

## **-Will you take my picture?**

**-Some reflections on the relationship between photography and tourism**

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# **-Will you take my picture?**

## **-Some reflections on the relationship between photography and tourism**

*Håkon Larsen*

### **The tourist/amateur-photographer**

Sitting on a bench by the Little Mermaid Statue in Copenhagen, observing the constant flow of tourists taking pictures of the famous sight, I started contemplating on how obsessed tourists are with taking pictures. One by one the tourists approached the Mermaid and struck a pose to be immortalised in her presence. After the picture had been taken, the focus was directed towards the next stop on the city's highlight tour. It struck me as somewhat of a compulsion to take a picture, as if one has not been at a sight if a picture has not been taken. This led me to the question whether the picture has become more important than the actual experience; is it more important to document ones presence in famous sights than to enjoy the sights themselves?

Photography has become a constituting factor in the social practise of tourism, and it is therefore important to enhance our understanding of the relationship between the two. With reference to theoretical perspectives, photography can be considered as a mere representation of reality, or as an important factor in the construction and perception of reality. This theoretical discussion will in this essay be related to the practise of taking photographs when travelling, the uses of photographic images of famous sights and tourist attractions in the mass media, as well as the construction of holiday memories and narratives. Some of the questions to be discussed: - Is the use of photographic images in the mass media affecting our chosen destinations? - How is the widespread use of photography affecting the way we do a holiday? - Does photography influence the way we remember our holiday-experiences and construct our holiday-narratives? Lastly, the essay will discuss whether photography's function for tourists is somehow changing with the use of digital photography.

## Theoretical perspectives on photography<sup>1</sup>

The view on photography has changed over time, and this part of the essay will give an account of the three major theoretical or analytical perspectives on photography that have dominated in different epochs, as some historical knowledge of how academics has looked at photography in different times might be useful, before going into a discussion taking place within the dominating perspective at the present time.

When photography was patented by the French government in 1839, it was basically meant for scientific purposes. The first theoretical approach to photography, dominating between 1840 and 1930, has been characterised as the formalist or realist approach. Here photography, or as Fox Talbot called it; “the pencil of nature,” was considered a tool for the exact representation of reality, and hence a great tool for science. But photography was also regarded as art, and operated within two opposing discourses, that of art (or aesthetics), and that of science (or reality).<sup>2</sup> Photography became very popular and spread throughout the western world. In line with this trend of increased use, photography also became a topic much debated.<sup>3</sup> Common for both the artistic and scientific use of photography was that a photograph was considered as a mere representation of reality.

The second theoretical approach to photography, the semiotic approach, dominated between 1930 and 1980. Its inspirer was the Swiss linguists Ferdinand de Saussure, who saw language as a coded system in which signs (words) have no obvious relationship to the things to which they refer; the signs are indexical (Hall 1997: 20-1). Through the process of coding we gain the ability to communicate, but some of the complexity of reality is lost in the process. Saussure divided the sign into signifier, the form, and signified, the idea or concept; a sign, is for Saussure a unification of an idea or a concept, and a form (word). The signs form a system, and each sign is defined in relation to other members of that system (Hall 1997: 31). In his model Saussure distinguished between *langue*, the underlying rule-governed structure of language, and *parole*, the particular acts of speaking or writing language produced by an actual speaker or writer. Saussure

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<sup>1</sup> This part, and the distinction between the three perspectives, is based on the lecture “the Photograph” given by Professor Francesco Lapenta at the Department of Sociology, at the University of Copenhagen on 17. September 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Still though, photographs operating within an aesthetic discourse were limited to portrait photographs, and the bourgeoisie would now have portrait photographs taken of them rather than portrait paintings, which meant that the painters had difficulties earning a living, causing the conversion of some painters into photographers. At the time having a photograph taken was rather expensive, and portrait photographs were thus considered a status symbol.

<sup>3</sup> One of its fiercest critics was the French poet and literary and art critic Charles Baudelaire, who claimed that photography should stay within the realm of science and not pretend to be art.

has been labelled a structuralist because of his focus on the deep structure of the language (Hall 1997: 33), and he has been of tremendous importance for the structuralist strain of social thought. However, he has been criticised for not giving enough attention to how language is actually used by actors; that he elevates langue over parole (Giddens 1987: chp. 4), and this weakness in the semiotic approach makes a third analytical approach to photography necessary.

Saussure's interest was in language, but his semiotic approach to language has been used to study the use of signs in culture in general. "The underlying argument behind the semiotic approach is that, since all cultural objects convey meaning, and all cultural practices depend on meaning, they must make use of signs; and in so far as they do, they must work like language works, and be amenable to an analysis which basically makes use of Saussure's linguistic concepts" (Hall 1997: 36). Roland Barthes elaborated Saussure's semiotic model and introduced some new terms. He distinguished between a signs denotative and connotative level; "Denotation is the simple, basic, descriptive level, where consensus is wide and most people would agree on the meaning" (Hall 1997: 38), and at the level of connotation: "[...] we are beginning to interpret the completed signs in terms of the wider realms of social ideology - the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems of society" (Hall 1997: 38-9). Thus denotation is the objects in the picture, or the literal meaning, while the connotation is the cultural elements associated with the picture. In his essay "Myth today" in *Mythologies*, Barthes considers representation as a two-stage process, where the first stage is like that discussed earlier in which signifier and signified form a sign, while at the second stage the sign from the first stage becomes a signifier. This second stage is what Barthes calls myth. There are two semiological systems in myth, a linguistic system; the language-object, and myth; the meta-language. The latter is a language in which one speaks of the former (Barthes 1999b: 53).

The semiotic approach to photography looks at the photograph as a text and analyse it accordingly. The focus is inside the photography. In the third approach to photography the focus is no longer inside the photograph, but directed toward the context in which the photograph is used. This approach is often labelled as the postmodern approach to photography, where the works of Michel Foucault, and especially *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002), is of importance. Here he introduced what has later been known as discourse-analysis. "A discourse is the particular mode of textuality of an institution. It is a set of textual arrangements which work to organise and co-ordinate the actions, positions and identities of the people who inhabit them" (Thwaites, Davis & Mules 2002: 140). The same images are interpreted differently according to context; they are

polysemic. According to Barthes images have to be employed with a text to communicate an interpretation; the text functions as an anchorage (Barthes 1999a: 37-8). The text is, in Foucaultian terms, pointing out the discourse that the image is operating within. While semiotics is considered a universal interpretation of meaning, the postmodern approach rejects such universalism, and further, the representation of reality through photographs, which the formalist approach proclaims, is questioned. According to the postmodern approach we cannot address meaning without context and, according to Foucault, we cannot address context without looking at power. In his discourse-analysis Foucault is drawing on the distinction between *langue* and *parole*, but unlike the structuralists, Foucault thinks of the underlying structure (*langue*) as susceptible to historical change, and he is often labelled a post-structuralist because of his historization of these structures.

This essay will focus on the social use of photography, and hence be operating within a postmodern approach. This approach considers the context that the images appear in, how the images may influence social practice, as well as the images influence on the construction of reality. Since my concern is with photography as a constituting factor in the practice of tourism, a semiotic approach will not be sufficient because of its focus on *langue*, on the expense of *parole*. Still, some semiotic concepts will be employed throughout the essay when useful for describing images represented in photographs.

### **Where to go? /"the Dream of New York"**

"According to the postmodern argument the mass media produce our knowledges and desires" (Edwards 2003: 182) - and one would think that the destinations people choose for their holidays are heavily influenced by the images they have been exposed to through the mass media.

One example I find to be quite fascinating is what I like to call "the Dream of New York". People can be as critical as they want towards the United States and their foreign policy, but nevertheless love the idea of going to New York City on a weekend-holiday, and would probably like to live there for a short period of time. The city has almost become a holy place, worshipped by the urban youth of the world. It has gained the status as the definition of the urban lifestyle/dream. There is no mystery with regard to this phenomenon; it is simply a result of growing up in an age packaged with images of New York City. Most of these images represented in the mass media have connotations referring to the urban lifestyle that so many of the young generations of the world are dreaming of, and many of these images also have workings at the level of the myth (Barthes

1999b). Not only do images of New York City have connotations to the urban lifestyle, they also have connotations to the American Dream, New York being the city of opportunities. Images of New York City often function as a metonym (Thwaites et. al. 2002: 51-4) for the urban lifestyle, or the American dream, or both. When the Statue of Liberty and Manhattan Skyline are used in movies and TV-shows to represent New York City, these images are operating at a mythological level; the Statue of Liberty symbolises the American Dream, embodied in New York City - "If I can make it here I'll make it anywhere"<sup>4</sup> – and the Manhattan Skyline is a manifestation of the financial success of the city and it's successful inhabitants.

Most of the young people of the western world (adolescents and young adults) probably feel like they know New York, because of the thousands of images of the city they have seen represented in movies, TV-shows, sit-coms, magazines and so on. This is probably also getting to be the case for the young generations of countries outside the western world, who are adopting the western lifestyle. "Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution" (Sontag 1979: 24). So when people actually go to New York they go on some kind of image-holiday, like the city is just a big simulacrum (Baudrillard 1994); it somehow becomes hyperreal. You go on to see sights that you have seen represented a number of times before, but still feel obliged to reproduce these images by taking personal photographs. Here it is important to be in the picture yourself, if you are really to convince people that you have been there; "I am really standing in the place that you see on TV all the time!" TV, as a communication-medium, has the power to turn places that are not in themselves fascinating, into tourists attractions. If a building or its like functions as a symbol in a TV-show, the place usually becomes something tourists want to see when in the city. One only has to take the tram passing the Courthouse in Oslo to come across passengers, from other parts of Norway, enthusiastically pointing out to their travelling-companion that we are passing "Hotel Cæsar", the building used to symbolise the hotel in the soap opera. Just because one has seen a place represented a number of times, it becomes something one must see for oneself, like one has to get a proof that the place really exists. And as we all know, a lot of these places are to be found in New York City.

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<sup>4</sup> This stanza is from Frank Sinatra's "New York New York".

## Theories on tourism; two alternative approaches

People go on vacation to go “sightsnapping” or to get personal experiences in destinations with a holy status, as a result of mythological work in the mass media. This motivational factor may be unconscious, and other factors may influence tourists’ motivation for going on holiday, as well as the way they do their holiday. In his work, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* from 1964, Daniel Boorstin argues that Americans cannot experience “reality” directly but thrive on “pseudo-events”, of which tourism is the prime example. “Isolated from the host environment and the local people the mass tourist travels in guided groups and finds pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying “pseudo-events” and disregarding the “real” world outside” (Urry 2002: 7).

Dean MacCannell delivers an alternative approach; “All tourists for MacCannell embody a quest for authenticity, and this quest is a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred” (Urry 2002: 9). This search for the sacred leads the locals and the tourist entrepreneurs to construct artificial backstage-situations; tourist-spaces become organised around “staged authenticity”. While Boorstin argued that “pseudo-events” resulted from an individualistic search for the inauthentic, MacCannell argues that these events are the result of the social relations of tourists. Boorstin can be said to operate within a postmodern paradigm, he being a pioneer of postmodern thought; people do not search to get in contact with an empirical reality but satisfactorily enjoy an imitation of reality.<sup>5</sup> This theoretical perspective on tourism seems to give a satisfactory approach to mainstream tourism and “snapshot-holidays”, but not so with regard to backpacking and exploratory travelling, to which MacCannell’s approach seems more expedient. One only has to go through a catalogue from the Australian travel agency “Intrepid Travel” to get an impression of what staged authenticity is all about. This agency specialises on adventure tours for groups; “Intrepid is for those with a yearning to explore, a sense of fun and a wish to get off the beaten trail. Intrepid travellers want to experience a country and its people”.<sup>6</sup> The only problem is the fact that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to get an authentic experience of a country and its people by going on a guided group tour.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Baudrillard (1994) can be said to elaborate on Boorstin’s line of thought in his theory of the hyperreality of a mediated world.

<sup>6</sup> This quotation appears on Intrepid Travel’s homepage:  
<http://www.intrepidtravel.com/introduction.php?PHPSESSID=#>

## **Travelling with the camera**

Both travelling and the possession and use of a photo-camera are common for most people in the western world today. “To be a tourist is one of the characteristics of the “modern” experience. Not to go away is like not possessing a car or a nice house. It has become a marker of status in modern societies [...]” (Urry 2002: 4). Most people bring their camera when going on holiday, and it seems like this is when amateur-photographers take most of their pictures.

To verify holiday experiences photographic evidence is waterproof, at least with the use of analogue technology. “Photographs will offer indisputable evidence that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had” (Sontag 1979: 9). According to Susan Sontag the photograph serves the same function for people from different social strata when on vacation: “Taking photographs fills the same need for the cosmopolitans accumulating photograph-trophies of their boat trip up Albert Nile or their fourteen days in China as it does for lower-middle-class vacationers taking snapshots of the Eiffel Tower or Niagara Falls” (Sontag 1979: 9). They are all collecting evidence of their presence in these spaces. For a working- or lower-middle-class vacationer it is as exciting to be in Paris as it is for a young educated traveller to be in Vietnam, but part of the excitement exists in the anticipation to show off the pictures to friends and family upon return, and enjoy their enthusiasm and envy.

Nationality or ethnicity may be another factor distinguishing between the different uses of the photo-camera. The Japanese are well known for their “snapshot-holidays”. Sontag is explaining this with reference to the Japanese relation to their workplace. “Japanese, Americans and Germans all seem to “have” to take photographs and then to remember through these photographs - it is a kind of leisure equivalent of the distorting obligations of a strong workplace culture” (Urry 2002: 128). And now it seems as if the increasing middleclass in China to a certain degree are adopting the same form of travel style. The domestic travel in China is big, and the international travel is increasing as the Chinese society is opening up and evolving into a market economy. My personal observation of the Chinese domestic tourists is similar to observations of Japanese international tourists; they are all taking pictures of famous sights, and they like to be in the pictures themselves. (If a Caucasian person can be in it as well it will be even better<sup>7</sup>). One thing that seems common for both the Chinese and the Japanese is striking a pose - most often showing the V-sign<sup>8</sup> -

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<sup>7</sup> This of course goes for the domestic travelling.

<sup>8</sup> V-sign: “A hand-sign indicating victory, solidarity, or approval, formed by holding the raised index and middle fingers in the shape of a V” (<http://www.answers.com/topic/v-sign>).

when being photographed with famous sights.<sup>9</sup> Tourists all over the world practise this phenomenon, but it seems more common, especially the V-sign, among the mentioned nationalities. According to Bourdieu (1999: 166); “To strike a pose is to offer oneself to be captured in a posture which is not and which does not seek to be “natural””. So when one strikes a pose while being photographed on vacation, one does so to mark the distance from the ordinary day-to-day life. “Tourism is a leisure activity which presupposes its opposition, namely regulated and organised work” (Urry 2002: 2). Striking a pose may serve the function of confirming this opposition that one is now in a mode different from the regular one, and thus can act in a more spontaneous and relaxed way. A V-sign pose in a holiday-picture may symbolise two forms of personal victory: Firstly another sight on the “to see list” can be crossed out, and cultural refinement will be improved. Secondly the picture will become evidence of financial wealth; that one can afford to travel.

Apparently the photographs become somewhat more important than the experiences themselves, and one might say that people go on vacation to take photographs - the first thing you think about when seeing a famous image, is to reproduce it by taking a photograph. “A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it - by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. Travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs” (Sontag 1979: 9). Even the independent and exploring travellers who go off the beaten track, for example in South-East Asia, to have a pure experience, tend to bring their camera because they need to prove to their friends, and themselves, that they really had a pure experience. Or in the words of Sontag (1979: 162): “The urge to have new experiences is translated into the urge to take photographs [...]” The way I see it, this relationship between photography and backpacking leads to two paradoxes: Firstly, the experience becomes less pure once photographed. It is like the camera steals some of the uniqueness of the situation, drawing out some of the electricity of a special moment. Secondly, once a certain number of travellers have visited the same place, the locals will adapt to the situation, and hence the local environment will no longer be available for the travellers, in its purest form. Eventually the locals will produce what MacCannell called “staged authenticity”.

When obsessed with taking photographs, the experiences had while on vacation that were *not* immortalised by a photograph become unreal, as photographs shape ones memory of

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<sup>9</sup> Most Chinese or Japanese would probably object to being compared like this, but the similarities are there. And to speak just of these nationalities is of course a simplification; it might be the case that this travel style is common for most nationalities from East Asia, but then again many countries in this region are so poor that most people cannot afford to travel.

events. When you have looked through the photographs taken on a vacation several times the moments captured in these photographs become the things you remember, and the picture-based memory you have of an event is not necessarily the way things were actually experienced. “Ultimately, having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it [...]” (Sontag 1979: 24).

### **The photograph as mechanical reproduction**

When it comes to photography’s relation to holiday memories it may be productive to think of this relationship in the same terms Walter Benjamin thinks of photography with regard to the reception and appreciation of art. In his famous essay “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” from 1936, Benjamin discusses the impact of photography as a mechanical technology for reproduction, on the reception and appreciation of art. He argues that the original loses its authenticity with photographic reproduction, while the original preserved all its authenticity and authority with manual reproduction. This is because technical reproduction is more independent of the original than manual reproduction, and further that the technical reproduction can put the original into situations, which would be out of reach for the original itself (Benjamin 1999: 73-4). Therefore, with the mechanical reproductions of the work of art, the works are accessible to a far greater audience, which is a positive thing for Benjamin.<sup>10</sup> “That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” (Benjamin 1999: 74). The aura is the work of art’s specialness, its roots in myth and ritual, its fetish characteristic. A prerequisite for a work of art’s authenticity is its anchoring in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happened to be, and this authenticity adds to its aura (Lunenfeld 1996: 96).

When taking pictures while on a holiday, one mechanically reproduces the images seen, or the experiences had. Consequently the photograph (mechanical reproduction) functions to communicate the experience (the original), in the construction of the holiday narrative in the post-holiday phase. One needs not actively work through one’s memory to communicate the experiences to others or to oneself, if communication is done through photographs. However if pictures are not taken, one needs to actively work through the memory of the experiences, and in such a case the experiences are likely to be communicated more accurately. The reproduction of the event is then

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<sup>10</sup> This as opposed to Horkheimer and Adorno (1991) who argue that the affordable price level and increased acceptability of art, as a result of the culture industry, do not give the masses access to areas where they previously did not have access, but rather leads to a drop in refinement.

closer to the original than the mechanically reproduced memory in form of a photograph, as this allows you to remember and communicate the true perception of the moment. Details of the moment may be forgotten, as the things you tend to remember are in some way the things that made the biggest impression, but if a photograph is used as a memory of an event, the details in the photograph may take attention away from the things that actually made the most impact.

A photograph does not necessarily capture the moment as you perceived it; the photograph is more independent of the original. Using the words of Benjamin; the original memory preserves its authenticity when manually reproduced, but loses its authenticity if mechanically reproduced in the form of a photograph. Its anchoring in time and space is somehow lost with a photograph; the experience is removed from the place where it happened, or in other words the aura of the memory withers. With the use of a photograph as a representation of a holiday-memory the memory is accessible to more people than with the original memory, but along with this accessibility some of the authenticity is lost.

As a result of famous sights availability to a great audience through the use of images in the mass media, as well as individual holiday pictures, the sights lose some of its aura; when they are for everyone to see they are not as mysterious or exotic anymore. Seeing these places is not such a unique experience when you already have a picture of what it's going to look like. The evidence of your experience must then be collected in form of a photograph documenting your presence at the sight, resulting in the possible distortion of the memory. The paradoxical situation of the withering of the aura of the memory, and the necessity of certifying experiences photographically characterise the social practice of tourism in the age of mechanical reproduction.

### **The question of reality**

According to Jean Baudrillard “[...] culture is now dominated by simulations [...], objects and discourses that have no firm origin, no referent, no ground or foundation. In this sense, what Walter Benjamin wrote about in “the age of mechanical reproduction,” Baudrillard applies to all reaches of everyday life” (Poster 1988: 1).

When taking holiday photographs of famous sights, what you capture are images. In most cases people have seen these images represented in photographs before. According to Don Slater there are no real objects behind the photograph, only another image; we consume photographs of photographs of photographs (Edwards 2003: 184). If Slater is right, all photographs

are what Baudrillard call simulacrum, which is when the images bear no relation to reality whatsoever (Baudrillard 1994: 6).

Amateur photographs of famous sights, such as the Eiffel Tower or the Statue of Liberty, might be called simulacrum. Amateur photographs of “original” places and objects<sup>11</sup> on the other hand, are in my opinion not at the level of simulacrum. The latter are either at the first or the second phase of the image, that being the reflection of a basic reality or a masking or perversion of a basic reality. (The third phase of the image is the masking of the absence of a basic reality and the fourth is the simulacrum (Baudrillard 1994: 6)). According to the argumentation in the preceding part of the essay, these photographs would in most cases be at the second phase. In agreement with that line of argument photographs seldom are at the first phase, as photographs rarely represent reality the way it was actually perceived; photographs have a tendency to pervert a basic reality. When it comes to amateur holiday-photography though, most photographs are at the level of the simulacrum. The use of the photo-camera is reinforcing the “pseudo-events” referred to by Boorstin. The obsession with taking photographs is making the experience of reality more difficult, or even irrelevant; the thing most important for the mass tourist is to get a good picture, and not necessarily to get in contact with the local reality.

## **Digital photography**

Digital cameras, having been on the market for over a decade,<sup>12</sup> are now at a price-level affordable to most people from the middleclass - hence more and more tourists are using digital cameras when on holiday. Thus the question: Is the use of a digital camera somehow different from the use of an analogue camera, with regard to the practise of taking pictures on a holiday, the memories of the holiday and the post-holiday social interactions?

As for the practise of taking pictures, it seems like the amount of pictures taken increases with the use of a digital camera. The technology of such a camera allows you to edit your pictures right after having taken them, and thus decide which ones to keep and visa versa. Consequently, one needs not continually determine which situations are picture-worthy and which are not. When making use of an analogue camera, on the other hand, one usually does not want to waste film on images or situations that are not considered picture-worthy. And there is also an economic factor involved; with the digital camera you can view the pictures for free on your

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<sup>11</sup> By original objects and places I am referring to objects and places which are not famous sights or tourist-attractions.

<sup>12</sup> Kodak launched the first digital camera on the market in 1991.

computer. As is the case with analogue-camera, one is not dependent on a second part, or access to a darkroom. In other words, expenses are not a major concern regarding the amount of holiday-pictures to be taken.

With the digital camera as your travelling-companion, you can just snap away and determine which photos are worthy of keeping later on. With this technology you can to a greater extent determine which moments are worth remembering and which are not, so maybe the holiday-memory gets more distorted with the use of digital photography; you can edit away the pictures you do not want to keep, like “bad-hair-days” and pictures from situations not remembered as fun. If the holiday turned out to be a disaster you can try to convince yourself, and others, that it in fact was not that bad. Or maybe if the holiday was a success, you can delete the few pictures of the situations not worth remembering, thus ending up with the perfect vacation.

Furthermore, all the editing possibilities that digital photography provides may greatly affect the contents of the pictures one decides to remember a holiday by. Digital technology will for instance allow you to remove from a photograph a person you do not want to remember, like an ex-girlfriend or an ex-boyfriend. Although it may be very difficult, one can try to trick oneself into remembering the holiday without the ex being part of that memory. (The psychological consequences of this strategy are another story that will not be discussed here.) In summary one can to a greater degree shape ones memory of the vacation with the use of a digital camera.

All these technical manipulations of the pictures are done on the computer after the photographs have been taken. “[...] [T]he terms analogue and digital should be used correctly, as analogue images are primarily created with the camera and digital images with the computer. [...] Today, photographs are created without a camera, without light, without casing and with the conscious artistic manipulation of the photographic process. The “loss” of objectivity that is experienced as a result is counteracted by a gain of subjectivity and expression” (Jäger 1996: 107). This subjectivity and expression may be used to manipulate holiday experiences, and consequently the story of your holiday can be adjusted according to your audience.

The technology of digital photography also help the tourist industry smarten up photographs when marketing a destination. Among other things this can be used to paint a picture of a city covering up its ecological problems, as when you see pictures of Shanghai with a blue sky. Upon arrival at the destination some sort of surprise may occur, as your mental picture of the destination differs from the destinations empirical reality. Some discrepancy between the empirical reality and the picture-based mental image will always be the case, but the discrepancy is

strengthening as a result of technical manipulations of the pictures. I find this usage of the technology to be ambivalent in that it is used by the market forces and the tourist industry to paint pictures of destinations covering up its flaws. But on the other hand this manipulation may benefit the tourists in providing some extra excitement when the destinations differ from the tourists mental pictures. The manipulation and smartening up of products' representation is a well known strategy by the advertising and marketing industry, and the leading astray of the consumer is not something he wish for, but it may have positive effects as well, especially with the withering of the aura of the destinations in the age of mechanical reproduction.

The technology of digital photography will further provide manipulating possibilities for the individual; it is possible to manipulate pictures so that you can be placed in pictures of famous sights, thus faking a vacation. Making such a picture look trustworthy may be a problem, so this is probably not a tactic frequently used. But it may be in the future, as technology advances and usage becomes more common. This may provide an opportunity for those who do not have access to sufficient economic capital to travel the world in the young adult phase of the life-course, to fake such a trip of cultural refinement and important life experience. Great risks are involved of course as exposure may be disastrous for the individual, and easy to do for someone who has experienced the destinations first-hand. Further, manipulated pictures of "original" places will prove difficult as they are difficult to come across. All in all it seems like the photographs used in tourism gets removed further from an empirical reality with the use of digital instead of analogue photography. This goes both for advertising and the mass media, as well as for tourists marketing their vacation to friends and family.

An interesting sociological consequence of the technological advent of digital photography is the fact that pictures may be transmitted via e-mail to the ones back home whilst still out travelling. With this possibility the world becomes smaller: one can be at home and still take part in the experiences of a person who may be on the other side of the planet, and opposite when exploring, sightseeing or working in other parts of the world, taking part in the life at home is still an option (in a visual sense that is, as opposed to in an auditive sense, which has been possible for a long time with the use of the telephone, and in a textual sense, in form of letters and e-mails). Of course people were sending pictures along with their letters, before the advent of digital photography (and many still do), but what makes the use of digital photography in visual communication somehow different is the fact that the pictures can be transmitted in seconds, as opposed to days or even weeks. The time-space separation and the disembedding mechanisms,

which Anthony Giddens (1990) consider as two of the characteristic features of modernity, are intensified by this possibility.

## **Conclusion**

Today taking photographs have become so common that it is unnatural, or even deviant, to go on holiday without bringing a camera. If one does go on a holiday without a photo camera it is likely to be a conscious decision to either mark a distance to the mainstream tourist, or to avoid constructing a holiday-narrative through photographs (that one wishes to preserve an authentic holiday-memory), or both. Photography is now a key factor in the social constitution of tourism: The chosen destinations, as well as the visited and photographed sights, are influenced by exposure to photographic images in the mass media. The social action of taking photographs is one of the main activities during a holiday, influencing the way a holiday is done. And the pictures have a heavy influence on the construction of the holiday-narrative in the post-holiday phase. It is therefore important to think of the relationship between photography and tourism within a theoretical debate of the possibility of representing reality through different media in a postmodern culture, especially with the technology of digital photography growing ever more sophisticated. Through this essay I have hopefully made a small contribution towards an enhanced understanding of this relationship.

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