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### Lake Louise and Tourism Infrastructure (Not Pictured)

Lake Louise, located in Banff, Alberta, is a popular tourist destination whose image is widely circulated as a representation of Canada's beauty and wilderness. In order to maintain its stature as a major tourism destination in Canada, Lake Louise relies on tourism infrastructure and the concepts of destination and the sublime. In analyzing the relationship between destination, the sublime, infrastructure, and circulating representations, we can see the effect this relationship has on tourists and the tourist experience at Lake Louise, both positive and negative.

Lake Louise was "discovered" during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in the late 1800s and was a major rail destination, as it still is today with VIA rail. Prior to its colonial discovery, the Lake Louise area was known as the "lake of the little fishes" and it was used for hunting, gathering, and ceremonies by the Stoney Nakoda First Nations people. (Dulewich). The overtaking of Lake Louise as a rail destination required the dispossession of the Indigenous people who relied on those lands. In *Following the Infrastructures of Empire: Notes on Cities, Settler Colonialism, and Method*, Deborah Cowen discusses how Indigenous people all across Canada were displaced for the sake of the rail. Cowen describes how the CPR was premised "on the claim that Canada's 'finest portions' were otherwise 'abandoned to the savage'" (473), and the same can be said about the colonization of Lake Louise. Lake Louise is a tranquil, picturesque, beautiful turquoise lake surrounded by perfectly green trees and impressive

mountains. It is most definitely considered one of Canada's "finest portions," thus why it so commonly circulated as a representation of Canada's natural beauty. As such, it must not be "abandoned to the savage;" it must be given a use. This is where the concept of *terra nullius* comes in. Lake Louise cannot be left as just a lake, or "nothing land." It must be capitalized upon and given a use (by colonial standards). And so, the Indigenous land that is now known as Lake Louise was taken for the sake of destination. This gave the land a "colonial use" that continues to this day, and the land was saved from being "abandoned to the savage." Cowen quotes the mayor of Winnipeg in 1885 who asserted that "the CPR brought a vast territory under the beneficent influence of civilization and commerce" (473). With the construction of the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise in 1911, the land there was truly under the "influence of civilization and commerce" and remains that way today. Instead of allowing beautiful land to exist as a food source and simply for the sake of being appreciated, colonizers needed to monetize it and bring it under the "influence of civilization and commerce." They did this by making the Lake a rail destination and constructing the Fairmont. Today, people who visit Lake Louise can experience its natural beauty while paying for the luxury and modernity of staying in the Fairmont. This payment gives the lake its purpose by capitalist, colonial standards, and prevents the land there from being "wasted"—from being *terra nullius*.

When you Google "Lake Louise" the first photo that comes up every time is from the Banff Blog (Seagle). This photo shows the lake itself. It shows the crystalline waters and the serene mountains that surround it; a few kayakers can be seen enjoying the calm waters. The photo seems to have been taken right up on the shore of the lake with a high quality camera to enhance the serenity of the scene. What the photo does not show is the hordes of tourists behind the camera, nor the tourism infrastructure—both factors that would take away from the natural

sublimity of the scene. Pictures just like this one, that focus on the Lake's beauty and neglect to show the tourist environment, commonly circulate on social media. On Instagram and TikTok, accounts that post about travel, Canada, exploration and more can commonly be seen posting beautiful photos of Lake Louise and noting the natural beauty of Canada (Huii). These images consistently highlight the Lake itself, and not the crowds or infrastructure present.

These images are almost all taken from the same viewpoint thanks to the tourism infrastructure at the Lake. This infrastructure includes the paved pathways, lookouts, benches, bus stops, parking lots, washrooms and the Fairmont; all of which increase accessibility to Lake Louise for tourists. Brian Larkin defines infrastructure as “built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space” (328). The tourism infrastructure present at Lake Louise facilitates the flow of tourists and allows for the exchange of ideas surrounding natural beauty in Canada between the tourists present at the Lake and those who are not present, through media representations of the Lake. For example, tourists visit Lake Louise and, thanks to the infrastructure present, they can have a comfortable experience and the opportunity to capture the breathtaking beauty of the Lake on camera from an accessible viewpoint. Tourists then circulate their representations of the Lake, perhaps on their instagram travel blog, and generate new interest in Lake Louise from potential new visitors who, again, thanks to the tourism infrastructure, can easily experience the Lake's beauty for themselves.

In his book *Tourism: a Community Approach*, Peter Murphy describes how “negative vacation experiences can occur... when visitors with different expectations find themselves in conflict with each other over the use of community facilities and amenities” (127). Tourists visit Lake Louise to see the beauty of the Lake in person, but that's not all they can do. Some tourists come for a more wild, “outdoorsy” experience—maybe to kayak across the lake, or find a hike to

do—but others come for a luxurious stay at the Fairmont. Murphy continues to say that in order for a destination to be successful, “it must do its best to match the expectations of those groups it wishes to attract” (127). Thus the tourism infrastructure present at Lake Louise is necessary to create a comfortable experience to attract tourists who want to enjoy the view as part of a more luxurious vacation while still being acceptable for those looking for a more rugged vacation.

Images that are circulated rarely show the presence of other tourists, nor do they show the tourism infrastructure present. This can create false expectations for potential and future visitors. Lisa Parks notes that “since infrastructures cannot be captured in a single frame, we must read media with an infrastructural disposition—that is, when viewing and consuming media, we must think not only about what they represent ... but also think more elementally about what they are made of and how they arrived” (357). In this case, photos of the Lake do not also capture the infrastructure behind the camera that made the photo possible. So, when seeing these photos, viewers must not only contemplate the beauty in Canada that it represents, but also what’s going on behind the scenes. Did the photographer hike miles to a viewpoint? Or did they walk up a paved path and wait for their turn to get to the front of the lookout to take this uninterrupted photo? Thus “it is important not only to analyze how infrastructures appear in media culture but also to visit infrastructure sites”( Parks, 370) and see for yourself the full infrastructure. Media representations of Lake Louise that circulate can be analyzed to see how they represent natural beauty in Canada, but to see the full picture of Lake Louise and the infrastructure that made the photos possible, one must visit the Lake for themselves.

Though many tourists visit Lake Louise as a single destination, others opt for a rail tour. Many rail tours advertise Lake Louise as a top listed destination during the journey. These tours most commonly consist of two to five days of rail travel, usually with VIA Rail, with stops to

visit some of Canada's best natural landmarks. Although Lake Louise is a destination, the train journey is also part of the destination in and of itself. There is no express train across Canada; only long, meandering train journeys designed to give riders a perfect view of the nature of Canada. Many train cars are built with glass walls, providing riders with a 180 degree view of the sublimity of nature. One video posted on TikTok shows what it's like to do a 36-hour train journey across part of Canada (Sprouht). The video praises the ride for offering great views throughout the trip, and a few arguments in the comment section drive home the point that the rail is the destination for many people. Multiple comments on the video ridiculed Canada for not having a bullet train, saying Canada is "behind." However, these comments had notable replies of people in favor of the long rail journey, arguing that you "don't need to go fast when you're travelling the most beautiful scenery in the world" or that "the idea is to go slow and enjoy the beautiful country." The comment section also has many commenters remarking that they too wish to take a trip like this one. These commenters are all longing for the same experience of the technological sublime. The technological sublime refers to something natural and awe-inspiring that has been conquered by human-made technological advancements, such as these trains. Riders experience the technological sublime as they regard the natural sublime while hurtling across Canada in a massive technological icon; the train. So, riders take in the technological sublime and enjoy the train itself as a destination as they approach the destination of Lake Louise where they can continue fulfilling the fantasy of enjoying the natural sublime thanks to the technology that made the journey possible. And thus, Lake Louise has been branded by rail tour companies as a destination that can help complete the subliminal fantasy of Canadian rail travel.

In general Lake Louise is a destination partly due to the technological sublime of rail travel and the fantasy of exploration it evokes. Rail tours across Canada or through the Rockies

allow riders to experience the natural sublime through the windows of a train—an impressive technological advancement of modern times—thus allowing riders to experience the technological sublime and a feeling of conquering nature thanks to technology. As a common rail tour destination, Lake Louise is also a part of the fantasy of rail travel and the technological sublime that goes with it. Upon arrival at Lake Louise, rail tourists get to “discover” and “explore” the lake for themselves, thus continuing the rail fantasy of exploration.

Once rail tourists and tourists in general arrive at Lake Louise, they expect to see sublimity in its purest form: nature. In photographic representations, the lake is shown as beautiful, serene, and natural. Photos rarely, if ever, show more than one person, and they rarely show the tourist infrastructure, like the Fairmont. Only the lake is pictured in all its glory. Karen Dubinsky discusses how disappointment was a by-product of Niagara Falls’ fame (10) and how often images of the Falls were much more impressive than the Falls themselves. Similar things can be said about Lake Louise, after seeing the representations that circulate on social media, visitors can be faced with disappointment upon arrival and seeing that they are not surrounded by sublime nature, rather they are faced with sublime nature to their front and a pure commodification of that nature behind them. Dubinsky describes how people flocked to Niagara in a “search for wild things”(4); people do the same with Lake Louise. The images that circulate on social media depict a purely natural, wild lake. People go there to experience nature in its most wild form, and in some cases to continue the fantasy of exploration started with a rail journey, except that it’s not actually that wild at all because of the masses of people present and the tourism infrastructure present to make the experience as comfortable as possible.

Visitors get to experience the awe-inspiring Lake Louise but with the safety and comforts of the tourism infrastructure just behind them; purely human, man-made, infrastructure: not at all

wild. A video posted on TikTok describes this disappointment well (Jehabtron): a young girl is at Lake Louise and she comments on how she never realized the Fairmont Hotel was literally meters from the Lake and she was expecting a more wild experience. The video has 852,000 likes, clearly people agree with her. The popularity and fame of Lake Louise also brings in crowds of people who come to see what they've heard about. So, in addition to having the Fairmont ruin the wild aspect of the lake, the crowds of people are also simultaneously ruining the experience for each other by taking away the aspect of the escape from civilization that comes with the wild. In the peak tourism season (summer), up to 15,000 people visit Lake Louise per day (Audrey) and there are over 3.6 million visitors annually (Derworiz). The most popular photos of the lake that circulate online do not show the number of tourists there and so visitors expecting to have a serene, enchanting, private moment at the lake are not alone. We end up with potentially hundreds of tourists all chasing the sublime while simultaneously ruining the experience for each other. Multiple TikToks (Kaejon, Choo) highlight expectations of visiting the lake vs. reality, showing beautiful, serene views of the lake as expectation, and crowds of people disrupting that view as reality. So, is it really the natural sublime when you are following a specific script along with hundreds of others at the same time? This script involves staying on the beaten path, experiencing "wilderness" in complete safety, and pushing to the front of all the people to try to get your own photo that showcases the sublime at Lake Louise that you're searching for, to further the fantasy of exploration.

Dubinsky also analyzes how tourism is often an indirect and artificial experience (16). Tourists go to Lake Louise to experience beautiful, awe-inspiring nature but when they do so they are playing into the artificial tourist experience which includes the Fairmont and the tourism infrastructure. The experience of pure, wild nature is indirect because visitors are not fully

immersed in nature. When facing the lake, they get the picturesque view, but just behind them is the Fairmont and all its comforts and luxuries that make up the tourist experience of visiting Lake Louise. Dubinsky quotes Boorstin who says tourist attractions “offer an... indirect experience, an artificial product to be consumed in the very places where the real thing is free as air”(16). All of Banff National Park is there for exploring nature, truly in its natural form but tourists choose to indirectly experience the park by viewing Lake Louise comfortably from the foot of the Fairmont to try and get the feeling of sublimity while being safely on the well-trodden path. In a way, the destination, padded with tourism infrastructure, and the tourist script, to wait your turn in the crowds to get your own perfect photo, take away the sublimity from these natural places that were once purely natural sublime.

Over 150 years ago, the lake of little fishes was a practical destination; a food source for indigenous peoples in the area. But in 1882, the lake, then temporarily known as Lake Emerald, was colonized by rail workers. Soon after the lake was renamed Lake Louise, after Queen Victoria's daughter. By creating a railway destination and giving the lake a name that would attract Victorian tourists, colonists took away the practical destination that served indigenous peoples for many years, and ultimately ruined the natural sublimity of the lake of little fishes. Today, Lake Louise is well known for its beauty, but in order to truly appreciate that beauty, we must think critically about the Lake's history and consider how this piece of nature came to be named after a princess of a major colonizing power and what that means for those who have been there since long before the construction of the CPR.



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