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"TRAVELLING THEORY AND THE POLITICS OF
REPRESENTATION"

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Most attempts to analyze the social logic of tourism tend to focus on the relationship between tourism and modernization. This typically involves one of two alternative approaches. For political economists and some cultural theorists, tourism is seen as a modernizing force in a global process of political economic expansion and cultural homogenization. Others have used tourism as a trope for modernity itself.[1]

In his landmark work, *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell took both tacks, seeing tourism not just as a material element in the logic of modernization, but also as a metaphor for the modern subject (MacCannell 1976:1). The postmodern appropriation of tourism tends to follow along much the same lines, slipping with deceptive ease between the two approaches.

I wonder if in fact there isn't a danger in that slippage; if in fact there are some decisive differences between the metaphorical use of tourism and its material specificity. I think there are, and in the comments that follow I will attempt to outline the types of theoretical inadequacies that arise when concepts like modernity or modernization are imported to the discussion of tourism without a certain degree of caution being exercised en route. As Edward Said has argued in the essay from which the title of this paper is borrowed (Said 1983), consequences always ensue when theories travel from their points of origin to new contexts -- to which I would add, particularly theories about travelling. That these are specifically political consequences I hope to show by moving the discussion from that of tourism-in-general to the specific ground of tourism and underdevelopment.

For Paul Ricoeur, one of many theorists to link modernization tropologically to tourism, the spread of capitalism is irreversible: "mankind as a whole is on the brink of a single world civilization", in which the spread of technics, for instance

> creates an irreversible situation for everyone; its spread
> may be delayed but not totally prevented. Thus we are

confronted with a *de facto* universality of mankind: as
soon as an invention appears in some part of the world we
can be sure it will spread everywhere (1965:271-272).

This is strikingly similar to the approach of Dean MacCannell, who argues
that "beneath the disorderly exterior, modern society hides a firm resolve
to establish itself on a worldwide base" (MacCannell 1976:2), because this

deep structure of modernity is a totalizing idea, a modern
mentality that sets modern society in opposition both to its
own past and to those societies of the present that are
premodern or un(der)developed (op. cit.7-8).

Within this sort of discourse, then, modernization is a uniform, global
process which results in the 'museumization' of premodern cultural forms.
According to MacCannell, "the best indication of the final victory of
modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance
of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction
in modern society" (MacCannell 1976:8). The hypothetical end-point of
this process is supplied, tongue in cheek, by Ricoeur: "The whole of
mankind becomes a kind of imaginary museum: where shall we go this
weekend -- visit the Angkor ruins or take a stroll in the Tivoli of
Copenhagen?" (Ricoeur 1965:278).

It is this conception of modernization that we find underpinning most
semiotic or postmodern theoretical approaches to tourism.[2] According to
some writers, the construction of touristic experiences works by setting
off the premodern from the modern: touristic nostalgia serves as a
reminder "of the victory of the modern over its ever receding past" (Wilson
1988:4). In other approaches, touristic leisure is understood as a refuge
from the alienation of modernity; as a tourist, the individual reaffirms a
sense of social totality by "wandering through the museum" of displaced,
premodern cultural forms (see Neumann 1988, MacCannell 1976:7).

The fundamental problem with these kinds of theoretical approaches
to the social logic of tourism is the way in which they conceptualize
modernization and modernity. The interpretation of history implied by
many cultural theorists who 'use' tourism is that of a monolithic process
that obeys laws of uniform expansion. It's a vision with a number of
consequences for its theoretical object. Two of these consequences can be
listed very schematically before proceeding.

First, this is a resolutely undialectical perspective: it is as if at the
moment of modernization, premodern or traditional cultural forms
spontaneously give up their historical substance to the juggernaut of

modernity. This is a discourse which necessitates that the Other is denied effectively. It also depends upon a simplistic distinction between the modern and premodern that can only be sustained at a high level of abstraction.

Secondly, it's also a highly deterministic vision of historical change: there is little room for contingency when MacCannell speaks of the 'final victory of modernity, or when Ricoeur tells us that we are on the brink of 'universal modern civilization'. This notion of modernity as the final cause of social change has its roots, of course, well outside the confines of cultural theory. Within the canon of political science, similarly teleological conceptions have had enormous influence -- both on the Right, in the form of post-World War II modernization theory (see for example Rostow 1962), and on the Left, in some varieties of dependency theory (for example Frank 1969).

These problems within the theoretical discourse on tourism have further consequences in terms of how the social logic of the touristic experience is misread. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of Third World tourism and, specifically, the politics of the touristic encounter.

Surely one of the constitutive features of tourism is the encounter -- with unfamiliarity, with novelty: with Otherness. The analysis of touristic leisure must therefore be able to specify in what ways tourism, as one of our society's distinctive forms of cultural production, involves the conscription of Others in its work; in what ways the collective representation of our culture in touristic consumption presses into service the representation of *other* cultures.

An implicit assumption of most theoretical approaches to tourism is that the analytic terms of this encounter are sufficiently specified by a problematic of authenticity. For some, the tourist is a fool who travels merely to be duped by pseudo events (Boorstin 1964). An alternative argument with more theoretical currency is the idea that, for moderns, authenticity is always thought to be elsewhere. Accordingly, the touristic encounter can be read as a pilgrimage moderns undertake in order to seek authenticity of experience (MacCannell 1976, Horne 1984). Either way, the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic is usually given a central place in the analysis.[3]

It seems clear enough that the certification of experience, by way of a discourse of authenticity, plays a large part in the construction of the touristic encounter. But is that all there is to it? What I would like to suggest is that there is in fact much more going on in the discursive construction of the encounter than a problem of authenticity, and that this distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic serves to obscure or

displace a more important issue, namely the relations of power at work in the touristic representation of other cultures. A double problem is thus arrived at.

First, I believe that it is important to see how all the authenticizing work in the discursive construction of touristic encounters cleans up or depoliticizes the power relations that sustain those experiences. In other words, the construction of authenticity is inseparable from a relation of power and knowledge over the object constructed.

Secondly, my contention is that this same work of denial or displacement is also a constitutive feature of semiotic or postmodern approaches to tourism; that is to say, the problematic of authenticity in the theoretical discourse on tourism masks a certain aporia over the problem of representation and therefore the place of the Other in the construction of touristic experiences.

Some examples will suffice to explain the problems outlined above.

In the work of Dean MacCannell, for instance, we find a great deal of discussion about how a certain quotient of authenticity is constructed and maintained in the organization of the touristic experience, by the "sacralization" of touristic sights, (MacCannell 1976:42-50) and by the use of "sight markers"; bodies of systematic information about the sights being encountered (op. cit. 119-128). A good example is provided in Mark Neumann's accounts of his experience as a tourist-cum-theorist in the Grand Canyon:

> As I hiked down the trail, I confronted plaques and markers placed by the National Park Service that displayed varied forms of geological and anthropological information. The signs proposed a certain knowledge about the portion of the canyon where I was hiking ... As I stood near the canyon walls and read the trail plaques, I positioned myself somewhere on a totalized "grid" of geological knowledge (1988:6-70).

What Neumann's example illustrates, but does not take up, is the fact that the authenticity of the touristic experience is in no small part underwritten and enforced by a series of discourses that invoke a rhetoric of authority or expertise -- not just over the individual tourist, but over the touristic sight itself. The constitution of knowledges that ratify a sense of authenticity for the tourist, then, is inseparable from -- and dependent on -- a relation of power over the touristic object. Of course nobody has stated this convergence of knowledge and power more clearly and elegantly than Foucault:

'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of
power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of
power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime'
of truth (1980:133).

There's a corollary to this problem of the politics of representation in
the history of painting. In the fourteenth century, Brunelleschi devised
a system whereby painters could create the illusion of depth, a system that
depended upon the visual organization of space into a perspective
dominated by a single viewpoint. Its influence is still being felt as a
political as well as painterly preoccupation. In Western representation,

> "Perspective" is a system of relation of elements in the
> tableau, not only to each other, but, crucially, to one
> privileged element *outside* it; that is, to the source of
> perceiving consciousness (which it can represent only by
> its absence). To that extent the metaphor of perspective,
> of the sovereign subject's mode of connection to a
> dominated space ... is about *difference as a hierarchical
> mode of relation*, and about how it can be depicted and
> managed (Terdiman 1985:28, emphasis in original).

In most theoretical discourses on tourism, the relations of power
necessary for Others to be rendered as authentic Others are for the most
part left unspecified. What we have instead is a strategic absence, and a
blurring of the specific historical and material context of tourism. In the
case of Third World tourism, the fact of an *imperial* politics of
representation is thus obscured or denied.

Walker Percy's essay *The Loss of the Creature* provides, quite
unintentionally, an example of this imperial refusal to acknowledge the
dominative politics of the touristic encounter. It is also highly suggestive
of ways that we might re-think our thinking about tourism.

Percy's own concern is the desire for a pure encounter with the thing-
in-itself, unmediated by the prior experience of others. His term for this,
ironically, is 'sovereignty', and his favourite protagonist is the agent of
imperial conquest, or what he calls the explorer. But Percy is also
interested in tourism, and tells a story about an American couple visiting
Mexico as tourists. They see the usual sights, but "are never without the
sense of missing something" (Percy 1977:51). Their problem, as Percy
diagnoses it, is to find an 'unspoiled' place, one that is not encrusted by
familiarity.

Like so many tourists, they find it by accident. Lost on back roads,

they 'discover' a tiny Indian village where an elaborate ritual is underway. Knowing at once that this is what they have been missing, namely "an authentic sight", they stay for several days (op. cit:52). Nevertheless, their pleasure is anxious and divided;

> It is given expression by their repeated exclamations that "this is too good to be true," ... and finally by their downright relief at leaving the valley and having the experience in the bag, so to speak -- that is, safely embalmed in memory and movie film (Percy 1977:52).

What is the source of their anxiety? Another clue is contained, says Percy,

> in their subsequent remark to an ethnologist friend. "How we wished you had been there with us!" (op. cit:53).

According to Percy, the problem for our couple is that they were unable to experience their stay in the village as authentic because they lack the means to certify their own experience as genuine. Hence their anxiety:

> For at any minute ... a fellow Iowan might emerge from a 'dobe hut, the chief might show them his Sears catalogue (Percy 1977:53).

This is an experience we have all had as tourists; we have all felt that anxiety. But are its features explained by the problem of authenticity? Let us look a little closer at the encounter in the village.

The first thing that we should realize about this example is the extraordinarily important role that the production of Otherness, in the form of an absolute difference, plays in the construction of the encounter. Percy's story is an example of what happens when the terms of the encounter are uncertain. The couple, then, is doubly anxious; because the Other has not been ratified as an authentic difference, and because of the fear that the difference of the Other might not be absolute ("the chief might show them his Sears catalogue").

The second thing that is apparent about the couple's experience is a curious double bind. The price of their accidental encounter with 'the real thing' is unpreparedness: they are lacking the necessary brochures and experts to make the real thing real by transforming the unfamiliar into a recognizable Other. The cause of their anxiety, I would suggest, is a radical loss of power/knowledge over Otherness: remember how relieved our friends are when they are finally able to reduce and contain the other by embalming the experience in memory and movie film. This form of

difference, then, is organized hierarchically; it is a dominative mode of representation.

Lastly, since the touristic perspective is staked upon this objectification of the Other, a deep source of anxiety for our couple is precisely their level of involvement in their own experience: they are themselves "observed with friendly curiosity" by the Indians they are observing, and are relieved only when they are again in a position of exteriority to the Other (Percy 1977:52).

If I have preyed upon Walker Percy's text unfairly, it is because what we see in his work is a typical instance of what happens when you conflate the material specificity of certain forms of tourism with its 'use' as a trope for modernity, or postmodernity.

In closing, I would just like to offer two suggestions as to how the analysis might be reformulated.

The first corrective that emerges from my example of Third World tourism is the need for an analysis that is capable of respecting the historical and material specificity of tourism or, shall we say, its political economic specificity. A thorough archaeology of Third World tourism would therefore find its roots in the expansionist phase of imperialism in the nineteenth century, and situate itself within the critical analysis of underdevelopment. I have attempted to show that quite the opposite is true of contemporary theoretical discourses on tourism, that their weaknesses and elisions can be traced to a fundamentally ahistorical outlook or, more commonly, to assumptions about historical change that have a very problematic relationship with the complexities of the world system as we know it.

The second corrective that I have attempted to tease out of my examples is the absolute necessity of having a place in one's analysis for the politics of representation. My example of Third World tourism is used as a way of demonstrating the importance of realizing that the construction of this particular form of touristic difference is hierarchical through and through -- something that the discourse on authenticity systematically downplays.

By a politics of representation I also mean to underscore the importance of allowing for the hegemonic tension that is so much a feature of dominant cultural discourses. In a sense, the Other is always a constitutive presence in the social text of dominant culture: we need only recall Gramsci's conception of culture as a continually unstable and contradictory pact between oppressor and oppressed or, in the case of tourism, a struggle of the seer over the seen.

NOTES

1. Two representative works in this vein are Percy, 1977 and Ricouer, 1965.

2. For a straightforward semiotic approach, see Culler 1981. A more postmodern approach is that of Neumann, 1988.

3. Jonathan Culler (1981:131) has argued that this distinction is of central importance, calling it "a powerful semiotic operator within tourism".

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Commentary

Let me begin this commentary by endorsing Peter Laurie's appeal for tourism studies from an historical and political-economic perspective. It is encouraging to find anthropologists critically examining the lack of either perspective in much tourism-related theory. Given the recent post-modern emphasis upon reflexivity and native voice, I agree that anthropology has something critically constructive to offer tourism studies. It is time that authors of tourism ethnographies and analyses openly address their own different values with which they approach their work. Further, it is time we heard the local voice on tourism-related issues.

Laurie exposes a crucial theoretical problem in those analyses of tourism written from an 'authenticity' perspective: they obscure the socioeconomic reality of touristic situations. What troubles me about Laurie's carefully thought-out criticisms is his implication by omission, and by emphasis on MacCannell's work, that all tourism studies suffer this problem of obscurity. Laurie concludes that "contemporary discourses on tourism [have] a fundamentally ahistorical outlook". I question his implicit condemnation of all tourism literature by his failure to recognize a significant body of work which treats tourism as a modern form of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Nash (1977) and DeKadt (1978) are but two examples of early skepticism about tourism as an activity set in the real world of gross political and economic inequalities between nations and classes. (I recommend Malcolm Crick's review and list of citations from