

# VISUAL CULTURE AND TOURISM

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## CHAPTER 11

(Excerpts from)

### 'JOES BAR, DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN: PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF HOLIDAYMAKERS IN THE 1950s (pp.191-201)

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(p.198)

A particular feature of the Joe's Bar site was the use of props such as giant cardboard bottles and glasses, a range of hats, and theatrical props such as dancing canes. Although the appearance of the bar is a realistic one, these props and their use remind the viewer that Joe's bar was not totally real; and there is a tension between the veridical and the staged, providing shifting and sometimes ambiguous thresholds of representation. That this provides a space for symbolic enactment is perhaps confirmed by the particular use of the giant bottles and glasses in their phallic guise, signifying the presence of a sexual dynamic. However, such enactment is often ambiguous with regard to its unconscious nature, as the photographed holidaymakers seem to be aware of and to enjoy the sexual inference with a degree of playfulness that provides both opportunity and permission jokingly to acknowledge, and in part to construct, the sexuality of the holiday other. The wearing of fancy dress hats and the lascivious use of props, such as the giant bottles, committed the playful and ironic acting out of a symbolic sexuality.

(p.199)

As behaviour in the actual bars and dance halls of Douglas in the 1950s, especially among young holidaymakers, was considerably more decorous, such play acting perhaps anticipates the more extravagant drunkenness of the young British tourists, especially the male, which was to be a feature in the later decades of the twentieth century in locations such as Lloret and Ibiza.

It is also significant that pubs and bars at that time were still predominantly masculine spaces, where young men tested and acted out their manhood in symbolic Rites of passage. In Joe's Bar, it is the young males who more often than not assertively dominate the space with spatially expansive poses. During this period, women, especially young ones, would rarely visit a bar alone. Even in the company of men, it was usually the lounge they chose rather than the tap room or saloon, of which Joe's is more reminiscent. But in Joe's Bar there is the opportunity

for a symbolic female presence in a male-dominated territory, supported, it must be said, by the women sometimes taking on masculine representations in the form of the hats and canes. Nonetheless, as many of the photographs show, there is the suggestion of an acting out of a claim on the male territory, made with varying degrees of confidence and satisfaction.

This particular use of the Joe's Bar space by the younger male and female holidaymakers in the mid-1950s, we would suggest, both anticipates and is part of a changing cultural dynamic around alcohol and pub behaviour. It was also important to note that behind the photographer there was a public audience, as Joe's Bar was open to the passing throng of tourists who often gazed into the scenes being enacted. This would have added to the social dynamic of the poses adopted.