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*Tourist Studies* 2002; 2; 183

DOI: 10.1177/146879702761936653

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# Commodification, culture and tourism

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tourist studies

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SAGE PUBLICATIONS

London,

Thousand Oaks and

New Delhi

VOL 2(2) 183–201

[1468–7976

(200208)2:2;

183–201 031460]

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**abstract** This article revisits the question of tourism's role in the commodification of culture. I argue that an acceptance of a cause and effect relationship between tourism and cultural commodification requires an acceptance of a problematic notion of 'authenticity'. This is because the belief that tourism causes cultural commodification is based on a largely unexamined reliance on Marx's labor theory of value, source of what Barbara Herrnstein Smith has referred to as a 'double discourse of value', in which an intrinsic and sacred cultural sphere of value is presumed to circulate independent of an unstable and profane economic sphere of value. Given the social fact that everything, including 'culture', is a potential commodity, it would be useful for research to focus on how individuals and groups in host societies gain access to new forms of exchange rather than simply on the fact of commodification.

**keywords** *commodification, authenticity, culture, sacred and profane, exchange, consumption*

Tourists have the dubious distinction of serving as a target of derision for almost everyone. Indeed, scholars of tourism have more often than not begun their studies with a notion of tourism as something that is inherently 'bad', due to the cultural degradation it is claimed to cause (Crick, 1989: 308; Nash, 1981: 81; Wood, 1997: 5). In fact, a post-Second World War genealogy of laments for the havoc caused by tourism on the Other can be easily traced. The story is familiar to us all: once there was a pristine and natural place outside the West; then tourism arrived; now what was once pure and authentic has become spoiled and commodified. In short, tourism has been simultaneously internationalized, homogenized and demonized.

This story of loss transcends ideological and disciplinary boundaries. It is shared by conservative literary critics such as Paul Fussell, liberal academics such as Daniel Boorstin, harsh critics of postmodernism like sociologist Dean McCannell, and, as a subtext to larger arguments, Greens, feminists, and much

of the non-governmental organization (NGO) movement. All embrace, implicitly or explicitly, Claude Lévi-Strauss's plot line in *Tristes Tropiques*:

travel books and travelers [contemporary tourists] serve only to 'preserve the illusion of something that no longer exists'; genuine travel has been replaced by movement through a 'monoculture' in a fruitless search for a 'vanished reality'. (Lévi-Strauss, 1972: 39–40, 45)<sup>1</sup>

Related to this seemingly clear-cut story line, the relative 'seriousness' of tourism as a legitimate subject of inquiry remains an issue for many researchers. Hence, tourism research is often framed as a by-product of more scholarly work, with a focus that mainly serves to highlight and condemn its 'bastardization' features (Wood and Picard, 1997: 3; see also Nash and Smith, 1991: 13; Wilson, 1993: 33). Rather than operating as a legitimate academic topic, questions about tourism and travel have, until relatively recently, been relegated to the backbenches, so to speak, particularly in anthropology, where serious research on the subject dates only from the 1970s (Crick, 1994: 1; Nash and Smith, 1991: 13).<sup>2</sup>

Today, tourism, like other previously non-anthropological topics such as development and globalization, has gained a regular place at annual American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings. Along the way, however, it has been transformed into an anthropological object, one which is scrutinized and critiqued by an anthropology which claims to operate from a position outside of and distinct from tourism, a stance that works to mystify the relationship between anthropology and tourism. As an object of anthropological inquiry, it has been defined and shaped by a series of questions that tend to revolve around three issues: individual motivation (*why* do people travel?), economic gains and losses (*who* benefits from this travel?) and tourism's cultural impact (*what* 'cultural' changes does tourism bring?) (cf. Graburn, 1983: 10; Nash and Smith, 1991: 22).

In this article I shall focus on the latter of these questions, that of the relationship between tourism and culture. In doing so, I shall seek to draw attention to the role assumptions about commodification – what this means, how it works, and how what results relates to cultural beliefs and material objects – play in shaping answers to the question of tourism's impact on a people's 'culture'.

## Diluting culture?

Proponents of cultural involution have argued that cultural tourism can stimulate a revival of local interest in traditional cultural forms, thus both strengthening cultural bonds and providing local actors access to material benefits (cf. McKean, 1989 [1977]). Crucially, however, this position assumes that local actors can easily distinguish between what is 'sacred' (and not open to tourism) from what is 'profane' (and hence open to commodification) (cf. Picard, 1996, 1997).

On the other hand, in line with Lévi-Strauss's plot line, proponents of a cultural erosion model of tourism have warned against reductions in the aesthetic quality of cultural products and traditions due to tourist demands, arguing that the rise of tourism inevitably leads to a process of cultural commodification. The argument is that, while tourism may promote a renewed interest in traditional arts and social practices among local craftsmen and others, tourist purchases are fueled by a desire to possess a mark, rather than any genuine interest in local cultural traditions or beliefs (Mathieson and Wall, 1982: 165–9).<sup>3</sup> This results in what Shelly Errington has dubbed 'New Age Primitivism' – a situation in which objects come to signify a purely imaginary Other, one no longer tied to any specific context, geographical, historical, or otherwise (1998: 147–9). This lack of genuine interest carries over into the Other him/herself, so that Third World tourees, pressured to assume the idealized identities tourists come to expect, become other, resulting in an encounter defined by 'reciprocal misconstructions' (Lanfant, 1995: 35–6) – what Dean MacCannell (1994) has referred to as the 'postmodern emptiness' of idealized primitives performing for a culturally-consuming audience (see also Bruner, 1995; Linnekin, 1997: 216). This 'becoming other', a direct outcome of the objectification and commodification of both culture and ethnicity, is said to explain the contemporary mass consumption of identity merchandise by both touristic outsiders and local insiders, whose view of themselves is thereby distorted by the tourist gaze (Linnekin, 1997: 216–17). In other words, given a monetary value, ritual and tradition become valueless for local inhabitants (Harrison, 1994: 243–4). The 'death' of 'authentic' primitive art thus appears to be unproblematically tied to the pace of the incorporation of 'the primitive' into the global economy (Errington, 1998: 268). 'Death', then, is linked in this sense with a perceived decline of 'real' (that is, circulating outside of market exchange) social and cultural production (pp. 118–19). In its extreme form, this argument describes a world in which cultures have been replaced by a single monoculture, driven by a process of 'McDonaldization' and 'Disneyfication', one that transforms everything into a theme park and makes authentic travel experiences impossible (cf. Ritzer and Liska, 1997: 97–101).

A resulting degradation of local cultural practices and social relationships has led, in this view, to a host of social ills. In other words, the Development cure (increased tourism as a means of spurring economic change while strengthening local culture) is claimed to inevitably lead to new diseases, such as drug addiction, crime, pollution, prostitution, and a decline in social stability, as well as to the growth of 'capitalist values' and a 'consumer culture' (McLaren, 1998: 28). Indeed, researchers talk about measuring the touristic 'impact' on a local culture, language that brings to mind not just destruction (a bomb impacts on a target) but also passivity (the other is always impacted upon). In short, local cultures are presumed to be transformed (for the worse) by contact with a secular West, a presumption which implies the existence of pristine pre-tourist cultures which can serve as baseline tools for measuring the impact of this touristic degradation (Hitchcock et. al., 1993: 8; Wood, 1993: 63).

What results is a predicament that echoes both the late Walker Percy's (unattainable) desire for a fully experienced 'It' (1976: 54) and Lévi-Strauss's search for a vanished reality:<sup>4</sup> the more involved in tourism do local residents become, the less genuine do their cultural practices become and hence the less desirable they are as tourist objects (Bruner, 1995: 224). In other words, as 'they' become more like 'us', our desire for them is said to diminish. Tourism-as-cannibal ultimately consumes itself (cf. MacCannell, 1994).

Left largely unspoken in these discussions about tourism's role in the commodification of culture is the process of commodification itself. Indeed, a generalized yet largely unarticulated notion of 'commodification' operates at such a fundamental level in regard to tourism's relationship with culture that a discussion of precisely what this might mean, particularly in relation to authenticity, seems unnecessary. It thus serves as an example of Foucault's (1972 [1969]) 'already-said' – that is, the conditions of operation that define what can and cannot be said within a particular discourse.

## Commodifying what?

Adam Smith, seeking to establish a measure of value not tied to religion, defined productive labor as the source of all economic value. In his words, labor was 'the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities' (Smith, 1909: 36).<sup>5</sup> In asserting this claim, he distinguished between, first, an object's 'natural price' (its labor costs, land and production costs, and profit) and its market price (determined by supply and demand), and second, between labor's 'real price' (defined as 'the quantity of necessities or conveniences of life which are given for it') and its 'nominal price' (the quantity of money given for it) (Smith, 1909: 39–40, 58–60). In other words, Smith distinguished between a natural value (by its nature intrinsically good) and a market value (which, veering from the natural, is by implication 'unnatural' and hence inauthentic).

Classical economists such as Smith and David Ricardo downplayed the role of an object's use-value, seeing this as insignificant in the determination of value (Keen, 1993: 110). Marx, on the other hand, drew a sharp distinction between use-value and exchange-value, arguing that these are two (inseparable) parts of a whole, what he referred to as the 'dialectic of the commodity' (Keen, 1993: 110, 117). This is because all commodities (defined by Marx as anything that satisfies a human want) function as both 'objects of utility' and 'depositories of value' (p. 57). He argued that the use-values of commodities have different qualities, while their exchange-values (in relation to other commodities) have different quantities. This is because a commodity only has exchange-value in relation to other commodities; to use Marx's example, 'every other commodity now becomes a mirror of the linen's value' (p. 73).

However, in order to transform this barter system into a viable exchange system, a universal equivalent is required, a commodity which will give life to exchange-value, allowing this to be expressed. As Marx noted, commodities,

repositories of labor, speak; they 'express their value' through gold, and hence money (p. 77). Only in exchange do commodities thus acquire 'uniform social status', distinct from their individual utility (p. 84). Once a commodity assumes a money form, the social character of the labor contained within it is concealed; that is, the actual value of a commodity becomes 'a secret, hidden under the apparent fluctuations in the relative values of commodities' (p. 89). Producers (workers) are alienated from their produced objects and thus own labor, a direct result of commodity exchange. In other words, after their own labor is objectified through the rhetoric of the market, workers are estranged from the objects produced with this labor.<sup>6</sup>

This alienation is a direct result of commodity exchange, since without such exchange a given commodity would be fully utilized by its producers, presumably for a fixed purpose. Marx theorized that in what he called 'primitive communities' property was held in common and the concept of non-social (private) property did not exist. In such communities, commodity producers were not alienated from their labor because the objects they produced with this labor were held and used in common rather than exchanged as individual forms of private property. Any exchange that did occur only took place at the boundaries of a community's space, at the point of contact with other social groups. Marx speculated that a 'constant repetition of exchange made it a normal social act', leading to a situation in which the 'need for foreign objects of utility gradually established itself' (p. 98). This need led in turn to the development of a universal equivalent (money)<sup>7</sup>, which further stimulated the circulation of commodities, leading to the development of a more complex circulatory system – Marx's C-M-C (commodity – money – commodity).<sup>8</sup>

One of the most-cited examples of Marx's commodity analysis in regard to tourism has been Davydd Greenwood's essay on the commodification of a local festival in the Basque region of Spain.<sup>9</sup> Echoing Marx, Greenwood argued that anything sold assumes a commodity form, including culture. However, because culture does not belong to anyone, the marketing and selling of cultural productions to tourists is a form of community-wide expropriation. When this happens, local culture is 'altered and often destroyed' and 'made meaningless' to its people (1989: 173). In the case he cites, the Spanish Ministry of Tourism's interference in the *Fuenterrabia* festival had transformed an authentic, inward-looking, meaningful practice into a public spectacle for outsiders, which had led to a decline in local interest (p. 178). By transforming a local cultural practice into a development resource, the Ministry of Tourism robbed local participants of the meanings they had used to organize their lives (p. 179). In Greenwood's words, 'The ritual has become a performance for money. The meaning is gone' (p. 178).

More recently, Marie-Françoise Lanfant has argued that once heritage is transformed into a tourist product, its 'cultural value' is also transformed into a 'commercial value', a process which stimulates the reinvention of the past, leading to Umberto Eco's hyper-reality (Lanfant, 1995: 37). That is to say, rather

than being a reclamation of the past, heritage and tourism function as a new form of cultural production (a value-added industry) that takes the past as its theme (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 149).

As David Harrison has noted, however, the debate over the social impact of tourism rests on a conflation of social consequences and social problems. Whereas the former, whether intended or unintended, follow from particular policies and events, the latter *is* the former, redefined in moral terms. That is to say, an increase in international tourism in a particular place may well bring an increased multinational or transnational presence, a monetarization of traditions or other social activities, and a shift in local social relationships, among other consequences. However, these consequences become problems only when defined as such, which begs the question of who does this defining (1994: 250–2).

An approach such as the one employed by commodification critics mirrors that of development economists. Beginning from very different assumptions (for the former, that consumption is implicitly flawed, for the latter, that ‘culture’ can be utilized in much the same way as any other natural resource) both reduce questions about tourism to a cost vs. benefits paradigm. In other words, one’s objective becomes deciding what the ‘cultural costs’ of tourism are in relation to perceived economic benefits, as if culture and tourism are opposites in a zero sum game (as tourism increases, culture declines). This binary opposition between culture and tourism rests in turn on that most basic of dichotomies, Nature versus Culture – as civilization expands, nature retreats, corruption increases, and the Fall of Mankind is complete – darkness does indeed descend upon El Dorado. Hence the question becomes: how much lost Culture and destruction of Nature is economic progress worth?

However, if culture, whatever else it is, is indeed ‘hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinary differentiated, and unmonolithic’ (Said, 1993: xxix), how to respond to the argument that its essence or authenticity is undermined and disrupted by market forces? In other words, what do we mean when we speak about ‘authenticity’ and the ‘authentic’, and how do these terms relate to questions about purity and pollution in nature and culture?

In considering Marx’s commodity argument, what becomes evident is a binary distinction between physical activity and a (suspect) Other centered on exchange; while the former is taken to be the site of true value, in the latter, wealth appears to simply appear. This is because labor power for Marx is the source of all surplus value (the difference between the money paid for the use of a worker’s labor power and the selling price of a commodity produced by this worker) and hence profit for a capitalist. In Marx’s view, every commodity contains constant capital (raw materials and other inputs, building rent and production equipment) and variable capital (labor power). Using what appears to be a relatively straight formula (commodity = constant capital [cc] + variable capital [vc] + surplus value [sv]), he argued that the rate of surplus value (and hence the total value) of any commodity could be accurately measured by subtracting

constant capital costs (M1) from the final selling price (M2) of a commodity (C). In other words, a commodity's *authentic* value is, in his view, subject to calculation.

Yet, while claiming to give use-value and exchange-value equal weight in his dialectic of the commodity, Marx actually framed use-value as concrete and exchange-value as abstract (Baudrillard, 1988: 64–5). Capital (according to Marx) replaces an object's (natural) use-value with a (false) exchange-value (Baudrillard, 1972: 16–17). Such a natural value is regarded as a given by Marx:

The exchange, or sale, of commodities at their value is the *rational way*, the *natural law* of their equilibrium. It must be the point of departure for the explanation of deviations from it, not vice-versa, the deviations the basis on which this law is explained. (Marx, 1996 [emphasis added])

For Marx, the exchange of commodities at what he believed is their true value is the starting point for explaining exchange itself. In other words, rather than being engaged in a dialectic relationship with use-value, exchange is required to mirror it. A logocentric relationship between use value and exchange value thus reveals itself: a rational, intrinsic and stable authentic use value rooted in natural law stands against an irrational, imposed, and cabalistic exchange value based on human law.<sup>10</sup> Yet any attempt to rescue a seemingly 'natural' use-value from an unnatural exchange-value is ultimately a form of idealism, one which merely confirms the ideologies of signification and political economy (Baudrillard, 1988: 91). In short, an opposition between a *calculative* exchange-value and a *spontaneous* use-value does not work, whether in regard to material objects or cultural products: aesthetic and cultural objects are as much commodities as are seemingly non-cultural objects aesthetic objects (Frow, 1995: fn, 134).

Returning to the question of culture, we can say that the value of a generalized cultural production cannot be measured via a general economy of value that employs a binary distinction between the repetition of a (commodified) culture industry and the creativity of an idealized 'real' culture. This is because value itself is neither universal nor quantifiable, as John Frow has argued, 'What may in some sense always have been the case has become self-evidently so now: that different social groups employ criteria of value which may well be incompatible and irreconcilable' (Frow, 1995: 130). In other words, value, cultural or otherwise, is radically contingent:

All value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing and continuously interacting variables or, to put this another way, the product of the dynamics of a system, specifically an economic system. (Smith, 1988: 30)

This being the case, how then to decide what is and is not an authentic (that is, a non-commodified) cultural practice? It is important to remember that authenticity in this sense demands a turning away from the dichotomy of original-as-natural and a copy-as-degrading. In terms of cultural practices and

production, the copy is not degrading, indeed, it cannot be, since the health and longevity of any such practice or production requires faithful replication. What therefore becomes degrading is the traveling of cultural practices and their related objects from the domain of an authentic 'real' or genuine sphere to that of a corrupt, degrading, superficial sphere. When they travel on such a path, cultural practices are presumed by many cultural critics to move from a sanctified sphere of wholeness and, once outside, to become coarse. During this journey, Marx's (natural) use value is by implication supplanted by what he viewed as an *unnatural* exchange value.

In short, what Barbara Herrnstein Smith has referred to as a 'double discourse of value' regulates this journey. Cultural (that is, aesthetic) value circulates separately and distinctly from economic value. However, as Smith points out, these two discourses of value are bound up with each other in a binary relationship premised on the privileging of the cultural over the economic, a privileging in turn rooted in what she has argued is a broad-based suspicion of utilitarianism within the contemporary humanities. Thus, cultural value often is framed in everyday life as profound, transcendent, creative, intrinsic and an end in itself, while economic value is framed as superficial, repetitive, instrumental, calculative, and a means to an end. One is good, the other bad; one is located in the temple, the other in the market (1988: 125–6). Within the university, one is mainly studied in English and Anthropology departments, the other in Economics and Public Policy departments. Most importantly, these categories of value circulate as distinct and separate, a practice that leads to an always-present tension centered on efforts to maintain these distinctions, thereby mystifying the aesthetic (p. 33).<sup>11</sup> Smith argues that the anti-utilitarianism that often results is characterized by a refusal on the part of cultural critics on both the Left and the Right to even consider the possibility of continuity between these two spheres of value. This leads in turn to efforts by both conservative social critics and harsh market critics to protect the seemingly sacred from the 'jungle' of the market (pp. 129–30).<sup>12</sup>

At issue is how this authentic, genuine, sacred sphere is differentiated from an inauthentic, fake, profane sphere [Latin *profanus*, 'before or outside the temple'] – namely, by tying a particular culture to a specific people and a particular place, distinct from market relationships with outsiders, particularly tourists. For example, what happens when a group of non-Balinese take part in a *gamelon* performance? Or when a Balinese *gamelon* orchestra performs for a group of tourists? In each of these situations, authenticity circulates as an arbitrating mark. A group of tourists might well feel cheated if, having traveled to Bali, they are presented with a performance of Balinese music by non-Balinese.<sup>13</sup> This is because, just as objects appear to have a natural use value, so too does a particular culture and its practices seem to have a natural relationship with a particular people and a particular place: 'natives' are supposed to be native to a specific place (cf. Clifford, 1992). Thus, we may well assume that a *gamelon* performance 'not for tourists' by Balinese in Bali is more authentic than such a

performance at a Kuta Beach hotel in Bali; both appear to be naturally more authentic than such a performance by American students of Balinese *gamelon* at an American or British university. Yet it is important to keep in mind that this seemingly natural association of a particular people with a particular place and culture is a social and historical construct, a product, in a sense, of how anthropology has mapped the world, not a set of natural facts (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 4, 40). It is a desire grounded in an axiological attempt to make the contingent non-contingent by creating the illusion of objective validity (Smith, 1988: 54).

Authentic things, then, are bound up with seemingly authentic places: Chinese food served by Chinese people in a Chinese restaurant decorated to look 'Chinese' is seemingly *naturally* more authentic than Chinese food cooked by a Salvadoran immigrant at a fast food restaurant in an American suburban shopping mall. Yet this apparent authenticity is largely dependent on fulfilling the criteria used by, in this case, Americans to evaluate what constitutes 'real' Chinese food and a 'real' Chinese restaurant. For example, based on my own experiences in Beijing, not only is the food served in American Chinese and Beijing restaurants different in taste, but so, too, are the aesthetic markers that mark a restaurant as Chinese: the red walls, hanging lanterns, Chinese scrolls and use of characters as aesthetic symbols found in the United States contrast sharply with the mirrored walls, glass chandeliers, neon-lit wall paintings and pin-up calendars found in China. What counts as authentic, then, depends on the cultural lens of the seeker, which in turn guides the direction in which authenticity is sought (Spooner, 1986: 223).

Of course, the problem is that authenticity rapidly dissolves under the most casual examination, as anyone who has traveled can attest. Yet the desire for authenticity remains. One can argue that the West has in general located this desired authenticity in the past, both in its own and that of non-Western Others, while much of the non-West has come to locate this in the present of the West (Spooner, 1986: 230) – as can be seen, for example, in the role Disney World plays in shaping Japanese perceptions of 'America' (cf. Hendry, 2000). This (Western) focus on salvaging the past leads to a two-edged paradox. First of all, because a more authentic cultural life is presumed to have been lost, what has been salvaged is, by the fact that authenticity has seemingly disappeared in the face of commodification, difficult to refute (Clifford, 1986: 113). Secondly, because the past is defined as more authentic precisely because it is past, the present is, by implication, presumed to be a falling *away* from authenticity and thus of less value and interest.

An example of this is the clash of perceptions that takes place at the Great Wall of China. Foreign tourists in search of the 'real' Great Wall are inevitably disappointed with what they take to be the 'fake' Great Wall they are presented with by their tour guides at the tourist site of Badaling, a few hours north of Beijing. This is because the Chinese Ministry of Tourism has invested significant resources into transforming Badaling into what it apparently believes a modern

tourist site should look like, complete with parking lots, shops, restaurants, and a restored section of the Great Wall. Tourists who locate authenticity in the past of China are no doubt taken aback by the touts, buses, and newly cemented bricks, not to mention the piped-in music, packed crowds of domestic sight-seers, and the recently completed 'Great Wall roller coaster': the site/sight has been, it seems, desacralized, ruined, corrupted, cheapened. Conversely, the domestic tourists I have observed, traveled with, and spoken to on my own visits to Badaling as a resident, tourist, and study abroad leader have seemed largely untroubled by such concerns, concentrating instead on getting suitable pictures certifying their presence at the Wall. This is because desacralization (and therefore disappointment and unease) only makes sense when the Great Wall's authenticity is linked to not just China's past but also its physical 'thingness', so that the Wall's 'realness' is bound up both with its age and material condition. When a person or society does not equate an object's authenticity solely with its age, authenticity as a benchmark of genuineness stops making sense.

To summarize, the most authentic cultural practices and objects appear to be those that not only faithfully imitate an inherited set of practices and objects, but also are reproduced in a specific locale, by a specific type of people, and for a specific purpose, one unconnected to the market process. This last point is crucial: in order to be genuinely authentic, this reproduction must take place outside of the exchange process – that is, outside the supposed calculative rationality of the market and safely within the realm of Marx's natural use-value.

## A cracked mirror?

Like a voice in the background, one hears throughout this discussion of culture-as-commodity and commodification-as-a-destroyer-of-authenticity a faint echo of Lévi-Strauss' lament. It is an echo of the search for an alternative to ourselves, a search grounded in a belief that what we have lost can be found in Others more 'primitive', and therefore more natural, than ourselves (cf. Diamond, 1974: 120–2). It is a search that privileges the spatially localized and (seemingly) homogeneous as the location of culture. Anthropologists are joined here in this unending search for the Other's hidden good nature<sup>14</sup> against which our own degradation can be measured by not just certain types of travelers, but also by a long line of philosophers and contemporary social critics: Heidegger's location of *Dasein* within a problematic organic community; Sartre's desire for a self-recovery of what has been corrupted; and Raymond William's ode to country living all carry a trace of this longing.

This mode of thinking flows throughout the anthropological critique of tourism. Tourism is bad because it corrupts culture; it transforms what has been sacred into the merely profane; it cheapens the ritualistic, transforming what was authentic into spectacle. Yet, importantly, these charges obscure a crucial reality: what is most commonly referred to as the tourist impact on Others is grounded in the unspoken presumption that these Others at some point in the

past have lived in enclosed spaces of cultural purity, protected from outside contamination, akin to the inhabitants described in James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*. In reality, no Other has ever been wholly 'static, ahistorical, agencyless, [or] solidly bounded' (Castañeda, 1996: 9). In other words, there is no original moment; there are no ethnic Others who have existed in a never-never land, segregated in both time and space. Instead, there have always been those who have come before – if not always tourists, then missionaries, traders, political agents, explorers, and anthropologists (Oakes, 1997: 36).

Indeed, the whole notion of an original moment is quite problematic. How to decide at what point in time is a place or group or ruin or culture 'original'? (Castañeda, 1996: 105). This being so, what then constitutes the 'authentic'? After all, if we can agree that culture is dynamic and fluid, then today's staged hokiness stands a good chance of becoming tomorrow's authentic cultural tradition (cf. Cohen, 1988). Trains, once decried as a symbol of modern society's destruction of the past, have been transformed into examples of a lost age of 'real', 'authentic' transportation. Certain restaurants and bars have become contemporary markers of authenticity, based as much on their age and the fact that they do not belong to a chain as on their quality. Indeed, during this time of rapid social and economic change, when both time and space have been compressed, longevity as much as originality has become the primary marker of authenticity. Is it too much to suggest that, very soon, California's original Disneyland will be re-marked as a site of a certain type of Disney-authenticity?

Viewed in this way, it becomes clear how some travelers' (those who insist that they are not tourists?) dreams of an untouched place to claim as their own echoes the anthropologist's dream for 'a difference that remains the same' (Derrida, 1976: 62). For all of his professed hatred of travel and travelers, Lévi-Strauss' central dilemma – his belief that communication between cultures is necessarily corrupting, leading to the destruction of Percy's 'it' and Walter Benjamin's 'aura' – remains the dilemma of not just anthropologists and adventure tourists, but also proponents of the Frankfurt School's critique of capitalism. They argue that capitalism has transformed culture into an industry, one which churns out cultural products characterized by predictability and homogeneity and designed to support social conformity and control. Consumption, both cultural and otherwise, is said to operate as a form of manipulation.

Not only is this argument implicitly elitist and culturally conservative, it is also exceedingly reductionist, transforming the question of consumption into the fact of commodification. By doing so it leaves no space for further questions precisely because it claims to have all the necessary answers (Storey, 1999: 22). It carries off this operation by presuming an opposition between (authentic) creativity, framed as dynamic, heroic and singular, and (inauthentic) commodity consumption, framed as passive, uninspired, banal and superficial.

In addition, this Frankfurt position implicitly assumes that certain objects do not circulate as commodities. For example, the gift act as described by Mauss has often been framed as dichotomous to commodity exchange as described by

Marx; gifts are said to circulate within a framework of spontaneity, sociability, and reciprocity, in contrast to commodity exchange's self-centeredness, profit-focus, and calculative intent. However, what this logocentric stance ignores is the fact that calculative intent is always present in exchange of any type (cf. Appadurai, 1986). In other words, rather than categorizing objects (and, by implication, experiences) as *either* commodities *or* non-commodities – that is, as either profane or sacred (in terms of cultural practices and their related objects), or as inauthentic or authentic (in terms of material objects of production) – we might more usefully view all objects and experiences as *potential* commodities. In Appadurai's words, all things [including cultural productions] can be commodities, 'at a certain phase in their careers and in a particular context' (pp. 16–17) – a point with which not only Marx but also Austrian economists such as Ludwig Mises and F.A. Hayak would agree.

In the past, cultural conservatives could take comfort in the supposed autonomy and creativity of Culture in contrast to the presumed coarseness or quaintness (depending on one's view) of everyday folk culture (in 19th century terms, local culture [*Kultur*] in contrast to cosmopolitan civilization). Similarly, early cultural studies practitioners such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart could argue for the worth and value of the everyday lived experiences of the working and rural classes (redefined as popular culture) in contrast to both (elitist) Arnoldian notions of Culture and the (inauthentic) mass consumption culture critiqued by the Frankfurt School. Yet today what was once thought of as high culture is as bound up with commodity production as is Williams's popular culture.

A case in point is the impact tourism has on cultural objects and traditions. As already noted, one common critique asserts that tourism increases the demand for cheap copies of authentic art, leading to a desacralization of what once had been pure or whole. Yet without something that can be deemed inauthentic, the notion of authentic or sacred art no longer carries any meaning. In other words, the circulation of the fake and materialistic are required for concepts such as 'authentic', 'original' and 'traditional' to make sense. Far from being a sign of deficiency or lack, these secondary terms constitute what is normally seen as a (pure) whole. Or, as Brunette and Wills have noted, [any] 'thing, idea, or event cannot ever be whole, self-contained, and uncontaminated by an "outside"', because it depends for its very existence on that which it is *not*' (1989: 7).

That tourism does stimulate such a demand is certainly a valid point. Yet, as already noted, a paradox results: if commodified touristic productions cheapen what is viewed as an authentic, local culture, this tourist demand also increases the material (and, by extension, the aesthetic) value of those objects or practices classified as authentic and thus as somehow more 'real'. In other words, an increased demand for (cheapening) copies of local art increases the value of a distinctive authentic, real art by creating a market-driven category of 'real', one based on a claimed singularity. The paradox lies in the fact that this singularity can only be confirmed when what has been defined as 'authentic' re-enters the

marketplace of commodities (cf. Kopytoff, 1986: 84).<sup>15</sup> Secondly, while the claim that many tourists are interested mainly in possessing a mark of generalized Otherness rather than in attempting to know a specific Other may well be valid, it does not follow that this desire is connected in any way to the relative strength of local traditions. From a local perspective, these may have little to do with each other. For example, tattoo shops, mass-produced batik dresses, and rasta-look-a-likes are as widely available at the beach resorts of Bali (as marks signifying less a sense of 'Balinese-ness' than an ambiguous Third Worldism) as are profane copies of desacralized 'authentic' cultural activities such as *gamelon* and *legong* performances. Related to this point is the fact that seemingly straightforward categories of real and fake or sacred and profane may not be as clear-cut as they first appear. Indeed, the fake may at times be a more real copy of the real, one so perfect as to be *impossibly* real, and hence desirable in itself. Conversely, a copy may be so *impossibly* fake that it becomes desired for this fakeness.

In other cases, a copy may have assumed an importance that negates any privileging of an authentic original. For example, Ken Teague has argued that tourist-directed art in Nepal plays both an aesthetic and economic role in the production of 'real' art, particularly in the Kathmandu Valley, where Newari artisans have produced artistic copies for centuries, both for home and abroad, particularly China and Tibet. The production of copies in this case is so bound up with the production of what we might label 'Newari art' that any attempt to distinguish original from copy deconstructs itself (Teague, 1997: 182–6).

Finally, the question of cultural authenticity looms large in situations in which state authorities have attempted to use tourism as a tool for state-building by promoting the aesthetic aspects of cultural display while attempting to control the social relations of culture (cf. Picard, 1997: 198). However, as Picard has noted, such a policy rests on a belief that 'culture' and 'tourism' can be clearly distinguished, and thus kept separate (1996: 129–30). This becomes highly problematic in a society such as Bali, one in which tourism, having been present for such a long period of time, is best characterized as operating *within*, not *on*, local society. Hence the question to be asked in this case is not how tourism has impacted local culture, but rather how it has helped, and continues to help, shape this (Picard, 1997: 183).

There are, then, situations in which no existing criteria, either cultural or linguistic, exist for easily distinguishing between Western categories of the (non-commodified) sacred and (commodified) profane. This in turn illustrates once again the arbitrariness of supposedly natural distinctions between original and copy, sacred and profane, and authentic and inauthentic.

Commodification within the sphere of culture is a social fact. However, in speaking of this in the context of tourism, we should not be satisfied with simply charting its progress and then lamenting what has been lost, since to do so inevitably traps us in a desire for a more-perfect and always-lost past. In other words, what is needed is less focus on identifying what has been commodified

and hence no longer counts as 'authentic' and more attention on the question of how authenticity is constructed and gets decided.<sup>16</sup> It is necessary to speak of competing authenticities, all products of particular social forces engaged in a process of cultural (re)invention and consumption within the context of existing social relations (cf. Hutnyk, 1996: 9–11). Moving beyond the question of commodification does not mean that one thereby needs to either embrace the rhetoric of the global market or romanticize resistance against a global hegemonic order. Instead, accepting commodification as a starting point allows different questions to arise, questions that revolve around the ways in which people make meaning in their lives within the world of tourism.

## NOTES

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1972); see Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1980); Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1964); Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976) and *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (1992); and Priscilla Boniface and Peter Fowler, *Heritage Tourism in the Global Village* (1993).
2. Malcom Crick has identified a 1963 article by Theron Nuñez on weekend tourism in Mexico, 'Tourism, Tradition, and Acculturation: *Weekendismo* in a Mexican Village', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 34 (1963: 328–36) as an opening in this debate (Crick, 1994: 2–3; 1989: 310). This first spark of interest led to a roundtable discussion on tourism at the 1974 American Anthropology Association meetings, which in turn served as a basis for a later collection of papers edited by Valene Smith and published as *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (1977). Subsequently, three major reviews of tourism literature appeared in the field in the 1980s: Dennison Nash (1981) 'Tourism as an Anthropological Subject', *Current Anthropology* 22(5): 461–85; Nelson Graburn (1983) 'The Anthropology of Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* 10(1): 9–34; and Malcom Crick (1989) 'Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings, and Servility', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18: 307–44. Anthropologists who have touched on the relationship of anthropology to tourism include Dumont (1978: 224) and Rosaldo (1989: 96).
3. Of course, this leads to a paradox: if commodified touristic productions cheapen a seemingly authentic, local culture, this tourist demand also increases the material value of those objects or practices classified as authentic and thus somehow more 'real'.
4. 'The alternative is inescapable: either I am a traveler in ancient times, and faced with a prodigious spectacle which would be almost entirely unintelligible to me and might, indeed, provoke me to mockery or disgust; or I am a traveler of our own day, hastening in search of a vanished reality. . . .' (Lévi-Strauss, 1972: 44–5).
5. According to Smith, 'the real price of everything, what everything really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it' (Smith, 1989: 36).
6. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx argued that a direct relationship exists between the production of material objects and the degree of alienation workers suffer from the product of their labor: as the value of material objects increases, the value of the 'world of men' declines. Whether commodification, from this perspective, is

- intrinsically wrong from what Marx believed was a scientific standpoint, or from a moral standpoint, is another question.
7. Money, for Marx, was a 'cabalistic sign' because it carried a hidden meaning, its outward expression of price (which he defines as 'the money name of the labor realized in a commodity') concealing what he argued was the true value of a commodity, the labor power consumed in its production (1996: 108–11). Money for Marx, with its encouragement of greed, envy, hoarding and avarice, was the root of all evil, just as it was for another prominent German, Martin Luther (whom he cited with approval) (cf. 1996: 140–5).
  8. 'Commodity-Money-Commodity'. C-M constitutes a sale, M-C a purchase. That is, while commodity circulation begins with a sale (C-M) and ends with a purchase (M-C), the circulation of money begins with a purchase (M-C) and ends with a sale (C-M) – in other words, capital accumulation. The quantity of money begun and ended with in what he called 'the general formula of capital' (M1-C-M2) is surplus value (M2-M1 = SV) – the source of all capitalist profit (1996: 159–68).
  9. 'Culture by the Pound: An Anthropological Perspective on Tourism as Cultural Commoditization', published in Valene Smith (ed.) *Hosts and Guests* (1989 [1977]: 171–86). The original research for this article was conducted in 1969.
  10. Reversing Marx's binary opposition between a privileged use value and a suspect exchange value, Baudrillard has argued that use value functions as exchange value's naturalized form; thus, the very notion of 'use-value' is an effect of the system of exchange value, which is itself a simulacrum of use-value (Baudrillard, 1988: 99; Baudrillard, 1972: 137–9; Urry and Lash, 1994: 14). This binary distinction between a *natural* use-value and an *artificial* or suspect exchange-value also explains in part Marx's suspicion of trade and his characterization of money (a universal exchange sign) as a 'cabalistic' sign. Two linguistically different yet related sources can be identified for his choice of adjectives. A 'cabal' (MF *cabale*) describes an intrigue among a group of persons for a private purpose, while a 'Cabala' (Hebrew *qabal*) refers to an occult system that originated in a mystical interpretation of Jewish Scriptures. To be 'cabalistic', then, is to engage in a form of occult mysticism for private gain.
  11. Smith here draws on Derrida's examination of Kant's Third Critique in *The Truth in Painting* (1978). In this work Derrida focuses his attention on Kant's paradoxical claims that first, aesthetic taste is both subjective (that is, personal) and universal, and second, that the beauty of an object is universal – a claim which, requiring a *common* sense, becomes circular (taste judgments presuppose universal communicability, which presupposes a common sense, which is in turn presupposed by judgments of taste). Derrida then goes on to critique Kant's dismissal of painting frames and other ornamental features such as building columns as embellishments and decorative additions that remain external to a pure, centralized object. As Derrida points out, such a stance assumes stable, clear-cut boundaries between an inside and outside, intrinsic and extrinsic, and pure and impure. Yet a crucial ambiguity remains: a frame is both inside and outside a painting. It is neither only inside nor only outside.
  12. In a paradoxical way, this effort to police value boundaries works to naturalize 'The Market' by envisioning market processes as spaces of barbarity and danger. In other words, humanist concerns about the polluting effect exchange-value is said to have on a theoretically pure use-value (here reconceived as a stable and

universal aesthetic value) actually replicates the critique market critics level at market proponents such as E.A. Hayek. Moreover, as Smith notes, circulating around these boundary tensions are the languages (Marxist, Arnoldian, and Christian) of Man's Fall into market exchange and capitalism: Marxism's language of oppression and exploitation, aesthetic axiology's language of vulgarity and profanity, and Christianity's language of usury, avarice, and trickery (Smith, 1988: 140).

13. If, that is, they actually realize that the performers they are watching are not Balinese. If, for example, these performers were Javanese, or Sumatran, or native to any of the other islands within Indonesia, these tourists might well accept this performance as genuine. However, if white Europeans or North Americans were to perform, these tourists would no doubt believe they had not been given the 'real thing'.
14. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1976: 115). For Derrida, the study of non-European Others serves as an 'index to a hidden good nature, or a native soil recovered, of a "zero degree" with reference to which one could outline the structure, the growth and above all the degradation of our society and culture.'
15. This works for both (sacred) 'art' and (profane) commodities. On the one hand, the exchange value of an 'art' object increases in proportion to the quantity of copies of it produced as commodities. On the other hand, certain mass-produced consumer items from the recent past began their lives as (valuable) commodities, became less-valued over time, decreased in numbers as they became value-less, until, having reached the stage of singularity, became *re-valued* as collectibles. Most paradoxical of all is the way in which 'profane' copies of 'sacred' objects (such as museum prints) mimic this process, becoming valuable over time as their singularity increases. Cf. Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (1979).
16. Jean-Paul Dumont has spoken to this point in the context of otherness, calling on field working anthropologists to focus less on representing the otherness of the Other and more on the process of how this otherness is constructed – both in the 'writing down' of fieldwork experience and the 'writing up' of (at home) textual production. See Dumont, *Visayan Vignettes* (1992: 6).

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