Nude heritage selfies as a visual practice

Visa Immonen

Published online: 15 Nov 2022.

Submit your article to this journal ⌃

View related articles ⌃

View Crossmark data ⌃

Nude heritage selfies as a visual practice

Visa Immonen

Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

ABSTRACT

In the mid-2010s, the media reported a series of disturbances at heritage sites caused by visitors taking nude self-photographs or selfies. In this article, nude selfies are analysed as a visual practice, and it is discussed what they reveal about visually structured tourist encounters with heritage sites. It is argued that nude heritage selfies continue the practice of old European art visually linking nudity, heritage, and tourism. In fact, many of the violations that the visitors taking such selfies are accused of are relevant for the whole practice of global tourism. Consequently, nude heritage selfies allow discussions of broader cultural and social problems related to global heritage tourism.

Introduction: from disturbances to the study of a tourist visual practice

In March 2014, CNN reported that incidents of visitors stripping off their clothes and taking nude photographs at the fifteenth-century Inca citadel of Machu Picchu were 'on the rise, and getting under the skin of Peru officials' (Liu, 2014). During that and the following year, cases of nude self-photographs or selfies, causing disturbances at heritage sites, were frequently described by journalists. After this two-year period of relatively intense media attention, incidents continued to occur and are occasionally documented in the news, though their novelty value has worn out. The activity has also accumulated murkier connotations, with nude selfies reportedly taken at such dark heritage sites as Chernobyl and Oradour-sur-Glane (Abalo, 2019; BBC News, 2019).

The diversity of heritage sites and the manifold ways of shooting and disseminating nude photographs and reacting to the activity make the phenomenon of 'nude heritage selfies' a complex cultural expression, and therefore a tool to inspect the relationship between tourism and visual practices. The significance of such an inquiry is in understanding how a visually transgressive genre has become part of tourism, what is its relation to other touristic visual practices, and why it sparks so wide a spectrum of reactions. Since I will analyse heritage and nudity from the perspective of visual practices, this article not only looks at images and their typical motifs but also discusses their broader social context and reconstructs the media history of nude heritage selfies.

The analysis of the visual practice provides a basis for arguing that, on the one hand, nude heritage selfies continue the long European practice of visually linking nudity with heritage (e.g. Smith, 2018), but on the other hand, they are advocated in the media as a trend showing originality and offering the opportunity to do something visually different. These cultural and social tensions result in strong affective reactions triggered by the nude bodies, pushing the significance of nude heritage selfies beyond their visual content and the control of those who take them or those who try to

control the practice. Analysing and criticising them resonates with broader cultural and social issues identified in global heritage tourism.

Visual practice as the framework of analysis

Since nude heritage selfies are first and foremost a visual phenomenon, the theoretical framework of my analysis is based on the concept of 'visual practice'. It refers to 'a visual mediation of relations among a particular group of humans and the forces that help to organise their world' (Morgan, 2005, p. 55). Following Couldry (2004), the concept of 'practice' here emphasises what people do with a visual medium and how it affects other venues of human action. In the case of nude heritage selfies, these are media reports and texts, and the heritage sites themselves. Moreover, 'practice' as a concept crosses over and combines objects, institutions, individuals and their interactions (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010). Visual practice therefore participates in the social, cultural and material construction of reality (Morgan, 2005, p. 268 note 17), and consequently my analysis maintains the image in the centre, but crucially also encompasses the process of the production of images, and the various effects that the images have.

In addition to analysis of the selfies, examining the visual practice they are part of requires an understanding of their broader social and material context. In fact, heritage sites are semiotically charged places, or in other words, materially and visually differentiated from other places, calling for attention and distinct bodily movements (Palmer & Andrews, 2020; Waterton & Watson, 2014). Since heritage sites are a cultural and socially particular phenomenon, they provide an environment where combining public nudity with selfies creates images which spark highly diverse reactions and emotions.

Methodology for reading texts and images

The framework of visual practice requires a focus on images, and I will do this with the help of visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2012). It is a method which starts with the visual representation, and through it, explores the social world unfolding around the image. Visual discourse analysis is sensitive to the complexities and contradictions present in images and the intricacy of the effects they may cause. To examine the social and material context of this visual practice, I will start with the general visual history of nudity, revealing the complexity of the phenomenon, and after that, I will reconstruct the media history of nude heritage selfies. This part of the analysis is based on literature on the history of visual culture, and an international survey of media reports related to nude heritage selfies.

The second part of the analysis concentrates on the photographs themselves. I will examine their central themes, exposing the assumptions made visually about the tourist taking the selfie, and her or his relationship with the heritage site. It is especially vital to look at what is visible in these images and what remains invisible, like certain kinds of persons and identities, body parts, situations, and places. Firstly, I will identify the environment, or the tourist location, with the focus on what aspects of the site were taken into the picture and where the person taking the selfie is positioned in that environment. Secondly, I will proceed into smaller elements such as the number of persons and their positions and poses in the selfie, as well as possible artefacts appearing in the picture. This allows reconstructing a typical nude heritage selfie and its subjects, but also detecting significant variations to the common pattern.

Because many nude heritage selfies are meant only for a small circle of friends on social media, much of the visual material remains inaccessible for scholarly scrutiny. There are, however, some dedicated sites, most importantly 'Naked at Monuments' on Facebook and 'Cheeky Exploits' on Instagram, which collect and showcase individual shots submitted by users. For this study, all c. 1,500 selfies posted on these two platforms by 2020 were quantitatively analysed based on the categorisation of visual motifs. However, before going into the examination of the selfies, I will begin with the history of nudity and the media attention nude heritage selfies have received.

The complex history linking heritage with nudity

Nudity and heritage have a long history together in Europe, stemming from the Antiquity and its nude figures, passing through numerous works of art, and continuing, for instance, in the early modern custom of the Grand Tour (Chard, 1995). It was the practice of young upper-class men, usually Northern European, to carry out a lengthy journey in Southern Europe at the threshold of adulthood (Black, 2003; Trease, 1967). Among the most popular destinations of the Grand Tour was Italy and specifically Florence. For visitors to the city, the symbol of Florence was Michelangelo's sculpture of David, whose importance to the heritage industry continues in the numerous reproductions and photographs taken of his nude body. As Melotti (2018, p. 102) argues, the nudity and virility of the sculpture has an emphasised role in its symbolism – images and selfies often point towards David's genitals.

The Florentine sculpture was an expression of the tendency to conceptualise faraway places, usually in the Mediterranean, as the realm of moral otherness and sexual laxness where the northern traveller could experience that which was not considered suitable by his fellow countrymen (e.g. Aldrich, 1993). The otherness was represented in the form of naked bodies at heritage surroundings, and such imagery of nudity could be supported by the use of the naked body as a metaphor for truth (Barcan, 2004, p. 98), in this case, for true desires not realisable at home. This association between nudity and travel continues in contemporary tourism, whether it is a question of travellers arriving at designated nudist locations, or visitors being semi-naked or naked in other tourist destinations (Metusela & Waitt, 2012; Wiener, 2005).

In examining the history of European art, Clark (1956) makes the influential distinction between two categories of unclothed human bodies. While 'naked' refers to the mere absence of clothes with the potential implications of shame, social embarrassment, and disruption, 'nude' means a body depicted as self-confident in its nakedness in an aesthetic and ideal manner, a form of art. The distinction fluctuates, and images can shift from nakedness to nudity through the context of art. For instance, in early photography, when the technology was still a novelty, naked bodies were often depicted as nudes by using classical settings and references to paintings (e.g. Martineau, 2014; Turner, 2011).

The distinction between nudity and nakedness is apparent when nude heritage selfies are compared with examples of contemporary art where nudity is aligned with heritage. Spencer Tunick, for instance, collects masses of nude human bodies in public places as the central element of his site-related photographic installations. Tunick has typically used heritage sites, like art museums and places such as Plaza del Zócalo in Mexico City (2007), Blarney Castle in County Cork (2008), and the Opera House in Sydney (2010) (Bryant, 2010; Riegel, 2008; Sarmiento, 2007). Although Tunick's early work led him to be arrested in New York in the 1990s (El-Mecky, 2018), his later work in various parts of the world and prestigious locations has not caused similar problems with officials and public condemnation. In the context of art, the bodies appearing in his works have become, to apply Clarke's distinction, nude instead of naked.

Berger (1972) reformulates Clark's idea by pointing out that to be naked is to be oneself, whereas nude requires the naked body to be seen by others, which in the history of European art usually means nude women gazed at by men. This gendered hierarchy is repeated in the imagery of contemporary tourism: men are frequently depicted as muscled-bodied and able, whereas women are naked or semi-naked to the male gaze (Andrews, 2009). Brownie (2017), moreover, emphasises the act of getting naked, undressing, whether a private and habitual routine or an intentionally choreographed performance. She argues that due to the highly affectual and culturally loaded state of nakedness, undressing is potentially a destabilising gesture yielding ambiguity in situations where it occurs, and this also unsettles the neat distinction between the nude and the naked.

Whether depictions of nude bodies are categorised as artistic or erotic, a strong link between naked bodies, gender, and sexuality is maintained. There are, however, also other kinds of messages that nakedness in public can convey. A naked body evokes different sets of significance, for instance,

when depicted in a carnivalesque or grotesque manner, expressing the joy of life and vitality or beastly and ugly corporality, or when the body is shown as the expression of its social position or class, or when it challenges the status quo and the accepted forms of aesthetics and behaviour (Brownie, 2017).

Despite this plethora of potential meanings, there are some commonly identifiable types of being naked in public. In many national laws, 'flashing' is considered a criminal act motivated by the seeking of sexual gratification. In contrast, 'mooning,' or revealing one's bare buttocks, is also used to violate or defame the viewer or the entity at which the gesture is directed, but unlike flashing, it is without overt sexual connotations. In addition, 'streaking,' or running naked in public, has become a humorous activity especially at sports events, where avoiding the officials chasing the perpetrator is part of the game (Kohe, 2012). These gestures of nakedness are, despite being somewhat identifiable, volatile and dependent on the situation. Not surprisingly, Brownie (2017, p. 63) points out that it is not the undressing itself but rather the intention behind the gesture that is called upon to distinguish between indecent nakedness and acceptable nudity. This is also the key in debates about nude heritage selfies, and their ambivalent treatment in the media.

Nude heritage selfies in media reports

In 2006–2007, the website 'My Naked Trip' was created, exhibiting nude photographs shot at various heritage sites, including Machu Picchu (Rab, 2007). The site became a reference point for several subsequent media reports, as did also the site 'Naked at Monuments' (Marshall, 2015). Its creator started to take nude photographs at heritage sites in 2009, and in 2012 he launched the website along with identically named Facebook and Twitter accounts. Around the same time, in 2010, 'a French exotic dancer' stripped naked for a videoed dance performance on Uluru, Australia, and the recording was posted on YouTube, provoking 'outrage among Australia's Aboriginal people'. According to an interviewed Aborigine, the act was 'the equivalent of someone defecating on the steps of the Vatican' (Shears, 2010). A few years later, in July 2013, the British clothing company Time & Place posted an advert titled 'The ASSignment' on YouTube (TimeAndPlaceClothing, 2013). It depicts a travel itinerary beginning and ending in London and consists of a series of still photos of a young, white man standing naked at different tourist locations, mostly natural sites, but also places such as Machu Picchu, Uluru, El Castillo in Mexico, Taj Mahal in India, and the Christ the Redeemer statue in Brazil. The video never shows the man's face, as he is photographed facing the site and exposing his back to the viewer. The video's description poses this question to the viewer: 'Ever wondered what it would feel like to get naked in some of the world's most spectacular locations?'

In late 2013, incidents of visitors taking nude selfies at Machu Picchu caught the attention of newspapers, especially after guards detained an Australian and a New Zealander who had taken their clothes off, posed for selfies, and posted them on social media (Short, 2014). The pair was held in custody and forced to delete the photos from their camera. This did not halt the activity, and in February 2014, a pair of visitors were videoed running naked at the site. In March 2014, two Canadian, two Australian, and four American visitors were detained when taking nude selfies at Machu Picchu (Liu, 2014). The incidents continued nonetheless, as a British and a French visitor were reported to have been arrested for posing nude at Machu Picchu in 2016 (Harley, 2016), and German, Swiss, and Dutch visitors were escorted from the site by the police after they had removed their clothes and posed for photographs (Patient, 2018).

In August 2014, three Italian tourists were photographed walking naked in Barcelona, and the pictures circulated on social media, angering some of the residents (Kassam, 2014). In 2015, tourists photographing themselves in the nude were reported in the temples of Angkor Wat (Wochit News, 2015), including at least American, Argentinian, Chinese, French, and Italian visitors (Ceaser, 2015; Paris, 2015). As a reaction, the Cambodian authorities began to disseminate the official visitor code of conduct among tourists and at heritage sites (AKP, 2015). In the same year, a Chinese visitor

posed nude in Thailand, wanting to take photos for a portfolio, but also other incidents of Chinese tourists being naked or sparsely clothed were reported in Thailand (Hutchinson, 2015). Meanwhile in Malaysia, two Canadian visitors posed naked at Mount Kinabalu, 'a mountain considered sacred' (CBC News, 2015). They were arrested, fined, and expelled. The two visitors made a public statement, where they apologised for their actions and explained that they 'were not made aware of the sacredness of the mountain'. In Egypt, a porn actress with exposed buttocks was photographed riding a camel with pyramids in the background and posted the image on social media, and at least two porn videos were recorded in Giza in the same year (Ceaser, 2015). Another celebrity, a well-known pop singer, allegedly removed his underwear in public when visiting the pre-Columbian Mayan walled city in Tulum, Mexico, in 2016 (La Razón, 2016).

In addition to tourists and celebrities, artists also took part in the rising trend of nude heritage selfies. In 2015, artist Milo Moiré walked naked, holding a baby, at an exhibition of the LWL-Museum in Münster in a performance titled 'The Naked Life' (Moiré, 2015a), and in another performance, 'Naked Selfies,' she visited Paris, Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Basel taking nude selfies with other visitors (Moiré, 2015b). Moiré was arrested on the Place du Trocadéro, flanking the Eiffel Tower, and this incident was widely reported in the media (BZ, 2015). In 2018, another artist, Adrián Pino Olivera, was arrested as he posed nude in front of the Mona Lisa at the Louvre. The incident was part of a project in which Pino Olivera took nude photos in front of famous works of art and monuments across Europe (Connexion, 2018).

After the most prominent years of media reporting around the mid-2010s, attention was again drawn to nude heritage selfies in 2019, when the popularity of the television series *Chernobyl* increased dark tourism to the city. 'A social media influencer' was reported to have taken a semi-naked selfie in the nuclear zone, and the creator of the television series appealed to visitors to behave respectfully in Chernobyl (BBC News, 2019). Another incident of nakedness occurred in Oradour-sur-Glane – the village whose inhabitants a German Waffen-SS company massacred in 1944 – when a visitor took a nude photograph and posted it online (Abalo, 2019). A more recent report is from Malaysia, where an Italian couple shot a pornographic video at the Buddhist site of Bagan in 2020 (The Guardian, 2020).

The reported instances of getting naked at heritage sites, taking photographs, and posting them online reveal that the history of the phenomenon can be traced back to the first decade of the twenty-first century. In addition to the use of the internet, the commercialisation of the activity occurred relatively early, already before the media boom of 2014–2015, but the key factor allowing nude heritage selfies to break into public awareness was the novelty of the selfie. Selfies refer to a genre of self-portraits taken with a digital camera or smartphone held in the hand or supported by a selfie stick, although the device is not necessarily in the hands of the person photographing. Central features of selfies are, however, the focus on the photographing self and distributing the products via social media (Rettberg, 2014; Tifentale & Manovich, 2015). Although selfies were introduced decades earlier, their wave of popularity dates to the early years of the 2010s, overlapping with the emergence of nude heritage selfies.

Taking nude heritage selfies was widely reported in international news, and several feature articles discussing the spread and motivations of the phenomenon were published in the mid-2010s. Even a couple of scholarly reactions appeared (Davis, 2015; Mullins, 2015). After the boom years, the popularity of nude heritage selfies continued but attracted less media interest. This can be seen in the scarcity of feature articles, as news items have mostly become matter-of-fact reports of individual events.

Amusement and condemnation in the media

Going through the media coverage reveals the variety of incidents, but there are certain commonalities that allow moving from individual events to broader patterns. The reported situations can be individual acts by visitors dedicated to collecting nude selfies or incidents related to other criminal

acts or acts considered offensive, like disorderly behaviour and public drunkenness. Nakedness is also enacted in different ways, but three broad categories can nevertheless be pointed out. Firstly, the incidents related to artistic activity, like the performances by Milo Moiré and Adrián Pino Olivera, can be seen as continuing or commenting on nudity in European art. Secondly, there are pornographic activities where nudity is associated explicitly with intercourse or sexuality at large. The porn actress's photograph showing her exposed buttocks in Giza might not be pornographic as such, but her profession as a porn actress places the photograph close to, if not into, the category of pornography. Thirdly, there are the nude photographs taken by tourists at heritage sites, which do not depict carnal acts or operate under the auspices of art. They constitute the most numerous and widely spread category of nude heritage selfies. Unlike the first two categories, which have a lengthy history before the digital age, the third category is based on the internet and mobile technologies.

Taking nude selfies at heritage sites has a variety of consequences according to the media reports. The immediate ones include the distraction and emotional reactions occurring on the spot, ranging from amusement to condemnation, and the measures taken by the security services or police, which may remove the visitors engaged in the activity or arrest them for further investigations. Another, less immediate outcome is the social media attention drawn by the images and sharing and reacting to them. With a brief interval, some of the incidents are reported by the press. A typical news item describes the act and the visitors, notes that they were caught, perhaps arrested, proceeds to repeat the condemning comments from officials or locals, and ends up describing the legal or other consequences. The visitors are usually highly individualised with names and background details, while the administrators, although occasionally provided with names, remain more distant, and 'the locals' are often treated as an anonymous mass of enraged or otherwise emotional people.

The media texts usually present two tones of voice, sometimes in the same document. Firstly, reports can use tongue-in-cheek language and describe the incidents in a light-hearted manner, or secondly, they express some form of moral condemnation, particularly if nude selfies are taken in places considered sacred or cherished by 'locals'. The latter, denouncing voice echoes some of the general cultural critique directed at selfies around the mid-2010s. The emergence of selfies was framed as a psychologically explainable condition, positioning them as conduits of an individual's narcissism, although there were also more moderate, culturally oriented views (e.g. Blackburn, 2014; Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017; Cruz & Thorham, 2015; Murray, 2015; Rettberg, 2014; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015).

The visual analysis of nude heritage selfies

Although they are transgressive, nude heritage selfies are an extension of the established practice of taking photographs at tourist destinations, documenting the site and the visitor's presence there. Photographs are crucial for the contemporary visual culture of heritage, objectifying emotions and values into a distinct heritage experience and distancing them from the flow of ordinary life (Crouch, 2010). Photographing is thus part of the visual practice of being a tourist, and in their emotional and visual specificity, tourist photographs form a visual genre of their own (Ramamurthy, 2004, pp. 225–235). The genre is apparent in private photo albums, touristic postcards, and advertisements, and comprises photos of heritage landscapes, architecture, and museum objects, sometimes with the travellers included. Nude heritage selfies are part of this genre, but the distinct gesture of taking them and their visual particularities establish them as an individual sub-genre or even a genre of their own.

Equally important as the visual genre is the practice of taking tourist photographs. Selfies, like other tourist snapshots, are tangible evidence of the trip and allow sharing experiences. In fact, as Susan Sontag ([1979] 2002, pp. 9–10) argues, taking photos at a tourist site makes real that which one is experiencing and grants control over encountering the unfamiliar space. Moreover, photographing, as a repeated activity, gives a sense of structure to the visit. It takes place between

the visitor and the overwhelming thing encountered, facilitating the safe consumption of the site. Urry (1990) also focuses on the concept of distance in tourist photography, referring to the 'tourist gaze' as the separation between the one who is looking and the thing looked at, and the ways of filling that distance.

Selfies permeate contemporary cultural and touristic practice (e.g. Spechler, 2020). Although, technically speaking, selfies place visitors between the camera and the site, they nevertheless continue the cultural practice of the 'tourist gaze,' structuring the relationship between the visitor and the site and making the tourist experience palpable (Garner, 2021). Because selfies have gained such a prominent place in popular culture, taking selfies at heritage sites has become a practice encouraged by heritage institutions, exemplified by Museum Selfie Day, a campaign launched in 2015 (Hunter, 2018; Imam, 2015). Taking selfies at heritage locations is a part of the established tourist experience, but nude selfies are an exception to their general acceptability.

Based on the analysis of c. 1,500 nude heritage selfies, although there is a lot of variety in how they are taken, there are some features that appear frequently. Firstly, the scenic views in selfies can show both natural and cultural heritage, and the places can be located in any part of the world; the character of the site does not affect the poses and compositions. Secondly, one of the most constant characteristics is the absence of full-frontal nudity, that is, genitals and women's breasts are not visible, or they have been covered by objects – sometimes making the act of covering a humorous gimmick – or a digitally added distortion. The arrangement is partly dictated by social platforms that do not allow full nudity, but it also downplays the pornographic or sexual associations of the selfies, assisted by the preference for crisp contours, bright sunlight, and intense colours. Thirdly, people are usually entirely naked, or they have exposed their buttocks while keeping other articles of clothes on, perhaps suggesting the hastiness of taking the photo similarly to streaking, but the pictures do not otherwise suggest a readiness to flee or the danger of getting caught. The exposed buttocks also resemble the gesture of mooning, but the poses and atmosphere in nude heritage selfies do not suggest a similar aggression or wish to dishonour the viewer.

Typically, the person depicted in a nude heritage selfie stands alone in the centre of the picture, showing his or her bare backside to the camera and thus standing between the selfie's audience and the heritage view. This resembles the composition of Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Wanderer_above_the_sea_of_fog.jpg), but without the sombre, contemplative mood. Smith (2018) describes the person exemplified by the painting as a 'promontory witness' who, by his elevated gaze, is 'alluding to mastery of the scene beheld'. Smith considers this as a typical motif in the visualisations on the relationship of power between tourists and their destinations.

Unlike in Friedrich's work, in the selfies, the arms of the standing figures are held vertically at the sides, akimbo, or – this is common – raised over one's head in a V-shaped position like in veneration or the expression of joy and success. Turning their backs to the audience means that the persons remain faceless and somewhat unidentifiable. Nonetheless, despite their anonymity, they are almost without exception white, usually young and fit, and more often men than women (cf. Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015, p. 79). There are occasionally elderly persons, persons of other skin colours than white, and persons with portly or obese bodies, but they are conspicuously rare. Some selfies have several people exposing their naked backs to the audience. The interaction between the people is rarely sexual or sensual but emphasises the tender feelings between couples or the delight of comradeship and the equality of a group of friends.

Most nude heritage selfies attempt to underline their nonsexual purpose by not showing full-frontal nudity, while their playful character is emphasised by the visual devices to hide genitals as well as the smiling faces and cheery gestures of depicted persons. This parallels the general tendency of selfies to be promoted as a form of self-irony and flippancy rather than a serious or narcissistic pursuit (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017; Gunthert, 2015). The sense of youthful mischievousness also resembles the custom of streaking on Anglo-American college campuses (Kirkpatrick, 2008), which has attained some degree of quiet acceptance as pointed out by Herring

(2008). Another form of tolerated public nudity is nudism, which underscores the asexuality of nakedness and succeeds in this goal (Górnicka, 2016, pp. 165–167). Usually nudists are consented to, possibly seen as slightly comical but harmless, and nudism achieves this by adhering to certain locations and times. However, unlike college streaking, or nudism, nude heritage selfies violate the norms of spatial and temporal correctness. They are taken in places where visitors are expected to be publicly clothed at all times and not to document situations in which the rules are broken. Moreover, the visual practice of such selfies both emphasises and downplays the sexual character of nudity, and thus utilises the transgressive power of being naked at unsanctioned locations (Barcan, 2004, p. 185).

Conclusions: mitigated transgressions

Nude heritage selfies constitute a conflicting practice in terms of visual outcomes, social effects, and emotions. On the one hand, they continue the established practice of tourist photography and exploit the age-old association between nudity and heritage. Even museums exploit this association. In summer 2020, the Yorkshire Museum in England launched a 'curator battle' in which museums competed in producing photographs of works of art, and other objects in their collections with depictions of human bottoms (Sullivan, 2020). However, on the other hand, such nude photographs as well as nude selfies are advocated as a social media trend with novelty value and the ability to conceive something different. Not surprisingly, the emotional reactions to the activity of taking nude heritage selfies are also mixed, attracting the interest of news media and commentators.

Based on visual discourse analysis, the nude bodies in the selfies usually represent themselves as affluent, young, and buoyant white people, and this cheerfulness is echoed in the language of some of the press reports, attracting early commercial use of the phenomenon. In spite of efforts to align the practice with more accepted forms of nudity, like streaking on Anglo-American college campuses, the consequences of nude selfies remain graver, provoking administrative measures and generating rage in some audiences, which the media often designates rather vaguely as 'local communities,' but the tone of voice is more uniformly condemning when nude selfies are taken in European places of dark heritage and can be considered as defamatory identity work (Sivula, 2017, pp. 336–339).

In analysing the significance of undressing in public, Brownie (2017, p. 65) argues that the gesture is often meant to disrupt the ordinary flow of things, sometimes to make a political statement. It is not merely the progression of becoming naked, but an act that manipulates and transforms meanings. It can be seen as a form of removing cultural property, freeing the body from the cultural restraints that may otherwise govern the very same bodies (Masquelier, 2005, pp. 1–2), and some of this transgressive visual logic also structures the reactions sparked by nude heritage selfies. Taking a nude selfie utilises the emotional value given to heritage by disobeying it, and in some sense, the act marks the site as belonging to the visitor, who has done as they please.

Despite their visual strategy of controlled nudity, media reports show that nude heritage selfies have not succeeded in ironing out clashes between the established views on nudity and heritage. Although such photographs might be popular in private circles, they have not gained a similar position of public acceptance as, for instance, nudism with its regulated locations and practices. This demonstrates how difficult it is to control reactions and meanings attached to nudity and heritage in a tourism context, especially because the use of both is equivocal on at least three levels. Firstly, as the visual analysis showed, the selfies gain some of their force by using nakedness as a violation against the commonly accepted norm, but at the same time they deemphasise the sexual nature of nudity. Yet, as Rob Cover (2003, p. 58) points out, the meaning of nudity is never entirely controllable – there is always a seepage of obscene in the most innocent nudity. Secondly, the selfies gain their effectiveness by being contextualised at famous heritage sites, but the repetition of the same poses and compositions reveals how interchangeable and arbitrary the locations are. Thirdly, heritage spaces are locations of controlled behaviour (e.g. Haldrup, 2020). In addition to the official

codes of conduct and security measures imposed by the management, there are conventional ways of behaving and moving at sites; as the media reporting evinces, getting undressed at such sites outside the context of art inevitably goes against the rules. I argue that already these three levels of ambiguity make the attempts to control the meanings and consequences of nude heritage selfies precarious. 'Nudity,' 'heritage,' and 'selfies' have complex visual histories and combining them together in the same visual practice creates highly provocative images.

Many of the violations that nude heritage selfies, or rather the visual practice, are charged with are actually relevant for the tourist practice in general. Visitors taking nude heritage selfies are said to be privileged whites who come to a foreign site disregarding its real value and local circumstances and use the place as an interchangeable backdrop for their individual projects. Nevertheless, it is important to remember there also incidents where non-Westerners have undressed at heritage sites, such as the example of Chinese visitors in Thailand. I suggest that this setting has to do with hierarchies of privilege and ownership and is present in much of global tourism, not only in nude selfies. Taking nude heritage selfies, however, by making a distinct gesture not allowed at the site, emphasises that the site is marked and claimed by the visitor, disturbing the cultural and social ownership of heritage. This leads to a conflict. By bringing these problems into the limelight, nude heritage selfies allow the discussing of broader cultural and social issues related to global heritage tourism and negotiating between the conflicting emotions they raise.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Visa Immonen is Professor of Medieval Archaeology at the University of Bergen, Norway. His research focuses on medieval material culture, but he is also interested in heritage issues such as the use of digital media in heritage work.

ORCID

Visa Immonen http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7616-500X

References

Abalo, H. (2019, April 4). D'Auschwitz à Oradour-sur-Glane: Une question de décence. *France 3: Nouvelle-Aquitane*. https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/nouvelle-aquitaine/haute-vienne/auschwitz-oradour-glane-question-decence-1649628.html

AKP. (2015, May 17). Tourists to Cambodia required to respect visitor code of conduct. *Agence Kampuchea Presse*. https://web.archive.org/web/20150811064048/http://www.akp.gov.kh/?*p*=62427

Aldrich, R. (1993). *The seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and homosexual fantasy*. Routledge.

Andrews, H. (2009). 'Tits out for the boys and no back chat': Gendered space on holiday. *Journal of Space and Culture*, *12*(2), 166–182. https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331208325603

Barcan, R. (2004). *Nudity: A cultural icon*. Berg.

BBC News. (2019, June 12). Chernobyl selfies lead to warning from show's writer. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-48608713

Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. Penguin Books.

Black, J. (2003). *Italy and the Grand Tour*. Yale University Press.

Blackburn, S. (2014). *Mirror, mirror: The uses and abuses of self-love*. Princeton University Press.

Bräuchler, B., & Postill, J. (2010). *Theorising media and practices*. Berghahn Books.

Brownie, B. (2017). *Acts of undressing: Politics, eroticism, and discarded clothing*. Bloomsbury.

Bryant, N. (2010, March 1). Naked photo at Sydney Opera House Highlights Openness. *BBC News*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8542350.stm

BZ. (2015, July 6). Schweizer Nackt-Künstlerin vor Eiffelturm verhaftet. *Berner Oberländer*. https://www.berneroberlaender.ch/kultur/kunst/schweizer-nacktkuenstlerin-vor-eiffelturm-verhaftet/story/24301081

CBC News. (2015, June 17). Sask: Siblings apologize for posing naked on Malaysia mountain. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sask-siblings-apologize-for-posing-naked-on-malaysia-mountain-1.3115996

Ceaser, J. (2015, May 21). People are getting naked at historic monuments, WTF? *New York Post*. https://nypost.com/2015/05/21/why-are-people-getting-naked-at-historic-monuments/

Chard, C. (1995). Nakedness and tourism: Classical sculpture and the imaginative geography of the Grand Tour. *Oxford Art Journal*, *18*(1), 14–28. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/18.1.14

Clark, K. (1956). *The nude: A study in ideal form*. Pantheon.

Connexion. (2018, January 24). Artist arrested for naked pose in front of Mona Lisa. *The Connexion: French News and Views*. https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/Artist-arrested-for-naked-pose-in-front-of-Mona-Lisa

Couldry, N. (2004). Theorising media as practice. *Social Semiotics*, *14*(2), 115–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/1035033042000238295

Cover, R. (2003). The naked subject: Nudity, context and sexualization in contemporary culture. *Body & Society*, *9*(3), 53–72. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X030093004

Crouch, D. (2010). The perpetual performance and emergence of heritage. In E. Waterton, & S. Watson (Eds.), *Culture, heritage and representation: Perspectives on visuality and the past* (pp. 57–74). Ashgate.

Davis, W. (2015, June 12). Travel is a privilege, not a right. *The Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/travel-is-a-privilege-not-a-right/article24922925/

Diefenbach, S., & Christoforakos, L. (2017). The selfie paradox: Nobody seems to like them yet everyone has reasons to take them: An exploration of psychological functions of selfies in self-presentation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*(7), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00007.

El-Mecky, N. (2018). 'In public space, the naked body is still explosive:' How photographer Spencer Tunick won and lost to fight to work on New York's streets. *Iperstoria – Testi Letterature Linguaggi*, *11*, 40–54. https://doi.org/10.13136/2281-4582/2018.i11.336

Garner, A. O. (2021). I came, I saw, I selfied: Travelling in the age of Instagram. In M. Månsson, A. Buchmann, C. Cassinger, & L. Eskilsson (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to media and tourism* (pp. 316–325). Routledge.

Gómez Cruz, E., & Thorham, H. (2015). Selfies beyond self-representation: The (theoretical) f(r)ictions of a practice. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, *7* (1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v7.28073

Górnicka, B. (2016). *Nakedness, shame, and embarrassment: A long-term sociological perspective*. Springer VS.

Gunthert, A. (2015). The consecration of the selfie. *Études Photographiques*, *32*, 1–16. https://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3537.

Haldrup, M. (2020). Bodies at sea: 'Water' as interface in Viking heritage communication. In C. Palmer, & H. Andrews (Eds.), *Tourism and embodiment* (pp. 140–157). Routledge.

Harley, N. (2016, March 4). British tourist arrested for posing nude at Peru's Machu Picchu Ruins. *The Telegraph*. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/12183434/British-tourist-arrested-for-posing-nude-at-Perus-Machu-Picchu-ruins.html

Herring, E. (2008). We're going streaking: The theory of sanctioned deviance at Hamilton College. *Insights*, *2*(1), 3–16.

Hunter, E. B. (2018). In the frame: The performative spectatorship of museum selfies. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *38*(1–2), 55–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2018.1456673

Hutchinson, J. (2015, May 19). Adventure company fined for allowing tourist to strip off for NAKED Bungee Jump after holiday video goes viral. *Mail Online*. https://web.archive.org/web/20160317201116/http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-3087538/Adventure-company-fined-allowing-tourist-strip-NAKED-bungee-jump-holiday-video-goes-viral.html

Imam, J. (2015, January 21). Selfies turn museums into playgrounds for a day. *CNN*. https://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/21/living/feat-museum-selfie-irpt/index.html

Kassam, A. (2014, August 21). Naked Italians spark protests against Antics of Drunken Tourists in Barcelona. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/21/naked-italians-protests-drunken-tourists-barcelona

Kirkpatrick, B. (2008). 'It beats rocks and tear gas': Streaking and cultural politics in the post-Vietnam Era. *Journal of Popular Culture*, *43*(5), 1023–1047. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2010.00785.x

Kohe, G. Z. (2012). Decorative dashes: Disrobing the practice of streaking. *Costume*, *46*(2), 197–211. https://doi.org/10.1179/0590887612Z.0000000009

La Razón. (2016, January 7). Sacan a Justin Bieber por hacer desmanes en Tulum. *La Razón de México*. https://web.archive.org/web/20160112074140/http://www.razon.com.mx/spip.php?article292039

Liu, E. (2014, March 20). Peru to tourists: 'Stop getting naked at Machu Picchu!' *CNN*. http://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/naked-tourists-machu-picchu-peru/index.html

Marshall, P. (2015). Naked at monuments. https://web.archive.org/web/20150622102711/http://nakedatmonuments.tv/

Martineau, P. (2014). *The nude in photography*. J. Paul Getty Museum.

Masquelier, A. (2005). *Dirt, undress, and difference: Critical perspectives on the body's surface*. Indiana University Press.

Melotti, M. (2018). Florence: Tourism, heritage and consumption. In M. Kozak, & N. Kozak (Eds.), *Tourist behavior: An experiential perspective* (pp. 97–109). Springer.

Metusela, C., & Waitt, G. (2012). *Tourism and Australian beach culture: Revealing bodies*. Channel View Publications.

Moiré, M. (2015a). *The naked life*. Milo Moiré, Retrieved February 24, 2015, from https://milomoire.com/en/the-naked-life/

Moiré, M. (2015b). *Naked selfies*. Milo Moiré, Retrieved November 15, 2015, from https://milomoire.com/en/nackt-selfies-social-media-selbstentbloessung-karikatur/

Morgan, D. (2005). *The sacred gaze: Religious visual culture in theory and practice*. University of California Press.

Mullins, P. (2015). *Heritage exposed: Nudity at historical sites*. Archaeology and Material Culture, Retrieved June 29 2015, from https://paulmullins.wordpress.com/2015/06/29/heritage-exposed-nudity-at-historical-sites/

Murray, D. C. (2015). Notes to self: The visual culture of selfies in the age of social media. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *18*(6), 490–516. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2015.1052967

Palmer, C., & Andrews, H. (2020). Tourism and embodiment: Animating the field. In C. Palmer, & H. Andrews (Eds.), *Tourism & embodiment* (pp. 1–8). Routledge.

Paris, N. (2015, May 22). Angkor bans naked photos in new code of conduct. *Telegraph*. https://web.archive.org/web/20151209111024/http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/11623828/Angkor-bans-naked-photos-in-new-code-of-conduct.html

Patient, D. (2018, March 15). Naked tourists BANNED from Machu Picchu after exposing bums. *Daily Star*. https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/world-news/naked-tourists-machu-picchu-bums-16854096

Rab, A. (2007). *My naked trip*. https://web.archive.org/web/20070106192558/http://www.mynakedtrip.com/

Ramamurthy, A. (2004). Spectacles and illusion: Photography and commodity culture. In L. Wells (Ed.), *Photography: A critical introduction* (pp. 193–244). Routledge.

Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing ourselves through technology: How we use selfies, blogs and wearable devices to see and shape ourselves*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Riegel, R. (2008, June 18). 1,200 naked for sake of Blarney Art shoot. *Independent.ie*. https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/1200-go-naked-for-sake-of-blarney-art-shoot-26455535.html

Rose, G. (2012). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. Sage.

Sarmiento, T. (2007, May 7). Thousands strip for photo shoot. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-tunick/thousands-strip-for-photo-shoot-idUSN0626494920070507

Shears, R. (2010, June 28). Aboriginals' Fury as French exotic dancer strips on Uluru. *Daily Mail*. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1290208/Miss-Alizee-Sery-angers-Aboriginals-Ayers-Rock-exotic-dance-display.html

Short, M. (2014, March 12). Crackdown on naked selfies and streaking at Machu Picchu. *Gap Year & Backpacking Travel*. https://www.gapyear.com/articles/travel-news/crackdown-on-naked-selfies-and-streaking-at-machu-picchu

Sivula, A. (2017). Kulttuurisen muistin kätkemä konflikti: Paikallista muistomerkkihanketta koskevien uutisten kommenttiketjut negatiivisen kulttuuriperinnön tilana. In H. Hieta, A. Nieminen, M. Mäki, K. Siivonen, & T. J. Virtanen (Eds.), *Rajaamatta: Etnologisia keskustelua* (pp. 315–347). Ethos.

Smith, S. P. (2018). Instagram abroad: Performance, consumption and colonial narrative in tourism. *Postcolonial Studies*, *21*(2), 172–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2018.1461173

Sontag, S. ([1979] 2002). *On photography*. Penguin.

Spechler, D. (2020, April 24). The nude selfie is now high art. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/24/opinion/sunday/covid-nude-selfies.html

Sullivan, H. (2020, July 22). Race to the bottom: Curators in battle for best museum bum. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jul/22/race-to-the-bottom-museum-curators-in-battle-for-bestmuseumbum

The Guardian. (2020, February 13). Burmese Anger grows over pornographic video shot at Buddhist site. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/13/burmese-anger-grows-over-pornographic-video-shot-at-buddhist-site

Tifentale, A., & Manovich, L. (2015). Selficity: Exploring photography and self-fashioning in social media. In D. M. Berry, & M. Dieter (Eds.), *Postdigital aesthetics: Art, computation and design* (pp. 109–122). Palgrave Macmillan.

Tiidenberg, K., & Gómez Cruz, E. (2015). Selfies, image and the re-making of the body. *Body & Society*, *21*(4), 77–102. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X15592465

TimeAndPlaceClothing. (2013). *The ASSignment: Naked tourism with time & place clothing*. YouTube, Retrieved July 14, 2013, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = mWuEXSqF9qg

Trease, G. (1967). *The Grand Tour*. Heinemann.

Turner, M. (2011). *Exposed: Photography & the classical nude*. Nicholson Museum.

Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. Sage.

Waterton, E., & Watson, S. (2014). *The semiotics of heritage tourism*. Channel View Publications.

Wiener, M. (2005). Breasts, (un)dress, and modernist desires in the Balinese-tourist encounter. In A. Masquelier (Ed.), *Dirt, undress, and difference: Critical perspectives on the body's surface* (pp. 61–95). Indiana University Press.

Wochit News. (2015). *Tourists keep getting naked at Angkor Wat in Cambodia*. YouTube. Retrieved February 10, 2015, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QpGNWq4mRc