

Chapter 24

The Tourist Gaze 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0

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Few concepts stemming from tourism research are more cited and employed than “the tourist gaze” both within tourist studies and beyond. Its “success” is down to several partly inter-linked factors. Firstly, it illustrates the importance of a good book title. John Urry’s book *The Tourist Gaze* (1990, 2002; and 2011, with Jonas Larsen) is famous for the idea of the tourist gaze (despite the fact that it covers much ground). The concept and title nicely support each other and when we think of the tourist gaze we automatically think of John Urry! No other tourist scholar has had quite such a monopoly over a concept and a powerful “brand.” Secondly, Urry writes in a clear and fluid prose and since photographing, sightseeing, and sights are everywhere in the spaces of tourism, the notion makes sense intuitively. Thirdly, John Urry is much more than just a tourism scholar. Nor is he like the tourist who returns to the same place year after year. He is one of Europe’s leading social scientists with an incredible eye for discovering new societal problems. Urry’s sociological gaze seems to be forever on the move; he is like the adventurous traveler that goes to a new place before the hordes go there. But once he has reported from it, many will follow in his footsteps.

The publication of *The Tourist Gaze* in 1990 is an example of this. At that time tourism was not seen as a serious sociological matter and it was largely neglected despite its increasing social, cultural, and economic significance. There were some great tourism books at the time – most notably Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976) – but *The Tourist Gaze* must be read as an attempt to establish a “the sociology of tourism” (in fact this was book’s title until the editor suggested otherwise). Since then Urry has coauthored/edited a number of tourism books (Rojek and Urry, 1997; Bærenholdt et al. 2004; Sheller and Urry, 2004) and articles but he has mainly “traveled” elsewhere, writing about nature, mobilities, globalization, complexity theory, cars, aeromobilities, mobile methods, places, climate change, and – lately – oil. Yet many of these debates have been

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incorporated into later versions of *The Tourist Gaze*. A new chapter was added in 2002 while the 2011 or the 3.0 version – where John Urry invited me on board as coauthor – restructured and updated the previous versions and added three new chapters.

This chapter discusses the three moments or versions – which I call 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 – of the tourist gaze. The tourist gaze and its author we may say are on the move. This chapter gives an account of this “double-sided movement.” I pay particular attention to how these different moments of tourist gazes have been applied, or have influenced, tourism research but also how Urry (and Larsen) have incorporated new tourism ideas – such as embodiment and performance – in conceptualization of the tourist gaze. I also discuss much of the critique raised against it.

1.0

One of the most influential thinkers helped the tourist gaze into being. Urry begins with writing that the tourist gaze is inspired the French philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of the medic gaze. He cites Foucault (1976), who in the *Birth of the Clinic* argued that “the clinic was probably the first attempt to order a science on the exercise and decisions of the gaze” (cited in Urry, 1990: 1). So *The Tourist Gaze* is essentially about how tourism as a leisure activity and an industry is formed according to “the exercise and decisions of the gaze.” For Urry, this means that tourism is predominately a visual practice. Tourism is a “way of seeing” where business stages visual experiences and tourists consume them visually. Focusing on the gaze brings out how the organizing sense in tourism is visual. And this mirrors the general privileging of the eye within the long history of Western societies, as discussed by Foucault and others.

Taking his inspiration from Foucault, Urry argues that gazes are organized and systematized. So the tourist gaze is a matter of socially and technologically patterned and learned “ways of seeing.” Different kinds of gazes are authorized by various discourses. These different discourses include, according to Urry, *health, group solidarity, pleasure and play, heritage and memory, education, and nation* (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 19). While not authorized by a single knowledge-generating institution (like the gaze of the medic) the varied gazes of tourists are discursively organized by many professionals over time: romantic poets and painters, photographers, writers, bloggers, guides, local councils, experts in the “heritage industry,” travel agents, hotel owners, designers, tour operators, TV travel programs, Hollywood, the photography industry, tourism development, architects, planners, tourism academics, and so on. Urry speaks of a “vicious hermeneutic circle” (Urry, 2002: 129) to capture this discursive framing or choreographed nature of gazing (Osborne, 2000). Thus, effectively, tourists gaze upon places that they have already consumed in image form. Gazing is about consuming and photographing signs or markers and tourists are framed and fixed rather than framing and exploring. This explains the many studies of how commercial images frame tourist gazes (see, for instance, Dann, 1996; Marckwick, 2001; Waitt and Head, 2002). Part of the tourist gaze is the idea that gazing is mediated by specific representations and technologies. The guidebook-reading and photograph-taking tourist is the personalization of the tourist gaze. The coupling between photography and gazing is explored further by Taylor (1994) and Osborne (2000).

If Foucault plays the disciplining part in *The Tourist Gaze*, then “postmodernism,” this “intellectual hipster” of the 1980–1990s, plays the playful one. Postmodernism involves “dedifferentiation.” It dissolves boundaries between high and low cultures, between scholarly or auratic art and popular pleasures, and between elite and mass forms of consumption.

Postmodernism also undermines the distinction between “representations” and “reality.” We are said to live in an oversaturated image culture where representations are everywhere and often more exciting than reality. What we increasingly consume are signs or representations. Urry argues that the tourist gaze, even in the past, prefigures postmodernism “because of its particular fusion of the visual, the aesthetic, the themed, the commercial and the popular” (Urry, 1990: 86). The gaze is not least postmodern because it implies that tourists are folded into a world of texts, images, and representational technologies when gazing upon landscapes. Urry writes: “Much of what is appreciated is not directly experienced reality but representations, particularly through the medium of photography. What people ‘gaze upon’ are ideal representations of the view in question they internalise from various media” (Urry, 1990: 86).

More broadly, following Foucault we can see this making of seductive images and destinations as institutional mediation by “expert gazes” within which spectacle and surveillance intersect and power–knowledge relations are played out (this aspect has been further developed by Dann, 1996; Hollingshead, 1999; Cheong and Miller, 2000; McGregor, 2000). And finally Urry writes that postmodernism, due to the many circulating images of distant places, undermines clear-cut distinctions between tourism and everyday life, and home and away. Postmodernism means people become “everyday tourists,” daily gazing upon the extraordinary places on TV screens: “People are tourists most of the time, whether they are literally mobile or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images” (Lash and Urry, 1994: 259). The notion of the tourist gaze captures both the consumption of places through mobile images and the actual travel to and embodied appreciation of specific places. The tourist gaze may be virtual and it may be corporeal, but it is always bound up with the pleasure of gazing upon places that are out of the ordinary. Indeed, tourists often travel to places that are made “special” through the media. Much subsequent work on “movie-induced” (e.g. Law et al., 2007) and “postmodern” tourism (e.g. Pretes, 1995; Nuryanti, 1996) draws on Urry’s understanding of mediatized gazing.

Tourists, we may say, travel in mediascapes as much as physical worlds and they largely appreciate them through the visual sense. This is the controversial and generalizing part of the book that caused so much latter debate (discussed below). In the article “The tourist gaze ‘revisited’” published in 1992, Urry clarifies that it would be absurd to argue that tourists only gaze and that the visual sense is the only sense employed by tourists. But he insists the visual sense is the master sense and that gazing is the emblematic and most widespread tourism practice. The popularity of the tourist gaze as a concept is in part down to Urry was bold enough and successful in arguing that tourism is largely about gazing. The tourist gaze belongs not just to the visual culture of tourism but its center. Tourism is about organizing places as *sights* and gazing is about “consuming places” visually (Urry, 1995) as others have explored in relation to spectacular ecotourism (Ryan et al., 2000), polar bears (Ryan et al., 2000; Lemelin, 2006), Ground Zero (Lisle, 2004), and the “hip-hop hood” (Xie et al., 2007).

2.0

The newness of the second version of *The Tourist Gaze* published in 2002 was the new chapter “Globalizing the gaze.” It must be seen in relation to Urry’s edited book *Touring Cultures* (with Chris Rojek; Rojek and Urry, 1997) and especially his new interest in “mobilities” and globalization [see *Sociology Beyond Societies* (Urry, 2000) and *Global Complexity* (Urry, 2003)]. In the latter Urry formulates a sociological manifesto for our globalized age of mobile people, objects, image, information, and much more. In that new chapter Urry

writes that the world has become much more mobile and globalized, and this to an extent that he speaks of “global tourism.” He argues: “there are . . . countless ways in which huge numbers of people and places get caught up within the swirling vortex of global tourism. There are not two separate entities, the ‘global’ and ‘tourism’ bearing some external connections with each other” (Urry, 2002: 144). Since the first edition, the Internet and cell phones have become widespread and afforded what Urry terms “virtual travel” and “communicative travel.”

There are many more screens now allowing virtual gazing. And there is more corporeal travel due to cheap flights, more airports, and more destinations. So Urry sums up the situation by saying that “the amount of ‘traffic’ . . . has magnified over this last decade, there is no evidence that virtual and imaginative travel is replacing corporeal travel, but there are complex intersections between these different modes of travel that are increasingly de-differentiated from one another” (Urry, 2002: 141). The “roaring nineties,” we may say, was the decade of unprecedented levels of global mobility. The tourist gaze traveled abroad when especially package tours and budget airlines made air travel cheap and easy. In Europe, Berlin, Paris, Barcelona, and London became weekend playgrounds to what we might call the Easyjet generation. Overall, travel time and cost have reduced within the past decade, so frictions of distance and the cost of travel only partly matter in relation to physical travel; so many places are within reach quickly and cheaply (see Larsen et al., 2006). And, as a consequence, many people have become habituated to mobile leisure lifestyles and a touristic cosmopolitan outlook that presupposes travel by cars and planes.

Far more places are now part of global tourism. This includes very distant places and places thought to have little tourist appeal, such as places of war, disasters, and famine. This is a part of reflexive process whereby places and nations enter a new neoliberal global order where places compete with each other to attract business people and tourists (and cheap labor). Urry further notes that “gazers” increasingly emanate from many very different countries. In particular, the new Asian middle classes visit places of the West. The tourist gaze is no longer exclusively a Western one. The tourist gaze is everywhere and socially much more widespread.

Then Urry responds to criticisms raised against the tourist gaze. This includes Veijola and Jokinen’s (1994) assertion that the tourist gaze neglects the multisensuous tourist *body* and that there is a male basis to it (see also Pritchard and Morgan, 2000). Urry acknowledges this by highlighting that the gazing involves corporeal movement and mobile bodies that encounter places multisensuously, often through movement (see Urry, 1999, on the multiple senses involved in tourism; Larsen, 2001, on the mobile travel glance). He discusses gazing in relation to embodiment, and movement: “the body senses as it *moves*. It is endowed with kinaesthetics, the sixth sense that informs one what the body is doing in space through the sensations of movement registered in its joints, muscles, tendons and so on” (Urry, 2002: 152).

The sense of touch is crucial here. The walker’s feet on the mountain path and the climber’s hands on a rock face are explored in *Bodies of Nature* (Macnaghten and Urry, 2000). Urry (2007) also introduces the notions of “corporeal proximity” and “compulsion to proximity” to highlight that tourists travel long distances and pay much money to experience places *corporeally*. Virtual travel is a poor substitute for the sensuous richness of corporeal travel: “To be there oneself is what is crucial in most tourism. . . . Co-presence then involves seeing or touching or hearing or smelling or tasting a particular place” (Urry, 2002: 154). For Urry, “much travel results from a powerful ‘compulsion to proximity’ that makes it ‘obligatory, appropriate or desirable’” (Urry, 2003: 164–165).

3.0

Much happened between 2002 and 2011 when the third edition was published. In the field of tourism studies there was a great deal of talk about replacing the tourist gaze with a new paradigm of performing (Perkins and Thorns, 2001). This paradigm suggests that the doings of tourism are physical or corporeal and not merely visual (see Edensor, 1998; Coleman and Crang, 2002; Pons et al., 2008; Haldrup and Larsen, 2010 among others). The “tourist gaze” was critiqued for reducing tourism to *sightseeing*. Where are other senses, bodily experiences, and adventure, the critics asked?

Urry continued his work on developing the new mobilities paradigm but now in a more critical and pessimistic tone that spelled out the many social, economic, and environmental problems that multiple mobilities generate, such as surveillance, “overconsumption,” and climate change. So a new tourism paradigm challenged the tourist gaze as Urry became increasingly concerned about “bads” to which the global tourist gaze contributes. These issues frame the 3.0 version that illuminates some of the embodied and *darker* sides of the tourist gaze (with inspiration from Hollingshead, 1999; Morgan and Pritchard, 2005; Elliot and Urry, 2010).

Urry and I argue that there are many similarities between the paradigms of gaze and performance (see Urry and Larsen, 2011: chapter 8). The 3.0 version rethinks the tourist gaze in the light of this performance paradigm by developing a *relational* approach that acknowledges the *intersections* of the senses and people in people’s visual encounters with places (something Urry touched upon in the 2.0 version but did not develop much) (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 195–199). We show, drawing on various research, that gazing is embodied, multimodal, and involves other sensescapes. Tourists touch, stroke, walk, or climb upon and even collect the building and objects that they lay their eyes upon. Gazing often comprises seeing *and* touching and walking upon or moving along. Sights often require appropriate soundscapes and smellscapes. And gazers are never disembodied traveling eyes. If gazers are not bodily well they may fail to be impressed by the sight.

The 3.0 version also examines the social relations of gazing (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 201–205). Urry and Larsen write that tourists never just gaze upon places and things. Tourists gaze upon places in the presence of others, other tourists, and locals, as most tourist places are busy public places. They show that most gazing is performed with significant others and one’s “team” affords ways of seeing more than others. Gazing is relational and communal. It involves negotiations about what to see, how to see it, and for how long a time. Gazing within a given place depend as much upon the quality of the social relations that travel along with them as upon the place itself (as Haldrup and Larsen, 2003 show regard to family tourist photography). Who we happen to gaze with can be as important to the quality of the experience as the object of the gaze.

The 3.0 version explores the *relational gazes* of gazers and gazees. The eyes of *gazers* and *gazees* are likely to meet, however briefly, each time the tourist gaze is performed. Earlier moments of the tourist gaze stressed that tourists exercised much power over the places and locals become the “mad one” behind bars, relentlessly gazed upon and photographed (Urry, 1992). Indeed, scholars show that a pervasive tourist gaze can create feelings of being constantly watched and objectified (Maoz, 2006; Chhabra, 2010). Yet the 3.0 version also discusses how gazees are not necessarily passive and powerless. They can exercise some power and objectify visitors through their gaze (this is inspired by Maoz, 2006; see Hollingshead, 1999; Cheong and Miller, 2000). Urry and Larsen discuss the concept of the “local gaze” and

“mutual gaze” that brings out the resistance and power of hosts when interacting face to face with tourists (Maoz, 2006). There is always a “mutual gaze” with many intersecting, responsive gazes, between guests and other guests, tourists, and “brokers,” and between tourists themselves. Maoz says that: “the local gaze is based on a more complex, two-sided picture, where both the tourist and local gazes exist, affecting and feeding each other, resulting in what is termed ‘the mutual gaze’” (Maoz, 2006: 222). *Everyone* gazes at each other in the spaces of tourism; locals return the gaze of tourists and consequently tourists too can turn into the mad ones behind the bars (although most tourists are blind to this gaze, according to Maoz (2006)). Jordan and Aitchison (2008) show how many female tourists (especially on their own) are aware that they are subject to the sexualized and controlling gaze of local men. This uneasy awareness of being caught gazing is seen in a different way in a study of photography. Gillespie’s (2006) notion of the reverse gaze inspired by Maoz’s notions of the mutual gaze highlights the shame and discomfort when the photographee takes notice and gazes back at the photographer. The local gaze strikes back and positions the self-proclaimed traveler as voyeuristic gazer. And lastly there is the “intratourist gaze” (Holloyway et al., 2011), that highlights that tourists gaze at fellow tourists. *Other* tourists also influence and discipline the tourist gaze. And tourists separate themselves from copresent others by denouncing the superficial, snobbish, or boring behavior of those others.

The 3.0 version ends dramatically. The final chapter, entitled “Risk and futures,” questions whether tourist travel under the regime of the tourist gaze may actually turn out to be a somewhat limited period in human history. Urry and Larsen consider the risks and damages of the tourist gaze to the environments being visited, of long-term climates, and of the supplies of oil that “fueled” the tourist gaze over the mobile twentieth century. As the tourist gaze has gone global so it causes some powerful new risks and institutional gazes that these risks and fears generate in the built environment. Terrorism is one such risk. Destinations for Western tourists and especially airports are the front line of the war on terror where both terrorists and tourists are “on the move.” Airports in particular have developed a new sophisticated “panoptic sort” “surveillance gaze,” of cameras, face-recognition biometric cameras, iris recognition, and much more. So “in order that one can enter paradise for a week, systems of personal security are morphing into a new Big Brother where gazing tourists are subject to omnipresent surveillance” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 222).

The surveillance gaze is increasingly also at place in cities. In London one is likely to be recorded over 300 times a day by CCTV cameras (Morgan and Pritchard, 2005). The flaneur was the forerunner of the “gazing tourist.” The flaneur’s anonymity and liminality is now largely impossible: almost all movements are recorded, tracked, and “databased.” Tourists are now routinely captured by and subject to a powerful digital panoptic machine justified by the perceived risks of crime, violence, and terrorism. The first versions of the tourist gaze highlighted that significance of tourism companies (like Thomas Cook) in affording safe journeys. Now so-called independent travelers always face the new surveillance gaze to secure a safe journey without terrorists! This is the new “securitization ordering” of the tourist gaze.

At the end of the book Urry and Larsen (2011: 228–231) turn to oil. What has oil to do with tourist gaze? For Urry and Larsen, it is cheap and plentiful oil that has been the foundation, the very resource that has allowed the tourist gaze to “conquer” the world. It has shipped tourist goods and tourists across nations and even continents. There would be no corporeal tourist gaze without abundant cheap oil. Whereas the previous editions have explored the social and discursive ordering of the tourist gaze, oil represents the resource ordering of it. In his latest books on climate change and oil (Urry, 2011, 2013), Urry argues that most

industrial, agricultural, commercial, domestic, and consumer systems are built around the plentiful supply of oil.

Cheap and plentiful oil has afforded cheap journeys and many people have become used to frequent journeys and mobile lifestyles. Whereas the 2.0 version speaks of the necessity of travel, in the 3.0 version it is stressed how tourist mobility has become “excessive,” a “consumer addiction” (like much else in neoliberal consumer society), and how this “binge mobility” is incredibly destructive for the environment. Travel figures have soared and soared. There has been a move from low-carbon tourism to high-carbon tourism as trips to “neighboring” destinations are supplemented with far-away destinations. The tourist gaze 1.0 is largely about the rise and fall of British resorts and local tourists. The 3.0 version is about Dubai and international tourists, this neoliberal place of consumption excess and mega projects. Dubai’s ambition was to be the number one luxury-consumer paradise in the most inhospitable of environments. Huge amounts of oil have been used to build the biggest and most spectacular islands, beaches, hotels, and attractions, to transport in and out very large numbers of visitors and workers, and to provide cooled environments (including outdoor air conditioners and indoor skiing) in the desert. All that luxury was built for borrowed money and by thousands on thousands of poorly paid migrant laborers lured into a life of squalor and exploitation, hidden away from the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 237–240).

If “business were as normal” then we would expect that Dubai and other tourist places would be physically traveled to for a long while yet. Yet, as Urry argues in his latest books (2011, 2013), this is not the case. Oil is running out and tourism travel is causing severe climate change (as also discussed by Scott et al., 2012). On top of that there was the financial crisis that resulted in huge debts and financial collapses. So in the future it seems probable that travel is likely to become increasingly expensive, which makes the long-term growth in travel and tourism less likely. Urry and Larsen argue that the future has already arrived in Dubai where expatriates are fleeing and the population is shrinking, many construction projects are on hold or canceled, and construction workers are laid off, properties slump in value, and Dubai needed to be bailed out by a US\$10 billion loan from Abu Dhabi (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 239). They end the book by asking:

Is this history of the rise and fall of Dubai a forerunner of the history of the global present as in the next few decades the spreading of the tourist gaze comes to a shuddering halt or even a reversal beginning in an Arabian desert? Was the tourist gaze on a mass scale a feature of the twentieth century hubris that will gradually disappear once the oil begins to run down and sea levels rise further? The decline and fall of Dubai may thus be the start of a much more general decline in the significance of the tourist gaze. Will there still be a relatively widespread and common “tourist gaze” operating away in 2050? (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 240)

Urry and Larsen discuss some possible future scenarios of the gaze. One is “local sustainability” and a localized gaze. It involves a dramatic global shift towards lifestyles and travel patterns more local and smaller in scale: long-distance travel will be source of low status, not unlike tobacco. People will realize that air travel damages the planet’s health (Cohen et al., 2011). This scenario requires that people contest travel and the environmental ills that it generates, as well as articulating discourses that promote the *positive* outcomes of low-carbon holidays, not imagining that the exotic and distant is necessarily better. This ties into Dickinson and Lunsdon’s (2010) idea of slow travel in tourism and many articles in the journal *Sustainable Tourism*. The “exotic gaze” needs to be dispensed with and flying needs to be

heavily taxed. A marked *deg*lobalization of the tourist gaze must take place so that many international tourism systems, of places and transport, disappear. And when people do travel longer distances this need to be undertaken collectively and where possible by sustainable higher-speed trains.

Another – but related – scenario is that of digital gazing. One aspect of this scenario is that “much travel would be replaced by virtual travel” (Urry, 2011: 151). So far various types of screens have poorly substituted corporeal gazing. This scenario requires the innovation of communications that affectively stimulate the sensuous, emotional, and social richness of corporeal gazing and discourses that promote the joys of virtual sightseeing. Somehow the Internet needs to be focused upon and software and experiences developed that can substitute corporeal travel with virtual travel. The Internet and web 2.0 need to reveal the pleasures of the nearby, strengthen localness and no longer global choice and corporeal travel other than low-carbon travel.

Theoretical and Methodological Reflections: Conclusion

The tourist gaze is “on the move.” I have argued that it is not telling the same tale today as it did in 1990. The 1.0 version explored the social and cultural – the discursive – ordering of the tourist gaze. The 2.0 version turned to its global ordering. The 3.0 version is concerned with respectively the embodied and resource ordering of the tourist gaze. So Urry’s take on and interest in tourist gaze has shifted over the years. It has been gazed upon through changing theoretical lenses (e.g. visual theory, postmodernism, and the “mobilities paradigm”) and new “empirical realities” (e.g. media saturation, globalization, peak of oil, and climate change). We have seen how Urry questions the sustainability and very existence of a widespread and globalized tourist gaze. He suggests that future research with regard to the tourist gaze must explore ways in which it can be localized and de-exoticized as well as more virtual. There is a need to tame the global tourist gaze. In the meantime I would also stress the need for researching how the rising number of non-Western tourists gaze as there has been almost total focus on Western tourists. There have already been some studies on how Asian tourists gaze and they all suggest that the tourist gaze as described in this article is somewhat ethnocentric and does not capture the specificity of Asian ways of seeing (Lee, 2001; Shono et al., 2006).

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