

# The Show Must Go On: Tourism at Universal Studios

Lisa Ritter

## Introduction

Universal Studios near Los Angeles, California, provide an interesting and instructive example of both the development and the impact of tourism. The Studio, in its current state, appears to exist solely for the purpose of tourism. Yet, an in-depth study of Universal, its history and goals proves this assumption incorrect. As will be revealed in this paper, the Studio has changed a great deal in response to demands and pressures from the “outside world.” In this respect, Universal may be likened to a closed, native society whose material culture and life-style (i.e., motion-picture making and “glamour”) are appropriated and sometimes exploited by large commercial interests. The culture, in other words, becomes a product for tourist consumption.

The growing demand for the perceived privilege of visiting the Studio, which stems from the profusion of unique markers, indicates a great deal of tourist attention. The economic implications of this attention have not been lost on corporate entities. The intervention of these corporations, in some cases, becomes an interference.

Following an introduction to the history and practices of Universal Studios, this paper will examine the attitudes of those who work at the Studio and those who visit it, especially with respect to the perception of authenticity and the work-versus-leisure dichotomy. Such an examination illustrates numerous dimensions of the structure of the social establishment, as proposed by Goffman (1959). In addition, this paper will describe the impact of tourism on the physical plant and its “native” inhabitants.

## The Setting

Today, Universal City is just that—a city within Los Angeles County, California. Located on 420 acres of land in the eastern end of the San Fernando Valley, the city has its own post office, hospital, several banks, a stock brokerage firm, and a security and fire protection force. Such municipal statistics may seem unexceptional. However, Universal City is no ordinary town. In fact, the city is comprised of the Universal Studios Tour and is therefore the fourth largest theme park in the US.<sup>1</sup> It is also the largest and busiest motion-picture studio in the world.

Universal City has a working population of nearly 10,000 individuals, but only a few permanent residents (i.e., the groundskeeper and his family, who reside within city limits). Indeed, Universal is one of the most unique townships in the world.

On July 4, 1964, Universal City began offering public tours to the thousands of individuals who wanted a “behind-the-scenes” look at Hollywood. Since then, over 30 million people have visited the studio [in 1984], and approximately 3.5 million more are expected this year [1984]. Obviously, a visitor influx of such enormous proportions, to what must be perceived as an exclusive, labor-focused, “native” culture, cannot have anything but a dramatic impact.

The purpose of the study that follows is to examine and understand the development of tourism as it has affected the history, growth, and “culture” of Universal City and its people.

## The History of Universal Studio

### *The Beginning*

Carl Laemmle, a Bavarian immigrant, arrived in the US in 1884. In 1911, after involvement in a number of enterprises, he bought the Nestor Studio in Hollywood, California, and, on June 8, 1912, the Universal Film Manufacturing Company was formed. Several years later, the company purchased the Taylor Estate in Lankershim Township for \$3,500. An account of the early years of Universal Studios reads as follows:

“The entire nation was alerted for Universal City’s official gala opening, held on March 15, 1915. Trains streamed toward the new studio from across the country. Ten thousand sightseers swarmed over the lot as Thomas Edison formally started up the electrical equipment and Buffalo Bill Cody was honored as a guest of the young studio.

“ ‘Uncle Carl’ Laemmle, a natural showman, had bleachers erected overlooking the stages and began the first Universal Studios Tour in 1919. For 25 cents a head, spectators were invited to come in, have a box lunch and watch silent films being made. Cheers and applause were permitted even as the crank cameras turned” (Universal Studios 1981).

This statement appears to refute the argument made in this paper that Universal Studios can be compared to a traditional culture upon which modern tourist practices and commercial interests are imposed. However, a closer look at the Universal tour guides’ manual reveals an interesting point: “Uncle Carl” was inviting spectators to watch the making of *silent* films. Because extraneous noise was not a factor, destruction of the material product was not a threat. Therefore, a state of balance existed; i.e., the studio “natives” were able to make a profit, and the tourist visitors were able to view the production of a motion picture. A relationship apparently so beneficial to both parties had a certain future. Indeed, this mutually acceptable arrangement continued with little interruption for almost nine years. However, in 1928, the advent of sound cinematography had a drastic effect on the studio and the tour.

### *The Transition*

The end of the silent film era brought an end to the studio tour. A number of different reasons motivated the Studio’s change in procedure. First, Carl Laemmle, Jr., was placed in charge of production, and, with him came a new production policy. Henceforth, the Studio would concentrate on fewer, higher-quality films. The challenge from the competition meant a shift from the simultaneous outdoor filming of up to six Westerns to the indoor production of unique sound features. This change required the presence of a much larger crew, capable of working with newly developed sound equipment. The equipment itself required the use of sound stages to protect the production from environmental factors, such as fluctuating lighting, weather, and, of course, extraneous noise.

As the dynamics of the society of Universal “natives” changed, so did its attitude toward tolerance of visitors. The logistics of the tour instituted by Mr. Laemmle, Sr., were no longer feasible and, in the eyes of Mr. Laemmle, Jr., no longer profitable. Thus, the city was closed to outsiders.

### *The Reinstatement*

As Nash states, “Touristic expansion takes place according to the needs and resources of productive centers and their people” (1977:37). And so it came to pass that the new owners of Universal, the giant conglomerate MCA, reinstated the studio tour in 1964. Dr. Jules Stein, board chairman of MCA, and Lew Wasserman, president of the corporation, concentrated on three areas in their takeover of the studio: (1) improving the physical plant; (2) increasing television production; and (3) establishing a studio tour as part of a new image for “Universal City Studios.”

These developments were important to the continuance of the then ailing studio. The incredible impact of a new medium, television, had drastically reduced both the interest in and the importance of the motion-picture industry. Other studios, such as MGM and Paramount, faltered and were forced to sell large parcels of studio land (called the “back lot”) in an attempt to survive. MCA, on the other hand, saw a chance to save Universal’s property and personnel by turning the existing studio back lot into a tourist attraction. The effects of this decision were numerous and far-reaching. An analysis of the particular case of Universal Studios will assist in understanding the purposes and processes behind the evolution of a tourist system.

### **The Making of a Tourist Attraction**

The reinstatement of the studio tour, although not without its drawbacks, proceeded in a regular and rapid fashion, due in part to the power and financial support of corporate backing. At the time, the return to the state of a self-acknowledged tourist attraction seemed beneficial to both corporate and film-making interests. The latter

group, pressured by competition from television, was willing to admit almost any process that could bolster studio prosperity and allow it to practice its craft in a stable environment. The advantages for MCA and its corporate backers were obvious. By opening up the studio to tourists, a new studio image could be established. Accessibility was viewed as the key. The opportunity to see a motion-picture production “up close and personal” was proposed to narrow the perceived distance between the audience and the medium, an effect that television had already achieved with enormous success. To place the audience and the medium in close contact—to, in fact, allow the tourist to go “behind the scenes”—would rekindle public interest in the movies, while, of course, turning a huge profit.

The steps taken and the methods employed to implement this plan resulted in a situation that deserves close scrutiny. In the following sections, the ramifications of this plan will be examined with respect to the impact of tourism on the issues of “authenticity” and cultural practices.

### **Advertising and Marketing the Front and Back Stages**

The “new” Universal Studios, as conceived by MCA, required the introduction of modern techniques of advertising and marketing. As the 1984 press kits reports, “In 1964 management conceived the idea of allowing a tour company to drive its buses through the lower lot in order to boost lunch-time business at the Studio Commissary.” Later, Universal took over the transportation portion of the “Tour,” loading visitors into 125-person-capacity “GlamorTrams.” This method offered the greatest convenience for tourists, who could not be expected to walk the 420-acre expanse of the back lot. The new trams were also the best way of managing large numbers of tourists and, most important, were the most expeditious means of crowd control.

While the Tour could offer the visitor a “behind-the-scenes” look at how movies are made, management was not willing to relinquish the power of choosing which scenes were to be invaded. As MacCannell notes:

“The modern disruption of real life and the simultaneous emergence of a fascination for the ‘real life’ of others are the outward signs of an important social redefinition of the categories ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ now taking place” (1976:91).

In this passage, MacCannell accurately describes the very phenomenon that accounts for the great touristic interest in what Universal Studios’ Tour began to promote in 1964 and continues to promote today. The fascination with “what is truth in one’s life” and “what is real in the lives of others” drew 39,000 guests to the Studio in its first year of reopening.

Using Goffman’s model of “front and back stage” (1959), it becomes apparent that Universal has managed to rewrite reality in such a way that two models of it are operating at the same time (Figure 1). In the first model, which I shall call “Interpretation A,” the so-called “front stage” consists of the physical studio, or that portion of the plant that is the meeting place of tourists, as well as the tour route covered by Universal Tour employees. The “back stage,” which is not accessible to tourists, consists of all those facilities for Universal employees, such as the management offices, the dressing rooms, and the rooms where tour guides and other personnel take their break from tourists.

The model being promoted by Universal, on the other hand, is a different one, which I shall call “Interpretation B.” In this version, the unwitting tourist is led to believe that Universal Studios consists exclusively of a “back stage,” into which he or she steps as a privileged guest. This advertising approach lures the tourist who wants to “Come see the movies before they’re movies!” From this perspective, then, the implicit “front stage” is the legend, the elusive glamour of “Hollywood,” which, because it is not corporeal like the movie production itself, allows Universal Studios to assume back-stage status.

Universal’s back-stage-only strategy is very clever in terms of building tourists’ expectations. As MacCannell has suggested, the medium (i.e., the motion picture or television show) thus becomes the marker by which Universal Studios—and Hollywood—is identified:

“The commodity has become an integral part of everyday life in modern society because its original form is a symbolic representation (advertisement) of itself which both promises and guides experience in advance of actual consumption” (1976:22).

The tourist, who is promised experience when he watches the fantasies spun by Universal Studios’ film makers, expects to be guided through that experience on the Universal Studios Tour. As one three-time visitor to the Studio commented:

“I don’t know how I heard about Universal Studios. I guess you just know about it. I don’t think they advertise in Florida . . . No, you know what made it really hit home for me? When, at the end of ‘Animal House’ it says ‘When in Hollywood, visit the Universal Studios Tour’.”

Here we can see that Universal Studios, which filmed part of “Animal House,” has managed to juxtapose the marker and the experience in an almost subliminal fashion. The profusion of off-site markers for Universal Stu-

dios has an unfailling, if unconscious, effect. As one young man reported in response to the question, "How did you first hear about Universal Studios?":

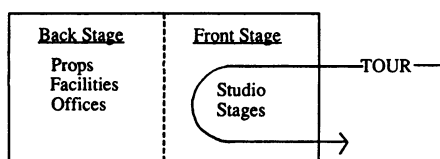
"You don't hear about it, do you? I guess you just always know it's there. Everyone knows it's there."

In most cases, the public's recollection of the experience of Universal Studios seems more vivid and focused than the off-site markers that led to its discovery. As one woman stated:

"Oh, I don't remember where I heard about it. But I remember the first time I was there."

There can be no doubt that Universal, having promised an "authentic" experience, is pressed to provide such an experience for tourists. Visitors to Universal Studios expect to validate the images of Hollywood supplied by formal information (i.e., advertising, the Universal Studios Publicity Department), as well as informal information gathered from friends. Indeed, it is the job of Universal Studios, as the self-professed "Entertainment Capital of the World," to present a valid, fulfilling experience for the tourist, which it does through its front-stage-only Tour, described by Interpretation A, which is purported to be the "back stage" in Interpretation B.

Interpretation A: Analytical Reality (cf. Goffman 1959)



Interpretation B: Mythic Reality, according to Universal Studios

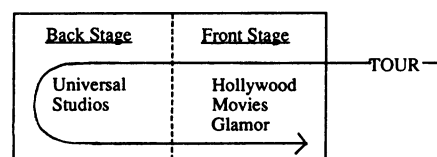


Figure 1. Analytic and Mythic Interpretations of the Universal Studios Tour

## Role Interaction

As Goffman states:

"Given a particular performance as the point of reference, we have distinguished three crucial roles on the basis of function: those who perform; those performed to; and those who neither perform in the show or observe it . . . the three crucial roles mentioned could also be described on the basis of the regions to which the role player has access: performers appear in the front and back regions; the audience appears only in the front region; and the outsiders are excluded from both regions" (1959:144-145).

Goffman's typology provides a useful basis for the study of role performance at Universal Studios. The primary roles to be examined here are those of the tour guide; the tourist; and the watched.

## The Tour Guide

The first role to be examined is that of the performer, who, according to Goffman, is apt to appear in both the front and back regions. The description is most applicable to the tour guide, an MCA employee hired for the expressed purpose of explaining the material culture and rituals of Universal City to those who visit it. The guide is an intermediary; his or her devotion is demanded by the corporation and his or her insight is plumbed by the tourist. By the very nature of the guide's job, the guide is the one most imbued with the traditions and culture of the "native" society; yet, he or she is also the one most likely to become jaded or to question the validity of the values that have been instilled in him or her. The guide's dilemma is described by MacCannell, who states that "...a weakened sense of reality appears with the differentiation of society into front and back. Once this division is established, there can be no return to a state of nature" (1976:93).

The tour guide is the one most likely to be exposed to and to experience the destruction of the local culture by tourists, or precisely those individuals who are supposed to be entertained by the tour guide. Such a situation is, at least, compromising for the tour guide and, at most, degrading. The tour guide is a pawn for commercial interests, a second-rate culture broker. The guide is also an on-site marker, whose words are often accorded reverence by tourists, who perceive the guide to be their closest link to Hollywood.

A brief look at the 300-page script for the two-and-a-half-hour Universal Tour demonstrates that MCA is not oblivious to the power the guide possesses. A typical portion of the guide's monologue is as follows:

“ . . . and folks, you’ll want to have your cameras ready, because in just a few moments we’ll be visiting the front lot. There, you’ll be leaving the tram to visit the Special Effects Stage presented by Eastman Kodak Company. The front lot is also where you are most likely to see a celebrity today, so, as I said, have those cameras ready . . . By the way, as we pull up to the Special Effects Stage, notice the large, black, camera booth off to the driver’s side of the tram. You may purchase film and flash-cubes at the booth, if you should need either of those items before entering the Stage . . . ”

The tour guide’s concern for the preparedness and well-being of the tourist is heart-warming. It is also mandatory. The aim of photo promotion by the tour guide is to coax the tourist into taking as many pictures as possible. Why? The key is big business. Kodak Film company has a monopoly on the photographic equipment sold at Universal Studios. They, like Coca-Cola, Kal-Kan, and numerous other corporations, provide sponsorship and capital in exchange for a “plug.” In other words, each of these corporate sponsors receives *at least two mandatory endorsements* by the guide on every tour he or she leads. In fact, the tour guide must recite at least twelve required plugs during the last three minutes of the Tour.

Verbal advertising of this sort has caused numerous practical and ethical problems for the tour guides. As one said:

“The whole damned thing is one long commercial. They’re [the tourists] not listening anyway, and I’m trying to give directions . . . The last thing I need is to be saddled with more plugs.”

Or, as another stated:

“The new drop point was the *worst*. It’s simply too much. More stuff to say in less time. It’s a bad reflection on Universal, and I hate doing it.”

The point to be made here is that corporate interests are reshaping the Tour and alienating the tour guides. The demands of MCA often conflict with or compromise the guides’ values. Stringent requirements for dress, appearance, speech, and attitude are intended to make these individuals meet the expectations of tourists. The result is a front-stage persona. Yet, the guide’s consciousness of the role often dilutes the conviction with which he or she delivers information—an effect that must be perceptible and therefore unsettling to the tourist.

### *The Tourist*

The tourist takes on the second crucial role in Goffman’s model of the structure of social systems. He or she is present only on the front stage, and it is there that his or her favor is curried. There can be no doubt that the tourist is the most important role performer at Universal Studios, simply because his or her money is desired.

Why do tourists visit Universal Studios? There appear to be two major reasons:

(1) *The Obligatory Sight*. Universal Studios has established a reputation as a tourist attraction. It is one of those places that a tourist “must” see. As one tourist stated: “We want to see California. We did Disneyland yesterday, and we’re doing Universal Studios today.”

This comment sheds light on the tourist’s perception of tourism. According to this respondent, sightseeing is a task to be “done,” or, to put it another way:

“Doing” Disneyland + “Doing” Universal Studios = Seeing California

(2) *The “In-Person” Viewing of TV and Movie Highlights*. The second most important reason why tourists come to Universal Studios is to see “in person” something that has been seen on television or in the movies. Currently [in 1984], the biggest “draw” is KITT, a computerized car from the Universal television series “Knight-riders.” Children are instrumental in this regard. As one youngster said: “My friend was here before, and he sat and talked to KITT like on TV. Are we going to see KITT, ’cause I told him we were gonna?”

In addition, the desire to increase one’s proximity to celebrities, to “rub elbows” as it were with matinee idols, may be interpreted as a product of participant-desired identification. A visit to the Studio may be an attempt to liken oneself to the “beautiful people.” This may be achieved by visiting their territory, taking their pictures, and otherwise sharing their culture. Unlike a visit to a movie theater, the tourist at Universal is no longer on the outside looking in. He or she *is* in.

Furthermore, Universal goes to great lengths to insure that the more discriminating tourist will not feel that taking the Tour is beneath him or her. A publicity release from Universal Studios’ publicity department states:

“Even during its humble early period, film stars always took the Tour. Jimmy Stewart, Shirley MacLaine and the crew from ‘McHale’s Navy’ frequently chatted with Tour visitors. John Wayne took to eating hot dogs in the Tour Entertainment Center and by the 70’s ‘Kojak’s’ Telly Savalas was distributing Tootsie Pops to Tour visitors.

“People from all walks of life have taken the Tour. Prince Charles of England, Elizabeth Taylor, Grace Kelly, Henry Kissinger, Paul McCartney, Michael Jackson and a group of Soviet Diplomats escorted by a Russian speaking guide.”

Such a release attempts to attest to the veracity of the experience offered by Universal Studios. Its claims cannot be spurious, nor its Tour common or vulgar, if figures like John Wayne not only visit, but do so regularly. The tourist, then, is able to bask in the light of the luminaries who, we are told, frequent the Studio.

### *The Watched*

Goffman has identified the third faction in his analysis of the social system as "those who neither perform in the show nor observe it" (1959:145). At Universal, this category does not exist. Rather, there is a fourth category, which I shall call the "watched," consisting of individuals who come to Universal Studios to work. This category includes the directors, technicians, hair dressers, camera operators, actors and actresses, and the many other Universal Studios employees who do not perform, but are in the show. These people, the rightful dwellers of the back lot, are ferreted out and exhibited by the tour guide for the tourists to see. Indeed, tourists come to the Studio to watch these people work, even though the average visitor to Universal Studios does not arrive with a conscious desire to view a "work display," as defined by MacCannell (1976). However, the Studio is, indeed, a work place, and the individuals who the tourists wish to see (i.e., "movie stars") are on the lot to *work*.

There is a distinction to be made, however, because, unlike some of the work displays described by MacCannell (1976), those who are watched at Universal Studios have not invited the watchers to watch them. Rather, MCA-Universal Studios Tour, Inc., capitalizes on the interest that tourists have in the movie-making community without an expressed concern for the welfare of the latter.

Greenwood's insights on culture as a commodity are as applicable to Universal Studios' "native" population as they are to the Spanish Basque community about which he writes:

"A fundamental characteristic of the capitalist system is that anything that can be priced can be bought and sold. It can be treated as a commodity. This offers no analytical problem when local people are paid to perform for tourists . . . It is not so clear when activities of the host culture are treated as part of the 'come-on' without their consent and are invaded by tourists who do not reimburse them for their 'service'" (1977:130).

Such is the case of the "locals" who work at Universal Studios. Tourists go to Universal to see and, in some cases, to harass these individuals, who most wish to be unseen and undisturbed. To add insult to injury, the filming crew must lease the sound stages and rent the back-lot land on which they work. Therefore, these people are literally paying to be exploited.

Two questions arise at this point: (1) What is the onlooker's interpretation of the activities being carried out by the local population? and (2) If locals are being exploited, then who is profiting from the influx of tourists?

The first question reintroduces components of the "work display" theory advanced by MacCannell (1976). However, because existing factors preclude the satisfactory categorization of Universal as a work display in MacCannell's terms, it is best to again compare the Universal situation to that of the Basque, in their performance of the "Alarde":

"What is most important is for whom the *Alarde* is performed. It is clearly not performed for outsiders; it is a ritual whose importance and meaning lies in the entire town's participation and in the intimacy with which its major symbols are understood by all the participants and onlookers (the latter often having spent months sewing costumes, directing marching practice, and teaching music to the children). *It is a performance for the participants, not a show*" (Greenwood 1977:130-131).

While the emotional, ritualistic aspects of the "Alarde" are not completely analogous to the workday practices at Universal Studios, the two phenomena do share some affinities with respect to their reliance on the correct interpretation of purpose and meaning by the participants. Filming is not a show. It is the product of an immense amount of cooperation and dedication by a small, exclusive group of people. The sudden imposition of literally thousands of visitors into the work environment wreaks havoc, for the tourists' interpretation of the filming "ritual" unfortunately does not coincide with that of the people who perform it.

Indeed, the desire of a tourist to appear as an "insider" leads to a bizarre reversal in the tourist's attitude and behavior when confronted with the very sight that he or she has been hoping to witness. Cohen (1979) has reported on this touristic behavioral response in his work on the sociology of tourism. According to Cohen, the tourist may choose to refute the concrete experience, interpreting it instead as a "put-on"—a show for the audience, performed with little conviction. In the case of Universal, the visitor who is seeing the "real thing"—i.e., the making of a movie—often becomes skeptical to the point of rejection. When visitors exhibit this behavior—known by Universal employees as the "tourist smarts"—they consider all witnessed phenomena to be spurious, in an attempt to protect themselves from being duped or appearing naive.

This behavior is damaging to the touristic experience and certainly to that of the film maker. For, if the tourist believes that such an event is occurring solely for his benefit, he may feel it is within his province (i.e.,

included in the price of admission) to disturb and disrupt the local activities. Therefore, if filming at Universal Studios is to be billed as a show, then the consequences of this interpretation by the audience may prove damaging to the experiences of both the “watchers” and the “watched.”

This brings us to the second question, namely: Who profits from an interaction such as the one described above? To answer this question, one must first discern which party is responsible for defining filmmaking as a show. The easy answer is MCA, which must certainly be held responsible for the publicity that has drawn more than 40 million guests to the Studio since its “reopening” twenty years ago. However, in all fairness, it is unlikely that the corporation had any idea of the magnitude of the changes that would be required of the Studio in the face of tourism. Of course, ignorance of the possible long-term effects of massive tourism is not an excuse, but, then again, it is not clear that MCA or its commercial sponsors are looking for an excuse. As Greenwood has noted:

“The culture brokers have appropriated facets of a lifestyle into the tourism package to help sales in the competitive market. This sets in motion a process of its own for which no one, not even planners, seem to feel in the least responsible . . .

“The commoditization of culture does not require the consent of the participants; it can be done by anyone. Once set in motion, the process seems irreversible” (177:137).

### Discussion: Responsibility and Change

There can be no doubt that, in the seventy-year history of Universal Studios, the relationship between the Tour and the Studio has undergone a great deal of change. The first quarter of the twentieth century saw the inception of a studio tour that appeared to provide mutual benefits to film makers and tourists. Silent film makers and actors profited from the encouragement provided by a live audience, and the audience, in turn, enjoyed a leisurely, relatively inexpensive day “behind the scenes” at a motion-picture studio. The Tour was discontinued with the advent of sound recording for the simple reason that the relationship between tourist and studio was no longer symbiotic under the new circumstances. The Tour’s second incarnation was more questionable. Although the Studio and its workers were given an economic reprieve with the presence of the parent corporation, MCA, and its new Universal Studios Tour, the impact of this seemingly unbridled commercial force has been felt with ever-increasing strength.

MCA continues to promote Universal Studios as a tourist attraction, and the result is a literal degradation of the Studio environment. Film makers, harried and harassed, seek new locations or move their filming indoors, away from the people who most wish to be near them. The increased demand for tours has also led to a recent major renovation of the Universal infrastructure. For example, a 1984 Universal press release reads:

“In order to easily and comfortably transport the Tour’s evergrowing visitor population, Universal Studios asked Winnebago Industries, Inc., to design and build a versatile, durable, yet comfortable people-mover. With the assistance of tour transportation experts they designed and have now refined the ‘SuperTram,’ the world’s largest free-moving, gas-driven road vehicle. ‘SuperTram’ has a passenger capacity of 175, 33 percent greater than the older model ‘GlamorTrams.’ The Tour has a fleet of 15 ‘SuperTrams’ with more on order to be delivered within the next 12 months.”

What the press release fails to mention is the continual trouble and expense posed by the SuperTram since its introduction in the early 1980s. The increased size of the vehicle has required a denser road surface, a larger turning circle, and a wider rail system, none of which were anticipated by the “tour transportation experts.” The result has been several accidents, thousands of dollars of road work, and a number of alienated Teamsters. The SuperTram is not popular with employees, because it reduces the number of drivers and guides needed per day, it breaks down with extraordinary regularity, and it poses a safety hazard.

In addition, as one might expect, the growing tourist influx has had a number of secondary effects. The noise, smog, and litter created by the public and their means of transportation have marred the environment necessary for motion-picture making. This has caused a further rift between those who work at the studio and those who attempt to capitalize on it.

This rift is perhaps best illustrated by “Prop Plaza.” Built in 1965, Prop Plaza provides a stopping point on the tour route, ostensibly to provide time for a rest during the Tour. However, no attempt at commercialization has been overlooked at this location. Built around the large props from the television series “The Land of the Giants,” Prop Plaza is a merchandising arena of vast proportions. In fact, the path that tourists must follow to reboard the tram winds by every shop, film stand, and souvenir booth on the three-level plaza. Tour guides, furthermore, are required to point out the gift shops and the amount of allotted time to be spent at the Plaza. Although the tour guides are programmed to read, “We recommend you spend about 20-25 minutes here at Prop Plaza, before continuing with your tour,” a number of cynical guides have proposed changing the text to read, “We recommend you spend about 20-25 *dollars* here at Prop Plaza, before continuing with your tour.”

## Conclusion

This last comment reveals a great deal about local attitudes toward the tourist population and the infrastructure tourism has spawned at Universal Studios. The current situation at the Studio is one of extremely grudging acceptance. Tourists continue to flock to the Studio, and local industry people continue to resent their presence. Tour guides, as second-rate culture brokers, remain caught between the two factions, who resist acknowledging the importance of one another. For, while the producer may bemoan the fact that his filming is interrupted at regular intervals by a SuperTram filled with gawking tourists, he must realize that these same individuals are a prospective audience for his new film endeavor. Their very presence at the Studio is an indication of the degree of interest that these tourists have in the Studio and its inhabitants, although most do not wish to appear naive, or "green," about what they think goes on there.

The final presence—and the one that remains at a safe distance from this interaction—is the corporation, which, along with its commercial backers, continues to reap the benefits of the situation. It is this corporate entity that, through promotion of film making as a show, has created as many problems as it has solved.

Thus, having revealed some of the inner secrets of one of America's major tourist attractions, it is appropriate for me to end this paper with this note:

*"When in Hollywood, visit the Universal Studios Tour."*

## Notes

1. This ranking is based on paid admissions. The three leading attractions are as follows: (1) Disneyland, California; (2) Disney World, Florida; and (3) Epcot Center, Florida.

## References Cited

Cohen, Erik

1979 Rethinking the Sociology of Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 6:18-35.

Goffman, Erving

1959 *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Greenwood, Davydd J.

1977 Culture by the Pound: An Anthropological Perspective on Tourism as Cultural Commoditization. *In* *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Valene L. Smith, ed. Pp. 129-138. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Nash, Dennison

1977 Tourism as a Form of Imperialism. *In* *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Valene L. Smith, ed. Pp. 33-47. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

MacCannell, Dean

1976 *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken.

1981 *Universal Studios' Tour Guide Manual*. Universal City, California: Universal Studios.