

Platform stage Global tourism

For many years the Globe has been often derided and occasionally praised as a tourist destination. Why? And does it matter? Dennis Kennedy and Gabriel Egan dispute the issue.

Dennis Kennedy

A tourist, like a theatre-goer, wants to experience the extraordinary for a limited time without personal responsibilities, taking the pleasure Mikhail Bakhtin called the 'carnavalesque'. Tourism grew in the 19th and 20th centuries with the availability of cheap travel, which itself was part of the alienating experience, adding to the sense of pilgrimage. Historians have noted that for the 19th-century traveller a train carriage window turned the passing landscape into a show, and from the top of the new Eiffel tower Paris could be experienced for the first time as a map of itself. What tourists normally want is the experience of the absolute 'other', a sense of the past as pre-modern and un-alienated. Tourist sites promise this and sometimes can achieve it only by staging 'authenticity', which is not a single quality derived from careful attention to historical detail but rather a product of the complex ways in which tourists respond to cultural sites as intellectual and sensual experiences. Many travellers today are perfectly aware that the touristic necessarily implies the inauthentic, yet are willing to play along - like spectators in the theatre--because the game is fun. When new, the Disney centres were derided for their fake reconstructions of American life but now, by the paradoxical twists of postmodernism, they are accepted as entirely authentic representations of the fakery which tourists enjoy while remaining fully conscious of the counterfeit. The new Globe is a wholly invented building and not, as a common misconception has it, a restoration of an existing theatre on the same site. Its round shape is one favoured by many festival sites in the past and present for bringing people together and providing a comforting environment in which, for a while at least, one may make oneself a friend among strangers. Being an invention, the project's cultural meaning is entirely dependent on the way it is represented to its consumers. The project's originator, Sam Wanamaker, was a structuralist inasmuch as he thought that the proper method of performing Shakespeare's works was implied in the texts, and a more complete understanding of the plays would emerge in a building which restored them to their first physical context. It is surprising, then, that the productions mounted by the Globe to date have not experimented with Elizabethan performance practices in any consolidated or consistent ways: even the 'authentically' costumed Henry V was acted and spoken in a modern style. Clearly the audiences enjoy the performances, but the model for their enjoyment is other modern events that invite spectator involvement, like football matches or rock concerts or 'Renaissance fayres'. The real attraction of the site is the total experience it offers, including the restaurants and exhibitions; together these give tourists something to tell the folks back home.

The entire Bankside district is being redeveloped and the Globe - that is, the Shakespeare Globe Centre - is undoubtedly succeeding, but not because of 'culture, education and entertainment' (Sam Wanamaker's goals named in the first issue of the newsletter *Bankside Globe*, 1973) but because of what these goals implicitly oppose,

tourism. Even charity and religion have been commodified by late capitalism, as too has the Olympics which formerly celebrated the amateur, along with much of Western theatre. The residual traces of humanism and high-art ideals of the Globe have little to do with its success. Tourism is an exchange which thrives on difference becoming familiar, and although the Globe still shows us that Shakespeare's world was not ours, the project is constantly in danger of effacing that difference. If Shakespeare's otherness is smoothed away, if his Elizabethan past ceases to seem like a different country, late capitalism's global homogenizing commodification will have won at the Globe as well.

Gabriel Egan

Tourism is indeed vital to the survival of some theatre companies, for the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon as for the Globe on Bankside. The RSC has managed sufficiently to decouple its productions from the other attractions of the town that they are, for instance, reviewed in the press in their own right and not as adjuncts to the business carried on by the Birthplace Trust and the souvenir shops. By contrast, the Globe theatre's work is read in the light of the entire site, which is perhaps inevitable since the project was designed from the beginning as a centre incorporating education and exhibition activities. The RSC has much smaller operational appurtenances and is unable to offer a masters degree programme or to fund its performances directly from tourism without government subsidy. You appear, Dennis, to consider tourism a necessary evil which is not as simplistic as it might appear; after all, are we not all tourists sometimes? My enjoyment of the Renaissance treasures in Florence are no doubt childlike to the knowing art historian. Your view of tourism is, I think, shared by the Globe project which holds an intellectual endeavour - knowing more about Shakespeare, his theatre, and culture - as a higher ideal which might lead from the simple tourist experience. I agree that this has 'little to do' with the Globe's success but these activities can fruitfully co-exist and, unlike at Stratford-upon-Avon, its tourist income lines no private pockets but is (once outgoings and development costs are covered) returned to the local community and to school and university groups.

The 1599 Globe was a reconstruction of the 1576 playhouse called The Theatre whose name consciously evoked the classical tradition of ancient playhouses. Foreigners in Renaissance London repeatedly used the terms *theatrum* and *amphitheatrum* when describing these tourist attractions to the folks back home, and in 1596 Johannes de Witt made the same classical connection when he sketched the Swan playhouse's 'sedilia' (lesser seats), 'porticus' (walkway), and 'orchestra' (senators' seats). The virtually round wooden playhouses of the late 16th century, made in imitation of the lost stone amphitheatres of 1000 years earlier, were themselves deliberate attempts to bring the distant past into the Elizabethan present and to understand this we must think about Tudor synthesis of continental cultural tastes with indigenous forms. These Elizabethan tourist sites competed with, shared audiences with, entertainments of animal torture and the sex industry, yet they produced dramatic art of enduring power. It is true that Shakespeare's theatrical 'world was not ours', but in an important way it was not his either, being already a dialectic between his Tudor present and a classical past which he and his fellow players recreated (in their venues and their works) without ever deluding themselves that such

a past could be innocently recovered. The struggle for those who articulate the project's aims to the public must be not so much to retain 'Shakespeare's otherness' as to understand this otherness as an ongoing engagement with the past.

DK

Our positions are not as far apart as they appear. Though it is a bit oversimplified to imply that because Shakespeare's own theatre evoked the Roman past, it was therefore dependant upon tourism, it is certainly the case that we are all tourists now and then. I actually like being a tourist. It is a liberating and often rejuvenating condition, with large opportunities for sensual and intellectual pleasure. It can take many forms, from the wildly adventurous to the modestly comforting. Though tourism contributes to a flattening of distinct cultures in the world, it is usually stimulating nonetheless and can even have a corrective effect on racism and extreme forms of nationalism. The difficulty is that tourism has become the world's largest industry. In many ways tourism demonstrates the contemporary triumph of late or monopoly capitalism, feeding off an ebullient 'First World' economy, engaging in globalized commerce, often with unfortunate impact on traditional and poorer societies. But of course Shakespeare is different. Many people reject the notion that they are tourists when at Bayreuth or the Edinburgh Festival, thinking of themselves as travellers for cultural improvement. Yet cultural tourism is well defined in the tourist trade as an important source of income. Many governments recognize its significance; William Rees-Mogg, Margaret Thatcher's chairman of the Arts Council, proclaimed in 1985 that 'the arts are to British tourism what the sun is to Spain'. My point is that all spectators at a production at the Globe theatre are tourists, not just the out-of-towners. They are not necessarily engaging with the past, but they are always engaging with an adventure activity. The Globe project, I would suggest, needs to identify more openly the ways in which it is part of and complicit with global tourism, so that it might mark its difference from other theatres and other adventure activities more clearly, and perhaps more honestly.

GE

While not dependant upon foreign visitors, the new capitalist theatre industry of the late 16th century was like the modern tourist industry you describe in that it popularized bygone culture, which made its critics cry 'vulgarization!' and 'failure to grasp the otherness of the past!' Total ignorance flattens cultural difference whereas tourism starts with willed engagement in the alien. Mere travel does not necessarily do this: have we not all met someone who saw the world during military service and came back thinking that foreigners are a funny lot? Your point is that 'all spectators' at a Globe performance, not just 'the out-of-towners', are necessarily tourists because, unlike other theatres, it is an 'adventure activity'. Too little is known about theatre audiences and their responses to what they see, and we simply have not the data for your assertion. I would not be surprised if there were world-weary Literature and Drama students making multiple visits to the Globe each summer because it is cheap

(£5 to stand), it takes place conveniently in the afternoon (evenings being prime time for less cerebral recreation), and it puts their study in a new demotic context. The Globe project is unfairly singled out in your narrative: the RSC is also 'part of and complicit with global tourism' (why else is a small market town in the West Midlands its home), so must it too strive to identify that connection more openly and honestly?

DK

Yes, the RSC is part of the tourist industry. Like other arts festivals, the RSC could not survive in a small town without travellers. More openly touristic are the various enterprises of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the hostelrys and restaurants of Stratford, and much of the larger economy of the town. The Shakespeare industry is now global, but Stratford is its symbolic capital. I don't wish to single the Globe out for criticism, nor suggest that cultural tourism is in itself a diminishing activity. A major difficulty in discussing the issue is that many people assume the touristic is automatically inauthentic or degrading to 'high' art. Class and intellectual biases against popular culture have probably influenced this notion; one of the most refreshing aspects of the Globe is its subversion of the stuffy attitudes that still continues to infect most theatre-going. If it could add higher quality productions to that subversion, and contextualize them with the Globe's relationship to tourism instead of pretensions to an Elizabethanist experience, it would not only be more honest: it would also be more fun.

GE

Who could refute that "higher quality productions" are desiderata at any theatre? It is hard for me to imagine how productions could be contextualized with the project's relationship to tourism, but I would support that. The word most often used at the Globe about the relationship between the present and the project's object of interest (the theatre world of 1600) is 'dialogue', which returns us to Bakhtin, with whom you began. Bakhtin's other celebrated idea (apart from carnival) was the dialogic nature of all communication - including dramatic art - which necessarily acknowledges its addressee. Traditional bourgeois theatres put their audiences in the dark, encouraging the actors to ignore them and them to ignore each other, so that an essentially social experience is deformed; it becomes individualistic voyeurism. In place of the active conflict which inheres in any ongoing negotiation of meaning, the experience becomes monological - a director's theatre, in which the shared territory is replaced by the director's 'reading' of the play: his or her choice of design, the specific instructions given to actors and so on. In its combination of common speech, new coinages, and high poetry, drama of Shakespeare's time is truly multi-voiced (Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia'), and this principle of diversity applies to the moment of performance also, there being no single reason to spend an afternoon at the theatre. Tourism is an essential part of the context in which play productions take place, at the Globe theatre as elsewhere. It always was.

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