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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

a similar perspective in *Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences : Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings, and Servility*. (Annual Review of Anthropology 1989, 18:307-344).

It is true that tourism has often been presented, particularly in textbooks, as a system devoid of power relations. Studies which emphasize authenticity concentrate on the tourist compelled by certain Western-industrialized notions of alienation and escape; thus, they miss a great deal about the international tourism system made possible by levels of affluence. Tourism commoditizes culture; rich tourists can afford to appropriate leisure and culture. I would challenge Laurie to read studies written from the perspective of tourism as a commodity (again, Crick 1989 is a good place to locate sources), in which the power relations inherent in travel industry/destination negotiations and tourist/local interactions are implicitly or explicitly addressed. Taken as a whole, these studies point to the ways in which tourism effectively emphasizes the inequity in the global distribution of wealth.

My final comment addresses Laurie's article as representative of post-modern diatribes in general. Once more I am confronted with a host of criticisms and deconstructions that fail to ground themselves in social, political, economic or ethnographic 'truth'. What I would dearly love to read is a paper of this theoretical calibre supported by reflexive -- postmodern, if you like -- ethnographic example. (Jon Altman's published material on tourism among Australian Aboriginies may be useful here; even a brief postmodern critique of holiday brochures as "touristic representation of other cultures" might support the argument.) If I understand Laurie's thesis correctly, his aim is to integrate elements of 'authenticity' theory with elements of the theory of 'power' in order to bring international political-economic relations down to the individual tourist/local level. The theory is here; now we need the practice.

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Response to Reimer

It would be tempting indeed to simply concur with Gwen Reimer's incisive comments on my paper and be done with it, since I believe the two of us are fundamentally in agreement about what sorts of changes might help bring about a more historically and materially grounded form of tourism studies.

There are points of difference, however. Our disagreement is not so much over the prescription for future inquiries as on the diagnosis of what is problematic about current theoretical approaches. Perhaps I did not make myself sufficiently clear: accordingly, the following brief comments are offered as a response to Reimer and as a means of stating somewhat more bluntly what I feel are the central issues I have attempted to raise.

My intent in the paper above is to raise a number of questions about just how well postmodern and semiotic approaches to tourism-in-general do justice to the specificity of Third World tourism. By focussing on the problematic of authenticity, I have merely held up for critical scrutiny what is surely a central object of interest in these sorts of theoretical discourses, of which Dean MacCannell's *The Tourist* is an exemplary -- and highly influential -- example; hence the emphasis on his work. Far from identifying an 'authenticity theory' with other elements, as Reimer suggests I do, my attempt has been to isolate one theoretical problematic that has come to play a central role in the postmodern and semiotic appropriation of tourism, and to demonstrate some of its unexamined assumptions.

There are, of course, many other interesting features of contemporary writing on tourism that would benefit from this sort of critical interrogation; for example the often unproblematic way in which the concept of 'leisure' finds its way into tourism studies.¹ I have chosen to focus on the issue of authenticity partly because I am struck by the