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Polytechnic Touring Association, 1888–1939**

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**Title:**

Tourist Photographers and the Promotion of Travel: the Polytechnic Touring Association, 1888 – 1939

**Abstract:**

The Polytechnic Touring Association (PTA) was a London-based, originally philanthropic turned commercial travel firm whose historical origins coincided with the arrival of the Kodak camera in 1888 – thus, of popular (tourist) photography. This article examines the PTA's changing relationship with tourist photographers, and how this influenced the company's understanding of what role photography could play in promoting the tours, in the late nineteenth and early twenty century. This inquiry is advanced on the basis of the observation that, during this time, the PTA's passage from viewing tourists as citizens to educate, to customers to please, paralleled the move from using photography-based images to mixed media. Such a development was certainly a response to unprecedented market demands; this article argues that it should also be considered in relation to the widening of photographic perceptions engendered by the democratization of the medium, to which the PTA responded, first as educator, then as service provider. In doing so, the article raises several questions about the shifting relationship between "high", or established, and "low", or emerging, forms of culture, as mass photography and the mass marketing of tourism developed.

**Keywords:**

Polytechnic Touring Association, tourist photography, travel marketing, history, popular culture

**Introduction**

In 1896 H. Samson Clark, the advertising agent of the London-based Regent Street Polytechnic (RSP), and also one of the editors of its in-house journal, the *Polytechnic Magazine* (PM), wrote to L. Trapp & Co., distributors of photographic materials:

As the summer season will soon be upon us, will you allow me to draw your attention to the special advantages of the Polytechnic Magazine as an advertising medium for advertisements of photographic materials and apparatus. The Polytechnic Photographic School is one of the largest and most successful of its kind in the Kingdom, and in addition to it we have a Photographic Society in which are enrolled students who pass through the Photographic classes. You are also probably aware that the Polytechnic Institution is the largest of its kind in the world, numbering fully 15,000 members and students mainly drawn from the West End, while during the season several thousands of people travel on the Continent under our auspices, so that you will see that the Magazine circulates among just the class of people who use photographic materials.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of Clark's letter the number of those engaged in photography in England, due especially to the arrival on the market of cheaper and easier to operate cameras, was on the increase. Aware of this growth, and in an effort to draw the attention of potential advertisers, Clark outlined the breadth of those involved with photography at the Polytechnic. They included not only the students and members of its Photographic School and Society, but also the lower-middle classes of the West End, those clerks and shop assistants that composed at this time the majority of the Polytechnic membership (Heller 2013), and those who travelled with the soon-to-be Polytechnic Touring Association (PTA).<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of photographic practices and related aesthetic and subjective desires, this was then, rather than *one* "class of people", actually a very heterogeneous group. One of the key contexts in which such a diversity of approaches contested each other was that of travel and tourism. In part this derived from the conflicting aspirations of the various parties, especially as a result of tourists' access to the means of representation: as we shall see, the narratives of travel that tourists produced challenged the authority of what had up to that point been the recognized aesthetics of travel.<sup>3</sup>

This article examines the transformative role that such a "democratization" of photography had on the visual economy of images (Poole 1997) in the context of the emerging travel industry from the late nineteenth century. Specifically, it looks at the PTA's response to such new access to the medium by focusing on the travel firm's changing relationship with tourist photographers in the period between 1888 and 1939. A study over such a long period of time provides a compelling context for thinking more generally about the influence that the democratization of photography had on ideas of both travel and photography in this period. It seeks, in this way, to establish the extent to which new photographic practices might have influenced the PTA's use of photography for promotional purposes as the organization was becoming a commercial venture. In the passage from philanthropy to commerce, a crucial transformation took place in the organization's approach to tourists: from citizens to educate they became customers to please. Simultaneously, the PTA moved from a predominant use of photography-based images, to the use of commercial art, combining drawings, graphic design and photography – thus joining the 'golden age' of advertising (Nevett 1982).<sup>4</sup> This was certainly a response to the passage from representing, and thereby promoting, an experience which was perceived as fundamentally didactic, to one understood as mainly hedonistic, as the concerns for education and respectability that had motivated the earliest tours eventually faded with the emergence of unprecedented market demands. This transition also reflected a broader shift in the market from promoting the "rational" (utility) of products to their "symbolic" qualities (Leiss et al. 1986).<sup>5</sup> It was within this context that many turn-of-the-century artists, assessing their role and possibilities within modern society, joined the ranks of economic production: the fusion of fine and applied arts, which in England had its roots in the Arts and Crafts movement, led to commercial art.<sup>6</sup> This form of visual communication was seen as enhancing an emotional response, and related forms of consumer desire, that, allegedly, a straightforward photographic realism could not prompt.<sup>7</sup> In the context of travel this led, for example, to illustrated travel posters.<sup>8</sup> If and

how a transformed approach to photography also influenced the emergence of new visual strategies, however, is still largely unexplored. As I will attempt to demonstrate, the different roles allocated to photographs and other visual media should be seen as ways of regulating, in accordance with a company like the PTA's changing objectives, the plurality of photographic perspectives that the democratization of photography had engendered. It is in this light that the following seeks to understand how the construction of photographic meaning was altered as a result of tourists' appropriation (and ensuing re-elaboration) of the means of representation within an emerging mass travel market.

The PTA is, in this respect, a remarkable case study. It originated within the educational context of the RSP (also known as the "Polytechnic" or "Institute"), and maintained throughout this period a connection with its parent institution. This made it possible for the educational infrastructure of the earliest tours to be continued, by gradual adaptation, into the broader marketplace of twentieth-century tourism. As a consequence, the knowledge-based framework within which the relationship between photography and travel initially emerged had to be negotiated with the development of mass photography and the requirements of a growing mass market of commodified travel.

### **Travel, education and respectability (1888-1923)**

The PTA originated within the Regent Street Polytechnic, which had opened in 1882. The personal project of the philanthropist and businessman Quintin Hogg (1845-1903), the Polytechnic's ambition was "to make a man into a good citizen, by helping him educationally, physically, socially, and helping him to a true religion."<sup>9</sup> Travelling developed as a complementary aspect of this project: subject-specific excursions were organized with the Polytechnic Schools, clubs and societies, and emigration and work-experiences abroad were also supported.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, tours in Britain and abroad, at first designed for the working and lower middle class community of the Polytechnic, were expected to contribute to one's personal and professional development. Originally conducted on "Christian and temperance principles",<sup>11</sup> the tours encouraged adherence to "rational recreation" and respectability – thus conforming to that broader "basically and relentlessly didactic" (Bailey 1978: 47) structuring of social activities which aimed at regulating the leisure of the "lower" classes within the dominant bourgeois ideology of the period. The Polytechnic intended, in this way, to secure for its members conformity with established social norms and values in order to form them as modern, respectable citizens.

Because of the success of Hogg's project, in 1891 the Government's Charity Commissioners started supporting the Institute financially. Hogg's personal control over the Polytechnic ended, and educational and recreational activities became increasingly separate; this also effected a restructuring of the Polytechnic's travel arrangements, as the Governing Body decided that it could no longer be liable for them.<sup>12</sup> In order to support the tours financially, the Polytechnic thus began to cater for non-members, opening to the broad

middle class market. With the establishment of the PTA as a private company limited by shares in 1911, it officially became a commercial body.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the early turn towards commerce, however, in the years between 1888, the date retrospectively chosen as the origin of the PTA, and 1923, the tours remained focused on the possibility to travel in order to learn. This was largely because of the commitment to education and travel of Hogg and of his close collaborator Robert Mitchell (1855-1933), the Polytechnic's Director of Education who managed the tours until 1923.<sup>14</sup> As Jos S. Dexter, a teacher in the Polytechnic Science School, put it in 1899:

The popular and right use of a holiday is to enable the mind and the body to recuperate and to store energy, physical and mental, for a coming year. [...] Recreation consists in a change of work, and not in its cessation, and by keeping our mental faculties open we may reap an educational harvest in a pleasurable and health-giving way. [...] You will return a wiser and better man or woman – wiser in mind, better in disposition, and with thoughts on a higher plane.<sup>15</sup>

Those who participated in the tours recognized (at least in principle) this approach; as one tourist put it, “levity in the sense of pleasure would indeed have been unworthy.”<sup>16</sup> Although records reveal that many at the Polytechnic felt that they could not afford the majority of foreign tours, and that the motives for those joining them were not in fact necessarily educational, the Polytechnic/PTA remained committed, way into the mid-1920s, to fostering tours that could contribute to the “formation” of the participants. This self-perception may have been more of an aspiration than a fact, given the feasibility (or otherwise) of promoting tours for educational reasons only, but it determined how the organization saw itself: preoccupied, as it put it in 1923, with “the wider outlook of the intrinsic value of the service to its beneficiaries.”<sup>17</sup> Importantly, this commitment to *imparting* the knowledge considered necessary for a “formative” experience also influenced the PTA’s relationship with the tourists that it catered for, its response to the development of those tourists’ photographic practices, and, related to this, the function expected of photography in the promotion of travel.

### **The education of tourist photographers**

In March 1894, in anticipation of the summer season, the *Amateur Photographer (AP)* advised its readers:

The Polytechnic trips to Norway were last year such a great success that a series of fortnightly cruises have been arranged for this summer, and at such a low rate as to make it a very cheap holiday. (...)

For photographic students doubtless these trips offer many advantages, which, however, are always associated with disadvantages. A dark-room will be arranged on board, and Mr S. J. Beckett, who accompanies these trips as official photographer,

will, of course, be pleased to give all information to those who may go.

One of the disadvantages to hunting in crowds to the man who goes on photography bent, is the "crowd" in the first place; this gets in the way, interferes with the ease and comfort of the photographer. Then again, a general excursion will not stop whilst the photographer wishes to take a view, provided, of course, he has not a hand-camera. And then some of us even object to photograph with a crowd of photographers, and believe that more is done by working quietly by oneself or with one's friend. Still, the trips mentioned above afford so many opportunities that they are well worth the attention of our readers.<sup>18</sup>

That summer, the Polytechnic reported that it had catered for over 1,000 people to Norway alone;<sup>19</sup> a group photograph taken in 1896 (figure 1) gives a sense of scale of the number of participants. As the success of the tours grew, so did the size of the groups – one of the Norway cruises of 1903 listed 169 passengers.<sup>20</sup> Such a "crowd", one can imagine, would have made it difficult to follow the process of "selection, composition, balance, harmony" that the *AP* considered the minimum requirement "'to make' a picture."<sup>21</sup> The following year the *AP* was more lenient – "The programme of the Eastern and summer tours arranged by the Polytechnic lies before us, and photographers will find them a pleasant a reasonable method of enlarging their experience and stock of negatives" – yet it made sure to highlight how such benefits could only be enjoyed by "an expert photographer."<sup>22</sup> As the journal had declared elsewhere, "The better class of workers, as a rule, avoid the excursion, as if it were altogether a hateful and an abominable thing; and too often the affair degenerates into a mere cockney outing."<sup>23</sup>

The case of W.C. Chaffey, a member of the Lewisham Photographic Society who had participated in a Polytechnic Norway cruise, illustrates the *AP*'s nightmarish visions. Chaffey's lecture, which reportedly had included "numerous snap-shots of incidents during the voyage, such as Sunday services, deck billiards, and quoits (one slide showed the quoit in mid-air), leap frog, passengers overcome by mal-de-mer"<sup>24</sup>, was harshly reprimanded by the *AP* as an "abuse (...) unworthy the attention of any photographer possessing the ordinary instinct of a gentleman."<sup>25</sup> This reprobation seems to have been directed to the photograph of "passengers overcome by mal-de-mer" alone, yet it was part of a broader anxiety about what was seen as the "intentional lowering of the standard of good taste."<sup>26</sup> This might not come as much of a surprise, since the *AP* was an advocate of the artistic recognition of the medium, and saw the practices enabled by the Kodak as "most detrimental to the advantage of photography."<sup>27</sup> What makes it particularly relevant, however, is that this perspective was endorsed by Alfred Horsley Hinton, or possibly written by Horsley Hinton himself, who at this time also taught at the Polytechnic School of Photography.<sup>28</sup> Another example of the Polytechnic's "serious" photographers' view of touring with the Polytechnic is offered by the case of Samuel J. Beckett, a teacher in the Polytechnic School of Photography who worked as "official photographer" on various Polytechnic tours between 1892 and 1902. During a lecture on his tour of Norway with the

Polytechnic, given to the Hackney Photographic Society, of which he was a member, Beckett commented: "This is a gorge outside the hotel, but it is nothing to the gorge taking place inside",<sup>29</sup> a remark that, while probably describing eating habits, nonetheless implies that Beckett's opinion of the Polytechnic tours as an appropriate photographic context was not the highest. Indeed, in 1895, having organized "a cheap photographic trip to the Continent" for the Hackney Photographic Society, he opened the vacancies left to the readers of the *AP*, and not of the *PM*.<sup>30</sup> This latter episode apparently resonates with the views of the Polytechnic School of Photography and Photographic Society more broadly, as there is no record that they took advantage of the Institute's travel arrangements, as many of the other Polytechnic schools, clubs and societies did.

While this scenario is far from indicating that the leadership of the Polytechnic shared the point of view of the *AP*, or of its more distinguished photographers, it certainly suggests that the unity among the "class of people" inferred by Clark's letter was, in fact, rather contested. Simultaneously, a broader realization that tourists' photography could move beyond what people had up to that point known photography to be started to emerge. Figures 2 and 3, which show a number of "snapshots" taken during Polytechnic tours to Norway in the years 1906 and 1908, offer an example of some subjects that attracted tourists' attention: fellow travellers, entertainments and deck sports. Other tourists, supposedly not motivated by anxieties over the lowering of the status of photography, commented on this. Specifically, some were the response of fellow tourists who had been photographed in an unflattering moment. "For hours", a tourist reported in 1891 on a Polytechnic excursion to the Folgefond Glacier "these cameras were opening fire on us with 'snap shots' whenever any photographer fancied our efforts to scramble up looked particularly entertaining - we, of course, completely unconscious of these clandestine perpetuations of our attitudes."<sup>31</sup> Others noted the unusualness of tourists' practices. W.G.L. wrote in 1899 about a Polytechnic cruise to the Baltic that "stand cameras, hand cameras, and Kodaks [sic] were here very much in evidence, much to the amusement of the natives and also to the non-photographic members of our expedition."<sup>32</sup> And some recognized that, first and foremost, what had changed, as Charles Woolley wrote in 1905 following his Polytechnic Norway tour, was that tourist photographers were themselves now interested in a seemingly boundless range of subjects:

"The march of the camera men" has become an active and busy one by this time, and snap-shots are everywhere being fired off, to secure the coveted trophies to carry back into everyday home-life. And what subjects they form! Throughout the full range of the daily common round, right up to the pitch and point of sublimity. Almost indescribable, but all too readily, realizable "on spot."<sup>33</sup>

These testimonies introduce the ground on which the practice of the tourists was being assessed: their nonconformity to accepted (photographic) canons. Although photographers were certainly capable of taking different approaches, the aspirations of professional and amateur photographers were (at least in principle) quite different from those of the tourists. While the first

group might have had broadly accepted commercial, documentary, and/or artistic views, tourists' use of photography was not restricted to this framework. For this reason tourists' practices were perceived not just as different ways of articulating travel visually, but most importantly as *qualitatively* different ways of doing so. If, as Gunn (2005) indicates, a certain idea of (high) "culture" was indeed central to the constitution of an English middle-class identity during this period – thus, also providing a benchmark against which to evaluate other (perceived as lower) cultural forms - it was precisely the lack of culturally-recognized skills that allowed tourists to take photography in new directions, experimenting with it in individualized ways.<sup>34</sup> Undervalued as it was, this "new amateur aesthetic" (Snow 2012: 2023) was key in complicating, but also enriching, photographic understanding of the time.

The Polytechnic's relationship with tourist photographers, and the function expected of photography in representing the tours, developed on this premise: while the institution endorsed the social norms and values that demanded a respectable approach to travelling, and which extended to the use of photography, it also recognized tourists' increasing familiarity with the medium, which was pushing the boundaries of what photography could actually be and mean. This emerges clearly in the context of the tour reunions; social gatherings that brought together those who had participated in the excursions. As was often noted, the audience's attention came alive when looking at something of which they had a personal experience. "The very fact that the views were so familiar and realistic", commented the *PM* in 1894, "made the lecture all the more interesting and Mr. Studd, well primed with anecdotes, proved the best of showmen. Every slide produced its own flood of memories."<sup>35</sup> "The friends enjoyed themselves immensely", wrote another report in 1896, "especially those who could follow the lecturer by experience."<sup>36</sup> This enthusiasm was even more noticeable when what was to be projected were photographs showing tourists' activities or taken by the tourists themselves: "The pictures were received with enthusiastic applause, and hearty laughter greeted the reproduction of deck sports, especially the obstacle races."<sup>37</sup> Chaffey's slides, which had so upset the editor of the *AP*, were also shown during the Norway Reunion. Perhaps Chaffey had removed the offending slide(s) by then, however he seemingly kept other images of his fellow tourists, as the *PM* commended them as "exceptionally good of their kind, and personally interesting."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in 1898, during the Weston reunion, the reporter noted:

What recollections each picture brought forth as it was thrown on the screen! When any special groups appeared there was a cry of 'Oh! there's So-and-so,' and 'Why, that's,' and any snap of an amusing nature, and there were several of this description, was instantly greeted with roars of laughter.<sup>39</sup>

The inspection of fellow tourists' photographs also had become a much-anticipated moment. In 1902 guests "derived considerable pleasure from an inspection of the large and interesting collection of photographs made and sent by members of the various parties";<sup>40</sup> in 1913 "many of the visitors were

entertaining themselves viewing the photographs taken by the visitors during the season. Many sedate ones were surprised to see themselves 'as they were' in Scotland, and the snapshots caused great amusement."<sup>41</sup>

As these examples indicate, the Polytechnic recognized the significance for the tourists both of photographic practices and of images that directly related to individual experience, and seem to have been aware of how the response generated by these images differed from the more "official" ones. What the democratization of photography had transformed, in this way, was not only who could photograph what, but also how the relationship with the photographed influenced the understanding of the images which, because of the multiple interpretations of the tourists, mediated by personal experience and memory, could not be unitary.<sup>42</sup> The choice of including these photographs in the reunions was probably supported by the informality and sociability of the event, and by the recognition of the promotional value of images that generated so much attention.

Yet, significantly, apart from a very few tourists' reports, up until the mid-1920s none of the promotional materials available for examination were illustrated with photographs seemingly taken by tourists, or showing tourists and their activities. Rather, they generally included the views of whichever iconic sights/sites defined each destination (figures 4 and 5). As I have explored in a larger study (Dominici 2014), one function of these images was certainly to anticipate, in order to promote, the tours, thus conforming to the travel industry's broader transformation of the picturesque into a style of representation (Urry 1990). The educational ambitions of the Polytechnic, however, indicate how images were also expected to *instruct* the viewers on the relevant features of each destination, thus signposting those culturally recognized sites whose visit would have secured for the tourists an "instructive" and "respectable" experience.

This perspective also informs an understanding of the travel firm's response to tourists' photography, and of how this impinged on its own use of photography. In its role as "educator", the organization related to tourists' photographic practices by instructing the prospective tourists about the recognized approach to photography and travel. What was at stake was not the status of photography, a preoccupation in terms of which the Polytechnic School of Photography and Photographic Society, or the AP, judged tourists, but the status of the tourist photographers themselves as citizens. By looking at images tourists were expected to learn what were considered to be the significant features, from the perspective of instruction and self-improvement, of each destination. The function of visual media was to give evidence of a world that did not change according to tourists' perspective, but which was fixed in its pedagogic potential and availability for tourists' consumption. In this respect, tourists were considered the passive *recipients* of information, expected to recognize and learn from an established source of value – the PTA's. Importantly, the reason for this was not just that the Polytechnic/PTA wanted to promote *the* recognized model of photographic and travel practice, but also that, in doing so, it strove to regulate a practice that, as was often pointed out, could hardly be defined as belonging to the "respectable"

classes. In line with the concerns of the rational recreation movement, this use of images was thus a means used by the socially and economically “hegemonic” classes to form “subaltern” classes via the structuring of a cultural practice.

### **Travel in pursuit of pleasure (1924-1939)**

The PTA’s self-perception changed with the appointment in 1924 of a new Managing Director, Ronald Studd (1889-1956): moving away from the role of “educator” the travel firm began promoting itself as a service provider.<sup>43</sup> The main reason for this was Studd’s recognition that, in order to survive in a newly competitive market, the PTA had to adapt to the sociocultural and economic transformations that had followed the First World War. One consequence of these transformations was that ideas of travel and education also changed, as it was recognized, for example, how travel could be made “improving” simply by facilitating the having of “a good time”.<sup>44</sup> This did not mean that the PTA abandoned the view that its tours could also have a more didactic side - generally all of the excursions included sightseeing tours to major places of interest, while some tours were promoted with a more specific attention to their cultural value. Although the travel firm was now “entirely separate from the Poly in organization and personnel”, it was noted in 1938, it “has always been sympathetic to the Poly.”<sup>45</sup> What changed was the form of “instruction” that these were expected to provide, and how this could be obtained. As stated in a 1927 advert, tellingly titled “to Europe’s playground by Polytechnic!”:

This year, experience the splendid change which only foreign travel gives. A change which sees your daily life and habits dropping away like a cloak, until you feel that *this* is your life. This enchanted wandering, this drinking in of beauty, this tasting of new and rare delights ... *you* were made for this. And when the time comes to return, you have so much of your holiday to bring away with you. Vivid impressions, rich memories, new dreams, all stored away to carry you through the winter. And remember, because you have been interested, others will find you interesting too.<sup>46</sup>

This was no longer a list of what a “respectable” tourist was expected to see and do; rather, by focusing on the tourists’ feelings and emotions it sanctioned individual experience as the basis for the acquisition of an improving experience. As such, the “learning” process could take place not only by “knowing” (intellectual engagement), but also by “feeling” (emotional engagement), and the choice of what to include within this experience lay primarily with the tourists themselves. In this sense, if, as Brown and Phu have recently argued, in photography “the affective and the political are mutually constituted” (2014: 350), the PTA’s shifting understanding of educational experience brings into focus the role that personal and emotional investments played in the emergence of new uses and meanings for (tourist) photography more generally. Consequently, this transformed the PTA’s promotion of the tours which responded no longer to what it thought the public *needed*, but to what it *wanted*, a move that simultaneously was seen as harnessing an existing consumer desire. With these objectives in mind, how

tourists understood promotional images became a pressing concern for a travel firm that depended on their response to its *own* marketing to succeed. To this end Studd developed a marketing strategy, starting from an investigation of tourists' own demands, that would create for the PTA "a character of its own, individuality, so that the clients could identify the character of its advice with the name" (1950: 102). Such intangible service was embodied by the stylized image of a seagull – "something easy to define and remember symbolizing the service I hoped to give" (1950: 112) - accompanied by the slogan "travel Polytechnic", generally on a dark blue background or within a white and dark blue color scheme (figure 6). The PTA's relationship with tourist photographers and, related to this, its response to the possibilities of photography for visual promotion, thus adjusted to the twofold requirement of promoting travel as an event based on individual experience, and of branding the tours in relation to the unique identity of the PTA itself.

### **The PTA Photographic Competition and branding**

Each year sees an increasing number of people of both sexes and all ages attracted to that fascinating hobby – photography. Members are reminded of an attractive competition which has been arranged for camera enthusiasts travelling on a Polytechnic tour.<sup>47</sup>

In April 1928 the PTA launched a photographic competition. The event seems to have been a considerable success - in 1931 the competition was "widely and keenly contested, several thousand entries being received" - and ran each year until the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>48</sup> To an extent, the decision to start the competition was, as the above passage recognizes, a response to the widespread popularity of photography as a personal record at this time. The PTA was not innovative in this regard, and the setting up of photographic competitions as a way to promote products was a common marketing move (Taylor 1994: 38). A shift of camera use in the personal and the everyday could be observed already during the war: at a time when outdoor photography was mostly forbidden, photography prospered in the domestic space, and its images became an intermediary between the soldiers and their families (Taylor 1994: 29). This intensified in the post-war context, as the wave of emancipation and individuality that had followed the First World War - 'the break of a new kind of freedom' (Inglis 2000: 96) - affected photography as well: as travelling released itself from the constrictions (even if only apparent) of respectability, so had photography. Popular photography became a broadly accepted activity (in part because of its increasing market value), and the promotion of photography as a way to document the memory of one's leisure time was, in this respect, especially encouraged.<sup>49</sup>

At a time when social class was defined not so much on the basis of one's cultural capital but one's income, or profession (Gunn 2005), the nature of the debate between tourist photographers and the self-appointed more "serious" photographers also changed. The discussion of what made a "good" photograph no longer appealed to the gentlemanly character of the photographer, or to what was socially acceptable. The *AP* still advocated "the

personality of the 'man behind the camera'",<sup>50</sup> and distinguished the practice of the "snapshotter" from that of the more "advanced pictorial worker", yet it also recognized that: "Holidays at this time of year connote snapshot photography, and no holiday is complete without a camera."<sup>51</sup> In an ironic turn of events, the judge of the PTA Photographic Competition between 1928 and 1937 was F.J. Mortimer, the editor of the *AP* (thus probably the author of the passages above), that same journal that just over thirty years earlier had cautioned its readership against travelling with the Polytechnic.<sup>52</sup>

The popularity of tourists' photography, however, should not be seen as the only reason why the PTA launched the competition. That people responded to photographs in idiosyncratic ways was also of consequence in a context in which tourists' practices were seen as the product of customers. "It is rather interesting to note the effect of certain subjects when a mixed collection is shown to a non-photographic audience" commented the *AP*, possibly Mortimer again, in 1930. "Landscapes, if one can judge from the applause which greets the pictures as they appear upon the screen, are only popular when they show some spot known to the audience."<sup>53</sup> Studd himself was aware of this: since the 1890s, he noted, tourists had "shrieked at snapshots", and during the reunions had tried "to recapture the summer holiday, taking snippets of recollection and blowing them up lifesize" (1950: 112, 113). A travel approach that put at its center the tourists could not but adjust to their photographic practices as well, and the PTA Photographic Competition provided a space to do just this. The competition's regulations, which remained the same throughout this period, introduce the company's transformed vision of tourist photographers, and also hint at how this came to influence the use of photography in the promotion of the same tours:

(1) Entries will consist of photographs taken in the course of any tour booked through the PTA [...] Entries will be judged solely on their merits as illustrations, and not as photographs. The interest of the subject, especially from the touring point of view is the main thing, not the photographic quality of technique. (2) Only bona-fide Amateur Photographers are eligible to compete for the prizes offered in this Competition, which is confined to those who have travelled under the auspices of the PTA [...] (9) The copyright of prize-winning pictures shall vest in the PTA, Ltd, who without further consideration shall be entitled the possession of the negatives and the assignment of the copyright. The PTA reserve [sic] the right to reproduce all pictures with suitable acknowledgment. (10) Names of the prize winners will be announced at the Continental Tours Re-Union of the PTA, the occasion of which will be announced later. The winning pictures will be exhibited on the screen at the Re-Union, together with a selection of the photographs submitted.<sup>54</sup>

Participants were expected to submit images interesting "from the touring point of view", thus of the iconic sights/sites of each destination, and *not* of subjects of personal interest. Simultaneously, though, the non-professional photographers eligible to participate did not have to prove "quality" or

“technique.” Competitors were thus expected not to demonstrate their ability in creating “photographs” (images that would have been judged primarily on their aesthetic qualities) but to “illustrate” how they had experienced the destinations. That is, if the PTA expected the participants to submit images, for example, of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, or of the Coliseum in Rome, it also expected these images to reflect the photographers’ experience of and perspective on visiting these iconic places.

These requirements suggest the PTA’s recognition of tourist photographers-customers as the protagonists of the travel experience; but what is perhaps most intriguing is rule number 9, which illuminates how such a transformed relationship with tourists had come to influence the approach to photography in promoting the tours. By anticipating a promotional use of the submissions, rule 9 reveals the PTA’s intention to promote a tourist-centered approach to its travel services through the viewpoint provided by the tourists themselves. Although no records have survived that can reveal what use the PTA effectively made of these photographs, a number of assumptions are plausible. Firstly, the winning images, but also a broader selection of submissions and later films, were projected during the tour reunions. For example, during the 1928 Continental Tours Reunion “a selection of photographs taken by the competitors was shown on the screen. This was followed by a series of coloured photographs of the various centres which were described by Commander Studd.”<sup>55</sup> The distribution of prizes offered another occasion to promote the breadth of the PTA tours and facilities: while the first prize was a “Challenge Cup” and a Cine-Kodak, the first 16mm camera, prizes from two to six consisted of one-week holidays in one of the PTA structures. As the PTA was careful to highlight: “The chalets and hotels mentioned above are all Polytechnic Properties, run by Polytechnic Staff to give the best comfort to Polytechnic Visitors.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, during the New Year’s Fete of 1937-38 the PTA arranged an exhibition of “some hundred enlarged prints of the best pictures taken by the tourists during the last holiday season in connection with the Prize Competition of the Association.”<sup>57</sup> If the use of tourists’ photographs during these social gatherings was, to an extent, the continuation of an established practice, the apparent use of the competitors’ photographs in the brochures as well reveals a deeper change of approach to tourists’ photography. There is no documentation that overtly acknowledges the provenance of these photographs, but clues observable in the same images support this conclusion. The first page of the Swiss Tour section of the 1929 summer brochure (figure 7), the first to follow the competition, is exemplary of the use of such images made between 1929 and 1934. The four images credited four photographers, while captions direct attention to the point of interest of each image, and to tourists’ activities. S.G. Cogswell’s photograph of a “Polytechnic party at Altdorf Tell’s monument” (second from above) shows a woman smiling toward the camera with a group of tourists behind her standing before the monument. As the caption indicates, there is little doubt that this was taken during a PTA excursion, and it also seems plausible that the woman and the photographer, who obviously were aware of or knew each other, were with the party. D.G. Blackbeard’s “Nearing the summit of the Titlis – Engelberg”, represents, by comparison, one of the activities provided to tourists, mountain climbing. Another example is a page

from the French section of the 1931 summer brochure (figure 8).<sup>58</sup> E.F. Allen's "Carved Rocks, Rotheneuf" (top-right) certainly illustrated a place on the itinerary, yet the woman sitting on the left-hand side of the frame, smiling to the camera, also suggests the photographer's intention to record a personal memory of the place.

The PTA Photographic Competition reveals how the travel firm expected photographs to convey, through tourists' perspectives, those iconic sights/sites not as they ought to be experienced, but in the many ways through which these could be made one's own. The commercialization of travel certainly affected the use and perception of photography to the extent that its documental value was turned into the representation of destinations as products available for tourists' consumption. The information that photographs were meant to convey was now promotional, yet it also represented a new view of travel in which tourists were offered sites and activities to choose from in constructing *their* potential experiences. On this account, the establishment of the competition was not only a tactical response to a popular pastime, but also the realization that idiosyncratic perspectives could communicate the idea of travel as an experience centered on the personal and emotional response of the tourists. Simultaneously, the PTA had the marketing imperative of framing individual experience within the organization's domain, in this way implying that in order for such experiences to take place tourists had to rely on the infrastructures and services provided by the PTA itself. It did so by combining the use of photographs with the symbol of the seagull, the slogan "travel Polytechnic", and the dark-blue color palette on all of its material, and then eventually by taking a mixed-media approach.

In 1935 a turn took place in the PTA's promotion of travel. "Hearty congratulations to the PTA on their new prospectus", wrote the *PM*. "It is a fresh departure in colour printing and should attract many tourists."<sup>59</sup> Inserts with hand-colored photographs had been used since 1930, but as the *PM* pointed out, this brochure was remarkably different. Yet, color was only one aspect of this transformation, and not the main one. The most significant change took place in the visual media used to represent the destinations. Figures 9 and 10, from the 1935 summer brochure, are exemplary of PTA's visual promotion up until 1939, a style also used on posters and leaflets. Photographs (some likely to have come from the PTA Photographic Competition) were still used, but they were now part of a layout that also incorporated drawings and graphic design.<sup>60</sup> Figure 9 shows the unfolded cover of the insert introducing the tours to Switzerland, and figure 10 the reverse side of that same page, unfolded. The cartoonish map of Switzerland sketched the geographical position of the PTA facilities by locating them in the midst of stereotyped characters and historical figures (from local peasants to William Tell), and of representative features of each destination (hard yellow cheese in Gruyere, or the statue of the Lion in Lucerne). The idyllic mountain scenes that framed both the map and the adjoining illustrations reinforced the narrative of Switzerland as a destination untouched by modernity. Photographs and drawings were thus allocated distinctive roles: while photographs signposted what had become the symbolic views of each destination, illustrations framed in imaginative ways what such iconic places

had to offer by travelling with the PTA. As such, this representation aimed to stimulate the desire to travel with the PTA by constructing the idea of an enjoyable experience that tourists could make personal through choosing what and how to visit. Similarly, the images used to introduce the tours to Belgium in the 1936 brochure combined drawings and photographs as a way to complement the idea of a “freedom of the golden coast”, as stressed on the cover of the insert (figures 11 and 12). The drawing gave an overview of the Belgian coast, represented as a “playground” that hosted tourists’ activities within the principal sites of each destination. The reassuring photographic presence of Studd, who appeared on almost all of the brochures during this period, towered over what could be described as an aggregate of options from which the tourists could pick and choose, thus constructing their own experience. The image of the Managing Director stood, in this way, for the PTA’s wish to raise itself above tourists’ perspectives and practices – no longer to guide their formation, but to facilitate it by providing what was promoted as “the best” service. This message was generally reinforced within the text. In the example above, the image of tourists engaged in leisure activities was thus accompanied by the comment “no worrying details – simply enjoy yourself” (figure 12).

This then indicates how, during the interwar years, the PTA’s response to tourists’ photography changed as a result of transformed market requirements. As such, however, it also complicates dominant understandings of the interwar “golden age” of travel illustrations by suggesting that the emotions these were expected to trigger were not only in response to the perceived rationality of photography, but also an attempt to frame the plurality of photographic perceptions engendered by the democratization of the medium. That is, commercial art provided a way to regulate how an audience of potential tourists/consumers could understand such destinations, simultaneously conveying the sense of enjoyment and leisure that the PTA recognized as a market demand.

## **Conclusion**

There should be a future for hand-camera work not yet imagined. Let us hope so at least, for the present, if we judge it for the generality of the work one sees, is poor recompense for the outlay, the expenditure of money and time, which we know must be incurred, nor is it at all worthy of the photography whose methods and formulae it uses.<sup>61</sup>

What this future proved to be was probably not what Horsley Hinton, writing in 1893 about hand-cameras and travel, might have hoped for. Despite the complaints made about tourist photographers in more elitist photographic circles, this did not stop the spread of an activity that people truly seemed to enjoy, let alone influence how such activity evolved. Indeed, popular photography problematized the relationship between image and knowledge by multiplying photographic readings. In this respect, the PTA is a remarkable case study that allows for reflection upon the ways in which the state of travel photography changed at the crossroad of conflicting cultural practices, productions and desires. In the period between 1888 and 1923 the role of

“educator” that the organization saw for itself demanded a regulatory approach towards the forms of culture produced by the tourists; while in the period between 1924 and 1939 commercial imperatives dictated that tourists’ perspectives had to be accounted for. The passage from a use of images that imparted knowledge to the viewers, to illustrations that encouraged an individual experience as the basis for the personal acquisition of knowledge, brought with it a new approach to the use of photography that recognized tourists’ agency while at the same time trying to determine how this should be structured. This progressive representation of travel through the combined integration of photographs and drawings points, therefore, to a new role for photography which was affected by the democratization of photography itself.

The history of the PTA offers a significant testimony not just to the establishment of a photographic currency that had value first and foremost within the private sphere, but also to the transformative character that such currency had within the visual economy of the mass marketing of tourism. The flow of images that the Polytechnic/PTA produced in order to promote certain ideas of travel changed with the passage from an institutional collectivism that aimed at forming modern citizens, to an emphasis on individualism whose constitution broadly fell under market forces, thus forming citizens as consumers. Yet, the changing functions of this production of images must also be understood as a response to ideas about photography that tourists’ practices had made unavoidable. Considered from the perspective of cultural production, this was a way to *contain* a form of culture that was generally perceived as coming from the “lower” part of society. This raises several interesting questions concerning the influence that photographic popular culture had more generally on commercial culture, and specifically on the development of commercial art, in the early twentieth century. It suggests that its roots should be investigated not just in the design movements of the late nineteenth century, and their relationship with the imperatives of an increasingly competitive market – a familiar narrative centered on the fusion of the “fine” and “applied” arts that was one legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement - but also in relation to the value that images came to accrue as a result of the emergence of popular photography.

## NOTES

1. Clark (1896).
2. The first recorded use of the name Polytechnic Touring Association is from Holscher (1900).
3. In a study comparing commercial photographs with snapshots produced by tourists in the period 1880-1940, Snow notes how compact cameras enabled tourists to “counteract” normalized views of travel through the possibility of “controlling their own image” (2012: 2015). She observes that: “When tourists finally had their own cameras, they sought out the canonical, but along the way, they also captured unexpected moments and happenings, seemingly small and insignificant details that capture the more subtle experiential qualities of tourism. This created a much more eccentric and individualized body of imagery than the market driven images produced commercially” (2012: 2025). Similarly Garrod (2009), working on the influence that tourism marketing has on the tourist gaze,

- argues that what tourists produce is, above all, a re-elaboration of these institutionalized visual narratives.
4. See also Hindley and Hindley (1972) for an account of Victorian advertising, and Ward (1998) on the development of place marketing and promotion in England and America primarily during the period here considered.
  5. The influence that this shift had on the use of photography is discussed in depth, within the American context, by Brown (2005). Church, among others, observes that “the process by which associational images began to take precedence over informational content” developed simultaneously in Britain and America (2000: 640).
  6. See also the Art Nouveau movement in France, as well as, slightly later on, the Deutscher Werkbund and Bauhaus School in Germany. On the emergence of commercial art in England see Barnicoat (1972) and Raizman (2003).
  7. Brown describes this as a “‘uniqueness’ designed to stimulate consumption through the promise of individuality” (2005: 716). As we shall see, the production of images that were “uniquely PTA” indeed preoccupied the travel firm in the late-1920s and 1930s.
  8. For an account of the interwar travel posters see Barnicoat (1972), Cole and Durack (1990), Shackleton (1976).
  9. Anon. 1913. *Polytechnic Magazine (PM)* (October): 175.
  10. Strong notes how the “spirit of travel” of the Polytechnic aimed at strengthening the members’ collective identity as part of the British Empire, thus fostering them to become “active participants in the nation’s prosperity and imperial destiny” (2012: 114). This promotion of a culture of travel had a strong visual component: it was articulated in Regent Street through lantern lectures; the cinematograph; exhibitions; and the circulation of travel books and maps.
  11. *Polytechnic Tours Programme*, 1897: 49.
  12. The Government’s Charity Commissioners agreed for the tours to be connected with the Polytechnic work on account of the donations received. *Polytechnic Governors Sub-Committee Minutes*, 17 December 1938: 2. The PTA donated sums of up to £3,000 annually to the Polytechnic; it was later estimated that its contribution between 1882 and 1914 was of at least £50,000 (Wood 1934: 37).
  13. The three owners, with one-third of the company each, were Douglas McGarel Hogg (1872-1950), son of Quintin Hogg, Robert Mitchell and J.E.K. Studd (1858-1944). *Certificate of Incorporation 1911; Articles of Association*, iv: 7.
  14. Mitchell had started working with Hogg in 1871 as the honorary Secretary of his York Place Ragged School and Mission. He became the Polytechnic Director of Education in 1891 (Wood 1934).
  15. Dexter (1899: 227).
  16. Woolley (1905: 13).
  17. W.G.L. (1923: 221).
  18. Anon. 1894. *Amateur Photographer (AP)* (23 March): 193.
  19. Anon. 1894. *PM* (12 September): 180.
  20. Pate (1904: i-vii).
  21. Anon. 1891. *AP* (October 9): 251.

22. Anon. 1895. *AP* (March 15): 162.
23. Anon. 1895. *AP* (February 22): 118.
24. Anon. 1892. *AP* (September 23): 218.
25. Anon. 1892. *AP* (October 7): 241.
26. Anon. 1894. *AP* (December 14): 402.
27. Anon. 1891. *AP* (October 9): 251. Scharf (1976), among others, proposes that Pictorialism, the pursuit of photography as Art also supported by the *AP*, emerged, at least to an extent, through a rejection of popular photography. Within the context of travel and tourism, this approach reflects the broader debate, examined by Buzard (1993), that since the end of the eighteenth century had seen the practice of the “vulgar” tourists belittled in confrontation with those of the (self-appointed) sensitive travellers. As Löfgren (1999) notes, with the standardization of travel routes, what came to be understood as the authentic cultural experience was not the originality of the route, but how one’s own experience could be made meaningful, for example by elaborating it visually.
28. A noted member of the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring, Horsley Hinton was also on the committee of the National Photographic Record Association, the photographic survey movement founded by Sir Benjamin Stone in 1897. As Edwards notes, Horsley Hinton’s affiliation to both causes (the former concerned with promoting photography as individual vision, the latter with promoting the indexical properties of the camera) attests to photographers’ ability to ‘inhabit[ing] a number of photographic identities’ (2009: 11). Yet, while the various roles occupied by Horsley Hinton were still perceived as respectable, the practices of the tourist photographers were not. An example of Horsley Hinton’s views on tourists and photography is to be found in Horsley Hinton (1893a, 1893b). For an account of the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring see Harker (1979).
29. Anon. 1892. *AP* (October 21): 292.
30. Beckett (1895: 164).
31. Anon. 1891. *PM* (September 11): 160.
32. W.G.L. (1899: 109).
33. Woolley (1905: 13).
34. Similarly Williams notes that “high” culture became instrumental in defining social order during the second half of the nineteenth century (1976). The cultural practices of the tourist photographers emerged, conversely, within “the most ordinary experience” of everyday life ([1958] 2002: 94).
35. W.T. (1894: 39).
36. Anon. 1896. *PM* (February 26): 112.
37. Anon. 1900. *PM* (December 12): 276.
38. Anon. 1892. *PM* (October 13): 183-184.
39. Bailey and Poole (1898: 199).
40. W. (1902: 230).
41. E. W. 1913. *PM* (December): 216.
42. A number of studies have explored the transformative character of tourists’ photography. For example, Stylianou-Lambert’s reflections that tourist photographers need to be “granted the status of cultural producers in addition to that of cultural consumers” (2012: 1821); Garlick’s (2002) considerations on how the use of the camera can expand upon the tourists’ understanding of their experiences of travelling and

- photographing, which he identifies in the impossibility of matching one's memory of a first-hand experience and its photographic equivalent; and, as seen, Snow (2012). Furthermore, recent studies on the affective dimensions of photographic meaning (for example the collection of essays edited by Brown and Phu 2014) suggest that such a transformative character must also be investigated in relation to a new practice of viewing rooted in the tourists' own personal feelings.
43. Ronald Studd was Managing Director until his death in 1956. In 1929 he bought out Mitchell's shares, who hence ceased all involvements with the PTA. In the period 1939-1945 Studd joined the Navy, and the PTA activities stopped. He was the son of a key Polytechnic figure, J.E.K. Studd, who had been Honorary Secretary of the Polytechnic from 1885, its vice-President in 1901 and President from 1903 to 1944, and a Director of the PTA from 1911 to 1944.
  44. More than a transition, the passage to the interwar years was perceived as a fracture with the previous social order. Hobsbawm, for example, writes that 'the great edifice of nineteenth-century civilization crumpled in the flames of world war, as its pillars collapsed' (1975: 22). This was reflected in a new attitude towards travel. In his study of interwar travel literature Fussell recognizes how the war had made life in England so unpleasant as to become in itself a 'powerful stimulus to movement abroad' not only for writers but also for the broader population (1980: 18). See also Holloway *et al.* (2009) and Walton (2009). For a cultural perspective on the changing social meaning of holidaying see Inglis (2000).
  45. This affiliation was certainly also financial, as the PTA continued donating £2,000 annually to the "social and athletic work" of the Institute. Studd, J.E.K. 1938. *PM* (January): 4. In 1951 the *PM* estimated that "from 1912 to 1939 the PTA had contributed, partly for services rendered and partly as donations, over £51,000 to the Institute." Anon. 1951. *PM* (March): 71.
  46. Advertisement, 1927. *PM* (June): back cover.
  47. Anon. 1928. *PM* (April): 103.
  48. Anon. 1931. *PM* (November): 218. The competition was resumed in 1947, but it has not been possible to ascertain until when it ran.
  49. Holland (2009) and West (2000), among others, argue that Kodak's marketing was key in encouraging the use of photography to document one's holidays, pressuring consumers to construct and preserve a photographic memory of their leisure time. In this way, Nickel notes, Kodak "created not just a product, but a culture" (1998: 10).
  50. Anon. 1928. *AP* (22 August): 11.
  51. Anon. 1930. *AP* (30 July): 13.
  52. Mortimer's presence in the PTA Photographic Competition attests to the degree to which the status of tourist photography had changed also, given his earlier involvement with Pictorialism. Mortimer had become the editor of the merged *Amateur Photographer* and *Photographic News* (of which he had been editor since 1906) in 1908, following Horsley Hinton's death. That same year he had joined the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring; his views on the pictorial photographic aesthetic were such that in 1910, following the frictions that had emerged with the allegedly more avant-garde fringes of the group (led by Alfred Stieglitz), Mortimer had reformed the group as the London Salon. See Taylor (1984).

53. Anon. 1930. *AP* (March 19): 5.
54. *The Polytechnic Tours for 1929* (1929: 140).
55. Anon. 1928. *PM* (November): 310.
56. *The Polytechnic Tours for 1929* (1929: 139).
57. Anon. 1937. *PM* (December): 258.
58. *The Polytechnic Tours for 1931* (1931: 112).
59. Anon. 1935. *PM* (February): 20.
60. *Polytechnic Summer Tours 1935*.
61. Horsley Hinton (1893b: 280).

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