

# STAGING CULTURE

An experiment to comprehend commodification through visual ethnography

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The Inezganean view  
on Agadir's touristic beaches. (2014)

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Branding has become a trendy word of today – not just for companies or organizations, but for entire nations and countries. New economic prospects are created by redefining parts of our heritage and culture. No longer are our surroundings only servants of our society's values or norms, but means to achieve economic ends and harness the monetary capacity our cultures possess in the era of tourism.

– This is the very phenomenon I identify here as commodification.

The objective of this study is not to determine the ways in which commodification may or may not exist or influence its surroundings. Instead I treat commodification in this study as an undeniable change that has occurred and occurs ever increasingly throughout this modern era we live in.

In this study I hope to answer the following research questions:

- How can commodified cultural representations be captured, examined or represented through the use of visual material?
- How can MacCannell's theory of the six stages of touristic authenticity be combined with ethnographic findings of the modern era of tourism? And how does it expand our understanding of the theory itself?
- How could visual ethnography be used as a main methodology or method in an ethnographical study?

I have approached these objectives through the use of visual ethnography in Agadir, Morocco during a week-long stay in December 2014. The material constitutes altogether of some 800 photographs of the city's surroundings, architecture as well as some observations on the local collective and public behavior. I have introduced this material and the related methodological and ethical considerations in Chapter 2 focusing on the roles I had within the cultural context to describe the process of non-systematic visual ethnography I applied in the field.

In this study I am to rather exemplify and explore the possible ways in which the new commodified culture exists and can be observed, especially within the theoretical guidelines previously introduced by Dean MacCannell in his book *The Tourist – A New Theory of The Leisure Class* (first published 1976, revised 2013). In Chapter 4 I have described shortly the theoretical framework of commodification following the ideas set forward by MacCannell by focusing on his idea of a front stage – back stage continuum

constituting of six stages that represent the various levels of authenticity of a touristic experience, borrowing from Goffman's original dichotomy (1956).

I have analyzed my visual material alongside MacCannell's theory on the touristic stages of authenticity to explore the ways in which the two may or may not be compatible. This sampling practice and its outcomes are introduced more closely in Chapter 5, where I have undertaken a preliminary idea of a visual continuum of the six stages of authenticity.

In this study I have also applied an essayistic style of presenting my findings, derived from MacCannell's way of writing. I have adopted this style in order to present my findings accurately as multi-folded and abstract as they are – especially in relation to MacCannell's theory that has remained partial and with scarce practical applications.

I also would like to emphasize, that this study aims merely to sample the use of MacCannell's theory together with visual material as opposed to creating any ethnographic discourse regarding Agadir or Morocco itself. This is an experiment to comprehend commodification – and MacCannell's theory – through visual ethnography. Therefore I suggest that the last chapter constitutes the most crucial part of this study as it is to clarify the ways in which I have used this study to expand our understanding of MacCannell's theory, commodification as well as the use of visual material in ethnographical practices and the possible downfalls and opportunities of this sampling practice.

## 2. THE USE OF VISUAL IN THIS STUDY

### 2.1 ETHNOGRAPHY

A basic methodology applied in ethnological studies is ethnography that refers to a wide range of practices used to gather qualitative and interpretive data on people - classic of which being the participant observation. Typically ethnography is practiced through direct encounters with the studied subjects, ideally without influencing the observed situations while simultaneously discovering the characteristics and traits that often lay hidden in the observed and only emerge through accidents and careful questioning of the represented realities. (Madden 2010, 15 – 17.)

However, ethnology tends to apply methodologies rather than a methodology – a bricolage of practices, if you will. This means that the ethnographer chooses his methods from a wide range of possible research practices often across disciplines and their methodologies while combining them creatively in order to accomplish the most appropriate research methodology for the specific subject of study. To construct a bricolage of methods requires careful considerations and strategic understanding of the quality of the information received through the various research practices and how they might overlap, link, intertwine or collide. (Pink 2007, 5 – 8).

In this particular study I have applied methods of visual ethnography accompanied by hidden observation. In the latter sections (Chapters 2.2 – 2.5) you will find more detailed information on these methods and the related research practices.

### 2.2 VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Visual ethnography refers to the methodology in which the subject of study is studied through the use of visual images or visual imaging such as photographic or filmed material, art or other visual illustrations. The visual has long traditions within the ethnographical umbrella of methodologies and practices, dating back even as far as Malinowski who – as well as others since his example - used visual material as a way to capture the intangible or non-linguistic information during his fieldwork (Pink 2007, 21 – 22, 27 – 28, 65, 68 – 69, 74 etc.) Still to date the capturing practice remains as one of the primary reasons for the use of visual material in ethnographical studies.

The benefits of visual ethnography are mainly in its ability to hold detail and offer accuracy of identification through the amount of information the visual material withholds. In ethnographic fieldwork capturing detailed information accurately is increasingly valuable as the observed situations may appear multi-sited, manifold or baffling as experienced, but reveal their simplicity or patterns later on after closer examination. (Collier 2003, 235, 243 – 248; Pink 2007, 84.)

There are multiple ways in which the methods of visual ethnography can be applied. Its main uses in history have been to record representations, but nowadays the interest has shifted towards the use of pre-existing imagery or to collaborate with the studied social actors to produce visual representations (Pink 2007, 40 – 41.) In this study, however, I have applied the classical recording approach through photographing.

As mentioned, the benefit of using film for recording is the accuracy of the material. Photographs are always located partly in the place and time of their origin as they are momentary representations of representations that occur in a specific space and time. What differentiates photographs from filming is their ability to stop time and capture the given scene and its simultaneous presentations into layer-specific recordings as the film sums up the various layers of the occurrences in form of a collective representation. (Pink 2007, 75, 123, 135; Collier 2003, 235 – 237.)

The downfalls of the use of photographic material are interrelated with the benefits: as the photographs are able to stop the flow of time to capture momentary actions and aspects of the observed, the overall understanding of the studied subject may remain fragmented or partial. Experiences and meanings can hardly ever be captured through photographic recordings, where as they may be illustrated through them. I suspect this to be one of the reasons, why especially the use of photographic material in ethnography has for a long time mainly focused on illustrating the subjects of study within the analysis rather than the actual material being taken under analysis itself. The common belief is that the visual material remains inevitably partial and always needs to be accompanied by another method to fill in the gaps between the photographs (Pink 2007, 75, 123).

This notion of completeness and incompleteness became crucial to consider and to understand when browsing through the photographic material gathered for this study: Photographing is a method of observation and a method of recording. Therefore photographs are often understood to be either one or the other. However, the photographs

taken in Morocco were not mere illustrations or captures of the present culture but visual field notes as they also captured the related observations – and consequently became simultaneously physically partial yet complete in memory.

Therefore in my case study, the camera did not play only the role of a recording device but also that of a filter that directed my visual observations: the world captured within the material was selected and cropped both on the terms of the camera as well as my own schemas.

As there are different ways in which to apply visual ethnography in practice, there are also different ways in which to interpret and use the material depending on the quality of the material and the subject of study. Some attempt to construct a visual narrative; some rather categorize the material to create a traditional typification of customs or objects of material culture. (Pink 2007, 127 – 131, 147 – 152, 154.)

In this study I am not to illustrate my observations through the use visual material, nor to construct a typification of any kind. Instead I aim to actualize the sighted observations through the use of visual material. I am to exemplify and analyze the possibilities of recognizing the stages of authenticity put forward by MacCannell (2013, 100 – 102) and sample the possibilities to expand his linear front stage – back stage continuum into the visual. (See more in Chapter 4.)

### 2.3. VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE FIELD

The material for this study was gathered during a 7-day-period in Agadir, Morocco, in December 2014. This week long travel was planned to serve multiple meanings as leisure and amateur photographing.

The original purpose of the trip was to spend the holiday getting to know Agadir, the other cities nearby and Marrakech a bit further away. These plans were, however, changed due to a major flu that wore me down almost throughout the whole week. Instead me and my travelling companion ended up spending our time wondering around the streets of Agadir and the neighboring little towns Inezgane and Ait-Melloul.

Though I was set to study the culture in Morocco during our travel, I had not decided my actual topic or an area of interest beforehand. I had only decided to practice visual ethnography and therefore came to spend the days in Morocco with my Canon nearly glued to my hand, taking photos of everything I found intriguing or confusing. I ended up with



some 800 semi-ethnographical photographs including some touristic shots as well as failed attempts.

All the photographs and observations used in this study are gathered during the first 6 days of our stay. In fact, I stumbled onto the actual subject of this study, commodification, on our last day after gathering most of my material. Therefore it is hard for me to distinguish the mental frames or presupposed pieces of knowledge that might have influenced my process of material gathering or observing – except for the obvious cultural roles and status I had on and off the field.

## 2.4 MY ROLE AS AN OBSERVER

When describing visual ethnography Pink (2007, 21 – 22) determines ethnography as a process of creating and representing knowledge that is based on the ethnographer's experiences. The conscious and unconscious schemas of the ethnographer influence his interpretations. Therefore the ethnographer is encountered with the need to reflect not only on his findings but their origins throughout the studying process and suspect the implications his preceding experiences may have on his work. (See also Pink 2007, 23 – 24.)

### 2.4.1 THE ROLE OF A PHOTOGRAPHER

In my case, it would not be sufficient to try and reflect the preceding expectations and schemas I took with me to the field as my studying process was rather more intuitive than systematic. Therefore I experience my status, especially as a photographer that precedes the notion of a field in the first place, to be of more importance as it constructs the baseline for my intuitive practices. Moreover the status of a photographer is a status that is unique to my choice of methodology, as Pink (2007, 47) puts it explicitly; the camera grows into a part of the context of studying as well as into the ethnographer's identity.

The camera does have a special part within my identity: for five years I have been practicing amateur photographing with my pocket sized Canon that has not only attached itself into my heart and hand, but travelled also as my companion all around the world. I did not travel to Agadir only as an ethnographic photographer, but also as an inspiring publishing photographer.

In reference to my use of visual ethnography after departing the field, however, the roles within the framework of the status of a photographer are of less importance to my study, as there is no actual way to tell apart a journalistic, anthropologic or touristic photograph

without contextual cues: what makes the photographs used in this study anthropologic or scientific, is the way they are situated in relation to the theoretical background and the ways in which they are used to evoke anthropological meanings. (Pink 2007, 23.)

#### 2.4.2. A WESTERN WOMAN WITH A CAMERA

The core status influencing my fieldwork can be narrowed into the big three; gender, ethnicity and occupation – a woman, a western and an ethnographer – that interestingly intertwined into each other and manifested their presence and influence through various differing encounters throughout my stay.

Me and my travelling companion were most commonly encountered with a few distinctive phrases such as *Where are you from?* and *What a nice weather, yes?* These phrases came to illustrate the ways in which I was encountered based on my appearance. When my companion and I chatted in Finnish, we were thought to be Finns but when we changed our language of communication into English, we were thought to be English.

Not only did my status as a western tourist influence our encounters but also my status as an accompanied woman. When I had a knee-length skirt on or stood alone I was approached with the phrase of *May I have your phone number?* – Whereas when I changed into a longer skirt or stood by my male companion he was approached with the phrase *Are you married?*

I believe this to derive from the Muslim notion in Northern Africa that an unmarried woman displays her beauty to attract mates, whereas concealment signals eliteness and maturity (Salamandra 2007, 531 – 532). Women are able to guard their spaces particularly through veiling, as I did on occasion to fit within the cultural contexts. In addition, a woman in Islamic cultures would traditionally be accompanied by a man who is a close relative or husband (Newcomb 2007, 538). Therefore the assumption that my companion and I were married was from the local perspective rather justified.

Though my intentions were never to examine the culture from a gender-perspective, some connotations of such were constantly evident due to the local Islamic practices that distinct between genders and set somewhat hidden expectations for women in order to receive acceptance or access to certain social spheres. Therefore my role as a woman restricted my observations but allowed me to peek into places and spaces I might not have seen otherwise, especially as I was portrayed as a veiled woman guarded by her husband. Without these attributes and travelling alone, I wonder how I would have actually been encountered in the areas further apart from the city's touristic center.

These briefly introduced status transformed into roles through my encounters. I learned to play the role of *a married western woman* and *a western tourist* – though both of these roles based on fictions created by the imaginations of the locals. I never had to reveal my role as an ethnographer or even as a university student. Thus I came to, may I say accidentally, practice hidden observation as I let the locals define my status in the field.

## 2.5 ETHICS

Hidden observation has multiple ethical implications that should be considered before its possible use, especially whether it's applicable in the selected surroundings and may violate the integrity of the locals intimacy. Moreover hidden observation, as disguising ones status and role in the environment, may lead to loss of trust and/or safe connections between the observed and the observer. (See Madden 2010, 90 – 91, 94.)

In this case study, the ethical questions opposed by hidden observation differed from the suggested implications above: as mentioned, the practiced observing transformed into hidden observation by accident and not for a certain cause or a purpose. My preliminary plan of conducting fieldwork was rather to enter the field simultaneously in the role of a tourist and an ethnographer to gather a variety of material, which turned out to be easier than expected due to my choice of methodology - visual ethnography - which allowed flexible movement between the roles (See Pink 2007, 22 – 24, 34).

However, this movement between various roles, especially those of the tourist and the ethnographer, may be seen as a risk factor that might endanger the reliability, validity or even ethics of my study: if I cannot define the positions used in the study and fieldwork explicitly, how am I ever going to validate my results as scientific or sound?

This seemingly possible controversy or conflict of roles can be overcome in this particular case following the lines of MacCannells methods (2013, 1, 178 –179): He states that the tourist and the ethnographer have a common goal of “- - *determining the point at which forced traditionalism ceases to base itself on the truths of day-to-day existence and begins to crystallize as a survival strategy* - -”The difference between the two roles, however, lies in their motives. The ethnographer aims to create collective understanding of the social world, as the tourists’ motives may remain mystified or mainly self-derived. Therefore the ethnographer and the tourist are roles that may exist simultaneously and often even inseparably.

What I therefore suggest to be the most crucial ethical concern in my study is the legitimacy and so-called decency of the visually capturing culture as an appropriate method. As stated ethnography is a delicate method to apply and so is visual ethnography to an even greater extent. The ethical aspects to consider when applying visual ethnography according to Pink (2007, 43, 52 – 62, 166) do not only include the actual photographic practice or the agreed use of the photographs, but also the appropriateness of the practice, the representativeness of the photographs as well as the possible symbolic meanings and possible political implications or power relations the photographs possess.

Another important ethical aspect to consider also arises from my decision to approach visual ethnography as my main method. I approach photographs as my main material – not as illustrations. For example, for this particular reason I have chosen to embed the photographs into the written text in Chapter 5 as if they were extracts from any other material in a written form.

In this particular study the other two most important ethical questions of those previously mentioned were, the appropriateness of the applied photographic practices in the field and the accurate representativeness when situating the photographs. I have introduced these shortly in the following:

Photographing is a practice governed mainly by the so-called good practices, commonly locally determined, that guide the photographer to approach people and situations in a manner that is labeled as appropriate. The most common universal regulation is the need for permission when photographing people who may be identified from the photographs. (Pink 2007, 52 – 62.) In Agadir, my photographic practices were challenged by the local regulations: According to the local interpretation of Islamic teaching one cannot photograph people, often especially women. Also, photographing of public spaces was not clearly regulated.

Due to these restrictions I set myself to photograph rather the material culture and our surroundings than the actual actions or performances of the local people. This may be seen as a faulted or partial way of obtaining information on culture, as the detailed actions of the locals are framed outside the visually captured observations – however, I found this approach to help me obtain informative material that led me to my subject of study.

This approach may follow the ethnological traditions of a material-based bottom-up approach, but somewhat opposes the traditions of visual ethnography: Pink states (43, 45,

49 – 51, 166), that the photographer must understand the ethical and larger contexts of the entered field beforehand to practice informed and responsible visual ethnography as well as to be aware of the extent to which the practice may be applied. According to Pink one should have information of the field rather *a priori* than *a posteriori* – which is exactly the approach I avoided and instead familiarizing myself with the backgrounds and other material after departing the field to tackle the possible dilemma of informed usage.

I believe this material-based bottom-up approach has assisted me to contextualize the photographic material and my observations more appropriately in respect to their authenticity. Also my choice of entering the field simultaneously as a tourist and as an ethnographer to obtain the information through actual observations led me to note the similarities and slight differences between the depicted places that might have remained unnoticed.

### 3. AGADIR - THE REBUILD CITY OF TOURIST REPRESENTATIONS

The area around Agadir can be referred to as touristic not only because it has become a popular tourist destination, but also because it has been built into one. The city was constructed to withhold the cultural experiences the average tourist is expected to desire to witness - in short, to resemble the real. (See: MacCannell 2013, 91; Marokko-info; Matkailualan verkostoyliopisto 1997.)

The commodification practices (introduced more closely in Chapter 4) have spread across the modern world and claimed a role in the economies of multiple countries and cultures. Entire nations and regions have become dependent on this turn to commodification – as did Morocco since their independence in 1956. The city of Agadir has especially been developed within the terms of commodification since its famous earthquake in 1960. (Silverstein 2012, 331 – 332; Marokko-info 2015)

#### 3.1. THE ORIGINS OF AGADIR

The city of Agadir, the modern tourist location, was once one of the major ports to Atlantic Ocean. The city was strategically placed to trade goods from the Souss Valley and the treasures of Sauraha (Matkailualan verkostoyliopisto 1997, 34). This not only made the city luring in the eyes of the local tribes such as Berbers, Arabs and Saadians, but also in the eyes of the Portuguese, who built forts and armed the city to protect the major port to the sea. These forts are one of the supposed origins of the city's whole name, *Agadir n irir*, meaning the fortified granary (Marokko-info 2015).

Nowadays the city of Agadir is merely known for its attractive trio: sand, sea and sun. Its sunny beaches are washed away by the Atlantic Ocean and the sun shines bright on the city for some 300 days of the year. (Marokko-info 2015). Since 1970 Agadir has attracted an increasing amount of tourists from Europe and other Arab countries, as well as other Moroccans craving for the warmth and blue ocean waves. (Matkailualan Verkostoyliopisto 1997, 34 – 35).

However this turn to tourism was neither built from scratch nor with low costs: Agadir was hit by an earthquake on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February 1960 with no survivors. The only memorabilia left standing was, and still is, the fort of Kasbah on a hill overlooking at the ocean. (Marokko-info; Matkailualan Verkostoyliopisto 1997, 34 – 35).

The city was rebuilt three kilometers south from its original location, with only a few hotels and buildings rebuilt in their former places (Marokko-info 2015). The hills and beaches of Agadir were no longer the homes of merchants and nomads, but modern service industries – especially newly found tourism.

### 3.2 THE TURN TO TOURISM

Since the 1930s and 1940s Agadir has been developed as a sun, sea and sand destination to compete with the other Mediterranean destinations - marketed as the '*Moroccan Nice*'. However, the full economic and developmental possibilities of tourism in Morocco or Agadir remained unrevealed before the turn in the 1960s. (Matkailualan Verkostoyliopisto 1997, 40.)

In 1962 a new community plan for Agadir was established with reservations made for touristic services such as hotels, restaurants and other infrastructure nearby the seashore. The real property of the people was expropriated for these purposes and the government supported monetarily various rebuilding initiatives, especially when building and creating the central tourist area of the city. (Matkailualan Verkostoyliopisto 1997, 40 – 41).

Not until the mid-1960s, nearly a decade after their independence and four years after the earthquake, Morocco turned officially to tourism as the solution to their poor economic situation and instability: The 1965 tourism master plan identified tourism officially as the second most important sector after agriculture to develop. This turn was mainly due to a delegation by World Bank experts, as they were invited to assist in the creation of a plan for the future economic development and stated that Morocco should abandon large industrial projects and develop its tourism sector. (Minca & Borghi 2009, 29 – 30.)

Since 1965 Morocco has engaged itself in large-scale tourism developments and created a number of plans - most recent of which, the 2010 ten-year-plan for increasing the tourism's contribution to GDP from 8,5% (year 2000) to 20% by 2020. Other objectives include, the creation of 160,000 new bed spaces and 600,000 new jobs by 2010. (Minca & Borghi 2009, 32).

### 3.3. THE TOWN TODAY – A MODERN COMMUNITY AS A COMMODITY

Nowadays the Moroccan authorities attempt to re-fashion the old tourist attractions through aesthetics and functional organization of tourist spaces. (Minca, Borghi 2009, 30 – 33.) However, there are no built attractions in the city of Agadir such as amusement parks or shopping malls. The only built attractions in the town remain to be the ruins of Kasbah and a handful of museums. Instead, the town is filled with high-end hotels and night clubs.

Partly due to the lack of built attractions the turn to tourism in the city has meant largely relying in to the cultural product of Moroccan hospitality and exoticness (Minca, Borghi 2009, 32). This has meant creating a new welcoming culture for the tourists through re-branding a variety of places and encounters as cultural and establishing various services in the area. The aim is to rebrand Agadir to as much of a cultural destination as the other cities of Morocco, such as Marrakech (Matkailualan verkostoyliopisto 1997.)

As the tourist part of the town has its ends and exits, so does the functional culture of hospitality and the welcoming attitude towards tourism in general. Modern day tourism is not a mere economic benefit to the city, but a restraint at worst with no added or sustainable benefits. Tourists do not only bring in money, but also cultural influences and deterioration of the environment – these impacts on the city are not appreciated among the locals. As the money comes in, it also goes out covering only the main costs of keeping up the cultural experience of Agadir. (Matkailualan Verkostoyliopisto 1997, 41).

The future of the town rests on unsteady grounds as the tourism that once was, and somewhat still is, seen to be able to lift the region or even the whole country from poverty may be to blame if the economic situation of the country does not improve in the upcoming years.



## 4. HOW DOES A CULTURE BECOME A COMMODITY?

Commodification is a progressive process of altering meanings. MacCannell (2013, 182) introduces the basic idea behind modern commodification as follows "*Entire nations are becoming aware of their internal, cultural element, not in terms of industrial functions, but as attractions - -*" Countries have engaged in an endless continuum of creating new market value through branding as the modern global competition and new service industries have set new standards for cultures to differentiate themselves from each other: such as how Finland is nowadays known as the origin of the northern lights, Denmark is known as the land of Legos.

In the following I am to first shortly discuss the aspects that may have influenced this turn to commodification in the world of increased tourism and second the actual impacts the modern day actions of commodification may have.

### 4.1. MODERN TOURISM

According to David MacCannell (2013, 1) we live in an era of tourism as the global population has become a population of tourists: the modern-man-in-general no longer only appears as a nosy spectator wanting to observe the occurrences of life, but has obtained the essence of that being, often referred to as a tourist. Tourism as a word does not therefore only refer to the actual beings that we recognize as tourists due to their stereotypical characteristics, but to our global mobile population as a whole. We are all tourists, without our consent - no matter what lengths we take to disguise our inevitable curiosity towards the world around us.

The commonness of this population – that also lies at the essence of a tourist - can be traced back to our underlying need for experiencing authenticity and differentiation to inspire and organize our understanding of the world: we desire to encounter the reality we assume to exist as an untouched whole, *as it is* (MacCannell 2013, 10 – 15, 27, 34 – 36). This is often thought to be an experience easier to obtain in a foreign environment that seems untouched by the hands of modernity, globalization or capitalism. Or in an environment that is easily distanced from the experiences of our everyday lives.

The possibilities of imagination and the following variety of experiential alternatives imaginable have also decreased the value of work as a life holding experience for the individual: The possible preforms of thoughts and world views - cultural experiences - have

multiplied and become more obtainable and concrete. Work is experienced changeless or constant and therefore cannot compete with these imaginative possibilities. Consequently the individual seeks leisure in cultural experiences that can be easily shaped to fit and hold the persons individuality, world views and aspirations in life. (MacCannell 2013, 34 – 36, 40 – 41, 159.)

Nowadays it seems simultaneously as hard to find a place in which you do not see a tourist or a place without an object that could be determined as a sight. MacCannell (2013, 13, 42 – 43, 47 – 48) explains this by the actual individual desires of novelty seeking that create collective aspirations – of tourists and for the creation of touristic locations.

I myself would perhaps go one step further to suggest the reason for this occurrence to be deriving from the collective power tourists hold to determine the locations as sights, as introduced in the following paragraphs. To a tourist the action of visiting a site is a conscious or unconscious ritual performed to serve the community of the global tourist population as every human is a preceding or a future tourist enabling the place to be made meaningful as a sight.

#### 4.1.1 TOURISM AS CONSUMPTION

Tourism as a collective set of actions can therefore be perhaps best described as the consumption of cultural experiences that are not necessarily easily defined or tangible. As Nate-Chei (2011, 47) puts it in her ethnography of tourism “ - - *we can consume experience through interpersonal actions, without depending on things* - - ” as the cultural experiences are produced, made meaningful, by our own imaginations on the basis of the observable, yet not required, external stimuli. (See: MacCannell 2013, 110, 118, 119 –123; Nate-Chei 2011, 31).

I comprehend the stimuli to refer to a space, a monument, a behavioral pattern or anything that points to the cultural object as an experience. These MacCannell (2013, 110 – 111) refer to as *markers*, on-site and off-site objects that hold information on a particular sight.

The stimuli include the sight and its markers as a whole: the Eiffel Tower, the hospitality of the Nepali people, the graffiti of Brooklyn or the Fado on the streets of Lisbon. The matter of creating an attraction or a sight is therefore a practice of re-determining a space or an object and its purpose – also known as branding, or according to MacCannell (2013, 117 – 130), the matter of putting markers in place to symbolize the sight.

This modification or creation of markers often follows the idea of creating an experience, often to produce monetary value or profit. However, the experiences of individuals can hardly be altered through these deliberate actions or visual manifestations of locality, ethnicity or authenticity: the main transformation of an object into an experience is based on the tourist population's collective practices that take after the individuals' schemas and intentions, not the context itself.

However, tourism still remains as an economically low-cost but high-profit industry. MacCannell states in his book that "*- Cultural experiences are the ultimate deposit of values, including economical values, in modern society.*" Cultural experiences tend to encapsulate values in relation to the cultural context such as nationality, traditionality or prosperity and transform them into means to generate sustain profit as the construction of ideas consume minimum labor and expenses. (MacCannell 2013, 27 – 29). For example the Eiffel Tower requires hardly any maintenance while generating profit, hence it encapsulates various ideals of art, history and French nationality that are easily marked and collectively determined.

#### 4.1.2. COMMODIFICATED CULTURES

The main motivation for commodification as a functional action remains in the sights' potential economic benefits. The creation of tourist attractions and locations has become rather common as every nation wants to harness their means to get a share of the potential economic benefits of the modern tourism industry.

In the 1960's tourism was first introduced as an answer to nations' economical and unemployment problems and ever since the 1970s or 1980s tourist destinations have been marketed (Lanfant 1995, 7 – 8; MacCannell 2013, 194 – 198). Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this turn to commodification of culture and heritage has almost become a trend. An increasing number of countries and ethnicities are joining the movement to make money and to claim authority over their traditions, ethnic dignities and their economic uses (Nate-Chei 2011, 33 – 34).

Hence I suggest the contemporary commodification of culture to be endogenous and expedient rather than completely drafted by exterior capitalist pressures. The strategic use of ethnicity and culture is becoming necessary for various localities - not only to attract business or participate in the global markets, but also to protect cultural heritage or ethnicity. As Nate-Chei argues, tourism can be utilized by the culture equally as the tourists can utilize the culture (Nate-Chei 2011, 31 – 32).

With this study I intend to outline the ways in which culture can be commodified by the locals themselves endogenously in reference to the model set forward by MacCannell (2013, 100 – 102) rather than depicting the ways in which the capitalist world-order pressures the localities to globalize, commodify or alter their cultural representations. These pressures do exist, but I suggest that they only become actualized by the localized and inbound mechanisms of the societies, through which they engage in the global sphere and create counter-forces to oppose the control of capitalism through strategic commodification .

#### 4.2 STAGES & STAGING OF TOURISTIC AUTHENTICITY

In Agadir I encountered a number of men who were dressed in the “traditional” attire - most commonly those of the water sellers’ - to attract attention. They wandered around the hallways of the Souks ringing bells for hours seeking tourists to approach and never did I hear them make the mistake of not requesting that in exchange for a picture the photographer was expected to give a few dirhams to fill the their pockets but only after the picture had been taken.

These men were an example of poor people looking for some money in exchange for favors with the tourists: some offered to help you over the street and lead you to your destination through the labyrinth of little streets – some just politely offered you a taxi ride, triple the standard price. In the behavior of the locals, one could recognize glimpses of the functionality of commodificated touristic realities disguised under the mask of heritage.

These represented realities, as that of the water seller’s, often refer to traditionalism and the former simplicity the cultures possessed before the era of modernization. The tourists are intrigued by this kind of possibilities to simultaneously enter a space un-corrupt by the global capital forces that blur cultural boundaries, and to discover the local space of intimacy and heritage – a back stage. (MacCannell 2013, 100 – 101; Lanfant 1995, 17.)

#### 4.3 MACCANNEL’S SIX STAGES OF TOURISTIC AUTHENTICITY

The back stage - the space of ‘the real’ - is opposed by a front region – the space of the staged encounters - as derived from Goffman (1956, 69 – 72). However in this particular study I am to use the revised model by MacCannell (2013, 100 – 102): he has divided both of these regions represented by Goffman into separate three stages. He presents altogether a six stages continuum of touristic authenticity: the front, the touristic front, the mimicking front, the open back region, the altered back region and the real back region.

**Stage 1 |** *The front region first depicted by Goffman.* This is the stage of social performances and staged surroundings that embody certain consistent cultural standards or profound ideas (Goffman 1956, 66 – 68; Goffman 1959, 55 – 56). In MacCannells words (2013, 101) the front also evokes the tourists' imaginations and desire to see behind the set scenery.

**Stage 2 |** *The touristic front.* This is the front region created by using some images related to the back region: i.e. a Mexican restaurant with cactus and sombreros. This region serves as a front region, the arena for performances, and is merely decorated to resemble the back regions to evoke imaginative ideas of authenticity and an experience that can be attached to the schema of the intriguing back stage. (MacCannell 2013, 101.)

**Stage 3 |** *The front region that is completely organized to look like a part of the back region.* This stage can be also referred to as the mimicking stage, since the representations mimic the back stage. This means that this stage is staged, as in theatre, to appear as the back stage. The representations of this stage may include i.e. the re-acting of rituals or traditional events. (MacCannell 2013, 101.) This is a region I suggest the locals to build up intentionally and perhaps even strategically, since the stage provides a disguise for the back region and the rituals, traditions and heritage.

**Stage 4 |** *The open back stage.* Normally the access to the back region depicted by Goffman (1956, 70) is limited or even non-existent. However, the public is invited to the open back stage to see the occurrences. I suggest the stage 3 to differ from this stage mainly through its functionality (See: Stage 4): stage 3 is created as an open disguise, whereas stage 4 remains inevitably open as the access to it cannot be restricted.

**Stage 5 |** *The back stage with a partial access.* On this stage the public and tourists may have the ability to peek into the reality of the back region. They are shown bits and pieces that are often altered and cleaned up to evoke the right connotations, and protect the most vulnerable parts of the local culture and heritage. (MacCannell 2013, 102.)

**Stage 6 |** *The back region depicted by Goffman.* This stage is hidden from the audience and kept restrained from those following the occurrences of the front stage. The back stage is kept as the space of non-intrusion and intimacy (Goffman 1956, 70 – 72). Therefore it is hard to confidently determine to have encountered the real back region, as intimacy remains most commonly unobserved.

MacCannell's definitions of these stages have remained partial. The Tourist includes only a few abstract sentences for each stage (see 2013, 100 – 102) and presents only a few imaginary examples of some of the stages. This scarcity of deriving points and the profound need to follow MacCannell's ideas accurately in this study has led me to decide to only interpret the theory from the viewpoint of visual material and not present any other interpretations alongside the visual depictions.

In the following I am to broaden this theory by MacCannell (2013) by making the abstract stages concrete through the use of visual material. My goal is to sample the ways the theory can be applied into the reality of Agadir and the ways in which the visual material could be used to construct a visual linear of the six stages of authenticity when focusing on the visible differences between the stages that make each stage distinct and recognizable.

In the Chapter 5 the visual material is divided according to the six stage model. Each stage has two to three photographs demonstrating the stages and the related representations. These photographs are accompanied by small captions in which I clarify the cues and observations of the identified staged cultural representations.

## 5. VISUAL CONTINUUM OF SIX STAGES OF TOURISTIC AUTHENTICITY

### 5.1. THE FRONT REGION | SECTEUR TOURISTIQUE

Secteur Touristique is the name of the area located near the seashore. This area seems carefully designed for touristic purposes: The Beach Boulevard near the ocean shore is built with beautiful stonework, with polished tiling and carefully planned greenery. The architecture is rather detailed and built to resemble the established traditional Moroccan style of architecture.

The boulevard has a number of wide agoras attached that seemingly serve only as spaces built to represent the area's grandness visually. People walk along these pathways, but the only sights they can witness along these routes are the local peddlers and the mountain Kasbah overlooking the sea.



The front stage also appeared to me as luxurious and modern; the traditional Moroccan characteristics are accompanied by borrowed inspirations from other cultural spheres or references to the so-called global culture, as in the picture below taken from the harbor of Agadir.

On the right the scenery is continued by a row of brand stores (i.e. see the sign of Zara) and on the left by an ocean view bordered with beautiful tiling railings and a deck for sitting and relaxing. The roads to and within the harbor are also tiled and creates a contrast in comparison to the other areas as the other roads in the city are covered with asphalt.





## 5.2 THE TOURISTIC FRONT STAGE | GREENERY & PARKS

It was rather difficult to identify the touristic front stage as I was at first hesitant of how to visually narrate the observations of the ways in which small cues were given intentionally to provoke meanings in reference to the back stage. The most accurate representation I discovered was through the greenery within the city. Agadir had only a few official parks but a number of planted trees and bushes decorating the driveways and sidewalks. The parks, as in the photographs, had a distinctive look created with details that feed our imagination of traditionalism.

The picture below is taken from Jardin De Olhao -park in the city center. The appearance of the entrance has multiple cues: the walls are made of ancient looking slates and the woodwork on the bridge evokes some connotations of the traditional Moroccan architecture.



As stated, the city has only a few parks or other areas reserved for greenery, but a great number of planted palm trees and other small bushes and flowers. The use of these seemed often rather inconsistent as some of the parks and pathways were better kept than others. Also the function of the parks or park-like areas remained unclear to the visitor as there were almost no seats or services available.

In the photograph below I have captured one of these large park-like areas that had no apparent function. It merely seemed to be a construction that was meant to support certain ideas or evoke meanings such as fruitfulness, naturalness and prosperity.

For example, I invite you to look at the skyline of the city in the photograph and pay attention to the high palm trees: in reality they are fake, used as a disguise for the city's water tanks and antennas hidden beneath the green leaves for a more aesthetic appearance.



### 5.3 THE MIMICING STAGE | SOUK EL HAD

There are a number of ways in which the front stage that appears like the back may be identified. One of the cues implying that Souk El Had may be part of the back region was that it is commonly used by the local people. However, it is also advertised as a sight to tourists – and sights most commonly refer to an object belonging to the first four stages in the continuum (See: Chapter 4.3.).

The Souk El Had is located just outside the Secteur Touristique, a notch up north, in an area that was often referred to in public discourses as more local. The settings were such that corresponded to the imagined schemas on how the back stage is to appear: the area was covered with tarts and every imaginable fruit and vegetable was sold on wooden tables in neat rows.



The Souk has several different sections varying from clothing to furniture and from groceries to shoes. This variety is one of the key factors building up the appearance of authenticity: the modern and traditional cultures appear to be intertwined in a western manner as Abayas and Adidas are sold next to each other. The sections with groceries and furniture particularly possessed the imagined appearance of authenticity through their distinctive feels. For example, in the carpet section (in the picture) you could smell the unique odor of thread.

I suggest that one cannot differentiate these stage three encounters from the so-called real in any other way than by comparing the different spaces classified into the same categories of i.e shops, hospitals or schools. For example, if I had not visited the market in Inezgane (see stage 6), I might have experienced this as authentic.



## 5.4 THE OPEN BACK STAGE | KASBAH

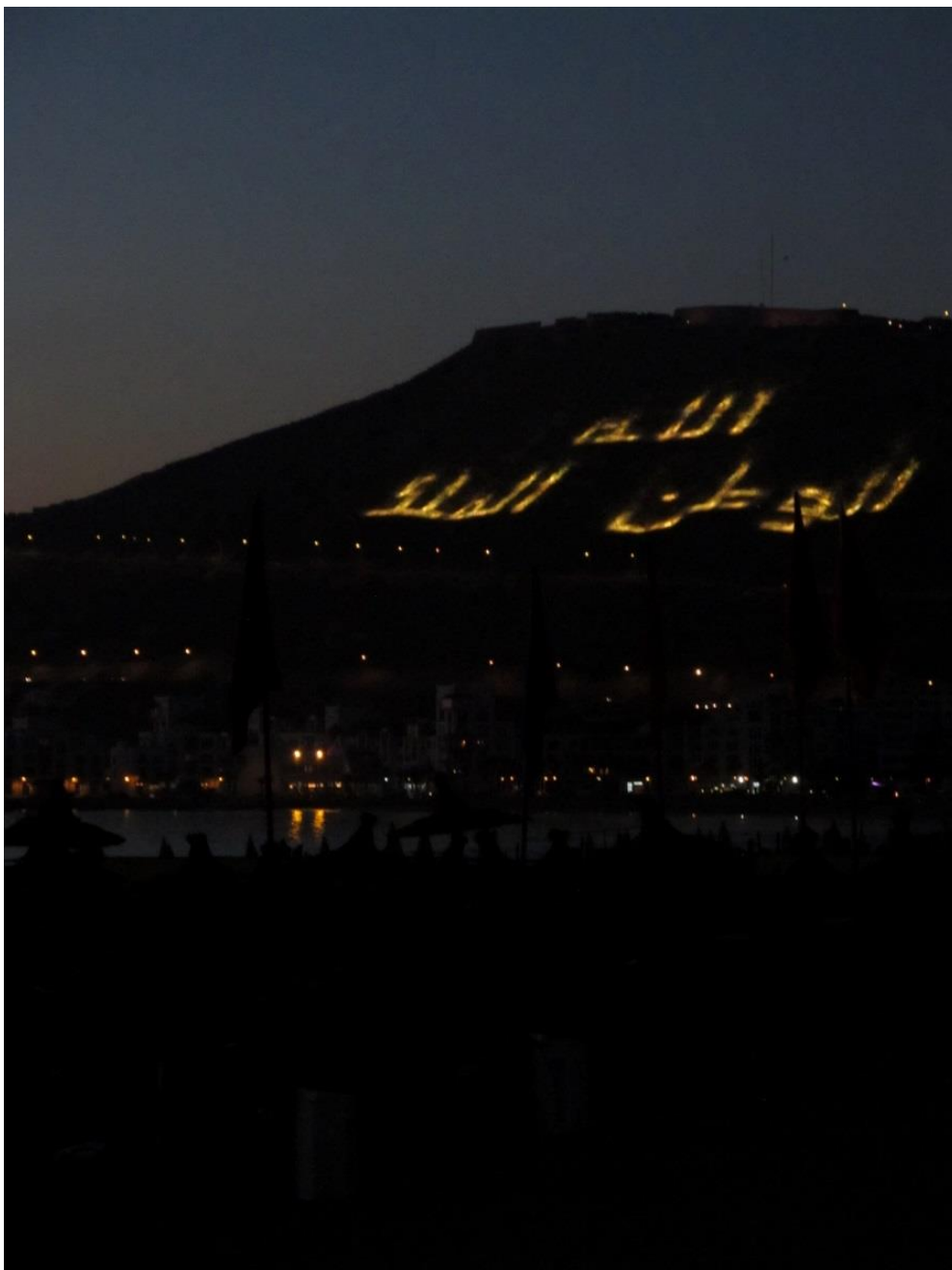
This is the stage in which the material from my fieldwork has opened up the most possibilities to extend MacCannell's theory: MacCannell describes the open back stage to be a stage to which the tourists can see into. He also states that it has similarities with stage three and therefore it is hard to tell the two stages apart. (MacCannell 2012, 101.) However, I believe he fails to mention or consider the difference between the two in reference to their intentional nature or functionality.

For example Kasbah, the fortress mountain, is a part of the open back stage as the locals have no means to close it down or hide this part of their heritage.



The locals are unable to alter Kasbah without altering their own heritage (see Chapter 3) – if they were to close down Kasbah, they would not only lose the touristic value of it but also the value it has as the remains of the 1960s earthquake. Therefore I suggest that as the locals are unable to hide the mountain, or the history and heritage related to it, their best option is to mark it as a sight - commodify it.

Therefore, as Kasbah is positioned as a part of the back stage it serves also as an inspiration point for tourist imaginations. Perhaps due to these means, Kasbah has become the symbol of Agadir depicted and posted whenever talking about the city - especially the words on the mountainside (*Allah, the king, the native land*).



## 5.5. THE BACK STAGE WITH PARTIAL ACCESS | INEZGANE

On our last day at Souk El Had in Agadir a merchant asked us where we had been during our holiday. We told him that we had been to Inezgane and to our surprise he answered us bluntly "*you see no tourists there*".

Inezgane is a nearby city, almost a part of Agadir as they have grown attached to each other. Inezgane is located some 10 kilometres East from the touristic sector. In my opinion Inezgane is a prime example of the altered back stage due to its modern yet local nature. This is where the locals live their everyday lives, yet still in terms of tourism.

The various details of the visual - such as as the christmas lights, the organization of traffic and the beautifully decorated Mosque - all showcase how the local and global spheres live parallely in the same space. In comparison to the front stage, this looks more local – yet in comparison to the back stage, this seems externally influenced and modified.



In MacCannell's terms Inzegane appeared to be an altered back stage, mainly due to its dual nature. In example, the local population was simultaneously aware of the Souk of Inezgane (in the picture) being a sight to see for the tourists, but their glances towards our presences implied the tourist visits to be rather rare.

The Souk and its surroundings were rather different not only look-wise but also with their feel when compared to that in Agadir. For example in Souk El Had there were hardly any fruit merchants like those photographed here with carts and loud voices or muddy plains on which the goods were sold. This souk was also the scene of the traditional monthly camel market.





## 5.6. THE BACK STAGE | HOW TO ENCOUNTER IT?

The exact moment when one might have encountered the backstage is perhaps the hardest stage to determine as one can never be sure if he has encountered the real back stage or if the representation was still a part of another stage of authenticity. Therefore I decided to introduce here three experiences that come the closest of what I understood MacCannell to have meant with his definition of the back stage (2013, 102).

For me the first encounter occurred in Inezgane, in the local grocery market on a muddy plain with hundreds of people selling fruit from the ground and old radios from car hoods. The locals stared at us walking down this muddy path. We were stopped at the end by a man who introduced himself to be a local policeman. He told us to turn back immediately as the area from that point on was - apparently as implied - known for illegal immigration.



The second encounter occurred when exiting the borders of the reality of the muddy plain. We lost our way back and found ourselves staring at piles of boxes, fruit and rustic metallic containers on a stowage, again on a muddy field only a few meters away (as we later came to realize) from the local market place and the Souk of Inezgane.

There was litter everywhere as well as horse manure and a rusted old bicycle rested neatly beside the plastic containers. Most of the containers and storage items rested in neat piles in the middle of the yard, with nothing to guard them from ants, bugs or birds.



The third encounter I suspect to be the closest I could get to the existence of the back stage and the possibility of ever encountering it as a tourist ethnographer was a few hours later in Ait Melloul, another 5 kilometers South-East from Inezgane. Our aim was to see the Souss River and its shores, but eventually found ourselves walking around the dusty streets in the center of Ait Melloul accompanied by a herd of lambs.

This photograph was taken at the time of the sunset in Ait Melloul as a group of teenaged boys trained their soccer skills in front of us and a group of younger boys practiced their donkey-riding skills behind us, meanwhile the herd of lambs found us sitting on the stones that seemed to be all that remained of a small house or storage unit.



## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1. STRATEGIC STAGING AS A MEAN OF CULTURAL PROTECTION

The publications on Moroccan tourism have characterized Agadir as a tourist product suffering from competition, a new south destination built up with no local culture (Minca Borghi 2009, 30 – 31; Matkailualan verkostoyliopisto 1997, 41). This seems to be a development trend of the new economic future as the importance of evolving tourism industry increases, especially in the developing countries hoping to find a cure for their unemployment rates (Lanfant 2012, 7 – 8).

As the tourism industry expands and the economic benefits are sought, the countries are not faced with mere benefits but also possible threats, especially against their cultural heritage as the risk threatening the heritage is similar to that threatening rare languages: distinction. The countries therefore need to instrumentalize their identities for economic ends, but also conserve their own cultural heritage and protect it from the influences the global culture may oppose on it (Minca, Borghi 2009, 12, 16 – 18).

This conservation requires selection of those traits or traditions the community is willing to harness to pursue economic purposes and separate them distinctively from those that are sanctified for the locals only. This separation I believe to occur through the unintentional, yet somewhat intentional, use of the multi-layered structure of staged authenticity theorized by MacCannell (2013, 100 – 102).

In his original theory MacCannell proposed, along the lines of Goffman, that the staging occurs rather unintentionally as the community drives to commodify their heritage or create a desired impact (MacCannell 2013, 98 – 102; Goffman 1959, 53 – 55, 64 –65). However, I hereby present a somewhat contrary notion, also implied by MacCannell as reflecting back on his theory in 2013 (MacCannell 2013, 194 – 195): as every destination becomes increasingly marketed, the need to recall the originality and preserve the heritage increases and becomes the primary motive for the creation of staged authenticity.

In Agadir this became evident as the tourist facilities were centralized in a particular area. All the tourist infrastructure and knowledge available (i.e. maps) was only provided for the area recommended for tourists. Furthermore, after our visit to Inezgane and Ait Melloul a local merchant commented: "*Nobody goes there. -- You see no tourists there.*" But the identified

back stage, the heritage, was located particularly in those areas cut off from the reality presented for the tourists: the Islamic grave yards, schools, corn fields and wooden huts.

## 6.2 EVALUATION AND CONSIDERATIONS

The objectives of this study were multifold: first to determine how the visual material could capture commodified representations, secondly to explore the possible ways in which visual material and observations may or may not support or extend the theory put forward by MacCannell on touristic authenticities and third to explore the ways in which visual ethnography could be used as a main method or methodology (Chapter 1, Introduction).

In the studying process the first objective was intertwined with the second. The application of visual material in capturing commodified representations also referred to the application of visual material into MacCannell's theory.

The task itself proved challenging yet inspiring as there is a clear lack of anthropological studies that have applied MacCannell's theory (2013, 100 – 102) further beyond mere mentioning. It is difficult to determine the suitability or appropriateness of my application, as the benchmarks are scarce and MacCannell himself seems to treat the theory as an abstract classification tool rather than a structuralized set of analyzed real-life observations.

In addition, I gathered my material without any prior knowledge of the theory itself. Therefore, as also suggested in Chapter 2, one of the most challenging parts of this study was the reasoned selection of the photographs. The selection was rather based on an intuitive assessment than a structured theory-oriented combing of the material – which may be criticized as an inappropriate analyzing method.

I attempted to solve this dilemma in the studying process mainly by focusing on the contrasts between the photographs in the selection process. I based this on my understanding that MacCannell's stages are only observable in relation to each other. I found this to be the most fruitful approach as the preceding knowledge on the theory was scarce. Therefore I also deliberately chose to represent MacCannell's theory through photographs that create a visual continuum of stages through contrasts - even if the reader is only to browse them through without focusing on the captions and observations – instead of representing the theory through experience-based examples. This approach is original in reference to MacCannell's theory and contributes to the possible further developments of this theory.

During the process, I was also increasingly concerned if I was suggesting a categorization or typification of spaces in Agadir based on their relative authenticity – especially as it was not my intention to create statements on the spaces' authenticity nor on Agadir as a touristic surrounding. Therefore I have also decided to grasp on the touristic history of Agadir only briefly in Chapter 3. The references used in that Chapter can be rightfully seen as partial, which I also recognize as a clear deficiency within this study.

The third objective, to explore the ways in which visual ethnography can be used a main methodology or method, was perhaps the hardest to tackle in this study. There are number of ways to apply visual ethnography, however most of them encounter the photographs as illustrations of a phenomenon or the material world. My intention in this study was instead to treat a photograph as material that itself is an essential part of the observation – capturing the culture from within, not from the outside.

This also led me to a dilemma with the actual anthropological tradition: I did not practice interviews or observations in the traditional sense or engage in a process to understand meanings as such nor did I practice visual ethnography in the traditional sense.

When I entered the field I already knew I was not practicing fieldwork that would enable me to define knowledge of meanings, values or attitudes but merely assume some of their existence. As I later took on MacCannell's theory I decided to distance myself deliberately from the meaning-perspective as a whole. I started to strive for knowledge on the appearances and possible experiences in between the local and tourist populations' cultures. I combined the visual material with my participant and touristic observations and previous theoretical knowledge to be able to suggest a few deriving points for staging and commodification beyond their claimed occurrence as by-products of everyday life.

Due to the downfalls or points of critique set forward in the previous the notions represented in this study are inevitably partial and remain as mere suggestions. To prove the claims set forward in this study profoundly on a specific location as Morocco - especially regarding the strategic nature of staging - we'd need to obtain information on the spaces' meanings given by the local authorities, local people and tourist populations in the present and in the past to compare the reasons of the spaces' existence and meanings they have possessed within their life cycles. Unfortunately this remains rather impossible on most of the locations as they do not have a recorded history of spaces or their construction.

However, I see MacCannells' theory as a potential new deriving point for future studies aiming for knowledge of the reasons for commodification and its possible intentionality: If the theory is applied on several manifold locations the material and related observations are comparable within the terms of commodification and staged authenticity as the differing cultural meanings possessed by the spaces may be seem somewhat irrelevant. Through this new form of so-called typification of surroundings into stages we might end up with a list of characteristics specific to each stage and obtain information on the meanings given to them and their construction.

As we see here, the outcomes of this study and their accuracy are in fact be secondary to the value of the effort put to develop MacCannell's theory and the representation of visual material in a theoretical context. Therefore I see this study most of all to be an important opening for the discussion of modern tourism and to contribute to the current discussion of visual ethnography as a main method of attaining relevant cultural information rather than asserting meaning.

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