6 The Everyday Tourist

Traveling the Theater of the Mind in the Wake of Permacrisis

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Introduction

The present age is characterized by high instability and uncertainty, identified by the recently coined term 'permacrisis' (*Forbes*, 2023). It is described as a continuous period of turmoil and multiple crises, which call for a rethinking of conventional business models and modalities. In a 2023 *Forbes* article, digital transformation was proposed as key to counter the effects of permacrisis, which entails a shift towards creating resilient business that is pressure tested for disruptions. This means developing new business models and modus operandi that allow for agility and adaptability through the use of technology. Tourism is without doubt one of the sectors affected most by the permacrisis. According to McKinsey and Company (2023), metaverse could be the next evolution for the tourism industry. The metaverse allows for collective experiences, where digital and physical worlds converge, creating completely new, hybrid, immersive experiences, also referred to as 'extended realities' (augmented and virtual reality). McKinsey and Company's (2023) estimated value for the travel sector to be over $20 billion by 2030 and as such, they paint a financially strong picture for a touristic metaverse. However, they also emphasize that today, its primary relevance, is for the events and the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) sector and they raise concerns about users' data protection and virtual rights to locations. While the move towards digital forms of tourism would logically take place independently from permacrisis, it appears that its turbulent conditions have significantly accelerated digitalization along with the restructuring of broader socio-economic systems and sectors (Tzanelli, 2021). As a result, it is critical to ask what the constitution of tourism is in today's society, what tourism means (or what tourism is like), if it is defining quality up to now, the physical travel, is de-emphasized or put aside.

This chapter looks at the case of popular culture as a special entanglement of affective connections, building digital, online communities that elevate virtual travel to a real-like embodiment of the world and open new possibilities for its reconstruction. The idea of the 'Theater of the Mind' is here employed, a jargon first used in radio drama (Verma, 2013) and later in the context of role-playing games, recognizing the link between the mind and media through audience imagination, facilitating reconstructions of travel to places experienced through popular

culture expressions. Given the definition of popular culture as what people do in their everyday life (Fedorak, 2018), it is here put forward that virtual travel in itself is a new and hybrid expression of popular culture. On this basis, the emergence of 'everyday tourist' as a new type of traveler is identified that transcends traditional definitions of tourism. The purpose of this chapter is to better understand the evolving digital-driven transformation of tourism and the pivotal role of popular culture as sublimation of everyday life, which challenges not only the conventional perceptions of destinations and tourist-systems as fixed constructs but also the traditional dichotomies between fantasy–reality, everyday–extraordinary, and mobile–sedentary. The analysis operationalizes a mobilities perspective to explore the nature of structural change and its implications for the redistribution of power in the tourism (production) system. It is concluded that 'everyday tourism' constitutes a form of 'popular culture world-making' that may act as an antidote to the deleterious effects of permacrisis, but attention is also needed on preventing and/or mitigating its potential dark side.

Tourism Mobilities and Popular Culture

The notion of mobilities is fundamental in tourism through its focus on the connection of tourists and destinations, primarily through corporeal mobilities, but also through the mobilities of organic and induced images of the destination (i.e., virtual tourism). Media mobilities and virtual travel have always been a strategically important part of destination marketing, in the same way as news media and popular culture consumption have evoked or created reluctance to visit places portrayed, sometimes out of control of destination management (Lundberg & Lindström, 2020). Miami in the 1980s is one 'pre-digitalization' example of a destination capitalizing on the iconic TV series *Miami Vice*, portraying Miami together with a novel integration of contemporary pop and rock music and stylish or stylized visuals. Nevertheless, parallel to the success of the story of the Miami-based undercover detectives Crocket and Tubbs and their fighting against drug cartels in the paradise-like environment of Miami, the darker image of a society suffering from drugs and drug-related crimes reported about in the news media, blurred with the fictional images (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). Consequently, the crucial intertwined relationships between different categories of mobilities existed long before digitalization became a key driving force of society.

However, over the years, the development of advanced information and communication technologies have created complex mobilities production and consumption patterns, further challenging the notion of how people and places are connected in the tourism system (e.g., Jansson, 2020; Reijnders et al., 2022) and the tourism system per se (Lindström, 2019; Lundberg & Lindström, 2020). In the wake of the pandemic, the traction of virtual tourism through popular culture consumption accelerated and replaced the ability to go and visit places 'in real life'. Hence, the crucial role of technology in reshaping the structure of tourism and driving tourism mobilities is of paramount role for the understanding of relationships between tourism and popular culture placemaking (Verma et al., 2022). In addition to being

a cornerstone of tourism, applying the theoretical notion of mobilities prevents a limited understanding of tourism as a sedentary and non-ordinary activity, but as an everyday activity blurring and intersecting with other categories of mobilities, for example virtual travel to places through popular cultural consumption (Cohen et al., 2015; Edensor, 2007; Haldrup & Larsen, 2010; Hall, 2005).

Popular culture plays a crucial role as a place image-maker and there is a myriad of examples where destination marketers use popular culture to strategically promote awareness and create anticipations among audiences to visit a place during and after, for example, watching screen productions, reading books, or listening to music. Consequently, one can argue that the tourism system/supply chain has evolved/converged as a consequence of the development of digitalization (e.g., streaming services, social media, virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence) and the complex web of conflation of popular culture/tourism mobilities in the wake of this development. Norway is one of many examples of a country where the business of physical tourism mobilities increasingly intertwine with the business of on-screen production and thus the business of virtual tourism. The blockbuster productions of *Mission: Impossible* (*Fallout* and its sequel *Dead Reckoning*) with Tom Cruise as the leading actor made the decision to film advanced action scenes in Norway. A combination of the beautiful Norwegian mountain and fjord landscape, easily accessible through advanced transportation infrastructure and the support of the Norwegian state, reinforced this decision (Innovasjon Norge, 2022). The business of consuming places, physically and virtually, in the wake of on-screen productions, has evolved as an important part of tourism and destination development, restructuring the tourism production system and the power relations within it (Lundberg & Lindström, 2020). Complex intersectoral collaborations between the tourism and the film industries as well as blurred policy and governance landscapes at various levels challenge the traditional understanding of tourism mobilities, its impacts and the governance strategies that need to be put in place to balance business growth and protection of natural landscapes and local communities.

This development can be understood through the lens of the intellectual roots of mobilities in sociology and the so-called new mobilities paradigm. It springs out of a reaction in social science towards the lack of engagement and simplified understanding of the systematic movement of people, for example, for leisure and pleasure (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000, 2007). The paradigmatic shift is both a backlash to sedentarist theories and an extension of the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences, stressing the interpretation of space and spatiality of human life. As pointed out by Sheller (2004), mobilities take place through the mobilization of locality and the rearrangements of the materiality of place. The notion of mobilities is here understood as a phenomenon encompassing the movement of people, objects, and ideas, across different spectrums of movement. Building on the seminal work by Sheller and Urry (2006) and their theoretical pillars underpinning the so-called new mobilities paradigm in the social sciences, there are a number of crucial factors to take into account to understand the underlying premises of tourism mobilities in the wake of digitalization and permacrisis. Places that are connected to each other will have consequences for how people perceive them.

Mobile sociotechnical networks shrink distances, making things and people closer to each other in advanced and crucial ways. Consequently, popular culture consumption/production is not an objective transmission of place images but converging the meaning of place as it connects people to places and shapes how they relate to them through fictional stories. Places are physically and subjectively shaped by people, capital, material, and immaterial things. It is therefore important to pay attention to the distribution of power as well as the winners and losers in the placemaking machinery of popular culture tourism. Mobilities are dynamic, complex adaptive systems, on the one hand, striving for stability (path-dependency), and on the other hand willing to change when stability is disrupted. Hence, it is of importance to both pay attention to popular culture tourism production/consumption path-dependency and the disruptions to patterns to better understand this phenomenon (Sheller & Urry, 2006, 2016).

Adding to the complexity, advanced and rapid digitalization mean new, sometimes blurred, relations between physical travel and different forms of mediated tourism (e.g., virtual tourism). Media and the general communication landscape have gone through similar development in the wake of the rapid digitalization. This results in the tourist having an opportunity to engage in multiple (digital) formats and platforms. Single media consumption (and production) is, thus, replaced with complex webs of transmedia cultural circulation (Freeman & Gambarato, 2018; Jansson, 2020). At first sight, it is tempting to define this as an increasingly blurred media landscape, obstructing the understanding of virtual tourism mobilities. However, as pointed out by Jansson (2020), one must be sensitive to new distinctions evolving through transmedia cultural circulation. Jansson (ibid.) proposes a typology aiming at explicating "how the normalization of transmedia in society contributes to further de-differentiation along the lines of the post-tourism thesis" (p. 392). The typology contains a triple articulation of de-differentiation entailing the transmedia tourist. First, transmedia further extend tourist practices and attitudes in everyday life (ubiquitous transmedia tourist); second, transmedia accentuate the de-differentiation between 'home' and 'away' (decapsulated transmedia tourist); and third, transmedia generate and extract digital audience data (streamable transmedia tourist). This epitomizes the emergent configuration of virtual travel as an ontological mode of action challenging conventional perceptions of tourism, reality, and the world.

Irrealism and Virtual Travel

Drawing upon mobilities theory, Tzanelli (2020) examined websurfing of cultures and landscapes to suggest that such virtual travel should be considered as a novel secular form of metamovement. This type of touristic activity produces multiple versions of reality (world versions), both in conjunction with corporate internet design and independently from technocratic control. It also produces online "travel" communities reorganizing perceptions of mobility within a virtual system of services. In particular, Tzanelli (2020) highlights that digital travel is an act of irrealism:

not only does it open up new possibilities of performing travel as an imaginative/imagined form of movement, it also pluralizes the ways such travels are relayed to others. It is not limited to a "simulation" in consumerist ideological contexts, but also involves pluralizing representations of existing landscapes, heritages, and cultures of actual sites and increasingly tourismified destinations.

(p. 236)

Irrealism is a philosophical term originally conceived by Goodman (1978). It is not the antonym of realism but instead broadly means that the world consists of autonomous alternate versions. While these versions may concern specific modes of unreality in a very unique or unusual fashion, at the same moment they may also combine realistic scenarios in full compliance with human senses and universal physical laws. Their understanding can help us appreciate the multi-sided making of the world and the possibilities for constructing alternative worlds by transcending the conventional views of reality.

The irrealist capacity of digital travel put forward by Tzanelli reexamines understandings of world-making as a force that shapes tourism around the world. It revises Hollinshead's concept of *worldmaking*, which described that tourism realities were the preferred one-sided and exclusionary version staged by destination authorities (Hollinshead et al., 2009). On the contrary, digital travel encourages the human mind to produce several world versions, which may swerve from those designed by technical experts. While virtual tourists still come in contact with the objectified world made by digital experts and destination authorities, they have the liberty to making new worlds, both alone and in unison with other virtual travelers, with whom they can form a digital community. This enables fertile blends of world-making that combine different elements oscillating between fantasy and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, or internal (made in one's mind) and external (made by others) perceptions of the world. Such irrealist constructions of the world allow for more freedom and plurality of travelers' agency and representation of their various views. In this manner, they contribute to the hybridization of tourism in multidimensional niche products and its strengthening as a means to understand the world. In this regard, Tzanelli (2020) characterizes virtual travelers as popular culture worldmakers, being both romantic in a personal search for meaning and mundane "in constant dialogue with the technocraft of touristified digital business" (p. 239). This notion reconceptualizes Urry's tourist gaze to a hybrid irrealist perspective of popular culture. It also poses questions about how virtual 'popular culture worldmaking' and its tourist gaze are experienced, negotiated, and crystalized.

Thus, modern tourism is a complex form of mobilities, challenged by advanced digital consumption and production of popular culture, offering an alternative to the physical movement from home to the tourist destination. Today, consuming places at home has evolved as an alternative to being a tourist in the traditional sense. Consequently, one can become travelers in our everyday life, doing our routine activities and escaping at the same time, being in our ordinary world and entering other worlds concurrently, converging reality and imagination, hence making virtual travel part of our everyday life and popular culture, what is described with the

term 'everyday tourism'. The notion of everyday tourism is eradicating the lines between home and away, the physical act of traveling and traveling through mind. One can argue that everyday tourism as an expressive practice of popular culture is a democratic form of tourism, accessible for the vast majority.

Nevertheless, from a sustainability perspective, everyday tourism raises questions about how everyday tourism mobilities change the consumer/tourist experience and behavior. Furthermore, it will lead to new groups of winners and losers in the tourism system, especially from a local business and community perspective, as well as the ecological footprint of popular culture induced tourism. A number of critical points can be made, using Foucault's understanding of power, critically applied in a tourism setting (Cheong & Miller, 2000). Power is omnipresent in the tourism system, and it includes the whole network of direct and indirect tourism stakeholders. Furthermore, power is not fixed to specific stakeholders in the tourism system; it works at many different levels and directions. The Foucauldian targets and agents may change over time and in different contexts. With that said, the tourist gaze is defined as the primary mechanism of power in the system and, lastly, power in the tourism system is both repressive and productive. A closer look and deeper understanding of the different dimensions of power of 'the theater of the mind' and the complex web of stakeholders included in the production of the tourism experience is needed (e.g., Lindström, 2019; Lundberg & Lindström, 2020). It will provide crucial information about stakeholders in control of the gaze, where the business opportunities are and, most importantly in the wake of the permacrisis, provide insights into the (un)sustainability of popular culture tourism.

The Everyday Tourist in Permacrisis

Returning to the everyday tourist and their everyday-extraordinary travels in the wake of turmoil and multiple crises, permacrisis signals a long-term turbulence in social organization and planetary economic, political, or cultural institutions and structures (Tzanelli, 2021; Ziakas et al., 2021). It marks an epoch of transition where boundaries are blurred as to what and how people may live, what they do, where they can go, how they can travel, and who they actually are. It is more of an existential crisis interrogating the very grounds of our hypostasis as individuals and makeup of society at large. The anxiety and fear about tomorrow put into question our current way of life and the extent to which it leads to sustainable futures. It is within this tempestuous context that expressions of irrealism take place and gain prominence as a way to adjust in the new conditions or new normal and find solutions to diachronic problems. Meta-tourism along with phygital forms of touristic interactivity that blend physical and digital elements (integrating technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence) to enhance the tourist experience play a significant part in enabling imagination to become a living medium of traveling in conjunction with the organic corporeality of tourists and destinations (Mieli, 2022). It is proffered here that meta-tourism is an emergent genre of popular culture that constitutes a new type of tourist: the everyday tourist.

The notion of everyday tourist is an analytical construct and ideational formation. It is neither merely a material category nor just a paradigmatic travel enactment. Instead, it is the archetype of a consumer who uses multimedia to travel across the world and experience destinations as much digitally as physically. The digital modes of traveling allow for an ontological transcendence of long-established dualisms that defined tourism: home–destination, ordinary–extraordinary, and mobile–sedentary. Specifically, the everyday tourist can be concurrently at home and away, traveling to extraordinary places of imagination as part of their ordinary life. In this fashion, the everyday meets the extraordinary extending the boundaries of reality, albeit confined within the spatio-temporal limitations of being home. Different blends of popular culture can be created to enable the confluence of imagination and reality (Ziakas et al., 2022). Consequently, meta-tourism takes on a different character and dimensions. Tourism traditionally has been viewed as an activity beyond ordinary life, a special time outside normal time and away from everyday routine, an activity exotic or extraordinary. On the contrary, the everyday tourist makes traveling part of their ordinary life, or in other words, it is the living embodiment of idealistic imaginaries taking place within their routine and mundane realities with the potential to reverse them when they move from the individual to collective level. This may occur when individual imagination of meta-travel experience is shared, discussed, negotiated, and evaluated via enduring participation in online fandom communities. Internet facilitates a shift from the individual to the collective through its 24/7 access to the audience's popular culture object of fascination and interaction with likeminded people. The audience's emotional ties to these 'fictional' places, characters, and storyline can shape their affectional feelings, loyalty, longing, and even shape their identity. Furthermore, it can provide an audience with a 'safe haven' or 'happy place' as a contrast from the strains and rejections of everyday life and contribute to an overall sense of well-being.

Perhaps this has never been more evident than in the global lockdowns in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. In many countries across the world, citizens' mobility was highly restricted, allowing us only a few hours outside our homes a day. For many of us, this led to an everyday life of doomscrolling the news and checking in on real-time updates of rising COVID-19 cases and deaths, dealing with this new reality of life, which resulted in an all-time high need for bodily and mental escapism. As legal restrictions followed, prohibiting us from leaving our homes, and hefty penalties were enforced as well as physical traveling was banned, many of us turned to escapism by means of streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and HBO and social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. This is where audiences went to escape our darkest fears and boredoms that made up their new dreary 'everyday life', to visit our favorite places and people, old and new. They visited a fashionable pre-pandemic New York to see our *Sex and the City* friends Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda. They also explored new fascinating places like a tiger zoo in Oklahoma and its owner Joe Exotic aka The Tiger King. This form of escapism allowed audiences to dream about old and new places. In crises that followed, such as the 2022–2023

cost-of-living crisis, other restrictions, such as money and time, have limited our physical mobility and challenged our mental health, and once again audiences have turned to escapism as an everyday tourist, traveling the theater of the mind by means of different hybrid forms of popular culture expressions.

Concluding Remarks

The increasing digitalization of tourism in the tumultuous conditions of permacrisis reconstitutes the traditional notions that defined tourism to date. A mobilities perspective allows for exploring and appreciating the transformation of tourism within its social organizing context of dynamic relationships, identities, and cultures. It brings to the fore the need to better understand how virtual connections are embodied, enacted, and elevated via online communities that convert and refine virtual travel from individual imagination to a social experience of world-making in terms of co-constructing alternate social realities. In this regard, the role of popular culture in bringing the everyday to tourism deserves much more attention. Especially, the kaleidoscopic spectrum of popular culture expressive practices enables the hybridization of tourism with different fandoms and activities (Lexhagen et al., 2022), thus engendering new forms and patterns of tourism like the archetype of everyday tourist that have been put forward in this chapter.

At a practical level, by understanding the everyday tourist, established practices on how tourism has been marketed and managed to date can be challenged. Time becomes less dominant as virtual travel can happen anytime. Importantly, the place is not a fixed destination anymore and can take on multiple irreal dimensions or world versions that are means to a perennial ontological end: how realities are built up and understood. Attributes of world-making and popular culture fandom visions should be incorporated into tourism products and online travel communities to cross-fertilize the daily realities with alternate world versions. In other words, tourism becomes a journey about the everyday as much inside as beyond the confines of the everyday.

The embodiment of everyday tourism provides possibilities for more freedom, pluralism, and emancipation of tourist agency to reconstruct social conditions or social worlds. It brings to the fore the ongoing hybridization of tourism with alternative modes of travel and permutations of popular culture. It transcends conventional dichotomies that have long constrained the ontology and breadth of tourism as a social phenomenon. In this sense, the everyday tourist may become an active agent of co-constructing alternate phygital orders and social worlds in a continuous process of world-making. In a similar fashion, the tourist gaze of the everyday can be described as a reflexive and dialectical practice between the idealistic and the mundane, which epitomizes different ways of looking at the world, reshaping what is seen, and how it is seen. It blurs the borderlines between reality and imagination bestowing an irrealist world-making theater of the mind that offers a temporary shelter from the pains of permacrisis. An imagined theater of everyday life about visions and embodiments of the ideal, extraordinary, or utopian performed by a

diverse cast of actors ranging from individual tourists and online communities to media and destination authorities that altogether compose the hybrid phenomenon of everyday tourism.

The recognition of everyday tourism as an expression of popular culture can afford the critical study of this phenomenon. Fruitful prospects have been highlighted herein, but one should also be careful of its limitations, caveats, or possible negative effects. Here a major criticism is the extent to which virtuality via meta-tourism overcomes the risk of self-isolation within an individual's theater of the mind and translates to meaningful or equitable relationships and co-constructions of alternate worlds, then what these worlds are, where power lies, and whose interests are served in these realities. The economic power of high-tech apparatuses and affordability to everyone is a principal factor that needs to be considered in popular culture meta-tourism world-making. Future studies need to examine the economic and political tapestry of interests intertwined with meta-tourist configurations. Equally, the social context and nature of exchanges that reshape the tourist gaze have to be explored from a critical mobilities perspective. It might be unfortunate if what one has at the end is a return to where one was in the first place, reproducing or even magnifying existing inequalities, changing the world so that it remains the same. The critical study of everyday tourist journeys can give an insight into where fans are going to, how they move in-between, and eventually what kind of worlds they co-create.

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