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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

persistence with which it crops up in writings on tourism, and partly because it offers a way of bringing to the fore the matter of politics of representation; in other words, the construction of the Other.

In this respect, I thank Reimer for reminding me that there are, in fact, a number of studies which locate tourism within the broader political economic context of imperialism and neo-colonialism; the works she cites by Nash, de Kadt and Crick are excellent examples.

The problem that remains -- and it is a considerable one -- is how to undertake critical analyses that are capable of handling the 'big facts' of imperial and neo-colonial domination *as well as* doing justice to the specificity of representation. It is all too easy to reduce complex cultural and ideological phenomena to mere 'functions' of the global capitalist economy, or to examples of how the system meets its 'needs'. As Edward Said reminds us,

To say simply that modern Orientalism has been an aspect of both imperialism and colonialism is not to say anything very disputable. Yet it is not enough to say: it needs to be worked through analytically and historically (1979:123).

Indeed, much of the neo-Marxist literature on imperialism, for all its strengths, downplays or outright elides the importance of large-scale systems of cultural representation such as Orientalism. The implicit assumption is that cultural phenomena are somehow peripheral to the real business of the political economy. Modern tourism shows this assumption to be false. Tourism is, of course, a very big business: as Crick has pointed out, it was the largest single item in world trade until oil prices rose in the early 1970s. But what drives this traffic in money if not a veritable traffic in *signs*: representations of upward mobility, of the Exotic, of Otherness? Modern tourism, and particularly the burgeoning trade in 'Third World' adventure, is the example *par excellence* of a political economic phenomenon that is heavily dependent on a continual play of representation.

On this point, I am confident that Reimer and I agree that postmodernist theories have taken us a long way toward understanding the importance of complex, textually mediated cultural phenomena. My point of departure from postmodernism(s) -- and I am not sure this has been acknowledged by Reimer -- is to insist that representation is also a play of *power* in which the larger political economic context has a determining presence, particularly for those who are represented.²

In other words, Third World tourism is a complex cultural predicament, for the tourist as well as the 'native' -- but not equally so.

The real challenge for postmodern theories is to recognize this, and in doing so to resist the tendency towards what I have called the 'imperial refusal'.

NOTES

1. The touchstone for more radical approaches to leisure is Veblen, 1953. For a critical review of the sociological literature, see Rojek, 1985.
2. My approach is heavily indebted to Edward Said's work. For more recent thinking that moves along similar lines, see *Inscriptions* Vol. 5 (1989), special issue entitled 'Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists'.

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