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Urban Analysis: Practices of Tourism at Valley Fair Mall

When I arrive at Victoria's Secret for a day of work I begin to realize just how many tourists come to the Valley Fair mall. People approach me from China, England, Mexico, and even Canada. Right outside of our store is the currency exchange for international travelers that are looking to shop at the best stores all found "under one roof." When observing some of these individuals I recognized that the mall creates a stage for tourist performance. In the following essay I will be focusing on tourism in the Valley Fair Mall by looking at photography, hidden locations, and the mall as a city.

When at work I often find myself being approached by tourists who have asked me to take a photo of them in the store; however you are not allowed to take photos in our store. I then observe that these tourists have moved to the outside of the store to take a picture with the Victoria's Secret logo. Individuals are creating tourist performance when this happens. Post-tourists of omnitopia are described in three ways, "they are freed from traditional tourists locales; they can experience multiple perceptions of tourism; and they are self-reflexive about their roles in the co-construction tourist site" (Wood, 2005, p. 7). Manipulations of the photographer's view can be altered; places and people can become props (Wood, 2005, p. 8). While watching tourists from China at work I noticed a boy attempting to capture a photo of his family, when another man approaches and asks to take the photo for him. The family then proceeds to crowd around and hide their cameras behind their back to not make them look as if they were attempting to take a photo; "one might imagine his institution that every added layer of artifice diminishes the value of the images framed, the picture he will share with friends of a stranger

outside of a casino who happened to resemble the Statue of Liberty” (Wood, 2005, p. 9). This gives an explanation of inauthenticity because the tourists wanted to get these massive photos of the models that are in front of the store in their picture. This gives the illusion similar to the Statue of Liberty in Vegas because when the family shows this picture to friends and family in China it creates tourists performance by the illusion that the model is actually with them, not just a photograph from the store. However when tourists are taking photographs they become unaware of hidden locations or access points that can designate them to a specific store.

When tourists shop around the mall they walk along the many aisles and escalators to get to their desired locations. They are so distracted by having so many stores in one place that they miss unseen exits that can get you to a store faster. Along Valley Fair there are exit doors that lead directly around the mall or to the top roof of the building. The majority of individuals believe that these are just exits, but they are the back alleys of the mall. These alleys can lead you from one exit to another in the mall. Tourists are so caught up in their “tourist’s performance” that they do not see the fast travel that happens amongst employees. Goh explains the, “other below spaces and doorways including a little-used subterranean entry into Harrod’s department store...and a special carriage into the London Underground” (Goh, 2011, p. 180), which creates a juxtaposition between the mall tourists and the employees. Now that I have explored photography and the hidden passages of the mall, it is not difficult to see Valley Fair as a city.

The Valley Fair mall is seen as a city because someone must be apart of it to know what is going on. To get involved in the city you must immerse yourself in it. Tourists interact from around the world, which explains the educational value in “walking the city,” or in this case walking in the mall. When tourists amongst the mall interact there is a new type of life

happening between powerful structures (de Certeau, 2011, p. 2). Benjamin stated that the common man is the “essential figure as the modern urban spectator” (Benjamin, 1936, p. 2). The new cities/stores in the mall create an entirely new lifestyle for the people. Someone cannot look out from a tall building and know what interactions are happening in the city unless they expose themselves in it. This is where I see the mall in two ways, the individuals that walk around the mall and pass stores, and the people who immerse themselves in the stores. Tourists around the world essentially have to immerse themselves in the stores to experience what happens in this society compared to their own.

Tourism is found in any area of Valley Fair mall. For individuals “the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own” (Sontag, 1973, p. 4). Tourism in the mall gives individuals a sense of experiencing a new culture without actually experiencing it fully. Someone can visit different stores that are from around the world or travel the world just within the food court with its many cuisines. Wood, Goh, de Certeau, and Benjamin are all in agreement with the idea of Tourism. As humans we like having the comfort of everything we need in one location, even though that location can have its inauthenticity. Individuals however must realize the importance of immersing themselves in the mall lifestyle rather than just observing it.