

# COORDINATES OF AESTHETICS, ART AND CULTURE 7

Public space in the contexts  
of aesthetics, art theory  
and art practice

11. — 12.  
November 2021  
Prešov

Book of  
abstracts



University of Presov, Faculty of Arts  
Institute of Aesthetics and Art Culture  
Society for Aesthetics in Slovakia

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**BOOK OF  
ABSTRACTS**

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## AESTHETICIZING BANALITY.

### THE AESTHETIC PARADOX OF URBAN TOURISM

Millions of Japanese tourists visit Paris every year. On average, 20 of them are so disconcerted by the gap between reality and their idealized vision of the city, that they fall prey to the so-called Paris syndrome, characterized by a number of psychiatric symptoms including delusional states and anxiety (Viala et al. 2004). Interestingly, subjects suffering from the syndrome are mainly concerned with the aesthetic aspect of their journey. Psychopathological issues aside, the gap between expectations and reality is a common experience for tourists. Why is it so?

Surprisingly, the phenomenon of tourism has been enquired almost exclusively from an ethical, economic and social point of view, whereas its aesthetic implications have been largely ignored by philosophers. On the background of the current debate in everyday and environmental aesthetics, we define tourism as an intrinsically paradoxical aesthetic practice.

We assume that urban tourism is mainly motivated by the search for allegedly extraordinary experiences (Todd 2009; 2012; Maitland and Smith 2012). At the same time, tourists are driven by the desire to find themselves immersed in the authentic “everydayness” of a place (MacCannell 1999, Culler 1981).

On this view, we argue that tourism provides a strong form of aestheticization of banality: it encourages travelers to adopt the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990), i.e., a special form of aesthetic gaze entailing an intentional detachment from the ordinary. As a result, tourists contemplate with an aesthetic eye what is just banal routine for the many inhabitants of the cities they visit (Live the real Paris!). Hence the paradox: for while looking forward to living an immersive experience of the ordinary (Saito 2007), tourists are inevitably confined to the role of detached spectators. Urban tourism is thus a promise that cannot be kept: an appreciation of banality by means of an experience of aesthetic detachment.

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