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Performing a Future (in) Performing a Past:
The Industry of Cultural Performance and the Utopian Impulse

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Tourists travel, and with them, so do ideas. One of the most prominent effects of globalization on the world is the increased mobility of people across national borders, for both business and leisure purposes. As globalization has taken effect, the tourism industry has grown to be one of the largest and most important in the world.¹ The growth and prominence of tourism has in turn had a huge effect on the identity formation both of the places being visited, as well as of those people doing the visiting. Tourism is not mere leisure, Adrian Franklin reminds us. Rather, it “can be understood as spaces and times of self-making,” through which tourist and host cultures interact, resulting in the dissemination or solidification of a cultural identity (Franklin, 2003: 2). This identity formation has an effect on both tourists and hosts. The tourist, in observing a host culture, forms new ideas and images of what constitutes the host culture; at the same time, host cultures, in choosing what aspects of their culture to “stage and manufacture for tourists,” are curating, defining, and solidifying their own identities (Gmelch, 2004: 17).

In his seminal work on tourist theory, *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry writes, “Not only do tourists travel but so too do objects, cultures and images” (Urry, 2002: 156). When tourists visit a new place, they leave with the memories and stories of their interactions with a host culture. These interactions are especially effective since, as Urry argues, tourists exist in a Turnerian liminal² space while they are traveling, particularly open and susceptible to the new environment surrounding them. While tourists are traveling, they develop a new sense of what constitutes the identity of the place they visit (Urry, 2004: 434). This constructed conception of identity is then disseminated through the tourists’ home cultures every time they play videos, show photographs, or tell stories about their travels.

When tourists visit a new place, they are also visiting what Slawomir Kapralski calls that place’s “landscape.” For Kapralski, “landscape” is not just a geographical term; rather, it is the integration of the geographic territory of a place combined with the cultural meanings and history of

that place (Kapralski, 2001: 35). To a large extent, tourists who enter this landscape are really entering a sort of battlefield, upon which differing conceptions of identity and cultural ownership are fighting (2001: 37). Part of this fight, I argue, involves how host cultures choose to portray themselves and their identity to tourists. While this battle is played out on many fronts—including native foods, local customs, and the architecture of a given place—the point of contact this paper will focus on is the *interventionist* project of cultural performances, through which host cultures interact directly with tourists. Through these interactions, hosts “stage” or “perform” culture for visitors, who may view these performances as authentic (or unstaged),³ and then disseminate these “authentic” experiences when they return home through the memories and artifacts they bring home with them.

Manfred Pfister expands on Kapralski’s notion, denying the very idea that cultural identity could ever be something inherent to a space. He writes:

National identity is not some naturally given or metaphysically sanctioned racial or territorial essence that only needs to be conceptualized or spelt out in discursive texts; it emerges from, takes shape in, and is constantly defined and redefined in individual and collective performances. (Pfister, 2008: 9)

These performances of identity can take many forms: books, pageants, plays, music, etc. Regardless of the medium, Pfister argues that cultural identity cannot be formed absent of performance.

Cultural performances are an example of what performance studies scholar Richard Schechner calls “restored behavior,” in that they are re-performances *of* the past *in* the present (Schechner, 1985: 35). That said, even though cultural performances re-iterate what is already past, this does not mean that they are exactly as they were at their inception. Every new reiteration of a cultural performance offers the chance for change and alteration (1985: 37). As Schechner writes, “Restored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were—or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become” (1985: 38). Performance theorist Victor Turner offers support for this assertion.

According to Turner, cultural performances act not just as mirrors, reflecting the values and traditions of a society, but as “magical mirrors of social reality” that work to “exaggerate, invert, reform, magnify, minimize, dis-color, re-color, even deliberately falsify” the culture of the performers (Turner, 1988: 42). They not only reflect the culture of the performers; like a funhouse mirror, they provide an altered image of what they are reflecting, and this altered image often represents what a culture wants to be more than what is actually is (1988: 41-42). Thus, the particular performance mode of performing culture to other cultures stands as a specifically powerful form of meaning-making.

To complicate this fact, performances of cultural identity to the Other are never only one-sided; these performances are actually intercultural, as the act of watching a cultural performance is a performance of culture in itself. Pfister calls these inter-cultural transactions the performance of difference, and it is this performance of difference that amplifies those aspects of one’s cultural life that “make a difference.” This type of performance “‘draws a line’ between self and other—boundary lines that are, however, constantly being redrawn and renegotiated, and remain instable and shifting” (Pfister, 2008: 9). The performance of and reaction to cultural performance, then, consistently redraws the figurative border lines between what designates one landscape and what separates it from neighboring places.

I will examine three specific inter-cultural performances that are constructed at least partially for the tourist. Each of these performances works to establish or perpetuate a social identity for the city in which it takes place. These specific performances were staged in three European cities—Barcelona, Krakow, and Venice. Urry asserts that, in response to global flows, there has been increased debate regarding “the changing nature of Europe” (Urry, 2004: 433); these new shifts in attitude towards identity are particularly interesting in the light of Europe’s long and complex history and its status as a diverse geography of developed countries. To provide a specific through-line to

this study, I will examine these three tourist performances through the lens of Urry's thesis that "social identities emerge...out of particular structures of feeling that bind together three elements—space, time, and memory" (2004: 436). Urry borrows the notion of "structures of feeling" from Raymond Williams, who uses the term to mark cultural phenomena that are in the process of forming, but that have not yet been incorporated into the dominant cultural milieu (Williams, 1977: 132).⁴ Williams argues that oftentimes structures of feeling are first observable through art and literature, which act to articulate emergent and pre-emergent cultural shifts (1977: 133).

Given Williams's focus on the arts as an indicator of shifting cultural modes, it is particularly appropriate to use Urry's thesis on social identities emerging through structures of feeling to discuss identity formation in relation to the artistic production that is tourist performance. I argue that these structures of feeling are manifested in most tourist performances through specific versions of Urry's three elements: space, represented through attitudes of nationalism;⁵ time, represented through notions of progressivism; and memory, represented through senses of nostalgia. All of the tourist performances examined below include all three elements, but each specific performance tends to emphasize one element over the other two, demarcating a specific desire for the tourist to recognize that element as central to the identity of the host culture. Consequently, in choosing whether to prize a sense of nationalism, progressivism, or nostalgia, the host culture is working to create or solidify an identity that may be disseminated by tourists when they returns home. After investigating the three performances individually, I will demonstrate how all three of these tourist productions—and most other tourist productions, for that matter—contain within them a utopian impulse to shift and perfect their own worldview, as well as that of others.

Dancing in Circles: The *Sardana* and Catalan Nationalism

I was running. It was my birthday and it was hot and I was running through the cobblestone streets of the Barri Gotic, the old medieval section of Barcelona. But I was late, so I had to run. My guidebook told me that it started right at noon, and I could hear the cathedral's bells ringing already. As the clapper struck the bell for the twelfth time, I turned the corner into a large, bustling plaza.

The cobla, the traditional Catalan band of 11 musicians, was gathered on the steps of the Catedral de Barcelona, Barcelona's 700-year-old Gothic cathedral. The streets of the Barri Gotic were filled with tourists and native Barcelonans. The Plaça Nova, the large square in front of the Cathedral, was particularly crowded, thanks largely to the beautiful weather. Tourists continued to shuffle into the square, later than even I was for what was about to take place—an event they read about in their guidebooks and heard about from friends who have visited this capital of Catalanian culture.

As I stepped in front of the cathedral, the musicians of the cobla raised their woodwind instruments to their mouths or stood with their drum sticks at the ready. A group of elderly men and women emerged from the crowds of people in the plaza. The ladies dropped their purses and bags on to the ground in neat piles, and these aged men and women joined hands to form two circles in front of the cobla. Before the twelfth bong from the carillon faded, the band began to play and the circles of people began to dance.

The dance was peppy and upbeat. The music was quaint and had a striking, optimistic rhythm. The circles of people hopped about, turning clockwise, then counter-clockwise, trying to keep time with the music. The dancers—lifelong Catalans that surely had been performing the dance for many years—were old and arthritic, so the dance seemed somewhat subdued. Even so, I could tell what the dance looked like when these elderly Catalans performed it in their younger days. The dancers' faces beamed with smiles; they performed the dance as if it were a mandate. One old man was particularly feeble; his feet hardly left the ground, but his commitment to the movement was completely visible. I imagined him farming the fields of Catalonia as a boy. The woman next to him was elegant in her frailty;

she wore a bright purple suit and a dazzling smile on her face. I imagined her to be a ballerina or an actress in her younger days.

The dance lasted for about eleven minutes. Then the band played a final, harmonized note to conclude the song. The circles of people broke. The ladies grabbed their purses. The farmer went one way, the ballerina another. Soon the square looked just as it had twelve minutes earlier, before my first encounter with this dance: the sardana, the national folk dance of Catalonia.

The sardana is performed in this way every Sunday at noon exactly (Figure 1). Tourism scholar Dean MacCannell writes, “A version of sociology suggests that society is composed not of individuals but groups, and groups, too, figure as tourist attractions” (MacCannell, 2004: 66). Surely the group of Catalans performing the sardana falls into this category. Tourists come in droves to catch a glimpse of this performance, which is advertised in most guidebooks; these



Figure 1. Dancing the sardana in the Plaça Nova, Barcelona.

guidebooks describe the sardana as the official Catalonian folk dance, but few of the tourists who watch the performance actually understand its implications and history.

For nearly one thousand years, one of the largest issues in Spain has been the relationship between the central government of the country and that of its many regional governments (Wiarda, 2000: 48). Historically, one of the largest sites that has seen this conflict play out is Catalonia, an eastern region of Spain that borders France and the Mediterranean Sea and has Barcelona as its capital. For centuries, Catalonia has operated largely autonomously from the central Spanish

government. Catalans speak their own tongue, called Catalan, which is not a dialect of Castilian Spanish but a language all its own. Further, Catalans have a rich cultural history of art, music, dance and other traditions. While many of these traditions—like the sardana—remained unstandardized for most of Catalonian history, the Catalonian renaissance, or *renaixença*, of the nineteenth century saw a concerted effort to preserve Catalonian culture by standardizing and proliferating the Catalan language and its cultural traditions (Edles, 2003: 318).

Catalonia suffered particular hardships during the reign of Francisco Franco after the Spanish Civil War of the 1930's. In his efforts to unify Spain under a single federal government, Franco rescinded Catalonia's autonomous regional government, which had only been established less than a decade earlier, and banned the public use of Catalan language and traditions, like displaying the Catalan flag or dancing the sardana. Under Franco's reign, dancing the sardana became a revolutionary act—a performative revolt against Franco's suppression of Catalan culture. Cultural traditions like dancing acted to solidify nationalist myths, which, as Laura Desfor Edles puts it, “opened up new political possibilities, including the very *idea* of political nationalist mobilization” (2003: 320). People would stop on the streets of Barcelona to dance the sardana with friends or strangers. It was defiant and it was risky, but it also gave the oppressed Catalonians a way of celebrating their abjected culture.

After Franco's death, Catalonia was again granted its regional autonomy. To this day, one of the largest points of contention in Catalonia is the role the federal government in Madrid plays in controlling Catalonian policy. There is even a significant number who desire Catalonian independence from Spain altogether.⁶ Whether Catalans desire actual independence from Spain or not, however, many of the people of Catalonia value their national identity as Catalans even more than they value their identity as Spaniards. One of the ways Catalans stage this nationalist sentiment

for the world is by dancing the sardana every Sunday at noon for the hoards of tourists who come from across the world to watch them.

Taking Urry's idea of social identities emerging "out of particular structures of feeling that bind together...space, time, and memory," it could be said that this tourist performance is most concerned with the first of these elements. Space, after all, has implications to the geographical and the local, and I would argue that nationalism is a manifested passion for one's local geography, or rather, one's cultural landscape, which includes not only geography but also the people and traditions that are a part of it.

Joan Ramon Resina writes, "Identity...is not a precultural or prepolitical given but develops as part of the process whereby a group attempts to achieve national recognition" (Resina, 2003: 66). By dancing the sardana, the group of Catalans is using a cultural tool to reaffirm nationalist sentiment and garner recognition for their nation through tourists. Through the ritual of performing a national dance, the dancers are performing an act of transfer of their nationalist sentiment to their audience—an act that may continue to resonate once the interaction with the ritual itself is complete.

As the old Catalans perform the sardana for the observing tourists, they are laying claim to the space surrounding them. Just as the sardana was performed as a revolutionary act under Franco's regime, it is performed today as a reminder of Catalonia's own history and culture separate from that of the rest of Spain. This experience is validated by guidebooks and websites like Barcelona.com, which advises tourists not to join in on the dance, as "one wrong move can put the entire circle out of step." By prohibiting tourist participation in the sardana, these tourist resources are also authenticating the performance itself, conferring on it a requirement of expertise and a sense of exclusivity that the non-Catalan would be loath to disrupt.

Of course, space (exemplified through nationalism) is not the only element at play here; time and memory have their place, as well. Time, exemplified through a sense of progressivism, seems least at play of the three elements, though it is definitely present. After all, the Catalanian *renaixença*, which saw the standardization of the sardana, was nothing if not progressive. It saw the development of the *modernisme* movement—exemplified most acutely in the work of *moderniste* architect Antoni Gaudí—which was perhaps one of the most progressive cultural jumps the world has seen (Edles, 2003: 318).

On the other hand, it is much easier to notice the element of memory (nostalgia), in the performance of the sardana. The dance is a centuries-old tradition being recreated in the present; this recalling and re-performance of the past seems heavy with the weight of nostalgic thinking. Resina provides an intriguing counterpoint to this argument, however, supporting the view that nationalism is truly at the center of the performance of the sardana:

A penchant for the past is, of course, typical of nationalism; but it would be a mistake to assume that the past is necessarily cultivated in a nostalgic mode. The past furnishes arguments to the present. And since it is a function of the need to live in the present, it is always a contemporary phenomenon, always, therefore, in the making. (Resina, 2003: 68)

Even though the sardana is a recreation of an age-old tradition, it is being created with a sense of the present at its core. It is a declaration of nationalist passion and a performance for the rest of the world to see that passion embodied. In this way, the elderly Catalan dancers, as they perform for the crowds of visiting spectators, create their nation anew every Sunday at noon. The hope, then, is that tourists will recognize this self-making process and pass the experience along to others.

Touring Stalin’s Folly: “Moving Forward” in Nowa Huta

A tiny black car called a Trabant pulled in front of the Holiday Inn where I was staying near Central Krakow, and a young Polish guide named Cyril, clad in a bright orange jacket, emerged from the car to greet my boyfriend and me. Cyril was not very old...younger than both my boyfriend and myself. We would later find out that

he was four years old when the Wall fell. My boyfriend, who grew up in Romania, was eight. I was six, but that did not mean as much for me, since I was the only one of the three of us who did not live behind the Iron Curtain before that historic day. Regardless, the three of us piled into the miniscule Trabant, and Cyril turned the ignition. The car shook, the engine rumbled, and the three of us sputtered away from Central Krakow to a nearby neighborhood called Nowa Huta.

Our journey began at a tiny café that Cyril told us was once a hangout for the top Communist officials when Nowa Huta—“Stalin’s Gift to Poland” and what was intended to be the ideal Communist city—was built. We drank some coffee and had a shot of vodka as we listened to stories about the history of Communism in Poland, narrated by Cyril as he flipped through a picture scrapbook on the table.

We ventured off to the steelworks on the outskirts of the town—Nowa Huta, after all, is Polish for “New Steelworks”—and caught a glimpse of the factory that had left all the buildings of Nowa Huta black with soot. We visited an apartment building still decorated in the tradition of the Polish men and women who lived in Nowa Huta in the 1970s and 80s, drinking more vodka as we watched a Communist propaganda film. We drove to the first church the Poles were allowed to build in Nowa Huta—Poland being too Catholic for even Stalin to prevent them from indulging their impulse for the religious. We sat for lunch at an old “Commie” Milkbar to dine on pierogi and sausages, surrounded by the residents of Nowa Huta who were on their lunch breaks. Finally, Cyril took the two of us to an empty parking lot where we got to drive the Trabant, hoping that it would not fall apart thanks to our ineptitude with manual transmission, along with the three or four shots of vodka we had consumed.

Then, four hours after our journey began, Cyril dropped us back at our Holiday Inn and drove away in his tiny, black car.

Crazy Guides Communism Tours is a popular and fast-growing English-language tour in Krakow, Poland, that takes interested tourists on a personal tour of Nowa Huta, which was once a city unto itself when it began construction in 1949, but now has been incorporated within the borders of greater Krakow. The Communist neighborhood is one of the many failed experiments of

the Soviet Union when Poland was a part of the Eastern Bloc, and Crazy Guides Communism Tours is the only tour company in Krakow that takes curious tourists to visit this less-attractive but history-laden part of the city. According to their website, since the company began, Crazy Guides is now “Europe’s most famous alternative tours company”⁷ and has been featured in most travel guidebooks, as well as through many major media outlets.

Based on Urry’s theory of social identity formation, the element most at play in the Communism Tours is Urry’s second element, time, exemplified through a massive push to view Krakow in light of a sense of progressivism. Krakow, like all of Poland, fell under Soviet influence after the end of World War II. After already experiencing the devastation of German occupation, Poland was now subject to another repressive regime that attempted to impose the Communist Ideal on the vehemently Catholic landscape of Poland. As such, Poland (and Nowa Huta in particular) can be seen as a chronotopic space. Polish theorist Kapralski expands on Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary term chronotope—“the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships”—to mean also a “real but symbol-laden and often mythologized place in which events important for the construction of a group’s identity either actually happened...or are symbolically represented by—for example—monuments, the very arrangement of space, and its social functions” (Kapralski, 2001: 36). Nowa Huta, in this sense, is a chronotope, it being a “symbol-laden” space filled with a meaningful and controversial history. Crazy Guides Communism Tours works to unlock this history and interpret many of these symbols for tourists, most often with a strong sense of irony and wit that conveys—with a wink and a nod—that Krakow has progressed infinitely beyond the failed Communist experiment of the Soviets. It would be possible to argue that nostalgia for the past is the predominant element at play in this performance, but Crazy Tours actually uses the past as a means to an end: that of portraying a more progressive future. In this way, the tour supports Frederic Jameson’s claim that the “new generation of post-globalization

Left...has more and more frequently been willing to adopt” the language of Utopian (*qua* progressive) idealism to criticize the already Utopian ideal of Communism (Jameson, 2005: xii). In other words, the Crazy Tour guides have reappropriated the techniques of the Communists they criticize to paint a picture of their own progressive nature. They do this most clearly through the use of several specific instruments of the past.

The first instrument conveying a sense of progressivism is the Trabant car that Crazy Guides uses to drive around their customers. The Trabant was a car manufactured in East Germany during the Cold War (Figure 2). It is a very small, two-door car with both the engine and the fuel tank under the front hood. Having personally sat in the car, I can say that it is not only uncomfortable,



Figure 2. Trabant used by Crazy Guides Communism Tours.

but also a little frightening. As the Trabant rumbled along, I would not have been surprised were it to fall apart completely in the middle of the street. Further, there is no gas gauge in the car, so there is the very real possibility that it could run out of fuel with no warning whatsoever. Throughout the tour,

the guides constantly acknowledge the defectiveness of the car, drawing attention to the rocky and dangerous nature of the ride. On the company website, the company tells customers about the car with an ironic nostalgia—a tone evoked over and over again by Crazy Guides—in a way that actually helps to convey a disdain for the past and a sense of progressivism underlying the discourse. “Our Crazy Trabants are authentic East German automobiles,” says the website. “These masterpieces of East German engineering may occasionally cause us some headaches, but these hiccups are all part

of the unique Trabant experience.” By driving the tourists through a failed Communist city in a failed Communist car, Crazy Tours is using humor to convey a sense of knowledge—the knowledge that they, too, believe that the Communist system is a failure.

The second instrument of the tour that exemplifies a sense of progressivism is the language the guides use and stories they tell. Guides are armed with an arsenal of one-liners that, again, communicate a sense of ironic nostalgia. Since most of the tourists who go on these English-speaking tours are young Americans, this language also displays a bias towards capitalism, satisfying a notion of superiority in the tourists’ economic system and way-of-life. Both on the website and on the tour, the guide would several times say, “In Communism, everyone is equal, but some are more equal than others.” In the FAQ’s section of the company’s website, under the question “Are you Communists?,” it reads, “We are real communists, because we earn sh*t and our boss Crazy Mike, who is the most equal amongst equals, takes all the benefits.” There is also constant sarcastic reference to “the good ol’ days” to describe Poland under Communist rule.⁸

Crazy Guides uses a set of specifically-curated locations as the third tool on its tour. From the sad looking “Communist restaurant” that begins the tour to the “Communist apartment” that is still decorated in the style of the 1970s, the stops on the tour highlight the failure of Nowa Huta. In the dated apartment, tourists sip vodka, eat pickles, and watch a Communist propaganda film, which contributes to the satire of the tour itself. One of the final stops on the tour, however, is of the first church that the Soviets allowed the Poles to build in Nowa Huta (Figure 3). The striking building is undoubtedly a product of the 1970s, with its curved exterior and its abstracted and symbolic interior. The guides tell tourists the story of the church’s construction, which was complicated by the fact that, although Stalin finally allowed the Poles to build the church, he would provide them with no construction materials. The Poles managed, however, since the church was so important to them, and the entire exterior of the church is testament to their dedication. It is covered with millions of

smooth river rocks, which the guide says were collected by all the Poles of Nowa Huta, who then placed them around the church's exterior. This story, in particular, is fascinating, as it portrays both a sense of progressivism—in that the Poles of the time were quite progressive in the design of the church and in figuring out how to overcome obstacles to construct it—but also a huge sense of nostalgia—in that the story of the church's



Figure 3. First church of Nowa Huta, Poland.

construction is a wonderful memory of success against an oppressive regime. It also marks the one moment of the the tour that is purely sincere, with no sense of irony to color this stop on the tour.

Kapralski writes, “When two communities dwell on the same territory they tend to turn it into the chronotope of their respective identities. This situation may, and indeed always does, lead to a conflict over landscape, since both groups try to symbolically mark their presence in the same physical space” (2001: 37). Only decades ago, two communities did dwell in Nowa Huta—the Poles and (at least figuratively) the Soviets—and there was a huge conflict over the landscape of the city. Today, one can argue, a different conflict exists, between the historical community and ideas of Nowa Huta and the present Nowa Huta, no longer subject to Soviet rule. While Urry’s other elements are surely at play to some extent, it is the element of time that takes particular precedence here. Crazy Guides Communism Tours seems to be fighting the battle over the cultural landscape of Nowa Huta, using the instruments described above to “symbolically mark” the space as past and, in doing so, marking the Polish people themselves as progressive.

A Death in Venice: Nostalgia amidst a Dying City

It was Saturday, November 14, 2009. I was not in Venice. I wish I were in Venice. Venice is my favorite city in the world, so I would always like to be in Venice. But on this day, I was not in Venice. I was in my apartment. In New York. At my computer. I was watching with rapt attention the news feeds on the internet as an event I had been anticipating for several weeks unfolded in front of me.

The stone streets of the ancient city were packed with people—locals and tourists alike—clamoring for a view of the Grand Canal of Venice, the magnificent central waterway that cuts a slithering “S” through the city, dividing it into two separate halves. A fleet of black gondolas—Venice’s most famed mode of transportation—glided somberly through the murky, blue-green water. Some of the gondoliers were wearing black hoods, and their faces were painted a ghostly white, evoking both the masks of Venice’s famed Carnevale, as well as death masques. Another boat supporting a shiny, black grand piano accompanied the fleet, as a pianist played mournful dirges that echoed off the crumbling palazzos and down the curving waterway. At the head of the fleet sailed an ornately decorated pastel gondola that carried as its cargo a vibrant pink coffin draped with the flag of Venice—a deep red background with a golden lion of St. Mark in the fore.

The funeral procession approached the arched, white Rialto Bridge, which crosses the Grand Canal almost exactly at its center. For centuries this bridge was the only pedestrian route across the Grand Canal, though three newer bridges have been constructed in the last century or so. The hooded pallbearers removed the pink coffin from the boat and marched it solemnly to the Ca’ Farsetti, the palazzo that houses Venice’s City Hall. In front of a large group of fellow mourners, one of the hooded men read somber poetry written in a Venetian dialect—a requiem mass fit for the “death” of a centuries old cultural capital. This was Il Funerale di Venezia—The Funeral of Venice (Barry and Constantini, 2009).

The Italian city of Venice is facing a series of difficult challenges in the present moment, all of which seem to put the city’s literal survival into question. The threat of rising water, a faltering economy, the constantly diminishing population, the massive effects of industrial pollution in the

lagoon surrounding the city, and the undeniable fact that the Venetian islands, while a miracle of construction in their day, are now sinking lower and lower into the ocean floor, have all contributed to a global discourse regarding the Death of Venice. This discourse seems to be perpetuated not only by tourists from across the world, who rush to see the city before it turns into a second Atlantis, but also by the lingering residents of Venice, as exemplified by the staged funeral described above. Apparently, the future of Venice seems questionable at best and an impossibility at worst. The refrain most frequently invoked laments the fear of Venice becoming a “floating museum,” and surely there is credence to this fear. Venice *is* sinking, both physically and economically, but there are, perhaps, other forces at play here.

In her book *Destination Culture*, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett writes that heritage “is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead and the defunct” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 149). This transvaluation created through marking a space as a heritage site ultimately leads to a “second life” for that space (1998: 149). Venice seems to be going



Figure 4. Boats sail down the Grand Canal at the Funeral of Venice.

through just such a process. The city, indeed, is battling against incredible odds, and these challenges are surely causing a shift in the very nature of Venetian identity. Yet while many claim these trials will lead to Venice’s death, perhaps they are also

contributing to the transformation of

Venice, marking it as a site of heritage and solidifying its importance in the global community. In this way Venice seems to be utilizing Urry’s third and final element of social identity, memory

exemplified through nostalgia, as its predominant tool in disseminating a Venetian identity to the world through its tourists.

The funeral described above was organized by a group called *Venessia.com* (Figure 4). The group meant the funeral to be a wake-up call to the Venetian city government, signaling that something needs to be done. At its height, the population of Venice peaked at 164,000 inhabitants. Today, that number has sunk below 60,000 (Kingston, 2009). The average age of Venetian residents hovers somewhere around fifty, the highest average in all of Italy (Goodman and Van Riper, 2009: 13). Furthermore, since Venice sees an average of 55,000 tourists each day, there are many days when the number of tourists in the city of Venice outnumbers the number of actual Venetians. All of these factors pushed Matteo Secchi, a Venetian business owner, to organize the Funeral of Venice (Kingston, 2009).

While the funeral's foremost audience may not have been tourists, the performance was observed by a huge number of them and was covered by many major media outlets around the world, so the funeral had the potential for much more far-reaching effects than just the Venetian City Hall. Also, since the tourism industry is the largest contributing factor to the decrease of Venetian residents,⁹ it is easy to argue that the Funeral has huge implications for the tourists watching it since it alleges their presence as the central threat to Venetian identity. As such, the Funeral of Venice uses Urry's third element of social identity, memory, by evoking strong and celebratory images of an idealized past to critique and alter the present.

First, one of the funeral's central images, the gondola, is perhaps the most widely-recognized symbol of Venice across the world, and that symbolism is enmeshed in the sense of history that surrounds the vessel's use. Gondolas have been in use for centuries in Venice and are a mode of transportation unique to the city. By making them such a central element in the funeral procession, the performers are highlighting a nostalgia for what was once the only mode of transportation in

Venice. Second, the playing of Venetian dirges and reading of Venetian poetry has obvious references to the past, evoking the memory of art forms that are now less and less pervasive.

Finally, the leader of the procession carried a white mask with him—a reference to the Venetian tradition of *Carnevale*, as well as the Venetian mask-making tradition that is also known across the globe (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Funeral procession with masks carries the coffin to Venice's City Hall

The elements of nationalism and progressivism are assuredly present in the Funeral performance, too. Venice, one could argue, is a nation unto itself, at least in the mind of most Venetians. There is even a recent initiative by the National Geographic Society to collect DNA samples from Venetian men to track the Venetian genetic code before it disappears (“DNA Tests”, 2009). In this sense the Funeral of Venice is an act of Venetian nationalism, attempting to preserve it and its traditions in light of the presence of so many non-Venetian inhabitants. Progressivism is an aspect of the Funeral, as well, since the central point of the Funeral is to motivate government action in the face of the challenges Venice faces. Still, these reforms mostly involve preserving an “old” Venetian way of life rather than enacting a new one, so nostalgia colors this sense of progressivism to a large extent.

For the tourists viewing the Funeral, they are seeing two conflicting acts at play: an observance of tradition, as well as a focus on the future. As Jameson and Jose Muñoz assert, however, a sense of futurity is always tied up in nostalgia for an idealized past (Jameson, 2005: xii; Muñoz, 2005: 9-20). In this way the Venetians’ progressivism is really a cry for the return of some

past time when Venice was not sinking, when tourists were not rampant, and when the economy was not in such tatters. As is so often the case, of course, Venetian history does not necessarily contain a time when none of these situations was a problem. Nostalgia is elusive in that way.

By performing this nostalgia, the Venetian “mourners” are working to mark the site as dead or defunct, transforming it into a place of heritage, according to Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 149). In so doing, the “mourners” are surely accomplishing something in terms of reframing Venice in the public discourse. Even as they mourn the death of Venice, they are also proclaiming its “hereness,” according to Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 153). That declaration of “hereness,” then, will be disseminated around the globe by the tourists who visit this “dying” city. In effect, the mourning of Venice and the nostalgia it evokes are perhaps the Venetians last best hope of keeping Venice’s social identity vibrant. After all, how can a city so present in the public discourse ever truly die?

Tourist Productions and the Utopian Impulse

Kirschenblatt-Gimblett writes, “Tourism can be taken as a barometer, and it operates as an instrument, of local and national self-understanding” (1998: 141). It seems only logical to note that the displays and performances of culture put on specifically for tourists are also an instrument of “local and national self-understanding.” Expanding upon this statement, tourism also becomes an instrument for transcultural understanding, or the lens through which the outsider understands the stranger’s local and national space. If, as Jeremy Boissevain concludes, tourists, while traveling, assume new identities for themselves, opening themselves to new experiences and the possibilities for new behaviors (2004: 254), then it also seems plausible that tourists are open to *seeing* the identity of others anew, reconstructing notions of other cultures and ways of being that they then take home, process, and disseminate.

This interchange between tourist and host culture, along with the identity formation that occurs through the host culture performing a specific and curated cultural act, constitutes a form of utopian construction through which the host culture performs for the tourist its more perfect and pure version of what its society should be. Victor Turner describes this phenomenon as performance in the “subjunctive mood” (1987:41). Just as in language, the subjunctive mood is characterized as that which expresses possibility, potentiality, and hope. It is never certain; it is often predictive. These cultural performances could be seen as subjunctive in that they communicate a vision of the world that speaks more to what it could be than what it actually is. Similarly to the cultural performances analyzed in this paper—all of which manifest, I argue, in the subjunctive mood—there is another concept that exists always in the subjunctive mood: the notion of Utopia.

In his treatise on the construction of utopias, Frederic Jameson argues that underlying the politics of any utopian thought runs an always shifting “dialectic of Identity and Difference.” These two juxtaposed forces work to construct a new imaginary that is radically changed from the present one (2005: xii). If this dialectic is an essential marker of utopian thinking, then tourist productions—those described above and most others—exemplify at least some element of the utopian impulse, in that they are all concerned with the distinction between that which is of the host culture—Identity—and that which is of the tourist culture—Difference. Of course, this relationship of Identity and Difference also works likewise, as the exchange between tourist and host culture is not unidirectional, but always mutually constitutive.

Jameson writes that utopias emerge within enclaves—spaces carved out of larger spaces within which the utopian impulse may grow and differentiate itself from the dominant cultural forms (2005: 15).¹⁰ Each of the tourist performances addressed in this paper represents a utopian enclave of some sort: the enclave created within the circles of the sardana, out of which radiates the aforementioned nationalist impulse; the enclave within the Trabant, which acts both as reminder of

and transport to the sites that communicate a need for progressive movement; the enclave of the funeral march, which carves its path through the waters of Venice to the doors of the city hall, demanding a return to that more perfect past. All of these enclaves want to grow, to envelop their cities as a whole. These performers seek to make their home a utopian enclave unto itself. Within these enclaves, and through the help of Jameson and another scholar of Utopian theory, José Esteban Muñoz, it becomes clear that all three elements of Urry's and this paper's thesis—space and nationalism, time and progressivism, memory and nostalgia—are also essential elements for the construction of any utopia.

While the social ideal of nationalism has come to evoke some suspect and often frightening images, the basic idea itself, which calls for a devoted love of country, along with the independence of that country and its people, recalls the very first Utopia, created by Thomas More in his famous text from 1516. More's Utopia is an island, separated from the rest of the world and the world's peoples by not only ideological differences, but by a physical body of water. Jameson writes that the politics of Utopia occur exactly in this gap—this water or border—between the “newly created island and its non-Utopian neighbors” (2005: 24). Nationalist sentiment seeks to mimic this separation, if not by water, then at least by a drawing of borders that separates their own culture more clearly from the others. It longs for this gap to be more boldly marked, and the performance of national-cultural acts for the public—like the dancing of the sardana in front of the Cathedral of Barcelona—is a call for that marking to take place. The circles of the dancers draw a line in the ground just as numerous Catalans would like a line to be drawn between themselves and the Spanish government in Madrid. Moreover, the circle of dancers is a closed one, not admitting anyone who does not know the dance and, therefore, does not fully understand their utopian vision. In this way the steps of the dancers feet are figuratively tapping out Jameson's utopian gap in 2/4 time.

The relationship between utopia and progressivism seems the most obvious. After all, the desire for utopia is characterized by the desire to *progress* from the current state of things to a more perfect, more idealized, more utopian state. It may seem odd, however, to look at the Crazy Communism Tours of Krakow as exemplifying the utopian impulse, particularly since, as Jameson reminds his readers, the politics of Utopia were often used by 20th century Socialists to describe what they were attempting to achieve (2005: xi). Indeed, Nowa Huta itself was meant to be a utopia that would outshine the neighboring city center of Krakow. And yet the Socialist project of Nowa Huta failed miserably. Now, with a healthy dose of irony, the Communism Tours are using the failure of Nowa Huta as the cornerstone for a new utopian project. Muñoz describes his own utopian methodology as “a backward glance that enacts a future vision” (2009: 4), which also expresses the methodology used by the Communism Tours of Nowa Huta. By using what Muñoz would call “radical negativity,” the tour guides of Crazy Tours cite the failures of one utopian enclave to enact a newer, more progressive enclave that has moved past the failures of the last one. The ironic negativity used to introduce the tourist to Nowa Huta then becomes “the resource for a certain mode of...utopianism” (2009: 13). In another ironic turn, though, by using Nowa Huta to construct a new utopian mode, the tour company is fulfilling what Jameson would say is the greatest success of any utopia: that its failure makes the world more aware of its own limits and shortcomings in utopian thought (2005: xiii).

Both Jameson and Muñoz discuss the important role that memory plays in the formation of any utopian impulse. In his work, Jameson invokes an age-old maxim when he writes, “Nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses” (2005: xiii). He goes on to write about how truly impossible it is to envision a new future world that is not only a collage of what has already existed (Jameson, 2005: xiii). Yet there is a hope in this necessity, which Muñoz points out when he writes, “It is important to call on the past, to animate it, understanding that the past has a performative

nature, which is to say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things” (2009:27). With the Funeral of Venice, the constructors of the event are using nostalgic evocations of a lost past—Venetian poetry, Carnevale masks, local symbology—to conjure what has been lost into the present. In this instance, the utopia the performers wish to construct is the imagined idea of what has already been. Paired next to the numerous hardships faced by modern-day Venetians, the romanticized stories of the past seem infinitely more promising. “*If only things were like they used to be*” is not only nostalgic, but also utopian in its intent, because that very phrase encapsulates an impulse to create a new and better world in the present. And while nostalgia is most clearly seen through the funeral of Venice, this remembrance of things past is also present in the sardana, the Commie tours, and many other tourist performances that take place in a city with any history whatsoever.

Despite all of this evidence, Jameson remains skeptical that a symbiotic relationship between utopian thinking—which he asserts implies a level of self-sufficiency and locality—and tourism—which implies a reliance on and communication with a global community—can exist. He writes, “Tourist art is certainly a new space of creation and production, but scarcely a form through which an older national or local culture is produced and reproduced” (2005: 215). Even so, each of the three tourist performances examined in this paper offer a counter-argument to Jameson’s theory. Utopian thinking seems to be something ingrained in the human psyche. As the world becomes more globalized and less self-sufficient, these are at least a few instances to show how cultures have adapted by nurturing a relationship with the other while simultaneously maintaining and developing their own political, utopian projects.

Conclusion

In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor discusses the importance of looking at performed culture as a viable and essential means of

studying cultural identity and history. While performances of culture are not a part of the archive—recorded or printed cultural information that is “resistant to change” (Taylor, 2003: 19)—they are a part of what Taylor calls the repertoire. The repertoire contains the embodied performances of cultural identity. It is constantly shifting, and it requires the presence of both the performers and the audience for it to exist (2003: 20). The dancing of the sardana, the Communism tour, and the Funeral of Venice are all a part of the repertoire of their respective cities. Through these performances, cultural identity is embodied and transmitted to an audience in a visceral, unique manner—a manner that the archive cannot replicate.

Taylor also tells her reader that “the repertoire, like the archive, is mediated” (2003: 21). There is a “process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission” that occurs within the repertoire (2003: 21). This paper attempts to examine that exact process, by pointing out and analyzing what has been selected, internalized, and transmitted through these interactions between host culture and tourist. While these mediated performances will continue to evolve (even as they become a part of the archive through tourist photographs and videos or in papers like this one), they speak to the innermost beliefs of their respective cultures in the moment of their performance, providing insight into how people view themselves and how they wish to be viewed by others.

Using Urry’s model of social identity, this paper finds three specific elements particularly present in some form in most tourist performances—nationalism, progressivism, and/or nostalgia. How a group or culture chooses to use or not use these three elements demonstrates their own self-understanding or their own desires for how they hope to be seen by others. There are, of course, some problems with this process. For one, as Davyyd J. Greenwood writes, “The onlookers often alter the meaning of the activities being carried on by local people” (2004: 159). Host cultures can be as careful as possible and still have no control over how tourists will interpret their performances.

There are, assuredly, people who go on the Communism Tour in Krakow wondering how the guides could still be so supportive of Soviet Socialism. There must be those who see the sardana and describe it to their friends as a Spanish folk dance, rather than a Catalan one. Also, this paper focuses only on tourist performances in three developed, democratic cities in a relatively prosperous Europe. Future investigation must surely be conducted as to how this model changes when applied to developing cities, as well as cities or countries that operate under more autocratic rule.

As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the identity of individuals as well as of societies is in constant flux, and the repertoire of these places continues to expand. Deborah Kapchan writes, “We are always involved in the coming to terms with cultural identity, the codification and objectification not only of other cultures, but of our own” (2006: 12). In a world where this is undoubtedly the case, it is important to examine these identity shifts, and specifically how cultures are trying to shape them. There is much to be learned from watching people perform their own culture, for this performance is, at its core, a forceful, interventionist act. At first glance, it may seem like the elderly Catalans are just dancing an old dance or that the mournful Venetians are only playing dress-up, but these tourist performances are revolutionary in the deepest sense. They are working to intervene upon newcomers, to change their minds, to shift completely their way of seeing and knowing. Indeed, they are building a new, more perfect world.

NOTES:

¹ Sharon Bohn Gmelch writes that “one in every 12 workers” worldwide is involved in the tourism industry. She also states that tourism “accounts for 11 percent of the global gross domestic product.” (Gmelch, 2004: 4)

² Ethnographer Victor Turner writes about liminal spaces as those spaces which exist “betwixt and between” two more definite states of being. When the subject is within a liminal space, he is more susceptible to influence from the world around him (Turner, 1977: 36).

³ Dean MacCannell writes extensively about the touristic inclination for authenticity and the “desire to share in the real life of the places visited, or at least to see that life as it is really lived.” (1976: 96).

⁴ For Williams, “dominant culture” marks the culture system that is accepted, lived, and embodied by the majority of a society. It is viewed as the “norm” from which other forms of culture deviate. “Emergent culture,” on the other hand, signifies new “meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship” that are being created

within a society. Emergent culture will either be appropriated into the dominant culture or will eventually disappear. For more, see Williams 1977, 121.

⁵ I use the term nationalism in the most neutral form possible to mean only love and devotion to own's homeland, its people, and its culture, sometimes accompanied by a desire for the independence of that land. Nationalism certainly has some negative connotations, but I imply none of those in my use of the term.

⁶ A 2007 poll conducted by the *Institut de Ciències Polítiques I Socials* found that 31.7% of the Catalanian population favored independence from the Spanish state ("Sondeig d'Opinio").

⁷ See <http://www.crazyguides.com/>.

⁸ See <http://www.crazyguides.com/>.

⁹ Because of the rise in tourism, cost of living expenses have risen exponentially in recent years, making living in Venice financially strenuous (Newman, 2009). Further, since the passage of a law in 1999 that uses financial incentives to encourage the conversion of houses into tourist lodgings, the number of hotels and the like has increased six-fold (Newman, 2009). In the face of such an increase in tourist accommodations, there have not been any new buildings for Venetian residents in the past five years, and the list of those awaiting public housing continues to grow (Natanson, 2009).

¹⁰ The spaces referred to in this instance are slightly different from those addressed throughout this paper through Urry. Jameson's spaces are more abstracted and less beholden to geography, though they could definitely still be manifested in the geographic.

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