

Blaž Križnik: An Experience of Modernity

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Travel, understood in the broadest sense of the term as mass mobility of people, goods and cultures, is characteristic of modernity. Numerous technological innovations and changes within the organisation of traffic, representation and communication, have contributed to the shape and development of modern society and have significantly influenced the principles, ideology and understanding of modernity. The substantial increase in traffic during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was necessary for the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of society. New means of transportation and infrastructure became one of the prevalent expressions of modernity, and simultaneously played an important ideological role within the formation and legitimisation of the modern social structures that create cities, national states and world economy. This heralded the deconstruction of former pre-modern community bonds. New forms of travel, as described in the writings of Baudelaire, Simmel and Benjamin, profoundly influenced work, everyday life and culture in cities such as Paris and Berlin of the period.

The speed of technological development in transport within the second half of the nineteenth century has, along with many other social and economic changes, not only influenced the development of mass production, but has continued to define the fast pace of all consumption. For example, the expansion of the railway network created the first wave of mass tourism in England as the railway and later the car made travel more accessible. What also happened was the commodification of travel itself. Travel now has two roles: one as integral to the organisation of industrial production and consumption, the other as a subject of mass consumption itself. The aim of travel took on an aesthetic dimension and its symbolic value superseded its function role within society.

The aesthetisation of consumption and everyday life are two important characteristics of contemporary society. The growth of communication has greatly facilitated production and consumption, with each product's distinctive aesthetic character. Exchange val-

ue no longer mirrors use value, but rather the symbolic and sign value. The *economy of signs*, which has re-established itself alongside, encompasses the omnipresent and eternal circulation of endless images and narratives. Consequently, the consumption of travel is dependent on the mechanisms of the representation of actual spaces rather than the actual spaces themselves. With the latter it is not only the growth of imaginary travels within the virtual world that is called into question. Within contemporary society, travel is more connected with the consumption of imaginary places rather than existing ones. A characteristic of numerous theme parks, which appeared within the last decade and are being advertised as more real than reality itself, is the mass consumption of alienated and de-contextualised images and narratives, filled with symbols and signs. As a result, one can travel to an imaginary Venice in: Florida, Guatemala, Las Vegas, Nagoya, Macao, Minnesota, Shenzhen, Tokyo and probably elsewhere.

The fast growth, commodification and aesthetisation of travel, directly influence the role of space within contemporary society, significantly altering its social and spatial organisation as well as our everyday experience of space itself. As opposed to actual places that were connected to pre-modern and modern society, we now find places composed of real and imaginary non-places, or the so called *spaces of flows*, which have become a dominating organisational form of social, economic and symbolic life in contemporary society. This does not imply the disappearance of traditional spaces, but asserts that within the conditions of fast urbanisation, globalisation and informatisation of society the meaning of a particular space is dependant upon its accessibility and its integration within the *spaces of flows*. Transitional spaces, such as airports, traffic junctions, hotel lobbies, motels, theme parks, congress centres and other scenes of spectacle, are in these terms distinct representations of modernity.

The contemporary social, cultural and ideological significance of travel has not changed significantly from the nineteenth century. It seems that any changes in the meaning of travel, reflect society's broader structural transformation.

Sociologist John Urry states that diverse historical periods during the development of

capitalist modes of production and consumption are also reflected within characteristic forms of tourism, in as much as we define the latter as one of the prevailing forms of commodified travel within modern society. Within early capitalism, tourism established itself above all as entertainment for the bourgeoisie. Mass tourism only became possible during industrial capitalism, when the conditions for mass consumption had been established. In spite of their connection, production remained separated from consumption, and this is reflected in the separation of the functional from the symbolic aspect of travel. The transformation of industrial into post-industrial capitalism is supposed to end tourism as a distinctive social practice, as today we spend most of our time as real or imaginary tourists. With production and consumption becoming more and more intertwined, the dividing line between the functional and aesthetic aspect of travel has also disappeared.

Tourism has been transformed from 'mass' into an extreme form of individual consumption, which mostly relies on the economy of signs – the symbolic and sign value. Moreover, the mechanisms of representation of spaces, which translate the latter into singular images and simplified narratives, provide the central role within this operation. According to Barthes, such de-contextualised images and narratives are the basis for the formulation of myths, which on various levels create new relationships of power within society or legitimise existing ones. It is the actual travel itself, which presents an important form of reproduction of such myths.

Jasmina Cibic's spatial interventions speak of travel, representation and reproduction of myths and their ideological background. They also disclose the contradictions of contemporary society, which are connected to the meaning and experience of travel and its commodification as well as with its specific mechanisms of representation and ideological domination. Cibic's spaces are at the same time actually installed and interlinked with the transitional *spaces of flows*. Or, in other words – the *spaces of flows* are an intrinsic part of Cibic's interventions. It seems that the intention of her spatial interventions is not the surpassing of the abovementioned contradictions, but the making of these contradictions into readable and evident ones. With this she uses the very mechanisms of

representation, which produce these contradictions in the first place – the translation of reality into singular images and simplified narratives. Along with the dissection of myths, the artist discloses that every space and its experience can be a subject of commodification and enforcement of real or symbolic power, as well as drawing attention to the ideological background of such appropriation. In this way, the mechanisms of representation and appropriation of space and its consumption can also function as a parable and critique of the activity of the art market. Jasmina Cibic critically points toward the questions of the ideological role of myths not only during the process of commodification of specific spaces and their experience, but commodification of everyday life in general.

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