practices involved in the situated nature of production, circulation and consumption/reception of imagery within tourism.

In response to the ethnographic critique, the focus of visual studies is shifting away from the representation and images' visual contents, towards a critically informed appreciation of the materialities, practices and performances involved in their staging. This growth takes the direction of non-representational *practice-oriented* approaches. The burgeoning body of research covers topics that range from the ethics of phototaking behavior to the performances of families' photographic staging (Baerenholdt et al., 2007; Larsen, 2005, 2006; Robinson & Picard, 2009; Scarles, 2013). Tourists' photographic practices emerge "as a series of active performances" (Scarles, 2009, p. 481), defining who tourists are, how they go about being tourists, and how they engage, stage and capture the visual scenes tourism offers. It is noteworthy that the focus of this body of research is on *tourists'* visual practices, and I presently wish to add to this line of inquiry by offering a move away from tourists' phototaking practices to study images produced by *corporate actors*, i.e. by the industry itself (Wood, 2005).

When exploring corporate actors within tourism I am less interested in the iconic, mass-produced images of cities, landscapes, and 'exotic' peoples, or in short in the representations of Otherness (which have received ample research). Rather, I explore the corporate-produced images of the *tourists* themselves, which are produced for their leisurely consumption while on tour. To pursue this, I engage in an up-close, ethnographic exploration of a site brimming with commercial visual practices in the shape of a cruise ship. Aboard this ship is a complex, multi-sited system of institutional photo-taking and photo-displaying arrangements, where images of vacationers are taken and sold profusely. As a result of studying this system I am able to focus on the *industry's phototaking choices and practices*, and on how it acts as a lucrative agent that connects sites of visual production and consumption. At least as importantly, I am able to reflect on the unintended social and cultural effect of this operation. My observations include notes regarding the location and action of photographic devices, as well as vacationers' interaction with them: from the decision to have their pictures taken to viewing and purchasing in-situ produced pictures/souvenirs.

Away at sea, cruise ships offer semiotically rich spaces that resonate in a condense manner the visual architecture of tourism more generally. The cruise mega-ships offer highly enclavic and commercial spaces, and amount to a distinctly lucrative subsector within global tourism. With a robust annual growth of 8% during the last two decades, cruise tourism hosts nearly twenty million passengers annually (WTO, 2010). A single corporation, namely Carnival Corporation, owns 45% of the global cruise market, amounting to the "largest and most profitable tourism companies in the world" (WTO, 2010, p. xvi). This corporation also owns the cruise ship on which this ethnography was conducted. Despite its attractive value, cruise tourism remains a largely unexplored subsector (Chin, 2008; Weeden, Lester, & Thyne, 2011), particularly so in regards to socio-cultural questions and even more specifically with regards to on-board research (Papathanassis & Beckmann, 2011).

In what follows immediately after the methodological expose, I describe two visual sites and corresponding occurrences on board a cruise ship: the first concerns installations and interactions by which vacationers' pictures are taken, and the second concerns the same with regards to the public display of photographs for consumption. The concluding section offers a theoretical discussion, combining a panoptic perspective with a neo-liberal zeitgeist.

Ethnography's visual sensitivities and a structured accident

The traditional focus on the meanings of images, rather than on the practices and semiotics involved in their production, circulation and reception, bore methodological consequences. It resulted in that much of the initial visual research in tourism had shoved ethnography aside, as the analysis of images prevailed over the observation in situ of embodied practices and performances (a focus that is understandable in light of the pervasiveness of images in tourism, and their highly iconic nature). Feighey (2003) suggests that the problem concerns insufficient interdisciplinary fertilization with fields where visual research has been more deeply embedded, and Palmer (2009, p. 76) concludes that "it is only in the past few years that tourism researchers have actively embraced and engaged with the visual in ways other than as illustrations for the written word."

In line with these authors, I view ethnography as an *activity based approach*, which is sensitive to the practical actions that animate tourism's intense visual sphere. My ethnographic commitment

highlights the embodied, casual, and leisure-related routines by which images are made and are then made to be consumed. These practices are understood as part of the roles people perform while being, or while becoming, tourists. After Goffman's (1974) dramaturgical theory, a practice-inspired performance perspective suggests that while pictures are certainly 'frames' that present people's 'selves' in the front-stage, the *very acts* involved in producing these images are performative as well. These practices are too often and too easily dismissed as a 'back-stage activity', yet what happens when pictures are being taken is at least as telling in terms of understanding tourism's visual spheres as the analysis of the visual product. Like Larsen (2005, p. 416), I view tourism photography as "a choreographed and experimental performance connecting the representational and nonrepresentational," one which asks researchers to turn "to ideas of embodiment and performance to destabilize the visual hegemony of images, cameras, and gazes in tourist studies." Ethnographic accounts can remedy the common view whereby tourist photography has been "dismissed as 'all eyes and no bodies'" (p. 417). I aim to contribute to a *holistic ethnographic approach* to the visual in tourism, one which surpasses representation (the representational temptation), and asks not of the history of the image and its meanings, but instead of its current corporate and institutional staged production.

Leaving from a beautiful Florida coastline on a pleasant, warm and sunny day in the winter of 2013, my observations draw on a highly commercial site in the shape of a five-day cruise-ship to the Bahamas. I travel with my family on a trip that I did not initially conceive of as research-related, yet the opportunity lends itself to an account of the genre of touristic (auto)ethnography (Botterill, 2003; Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012; Noy, 2007). Autoethnography holds particular merit in the study of tourism because, alas, tourism scholars are often entangled in tourism in their everyday lives. Presently, the *autoethnographic* approach manifests itself primarily in the fact that I did not purchase tickets with the intention of conducting research. Rather, my 'entry' to the field was incidental (as a parent and not a scholar). In a methodological comment made by anthropologist Jan Blommaert (2004, p. 646), he indicates that the data he studies "came to me by 'structured accident': a coincidence conditioned by my social position." This reflexive observation supplies an accurate description of the circumstances of my own 'data-collecting' method.

In this respect, the (auto)ethnographic approach to visual routines manifested itself in the fact that it required *transforming* the camera we brought with us to the cruise (the 'family camera') into a *research device*. At stake here is not only the question of technologies (specifically visual technologies) that serve in ethnographic studies (Brummans, 2007; Licoppe & Dumoulin, 2010; Noy, 2011), but their multi-functionality, and the fact that technologies' actual employment is situated and largely shaped by context. The transformation of the family-camera into a research-device was possible because I use this camera in other visual studies, which eased my re-use of it during the cruise. The camera turned out to be crucial in two ways: once I realized what a heightened visual environment we were engulfed in, the camera was invaluable in being able to record that environment, and in doing so through its own medium, i.e. visual capacity. Also, I often use cameras in my study as mnemonic devices, which help me remember the scenes I study (over and above written field notes). Lastly, since I was on vacation and did not bring a notebook with me, I improvised and used paper in our cabin for writing field notes. I also used my laptop effectively to document my impressions and observations, to look at the images I had already taken and to think through what more needed to be studied.

The 'auto' prefix in the word autoethnography bears an additional meaning: I should also say, reflexively, that the time and effort invested in this ethnography can be partly accounted by the notion of the 'tourist angst' (specifically my 'cruise vacationer angst'). Tourist angst refers to a sense of uneasiness some tourists feel with regards to their position *as* tourists. "Other people are tourist, while I am a traveler" as MacCannell (1999, p. 107) puts it, or a "gnawing suspicion that after all ... you are still a tourist like every other tourist" (Pan, 2009, p. 226). I refer to the role-shift I performed in the consumer enclave on the cruise ship, for I too was, after all, a vacationer, and yet I dedicated a significant portion of my time to act as a researcher. Over and above my curiosity and amazement with the relentless photographic operation taking place on board, I performed 'being a researcher' because I was apparently not content with 'merely' joyfully submerging in the "floating utopia" (Berger, 2004, p. 65) on which we boarded.

Take as many photos as you want

Our cruise ship, which is huge and magnificent, is set to depart in a couple of hours, and we have just parked our car and are walking to the cruise's vast terminal in Florida-wonderful weather. By "we," I mean my wife, our two daughters (10 and 14), and myself. This is the first cruise we have ever taken, and we bought the tickets because we are new to Florida, and cruising here (cruisin', as they call it) is a popular leisure activity: my students and colleagues mentioned it favorably as a family friendly, pleasurable and quite affordable recreation. After presenting our passports, we get on a long zigzagging bridge that leads us to the ship, and directly (in) to a photo opportunity: five young and very kind employees encourage us to allow them to take a photo of us. Their shirts are uniform-red and carry the formal title: Photo Staff. Smiling, one of them addresses us: "Please, it's a great opportunity." He points with his hand to the space at his left, where two impressive looking cameras are mounted on tripods and some lighting equipment is readily placed. In the background, a neat and large canvas presents an image of the cruise ship we are boarding, floating in beautiful blue shades of the sky and the water nearby.

Right in front of us, four college students pose before one of these installations for their picture to be taken, placing their arms on each other's shoulders. One of them is a woman and she is wearing a shirt with RUB ME FOR LUCK written across her chest, and one of the men has the words BOOZE CRUISE on his back. They laugh excitedly. The picture-taking routine is brief, lasting a few seconds, and then the college students continue up the zigzagging corridor toward the ship's insides. Before them, another picture was taken featuring a family of four who posed against an identical canvas nearby. The family has now moved on, but they reminded me of my own family: there are four of them as well, the kids seem to be of similar ages, and they were not American (they had a British accent). As they prepared for their picture to be taken, the mother asked her children to stand in the center of the frame, and the parents stood at both ends. Although there was plenty of room left on their sides, both parents leaned with the upper part of their bodies toward their children (who were standing in the center), as if sheltering or shielding them. After a few pictures were taken, the young photographers informed the mother she could simply look up the pictures in the PHOTO GALLERY without a tracking number or receipt.

I think we too might have our picture taken, but despite the temptation we haven't even embarked yet, so we feel it's 'too early' for pictures now. Also, I am a bit uneasy with having our picture taken against an *image* printed on a canvas, when we are embarking on the actual ship! I look at my partner, and she motions with her head that we will move onward, while our daughters have already made their way onto the body of the ship. In a beautiful paper on family photography in tourism, [Haldrup and Larsen \(2003, p. 27\)](#) point out that, "[n]ot only do many tourists derive pleasures from performing photography in itself, but properly staged images will ensure ... that the desired atmosphere will be projected into the future: 'see for yourself, it was really a good holiday.'" So I continue, hopeful we haven't missed too much and that more photo-opportunities will be available later during the cruise.

By the time we find our room, begin to unpack our belongings, and attend the obligatory briefing, dinnertime arrives. A brochure in our room explains that "dinner required formal attire" and is held in the Acapulco Dining Hall on Deck no. 4, which is where we must dine. So, here we are: the four of us sitting around a groomed dinner table, dressed nicely, enjoying our conversation inside an amazingly huge dining hall. This hall is one of five that simultaneously serve meals to over 2,500 of the ship's vacationers. During dinner, we pass on at least three requests by the ship's photo-staff to take our picture around the dinner table. Equipped with professional looking cameras, the friendly requests of these employees are not a nuisance for us, and the ship's personnel are so courteous we nearly forget their requests shortly after they leave. They repeatedly inquire and propel: "Why not take your picture? Taking pictures is free. You don't have to buy them. We can take as many photos as you want." They reassure us that there's no obligation whatsoever to purchase the pictures, and that they will be printed for us "anyhow." But we are a bit embarrassed by the attention we warrant (makes us feel too important ...), and perhaps because we are new to cruising and to the intense visual culture surrounding it, we do not view the occasion of dining as an event that demands photography. Also, personally, I

am somewhat suspicious of the claims that there is no obligation to make a purchase: the cameras flashing constantly around us, and I presume that if so many pictures are taken (and printed “any-how”), someone might have to pay for them eventually. Or perhaps not? Plus, we have our own simple digital camera, which has travelled with us extensively for a good number of years, and which we are fond of, and we feel comfortable using it whenever we want to take a picture.

While enjoying our dinner at the Acapulco Dining Hall on Deck no. 4, I think about the ways the photo-staff has approached our table with kind yet insistent requests, and it reminds me of one of the industry’s main characteristics as a *service industry*. Institutional power and disciplining practices are executed by this *service industry* through what Ritzer and Liska (1997, p. 106) call ‘soft-power’ or ‘soft control’. These terms imply that masses of tourists must be managed smoothly and seamlessly, so as to avoid tensions and frustrations. Indeed, managing 2500 of us here simultaneously is a logistical challenge. For instance, the dining timetable we received, though colorful and decorated with names of exotic destinations, is well-suited for a large-scale efficient operation: guests are grouped into four different dining halls, and within each dining hall we are organized into three distinct time-slots (‘early dining’, ‘regular time’, and ‘late-dining’).

If I was concerned about not having our pictures taken when first boarding the ship, I am repeatedly reassured—disillusioned—during the cruise of the all too pervasive opportunities made available to us to smile for a camera. It is a routine activity to approach guests in any of the ship’s public spaces, and particularly in locations that are found mostly near the outdoor pool (located on the top and open deck) and in spaces designated for photography, which are located in *passengers’ bottlenecks*. For example, each time that the ship docks and passengers disembark or embark, a bottleneck is created where a number of photo-taking installations readily await us. These installations are sometimes positioned serially, and sometimes in a parallel manner. On the second day of the cruise, for instance, we leave the ship for the shore and instantly receive an invitation to have our picture taken by a photo-staff employee positioned right outside the ship. He is offering to take our picture against the background of the huge white body of the vessel (the actual ship this time, not an image on a canvas). Following him, two additional spaces are also designated for similar photographic ends. There, too, employees are positioned with long-lens cameras and lighting equipment: in one spot there is an employee dressed like a pirate (swords, black hat, makeup and all), and in a spot nearby another employee is wearing a colorful sombrero and striped poncho. The employees laugh and smile with vacationers as photos are taken, at times striking a playful pose with a threatening (pirate-like) facial expression. In yet another location just a few feet away, vacationers’ pictures are taken near a small steering wheel-like device about two feet high, which is made of wood to resemble the ship’s helm. Those who disembark or embark often stop at these places for an instant photo-opportunity; most do so individually or as couples. The latter typically hug, wearing sunglasses or raising them over their foreheads. The photo-staff employees who work here are generally in their twenties and come from countries mostly in South and Latin America, Asia, and East Europe: the young man wearing the sombrero lives in Zagreb and the Pirate comes from a town near Manila (Wood, 2000, observes the neo-liberal policies of hiring cruise ship employees, and the “clear horizontal and vertical lines of ethnic stratification” [p. 353] that their policies sustain, and Lester [2011, p. 135] critically points that the “ship is the theatre and the employees are the props”).

Staging ‘casual’ portraits

Inside the ship, more professional looking photo-installations are strategically located along one of its busiest decks. Seven separate installations are mounted alongside the long hall, and are in operation for a few hours every evening. Across the hall are shops, formal and occasional dining facilities, and one of the entrances to the ship’s casino. This location is strategic because the hall serves to connect the back of the ship with its front, where different attractions are located and various activities take place (the swimming pool on the one end, and the jacuzzis on the other). Most vacationers—including ourselves—cross the hall a few times every day. While in operation, each photography station presents a different visual ‘theme’, and produces approximately two hundred pictures each day. One of the stations has a sign: MAGAZINE COVER. Here passengers’ pictures are taken against a clear green background. Later their images will be digitally superimposed on a background, which

resembles a travel magazine cover with sunny beaches and palm trees—a view that is actually readily available from the ship’s upper deck. The theme of the next photographic installation is titled PIRATES, and passengers pose against a canvas image of a pirate ship in the background with a few accessories available for wear and yield, as well as an antique looking wooden treasure box nearby. I recognize the employee who posed yesterday as a pirate outside the ship, and he recognizes me with a greeting and invitation to have my picture taken. Further down the hall, a number of similar photographic stations are operating, about ten feet away from each other, carrying titles of NIGHTTIME (night sky with moon and stars), and CLASSIC (Greek-looking archeological site with a temple in the background, and two plastic Corinthian columns as part of the set). Two more installations carry large signs indicating CASUAL (large and lavish carpeted hall in the background, and in the set a large velvet couch with a decorated vase), marking them as ‘theme-free’ photo-occasions (Image 1 below).

I find myself contemplating the CASUAL sign. MacCannell (1999, p. 101) famously asserts that, “[t]he touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences,” and tourists are typically not searching for routine images of themselves. The marker CASUAL here has to do with the fact that the cruise vacation is a priori a *non-casual* occasion, hence what is marked as ‘casual’ enjoys an extra-ordinary quality, rather than a casual one. This is the “extraordinary ordinariness” of contemporary scenes and images in tourism (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 24). The vacationing tourists on board, whose pictures are constantly being taken, are not seeking authenticity; they enjoy rather pleasurable inauthentic scenes, which mirror their image in a complimentary fashion. Compared to the tourists that MacCannell observed in the 1970s, these are *post-tourists* (Ritzer & Liska, 1997), and the recreation they embody seeks something quite different than authentic cultural objects and/or experience.



Image 1. CASUAL portraits (Photo by author).

Contemporary literature on cultural and media studies offers enriching critical perspectives with regards to consumers' everyday aesthetic practices. Writing about the visual and aesthetic dimensions of celebrity figures in western consumer societies, Pels (2003, p. 59), too, notes the "extraordinary ordinariness" that characterizes the aura surrounding celebrities. These celebrated figures are 'like everyone' but at the same time also qualitatively different, successful and unreachable. Goggin (2006, p. 128) adds that in contemporary celebrity-obsessed capitalism, celebrity is "something that can be experienced by everyone. The production of ordinariness as a defining feature of contemporary mediascapes, evinced in the 'reality television' . . . promises that 'ordinary' people can become celebrities." The context of cruise tourism is unique here, because cruise ship travel has been historically associated with the travelling elite, and vacationers' images have a fertile soil to be imagined on, encouraged by the cruise's production of "luxury, elegance, refinement and pleasure" (Berger, 2004, p. 24). Whether 'casual' or not, the vacationers are constantly courted by the photo-staff (as by waiters with colorful alcoholic beverages with funny names on their trays), and enjoy a type of celebrity-ness embodied in photographic practices and scenes.

All the photographic installations present large signs, indicating: TAKE AS MANY PHOTOS AS YOU WANT. THERE IS NO OBLIGATION TO PURCHASE! and in-house photographers repeat this text orally. Although this may be a small semiotic inaccuracy, the text makes it seem as though these are the vacationers who are taking photos, yet it is only the photo-staff personnel who take them. With courteous and inviting performances, they proactively 'fish' passengers who are walking back and forth in the hall. They do so in a spontaneous and unobtrusive way, repeating the sign's text and inviting us: "it's free here" and "you're invited to try, it's fun." During operation hours, the photo-stations are bustling, with lines of people waiting for their photos to be taken at each station. This busyness suggests that the stations are successful in appealing to the passengers, many of whom seem not to have had initially planned to have their pictures taken there, but gravitate toward the installations while in the hall. The younger vacationers I talk with, most of whom are college students, are generally familiar with the cruise because they or their friends have taken cruises before. Jim (21 years old, an undergraduate student in International Relations) is with his girlfriend: "It's the second time we're taking this cruise and it's a lot of fun and so is having our pictures taken. It's part of the fun and we later send it to our friends in Ohio." Melissa (20 years old, an undergraduate student in Communication) is on the cruise with three friends: "We call this the *booze cruise* 'cause we come to party 'cause it's our Spring Break. We like our pictures taken together and we do silly partying stuff (laughs)." The older vacationers, who are usually visiting from outside the US (mostly from Canada, Mexico and Brazil) are less familiar with these practices. A retired couple from Toronto says that "there are many places here where they take our pictures, and it's a good way to remember the cruise to the Bahamas," and Larissa (who is traveling with her husband and children from Mexico), says, "we like pictures and I can choose what we want for our family. We like simple pictures where our children are smiling."

At this point, everyone seems to be content with the free photo-opportunities, and I observe five instances where vacationing tourists visit *three* installations consecutively. They pose in accordance with different themes in each installation, and three to five pictures are taken every time. The actual shooting of the photographs suggests itself as a site of brief, yet complex embodied interactions, which amass to tourists' "authorized visions" (Feighery, 2009, p. 166) of how they occupy spaces and identities while on tour. Invariably, in all the instances I observe the photographers stage the vacationers' bodily postures (and when there is more than one person, also inter-bodily postures) and facial expressions. In one occasion, a picture of a woman in her thirties is being taken. After looking into the camera a few times and adjusting the lighting equipment and the old-looking, wooden table with two plastic flower bouquets on it, the photographer starts adjusting the woman's body posture. Initially, she stood with both legs straight and near each other, but he asks her to move her right leg forward and raise it a bit, so that there is a slight bend at the knee. Also, the photographer asks her to rotate her body 45 degrees sideways, so as not to face the camera directly. Then, addressing her shoulders, he works on relaxing her right arm, which faces the camera: he repeatedly suggests that she be "more relaxed," and smiles and touches her hand with his palm and shakes it a bit a few times. Then he hands her one of the two bouquets from the table, while he supplies directions as to how high to hold it, and directs her to rotate her body in relation to the angle of the camera. Once behind the camera, the photographer follows with a line of directions about her facial expression—he asks her to

smile, to turn her look in a particular direction, saying, “it’s like you’re looking somewhere far, there, and raise your chin a little, yes, like that. Good.” Throughout the entire interaction the woman is not saying anything besides a few conforming “a’ha”s. In other occasions, more verbal interactions take place, and sometimes also the coordination of a few vacationers who were posing together. But there are no occasions that I witness where vacationers suggest something different than the way proposed by the photographer, or that they use the photo-installations when the photographers are not there.

In Andrew Wood’s (2005, p. 316) reflections on his experience in Las Vegas, which resonates with my cruise experience, he observes that tourists “busy themselves with technical details and position each other in poses that strike me as ‘typical’: looking out over the landscape or smiling directly at the photographer.” Wood continues to describe the detailed instructions he received when posing for a photo: “The photographer instructs me to place my bags on the floor and positions me in two poses, one standing arms outstretched . . . The photographer’s assistant hands me one ticket for each photo and helpfully reminds me that I can purchase prints downstairs” (p. 316). The occasion Wood reports on is similar to the cruise’s photographic routines in that tourists’ images are repeatedly staged and taken, and in that these photographic occasions are nodes in a chain, leading to the sites where the photographs will be presented and offered for the tourists for purchasing.

Photo-gallery: a floating exhibition

The final site that illuminates photographic settings and practices on the ship is where the vacationers encounter and observe their images and can purchase them. It is the centerpiece of the cruise’s visual and photographic ecology, and it occurs in the ship’s largest indoor space: a high circular hall that is designated as the PHOTO-GALLERY. I see this location as central not merely because this is where images, in the form of vacationers’ printed photos, are traded for dollars, but because the unique semiotics of this open space, where multiple pictures are publically exhibited and where interactions addressing them intriguingly transpire.

To begin, *all photos* taken on the ship are immediately printed and publically displayed here. Consequently, at any given moment some 4,000 pictures are available—printed and put on display regardless of whether those captured in them will purchase them or not, or whether they approve of their images being publically exhibited. As a result, the hall has the appearance of a large exhibit, comprising an impressive collection of colorful if monotonous photos.

The photos are arranged along the hall’s round circular design in a spatio-temporal grid that indicates when and where they were taken. The aim is to make it easier for consumers to locate and collect the images that they are searching for. Because the images are all quite similar—having been taken more or less in the same places and at the same times—the task of identifying a specific image is not trivial. Hence, as part of the photos’ systematic arrangement, the event at which photos were taken is indicated: EMBARKATION; FIRST EVENING FORMAL DINING; DAY 2; KEY WEST, and so on. These markers, which appear either on top of boards in which the pictures are located, or sometimes printed on the pictures themselves, help the vacationers effectively find their prints. At the same time, the photos’ systematic arrangement also presents the corporate’s imposed method of *classification and categorization* of the tourists’ collective, and the commercial structuring of their travel/cruise experience. Whether institution or inadvertently, these markers set a linear narrative for the vacationers, which re-tells the voyage in terms of sites and scenes of commercial visual production/consumption.

Most of the vacationers take their time as they slowly walk in front of the large boards during the days and in the evenings, scanning and searching the multitude of photographs for their images. Passengers repeatedly visit the PHOTO-GALLERY display, strolling through its round, highly visible pathways (which include four decks), in what amounts to *one of the pastime activities they engage in on board*. This common practice fits nicely with Kwortnik’ (2008, p. 293) observation, whereby cruise ships “focus passengers’ attention inward” through the use of shipscares and through “entertainment architecture.” This architecture serves to “adorn public spaces and the grandiose . . . designed to be utterly unlike most anything passengers might experience at home” (p. 293). In the PHOTO-GALLERY space, a few boards are arranged like book pages, and passengers flip through them, while others are fixed on the ground or mounted on the walls (Images 2 and 3 below). The pictures do not stay in the



Image 2. looking at and shopping for pictures at the round PHOTO-GALLERY (Photo by author).



Image 3. Architecture of display at the PHOTO-GALLERY (Photo by author).

same place for long, and every four hours new sets of prints arrive and older ones move further around the display. Because the prints are arranged temporally, a continuous rotation in the location of the photos takes place, and the oldest prints are put aside in a large box, in case vacationers will wish to retrieve them at a later time (and are recycled after the cruise is over). The photo-staff notify vacationers of this rotation, and proactively assist them in locating their pictures, inquiring if they remember where and when they were taken, and directing them to their photos' whereabouts. The employees also remind the vacationers that, "the pictures are moving all the time 'cos there're new pictures coming in, and it's harder to find the old ones. Better find your pictures now." In this way, a temporal dimension is introduced into the consumption phase, and vacationers are put under some time-pressure, where the longer they wait the less chance they have to locate and retrieve the prints they are looking for.

Two additional noticeable signs act as markers in the large space of the PHOTO-GALLERY hall. The first presents the symbols of a digital camera, a camcorder and a smartphone, all of which are crossed-over. It reads: FOR REASONS OF COPYRIGHT AND TO PROTECT THE PRIVACY OF OUR GUESTS, THE USE OF ANY TYPE OF IMAGE CAPTURING DEVICE IS NOT PERMITTED IN THE PHOTO GALLERY. Many vacationers I observe express discontent with having to pay for their pictures, and the photo-staff personnel with whom I spoke agreed that their main task is to *oversee the prints* and make sure that vacationers do not take them or take pictures of them with their mobile (smartphone) cameras. They shared with me stories they titled, “not nice encounters” and “annoying interactions,” referring to upset vacationers who tried to make digital copies of their images, resisting the idea that their own images are right-protected, and refusing the instructions of the photo-staff personnel. About a quarter of the time that vacationers who try to copy pictures are approached by photo-staff personnel, they resist the ‘copy-right’ argument and a conflict emerges. I did not observe a frontal conflict, but I constantly witnessed instances where employees asked that pictures not be taken (“Sir, no pictures here please!”). These requests were mostly respected, but at times tourists indicated they do not understand the language, or simply ignored the request and went on taking pictures of their photos.

One employee shared a memorable anecdote of how a male vacationer chased him across the ship’s hall, because his wife told him that the employee called her “a bitch.” The employee insisted that all he did was intervene (three times were needed) in her attempts to take digital pictures of her prints. For him, and for other members of the photo-staff, watching over vacationers near the photo-boards and photo-stands is a difficult task that they refer to as “the biggest nuisance.” This is essentially a *surveillance* role, aimed at guarding the *visual capital* obtained by the industry and keeping it in its hands. Photo-staff employees also face occasional complaints from vacationers regarding their pictures being right-protected (“they tell us, ‘why can’t we have the picture, it’s *our* picture!’”). I note that the actual prints are electronically protected, and every print has a small magnetic tag glued to its back, so it turns the alarm system on if taken out of the space of the PHOTO-GALLERY.

On one occasion, which took place when I was taking pictures of PHOTO-GALLERY, I noticed an older, African-American vacationer observing me. She approached me surreptitiously, leaned over closely and said quietly: “I’m withya– I seeya– I’m withya,” and winked (that famous polysemous Geertzian wink). I smiled back. Although I suspected that she thought I was taking pictures of my own prints, I nonetheless enjoyed her sympathy and shared her sentiment; in a sense, I too was taking pictures of the prints that were of interest for me (on researcher’s visual collections and practices see [Noy, 2011](#)).

A second visible sign delineates the prints’ prices. Titled, YOUR FUN PHOTOS, the sign presents four standard photo sizes, ranging in price from USD9.99 for the smallest image to USD23.99 for the largest (4 × 6 inches and 8 × 10 inches, respectively). There are also many non-standard sizes that are offered, such as a poster-size image for USD59.99, and various visual accessories, which vacationers purchased less frequently, including simple and decorated picture albums, plastic and wooden frames, and digital cameras. Many vacationers purchase prints here: during a typical cruise, 20,000 pictures are exhibited, of which approximately 15% are purchased, which culminates in the total sum of USD30,000 (at the very least). The manager of the photo-staff team proudly assured me that selling pictures is the second most lucrative source of income on the cruise ship, after the Casino.

Strolling leisurely through the PHOTO-GALLERY hall in search of their photos, vacationers engage in a variety of visual and visually-related activities. Some are instrumental activities focused at locating their images, while others are more at ease. I observe two main types of interactions taking place: The first concerns locating pictures and negotiating (deciding) if and which to purchase. An *interaction* occurs as the vacationers reach their decisions *socially*, i.e. doing so while talking with friends or relatives. Thus locating one’s pictures and judging which are worth purchasing (and which would be left for recycling), amounts to yet another *visual-related activity* in which vacationers engage publicly. The second type of interaction is also social and public, and concerns references to *others’* images. While vacationers search for their images or idly roam the huge exhibition, they are presented with *all* the images of the ship’s vacationers whose photos have been taken. Hence searching for one’s own images requires literally scanning thousands of images of others. Some vacationers make amusing audible comments about these images, and the large visual exhibit becomes a *visual attraction in and of itself*. The exhibition is a *collective mirror* of sorts, where images of the vacationers are mediated,

mediatized, and re-introduced to them. If the modern tourist gaze was initially directed at the Other, the scenes that post-tourists witness on board are reflexive and carry a mirror-like quality: this is not the view of the ocean or of the islands and towns of the Bahamas, but of the commercially framed publics (collectives) of the vacationing tourists themselves; of their individually and collectively media-t(iz)ed images.

The images below depict vacationers looking through pictures in a small stretch of the ship's round PHOTO-GALLERY hall ([Image 2](#)). Part of the display includes sixteen boards loaded with some 80-100 pictures each ([Image 3](#)).

Viewing this huge display of pictures was an unexpected and powerful experience for me. Most of my recent research on visual displays and photographic practices was done in heritage museums, which might be why I could not avoid recognizing the similarities between the cruise ship's visual arrangements and how they amount to what [McAlister \(2013\)](#) calls collective "memorial scenes." It was mesmerizing for me to recall, upon initially entering the PHOTO-GALLERY, the last heritage museum in which I conducted research, namely the Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem (*Yad Vashem*). There, in The Hall of Names, hundreds of photos of Jews and pre-Holocaust Jewish families are presented in a spiral hall, not unlike the PHOTO-GALLERY, creating a stressful sense of a confined space (while at the same time conveying the cyclic notion of Jewish life and time). Surely, my experience in the cruise ship's hall is idiosyncratic, yet the exhibition nonetheless viscerally reminds me of my experience at heritage museums. Historian Pierre [Nora \(1989, p. 13\)](#) influentially argues that "modern memory is, above all, archival," and that it "relies on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image." In the cruise's PHOTO-GALLERY, visual imageries of vacationers showcase essential issues of memory, collective visual representation, and audiences. This is a collective visual representation of a collective, which is produced, presented and sold (i.e. mediated) to a collective in a highly commercial and confining touristic environment. If in heritage museums visual displays and artifacts are curated so as to produce a sense of lasting and stable images and identities of a given public/community, the PHOTO-GALLERY powerfully performs the reverse: the multitude of images are brief, provisional and transitory; if they will not be obtained (by purchasing them), they will dissolve instantly.

Discussion and conclusion

The spaces of the cruise ship are ultimately enclavic, highly-commercial environments, where vacationers' images are repeatedly staged, produced, printed, and displayed. Although vacationers are presented with actual *printed* photos and not digital images, I begin by noting that the speed at which the operation is executed is possible only in a digital environment. The cruise photo-machine builds on the seamless connection between the photo-taking installations, i.e. CASUAL portraits, and the photos' commercial display, i.e. PHOTO-GALLERY. It offers 'fast-photography' in a way that resembles fast-food: like the drive-through set-up (so familiar to North American tourists), vacationers' images are taken in one site and are then briefly presented to them in a nearby location, as part of an unceasing consumer chain (see [Larsen, 2006](#), about the proximity between visual production and consumption in tourism). This is a lucrative set-up, and as the comedian on the ship said one evening in his standup performance, "When you complete the cruise and look at your bill, you think that they've accidentally wrote your zip-code instead of how much you have to pay!" All this is further accentuated because the cruise is marketed as an "all included" excursion. Other activities that are offered *for pay* are the casino and alcoholic beverages, both of which share interesting characteristics with the photo-taking operation.

Tourism's neoliberal panopticon

Two theoretical frameworks account for the visual commerce taking place on the cruise. The first is expectedly a Foucauldian perspective, which emerges from the heightened, heterotopic architecture of visibility, designed as part of the cruise ship's touristic spaces. Foucault's classic studies examine state institutions, predominantly the jail, which possess powerful visual regimes that enact visual

surveillance. Through the notion of Bentham's Panopticon, Foucault (1979) argues that continuous visibility is crucial to the functioning of power-relations in various state institutions. He emphasizes the potential of surveillance as a technology of statecraft, by which the state produces docile bodies essential to its functioning. The prisoners, who do not know whether they are scrutinized at any given moment in time, learn to behave as if they are always under surveillance.

Unlike jail inmates, however, cruising vacationers are perceived—and reflexively perceive themselves—as occupying the opposite social location, i.e. bourgeois ideals of freedom, mobility and agency. Nonetheless, on board the cruise they face a form of *panoptic (self)-surveillance*. By engaging in the immersive solicitations of the photo-staff, vacationers partake in their own surveillance; in their own self-disciplining visual regimentation. Indeed, for Foucault the panoptic form of state scrutiny is not only the province of external forms of policing; but also of the internalized systems of discipline by which citizens learn to police themselves. That tourists should be under (self-)surveillance is surprising only if they are perceived a-priori as agentic. Cheong and Miller (2000, p. 371) criticize this notion by noting that in western research, “tourism is often understood as a product of the individual decisions of tourists” (cf. MacCannell, 2001). Various Foucauldian strategies are employed in tourism, such as instruction, persuasion, and advice, all of which appear in the descriptions above. If in the jail's oppressive and aggressive environment a visual regime is enforced upon prisoners, on the cruise ship tourism's soft-power and soft control (Ritzer & Liska, 1997, p. 106) is at work, and a tight visual regime is imposed in highly agreeable ways; amounting to tourism's “visionary violence” (Hollinshead, 1999).

Yet the Foucauldian panoptic perspective runs short in the present context. It has been criticized as “apolitical” and “stripped of any agents, interests, or grounding, reduced to a bare technological scaffolding” (Garland, 1990, pp. 170–171). Likewise, Coleman (2002, p. 295) observes that “studies that fail to contextualize the concept of the panopticon within particular political interests and social relations are analytically weak from the start.” This leads to a second and complementing theoretical framework, one which anchors tourism's visionary violence within a neoliberal regime. I am led to a theoretical modification also by the significant differences between state owned jails and institutions (on which Foucault commented), and contemporary tourism institutions, such as the cruise lines, which are privately owned trans-national conglomerates.

Under neoliberalism, panoptic self-surveillance serves within lucrative high-consumerism (Jameson, 1991), where tourists' selves are the object *and* subject of commodification. Edensor (1998, p. 45) describes how a complex of touristic facilities “provides a self-contained environment where tourists are encouraged (or intimidated) into spending as much money as possible.” Importantly, these processes do not address only the Other, i.e. faraway ‘exotic’ and ‘authentic’ cultures/peoples, which was the historical *paradigmatic case* of tourism. Rather, they address the tourist ‘subject’ her/himself. And further, at stake are not those who are framed in the picture, or even not those who frame it or who profit from these processes, but the gaze of the consumers. In the ship's huge and round PHOTO-GALLERY hall, a dizzying exhibition of thousands of vacationers' images is displayed, and this colorful yet monotonous (repetitive) display reflexively embodies the commodification of vacationers' images and gazes: while enjoying the idea that THERE IS NO OBLIGATION TO PURCHASE the images, vacationers literally face their images which are now corporately captured, owned and displayed. While vacationing tourists partake in producing their images—they are seemingly ‘co’-producers—they can obtain the final product only on set commercial terms. And while cruise tourism certainly did not invent the material artifact of the souvenir, the intensity of the production-cum-consumption of tourists' *own* images is telling.

The speed, the photo-taking routines, and the images themselves suggest that the ship's enclavic spaces are essentially *post-touristic stages*. Like images in malls, airports, casinos and other ‘non-places’ (Augé, 2008), observing the dazzling bricolage of vacationers' images, I cannot discern any indication of place, but only staged backgrounds, props, and low paid employees that pose as pirates. The floating and fleeting (evanescent) round PHOTO-GALLERY display is self-contained, and the mosaic of images assumes meaning only in the context of its on-board presentation to the cruisers. Writing on commercial stock photography, Bruhn (2003, p. 379) notes how it “cannot be adequately presented in the gallery room. It offers no recognizable genre or style outside of its industrial context.” And the cruise is precisely that. The industry's panoptic power here is not limited to *capturing* vacationers' images, but to publically representing them in particular ways and finally *selling* them to the vacationers.

The ship's extensive visual design and operation mediat(iz)e identities and spaces, and have the effect of allowing the passengers to both *imagine and enact* themselves therein—as individuals, groups, families, and publics. In line with Lester's (2011) work, we may juxtapose the heterotopic with the carnivalesque, which emerges because the ship offers confined spaces and durations. Vacationers imagine themselves and the spaces they occupy differently than they do elsewhere, and they act accordingly. The ship's public spaces assume a carnivalesque quality as they allow time/space for a carnival in the shape of a spectacle, albeit a highly disciplined one (Ravenscroft & Gilchrist, 2009). This spectacle reinforces current neoliberal regimes, and inside the ship's utopian spaces, what vacationers buy and buy into is more hetero-utopia than heterotopia. A memory-narrative of the kind told by Barthes (1984, above) on his mother's childhood photograph is arguably impossible, or at the very least irrelevant. Photographed repeatedly by the industry confirms vacationers' participation in and access to the attraction, i.e. being—captured/recorded—on a luxurious cruise. The fact that thousands of images are printed even *before* vacationers see them, tells that the lucrative organization of contemporary visual commerce in tourism is well-aware of the value of the material souvenir, and highlights tourists' desire to be corporately portrayed. The mode of collective public display, and vacationers' public responses, confirm the transformation of vacationing tourists into mediatized consumer publics.

In this article I refrained from focusing on the images' contents, and was interested rather in visual practices of producing, displaying, and delivering images *of* and not *by* tourists. I focused on the material arrangements where the transactions relentlessly occur, their design, and the socio-visual practices that they afford. As Feighery (2009, pp. 165–166, citing Tagg, 1988, p. 246) observes, photography as “a practice depends on institutions and agents which define it and set it to work ... across a field of institutional spaces,” and concludes that “it is this field we must study, not photographs as such.” Yet it is clear that the images—individually and/or assembled as a public collage—are part and parcel of the visual regime of tourism and its ocularcentric nature. I leave it for future studies to illuminate these visual representations and performativities, and how sexualized bodies, relationships and families are framed therein. These studies would complement practice-oriented ethnographies, to comprise a holistic evaluation of visual sites. The present study also offers directions for critical qualitative and ethnographic research of cruise ships, mainly examining the perspective of running mega-cruise ships (data that is hard to collect due to heavy gate-keeping exercised by cruise ship management). Such studies would take a comparative and comprehensive perspective, integrating ethnographic and other types of data collected both on and off board, tracing the dense neoliberal semiotics of cruise-ship tourism.

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