Chapter 12

Tourism and Media Studies 3.0

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ABSTRACT

The term “social media” generally refers to the multi-point creation and distribution of electronic communication. It is understood in opposition to broadcasting. This chapter explains the history of media studies as a means of comprehending these newer media in the context of tourism. They need to be studied in the light of existing media, even as we seek a new form of truly interdisciplinary work that brings existing approaches together. Taking its agenda from social movements as well as intellectual ones, and its methods from social sciences and humanities, Media Studies 3.0 should focus on gender, race, class, sexuality, sustainability, and pleasure across national lines—an apt setting for those working on tourism.

Keywords: Media studies 1.0; Media studies 2.0; Media studies 3.0

INTRODUCTION

The term “social media” generally refers to the multi-point creation and distribution of electronic communication. It is understood in opposition to broadcasting (though the notion that the most popular pastime worldwide now and in the last century should be other than “social” is bizarre). This chapter explains the history of media studies, which may be of value for
comprehending these newer social media in the context of tourism. This chapter discusses the social media in the light of their defunct, venerable, and middle-aged counterparts.

Across history, media studies have been dominated by three topics: ownership and control, content, and audiences. Approaches to ownership and control vary between neoliberal endorsements of limited regulation by the state to facilitate market entry by new competitors, and Marxist critiques of the bourgeois media for controlling the sociopolitical agenda. Approaches to content vary between hermeneutics, which unearths the meaning of individual texts and links them to broader social formations and problems, and content analysis, which establishes patterns across significant numbers of similar texts, rather than close readings of individual ones. Approaches to audiences vary between social psychological attempts to correlate audiovisual consumption and social conduct, and critiques of imported audiovisual material threatening national and regional autonomy. These three components, fractured by politics, nation, discipline, theory, and method, are embodied in what is called here Media Studies 1.0 and Media Studies 2.0. These two formations cover a new Media Studies 3.0, and offer some examples of how the media and tourism intersect in the contemporary moment.

TOURISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

Media Studies 1.0

Media Studies 1.0 derived from the spread of new media technologies over the past two centuries into the lives of urbanizing populations and the policing questions that this posed to state and capital: What the effect on the public of these developments would be and how they would vary between those with a stake in the social order versus those seeking to transform it. By the early 20th century, academic experts had decreed media audiences to be passive consumers, thanks to the missions of literary criticism, distinguishing the aesthetically cultivated from others, and psychology, distinguishing the socially competent from others (Butsch, 2000, p. 3). The origins of social psychology can be traced to anxieties about "the crowd" in a suddenly urbanized and educated Western Europe that raised the prospect of a long-feared "ochlocracy" of "the worthless mob" (Pufendorf, 2000, p. 144) able to share popular texts. In the wake of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke was animated by the need to limit collective exuberance via restraint
on popular passions (1994, p. 122). He was not alone, then or now. Consider
the opening line of Baroness Orczy’s famous adventure tourism novel of the
Terror, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*: “A surging, seething, murmuring crowd of
beings that are human only in name, for to the eye and ear they seem naught
but savage creatures, animated by vile passions and by the lust of vengeance
and of hate” (2009, Kindle Locations, 10488–10489). Elite theorists from
both right and left emerged across the 19th century, notably Pareto (1976),
Mosca (1939), Le Bon (1899), and Michels (1915). They argued that newly
literate publics were vulnerable to manipulation by demagogues. Even Mill
spoke of “the meanest feelings and most ignorant prejudices of the vulgarest
part of the crowd” (1861, p. 144). The founder of the “American Dream,”
the Latino James Truslow Adams, regarded “[t]he mob mentality of the city
crowd” as “one of the menaces to modern civilization.” He was particularly
disparaging about “the prostitution of the moving-picture industry” (1941,
pp. 404, 413). These critics were frightened of socialism, democracy, and
popular reason (Wallas, 1967, p. 137). With civil society growing restive, the
emergence of radical politics was explained away in sociopsychological
terms rather than political-economic ones. The psy-function warmed itself
by campus fires, far from the crowding mass. In the United States, Harvard
took charge of theorizing, Chicago observing, and Columbia enumerating
the great unwashed (Staiger, 2005, pp. 21–22). Tests of beauty and truth
found the popular classes wanting, and helped promulgate the idea of the
newly literate and suddenly enfranchised being bamboozled by the
artistically shameless and unscrupulously fluent.

The US Payne Fund studies of the 1930s investigated the impact of films
on what a gaggle of sociologists labeled “‘superior’ adults” (this expression
referred to “young college professors, graduate students and their wives”) versus children from juvenile centers. Researchers wanted to know, “what
effect do motion pictures have upon children of different ages?” especially
on people defined as “retarded.” These pioneering scholars boldly set out to
discover whether “the onset of puberty is or is not affected by motion
pictures” and what they called “The Big Three” narrative themes: love, crime, and sex (sound familiar?). They pondered “demonstrations of
satisfying love techniques” to see whether “sexual passions are aroused and
amateur prostitution ... aggravated” by the screen, gauging reactions
through “autobiographical case studies,” questionnaires asking whether
“All Most Many Some Few No Chinese are cunning and underhand,” and
“skin response,” as measured by psychogalvanometers attached to young
people in cinemas and hypnographs and polygraphs wired to them in their
beds (Charters, 1933).
The Payne Fund studies birthed seven decades of obsessive social-scientific attempts to correlate youthful consumption of popular culture with antisocial conduct, scrutinizing audiences in terms of where they came from, how many there were, and what they did as a consequence of participating (Miller, 2009). In 1951, Smythe wrote of this effects research, “[e]verybody seems to be doing it, especially those who are best qualified by virtue of the fact that ‘they wouldn’t have a television set in the house’” (2004, p. 318).

Bob Dylan remembers the 1960s in Greenwich Village not only because he was singing in coffee shops but as a time marked by “Sociologists saying that TV had deadly intentions and was destroying the minds and imaginations of the young—that their attention span was being dragged down.” The other dominant site of knowledge Dylan encountered was the “psychology professor, a good performer, but originality not his long suit” (2004, pp. 55, 67).

Just such purveyors of normal science continue to cast a shadow across that village, and many others. The pattern is that when cultural technologies and genres emerge, young people are identified as both pioneers and victims, simultaneously endowed by marketers and critics with power and vulnerability. They are held to be the first to know and the last to understand the media—the grand paradox of youth, latterly on display in the digital sublime of technological determinism, as always with the super-added valence of a future citizenship in peril (American Academy of Pediatrics, Council on Communications and Media, 2009). New genres and technologies are accompanied by concerns about extreme distinctions among generations. The latest manifestation of this anxiety can be found in much pop-intellectual work that divines the existence of “digital natives” (Tapscott, 2009).

Concerns about supposedly unprecedented and unholy risks deriving from new media recur with each major technological and generic innovation. Damnation was sure to follow cheap novels during the 1900s, silent then sound film of the teens and 1920s, radio in the 1930s, comic books from the 1940s and 1950s, pop music and television in the 1950s and 1960s, satanic rock and video cassette recorders of the 1970s and 1980s, and rap music, video games, the Internet, and sexting since the 1990s.

The satirical paper The Onion (2005) cleverly mocked these interdependent phenomena of moral panic and commodification via a faux study of the impact on US youth of seeing Janet Jackson’s breast in a 2004 Super Bowl broadcast. Something similar in conventional tourism research can be seen into social media, which warns corporations about how to avoid negative responses and encourage positive ones, lest the herd-like public turn against
a particular company or resort (González, Gidumal, & López-Valcárcel, 2010; Pan, Xiang, Law, & Fesenmaier, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The audience must be controlled as if it were an unruly mob of 19th-century socialists. This anxiety and desire for surveillance has particular force when the social media are identified as causal agents, or at least facilitators, of child sex tourism (George & Panko, 2011).

Effects studies suffer all the disadvantages of ideal-typical psychological reasoning. They rely on methodological individualism and fail to account for cultural norms, let alone the arcs of history that establish patterns of text and response inside politics, war, ideology, and discourse. Each laboratory test, based on, as the refrain goes, “a large university in the Midwest [of the United States],” is countered by a similar experiment, with conflicting results. As politicians, grant-givers, and pundits call for more and more research to prove that the media make you stupid, violent, and apathetic—or the opposite—academics line up at the trough to indulge their contempt for popular culture and their rent-seeking urge for public money. Media Studies 1.0 rarely interrogates its own conditions of existence—namely, governments, religious groups, business leeches, and the media themselves account for social problems by diverting blame onto popular culture. It takes each new medium and genre as an opportunity to affirm its omniscient agenda (Miller, 2009).

Whereas effects research focuses on the cognition and emotion of individual human subjects via observation and experimentation, another way of considering audiences looks to the customs and patriotic feeling exhibited by collective human subjects, the grout of national culture. In place of psychology, it is concerned with politics. The media do not make you a well- or ill-educated person, a wild or self-controlled one. Rather, they make you a knowledgeable and loyal national subject or a naïf, ignorant of local tradition and history. Cultural belonging, not psychic wholeness, is the touchstone of this model. Instead of measuring responses electronically or behaviorally, it interrogates the geopolitical origin of popular texts and the themes and styles they embody, with particular attention to the putatively nation-building genres of drama, news, sport, and current affairs. Adherents hold that local citizens should control television, for instance, because they can be counted on to be patriotic in the event of war. Many nations prohibit foreigners owning TV licenses. The United States is a prominent example.

In addition to audience research and cultural policy, Media Studies 1.0 also includes political economy, which focuses on infrastructure rather than audiences, and critical theory, which is concerned that the audiovisual sector turns people away from artistic and social traces of authentic
intersubjectivity and toward control of individual consciousness. Both
work from the *nostrum* that the media are all powerful. Political economy
is more policy oriented and political in its focus on institutional power.
Critical theory is more philosophical and aesthetic in its desire to develop
modernism and the avant-garde. They began as one with lamentations
for the triumph of industrialized cultural production and the loss of a self-
critical philosophical address. The two approaches are also linked via a
distaste for what they deride as mass culture. Because demand is dispersed
and supply centralized, the media supposedly operate via an administrative
logic. Far from reflecting already-established and -revealed preferences of
consumers in reaction to tastes and desires, they manipulate audiences
from the apex of production. Coercion is mistaken for free will, and culture
is one more industrial process subordinated to the dominant economic
forces within society. It seeks a maximum of standardization and a
minimum of risk. The only element that might stand against this leveling
sameness is said to be individual consciousness. But that consciousness has
itself been customized to enable efficient media production (Adorno &
Horkheimer, 1977).

For Media Studies 2.0, popular culture represents the apex of modernity. Far
from being supremely alienating, it embodies the expansion of civil society,
the first moment in history when political and commercial organs and
agendas became receptive to, and part of, the popular classes; when the
general population counted as part of the social, rather than being excluded
from political-economic calculations. At the same time, there was a lessening
of authority, the promulgation of individual rights and respect, and the
development of intense but large-scale human interaction (Hartley, 2003;
Shils, 1966). This perspective has offered a way in to media audiences
that differs from Media Studies 1.0 and its faith in the all-powerful agency
of the media. For in Media Studies 2.0, the all-powerful agent is the audience.
It claims that the public is so clever and able that it makes its own
meanings, outwitting institutions of the state, academia, and capitalism that
seek to measure and control it. In the case of children and the media, for
example, anxieties from 1.0 about turning Edenic innocents into rabid
monsters, capitalist dupes, or mental Americans have been challenged by a
new culturalist perspective. This formation has animated research into the
generic features and intertexts of children’s news, drama, action-adventure,
education, cartooning, and play and how children distinguish between
fact and fiction and talk about the media as part of social interaction (Buckingham, 2000).

Faith in the active audience can reach cosmic proportions. It has been a donnée of 2.0 that the media are not responsible for anything. This position is a virtual nostrum in some research into fans, who are thought to construct connections with celebrities and actants in ways that mimic friendship, make sense of human interaction, and ignite cultural politics. Media Studies 2.0 commonly attacks opponents of commercial culture for misrecognizing its capacity to subvert patriarchy, capitalism, and other forms of oppression. The popular is held to have progressive effects, because it is decoded by people in keeping with their social situations. The active audience is said to be weak at the level of cultural production, but strong as an interpretative community. All this is supposedly evident to scholars from their perusal of audience conventions, web pages, discussion groups, quizzes, and rankings, or by staring at screens with their children. Consumption is the key to Media Studies 2.0—with production discounted, labor forgotten, consumers sovereign, and governments there to protect them.

Cybertarian technophiles, struck by the digital sublime, attribute magical properties to contemporary communications, and cultural technologies that obliterate geography, sovereignty, and hierarchy in an alchemy of truth and beauty. Cybertarians see omniscient, omnipotent audiences outwitting the efforts of capital, the state, and parents to understand and corral them. The new-media savants who construct the latter model routinely invoke precapitalist philosophers, dodging questions of state and capital by heading for aesthetics (Cogburn & Silcox, 2008). A deregulated, individuated media world supposedly makes consumers into producers, frees the disabled from confinement, encourages new subjectivities, rewards intellect and competitiveness, links people across cultures, and allows billions of flowers to bloom in a post-political cornucopia. It is a kind of Marxist/Godardian wet dream, where people fish, fornicate, film, and finance from morning to midnight. At such moments, one can say that what Eagleton (1982) sardonically named The Reader’s Liberation Movement is in the house. In his survey of this work, Mosco rightly argues that such “myths are important both for what they reveal (including a genuine desire for community and democracy) and for what they conceal (including the growing concentration of communication power in a handful of transnational media businesses)” (2004).

In tourism, the aggregated effect of collective knowledge via social media that is associated with personal recommendations of destinations is a good example of these claims (Popescu & Grefenstette, 2011). Such findings excite 2.0 advocates, as per the unseemly way that tourism experts egged on by
social media salivate over wealthy foreigners; a typical instance is the
discourse of Chinese consumers liberated from the state (Arlt & Thraenhart,
2011). Such sanctioned greed is some distance from research that illustrates
how the social media function as surveillance-and-control devices in places
as diverse as China and Australia (Qiu, 2007) or the World Privacy Forum
proposing that people are in a “one-way mirror society,” where power
accretes to corporations through the supposedly even-handed tool of
interactivity (Dixon, 2010).

The fundamental dilemma for adherents of Media Studies 2.0 is this: Can
fans or tourists be said to make rational evaluations of core questions of
social justice such as labor exploitation, patriarchy, racism, climate change,
and neo-imperialism—or in some specifiable way make a difference beyond
their own selves—when they interpret TV unusually, each other about
romantic frustrations, play pirated versions of Scrabble on Facebook, or
take a cruise based on amateur recommendations?

Has the society gone too far in supplanting the panicky Woody Allen
nebbishness of 1.0 (“I’m kind of bothered that . . .”) with the Panglossian
Pollyanna nerdiness of 2.0 (“Cool stuff”)? Keen, a lapsarian prophet of the
Internet, argues that the new landscape is abuzz with noise and ignorance
rather than subtlety and knowledge (2007, p. 12). He sees a dreary world of
constant clatter and frenzied imagery denaturing aesthetics in favor of
uninterrupted stimulus. This is no 2.0 utopia! Postrel, then editor of the
libertarian Reason magazine and later a New York Times economics
journalist, wrote a Wall Street Journal op-ed welcoming 2.0 as “deeply
threatening to traditional leftist views of commerce . . . lending support to the
corporate enemy and even training graduate students who wind up doing
market research” (1999).

Media Studies 3.0

One needs more frottage between Media Studies 1.0 and 2.0, breaking down
the binary between them. Media Studies 1.0 should register struggle, and 2.0
should register structure. Currently, 1.0 draws one’s attention to audience
inoculation and corporate control, but leaves out productive labor and
environmental implications. Media Studies 2.0 uptakes and responses, but
again marginalizes these key topics. Media Studies 1.0 misses moments of
crisis and hope, presenting a subject-free picture of structure but no agency,
other than psychological response, shareholder maximization, and manage-
rial rationality. Its nationalistic cultural policies often deny the banality of
protected cinema, the futility of quota-driven television, and the partiality
of who is chosen to create national images and appear in them. Media 2.0 misses forms of domination and exploitation, presenting an institution-free picture with agency but no structure, other than fan creativity and reader imagination. Further, both 1.0 and 2.0 are doggedly tied to nativist epistemologies that must be transcended. The nativism is especially powerful in the United States, the United Kingdom, and their academic satellites such as Israel and Australia, where effortless extrapolations from very limited experience support totalizing theories and norms, due to the hegemony of English-language publishing and scholarly links to the warfare, welfare, and cultural bureaucracies. The following remark (paid for by Vodafone) encapsulates 2.0:

Mobile phones have become affective technologies. That is, objects which mediate the expression, display, experience and communication of feelings and emotions. ... They are an extension of the human body ... building and maintaining ... groups and communities. (Lasén, 2004)

This will not do. Thankfully it is challenged by a remark that could come from 3.0—funded by a nongovernment organization of Mexican electronics workers:

The increasingly faster and more versatile computers, appealing mobile phones, high-definition TVs, Internet, tiny music players, ingenious photo cameras, entertaining games consoles and even electronic pets give us the idea of a developed, pioneering and modern world. It is indeed a new era for many; but the dark side of this prosperous world reveals a very different reality, that far from taking us to the future, takes us back to a darker past. (Centro de Reflexión y Acción Laboral, 2006)

Media Studies 3.0 is as much about experiences as technologies or institutions. The media color the world. They give it meaning; and the process is reciprocal. The sounds, stories, and pictures that are the media—whether social or antisocial—actually come from people. Old stories from oral traditions become commercial narratives. Letters to the editor tell newspapers what interests their readers. Audience measurements and focus groups instruct producers on which TV shows are likely to succeed and why. Fans become creators as they write zines that in turn become story ideas.
Marketers trawl street fairs, clubs, and fan sites to uncover emergent trends. Coca-Cola hires African Americans to drive through the inner city selling soda and playing hip-hop. AT&T pays San Francisco buskers to mention the company in their songs. Street performance poets rhyme about Nissan cars for cash, simultaneously hawking, entertaining, and researching. Subway’s sandwich commercials are marketed as made by teenagers. Cultural studies graduates become designers, and graduate students in New York and Los Angeles read scripts for producers and pronounce on whether they tap into audience interests.

Semiotics textbooks that critically deconstruct commercial culture adorn advertising executives’ bookcases. Precariously employed part-timers prowl the streets with DVD players under their arms to ask target audiences what they think of trailers for upcoming movies, or while away their time in theaters spying on how their fellow spectators respond to coming attractions. Opportunities to vote in the Eurovision Song Contest or a reality program determine both the success of contestants and the profile of active viewers who can be monitored and wooed. In all these instances, audience creativity is important. It informs and frightens producers, simultaneously offering them leads on stories and trends and daunting them with its changeability and friskiness. End-user licensing agreements ensure that players of corporate games online and contributors to official discussion groups about film or television sign over their cultural moves and access. Such topics frequently elude 1.0 and 2.0. They do not fit those models.

Studying tourism through the media and vice versa must blend ethnographic, political-economic, and aesthetic analyses in a global and local way, establishing links among the key areas of cultural production around the world (Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East) and diasporic and dispossessed communities engaged in their own cultural production. Media 3.0 needs to be a media-centered version of area studies, with diasporas as important as regions. It must be animated by collective identity and power: how human subjects are formed and experience cultural and social space. Taking its agenda from social movements as well as intellectual ones, and its methods from economics, politics, communications, sociology, literature, law, science, medicine, environmental studies, anthropology, history, and art, Media Studies 3.0 should focus on gender, race, class, sexuality, sustainability, and pleasure, across national lines—an apt setting for those working on tourism.

One can gain some tips on doing this from the history of theorizing culture. It has usually been studied in two registers: via the social sciences and the humanities—truth versus beauty. Culture has been a marker of
differences and similarities in taste and status, as explored interpretatively or methodically. In the humanities, cultural texts have long been judged by criteria of quality, as practiced critically and historically. For their part, the social sciences have focused on religions, customs, times, and spaces, as explored ethnographically or statistically. Thus, whereas the humanities articulate differences through symbolic norms (e.g., which classes have the cultural capital to appreciate high culture and which do not), the social sciences articulate differences through social norms (such as, which peoples cultivate agriculture in keeping with spirituality and which do not) (Benhabib, 2002; Wallerstein, 1989). This distinction feeds into the Cartesian dualism separating thought from work. It assumes that humans have two distinct natures: the intelligent and the corporeal. One is focused on action, the other on reason. That binary has dominated media studies, posing oppositions of society versus economy and audience versus meaning. It haunts 1.0 and 2.0.

For all its sticky origins in Cartesianism, this bifurcation and silencing of labor and culture cannot and should not hold. Historically, the best critical political economy and the best cultural studies have worked through the imbrication of power and signification. Blending them can heal the fissure between fact and interpretation, the social sciences and the humanities, and truth and beauty, under the sign of a principled approach to cultural democracy. Grossberg recommends “politicizing theory and theorizing politics” by combining abstraction and grounded analysis (1997). That requires a focus on the contradictions of organizational structures, their articulations with everyday living and textuality and their intrication with the polity and economy, addressing production, consumption, and social stratification. Half a century ago, Smythe studied TV texts as “a group of symbols” that “serve as a medium of exchange between the mass media and the audience.” He recognized that analyses of infrastructure and content must be supplemented by accounting for the conditions under which culture is made, circulated, received, interpreted, and criticized: “The produced program is … more than the sum of the program ingredients” because it is encrusted with “contextual and explicit layers of meaning” that emerge during its creation and consumption (1954, p. 143).

Relevant work toward 3.0 is already underway. Rajagopal notes that because the television, the telephone, the Internet, the neoliberal, and the outgoing tourist are relatively new to India, “markets and media generate new kinds of rights and new kinds of imagination … novel ways of exercising citizenship rights and conceiving politics” (2001). For Winocur (2002), women’s talkback radio in Latin America since the fall of US-backed
dictatorships has offered a simultaneously individual and social forum for
new expressions of citizenship in the context of decentered politics, emergent
identities, minority rights, and gender issues—a public space that transcends
the subordination of difference and the privileging of elite experience. Mosco
(2004) starts from the power of mythology then “builds a bridge to political
economy” in his investigation of neoliberal doxa about empowerment,
insisting on “the mutually constitutive relationship between political
economy and cultural studies” as each mounts “a critique of the other.”
One can note similar intent animating such innovations as Sarai, the
Free Software Foundation, and the Alternative Law Forum—exemplary
instances of Media Studies 3.0 in formation. They blend internationalism,
political economy, ethnography, and textual analysis, and resist the binarism
of 1.0 and 2.0.

The art world can incarnate this approach in its critical views of tourism.
For instance, Amsterdam’s urbanscreens.org uses electronic billboards as
public space to encourage active citizenship, as do Ars Electronica of Linz
and Melbourne’s Federation Square. Artists draw attention to personal
multimedia messaging services and corporate occupancy of public space by
placing passersby on billboards, as per Zhang Ga’s Times Square People’s
Portrait, for all the world a throwback to Judy Holliday’s moment of
celebrity in the classic Hollywood film It Should Happen to You (George
Cukor, 1954), when she buys advertising space in Columbus Circle to
promote herself.

Anderson and Wolff (2010), lapsed sacerdotal zealots of the new media
from Wired magazine, say the web is dead because social networks and
software applications are supplanting the old fantasy of an open frontier
with a new hegemony of a few institutions. Schiller (2007) challenges social
media enthusiasts to query the way that economic inequalities fuel new
consumer needs, as people rush to purchase inferior services at high cost. In
the United States, for instance, the decline in governmental oversight of
the media since World War II has diminished the quality and regulation of
competition, allowing telecommunication companies to exploit the need
for connectedness in times of fragmentation.

CONCLUSION

To understand media infrastructure, it is necessary to address technological
innovation, regulation, labor, ownership, control, and environmental impact,
utilizing ethnographic, political-economic, scientific, and public-policy
research. To understand content, one must address production and undertake content and textual analysis, combining statistical and hermeneutic methods. To understand audiences, ratings, uses-and-gratifications, effects, active-audience, ethnographic, and psychoanalytic traditions, combining quantitative and qualitative measures should be standard.

Two examples that use 3.0 can be used to show the relationship between the media and tourism. They concern major tourist spots thematized in films. Each involves environmental destruction and popular responses to corporate malevolence. They blend older and newer media in artful ways appropriate to 3.0.

Much of Fox Studios’ *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) was shot in the Mexican village of Popotla. During the making of the picture, the national film studio Churubusco was renovated and a National Film Commission established, with satellites across the country providing *gabacho* moguls trips in governors’ helicopters, among other services. Restoring Mexico to the Hollywood map gained the film’s director Cameron the Order of the Aztec Eagle from a grateful government. *Titanic* was, in this context, a screen testimony to the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement/Tratado de Libre Comercio, which has seen offshore film and television production in Mexico increase thanks to easy shipment of technology, especially for low-budget shoots. Studio owner Rupert Murdoch approvingly cited the number of workers invisibly employed in making the film:

> this cross-border cultural co-operation is not the result of regulation, but market forces. It’s the freedom to move capital, technology and talent around the world that adds value, invigorates ailing markets, creates new ones.

Meanwhile, local Mexican film production spiraled downwards, from 747 titles in the decade prior to the agreement/tratado to 212 the following decade (Maxwell & Miller, 2006; Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell, & Wang, 2005, pp. 164–65).

There is a cruel irony to this liquid globalization of cultural labor: the cost of the film could have provided safe drinking water to 600,000 people for a year. People submerged in the credits to *Titanic* (or not listed at all) supposedly benefited from the textualization of a boat laden with wealthy tourists and *lumpen* steerage that had been sunk by invisible ice and business bombast 80 years earlier. During filming, Popotla was cut off from the sea and local fisheries by a 6-feet-high and 500-feet long movie wall, built to keep citizens away. Fox’s chlorination of surrounding seawater decimated
sea urchins, which locals had long harvested, and reduced overall fish levels by a third (Kushner, 1998; Miller et al., 2005, p. 165). Today, Popotla is promoted as a destination for smiling foreigners eager to see where their favorite drowning sequences were shot at the charmingly named “Foxploration” (http://www.bajatours.org/about_rosarito_beach; http://www.rosaritoinn.com/foxtour.htm).

Such arrogant despoliation has not gone unanswered. In collaboration with artists like Jim Bliesner, the Popotlanos decorated the wall with rubbish to ridicule the filmmakers, and adopted the rallying cry mariscos libre (freedom for shellfish). (Photographs are available at rtmark.com/popotlainages.html.) This nifty environmental critique has largely eluded journalistic and scholarly analysis. Ars Electronica awarded the Popotlanos a prize for “symbolic low-tech resistance to real high-tech destruction” that was in keeping with the movie’s textual—if not industrial—class politics. But the award was a fraction of the money Ars Electronica gave the film’s producers for their innovative special effects. Resistance has come from groups using social media to pose as officials from the World Trade Organization to underscore the damage done to livelihoods and the environment. The Popotlanos’ view of Cameron’s putatively green, pro-indigenous, anti-imperialist Avatar (2009) is not on record, but their town is currently vilified by the likes of The Washington Times as a site for “illegals” seeking to enter the United States (Coombe & Herman, 2000; gatt.org/popotla.html; Kushner, 1998; Popotla vs. Titanic, n.d.; Sekula, 2001; Spagat, 2010).

Cameron acknowledges the need to change filmmaking in light of the ecological crisis. He is quick to point out that “Avatar was an enormous battle film that took place in a rainforest but was 100% Computer-Generated” (Cheney, 2010; quoted in Miller, 2010). When he castigated the Pacific Northwest for extracting oil from tar sands, the Edmonton Sun editorialized in best un-Canadian fashion “James Cameron is a Hypocrite” for working in California, where energy comes from power companies that use coal from elsewhere (Edmonton Sun, 2010).

Three years after Titanic, Fox made The Beach (Boyle, 2000), where a modern-day Asian Eden suddenly turns nasty for jaded tourists. Like the earlier film, it starred the environmental moralist Leonardo DiCaprio (Biggs, 2000). The Beach was shot in Maya Beach, part of Thailand’s Phi Phi Islands National Park. Natural scenery was bulldozed because it did not fit the company’s fantasy of a tropical idyll: sand dunes were relocated, flora rearranged, and a new strip of coconut palms planted. The producers paid off the government with a donation to the Royal Forestry Department, and campaigns with the Tourism Authority to twin the picture as a promotion
for the country. The damaged sand dunes of the region collapsed in the next
monsoon, their natural defenses against erosion destroyed by Hollywood
bulldozers. Thai environmental and pro-democracy activists publicized this
arrogant despoliation, while the director claimed the film was “raising
environmental consciousness” among a local population whose appreciation
of these things lagged “behind” US “awareness” (Law, Bunnell, & Ong,
2007; Miller et al., 2005; Shoaib, 2001; Tzanelli, 2006). Director Boyle
heroically announced his intention to “give something back to Thailand” by
hiring Thai apprentices but then complained that “[w]e were hauling 300
fucking people around wherever we went. And you know how hard it is to
learn Thai names. Every lunchtime was like a prime minister’s reception”
(quoted in Gilbey, 2002). Before the film was released—but no doubt after
having had their consciousness raised—the Ao Nang Tambon Administra-
tion Organization, the Krabi Provincial Administration Organization, and
various environmental groups filed a suit against Fox and local officialdom
for contravening the National Parks Act and the Environmental Protection
Act. It took seven years, but the Thai Supreme Court found in their favor in
2006 (The Nation, 2006). The reaction of the “300 fucking people” who were
being “hauled around” during production is not on record.

The political-economic background to such ecologically destructive
filmmaking implicates tourism. Structural adjustment as peddled by
neoliberal high priests at the World Bank, the International Monetary
Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the sovereign states that
dominate them has encouraged the Global South to turn away from
subsistence agriculture and toward tradable services, beyond manufacturing
capacity and in the direction of human exchange. In much of Southeast
Asia, these policies pushed people into littoral regions in search of work.
Fish-farming corporations created a new aquaculture, displacing the natural
environment of mangroves and coral reefs that protect people and land. The
requirement to reconstitute themselves as entertaining heritage sites and
decadent tourism playgrounds induced Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia
to undertake massive construction projects. They built resorts at the point
where high tides lap, attracting more and more workers and decimating
more and more natural protection. Areas that had not been directed to
remove natural barriers suffered dramatically fewer casualties in the 2004
tsunami (Bidwai, 2005; Sharma, 2005; Shiva, 2005). That ugly side to
tourism and the media is something 3.0 can specify, engage, and struggle
against. Doing so might make for a truly social media.
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