
AUTHENTICITY AND COMMODITIZATION IN TOURISM



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Abstract: Three basic assumptions, common in the literature on tourism, regarding "commoditization," "staged authenticity," and the inability of tourists to have authentic experiences are re-examined. Authenticity is conceived as a negotiable rather than primitive concept, the rigor of its definition by subjects depending on the mode of their aspired touristic experience. New cultural developments may also acquire the patina of authenticity over time — a process designated as "emergent authenticity." It is also argued that commoditization does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products, although it may change it or add new meanings to old ones. Conclusions contrary to the deductions following from the above assumptions are spelled out, and a new approach to the study of authenticity and meaning in tourism, which could help the formulation of a more discerning tourism policy, is advocated. **Keywords:** authenticity, commoditization, cultural tourism, tourist experience, tourism policy, tourist arts and crafts.

Résumé: L'authenticité et la marchandisation du tourisme. On examine dans cet article trois suppositions de base qui se trouvent souvent dans les oeuvres de recherche sur le tourisme au sujet de la "marchandisation", la "mise-en-scène de l'authenticité" et l'incapacité des touristes d'éprouver des expériences authentiques. L'authenticité se présente comme un concept négociable plutôt qu'un concept primitif. La rigueur de la définition de l'authenticité dépend de la nature de l'expérience touristique à laquelle on aspire. Les nouveautés culturelles peuvent en plus acquérir un air d'authenticité avec le temps, ce qu'on peut appeler "l'authenticité émergente". On soutient aussi que la marchandisation ne détruit pas nécessairement le sens des produits culturels, bien qu'elle puisse changer ce sens ou ajouter de nouveaux sens aux anciens. On explique bien clairement des conclusions qui sont contraires à la déductions qui s'ensuit de ces suppositions, et on prône une nouvelle façon d'aborder l'étude de l'authenticité et du sens dans le tourisme, ce qui pourrait mener à la formulation d'une politique touristique plus perspicace. **Mots clef:** authenticité, marchandisation, tourisme culturel, expérience touristique, politique touristique, artisanat touristique.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the contemporary literature on the nature of modern tourism and its impact upon host societies relies on several important as-

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sumptions. In a most general way, these assumptions can be formulated as follows:

First, tourism is said to lead to "commoditization" (Greenwood, 1977) of areas in the life of a community which prior to its penetration by tourism have been within the domain of economic relations regulated by criteria of market exchange (cf. Appadurai 1986). Local culture generally serves as the principal example of such commoditization. In particular, "colorful" local costumes and customs, rituals and feasts, and folk and ethnic arts become touristic services or commodities, as they come to be performed or produced for touristic consumption. Sexual services, in the form of tourist-oriented prostitution, are another major example of commoditization. The critical issue is that commoditization allegedly changes the meaning of cultural products and of human relations, making them eventually meaningless: "We already know from world-wide experience that local culture . . . is altered and often destroyed by the treatment of it as a touristic attraction. It is made meaningless to the people who once believed in it . . ." (Greenwood 1977:131). Furthermore, according to the same source, since local culture can be commoditized by anyone, without the consent of the participants (1977:137), it can be expropriated, and the local people exploited.

Second, commoditization is said to destroy the authenticity of local cultural products and human relations; instead a surrogate, covert "staged authenticity" (MacCannell 1973) emerges. As cultural products lose their meaning for the locals, and as the need to present the tourist with ever more spectacular, exotic and titillating attractions grows (Boorstin 1964:103), contrived cultural products are increasingly "staged" for tourists and decorated so as to look authentic. Fake "airport art" (Graburn 1967) is sold to tourists as if it were a genuine cultural product. Above all, tourists, who are apparently permitted to penetrate beyond the "front" areas of the visited society into its "back" (MacCannell 1973:597-8), are in fact cheated. Such back regions are frequently inauthentic "false backs," insidiously staged for tourist consumption. Thus, for example, localities may be staged as being remote, or "non-touristic," in order to induce tourists to "discover" them (MacCannell 1973:594); and native inhabitants of "exotic" places are taught to "play the native" in order to appear "authentic" to the tourists (cf. Cohen 1982a:19-21).

Three, "staged authenticity" is said to thwart the tourist's genuine desire for authentic experiences. MacCannell (1973:597) argued that "Touristic consciousness is motivated by the desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in that direction . . ." However, it is often the case that " . . . what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance [i.e., has been staged] for touristic visitation." According to MacCannell (1973:593), the tourist, in his desire for authentic experience, is the modern embodiment of the religious pilgrim. Tourism thus appears to become a modern surrogate for religion (MacCannell 1973:589; cf. also Cohen In Press b.). However, it is implicit in MacCannell's analysis that there is no salvation in tourism: the tourist establishment dominates the tourist industry, and by mis-

leading tourists to accept contrived attractions as "authentic," creates a "false touristic consciousness." A fully developed mass tourist system surrounds the tourist with a staged tourist space, from which there is "no exit." The modern tourist-pilgrim is thus damned to inauthenticity: "Tourists make brave sorties out from their hotels hoping, perhaps, for an authentic experience, but their paths can be traced in advance over small increments of what is for them increasingly apparent authenticity proffered by [staged] tourist settings. Adventurous tourists progress from stage to stage, always in the public eye, and greeted everywhere by their obliging hosts" (MacCannell 1973:602).

It follows from these assumptions that commoditization, engendered by tourism, allegedly destroys not only the meaning of cultural products for the locals but, paradoxically, also for the tourists. It thus emerges that, the more tourism flourishes, the more it allegedly becomes a colossal deception. These assumptions are highly persuasive and appealing to both sociologists and critics of modern society. But the conclusion seems far-fetched and hard to accept; unless, of course, one adopts a view of modern society as completely absurd and dominated by sinister powers, so that its members are surreptitiously misled to believe that they have genuinely authentic experiences, while in fact being systematically debarred from having them. However, before one goes to that extreme, it would be prudent to examine critically the above assumptions, in order to reach perhaps some more realistic conclusions.

AUTHENTICITY

"Authenticity" is an eminently modern value (cf. Appadurai 1986:45; Berger, 1973; Trilling 1972), whose emergence is closely related to the impact of modernity upon the unity of social existence. As institutions become, in Nietzsche's words, "weightless" and lose their reality (Berger 1973:86; Trilling 1972:138), the individual is said to turn into himself. "If nothing on 'the outside' can be relied upon to give weight to the individual's sense of reality, he is left no option but to burrow into himself in search of the real. Whatever this *ens realissimum* may then turn out to be, it must necessarily be in opposition to any external [modern] social formation. The opposition between self and society has now reached its maximum. The concept of authenticity is one way of articulating this experience" (Berger 1973:88).

Modern man is thus seen, from the perspective of a contemporary existential philosophical anthropology, as a being in quest of authenticity. Since modern society is inauthentic, those modern seekers who desire to overcome the opposition between their authenticity-seeking self and society have to look elsewhere for authentic life. The quest for authenticity thus becomes a prominent motif of modern tourism, as MacCannell (1973, 1976) so incisively showed. However, here is also found the source of the confusion which the unexplicated use of this term introduced into tourism studies. In MacCannell's writings, as indeed in those of the researchers who followed his line of analysis (e.g., Redfoot 1984), the "quest for authenticity" is a "primitive" concept, which is at best illustrated, but left undefined. However, one appears to

understand intuitively what is meant by it. It is a quest for that unity between the self and societal institutions, which endowed pre-modern existence with "reality" (Berger 1973:85). The alienated modern tourist in quest of authenticity hence looks for the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity. He hopes to find it in other times and other places (MacCannell 1976:160), since it is absent from his own world.

The difficulty with this use of the concept of "authenticity" in tourism studies is that it is a philosophical concept which has been uncritically introduced into sociological analysis. Furthermore, in tourism studies, the concept is used to characterize a criterion of evaluation used by the modern tourist as observer. The question, whether the "tourees" observed by the tourist at all possess such a concept, and if so, which traits of their own culture they consider to be "authentic" is rarely, if ever raised. Finally, the social analyst is tacitly assumed to understand the tourist's quest for "authenticity" because both belong to the modern world; they both appear to conceive of "authenticity" in similar, unproblematic terms. "Authenticity" thus takes up a given or "objective" quality attributable by moderns to the world "out there." The only apparent difference between the tourist and the social analyst is that the latter is more circumspect than the former. He is therefore assumed to be able to penetrate beyond appearances, and discover the deception of "staged authenticity" (MacCannell 1973) perpetrated by the tourees, or the tourist establishment. The unsuspecting tourist, who is less sophisticated and knowledgeable than the analyst, is assumed to be taken in by such prevarications. It then follows that, if the tourist had the analyst's debunking knowledge, he would reject the "staged authenticity" of the sights as contrived and lacking in authenticity. MacCannell and others who adopted his conceptual framework did not raise the possibility that the tourist and social analyst may conceive of authenticity in different terms.

In contrast to MacCannell, it is suggested that "authenticity" is a socially constructed concept and its social (as against philosophical) connotation is, therefore, not given, but "negotiable." The manner of the negotiation of its meaning should hence be made a major topic in the sociological and anthropological study of tourism. Several specific issues have to be distinguished.

Differential Conceptions of Authenticity

According to Trilling (1972:93) the provenance of the word "authenticity" ". . . is in the museum, where persons expert in such matters test whether objects of art [and by extension, ethnographic objects] are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore . . . worth the admiration they are being given." The approach to "authenticity" current until recently among curators and ethnographers will hence help to clarify the socially constructed nature of the concept. One of the paradoxes of the progressive professionalization of curators of primitive and ethnic art in the world's museums has been that a growing number of objects were declared to be "fakes," not because any new information had been discovered on the objects themselves, but rather because the

connotation of the concept of fakery had been gradually extended. "Purist" curators and art historians tended to conceive of authenticity in primitive and ethnic art in ever more rigorous terms. Thus, McLeod, the director of the Museum of Mankind and an expert of African art, defined "genuine" (i.e., authentic) African art as "... any piece made from traditional materials by a native craftsman for acquisition and use by members of local society (though not necessarily by members of his own group) that is made and used with no thought that it ultimately may be disposed of for gain to Europeans or other aliens" (McLeod 1976:31).

Another author, also discussing African art, declared as authentic "Any object created for a *traditional purpose* and by a *traditional artist* . . . ; but only if it " . . . *conforms to traditional forms*" (Cornet 1975:52, 55; emphases in the original). Like McLeod, Cornet also argues that, in order to be acceptable as authentic, the product should not be manufactured "specifically for the market" (1975:52).

Both authors hence emphasize the absence of commoditization as a crucial consideration in judgments of authenticity. It is noteworthy that Cornet proposes his definition despite his observation that there are cases where " . . . fakes [i.e., inauthentic objects] have become authentic" (1975:54), and cites as example objects produced by African artisans, in the past, for European patrons.

Such strict attitudes to authenticity, while in one sense professional, reflect in another the general modern preoccupation with authenticity which, indeed, appears to have contributed to the growing rigour of professional attitudes. Authenticity, for curators and ethnographers, is principally a quality of pre-modern life, and of cultural products produced prior to the penetration of modern Western influences: hence the common emphasis on cultural products which were "hand made" from "natural" materials. This emphasis obviously reflects the alienation of modern man from artificial and machine-made products. "The machine . . . could make only inauthentic things, dead things . . ." (Trilling 1972:127). The same is essentially true for those anthropologists who, in quest of an "ethnographic present," seek to recapture the society and culture of the people whom they study as these had been before the "contaminating" contact with the Western world.

Here too, scientific consensus mingles with the more personal, modern quest for the "pristine" and "authentic." Curators, ethnographers, and anthropologists thus constitute the most fitting prototypes of MacCannell's tourist who seek authenticity in other times and other places. Redfoot (1984:299-301), indeed, classifies anthropologists as "third-order tourists" who, according to Levi-Strauss, " . . . reject the artifices in their own culture and seek an alternative reality in 'quest'"; once there, however, they (unlike Redfoot's "fourth-order tourists") " . . . refrain from 'going native'" (1984:300). The anthropologist, thus " . . . digs deeper [than other tourists] in a quest for authenticity . . ." though, his quest " . . . is doomed to failure because of the subjective distancing from the 'primitive' built into the anthropologist's role" (1984:301).

Anthropologists, like curators and ethnographers, even if paradigmatic of the modern tourist, appear to entertain more rigorous

criteria of authenticity than do ordinary members of the traveling public. They belong to the wider category of modern, alienated intellectuals—indeed, their alienation from modernity often induces them to choose their respective professions.

Alienation may well be a structural consequence of the pluralization of modern life-worlds and the “weightlessness” of modern institutions (Berger 1973; Berger et al 1973). However, not all moderns are *personally* equally alienated or aware of their alienation. Those who continue to identify unreflectively with one or another of the centers of modernity such as the work-ethic or the ethos of material and occupational achievement, are personally less alienated than those who are not so identified. Those who are disposed to reflect upon their life-situation are more aware of their alienation than those who do not tend to such contemplation.

Intellectuals, here exemplified by curators, ethnographers, and anthropologists, will be generally more alienated, and more aware of their alienation, than the rank-and-file middle-classes, and especially the lower middle class, who still strive to attain the material gains which those beyond them already enjoy.

Alienation and the quest for authenticity, however, appear to be positively related (cf. Cohen 1979a:181–2). It follows that intellectuals and other more alienated individuals will engage on a more serious quest of authenticity than most rank-and-file members of society. It is hypothesized further that, the greater their concern for authenticity, the stricter will be the criteria by which they conceive of it. Less alienated and hence less concerned individuals, including most rank-and-file tourists, will be content with much wider, less strict criteria of authenticity. This was probably meant by Nettekoven (1973) when he argued that “tourists are not ethnologists” and by Desai (1974:3), when he observed that the tourist is not a “stickler for authenticity.”

However, though most tourists may not seek “‘authentic’ experiences in any ethnographic sense,” Goldberg (1983:486) cautions that “neither are they content with mere entertainment. . . .” Tourists indeed appear to seek authenticity in varying degrees of intensity, depending on the degree of their alienation from modernity. Following the preceding analysis, it can be argued that they will also conceive “authenticity” in different degrees of strictness. In other words, individuals who are less concerned with the authenticity of their touristic experiences, will be more prepared to accept as “authentic” a cultural product or attraction which more concerned tourists, applying stricter criteria, will reject as “contrived.”

This argument can be restated in terms of the author’s earlier typology of “modes of touristic experience” (Cohen 1979a; In Pressb) in which five types of such modes were proposed, according to the depth of experience the individual seeks in tourism. Tourism typically involves some encounter with the “Other.” The deeper the experience sought by the tourist, the more strongly will he tend to embrace this “Other,” and to turn it into his “elective center.” But, since the salience of that Other-turned-Center thereby increases for the tourist, his concern with its authenticity will grow proportionately. This, in turn, will induce the tourist to adopt stricter criteria for the judgement of authenticity than do those tourists for whom the experience is less salient. It follows that

“existential” tourists (Cohen 1979a:189–192), who tend spiritually to abandon modernity and embrace the Other as their elective center and, as it were, “switch worlds” (Berger and Luckmann 1966:144), or “go native” (Redfoot 1984:299 ff) will be the most “purist” of tourists. They will strive to move furthest away from the beaten track and to get in most closely with the natives (e.g., Blakeway 1980; Schneebaum 1970). In that, they resemble the anthropologist, curator, and ethnographer. However, unlike the latter, they do not take up the attitude of subjective detachment (Redfoot 1984:299) to the cultural products they encounter. While their experience may thus be fuller and more spontaneous, they also lack the professional attitude and critical capacity necessary to determine whether the traits by which they determine the “authenticity” of an object or an attraction are genuine or false. Hence they will more easily fall prey to sophisticated forms of covertly “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1973). Here, the locals or the tourist establishment “stage” precisely those aspects of the cultural product which serve the existential tourists as marks of authenticity, according to their own, strict criteria. Indeed, authenticity-eager tourists, like Hollander’s (1981) “political pilgrims,” may tend to idealize the destination, and thus eagerly embrace as genuine the very prevarications with which they are served. This kind of staging is particularly insidious, because it acts upon the profound will to believe of serious tourists, and not on the make-believe attitude of the more frivolous ones. The disenchantment of such existential tourists may therefore be particularly bitter (cf. Cohen 1979a:196).

The further one moves down the scale of modes of touristic experiences, the less strict the criteria of authenticity employed by the tourist will tend to become. The criteria of “experimental” tourists who experiment with various potential elective centers (Cohen 1979a:189) will still resemble those of existential tourists. “Experiential” tourists (Cohen 1979a:186–8), who seek to participate vicariously in the authentic life of others, will also tend to employ fairly strict criteria of authenticity, close to those of “existential” tourists. However, “recreational” tourists (Cohen 1979a:183–5), who seek in the Other mainly enjoyable restoration and recuperation, and hence tend to approach the cultural products encountered on their trip with a playful attitude of make-believe (Cohen 1985), will entertain much broader criteria of authenticity. Indeed, they might well be prepared playfully to accept a cultural product as authentic, for the sake of the experience, even though “deep down” they are not convinced of its authenticity (Cohen 1985:295: cf. also Goldberg 1983:485). Hence, a less ingenuous “staging of authenticity” will be sufficient to make this kind of tourist accept a product as authentic—though their conviction of its authenticity will also be less deep than that of “existential” tourists. Finally, “diversionary” tourists (Cohen 1979a:185–6) who seek mere diversion and oblivion on their trip, will remain totally in equanimity and unconcerned with the problem of authenticity of their experiences.

Differential Symbolizations of Authenticity

In the view of some experts on ethnic art (e.g., Willett 1976), authenticity and falseness are not a dichotomous pair of concepts. Rather,

there exists a continuum leading from complete authenticity, through various stages of partial authenticity, to complete falseness. The question therefore arises: Which are the diacritical traits which, for a given individual, in particular a tourist, make a cultural product acceptable as "authentic"? The question here is *not* whether the individual does or does not "really" have an authentic experience in MacCannell's (1973) sense, but rather what endows his experience with authenticity in his *own* view. Thus one can follow Gottlieb's approach: she "... assumes that the vacationers' own feelings and views about vacations are 'authentic,' whether or not the observer judges them to match the host culture" (Gottlieb 1982:168). However, while Gottlieb does not make any further inquiries into the bases of tourists' feelings and views, it is proposed here to open these to investigation. According to the approach developed above, tourists will differ in the number and kinds of traits necessary to their mind to authenticate a cultural product.

As the preceding section notes, for the purist professional expert, only a cultural product which appears authentic in all of its varied aspects, would be acceptable as "authentic." This may also be the case with deeply concerned tourists. Thus, on one of the trekking trips in which this author participated in the course of his study of the penetration of tourism into the hill-tribe area of northern Thailand, a French tourist, a teacher by profession, complained about the fact that the people in a tribal village, which had been opened to tourism only a few weeks earlier, used industrially produced plastic cups instead of indigenously produced bamboo cups. The mere adoption of plastic cups, although unrelated to the penetration of tourism, already offended his sense of cultural authenticity.

While this kind of tourist often serves as the prototype of the ideal tourist, he is, statistically speaking, a minority among the huge population of contemporary mass tourism. Such a demand for "total authenticity" will be most prominent among "existential" or "experimental" tourists, seriously concerned with the Other as at least a potential elective center. The vast majority of tourists do not demand such a "total authenticity." Even "experiential" tourists, though seriously concerned with the authenticity of their experience, and entertaining strict criteria for judgments of authenticity, will often focus in such judgments on some traits of the cultural product and disregard others. Hence, they will be prepared to accept a cultural product as authentic, insofar as traits, which they consider to be diacritical, are judged by them to be authentic. These traits are then considered sufficient for the authentication of the product as a whole. One could say that they symbolize metonymically the authenticity of the tourist-oriented cultural product as a whole. Therefore, such tourists will accept a commercialized object as "authentic," insofar as they are convinced that it is indeed ornamented with "traditional" designs and "hand made" by members of an ethnic group (even though it may have been made of different materials or in a different form than the "traditional" product and was produced expressly for the market). They may similarly accept as "authentic" a commercialized replication of local customs, such as a dance or a ritual, in so far as it is performed identically by members of the local group, as is its non-commercialized counterpart. A recent

study by Moscardo and Pearce (1986) provides some empirical evidence on this point. They have studied visitors' perceptions of Australian historic theme parks. Since such parks "preserve or restore some aspects of a nation's or a region's heritage" (1986:471), they are almost by definition not "authentic" in MacCannell's sense. However, the visitors generally did perceive them as "authentic"—in the sense of being accurate reconstructions of Australia's past (1986:474–6), rather than genuine historical remains. Contrary to the authors' claim (1986:472), park operators—and some tourists—appear thus to be using the word "authenticity" differently from social scientists. However, the point of this argument is that by accepting a particular trait of the site, namely "verissimilitude," as authenticating the site as a whole, the tourists become neither superficial fools satisfied with the spurious, in Boorstin's (1964) sense, nor victims of a prevaricating touristic establishment which "stages" authenticity in MacCannell's (1973) sense.

Recreational tourists, whose concern with authenticity is relatively low, may well accept even a substantially staged product and experience as "authentic." This would not be necessarily because they have been misled by the staging, but because even the faintest vestige of, or resemblance to what experts would consider an "authentic" trait of the product, may suffice for them to play the make-believe game of having an "authentic" experience. Therefore, such tourists may playfully consent to buy fake products or experiences as if they were genuine, merely because their resemblance to the genuine thing gives these tourists an inkling of authenticity. The recreation which Gottlieb's (1982) tourists derive from being a "King for a Day" or a "Peasant for a Day," one may argue, derives from their feeling "how it must have been to be a king (or a peasant)"; even though they are perfectly aware of the fact that their own, purchased experience has been staged for their benefit.

Finally, diversionary tourists may enjoy touristic products even if these are, in their own view, completely contrived, insofar as they appeal to them merely as "funny," "cute," or "lovely." A good example of such a product is a pair of embracing monkeys with sun-glasses, made of coconut shells, which are sold in touristic destinations all over southern Thailand, but are totally unrelated to any aspect of local Thai culture, except perhaps that monkeys serve as coconut-pickers in that part of Thailand.

Emergent Authenticity

Since authenticity is not a primitive given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence in the eyes of visitors to the host culture. In other words, a cultural product, or a trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic, even by experts, as Cornet's (1975:54) equivocation quoted above demonstrates. Thus, for example, an apparently contrived, tourist-oriented festival (such as the Inti Raymi festival in Cuzco, a "revival" of an ancient Incaic custom) may in due time become accepted as an "authentic" local custom. Similarly, craft products initially produced merely for sale to visitors and tourists, may eventually become "authentic"

products of an ethnic group or region — as happened with, for example, the Eskimo soapstone carvings (Graburn 1976b) or the Haida argillite carvings (Kaufmann 1976). Greenwood (1982:27) remarked that “all viable cultures are in the process of ‘making themselves up’ all the time.” One could call this process “emergent authenticity,” just as a parallel process in the ethnic realm was termed “emergent ethnicity” (Yancey et al 1976). “Emergent authenticity” stresses one aspect or refers to one manifestation, of the wider phenomenon of “invention of tradition,” whose ubiquitousness has been so impressively documented in Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) volume. In principle it is possible for any new-fangled gimmick, which at one point appeared to be nothing but a staged “tourist trap,” to become over time, and under appropriate conditions, widely recognized as an “authentic” manifestation of local culture. One can learn about this process of gradual “authentication” from the manner in which the American Disneyland, once seen as the supreme example of contrived popular entertainment, became over time a vital component of contemporary American culture (e.g., Johnson 1981; King 1981). They will, no doubt, in the future be perceived even by historians and ethnographers, as an “authentic” American tradition (cf. Moore 1980).

One further point, closely related to the concept of “emergent authenticity” ought to be noted. The new, “external public” (Graburn 1976a; Shiloah and Cohen 1983:237) provided by the tourists, may offer an opportunity to the producers of cultural products to incorporate in them novel but “authentic” messages, differing from those incorporated in cultural products intended solely for the “internal” local or ethnic public. Thus, Silver (1979) claims to have detected such messages hidden in the apparently exaggerated, “exotic” features of commercialized African sculptures. This author also found such messages explicitly stated in the commercialized figurative embroideries of Hmong (Meo) refugees from Laos (Cohen 1982b:41; Forthcoming). The Hmong from whose “traditional” arts figurative representations were absent, nostalgically depict in these embroideries the richness of their traditional customs to the world at large, as well as seek to draw its attention to their sufferings in recent history and to their present dire predicament. Such messages thus become new cultural expressions, which are recognized as “authentic” even by experts, such as anthropologists or ethnographers interested in cultural change.

COMMODITIZATION

“Commoditization” is a process by which things (and activities) come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods (and services); developed exchange systems in which the exchange value of things (and activities) is stated in terms of prices form a market. Though trade systems and gift systems were apparently even in the past less unequivocally segregated than previously claimed, markets have expanded throughout the world in the modern era, bringing about the commoditization of an ever wider range of things and activities (cf. Appadurai 1986). The principal question in this context is, what happens to the other meanings (partic-

ularly religious, cultural, and social) of things (and activities) once they become commoditized, particularly under the impact of tourism.

It is generally the case that "Dealings with strangers . . . provide contexts for the commoditization of things that are otherwise protected from commoditization" (Appadurai 1986:15). Tourists in the modern world are particularly ubiquitous types of strangers, notorious for their propensity to precipitate, directly or indirectly, the commoditization of an ever wider range of things (and activities), many of which have been kept out of the domain of the market prior to the penetration of tourism, by rigorous normative prohibitions and taboos.

According to Greenwood (1977), who made one of the first studies of commoditization of culture through tourism, the commoditized cultural products lose in the process their intrinsic meaning and significance for the local people, who in turn lose their enthusiasm for producing them. Thus, Greenwood argues, as the public ritual of the *Alarde* in the Spanish-Basque town of Fuenterrabia became a major touristic attraction, and the authorities declared that it should be performed twice on the same day to accommodate the large number of visitors, the local participants lost interest in it. Consequently, ". . . the municipal government was considering payments to people for their participation in the *Alarde*? . . . just as the gypsies are paid to dance and the symphony orchestra is paid to make music. The ritual has become a performance for money. The meaning is gone" (Greenwood 1977:135). In other words, the once "authentic" public ritual became a staged performance, a cultural "commodity."

Such processes of commoditization of culture for touristic purposes are doubtlessly quite common all over the Third World and in the ethnic areas of both Western and Communist countries. Rituals, ceremonies, costumes, and folk arts may all be subjected to commoditization. Moreover, since the process is frequently initiated by culture-brokers and touristic entrepreneurs from outside the local community, it may well lead to the exploitation of the locals and of their cultural resources by outsiders. Finally, the process of commoditization also tends to affect the cultural products themselves. As they become increasingly oriented to an "external public," rituals may be shortened, embellished, or otherwise adopted to the tastes of the tourists (cf. Boorstin 1964:103). Art and craft products may also be changed in form, materials, or colors (cf. Cohen 1983), ". . . in response to the impositions or temptations from large-scale and sometimes far-away consumers" (Appadurai 1986:47) such as in the case of "indirect tourism" (Aspelin 1977). Indeed, the emerging genre of "tourist arts" (Appadurai 1986:47; Cohen 1983; Graburn ed. 1976) is perhaps the most salient example of the commoditization of a range of cultural products through tourism.

All these developments and sometimes radical changes in the form and content of the commoditized goods and services notwithstanding, however, Greenwood's categorical assertion that, once a cultural product is commoditized "the meaning is gone," appears to be an over-generalization. Counter-examples may be easily found. For example, folk musicians, who play for money to an external audience, may be excited by the opportunity to present their art and proud to display

their competence. There is no reason to assume that their music lost all meaning for them, merely because they have been paid for performing it. It would be absurd to argue that all popular music is meaningless for the artists merely because it is commercialized. Greenwood appears to have assumed that the immediate negative reaction of the local population to the commoditization of the *Alarde* will become its permanent attitude to the festival. This assumption, however, contradicts an implication of his own later insight regarding "emergent authenticity," cited above. For, just as a new cultural product can become with time widely accepted as "authentic," so it can, although changed through commoditization, acquire a new meaning for its producers. Thus, what used to be a religiously meaningful ritual for an internal public, may become a culturally significant self-representation before an external public. Moreover, the two kinds of meanings are not necessarily mutually exclusive but could be additive: new meanings may be added to old ones, which persevere into the new situation. According to McKean (1976:241-3), Balinese ritual performances have three separate audiences, a divine, a local, and a touristic. This last one does not necessarily spoil the meaning of the performance for the two others. "The touristic audience is appreciated for the economic assets it can bring . . . but its presence has not diminished the importance of performing competently for the other two audiences, the villagers and the divine realm" (1976:244). Moreover, if Balinese performances are staged specifically for tourists, ". . . the funds, as well as the increased skills and equipment available have enriched the possibility that the indigenous performances will be done with more elegance, in effect conserving culture" (1976:244).

One has to bear in mind that commoditization often hits a culture not when it is flourishing, but when it is actually already in decline, owing to the impingement of outside forces preceding tourism. Under such circumstances, the emergence of a tourist market frequently facilitates the preservation of a cultural tradition which would otherwise perish. It enables its bearers to maintain a meaningful local or ethnic identity which they might otherwise have lost. This is particularly the case in the sphere of folk arts and crafts, many of which are in decline in Third World countries owing to the penetration of industrial goods and Western consumer tastes—but some of which have been salvaged or revived through demand by the tourist market (cf. Graburn ed. 1976). Finally, even where a cultural tradition still flourishes, its commoditization may well be emically perceived by its members as less of a change than it appears to an external analyst. While to the external observer, commoditization may appear to involve a complete transformation of meaning as a cultural product is being reoriented to a new, external audience. In many situations of commoditization, the performers themselves do not necessarily perceive that such a transformation had in fact occurred. Rather, despite the changed context, they may perceive an often astonishing degree of continuity between the old and the new situation. Thus, performers of tourist-oriented Voodoo shows in Haiti, do still go into a trance (Goldberg 1983:488); and tourist-oriented prostitutes in Bangkok bring many traditional attitudes towards Thai men into their relationships with tourists (Cohen,

in press a). Local people frequently interpret novel situations in traditional terms, and thus perceive a continuity of cultural meaning which may escape the observer (cf. Smith 1982).

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis leads to a conclusion which is, in the main, the opposite of that deduced from the basic assumptions prevalent in much of the contemporary literature on tourism, as presented at the beginning of this paper. Commoditization does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products, neither for the locals nor for the tourists, although it may do so under certain conditions. Tourist-oriented products frequently acquire new meanings for the locals, as they become a diacritical mark of their ethnic or cultural identity, a vehicle of self-representation before an external public. However, old meanings do not thereby necessarily disappear, but may remain salient, on a different level, for an internal public, despite commoditization — as the case of Balinese ritual performances exemplifies. Neither does commoditization necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products for the tourists, since these are frequently prepared to accept such a product, even if transformed through commoditization, as “authentic,” insofar as some at least of its traits are perceived as “authentic.” Such traits can then be taken to authenticate, metonymically, the product as a whole. The breadth of such authentic traits necessary to satisfy the tourist will, in turn, depend on the depth of the touristic experience to which each individual tourist aspires. Since most rank-and-file tourists do not aspire to much depth, a few traits of a cultural product which appear “authentic” will in most cases suffice for its acceptance as an “authentic” product. Hence, mass tourism does not succeed because it is a colossal deception, but because most tourists entertain concepts of “authenticity” which are much looser than those entertained by intellectuals and experts, such as curators and anthropologists. Indeed, for many tourists, tourism is a form of play (Cohen 1985), which like all play, has profound roots in reality, but for the success of which a great deal of make-believe, on part of both performers and audience, is necessary. They willingly, even if often unconsciously, participate playfully in a game of “as if,” pretending that a contrived product is authentic, even if deep down they are not convinced of its authenticity.

This re-examination of some of the assumptions prevalent in the tourism literature has some important implications for the study of the social and cultural impacts of tourism. In particular, rather than assuming the destructive impact of commoditization on the authenticity and meaning of cultural products, such impact should be submitted to a detailed empirical examination, if possible within an emic, processual, and comparative framework (Cohen 1979b:31–32). Such an approach will make it possible to gauge over time the permutations of meaning and authenticity as perceived by locals and tourists alike; it will also make it possible to determine the conditions under which cultural meanings are preserved or newly emergent, and distinguish them from those under which they are practically destroyed through the impact of tourism. Such an examination will, in turn, forge the

intellectual instruments necessary for the formulation of a prudent policy approach to tourism, as both a branch of economic development and as a major cultural manifestation of the modern world, which will avoid the extremes of a total condemnation of tourism as well as of its uncritical approbation. □ □

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