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On the actual street

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ON THE ACTUAL STREET [revised version 24/7/03]

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SCIENCE**

Introduction

What can the study of the media contribute to the study of tourism? On the face of it, electronic media at least (which is what we principally have in mind when we talk in common-sense terms about ‘the media’) change the organisation of space by making available a ‘despatialised’ awareness (Thompson, 1993: 187) of other places.

Electronic media might seem, therefore, to make actual journeys across space less important. Instead, however, I will be arguing that media representations of the social world make certain places more important, reconfiguring the landscape within which tourism occurs. New ‘compulsions of proximity’ (Boden and Friedlander, 1994) undermine generalisations about the supposed evacuation of space and place in postmodernity, and media tourist sites are a good example of such compulsion.

Interest in the media’s impacts on the wider landscape of consumption has been gaining momentum for some time, and geography, as a discipline, has been central here. If an earlier generation of geographers (Meinig, 1979: 183; Jackson, 1994: viii) lamented the loss of a symbolic landscape based in architecture and place, recent work has explored how media references have helped create a new symbolic landscape. The ‘magic’ of mediated place encompasses shopping malls (Kowinski, 1985; Hopkins, 1990; Langman, 1992) and theme parks, particularly those which are

sites of current or historical media production (Davis, 1996; Gottdiener, 1997; Couldry, 2000: Part Two). Sharon Zukin captures a more general trend in the changing interrelations between place and media when she claims that DisneyWorld's architecture matters 'not because it is a symbol of capitalism, but because it is the capital of symbolism' (Zukin, 1991: 232). Rather than reduce this new landscape to an extension of the audience's supposed passivity before television (Sack, 1992, chapter 5), it is more useful to attend to its details, and the divisions and hierarchies that structure them; in short, to take seriously the idea that this landscape is a 'landscape of power' (as Zukin puts it), with all the complexity that implies.

This chapter will discuss material from a detailed study I made in 1995-8 of visits to the outdoor set of Britain's longest-running soap opera, *Coronation Street*, which is housed at Granada Studios Tour, Manchester, ('GST') on a site next to the Granada Television studios. I will move outwards from more straightforward aspects of why people visit GST to more adventurous suggestions about the ritual quality of 'the Street' set (as it is often called) as a pilgrimage site.

Studying the set of Coronation Street

The set of *Coronation Street* (GST's principal attraction for many, perhaps a majority of, visitors) is a place of paradox. Its visitors pay to visit a location they have already watched free on television for years: part of the pleasure is not seeing something different, but confirming that the set is the same as something already seen. The Street set undoubtedly has a 'power of place' in Dolores Hayden's (1995) term, and yet, on the face of it, is poorly qualified to satisfy Hayden's definition of the term (ibid: 9):

‘the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens’ public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory’. The Street set is, of course, only an image of an ‘ordinary urban landscape’: no one has ever lived or died there. Clearly, the Street set’s ‘power of place’ rests not on public history in the usual sense, but on shared fiction. It is, as we shall see, a place with ‘aura’, a ‘ritual place’. I want to explore the framework within which visits to GST are meaningful. This is not to ignore issues of economics (marketing strategies, leisure resources, and so on). On the contrary, the high cost of visiting GST (both money and time) makes it all the more important to establish the meaning of the place which attracts such expenditure.

What do people do on the set of *Coronation Street*? They walk down it: people sometimes summed up their visit in this phrase. But, since many spend an hour or more on the set, there must be more to the visit than that. People take photographs and are photographed at points of interest - outside the Rovers Return pub, the shops, the houses - but that too is over quickly. Almost everyone spends time testing the boundaries of the set’s illusion: looking through the houses’ letter boxes or windows, pressing doorbells and knocking on doors; looking round the houses’ backs (the ‘old’ houses have paved yards backing onto an alley, the ‘new’ houses have gardens). People compare the details of the set with their previous image of the Street, testing, for example, if the set is up to date with the plot. Some of the set’s details are aimed at visitors, not the television audience: for example, the ‘for sale’ notices in the newsagent’s window. There is a lot of laughter on the set, especially when it is crowded. There is, of course, the pleasure of pretending, for a moment, that you live on the Street, posing with door knocker in hand or calling up to one of the characters. The visit is an elaborate form of performance and exploration.

A significant minority of visitors will already have visited GST before. Of the 21 people who wrote to me in the course of my research, 6 had visited more than once and another 7 said they wanted to return. Of the 143 people I interviewed on site, 21% had visited before, some more than once. (I also interviewed 11 people off-site in 9 interviews, usually in people's homes; it is these longer interviews which are drawn on most in what follows; first names of off-site interviewees have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.) Taking the site sample, returnees were three times as likely to be women as men; they also (as one would expect, given costs) were more likely to live in GST's own region (76% from the North of England). Even if returnees are a distinct subset of visitors, the fact that people return to GST at all needs to be explained. Chris Rojek has written of 'the sense of anticlimax that often accompanies the visit' to contemporary tourist sites: 'we see it; but have we not seen it before in countless artifacts, images, dramatic treatments, and other reproductions?' (1993: 196). The risk of anti-climax would seem to be especially great at GST (every visitor has seen the Street countless times on television). Not only, however, were such comments rare, but the routine nature of some people's visits may depend precisely on the Street set's taken-for granted symbolic significance: 'it's something everyone does and that's it. It's like (. . .) the Tower of London (. . .) I mean, you wouldn't sit down and discuss your visit to the Tower of London with people'. Perhaps visiting the Street set is significant precisely because it is the place you routinely watch. We need to unravel the implications of this apparently simple claim.

Most people I interviewed were positive about their visit to GST. There is, of course, a wide spectrum of engagement. People may visit out of interest: to see 'what goes

on', 'how it all works', finding it 'educational'. There is the pleasure of participation in the fiction, seeing '*Coronation Street* come to life'. But the visit may also involve considerable emotional investment for both men and women. For John, the intensity of going to the Street was 'like being on a drug'. Some people said they found it difficult to believe that they were actually there - on the set. Underlying all these reactions is the sense that it is significant to 'be there': it is an 'experience' marked off from the ordinary'. As one man put it:

I want to see the place (. . .) where this thing is, you know. It's an absolute experience, isn't it, a magnificent experience, isn't it, to come to this place.

Being on the Street set, then, is intrinsically significant.

How can we go beyond this starting-point? As mentioned, it is the shared framework of significance underlying people's visits to the Street that I want to explore, a framework which may be shared both by those bored and those fascinated with it. That does not mean, however, that it is just the most common reactions that I discuss. I will put considerable weight on those most intensely engaged with the set, not because their detailed reactions are necessarily typical of the wider sample, but because, by putting so much weight upon the shared framework of significance, they reveal its thought-patterns most clearly.

Questions of Identity

A first step is to consider visits to the Street set as public expressions of identity.

One obvious significance is as an affirmation of Northern English, working-class identity, for which the programme *Coronation Street* has provided a widely recognised stereotype for almost forty years (Dyer et al., 1981; Geraghty, 1991; Shields, 1991: 222-29). The dangers and constraints of this stereotype were occasionally remarked upon critically by ‘Northerners’ who had been to the South or explicitly reproduced by interviewees from the South. The stereotype is, of course, only partly negative; the associations of a ‘Northern’ sense of ‘community’ are positive. A connection with their own living conditions was acknowledged by visitors who were themselves Northern and/or working class and talked of *Coronation Street* as just ‘ordinary’, ‘everyday living’. However *Coronation Street*’s image of (Northern) working-class life has been rejected as outdated by other soaps, whether representing the ‘South’ (*Eastenders*) or the ‘North’ (*Brookside*) (Geraghty, 1991: 34).

The question, then, of what *Coronation Street* represents - and therefore what visiting GST, and the Street set, might signify - is already a complex one. For Beth, *Coronation Street* ‘is our heritage (. . .) our culture’, a sign of not just Northernness but also of Englishness, like ‘the smell of green grass’. Issues of identity connect with the rhetoric of GST and Granada Television (companies with a mission to ‘represent’ the region), as this comment of an HGV driver from Lancashire made clear:

Being in the North-West, it’s on your doorstep, I’ve watched it for years (. . .) I’ve been brought up watching it (. . .) and here we are [laughs]. You know, it comes up

on telly and you think, Ah, it's only round the corner that, bit like your local (. . .)

Like the tour rep said, it's put us on the map sort of thing (. . .)

The overall position is, however, more complex. Not only does *Coronation Street* represent only one in a whole field of competing representations of Northern and/or working class identity on British television. Also, for many, it is strongly associated, not with social reality now, but with the past: whether a personal past ('a breath of home') or, more starkly, a social past that is lost. As a middle-aged couple from Warrington put it:

[Man:] [sighs] I think [CS] is a place that no longer exists in reality really (. . .)

[Woman:] They have tried to update it but comparing it to where we live that neighbourly spirit has disappeared, you know.

[Man:] Yeh, and mainly due to television (. . .) people come home from work or wherever and they shut the front door and they switch on the telly and that's the end of it.

The irony that the community which *Coronation Street* projects has been destroyed in part by television itself is powerful.

In any case, visiting GST must mean more than a simple affirmation of class or regional identity. For any affirmation of identity at GST is complicated by the fact that the programme is, as everyone knows, a fiction and at GST you see how that fiction is constructed. That may bring disappointments quite separate from any wider sense of social identity affirmed by being there. For Beth, as mentioned, the

programme's connection with her life (particularly her childhood) was intense. But, reflecting on her visit, she felt disappointment:

It's like when you were a child, you imagine something, then you go back to it as an adult and it's totally different (. . .) it was exactly like that. Everything just seemed very small and flat.

Issues of identity are here cut across by issues of fiction.

Indeed, it is striking how little people spoke to me explicitly about class or regional identity. Perhaps it was too obvious to mention; certainly the dynamics of the interview situation (with me being a middle-class Southerner) may have encouraged some reticence. But another important feature of GST as a tourist site is that there is no place where class and regional identity are explicitly focussed as such. Many visitors to GST, in any case, are neither working-class nor from the North. There is, however, another identity affirmed at GST which cuts across regional and class divides: the 'community' of the programme's fans. A number of people mentioned their pleasure in the 'camaraderie' on the site that this may generate. It was expressed by Susan and Glenys (both lower middle-class Southerners):

[Susan:] . . . as you're looking over there, you say something, and then somebody behind you will say, Oh, so-and-so and so-and-so. And you tend to get . . . into another crowd then (. . .)

[Glenys:] So we were all there . . . with a common . . . thought, that we wanted to see Corrie (. . .) so you could talk to people and know that you had something in common even if it was only the fact that we were all *Coronation Street* fans.

The community of fans connects people who do not know each other, across different regions and classes; visiting the set may crystallise a temporary sense of that community, what the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1996: 11, 13) has called the ‘empathetic “sociality”’ we feel when we find “those who think and feel as we do”. Once again, however, it is dangerous to generalise: from my observations, most people went round the set on their own or with the small groups in which they came. There was certainly a sense of sociality on the set - expressed most outwardly in laughter - but visitors generally experienced this in parallel to, rather than with, each other. To understand GST better as a tourist site, we need, then, to go beyond the obvious shared identities performed at the site, and look more closely at the detailed ways in which visiting the set makes sense as a practice.

Being on the Street

The basis for the Street set’s significance is, seemingly, very simple: it is the place where the programme’s filming goes on, the actual place you have watched from your home over the years. There is of course an important fantasy element to being on the Street, the feeling you are in the place where the cast are filmed: it is ‘quite magical really, to actually believe that you’re there on the spot where . . . the stars walk along’ (Barbara, cf John). But this imaginative connection with the programme’s fictional

frame depends on fact: the fact that the set is the place of external filming. What are the implications of this?

The Street's significance as the place where filming in fact goes on was marked routinely in people's language. To be on the Street set is to be on the 'actual Street', to 'be there' at the place where 'programmes are actually made'. Its houses are the 'real' places of filming, not mere 'studio sets' or 'mock-ups'. This is a principal reason why people go to the Street set: 'I just wanted to see where it was done' (Julie); 'good to see the actual street where the show is filmed'. The fact that the set is the actual place of filming was not something most people quickly registered before moving on. I often heard people testing it out, wanting it confirmed:

Woman (20s) in large group of women asks guide: 'Do they really film here?'

Man (middle-aged) asks the guide: 'Is this the original *Coronation Street*?' 'No', he's told, 'this was built in 1982'. 'Where was the original one?' 'It's where the New York Street is' is the answer. 'But it was all done here [i.e. on this site]?' 'Yes', says the guide. (extracts from Fieldnotes)

Not everyone was convinced of this fact. There were some people who rejected the idea that the Street set is significant because it is a place of filming. Such counter-opinions emerged occasionally when I interviewed a couple or larger group: for example, the view that historical tourist sites are more 'authentic' than media tourist sites. These, however, remained minority voices among those I met - not surprisingly, since my sample was weighted towards those interested in the Street set.

Visiting the Street set may even involve an element of dislocation. If television 'constantly invokes . . . an unmediated experience that is forever absent, just beyond a hand reaching for the television dial' (Anderson, 1994: 82-83), then collapsing this distance may be experienced as puzzling: 'it's really weird though walking on it, because you watch it on TV and then you're thinking, well, people actually walk down this Street filming'. The sense of strangeness may continue when you reflect back on the visit much later:

[Debbie:] I don't know, it's sort of like being in a dream really, thinking I'm actually walking down *Coronation Street*. I just couldn't believe it (. . .) it just doesn't seem real sometimes. (cf Barbara)

For some people, the significance of 'being there' - on the Street set - goes beyond what they can rationally explain. For John, there was a sense, almost, of privilege:

I know that's silly because literally millions of people go a year now, and millions of people have seen it, but I felt that I was the only one, I felt I was there and I'd seen it for so long, and . . . it was like a dream come true, really.

A Canadian woman, originally from India, visiting during a holiday in Europe, put it this way:

It's hard to express what I felt when I walked up to the Street to actually feel I was there, I mean I think that's going to stay with me for ever. Because it was such a

wonderful feeling, it just left me speechless, you know, I just wanted to stand there.

Why does it matter so much ‘just to stand there’? And why does it matter so much to show others you have been there?

[Glenys:] That is what we were there for, wasn't it, to see the Street (. . .) We've got a photograph . . . on our wall in our room at work, of the two of us outside the Rovers [Susan laughs] . . . and that's us [laughs]. And we've got lines all round it, so everyone can see it. We've been there [laughs].

All media-based tourist sites, of course, involve a sense of ‘being there’ (‘there’, the place from which a media narrative has been generated). As with many clichés, however, it is a mistake to dismiss it too quickly before examining the pattern of thinking condensed within it. This will provide us with a better understanding of how media-based tourism works as a symbolic practice.

Aura

We saw how important it is for most visitors to know that the Street set is the actual place of filming. This relates to a distinctive feature of British soaps: what Christine Geraghty has called their ‘regional authority’ that comes from representing a place with a regional identity (1991: 35). An extension of this notion of authenticity is the assumption that the soaps are filmed in real places, or at least that they are produced

in a place situated in the narrative's region. Here is one man from Lancashire who had emigrated to Canada:

Anybody watching any show in the States, if they went to Miami, I mean they may not see people from *Miami Vice* because it may be filmed somewhere else entirely, but we know this [CS] is filmed here, you see.

We also have seen that, for some visitors, the Street is a place with a precise history, associated with specific episodes (Barbara, cf John). Another woman wanted to enter the set of the *Rovers Return* because 'there's a lot things happened there over the years'. In each case, the Street set is regarded as a place with a history which is 'fictional' only in a general sense (the sense in which *Coronation Street* as a whole is a fiction). If we regard the Street set as a place of filming (the perspective most people adopted), the set has a real history - of filming - tied to the history of the programme's narrative. It is the real, not fictional, place where fictional events were actually filmed.

That sense of history was at issue when John rejected going to Blackpool to see Granada's 'World of *Coronation Street*' exhibition.

I've no desire to go, I would hate it, because it's not the real one. [short laugh] All right, so people could say, 'But that [CS] isn't the real one'. But it is, it's where they film the outdoor scene, it's the one where the actors are, where the studios are, where it all originated. Where did Blackpool come into it?

Others made similar comments. One woman who was visiting Manchester during a holiday in Blackpool put it: 'no, we thought we'd come to the original'. The Blackpool 'Experience' is 'not the real Street'; only the Street set itself is 'the real thing', 'the real place'. Why? Because 'you know it's all done here'.

Note that John's sense that the Street set, and only the Street set, is worth visiting exists despite his knowing that it is 'only' a set and that others regard it as such ('all right, so people could say, "But that isn't the real one"'). This might seem to confirm the 'postmodern' truth, wittily expressed by Umberto Eco, that we live in a world in which the 'completely real' is identified with the 'completely fake' (Eco, 1986: 7, quoted in Rojek, 1993: 160); the Street set from one point of view is (as John understands) only 'fake'. But, again, to leave our analysis there would be a mistake.

People's preferences for seeing the 'real Street' (the 'original') are interestingly at odds with Walter Benjamin's famous thesis on the loss of 'aura' 'in the age of mechanical reproduction' (Benjamin, 1968). What people who reject the Blackpool 'Experience' hope to obtain at GST is precisely an 'aura'. Not the 'aura' of something outside the 'mechanical reproduction' of filming, but the 'aura' of the place and process of filming itself: using Benjamin's phrase, 'its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' (1968: 220), the aspect of a place that can only be grasped by going there. As Debbie put it in relation to the Street set, 'people never appreciate it, unless they're there'. Returning to John, 'aura' for him is not just some general notion of 'being there' inherent in any media site, but a quality precisely tied to the set's material history. Benjamin defined 'authenticity' in just this way: 'the essence of all that is transmissible from [the object's] beginning, ranging from its substantive

duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced'(1968: 221).

Compare that with John's explanation of why the Street set is better than a mere studio set:

I have seen studios (. . .) but nothing to compare with the Street (. . .) When you're sitting in the studio, you do see (. . .) the unreality, but on the Street (. . .) it's a real street, albeit there's nothing behind the door as such. But you're still there, it's still real (. . .) There was a funny thought that went through my mind, that it had been raining (. . .) And I actually looked down and thought, this is real because there's real rain, it sounded so stupid. And I stood in a puddle and I thought, Oh Crikey! Yeh, this is real, it's not covered over, it's always outdoors . . . the actors go out in all weather (. . .) it's real rain and it's real cobbles and it's real dirt [laughs] (. . .) You don't expect a set to be that real.

John was not the only person to regard the rain on the set as significant.

Why is the rain so special for John? Hardly just because it confirms the physicality of the set: even a studio set is physical in this respect. The rain is significant in part, I suggest, because in a small way it is 'a testimony to the history' which the set 'has experienced' (Benjamin); it is a token of the set's authenticity and John's authentic experience of it, his definitive access to its 'aura'. The rain which has fallen, and will remain, on the set after John has gone allows him to project into both past and future the connection - between viewer and Street - that 'being there' involves.

The Street Set as pilgrimage site

I want now to develop this notion of connection by exploring a ritual dimension to what people do on the Street set. Here is how one multiple visitor, Michael, described being on the Street set in a letter to me:

From the moment I put my foot on the Street I feel like a star. I start my walk down the Street starting from the 'Rovers Return' to the 'corner shop'. I look through ALL the windows and through ALL letter boxes. I touch the stone cladding of number 9. I feel so so very happy and trouble free when I walk down the Street (. . .) I just can't believe it. Every time I walk down the Street I get that same wonderful happy feeling (. . .) It [GST] is the best thing and most wonderful thing I have ever done.

There is a palpable sense of ritual here. Again, rather than dismiss it as eccentric, we should contextualise it in terms of what is perhaps the Street set's most fundamental attraction: its status as 'ritual place'.

In order to explain that claim, we must return to the basic question: what (for all visitors, not just devoted fans) does being on the Street set involve? Being on the Street involves a comparison between what you have watched over the years and the set itself. On the face of it, this is a banal comparison (seeing if the Street 'is actually like it is on telly'), but its dimensions are worth considering.

First, you are linking things in two different time-frames, the years during which you have watched the Street and the time now when you walk onto the set: 'for me, it was

amazing because I've seen it on the TV for so many years now (. . .) For me it was brilliant to finally see everything'. It is the bringing together of two separate time-frames (the time of your regular watching over the years, the time of your visit now) that allows a sense of completion: 'to finally see everything'. In Barbara's account, the transition between the time-frames of long-term watching and present visit is reproduced exactly in the transition from the final video image of the Street to the sight of the Street set itself was similar:

You went in a room where they showed you a video of sort of past episodes, and then they drew the curtain back. You'd watched it on the telly and then it was actually there. And then you set off and then you walked along it.

The feeling of walking into the space of the screen itself is vivid: this 'freedom' is clearly part of the designed effect of sites such as GST (cf Rojek, 1993; Davis, 1996). It works, however, partly because it reproduces in miniature the transition between time-frames that being on the Street itself involves. That is why, for Barbara, there was 'no point of actually going on the Street and then doing the video'. Second, being on the Street involves comparing the results of two different activities, two ways of looking, for which sometimes people used different words. 'Watching' the Street on television, you are constrained in how you can look at the set: you are limited by camera-angles, and so on. 'Seeing' the Street set close up allows you to look at its details in your own time and from any angle, and then put the whole thing back together:

I spent quite a bit of time there [on the set] and then after lunch I went back there and took a small turn [. . .] you know standing back and seeing it and picturing it in my mind as to how it appears on TV.

Seeing what the set ‘is actually like’ is an active process of finding out, qualitatively different from watching television. There is also a third, spatial, dimension to the comparison. ‘Watching’ the Street is something we do in the home, whereas ‘seeing’ the Street set can only be done in GST’s public space. Being on the set therefore connects two normally separate sites of discourse: the home and the site of media production. All these dimensions (time, activity, and space) are combined in Julie’s comment:

It was nice to see. An experience that you (. . .) actually sit in your living room and you’re actually watching that place, but now you’re actually standing in that place, and you can say (. . .) I’ve actually been there, and it felt good.

‘Being there’ involves connecting your ‘everyday’ practice of private viewing with the public place where the programme is actually filmed. This connection of different times, places, and activities is neither neutral nor trivial:

It’s magic, it’s a great feeling, sitting at home when you watch telly and say I WAS THERE! To think you could do that.

Just nice to know that you’ve seen [it], when you watch telly, that you’ve actually been and seen it for yourself.

As the last two quotations suggest, the significance of having been there goes on being enhanced after the visit is complete. This is because the connection made by 'being there' can be relived when at home you watch the programme again:

[Susan:] I mean, we were UNBEARABLE when we first came home, because as soon as it came on, [we said] We were there! [Glenys laughing]. And that's where we stood! (. . .) Every time we see it, we think, [whispers] Oh we've been there! [Glenys laughs] And it's still, it's still there, Oh, we've been there. It's really good, you know.

Since the private/ public connection made by 'being there' on the set is intrinsically significant, just the basic acts of occupying space on the Street are significant in themselves: 'to actually stand in the Street is lovely' (woman); 'just walking up and down something you see regularly in front of your eyes' (man). It is enough that you are, or where, 'there'.

All tourist sites, however, involve the realisation of some private/ public connection: a visit is always preceded by a private act of expectation. There is much more, however, to the Street set's 'power of place' than that. For the force of the connection the set embodies is the way it formalises and spatialises the hierarchical relationship between the 'media world' and the non-media, or 'ordinary', world. Not only is this hierarchical relationship significant and pervasive in contemporary societies (a large claim, of course, that I do not have space to defend here, but see Couldry, 2000), but it is precisely the type of category hierarchy that is played upon in ritual practice. The

work of the anthropologist Jonathan Smith (1987) is helpful here. He has drawn on Durkheim and Levi-Strauss's accounts of symbolic classification to develop an original account of ritual place. 'Ritual' he argues:

relies for its power on the fact that it is concerned with quite ordinary activities placed within an extraordinary setting . . . Ritual is a relationship of difference between 'nows' - the now of everyday life and the now of ritual place; the simultaneity, but not the coexistence, of 'here' and 'there'. Here (in the world) blood is a major source of impurity; there (in ritual space) blood removes impurity. Here (in the world) water is the central agent by which impurity is transmitted; there (in ritual) washing with water carries away impurity. Neither the blood nor the water has changed; what has changed is their location. This absolute discrepancy invites thought, but cannot be thought away. (1987: 109-110)

On the Street set, analogously, people do ordinary things - walking up and down, looking in shop windows, and so on - but they do them in an extraordinary setting (the frame of the Street set). Indeed, the whole process of being on the Street, as just argued, brings out connections - and differences - between the 'ordinary' process of television viewing (the 'now' of everyday viewing) and the 'extraordinary' moment of the visit (the 'now' of being on the 'actual Street'). The two situations remain of course separate, and the difference 'cannot be thought away': it is a difference within a symbolic hierarchy. The set is not any space, any street, but the 'actual Street' that you and everyone else have been watching all those years from your home. It is, in this precise sense, a ritual place, where two 'worlds' are connected.

The ritual dimensions of visiting the Street set encourage us to take our analysis one conceptual stage further, and see these visits as, effectively, ‘pilgrimages’. The metaphor of ‘pilgrimage’ has become so routine, so laden with irony and parody, that it has, arguably, lost analytic value – if, that is, we regard clichés as empty. I prefer however to follow the social psychologist Michael Billig’s argument that it is precisely the patterns of banal language that, by attrition, reinforce large-scale patterns of thought which are anything but banal in their consequences (Billig, 1995, 1997).

The general significance of the ‘pilgrimage’ cliché beloved of journalists and also academics (Reader and Walter, 1993) – a chosen journey to a significant place - derives from the way that contemporary societies are overlain, but unevenly, with shared narratives of significance. The landscapes of contemporary tourism are an important way in which such narratives are enacted and embodied. We make ‘pilgrimages’ to distant places which have not only personal significance, but a guaranteed social importance too; they matter to an imaginable group of others, even if when I set off on a pilgrimage I do not know who in particular I will meet on that journey. ‘Pilgrimage’ points are potential gathering-points where the highly abstract nature of contemporary social connection can be redeemed, through an encounter with a specific place. In general sociological terms, therefore, pilgrimage points are places where the ‘disembedded’ nature of late modern communities can be ‘reembedded’ (Giddens, 1990) in the form of a journey to a chosen, but distant site.

‘Pilgrimage’ in this broad sociological sense, far from being a trivial aspect of the modern social world, is endemic within it; contemporary tourism (the commercial

organisation of significant exceptional journeys) is saturated with possibilities of 'pilgrimage'. Media pilgrimages are specifically journeys to points with significance in media narratives. Through media pilgrimages, not only is the abstract nature of the media production system 'reembedded' in an encounter, for example, with a site of filming or a celebrity, but the significance of places 'in' the media is more generally confirmed. The media pilgrimage is both a real journey across space, and an acting out in space of the constructed 'distance' between 'ordinary world' and 'media world'.

To use the word 'pilgrimage', however, is not to claim any religious significance for such media-related journeys. In line with Durkheim's general rethinking of religious experience in terms of experiences of sociality, one leading concept of pilgrimage (Victor Turner's) encompasses many journeys without any link to religion:

Both for individuals and for groups, some form of deliberate travel to a far place intimately associated with the deepest, most cherished axiomatic values of the traveler seems to be a sort of 'cultural universal'. If it is not religiously sanctioned, counseled or encouraged, it will take other forms. (Turner and Turner, 1978: 241).

So there is no 'sacrilege' in extending the term pilgrimage to secular forms, including tourism. On the contrary, the faded religiosity of this term captures exactly the sense of continuity that we need to grasp the condensed resonances of contemporary media-saturated tourism.

GST is a 'pilgrimage' point in the sense that it is a central, symbolically significant place, where 'special' time can be spent apart from the time of 'ordinary' life (cf Turner, 1974), time that is 'special' simply because spent within 'media space': 'your time on the Street'. What is affirmed by going there is not necessarily the specific values (if any) associated with *Coronation Street* the programme, or even with the act of watching it. What is affirmed, more fundamentally, is the 'value' condensed in the symbolic hierarchy of the media frame itself: its symbolic division of the social world into two incompatible parts, a non-media world (where we live) and a media world to which we may (exceptionally) travel.

Conclusion

Dean MacCannell's pioneering 1970s research into the social and cultural resonances of tourism, for all its theoretical richness, received less attention than it deserved, perhaps because of the totalising, functionalist, neo-Durkheimian framework that it implied (although MacCannell himself tried to move beyond that framework: 1992: chapter 11). MacCannell rightly rejected Daniel Boorstin's reductive (1961) analysis of all tourism as just travel to 'pseudo-places' already seen on television, and offered instead the more constructive interpretation of tourism as a 'form of ritual respect for society' (1973: 589) and the huge range of work that complex contemporary societies contain. The links between MacCannell's vision and the 1990s growth of tourism to places where the media work (film or TV locations) are now clear, even if, in making them, we need to reemphasise the power dimensions of the symbolic landscape within which such journeys are meaningful (the hierarchical relation between 'media' and 'ordinary' worlds being an aspect of contemporary social power).

From our perspective today, we can see such journeys, and their growing media component, not as postmodern aberrations but as part of a wider intensification of the centralising processes of modernity. Ernesto Laclau in his book *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* captures the paradox at work here very well:

‘[contemporary societies] are required by their very dynamics to become increasingly mythical. This is linked to the proliferation of dislocations peculiar to advanced capitalism . . . commodification, bureaucratic rationalisation, and . . . the increasingly complex forms of division of labour’ (1990: 67, added emphasis). One of the primary myths of the contemporary world is that ‘the media’ are our central access-point to whatever we might want to call social ‘reality’ (cf Couldry, 2003: chapter 3). It is no longer then surprising that occasionally we wish, many of us, to spend our scarce time and money visiting the places where the media productions that instantiate that myth are made. Such sites of media tourism are, after all, not visits to just any place of work. They are visits to the places where the images are produced through which ‘society’ imagines it sees itself.

[6698 words + references]

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A more detailed account of my research at Granada Studios Tour is set out in Couldry (2000: Part Two); for a fuller development of the concept of ‘media pilgrimages’ suggested here, see Couldry (2003: chapter 5). Note that as of the time of

writing, I understand that GST is closed for refurbishment, although private visits to the Street set are still possible by special arrangement.

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