

NOGO VOYAGES

www.nogovoyages.com

Stéphane Degoutin

Blackpool immobile

Immobile travel notes

Tower World, Blackpool Tower, May 27th, 2008.

What am I doing here?

I am not the only one asking: every person I cross, when they learn that I am French, look sincerely intrigued and ask for answers I could hardly provide.

At the hotel, a man tells me he has been coming here for the last 22 years ; and for the fourth time this year. Yet, he does not seem to figure out why a French person would come here.

I ♥ Blackpool

For a non English person, Blackpool represents the most alien and exotic place. A fascinating space: fictional, yet definitely part of reality. A door left open to a different space, time and logic.

For the last three days, I have been exploring the city all around, running from a place to the other, by foot, by bus, by tram..., from the attractions to the outer suburbs, from the ocean to the interior, from the center to the neighbouring towns. I let myself be carried by the naive tourist's temptation to visit everything, to miss nothing, to understand everything, to take the most of it...

Tourism implies a form of perpetual motion. Rare are those (Paris Hilton ?) who can afford the luxury to roam around the globe and take the time to stop when they wish, without a schedule, as did the English aristocrats on their Grand Tour.

For the most of us, travelling implies making the best use of the time which has been subtracted from our professional life at great expense.

City of rides

Tourism represents the massive democratisation of the art of the promenade, of aristocratic extraction.

Once freed from its aristocratic shell and from the rules it imposed on the body, the promenade becomes a pure enjoyment of the space : roller coaster, monorail, steeplechase, great wheel, tramways... Rides represent the hyperbole of hedonist displacement.

Habitable theme park

The theme park city is the condensation of travel. It piles up differences on the smallest and densest possible space. It gives more for less. A few footsteps are enough to move to a different world.

Blackpool calls for perpetual motion. This is why it is adequate to experience exactly the opposite: travel immobile in a place which embodies the act of traveling.

Spot-traveling: to concentrate oneself on only one point of space, carefully selected as the unique place to travel. The most ordinary tourism thus becomes travel.

Staying immobile in the attraction implies a discrepancy in the practice of space, similar to the one I found on my first immobile travel, in the concourse of the train station of the Forum des Halles, in Paris, a hub where hundreds of thousands of people commute daily. Staying immobile in a place devoted to the movement creates the possibility for a travel.

In opposition with the desire of a global comprehension of the city, Nogo Voyages proposes the *voyage immobile* (motionless trip): to concentrate the energy of traveling in only one, very carefully chosen point.

The *voyage immobile* is a condensation of a travel.

Immobility may seem an absolutely normal practice in the public space. Yet it is not always that easy to travel immobile. Staying in a place without moving is not any more a normal use in the contemporary metropolis. It becomes more and more unusual, if not marginal.

It took me some time to find the right place for a *voyage immobile* in Blackpool. The first requirement was to choose a relevant point in the city at which to stop. The choice demands precision and subtlety: the spot must allow a relevant point of view. It must also be somehow illogical to be immobile there.

The main attraction – Blackpool's tower – finally appeared, with clarity, as the most appropriate place. I stop right in the center of the attraction. It allows me to tackle the theme park city from the heart, from the point of maximal tourist energy.

I will make a *voyage immobile* in the bizarre brick building that forms the base of the Tower and contains the amusement park Tower World.



Beginning of the *voyage immobile*

But am I really in the center of the attraction? Where exactly is the point of maximum tourist energy? in Blackpool? Now that I am in the Tower basement, I realize that it might not be here.

The Eiffel Tower (of Paris) offers spectacular points of views for the pedestrian who walks underneath. In Blackpool, the closer one gets to the tower, the less he sees it. From the outside, it is hidden by its brick base. Inside, one enters a labyrinth of corridors. The Tower acts as a landmark, an interesting view from everywhere around, except nearby.

Its verticality facing the infinite horizon is fascinating. Seen from the suburbs, it rises above the houses in lines, like a surrealist collage. Visible from everywhere, it diffuses the attraction everywhere.

Here, in the basement, I am at the same time at the center and in the periphery of the attraction: in the empty bubble around the landmark.

The periphery of the attraction is the main territory of exploration for Nogo Voyages (www.nogovoyages.com). We question the transitions between everyday life and attraction, and try to open doors between the two.

Our "Paris Suburbs Public Bus Tour" lengthens the duration of a very casual travel (a suburban bus ride) so that it lasts 8 hours and goes all the way around Paris' first ring of suburbs. Thus stretched, the commute becomes an attraction.

The *voyage immobile* in Tower World stretches the attraction. Like a magic trick, a repeated attraction loses its power to