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Gazes and Faces in Tourist Photography

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Title: Gazes and Faces in Tourist Photography
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Abstract:

Tourism and photography are fundamentally intertwined. Previous research on tourist photography suggests that the ways in which we use cameras can provide a path for understanding subjectivity and recognizing agency (see, e.g., Pattison, 2013). During the past years, technological development and changing social practices have led to a completely new way of touristic looking: that is, to a self-directed tourist gaze (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Acknowledging the impact of selfies in the change of visual culture, the study at hand is driven by curiosity about the ways in which tourists, travelers, and guests continue to encounter—or to avoid encountering—'the face of the other'. More specifically, the paper focuses on one of the central ethical questions concerning tourist photography: how tourists photograph local people in tourist destinations. The study builds on Caroline Scarles' (2012, 2013) seminal work on tourist photography that highlight the situational and intersubjective nature of ethical responses.

The theoretical approach of the study draws on Emmanuel Levinas' (1969) thought of ethics as being-for-the-other. Levinas' philosophy is embodied in his presentation of 'the face of the other' that 'speaks to me, and thereby invites me to a relation'. For him, the face is not a physical or aesthetical detail that could be reduced to an obstacle. Instead, the face of the other issues us with an absolute ethical challenge. It demands justice and calls for responsibility that transcends, or goes beyond, knowledge. Following Levinas' writings in *Totality and Infinity*, the paper turns the focus from the gaze to the face in tourist photography.

The empirical material for the study was collected through writing requests in regional newspapers in Finland. The respondents' written accounts of photographing included reflections on how and why they photograph, descriptions of unforgettable situations, along with more general perceptions and ideas regarding tourist photography. To train the attention into tourists' experiences of taking pictures, the analysis of the data was guided by hermeneutic phenomenology. Based on the analysis, the study suggests that the possibilities of encountering faces of other people play a central role in camera use. The results of the analysis encourage us to question the idea of "camera freedom" or "ethics free zones" in tourist photography—even when gazing or shooting from a distance. The study joins the ongoing search for responsibility in tourism settings by addressing the limitations of approaching ethics as a project of an individual, spontaneous subject. Moreover, it welcomes further discussion about the possible potentialities of 'the face' as a conceptual tool to facilitate reflection on other-orientedness, responsibility, and care.