

WESTERNERS' NEW AUTHENTIC DESIRES AND THE CHALLENGES FOR THAILAND

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Abstract

The authentic experience is a fundamental part of the vacation. The western tourist increasingly demands and needs more than sand and sea. Yet these needs are hard to meet at the category level and the experiential level. Thailand continues along the old theme of exoticness orientated around the biting instructions of the Ministry of Culture and the reassurances of the Ministry of Tourism in proclaiming a 'real' Thailand as accessible to the tourist. If Thailand seeks to regain the initiative it must greater understand the westerners' desires.

Keywords : Staged authenticity, tourist, postmodern, hyperreality, regime of ideas, depressive realism

Travel is always to see the 'Other': the exotic, the unknown. But there are the limits of comfort, safety and stability. The tourist usually errs towards enjoying rather than knowing. It is a time off from everyday life, not a time to seek everyday life. Nobody wants to be a 'tourist', all want to be a 'traveler' or 'adventurer'; this requires a staging of the exotic, and this becomes a pressing concern of the tourist industry in ensuring this sense of 'something-more'.

The guest hotels, hostels, and hotels stage the authentic (MacCannell, 1973) for the benefit of their paying guests. But this authentic sense of 'being'—of living in that place—is constructed through a pre-payment; there is no obligation on the part of the tourist. This lack of reciprocity, a lack of time to understand, an unconcern, necessarily means a fakery, a drama that at least one party knows is not running to the normal life script.

The westerner is a product of a particularly monadic life of neo-liberal capitalism. In western Europe, although less so in the United States, the tourist is atheist. They feel even their life back in the west is staged. This depressive realist view requires a distraction. The westerner seeks solace in holidaying. The Sunday newspapers offer up holiday packages that realistically can only be done once a year. The thinking about, mulling over, preparing for, chatting around the vacation experience identifies the desperate life of the westerner. Some seek more than merely the staged authentic, they seek a way out from this 'authenticated authentic', perhaps breaking through the 'shielding' (Sharpley, 1994, P.147) of the exotic destination. The failure to plough the staged set-up would be the moment of escape, since to not enter the 'tourist space' constructed for them would be a real achievement of failure: an existential

authenticity (Cohen, 2007). The suspicious and the emboldened or the hard-headed are likely to travel this path.

The Westerner as Tourist

Russians are content with beaches and Bombay gin. The Koreans are content to experience a series of manufactured events: 5 minutes paragliding, racing go-karts, a brand new 'traditional' floating market in Pattaya, and feeding crocodiles. Eastern Europeans go one stage further; they wish the tour to be packaged up in swimming pools, sand and salted tequilas, but they also wish to take a day for 'a little culture', visiting the local fishing town.

Westerners are quite distinct: they require such planning, fakery and self-denial, requiring considerable preparation by the tourist destination. The highly abstract notion of a Nation-State, in this case named Thailand, is part of this conspiracy of silence in the fakery of the authentic. Yet Thailand seems to provide a reassuring depth that goes past such stunted staging. A westerner walks into a temple to view what they have already planned to view; they are unlikely to understand the nuances of the images, they probably know little of Thai-style Buddhism, they will observe the cuteness of the monk's uniforms, the variety of the Buddha's postures and the coolness from the blazing heat. It all is rather hard. But like all cultural exchange, the authenticity depends on the two-way-ness, the 'exchange': not merely the hardship. As the westerner merely consumes, and the Thais produce, the fakeness is necessarily there. Thais will offer to tell them enough to feel that authenticity of not knowing enough. The signs reinforce the exoticness through their enchanting incomprehensibility of 'Thaiglish' and specialized temple vocabulary of bargeboards, stupa, chedi, and finials.

The Backpack experience is--in a moment of extraordinary paradox-- the staged authentic experience par excellence that prepares the middle-class youngsters of the west for the settled mundanity of adult life as admin staff, computer programmers and librarians. Of course, part of the drama script of the backpacker is to deny the inauthentic tourist trip of the international hotel roomer (the change of mind will come with middle-age). Their hope is the poverty (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003) of their finances will ensure the authentic developing-world life experience on the 'banana trail' of South East Asia. This trail through Asia is now a 'pilgrimage' and rite of passage well experienced among westerners; they are the equivalent of the Christian tourists to Jerusalem in medieval times. Yet their priority on enjoyment and the compromising insistence on relaxation and packaged experiences will avoid the dark industrial border city of Mae Sot or the tedious agricultural scrublands of Issan, despite attempts at legitimizing their experience through a refusal to pose for smiley photos, insistence on taking arty photos, necessarily results in the staged. Any contact will be with ironically cosmopolitan workers in the tourist ghettos of Thailand, where every problem can be remedied in fluent English. They are not ending up in Takbai to see the sites of the Thai army's blunder in Southern Thailand.

The westerner's life is fabulously banal (Baudrillard, 1982). They live in an intensely involved state apparatus from birth to death, with a media, which thinks only of them, so they

think only of themselves (De Zengotita, 2006). The subject of the state becomes a docile, productive, Cartesian individualized, fearing selves. This assemblage of norms produce (Foucault, 2010) a disciplining of the western mind (the Panopticon) affecting the desires of the westerner.

A new westerner has emerged. This person seeks *jouissance* (desire for a revealing of unhappiness) by going beyond the obviously fabricated tourist spaces and to persevere to the 'real' Thailand. But the spaces they are likely to find are mediated middle spaces: the 'false back'. They instead go to places fabricated as 'off the tourist circuit'. Since those receiving, perhaps local villagers producing necklaces or pottery, have a value in the visit, and this necessarily falsifies the experience, it is no longer an exchange but a resource extraction exercise for the locals; they are deliberately interrupting the flow of their lives for the benefit of the tourists. It is embellished as the hidden (Goffman, 1959). The region sought is the equivalent of the back stage passes to a fashion show, or the watching of a film recording at a TV studio.

For some the 'false back', the mediated middle space, proves to be enough. A western lady in Chiang Rai spoke of eating marshmallows over a fire as her greatest life experience. She did not know all the staff were tribes people, the grass-style villa she stayed in was exotic luxury in that area, unaffordable to the locals who lived in corrugated iron *pieds-a-terre*, the area was not historically linked to Siam until the Lanna kingdom was ended, and the food on her plate originated from South Thailand. In Chiang Rai the western tourists by seeking out the difficult-to-find 'false back' were rewarded with a general sense of Thainess, Thai silk for sale at reassuringly expensive prices, Thai dancing, and Thai cuisine. But the locals, when not putting on the drama of Thainess, gulped down German beer, behind a screened wall that metaphorically separated them from the inauthenticity. The westerners, separated from Thais to induce a sense of greater Thainess, drank Thai drinks and consumed Lanna music repackaged as 'Thai music'. All are disappointed with the other.

Few westerners need or require the extreme of existential authenticity. The drifter, requires high levels of novelty, the individual-mass tourist package (the group tour is now unlikely among westerners) requires little. But the existential experience is a growth area. A small tour guide office in Chiang Rai lists its treats-- in [the colour of danger] red pointing-- a tourist package is sold as "not touristic" (see Figure 1). This desire for the authentic has reached the sleepy border regions of Thailand.

Existential authenticity is not achieved via the object as such—the intentionality of the Thai dancers paid to dance is not significant—but rather the feelings the tourist got out of it. The question for the hotel industry is what feelings do their target group want, "what am I?". The authentic can be threatening. The tourist could wish to wallow in a sense of charity. Floridian retirees once a year travel up to a hilltribe school in North Thailand to watch a direct debit life-sponsored child dance for them in a forced show of appreciation. Ultimately, the reduction and absurdum of this authentic 'exposure' creates the post-ironic tourist cravings for the obviously false in order to see the real for what it is: Pattaya with its artifice of false illuminations, tacky discos and Russian hostess girls becomes an attraction *de jour* because it is not

mediated for the culture-seeking holidaymaker; Pattaya city's claim to be a family holiday destination suddenly seems authentic.

Thailand as the authentic

The Nation-State of Thailand is a fabricated (constructed) notion of one nation/race neatly fitting within uncontested, indisputable boundaries for time immemorial that makes for an ideal proposition to the westerner's humanist mind. Images and buzzes that become associated with the people are flashed into the westerner's mind through advertising and media news, and stories of exotic travels from returning holiday-goers. The advertising blurb ("Amazing Thailand!") to the 'long war' position of the 'Thai smile' is a cultural product to be enjoyed that resonates sincerity, homogeneity, unbreakability and an appearance of value in its examination.

The inept Thai Ministry of Culture, suitably interred outside the centre of Bangkok in the cultural desert of Pinklao, has yet to find the time to write a Wikipedia entry, but attempts to control the narrative of the ancient and unbreakable. It has criticized Nok Air's hostesses calendar (Kositchotethana, 2013), filed a police complaint for Lady Gaga's use of the Thai flag (Anon., 2012) (it "hurt Thai people's sentiment"), and without blushing, added 'buffalo racing' to the list of cultural icons of Thailand. The Ministry is tethering itself to the 'regime of images' (Jackson, 2004) it perceives as necessary for the inviolability of Thailand. These images are rigidly enforced and are enforced as taboos. Issues just as visible, but regarded as 'private', are given, in contradiction to western ways, free reign: 'the love of the disciplined surface' (Noparatnaraporn, 2007, P.57).

Thailand has been slow to respond to new western desires: firstly, Thailand has been tin-eared at adapting to western criticism of failures in notions of humanity; and secondly, westerners search for jouissance (in Jacques Ranciere's sense) are ignored in favour of more offerings of sun-sand-sex tourism conservatism. This is not simple bad marketing; it goes to the heart of authenticity and the meaningfulness (or lack thereof) of life. The response to the Krabi alleged rape, the bomb detector debacle, the banning of a Thai-government funded movie by the Thai government, all express a misshapen understanding of western 'response'. But they do care of the western response: the 'overinvestment in appearance' has as its target the westerner 'response', as the Other. Thainess is generated from not being the west so it goes to the heart of Thainess. New thinking is required to apply the exploratory literature of the academic and the expository writings of the fiction writer published in the new millennium that tie up this mismatch of the 'Thai way' and the 'western way'.

Thailand has an impressive mythical history that is clearly and repetitively handed down to every Thai child. This history allows little room for dissent. Notably, Thailand's writers did not quietly criticize the ruling government through polemics, allegories, metaphors and analogies. The medieval Europe's and Japan's clownish court jester through humour was able to say what others dare not say to the ruler. These lacks of backchannels has

created a narrow ideology and a vacuum of ideas. Contrast the nauseating account of the National Identity Board (Unknown, 2005): “Whatever direction Thai literature will take, one thing is certain. It will always keep the Thai character”. The literature is proscriptive and rarely prescriptive.

Thainess (Chachavalpongpun, 2005) is a recent construction. Since it was so rapidly fabricated (Anderson, 2006) the inherent contradictions are a little too obvious. When the girls on the Thai festival of ‘Songkran’ were fined for bearing their breasts, the proximity of girls doing this every night for the tourists was too obvious for the western press to not notice. The main story was the hypocrisy of the Thai establishment in bullying the young women into dressing the new proscribed way (i.e. the 1950s innovation of not showing breasts) and yet allowing the obviously lucrative go-go bars to go on about their business in defiance of the law. The New York Times headline—“Thais are shocked, shocked by topless dancers”(Fuller, 2011)—plays on the old-fashioned prudery of the Thai position through the ironic wink of a reference to the old movie Casablanca and the absurd denial of the ubiquitous industry of gambling in Casablanca. The concern tends to the trivial and the fabricated, not on the substantive and meaningful.

The world of hyperreality-- a morning news conference to announce there will be an afternoon news conference-- no longer allows for the annulling of events through denial; rather this, paradoxically creates the events de jour. The 1980s iconic cheerleader girl kept her friends in line at her sunny California High School, but this female social matrix power is in decline. Thailand-- as that same cheerleader--was “a cunning cheer leader, a good looker, an easy date who cheats at her exams and gossips about her friends, but is perpetually popular despite her shortcomings”(Scott, 2013). The private issues are public; they are events for not being delineated as public, a world of ‘pseudo-events’.

Ministry of Culture Thailand spends considerable energy on mammary glands, and six in particular at Songkran. In a culture with a short life, the narratives of Thainess are shallow, so the images of dance (a quick, overt display of high-culture) necessarily dominate. The Lanna dance, now renamed for the tourist brochure, the Thai dance, works in the same way as the boxers doing Muay Thai, pilfered from Khmer boxing. It is the symbol of Thailand, of Thainess. The Thai boxing, Thai dancing, and Thai buffalo racing, are all manufactured but their role is as empty signifiers to link together genial images of cheerleader Thailand for the consumptive tourist. The drama, the staged authenticity, requires in Act III that the symbols are not broken; they must be administered with due care: retrospectively eternal and unbreakable.

Reassuringly, the Thai word for ‘love’ cannot be used to ‘love’ the act of holidaying. ‘Love’ is restricted to the notion of ‘care’. Thais understand the limitations of travel as the authentic; love is the narrative expression of the authentic par excellence. This Thai position, along with the greater concept of ‘face’ (losing and saving it...), suggests Thais qua Thais are more adept at the underlying tension of the authentic. At the same time, the ‘Dog and pony show’ of ‘over staged’ religious ceremonies and award presentations of Thai institutions display the Thai awareness of the need for process over the meaning. The authentic acquires

authenticity in the method of staging; in the Thai way, certainly, the buffalo racing is Thai if Thais ride the buffalos. The Thai way that seems so preposterous to the critical westerner conveys the drivers of the abstraction of authenticity.

Analysis

Image management in a saturated media world is complex. A paradox underlies the clunky nature of the Thai government reaction to ‘bad news’. Baudrillard observed, the more information (Baudrillard, 1982, P.100) available the less meaning is generated. Information burns out in communication: it becomes phantom content. The event is a myth of pallid information, immediately understood as not real.

The Thai government’s harsh response to the girls bearing their breasts is immediately understood as having no fury, as necessarily absurd. The response in the most popular Thai internet forum (Pantip) was only mockery. They saw a bare-breasted lie. But they were also subjects of a nice, clean narrative to function as the real for someone somewhere. That person upon entering the brand new/ancient floating market is also able to picture girls wearing the new/ancient Thai fashion of covering breasts. A quick fix of staged reality of a past, glorious Siam is provisioned by the Thai government with a desire-response frenzy.

The Ministry catches the moment as a non-event, retrospectively policing the event into a blancmange of meaning. The event is decoupled from its time, and becomes a sign of spectacle: the moment is tamed, the passive consumer may continue on their journey of Thainess. The event was so carefully expected (what else were young girls to do in soaking wet shirts on Songkran?), so anticipated (the crowd cheered them on), so prescribed (the police moved in), that it in a sense never happened; no nagging Kantian sublime, just a mocking voice calling out nothing to see, on your way.

Since the functioning of the hyper-reality is to create meaning, and to encourage the person to be a subject seeking meaning, the greatest resistance of the tourist-- a most innocent subject of the hyper-real-- is not resist at all (Baudrillard, 1982, P.107): a view of Baudrillard’s “hyper-conformist simulation”. And so the po-faced-- or is it a poker-face?-- positioning by the Thai Ministry of Culture can be mocked but it perfectly fits in this sublime system. The audience at first response desires a radically ‘fatal’ event, perhaps the Thai Ministry admitting to hypocrisy or a closing down of the go-go bars, but instead consoles with the more satisfying banality of insignificance. Thais wanted the event to have meaning, but they equally fear the loss of meaning that could mean to their identity of being Thais.

There is a fear within the academic literature that the concept of authenticity has been stretched to its limits of usefulness (Barrow, 2008); that it is overblown, or must be used with caution. The arguments in this paper suggest the contrary. There is a need to tie up the tedium of the self-made authenticity of the western life and the inter-subjective experience of the object-made authenticity of Thailand. The tourist needs a ‘home’ (Wang, 2007). Not a house with a family, but somewhere to belong, somewhere that rings true. Thailand is reinvented as the new home. Thailand is reconstructed and

redesigned for the tourists' false understanding of Thainess. The Tourist imagines Thais frolicking about in the expansive and fertile rice fields dancing to lukthung with careful smiles, waiting a call back to the farmhouse to eat their tom yam goong. Thailand manipulates this by cultivating the recently invented civilizing discourse of not showing breasts; and enlarges with compromises on daily routines, changing cooking styles, redesigning architecture and deprioritizing their native language. The tourist demands a cup of tea, an English breakfast, the English newspaper, a Wi-Fi signal, a local internet café, and other necessary morning routines: a perfect otherness as each of these compromises allows the participant to luxuriate in Thainess; while drinking English Tea they watch the world go by. The host country cannot predict this since it is so individualized, but it can offer the means to this by intensifying flexibility and offering boundary-protection to the hyperreality of Thailand. Thailand lives for the transcendent: a processing and re-heating of consumptive desires.

Superficially, the Thai holiday offers the traditional pursuits of the postmodern pursuit par excellence: the novel experiences, the ability to try on a new identity (Bauman, 1997, P.14). The oversupply of novelty, the traumatic dislocation, harks back to a securing of the real. Thailand can be viewed as an exhibit, an art. "The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life"(Marcuse, 1978) wrote the German sociologist. Yet the authentic emerges from the cracks of the staged authenticity. The staging is opium. The cracking and revealing fosters transcendence. These fissures are the very parts the Ministry of Culture tries to stick together. When the staff at Disneyland fails to smile they are fired. Similarly, the Thai smile, while offering many meanings, is kept on for the period of transaction.

The prize-winning French author, Michel Houellebecq, writing about the crisis of modernity through the frame of 'depressive realism' conceives of the Thai holiday as a way to transcend the false needs of the western life. This life has been well described in the classic work of 'One Dimensional Man' (Marcuse, 2006). Relationships, since Marcuse, have become fewer and fewer, the workload of neo-capitalism takes up great space of peoples' lives. The life in the west becomes a life of hopeless banality: mowing the lawn at the weekend and procuring the best interest-free mortgage. "[I] don't understand, basically, how people manage to go on living. I get the impression everybody must be unhappy" (Houellebecq, 2011, P.147).

An escape from the false holiday is the mystery of the amorous attachment. This is the fundamental essence of man. Yet the Western life must mean through "sexual liberalism [the]... phenomena of absolute pauperization"(Vesterberg, 2003) in the sexual market. The Western man's desire for love remains: the one commodity that cannot be commoditized away. The western society has 'de-equalized' the sexual relations market but globalization has opened up the World. Thailand offers an abundance of the product for desire. Since love is intractably bound in financial resources, the western woman is always less likely to offer a less feminine

version, and less likely to be found for love. The Western man has the opportunity to look elsewhere. This may be criticized as ‘sexualizing a culture’ (see (Howe, 2009)), but this criticism of moralizing is precisely an assertion within the negotiation of the sexual economy; the need to regulate the sexual freedom of western men demands a delegitimizing of amorous encounters beyond the western state.

There are differing bounded narratives of that amorous transnational adventure. A Thai woman is contriving to fill a meaning, and the man has his own meaning. Neither are victims of these meanings. This is the Foucauldian assertion of the subject: not some generalized oppressiveness, no more than to go on a package tour is an oppression of the subject. Houellebecq, in the novel ‘Platform’ (Houellebecq, 2003), sends his antihero to Thailand to find what he sees as the only authentic moment in ‘a happy ending’ at the massage parlour. Thailand’s Culture Ministry need to face this human need; it is the moment of existential transcendence, not a moment of loss of face.

The tag word of sex tourist is a concept bound up in the delegitimizing forces (see (Cowie, 2012)). It is precisely because a relationship (read: “love”) for (mostly) men requires money no matter where sought negates the claimed ‘staging’ of the process: the authentic is found in the indivisibility. The two key points of modern literature is to point out two grand metamyths of western life that take their toll on the authentic western life: firstly, authentic love is not a mediation of money; secondly, all relations are private, not political economic.

Western life offers fewer possibilities of the traditional male life. Marriage was a grand bargain: in exchange for resource access, the man gained amorous access. The product now on offer is a sham, a parody of its past self. Once the marriage is sanctified, the western woman is literally in law under no obligation to offer anything more. The Clausewitzian negotiation (see (Cowie, 2013))-- who gets what-- ended at the ceremony. In a world where everything is commoditized, it is ironic in the western life that what is clearly (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004) an economic exchange is removed from the quintessential economic exchange of western post-industrial capitalism.

The War Gambit

This author encountered an alternative style of tourism as offering the experience craved but rarely consumed. The ‘holiday’ was a drama set in several scenes, starting with a train ride (Christmas 2011) from Bangkok to the insurrectionary Deep South of Thailand.

The loaded 9mm pistol pointed at the author’s face by the drunken army ranger, registered the point that it had been unfair to expect the insurgents to be the main problem; the author had anticipated fresh ‘experiences’ further south passed the Sino-Buddhist of Hat Yai city. The train guard showed no emotion. New rules were on display. No injunctions to not drink.

The drunken ranger pulled out a bullet from his pocket. “I elite ranger,” he said. A Malaysian friend sitting near was visibly shaking. The ranger proffered a photo of himself in jungle fatigues.

The author became victim to the soldier's drunken on-off best friends/enemy routine. But escape was made when the soldier passed out. One carriage down a cluster of restaurant staff gathered. Even they were not used to the terror. For the first time the author felt fear: a jouissance of the appreciation of life. The trip won its authenticity.

The Chinese merchant town of Hat Yai is a 'Singapore-on-the- Gulf' with busloads of Chinese mainland tourists: a suitably sleazy town for what felt like the last safe point before the insurrection zone; a place for R&R. A well-known hotel here offers girls in a glass bowl just below the hotel rooms. That night, a midget girl was dancing to celebrate the New Year: a plaza at the end of the world. The frontier town before things gets serious. The last place where backpackers dwelled; the last place with a McDonalds: Pattani has but a KFC.

On the train to the border town of Songklor, there are signs of a new reality, a new threat level. The police look like soldiers; they are well-armed and wear combat fatigues. Soldiers join them. It takes a longtime for the train to reach Songklor, stopping more and more frequently the closer it gets, every hamlet with even only a monkey sitting on the train platform receives a visit. At the same time, the closer to Songklor it gets, the less and less edgy the soldiers appear. A whole class of green uniformed Muslim schoolgirl disembarks. The soldiers sit down, no longer sitting in their defilade positions near the open rear door; they read newspapers and sleep. The train ride is slowed by the GT200 bomb detector-trained soldiers walking down the tracks. They didn't find any bombs; they weren't meant to.

Their fake bomb simulators are part of hyperreality. The signs of security were simulations for the safe Hat Yai. The 'divining-rod' bomb detectors are fake (Ehrlich, 2012) and the insurrectionists and soldiers know this. The CCTV images of the terrorist attacks appear in Technicolor colour on YouTube actually immobilize the meaning of the terror. The amnesia-inducing hyperreality creates a border of danger and safety that cannot exist. Ironically, this need to insist on safety negates the very desire to find authenticity. And the terrorist was the first manipulator of the media hyperreality to produce this boundary. The terror needs the sense of danger to the home of the terrorized.

We are condemned to too much meaning. The hyperreal, neo-liberal end of history with the looping saturation of meaning from advertising and the media spectacle refuses any attempt to grasp at meaning. The real is postponed to packaged moments that must fail to satisfy by the need to discursively secure them: that which is pushed into existence to be real, cannot be real. Coffee-table chats back home; dinners dining off the anecdotes, but the anecdotes are increasingly repetitive and worthless. Antarctica is already passé; Mount Everest is so littered with dead tourist bodies that it has become a littering problem; something more to be regulated and administered into the inauthentic. It becomes resolutely more difficult to explore, the easier it is to travel.

The war zone offers authenticity par excellence. No tour guides, no scam artists, uncomfortable hotels, unable and unprepared to sell fake trips or goods: the tourist finds a world of friends; people who are keen to see a new face and a friendly smile. In Algeria, in a remote town in the war zone area of the

Sahara Desert, the author shared a cup of Arab tea with a man in a Bedouin long white tunic, and a sleeveless cloak. But that man was not from a lost world. As a young man, this camel rider, in 1970s fashionable flared trousers studied engineering in England. A letter from his old English university offered the exotic: 'Mr., One Oasis, Sahara Desert, Algeria'. That letter arrived; no postcodes, no street number. Perhaps the university computer initially refused to print the address, pointing out the missing postcode: "Postcode required". The address was literally not able to be authenticated.

But we must be cautious: this extraordinary sense of authenticity is a trap of a hyper reality, a recursive loop of meaninglessness. The manufactured old symbols of exotification and tourism, determine the ideal tour project that then redefine and trump the actual way the tour trip is conducted. An authentic experience is only possible when the war trip is denied as a war trip; the trip cannot create a meaning for the visitor except to display the lack of meaning. This is the true triumph: to recognize no end to the unending simulation of reality. No longer attempting to conceive of an authentic experience, the escape is in escaping the very claims of the authentic; to go where nation-states cannot repetitively delineate the authentic. The State's intense biopower falls away (Foucault, 2010); his holiday is a re-imagination; it is a cleansing.

Conclusion

The Thai government is lost in the authenticity drive. It can exalt the fake (Disneyland), be the anticipator of the awkward postmodern staged moment (the war tourist); it can drop the 1980s staged authenticity. It has everything in place to be the escape from biopower; the weak governance of Thailand makes it such a pleasant place to visit; the panopticon of state power is reduced to a sideshow of bribery and mismanagement. These latter issues are simply the cogs and mechanisms of government in a closed- rent economic system (see (North, 2009)). Displaying the issues to enrage or generate controversy is to disguise the underlying rationale of exploitation, and hence hide the authentic: it is a 1980s staged Nation-State. Perhaps there is a wider issue at stake: Thailand feels it needs its 'God', the notion of the authentic, real Thailand, to thrive.

The Thailand that Thailand defends is the end product, of the full, achieved, object of enjoyment of the Lacanian western dreamer. But tourists want different things. Some proclaim a bold acknowledgement for the fake: long-necked tribeswomen will not go out of business anytime soon. Yet existential authenticity is high on the list for western tourists. The 'real', 'heartfelt', 'authentic' is packaged into every tour holiday brochure. But a chill is in the air: when the tour 'bucket shop' seller in Chiang Rai is on to the feigned authenticity by denying the very inauthentic nature of the necessarily inauthentic then the postmodern moment has hit Thailand. The issue is if Thailand responds by recognizing that it need not be only amorous economic relations that can break this barrier of authenticity.

Scientism with its rationalizations and datasets to categorize tourist-types is the study de jour. But it was Nietzsche's observation that these rational explanations are there to hide the irrational

heart. Science—the method of examination-- is dictating the ontology—the meaning of it all—without a questioning. The tourist seeks more than to be categorized. Creating another consumer category to define consumers who wish to negate consumerism is a typical capitalist response. Marcuse asks: “How can [the individual] satisfy his own needs without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependence on an exploitative apparatus which, in satisfying his needs, perpetuates his servitude?” (Marcuse, *An essay on liberation*, 1969, P.4).

Life is an absurdity. For Thailand this is a marketing opportunity; fewer fake floating markets and more of the fissure of the authentic. The answer might be found as far back as 1969. When an item is packaged (e.g. a packaged tour), this is out of necessity, and necessity simply means a lack of power ((Marcuse, *The ideology of death*, 1959): “Necessity indicates lack of power”). The Thai holiday can become a technology for overcoming the western fear of death and the sheer banality of life. Houellebecq wrote: “I’ve lived so little that I tend to imagine I’m not going to die; it seems improbable that human existence can be reduced to so little; one imagines, in spite of oneself, sooner or later something is bound to happen. A big mistake. A life can just as well be both empty and short. The days slip by indifferently, leaving neither trace nor memory; and then all of a sudden they stop” (Houellebecq, 2011, P. 46). Perhaps he just needs a nice vacation. And prices for Thailand are so attractive this time of year



Figure 1 Advert for the “Non Touristic”

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