



# Performing live

An interview with Barbara

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

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## Introduction

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's latest book, *Destination Culture*, took the tourist studies world by storm (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998a). Not only does it make the case for the centrality of performance studies to the analysis of tourism but it also shows the relevance of studying tourism for the understanding of culture and society in historical and contemporary contexts. The selection of topics in *Destination Culture* demonstrates the breadth of this relevance: the case studies of Plimoth Plantation, Ellis Island, Te Papa, Exhibiting Jews, exhibitions of ethnography and an analysis of kitsch form the basis of analyses of nation building, representations, multiculturalisms and the contested nature of 'identity'. The book also makes the case for a more performative approach to tourism and a critique of a purely visual understanding of tourist sites and spaces. More than anything, this book identifies the essentially *exciting* and important nature of tourist studies. At a time when so many new books on tourism seem theoretically stale and substantively repetitive, this was an intellectual breath of fresh air, material that would shake up tutorials and enliven student and conference discussions. This is the essential character of all her work, an opus that spans museums studies, folklore, performance studies, anthropology and cultural studies.

I met Barbara in New York on a cold, early spring day. Her office at New York University is in a building that rises above the marks and monuments of 1960s Greenwich Village. The heritagization of cool, hip and radical times alongside their various celebrity sites is an envious backcloth for anyone who works in tourist studies. Just the good coffee would be enough for most of us.

**AF:** How did you come to be interested in tourism as a field of study?

**BKG:** I started as a folklorist and, as a folklorist, I started from the other end of the spectrum, from all that is not tourism. In the 1960s, when I entered the field, folklore was all that was pure and good in this world. It was all that had not yet been discovered, touched and corrupted by tourism. This was a period in the field of folklore, which defended vernacular culture from those who would exploit it for commercial gain. Folk traditions were seen as vulnerable. The idea that I would find myself fascinated and energetically engaged in studying tourism was inconceivable. As it turned out, my training as a folklorist equipped me beautifully for thinking about tourism.

Now what was it that made me cross over? Three things were important.

First, I had been working in museums for a long time and I saw them as combining academic seriousness with a public mission. No matter how committed they might be to research, museums had also to engage a wider public. My early interest in museums would become a major research focus years later and when that happened, I found it particularly rewarding to think about them in relation to tourism.

Second, Ed Bruner turned me on to tourism as a research subject. We spent a year travelling with more than 20 American undergraduate students as part of the International Honors Program, which let us teach them in six countries over two semesters. The curriculum was to be mainly anthropology. The original plan was to teach several anthropology courses the way you would do at a university and it just so happened that the first part would be in Japan and the next part in Bali, followed by India, Kenya, Egypt and Israel. The way we structured the anthropology curriculum would have made perfect sense had we been sitting in the same classroom all semester somewhere in the United States. As it was, we would be reading Malinowski in Japan and Evans-Pritchard in Bali. After a few weeks, we said to each other, 'There is something wrong with this picture. Why not work with the situation in which we find ourselves and tailor our reading list accordingly?' We realized that even with six weeks in one place and homestays for the students, we were, like it or not, tourists – thoughtful, informed, serious, but tourists nonetheless. We were in each place for a short time. We would never be able to do the kind of participant-observation that takes years if an anthropologist is to create the kind of thick description so valued in ethnographic accounts. 'Face it', we said to ourselves, 'we are tourists and tourism is what is actually most accessible to us.'

By its very nature, tourism is designed to be experienced in a very short period of time, and the beauty of it for our purposes is that it repeats itself. We knew that we could pick any tourist site and within a four-week period we could visit it over and over again. We could see it as many times as we liked. This was a pedagogical windfall. There was a perfect fit between our situation and tourism as an object of study. We had already designed a course on tourism as part of the curriculum, but without realizing until that moment that it made more sense to make tourism the organizing framework for the entire curriculum,

in each and every country and for the entire eight months. After all, the point of the International Honors Program was experiential learning and tourism was our experience. This was a way of teaching that I used in New York City in a course titled 'The Aesthetics of Everyday Life'. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to use this approach abroad, with tourism as the focus. Working with Ed that year in all those countries was a transformative experience. After that I was hooked on tourism. That would have been during the academic year 1983–4. We subsequently published one of our case studies (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994).

We pretty much stayed put in one city or village for four to six weeks at a time, starting with Kobe and moving on to Batuan, Benares (Varanasi), Nairobi, Cairo and Jerusalem, with shorter stays in San Francisco, Singapore and Brighton. We made some short side trips, but overall we avoided running around from place to place. There were so many opportunities right where we were. Moreover, the comparative perspective was extraordinary. I can't imagine a more perfect way to encounter this subject empirically and theoretically. It was a very unusual situation.

Now, when I came back, of course I wanted to teach this material. Ed returned to an anthropology department, but I am in a performance studies department. During our year abroad, I realized that so many attractions are really performances, cultural performances, both literally in the sense of staged events and theoretically. I found it useful to use performance as a theoretical lens for thinking about tourism. As soon as I returned, I developed *Tourist Productions* and have taught that course ever since. That course became a laboratory for developing a performance studies approach to tourism. I wanted to find theoretical possibilities in tourism for performance studies and theoretical possibilities in performance studies for the study of tourism. That meant not only thinking about tourism, but also thinking with it. Of course, that course evolves and changes as I work on new sites.

My students at New York University reminded me of my own feelings about tourism before the year abroad. There is something about tourism that was disconcerting. It was a nervous object – the kind of thing that we love to hate. Tourism was a 'bad object'. You couldn't simply embrace tourism, love it and defend it on the kind of moral high ground occupied by literature and even folklore. Tourism, located between antipathy and fascination, was too equivocal for that. Studying such a resistant object required that we make a case for a topic without obvious appeal. In contrast, folklore you could love. It represented all that was good in this world – or, almost, until we looked more closely at the (mis)uses of folklore in the context of fascism, for example. Tourism was not the first time that a topic I initially found repulsive would become so intellectually rewarding.

Third, in addition to my early work in museums and the International Honors Program experience, there was performance studies. Working in this field made me particularly aware of artists who take tourism as one of their

themes. They do such subversive and interesting things with tourism. I like to think of them as performing theory, while generating theoretical possibilities in and through performance. I have in mind such artists/theorists as Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco. In 'Couple in the Cage', they enact the discovery of a lost tribe in South America by displaying themselves as 'Undiscovered Amerindians' in a cage. This performance was one of several protests against the celebration of 500 years since Columbus 'discovered' America. 'Couple in the Cage' was installed in natural history museums (National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, the Field Museum in Chicago, the Australian Museum of Natural History in Sydney), art galleries and museums (Whitney Museum's Biennial in New York), and public spaces (Columbus Plaza in Madrid, Covent Garden in London), and elsewhere. Gómez-Peña and Fusco also produced a documentary videotape of how people responded to it (Fusco and Heredia, 1993). Taking their inspiration from the history of ethnographic spectacles – the kind of thing that is alive and well within the tourism industry to this day – they characterize 'Couple in the Cage' as 'intercultural performance' and 'reverse anthropology' (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998b; Taylor, 1998). Their work offers exciting theoretical possibilities through its very enactment, as well as through reflexivity that is at once part of their art and a subject of their own critical writing (Fusco, 1995; Gómez-Peña, 1993). So returning to performance studies proved to be extremely productive.

**AF:** Barbara, tell me about the development of ideas since those early days. Who are the big influences?

**BKG:** My colleague Richard Schechner inspired my work from the outset, especially his essay 'Restoration of Behaviour' and his notion of performance as 'twice behaved behaviour' (Schechner, 1985). He turned me on to Plimoth Plantation, a historic recreation of an early Pilgrim settlement in 17th-century Massachusetts. They use first-person interpretation. Stephen Snow, one of our students, wrote his dissertation on Plimoth Plantation. He was a professional actor – and descended from the Pilgrims – and played two different roles there over the course of two seasons (Snow, 1993).

Steven Mullaney's 'rehearsal of culture', which refers to displays that are predicated on the disappearance of what they show, is enormously useful for thinking not only about the history of ethnography, but also for theorizing tourism (Mullaney, 1988). Foreclosure becomes a prerequisite for display, not only in public executions and ethnographic museums, but also in many tourist productions.

Johannes Fabian has explored how concepts of time shaped anthropology's disciplinary subject, folklore as a mode of cultural production, and the distinction between informative and performative ethnography. First, regarding time, tourism is often the final resting place of outmoded anthropological concepts, including temporal ones (Fabian, 1983). Thus, tourist productions play on the idea of time out of time, time travel and the encounter between an eternal tourist object and developing tourist subject, whether the destination is an East

African game park or villages along the Amazon or Sepik Rivers. Second, the notion of folklore as a mode of cultural production – this is an idea that Richard Handler developed in his work on nationalism in Quebec in the 1980s – is central to how I think about heritage (Handler, 1988). It is thanks to tourism that I have come to appreciate that the term ‘folklore’ is foreign to that which it describes such that the designation becomes constitutive of the phenomenon. This has peculiar effects – among them ‘folklorism’ and ‘fakelore’, terms that attempt to estrange that which has become naturalized as folklore. The heritage industry is predicated on a similar principle, namely, the power of a designation to constitute a phenomenon, to give it a second life as something other than what it was, as something other than that which might once have been taken for granted as habitus or custom or tradition, as understood by Haym Soloveitchik (1994). Third, the distinction between an informative and performative ethnography is very useful for thinking about situations – whether performance art or experimental museum practice or ironic tourist productions – that are reflexive (Fabian, 1990). Rather than treat the medium as a neutral transmitter of information, these situations bring the medium itself into view and in this sense are performative.

I mentioned Soloveitchik, who tries to account for the historically unprecedented stringency of ultra-Orthodox Judaism during the post-Second World War period. While his work might seem an unlikely inspiration for the study of tourism, it has proven to be extraordinarily resonant for my thinking. Soloveitchik explores what happens after a rupture, in his case the Holocaust, shatters the taken-for-granted such that what was once learned in the course of daily life, mimetically, precipitates into consciousness and becomes subject to ideological reworking. That which was once just done is now performed. One outcome is the stringency that he wants to account for. Other outcomes are the cultural revivals that I have explored, specifically the klezmer revival, as well as what comes to be understood as folklore and heritage and also certain forms of tourism.

As a folklorist I had started out in the 1960s with the idea of folklore as a kind of habitus – not mine, but somebody else’s. Working on tourism, in light of these scholars, helped me understand the extent to which the entire field of folklore is predicated not on habitus, but on a certain self-conscious distance from what once was habitus. That distance helps to produce the ideological charge that brings about a shift from doing to performing. The moment that anything is understood as folklore – and especially self-understood as folklore – it is no longer habitus. Then, of course, it becomes ripe for tourism and ripe for heritage production and ripe for all kinds of re-workings. Those reworkings are performative, rather than mimetic, following Soloveitchik’s distinction. This is one of the subjects that I take up in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* [1998a].

From the outset, Dean MacCannell’s (1976) *The Tourist* was very important, and it still is. It is really a classic. I still find it enormously useful for thinking about tourist attractions and how they are produced. All the ideas about

framing, back region, front region, and his semiotic approach continue to be helpful. I require my students to read *The Tourist*. While we are not as taken with the modernity argument as we are with the analysis of attractions, we continue to find much in this book that rewards study.

**AF:** Tell me how your work fits into the wider context of tourist studies in the USA. A lot of people reading the journal may not have a clear idea where tourism sits within the American academy, so maybe you could tell us a little bit about that too?

**BKG:** One context for my work is the not-for-profit sector – public folklore, the arts, museums and the heritage industry more generally. A second context is the study of tourist attractions – from historical, anthropological and theoretical perspectives.

During the 1970s, I was part of an effort to widen opportunities for professional folklorists by developing what came to be known as public folklore. Public folklore – the documentation, preservation, presentation and interpretation of culture for the public – opened the field to a broad range of activity in the form of festivals, exhibitions, media productions of various kinds and advocacy for local culture and cultural equity. As cultural brokers, public folklorists work largely in the non-profit arena and play an important role at the state and national levels in arts and humanities councils (see Kurin, 1997). Both the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities were recently headed by folklorists. Public folklorists have also been active in the development of heritage policy both nationally (the National Park Service, for example) and internationally (UNESCO). Because most heritage protection has focused on the built environment (and often heritage that is associated with elites), public folklorists have played an important role in making the case for vernacular culture and for heritage that does not take a material form – heritage that is embodied, performed, spoken and transmitted through living links in a chain of tradition.

Public folklorists also collaborate with the tourist industry. The industry needs their high quality programmes and these programmes need audiences and income. Among the most visible examples of their work is the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which draws millions of visitors to the Washington Mall each year in late June and early July. Indeed, public folklore might be seen as tourism with a conscience. The primary commitment of public folklorists is to the people whose culture they help present. Their work is marked by depth of research, theoretical sophistication and critical reflection. Having curated museum exhibitions and folklife festival programmes myself (and consulted on many projects), I've found myself attempting to theorize this kind of work in a dialogue with practitioners. I continue to explore the relationship between folklore theory and public practice (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1988).

I work in a similar way with museums and arts presenters, which means applying my experience as a practitioner, consultant and scholar to historicizing, theorizing and reflecting critically on contemporary practice. Two sites that

I have found especially rewarding are Peter Sellars's Los Angeles Festival, which virtually reinvented the very genre of arts festival – as he is doing again for the Adelaide Festival of Arts in Sydney – and Te Papa Tongarewa/Museum of New Zealand, the new national museum in Wellington. I discuss both in *Destination Culture*. Such phenomena are prime sites for exploring the relationship between public culture and commercial culture, the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors, the culture and the consciousness industries. My work on such sites is in a dialogue with artists, curators, scholars and heritage and tourism specialists and circulates in professional, policy and academic contexts.

I am also interested in commercial tourist attractions (and the entertainment industry more generally) and particularly in how their approaches and technologies affect the presentation of culture in other settings. As museums become more commercial in their orientation and techniques, as they ally themselves more with the tourism industry, controversies over their mission heat up. Rather than take sides, I prefer to explore the relationships past and present between commercial enterprises like world's fairs, amusement and theme parks, on the one hand, and public museums and arts enterprises on the other. Performance studies has much to offer such explorations thanks to the ways that the historical avant-garde and contemporary experimental performance destabilized the category of art, rejected hierarchies of high and low, disrupted the boundaries of cultural institutions like museums, and found artistic possibilities everywhere. So, for example, by viewing the museum as a school for the senses, I can look how its curriculum is changing in relation to changing sensoria of visitors, particularly young visitors, who have cut their teeth, so to speak, on adventure tourism, extreme rides, virtual reality games and the like.

One of the reasons I so relish visits to museums (and for that matter tourist attractions that have become museums of themselves) is to experience an older sensory curriculum. For whatever reason, such sites were insulated from change for long periods of time. In some cases, they were left alone because of too little or just enough funding, or because they had become irrelevant or someone recognized their historical importance, or they were simply bypassed as the city developed in another direction and other institutions superseded them. Stopped in their tracks at a particular moment, they preserve a certain architecture, display, order and knowledge formation that lets one experience something of the kind of body and sensory orientation visitors from another era might have brought there. I have in mind the Wagner Free Institute of Science, established in 1855 in Philadelphia, and the Mütter Museum of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. The College was established in 1787 and the Museum in 1859. **AF:** Judith Butler and the notion of performativity are also presumably important in your work?

**BKG:** Absolutely. It's important to distinguish performances, performance and performative. By 'performances' in the plural, I mean 'events' that are usefully understood as performances. My preferred method is to focus on a cultural performance – a site or event – as a unit of study and to work out from there

to wider contexts and larger issues. This gives me a definable object that I can observe repeatedly, in detail, and in depth. I get purchase or a certain gravitational pull from keeping theory and evidence in a taut relationship as I move between microanalysis and broader issues. Working closely with evidence is enormously satisfying. I want the material to surprise me. I want it to provoke new theoretical possibilities, ideas not already formulated in reigning theoretical paradigms. In performance studies, as in many other fields, there have been tremendous advances in building theory. A hypertrophy of theory can make objects disappear or overdetermine what can be said, if analytic outcomes are known in advance or have been anticipated such that evidence, now epiphenomenal, is invoked anecdotally after the theoretical fact, so to speak.

By 'performance' in the singular, I mean performance as an organizing concept for examining phenomena that may or may not be a performance in the conventional sense of the word. Thus, performance as an organizing concept is useful for thinking about politics, work and many other aspects of everyday life, from conversation and fashion to the preparation of food. My work has focused in large measure on activities that are not generally understood as performances – museum exhibitions, tourist environments and the aesthetics of everyday life (the title of one of my courses) – but which I analyse using performance as an organizing concept.

I use the term 'performativity' in a variety of ways, but primarily (following J.L. Austin's [1980] *How To Do Things With Words* and Butler's work) to get at agency – that is, what performance and display do (as opposed to what they say). Performativity offers a useful foil to representation, a concept that has had a lot of play in literary and film theory and cultural studies – and inspired by them, in tourism theory. In many ways, representation has been undertheorized and overused. I like to think that performance studies might offer alternatives for thinking about these issues, starting with theories of performativity. And, also drawing on the work of scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles (1991, 1999) and Michael Lynch (1994), who are rethinking representation and constructivism in ways that recent tourism theory would find useful.

**AF:** I just like the way performativity destabilizes fixed notions of social sciences. And makes the world accessible only through performance.

**BKG:** I couldn't agree more. What I so like about new forms of tourism is its potential for generating new theoretical insights, which we can then use for rethinking older forms of tourism. There is a way that theoretical possibilities emerge in relation to the historical unfolding of an empirical subject and disciplinary object. That said, one of the infuriating things about tourism is the degree to which the industry becomes a haven for ideas long abandoned, if not repudiated, by anthropologists, historians and scientists. These ideas enjoy an afterlife in tourism – in the promotion of wilderness, exotic locales, isolated cultures, particular historical narratives and the like. Tourism has to be the heartland of essentialism. To this day essentialism sells. The nation is a brand. So, you have to wonder what the decentred subjects of postmodern theory think they

are getting when they sign up for the essentialisms on which so many tourist products are predicated.

**AF:** I think one of the great things *Destination Culture* establishes is the performativity of things, the display and the displayers and so forth. Do you have any ideas towards a new agenda or new application?

**BKG:** I see the book as seeding ground, an opportunity to try out conceptual possibilities on a small scale. Since then I've been developing some of those possibilities. Most recently, for example, I've been working on the Jewish Palestine Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939/40, based on an enormous archive of primary materials. It is part of a larger project, 'Exhibiting Jews', which I outline in *Destination Culture*. Much of the writing about world fairs has been about nationalism and colonialism, both important topics. I'm arguing that what world's fairs are really about is internationalism, understood as the *sine qua non* of nationalism. That is, world's fairs create a space within which they structure the mutual recognition that is essential to the constituting and the sustaining of national claims. They do so through protocols, ceremonies and forms that are both performances and potentially performative. I am rethinking world's fairs along those lines, as an event that convenes the world within the world of the fair. I am focusing on the relationship between the world and the world of the fair at a time when the gap between them was widening day by day, between the time the New York World's Fair opened (April 1939) until it closed (October 1940). It was in the slippage between the world and the world of the fair that the Jewish Palestine Pavilion found a way to make a performance performative – to advance the realization of Jewish statehood by enacting it as a *fait accompli* within the international space and protocols of the fair.

I am considering the crowd as a performative element, something that at least one observer at the time noted. I am exploring concepts of exhibition specific to that period. World's fairs have always provided an occasion for experimentation with architecture and display. The New York World's Fair occasioned critical reflection on exhibition techniques and their effectiveness. Using architectural magazines, reports and planning and working documents from the period, I can get at concepts and practices that are historically specific and internal to the phenomena. I want to develop a very historicized and precise approach to these concepts and methods and then look at what was actually done and with what intended and unintended consequences.

In my current work, I am also rethinking the visual emphasis in studies of world's fairs, museums and tourism. While the visual emphasis is important, it can overdetermine the way tourism is studied. This relates to what I was saying earlier about representation and constructivism. While there is no denying the visual focus of museums and the spectacular visuality of world's fairs and theme parks, other senses are important, if unacknowledged and undertheorized. For example, one of the most controversial aspects of Te Papa, New Zealand's new national museum, was the inclusion of virtual reality amusements, for a charge, at the entrance to the exhibits. Detractors saw this as a sell-out. Supporters saw

it as an indication that Te Papa was making good on its promise to be ‘customer-focused’ and ‘commercially positive’ in its operation.

I read these rides – a virtual bungee jump, a ride back in time and another into the future – as marking two important moments. The first is Te Papa’s turn away from its own history as a museum and towards its historical relationship to New Zealand’s self-representations at world’s fairs from 1851 to the present – indeed, Te Papa itself could be seen as New Zealand’s most recent expo. The second has to do with the idea of the museum as a school for the senses, as I mentioned earlier. The rides, though a much tamer version of what amusement parks currently offer, mark out how the sensory curriculum is changing. Their appeal is less to the eyes than to the viscera, or rather they offer the pleasures of disorientation, vertigo, somatic awareness, anti-gravitational experiences and proprioceptive self-awareness. I argue that however much the visual is emphasized, a defining feature of the museum (like tourism) is proprioception – that is, the orientation of the body in space. Movement through space is a defining feature of both experiences. The rides that confront the visitor to Te Papa anticipate a different body, sensorium, way of being in the world, consciousness – a difference that sets the generations apart. Younger visitors just don’t live in the same body as their parents. Te Papa lets me think about the historical relationship between expos and museums and about a shift in the nature of embodiment that is incubated in the entertainment industry and only slowly making its way into museums.

Modes of locomotion for me are absolutely critical to understanding these forms. I see the difference between the museum, theatre and amusement park in locomotion terms. In the theatre, the stuff on stage moves and you sit still. In the museum, the stuff is nailed to the wall and you move – the museum walk arises from the processional tours of princely art collections, arranged in long galleries (Duncan and Wallach, 1980). In the amusement park, the defining mode of locomotion is the ride. Rides structure movement in ways that go beyond the limits of the unaided body.

Adventure tourism, a focus of New Zealand tourism, is absolutely critical to this discussion. Even if adventure tourism isn’t for everybody, even if it is only a sector of the market, its importance goes way beyond the niche it occupies. What’s called extreme challenge dramatizes how particular modes of embodiment – what I have been referring to as somatic, visceral and proprioceptive – are superceding the ‘visual’. Extreme rides (and other kinds of extreme challenge) involve a completely different kind of attention. You can’t focus with your eyes or your ears the way you do in everyday life or in theatres and museums. Everything is a blur. The speed, dramatic shapes and sudden drops produce the feeling of one’s stomach rising into one’s throat. Participants don’t speak. They yell. Is the anti-gravitational experience of these rides preparation for future life in outer space, anticipated by billionaire Dennis Tito, our first space tourist? You and Michael Crang take up some of these issues in your introduction to the first issue of *Tourist Studies* (Franklin and Crang, 2001).

I could see the importance of these kinds of experience with special clarity when I was writing about 'The Israel Experience', that is, about organized tours for Jewish youth (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2001). The itinerary generally takes them to Holocaust sites in Europe, followed in some cases by a dramatic re-enactment of the refugee boat crossing from Italy to Haifa, and a tour of Israel that includes such highlights as the Wailing Wall, Yad Vashem and Masada. The primary constituency for *The Israel Experience* is 14- to 20-year-olds. The sponsors hope that the youngsters will return home with a stronger 'Jewish identity' and attachment to Israel. It is an extraordinary use of tourism. Craig Rosa, one of my former students, studied the tours conducted by a rabbi in the Lubavitcher Hasidic community in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, as part of their outreach efforts. He coined a term for this kind of thing, 'proselytourism', to capture the idea of tourism as a medium of advocacy. We know tourism can function as medium for personal transformation, from such historical modes as pilgrimage and the Grand Tour to such recent niche markets as spiritual ecotourism.

It is historically unprecedented for tens of thousands of youngsters to have, or be given, the resources and opportunity to travel to Europe and Israel in this way. These tours are also an indication of the maturity of a tourism industry that can manage the volume, intensity, complexity and variety of such tours. When I looked more closely at what the youngsters actually did, I was struck by how many tours stressed gruelling desert hikes and other extreme physical challenges. Those who wish to effect an identity transformation in their charges believe that they can reach them more effectively through somatic, full-body experiences, than through more cognitive and spectatorial activities. This generation is adept with electronic media, including video and computer games and the Internet, and attracted to entertainment that is high tech, intense, fast and complicated – consider the complexity, the multiple plots and editorial style (many quick cuts), of popular films. These youngsters are multi-taskers *par excellence*. This adds up to distinctive styles of attention and distraction and high thresholds for excitement. In contrast with their everyday lives, tourism can be old-fashioned, low tech and slow – moving from place to place in a bus and walking around when you get to your destination. I was interested in how the organizers of *The Israel Experience* addressed these issues. Maybe the most important insight to come of this work is the importance of these younger generations and tourism that addresses their interests as harbingers of wider cultural trends. I also found interesting the role of such tourism for Israel itself, not only in financial, but also political terms. Tourism functions to some degree as a stage in a potential process of immigration. It is not unusual for Jews to retire to Israel. And an increasing number of Israelis are emigrating or splitting their time between Israel and a home elsewhere. The line between a single short tour of Israel, more extended stays and immigration is not only blurred, but strategically exploited.

**AF:** In your writings you argue that tourism can be instrumental in creating or facilitating new social arrangements and meanings. For example, in your

work on exhibiting Jews you make a connection between such displays and the creation of a Jewish state.

**BKG:** Yes, this is the focus of my work on the Jewish Palestine Pavilion at the New York World's Fair that I mentioned earlier. Not until you get the shift from cultural Zionism to political Zionism do you get an increasingly concrete plan for statehood. There were after all several possible outcomes of Zionism, only some of them advocating statehood at all and in Palestine in particular. You could have a national homeland without a state. A state could take any one of a number of forms and it could be located in any one of a number of places. Before the Second World War, not all Jews and not all Zionists necessarily advocated a Jewish state in Palestine, at least not at the time. I am looking at the role of 'events' such as the Jewish Palestine Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in building the consensus necessary to sway public opinion on the issue of Jewish statehood in Palestine. I am analysing the role of exhibition in putting that case forward and making it persuasive, precisely in the space of postulation, the subjunctive space, of the world of the fair. Millions of visitors to the fair – tourists, in essence – by visiting such projections (and generally accepting and praising them) made such projections more persuasive, more immanent and more likely to be realized.

In essence, the Jewish Palestine Pavilion was a way to enact the state as a *de facto* reality, lacking only ratification for it to become a *de jure* reality. However provisional the international space of the fair, the projection of Jewish statehood met with repeated resistance from New York World's Fair officials. With each slight – you're not a state, so you can't put your flag here, you cannot be in the parade of nations, you can't build your pavilion in the government zone – a social drama erupted. The organizers of the Jewish Palestine Pavilion won most of the battles and in some ways gained more ground, battle by battle, than if they had been accorded full recognition without resistance from the outset. Of course, by the time and after the Second World War broke out, several national pavilions were no longer sponsored by a state, for example, Czechoslovakia and Poland, and it became more difficult to exclude the Jewish Palestine Pavilion from international displays on the principle of government sponsorship. Exhibition in the context of the fair was a way of mobilizing support, engineering consent and putting forward a very persuasive case for statehood at a critical, and as it turned out, tragically opportune time.

Edward Said reflects on these issues from a Palestinian perspective:

... not only has there been no Palestinian narrative of 1948 and after that can at least challenge the dominant Israeli narrative, there has also been no collective Palestinian projection for Jerusalem since its all-too-definitive loss in 1948 and again in 1967. The effect of this quite extraordinary historical and political neglect has been to deprive us of Jerusalem well *before* the fact. (Said, 1995: 8)

These issues continue to resonate in controversies over the Israel exhibit in the Millennium Village at Epcot, a permanent world's fair, and in the strategies used

by the Palestinian Authority and Israel in their respective exhibits at Expo 2000, Hanover.

**AF:** But in a sense tourism and the naming of sites, and the naming of the things in the sites, can name something new and can name new practices and new processes.

**BKG:** Absolutely. No question about it.

**AF:** And then calling on people to come and bear witness to it seems like a ritual of nation making or nature making.

**BKG:** Yes, this is a critical insight for understanding the agency of the world of the fair as an international space in the subjunctive. Tourism can be an instrument for the mobilizing of public opinion. Visitors, by their very presence, by sheer dint of their numbers and their role as witnesses, can serve to ratify what they see. They arrive, visit, see, photograph, report, and thereby bestow a certain reality to a site. So there is a synergy between the production of the site and the role of tourists in giving it an even greater degree of reality than it might otherwise have. This is very important in Israel, where the success of tourism is a measure of the perception of peace and, in the absence of peace, a validation of Israel's moral authority. Tourists are, as it were, 'voting with their feet'.

**AF:** It's like diplomacy isn't it? The measure of acceptability and ratification is whether foreign dignitaries visit and the first thing you do if you wish to scrap that arrangement is withhold visits.

**BKG:** Yes.

**AF:** It's not a 'looking' thing.

**BKG:** Quite. It's about co-presence. Live co-presence distinguishes tourism – in principle, if not in practice – from other kinds of experience.

**AF:** What sorts of projects are your students currently undertaking?

**BKG:** I'll give you some examples of their work. Lynn Sally is working on fire spectacles, which she is theorizing as 'elemental performativity' – a felicitous formulation. She is looking at natural disasters, particularly at Coney Island, but also at world's fairs. Blagovesta Momchedjikova's dissertation focuses on the scale model of New York City, better known as Panorama of the City of New York. This model was created for the 1964 New York World's Fair and is housed today in the Queens Museum of Art in a building – the New York City Building – that was created for the 1939 fair and used in the 1964 fair. She is comparing tours of the model with tours of the city and focusing on the proprioceptive aspects of such spatial experiences. Lesley Wright's dissertation focuses on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail on the occasion of the bicentennial. She is analysing the mapping of historic interpretation on a trail that is only partly preserved and the experience of those who are retracing the steps of Lewis and Clark, despite the fact that the trail today moves not only through wilderness but also modern cities. Branislav Jakovljevic published an essay (1995) that he originally wrote for one of my courses on the challenges of presenting time-based media such as cinema in a museum. He examines the tension between educational institution and film theme park at the American Museum

of the Moving Image in Queens, New York, and argues for the importance of metamuseological strategies – what I would call, following Fabian, a performative, rather than strictly informative, museology.

Deidre Sklar recently published her dissertation on the Fiesta of Tortugas, in New Mexico (Sklar, 2000). It is an exceptional book – a movement ethnography and courageous piece of experimental writing that attends, through empathy, to the somatic aspects of experience. This work highlights the importance of addressing sensory aspects of tourism, a topic that is still somewhat underdeveloped and undertheorized in tourist studies. Troy Messenger published his dissertation, aptly titled *Holy Leisure*, about a Methodist summer colony on the New Jersey shore (Messenger, 2000). Linda Lehrhaupt analysed how three pilgrimage sites in Ireland – Lough Derf, Croagh Patrick and Knock Shrine – shaped the actual experience of their devotees. Judith Levine's dissertation analysed performing arts patronage in New York City during the 1980s, which was a critical period. Lucia Ruedenberg's dissertation focused on an annual Holocaust commemoration in New York City.

Over the years, students in tourist productions have worked on an astonishing array of topics, from vertical tours of the Cathedral of St John the Divine to the Second World War Japanese internment camp at Tule Lake as pilgrimage destination. They've looked at tourism all over the city – Wall Street, Chinatown, Harlem, Lower East Side, Greenwich Village – and analysed such icons as the Empire State Building, Brooklyn Bridge and Ellis Island. They've explored plans and policies governing the redevelopment of prime tourist regions in the city, among them Times Square and South Seaport. House museums, ironic interventions by artists in historic houses, and tours of private homes have been analysed in relation to the threshold between public and private. Students have studied a variety of walking and bus tours and looked at interpretive strategies, among them two-way, first-person interpretation at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Peggy Vail, who is now writing her dissertation on tourism in Bolivia, wrote a fine paper on the role and nature of narrative – and the story as ultimate souvenir – for independent travellers. The independent travellers she studied avoid taking photographs and collecting material souvenirs, preferring instead to have the kinds of experiences that will make for great stories. These intangible souvenirs are their ultimate trophies and they tell these stories while travelling and after they return home.

Marion Jacobson studied New York City's volunteer corps of Big Apple Greeters. Several students did pioneering work on Queer tourism and heritage sites in New York City. Others studied restaurants of various kinds, using Foucault's notion of heterotopia and, in the case of Lucky Cheng's, a drag queen restaurant, applying the notion of post-tourism. Not everyone worked in New York City, although I encouraged them to do so because they would be able to return repeatedly to their research site and conduct interviews in the course of the semester.<sup>1</sup>

**AF:** I think food establishes a different relationship with place and it also has a very interesting afterlife in terms of bringing it back, widening tastes, ‘civilizing’ and so on.

**BKG:** Food is an infinitely rich way of thinking about place, nowhere more clearly than in the French concept of *terroir* and strategy of *appellation*. James E. Wilson’s (1999) *Terroir: The Role of Geology, Climate and Culture in Wine Making* is a primer for thinking about place and, in his case, wine. On the one hand, wine, cheese and other foods that are intimately linked to the immovable attributes of place (climate, soil, air-borne yeasts, as well as social and cultural arrangements) are branded, controlled through appellation, and then bottled or otherwise packaged for consumption on the spot or for export. It would be worth examining the interplay between two different kinds of export: tourism that draws people to the destination to consume the local in situ and exporting local experiences (in a bottle or package) for consumption elsewhere.

Packaging substance is a way of capturing a piece of the place so that it can be carried away. An ironic example is canned Israeli air. This little can of air is in a long tradition of bringing home water from the Jordan River and dust from Jerusalem. These substances are tangible metonyms for the places from which they come and for which they stand. I’ve looked at this kind of thing in my work on the bagel. The more placeless it becomes – which is to say, the more ubiquitous and random – the more the packaging of savvy marketers will spell out where each and every ingredient came from. It’s the wheat in a Noah’s bagel (Noah’s is a bagel chain in California and the northwest) that comes from Montana. But where does the bagel come from? From a place that no longer exists: ‘We sell ninety-year old bagels ... that give you a taste of Old New York.’ Some say it’s the New York City water.

Food is a way of substantiating place, quite literally, in the sense of substance. Food is not only multisensory, often in ways that elude language while evoking memory, but also food offers a way to incorporate place quite literally, in the sense of ingestion. The ‘primitive’ sense of smell, which is, after all, the major element in flavour, is a powerful trigger of memory. Food is one way to carry that otherwise ephemeral sense experience away, to save it up for later. I would not underestimate experiences that are not entirely or primarily visual and particularly the role of the intimate sensory experiences of smell, taste and touch in sedimenting memory. I like to think of food as an ephemeral souvenir. It is not meant to last, but each time it is consumed it activates the senses and with them a chain of memories. Food has to be the ultimate medium of embodiment. You actually incorporate it into your very tissue and sensory experiences associated with food have a relationship to memory that’s very different from the visual and verbal.

Food also raises the question: what is it that makes ‘being there’ worth the effort if ‘there’ can be exported? In what ways and to what effect are places (and experiences) transportable? The Christian C. Sanderson Museum in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, would reward further study – John Dorst (1989) has written

about this site. Sanderson treated his entire life as memorable and literally chipped and snipped bits from things associated with experiences he wished to remember. His house, today a museum, is filled with these bits and pieces: melted ice from the South Pole, sand from the excavating of the Panama Canal, a penny flattened by Lincoln's funeral train, and pieces of things associated with momentous events – a bandage that had dressed Lincoln's wound and a bomber that hit the Empire State Building.

**AF:** What are your future plans?

**BKG:** I would like to build on *Destination Culture* in several ways. The essay 'Exhibiting Jews' is really a blueprint for an entire book on Jewish participation in world's fairs and I'm now working in depth on particular exhibits. The Jewish Palestine Pavilion, which I mentioned earlier, is a particularly rewarding site for many reasons, not least of which the unprecedented primary sources that are now available. There are issues in the essay 'Destination Museum' that I want to develop, especially the theorizing of 'experience', a term that both the tourism industry and museum use repeatedly. Museums – all kinds of museums – are richly rewarding and I continue to visit and think about them in relation to the 'idea of the museum' and the museum as a distinctive medium. I'm working towards a performance theory of museums. This is the focus of a graduate seminar Museum Theatre that I teach at New York University. I continue to take a special interest in Jewish museums, heritage sites and Holocaust memorials.

**AF:** I think your notion of the 'agency of display' shifts interest away from general theories of the tourists, tourist behaviour, authenticity – you know MacCannell's work and some of the other American stuff around the mid-century with its search for difference, authenticity and so on – to an interest in the disciplinary, cultural, political, economic, the claims and gambits by the creators and displayers. Is this where the new tourism research agenda is headed?

**BKG:** 'Agency of display' signifies a dynamic field involving the medium of display, what is shown, who shows, who experiences the display, and who is affected by it. I find it useful to be thinking about this force field in tourist attractions and world's fairs at the same time that I am looking at museums. Much work over the last 20 years has focused on what has come to be known as the poetics and politics of culture, with issues of community, identity and agency at the fore.

Your earlier question about postmodern theory and the decentred subject is important here. An interesting question for an intellectual history of tourist studies would be how 'identity' has been thematized and theorized by the industry itself, by the various stakeholders, and by scholars of tourism. The issue of identity – and its relationship to political mobilization and rights claims – plays out differently depending on context, as can be seen in the cases I've studied in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Israel. The Israel Experience uses the essentializing practices of tourism to consolidate a Jewish identity, an approach that is at odds with the notion of a decentred

subject. In contrast, my work on the revival of klezmer music – the East European Jewish instrumental tradition – seems on its face more ‘postmodern’ by its very nature. When is the decentred subject part of the phenomenon we are studying and when is it part of a theoretical approach that we are applying transhistorically? We need to test the notion of decentred subject (or MacCannell’s ‘modern man’) against historically and culturally specific understandings that are part of the situations we are studying.

MacCannell’s *The Tourist* historicizes tourism within a theory of modernism, just before theories of postmodernism took off. We need an intellectual history of tourist studies. Such a history could explore the relationship between historical understandings specific to the phenomena of tourism and theoretical frameworks that have their own history. Of course, they are entangled such that new phenomena suggest, if they do not actually require, new theoretical approaches. Once formulated, those approaches offer new ways of looking at historical material.

**AF:** What you’re saying is making me think of almost the historical pre-conditions for the kinds of contested cultural tourist world that we see. It’s almost kind of an extreme form of detraditionalization, fragmentation of life worlds, of habitus. There have been so many fragmentations of not, I would say, identities, but places for the self. They ask themselves what is a proper Australian to be in the world? They don’t really know. It’s got to be made up. It’s got to be formed and you’ve got to kind of put some things into it. Only things can anchor us.

**BKG:** Yes, tourism is a prime site not only for making but for making up. It has a subjunctive quality about it.

**AF:** Well that’s where I think performativity becomes critical because everything is in the process of becoming, everything is in the process of using what’s there. People’s insecurities figure in it, people’s securities might figure in it, someone’s moral worries might figure in it, someone’s nation building might figure in it. Tourism really, really does crave attention doesn’t? It’s one of those things. It is desperately trying to grab people’s attentions – join in with us, come on in. That’s one of the reasons why it feels vulgar.

**BKG:** Yes, though we do need to distinguish types of tourism. It is so tempting to take the entire phenomenon to task by making the worst examples the defining ones. The vulgarity has something to do with the spectacular and specular nature of so much tourism.

**AF:** You and I seem to think similarly about the problem of visualism. Your approach still focuses on display and visual performance, which is not exactly the same as visualism, you know the technology of the visual, but still it’s a key modality of tourism.

**BKG:** Yes. I should add, though, that I don’t think of display as a strictly visual issue. As we discussed earlier, movement and proprioception are critical, as are the haptic, thermal and ambient qualities of space, both light and sound. I’d like to pay more attention to the mobile viewer, how movement is structured, and

how mobility structures perception. Come to think of it, sitting is interesting too, especially when it's introduced into situations that assume a mobile visitor – for example, Ilya Kabakov's 'The Reading Room' is a response to his discontent with how little time visitors to an exhibition spend in front of each painting (Kabakov, 1996). They walk a lot and get tired. His solution was to create an installation in the form of a library, place tables and chairs perpendicular to the wall, and provide reading materials. He encouraged people to sit and while sitting to read, look, think and daydream.

**AF:** OK. Now I don't know if you've had the chance to see John Urry's new book? Its focus on transnational networks, mobilities, diasporas, flows of people and objects mirrors your work on displays of Jewishness and cultural diaspora. I think what John is saying about mobilities and social life is true. I mean it's almost as if it's been there, but people have been operating with a notion of greater spatial stability than there has actually been. Do you have any wider views on the implications of the fact that contrary to the standard model of tourism, which is the enduring motionless object and the mobile tourist, that in actual fact you've got mobile objects and you've got mobile tourists?

**BKG:** That's the history of world's fairs and museums, which is one of the reasons I so like to work on them. They are the classic examples, in the past and today, of that kind of mobility. Everything is in motion. Not only the visitors, but also the collections and performers, come from far and wide. Troupes of Samoan performers were the rage in the 1890s and appeared in world's fairs and other venues, as did Maoris and Native Americans. World's fairs moved around from city to city and they drew the world to the fair – they created the world of fair – in more ways than one.

**AF:** Yes I agree. I mean the notion of *flânerie* with the big city and the department stores and all that sort of thing. I mean you weren't just looking at things, you were looking at cities that were full of people that weren't from the city. People flowing through, arriving, departing ...

**BKG:** This is why I think that tourist studies is finding the notion of event so promising – not only events proper, but theorizing place as event and thinking about how an event becomes, for its duration, a place. World's fairs, like the Olympics, the art biennales, and sporting events like the Tour de France, are mega-events that work in this way.

**AF:** I mean New York is the classic place.

**BKG:** Oh absolutely.

**AF:** I mean you're wandering around the world down there.

**BKG:** Mega-events intensify what is already very intense about a world city like New York and about the two great world's fair cities in the 19th century: Paris and London.

**AF:** Obviously you have an interest in collecting and collections. It's central to your work both at the institutional and informal level, the idea that people collect things and have collections and they become part of national or sub-national collections and so forth. When I was reading your work it struck me

that collecting really is undertheorized as a kind of activity and a kind of behaviour? Do you feel that collecting is important?

**BKG:** Yes. There has actually been considerable work – and interesting work – on collecting. A classic is Susan Stewart's (1993) book *On Longing*. It doesn't set out to provide a comprehensive theory of collecting, but offers a fresh perspective on the miniature, the gigantic, the collection and the souvenir. It has inspired some nice ethnographic work and analysis on vernacular collecting (Danet and Katriel, 1989). What I so value about books like *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe* (Impey and Macgregor, 1985) is that while they do not set out to produce theory, their close attention to the historically specific concepts informing early collecting practices sets off theoretical sparks. The same is true of the *Journal of the History of Collections*, which Arthur McGregor edits. This work may not aspire to grand theory, but it does offer surprising moments of theoretical possibility. So too does Paula Findlen (1989) in her work on the history of museum as a term, concept, practice, architectural form and institution, and in her book (Findlen, 1994) on natural history collecting in early modern Italy. I find this empirically rich work theoretically suggestive. Anthropologists such as Nicholas Thomas (1991), Alfred Gell (1998) and Christopher Steiner (1994) have considered both sides of the transaction – not only the collections but also those from whom the objects were acquired and the nature of the transactions in a range of contexts. Fred Myers (2002) has done pioneering work among the Pintubi, one of several aboriginal groups producing acrylic paintings for the contemporary art market, which includes tourists, art collectors and museums, all of which he considers.

**AF:** Taste/kitsch. I mean it seems to me what you were saying in that final chapter of *Destination Culture* was very important, but it struck me that it was predominantly about consumption rather than display. But maybe there is something about taste and kitsch that is creeping in, for instance the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras, I mean it's a festival of kitsch. If it's not kitsch, it just doesn't belong. If it was remotely tasteful, you know, it wouldn't be there. So are we entering the world of kitsch now?

**BKG:** My main concern in 'Disputing Taste', the last essay in *Destination Culture*, was the stratification of the cultural field – where the bifurcations are created and how objects move under what conditions. I wanted to analyse signifying and material practices that produce particular categories that are themselves arrayed in some kind of hierarchy – to show how those categories are both a function of the hierarchy and help to produce the hierarchy. 'Disputing Taste' is really the other side of 'Objects of Ethnography', the first essay in *Destination Culture*. In the first essay, I asked how ordinary things become ethnographic objects, particularly in the context of museums. In the last essay, I look at how ordinary people curate the life world.

A second issue – and this relates to the Sydney Mardi Gras – is the way that camp transvalues kitsch. Much of the theory of kitsch comes out of a European

critique of mass culture in the context of fascism and an American critique in the context of the Cold War. Camp is but one of the ways that kitsch is reworked and transvalued. I wanted to suggest the limits of earlier theories of kitsch by looking for resignification of it in places that older theories of kitsch never went.

**AF:** On that very interesting note I think I will catch my flight back to Sydney! Thank you Barbara very much.

#### NOTES

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1. A fuller list of topics is available at <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/tourist/tpconf> and <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/tourist/tp98conf.htm>.

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