Introduction

The Ethnography of Tourism

Encounter, Experience, Emergent Culture

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Tourism has less to do with what other people are really like and more to do with how we imagine them to be, and in this respect is like any other form of representation, including ethnography.

—E. Bruner 1989b, 439

This is a book about a particular approach to the study of tourism, one that coalesced in the 1990s and continues to be prominent today, but that has roots reaching deep into the history of anthropology: the experience-near, interpretive-humanistic perspective. This approach is often (though not exclusively) associated with the work of the American anthropologist Edward Bruner. As the epigraph for this chapter suggests, it is characterized by an attentiveness to representation, imagination, interpretation, meaning, and the inherent subjectivity of ethnography itself, elements we address in the pages that follow. More broadly, this is a book about the ethnographic study of tourism, including its historical rise, its current state, and its possible future directions. Using Bruner’s work as a lens and a fulcrum, contributors to this volume draw upon their own field materials to shed light on a series of core methodological and theoretical concerns in contemporary tourism ethnography.

In this introductory chapter, our aim is not to offer an overview of the history of qualitative tourism studies or the anthropology of tourism, a task ably taken up by numerous other scholars. Instead, we focus on ethnography, in the anthropological sense of theories and methods grounded in in-depth, face-to-face, typically long-term encounters between researchers and the people, places, and phenomena they study. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first introduces anthropological ethnography and its transformations over the past several decades, highlighting the significance of those changes for
the ethnographic study of tourism in general and the approach to tourism ethnography associated with Bruner in particular. In the second part, we provide a detailed introduction to Bruner’s interpretive-humanistic perspective. We highlight the origins of his research agenda, particularly the concerted efforts he and others made in preceding decades to bring lived experience, interpersonal encounter, and emergent culture to the forefront of the anthropological agenda. This section also provides a guide to key concepts and themes addressed in Bruner’s work, including authenticity, narrative, contested sites, the tourist borderzone, and embodiment. Finally, in the last part we offer a view of the ethnography of tourism beyond Bruner, via a critical assessment of his enduring contributions to the field as well as an overview of the chapters that make up this volume.

**ETHNOGRAPHY, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND TOURISM**

The word *ethnography* refers both to a research method and to a kind of text, an attitude and a way of knowing. Although its meaning varies across the disciplines, for anthropologists—the primary proponents of the term over the past century, and the focus of this book—to do ethnography in the classical sense is to undertake field research into how people live and make sense of the world around them. This is achieved *participant observation*, anthropology’s hallmark method of living, traveling, eating, shopping, working, and generally participating in the day-to-day life of the people we study, while simultaneously analyzing our experiences through the triple lenses of social theory, history (change over time), and comparison with analogous phenomena elsewhere. In pursuit of holistic understanding, anthropological ethnographers immerse themselves in the myriad cultural, social, and environmental elements affecting human experience and material existence in their field sites, taking seriously the words and actions of the people with whom they interact.

If all goes according to plan, the result is an ethnography, a text (often a monograph) that provides a detailed description and multifactorial analysis of some aspect of life for participants in that society. These texts are typically organized around a particular empirical topic or theoretical question: What does being an adult female entail for a given cultural group, and how is the transition from one phase to another marked through ritual? What can auto plant workers’ shop-floor conversations, gift exchanges, and afterwork pursuits teach us about changing models of success in a globalizing economy? How do international human rights discourses and regional gender norms combine to produce policies that directly shape life prospects for female refugees? What does it mean to be “modern”? While the kinds of questions anthropologists ask have changed continuously over the years, the ethnographic mode of conceiving of research problems, studying them, and writing about them crystallized at a specific historical moment, the early decades of the twentieth century. When the foundational figures of social and cultural anthropology—Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and others—were developing their methods, there was considerably less movement of people and goods around the globe than there is today, and for the majority of the world’s peoples lifelong stasis, rather than mobility, was the presumed norm. Although some early anthropologists undertook research in European settings (e.g. Arensberg 1937; Chapman 1935), that was very rare; the vast majority of ethnographic fieldwork in the first half of the twentieth century was carried out in lands far from the metropole, usually among indigenous populations or in colonial settings. Typically, the ethnographer would arrive after an arduous journey by train or ship, find local accommodations, and set about becoming integrated into the local community. There he or she would remain for a period of months or even years, and little sign of the external world could be expected to intrude—at least, not as represented in the resulting ethnography. When foreign travelers—traders, missionaries, military troops, speculators, colonial settlers, and, yes, eventually even tourists—appeared during their fieldwork, many anthropologists simply chose not to mention it in their writing. Their focus was on understanding the internal dynamics of the local community.

**Ethnography and Tourism: A Changing Relationship**

We rarely have a record of when tourists first turned up in any given ethnographer’s “hidden corner of the world” (V. Smith 1977, 49). We do know, however, when their presence made its way into the scope of ethnography. Beginning in the 1960s, a smattering of publications and calls for further research on tourism-related phenomena started to appear in anthropology journals. However, from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, the vast majority of these contributions came from anthropologists and sociologists who had stumbled upon tourism in the midst of researching something else (e.g., Nuñez 1963; Graburn 1967; 1969; Greenwood 1972; Cohen 1971; Ansari 1971; Aerni 1972; see also Leite and Graburn 2009, 39; Nash 2007). Those who subsequently made tourism a focus of their research often had to make up for years of willfully ignoring the tourists in their field sites. Pierre van den Berghe, a leading ethnographer of Latin American tourism and ethnic relations in the 1980s and 1990s (van den Berghe and Keyes 1984; van den Berghe 1994; see also Nash 2007), nicely captured the default practice of that earlier era while presenting his work at a 1982 seminar on ethnicity and tourism: he confided
that in the 1970s he had become so adept at cropping the tourist hordes out of his field photos that he now lacked images to illustrate his lecture, which was an analysis of changing tourism dynamics at Machu Picchu, Peru.3

In this early period of ethnographic research involving tourism, anthropologists typically focused on “host” communities, meaning rural, indigenous, and postcolonial populations whose lands had become destinations for tourists. True to the classic model of ethnography, these anthropologists remained in place for an extended period, living side by side with their respondents through the ordinary activities of daily life. What had changed was that they now recognized tourism and tourism development as part of the mix. Early on, the questions these researchers asked followed lines of inquiry developed by anthropologists studying the effects of colonialism on indigenous culture: What was the observable impact of tourists and an emerging tourism economy on traditional lifeways? What signs of change, if any, could be identified in social structure, resource allocation, gender norms, and the annual cycle of labor, rest, and ritual? How were existing local dynamics of social stratification or exclusion affected by the presence of outsiders? More broadly, was international tourism development a solution for the woes of economically struggling, “underdeveloped” regions or nations, or did it lead to social, cultural, and environmental degradation?

Observers have described this early scholarship as understanding tourism “as an external force, something like a moving billiard ball, acting upon a pre-existing object, ethnic culture” (R. Wood 1998, 223). According to this model, tourism, like colonialism, would abruptly strike the local culture head on, scattering its traditional elements in all directions—that is, it would have an impact. Implicit here is an image of societies and cultures as fragile, unchanging wholes that must be protected from outside influence if they are to remain intact. Yet cultural contact, exchange, and influence are a constant of human existence; tourism is but one version of a perpetual process of change. Thus, as Quetzil Castañeda puts it, “there is absolutely no ‘tourism impact’ to study. It is the wrong concept by which to adequately understand the complexities of tourism” (Castañeda 1996, 9). It was not until the 1980s that more nuanced and flexible ways of thinking about the dynamic cultural phenomena surrounding tourism would fully flourish. Prior to the “opening up of anthropology” in the 1980s and 1990s—to use Edward Bruner’s (1984a) phrase—most tourism research was framed explicitly in terms of impact, and freighted with concern over the loss of traditional lifeways around the globe. Yet even the earliest ethnographic studies of tourism were more sophisticated and exploratory than the image of “impact” would suggest. The essays collected in Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism (V. Smith 1977), the first major volume of ethnographic studies on the topic, are a case

in point. While most are framed as an exploration of tourism’s effects on postcolonial, indigenous, and rural societies, they simultaneously address complex questions still at the heart of contemporary anthropology. These include cultural commodification and the persistence or even revival of ethnic and cultural identification; tourism as a novel form of interaction in which strangers conduct transactions across substantial cultural difference, while exercising agency in choosing what to reveal and how much to engage; the place of power and creativity in the sale of souvenir arts and crafts; and the stereotyped images that toured populations develop of both their visitors and themselves. From the very beginning, then, anthropological ethnographies of tourism have highlighted locals’ agency, recognized that societies were hardly stagnant prior to the tourists’ arrival, and combined an interest in material aspects of social, cultural, and economic change with attention to questions of meaning and identity (Lett 1989, 276–77).4

Nonetheless, the dominant ethnographic and theoretical models of the era tended to pose challenges for early ethnographers of tourism, particularly those seeking to place the international traveler at the center of their lens. Given the continuing dominance of the classic model of immersive fieldwork, this should come as no surprise. How could one spend months or even years participating in the day-to-day lives of tourists, who are—by definition—a transient population? “Given these temporal conditions,” explains Nelson Graburn (2002, 20), “the only way for the ethnographer to amass a sufficiently large amount of data would be to multiply repeat observations and questions with hundreds of tourists, but this strategy, of course, leads to qualitative data of no great depth.” He continues, “ideally, no ethnographer would study persons taking part in a ritual or other short-term event and expect to be able to interpret them meaningfully without putting them into the whole context of their continuing lives, especially the meaning and mark that such events might (or might not) leave on their ordinary non-ritual lives” (2002, 20; italics in original).

In light of these limitations, many social scientists writing about international tourists in the 1970s and 1980s turned to theoretical and typological generalizations (e.g., Cohen 1972; 1974; 1979a; V. Smith 1977, 8–12). This approach, of course, precluded rich and nuanced ethnography. The sole chapter in Hosts and Guests that focuses entirely on tourists, for example, is decidedly non-ethnographic in character. Written by Graburn (1977), it offers an overarching, cross-cultural theory of the meaning and role of leisure travel in the temporal flow of life, grounded in diverse examples drawn from an interdisciplinary literature.

Among those few who attempted ethnographic research on leisure travelers, most limited themselves to examining the behavior of domestic tourists—that is, those traveling to sites within their own country—as an extension of
ongoing fieldwork on a related topic (e.g., Núñez 1963; M. Smith 1982; Passariello 1983; Pfaffenberger 1983). Other researchers accompanied overseas travelers who shared their own national or cultural background, for example a Swedish anthropologist visiting the Gambia with a tour group from Scandinavia (Wagner 1977) or an American joining his compatriots on charter yachts in the Caribbean (Lett 1983). It was only after a period of dramatic change to the discipline’s methodological and theoretical underpinnings, running from the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, that anthropologists would find a way to undertake ethnographic research on diverse international tourists that could support their continued commitment to understanding “the native’s point of view” (Geertz 1974)—whether that “native” be a resident of a rural tourism destination, an itinerant tour guide, or a tourist arriving from afar.

In the next section, we briefly sketch how the anthropological practice of ethnography and its use as a way of knowing have changed since the late 1970s. In particular, we emphasize the significance of those changes for the study of tourists and tourism. Especially important here is the rapid expansion of topics, materials, and methods considered to be legitimately within the discipline’s purview. This transformation was sparked by the introduction of interpretive, postmodern, and poststructuralist theory into the anthropological mainstream. Bruner, today known largely for his influential work in the anthropology of tourism (e.g., E. Bruner 2005a), contributed to that earlier shift to a more humanistically oriented, experience-centered anthropology, well before he turned his attention to tourist performances, sites, and interactions. In fact, his turn to tourism research in the 1980s came relatively late in his nearly seventy-year career. Nonetheless, his approach to tourists and tourism—like that of his fellow travelers into tourism-related research, James Clifford (1988; 1997), Malcolm Crick (1985; 1989), Fred Errington and Deborah Gewertz (1989), Richard Handler (1988; see also Handler and Gable 1997), and Benetta Jules-Rosette (1984), among others—arose directly from his participation in the intellectual ferment and exploratory ethos of the preceding decades. His work thus provides an excellent example of a critical turning point in the ethnography of tourism.

“Opening Up” the Ethnography of Tourism: The Interpretive/ Postmodern Turn

It is not an exaggeration to say that the ethnographic method and writing of the early twenty-first century would be unrecognizable to anthropologists of the early twentieth. Whereas earlier ethnographers focused on recording characteristic aspects of “the way of life of a people”—a tribe, an ethnic group, a rural village, an entire country—and depicted either a static, monolithic cul-

ture or a small-scale society undergoing transformation as a result of external forces, by the 1980s many had shifted their attention to questions of meaning, process, power, discourse, representation, social change, individual agency, and the nature of anthropological knowledge itself (E. Bruner 1990). Various factors led to this transformation. First, a cadre of humanistically oriented scholars became interested in the work of symbolism and metaphor in society (e.g., Douglas 1966; Turner 1969; 1974; J. Fernandez 1986). Some focused their attention on the ways that events, performances, texts, and other expressive forms could be interpreted in their own right as meaning-making vehicles or as indications of primary preoccupations or values among the people studied (e.g., Geertz 1973; Bruner and Becker 1979; E. Bruner 1984b; 1986c; Babcock 1986; Turner and Bruner 1986). Second, a growing number of anthropologists began to reflect upon ethnography as a literary genre, a unique form of textual representation that could be analyzed in terms of common narrative structures, illustrative tropes, rhetorical modes of establishing authority, and interplay with other forms of cultural representation (Crapanzano 1977; Boon 1982; Fabian 1983; E. Bruner 1986b; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Geertz 1988; Van Maanen 1988). For some, this exploration provided an opportunity to break explicitly with the discipline’s conventional norms, experimenting with such alternative genres as fiction, drama, and memoir for representing understandings culled from fieldwork (e.g. Wolf 1992; Visweswaran 1994; Behar and Gordon 1995). Many also began to experiment with incorporating analysis of their own interactions and emotional responses into their analytical tool kit and then using first-person narrative in the resulting text to make that aspect of ethnographic research explicit (e.g., Rabinow 1977; Myerhoff 1978; E. Bruner 1984a; 1993a; Rosaldo 1984; Kondo 1986).

This attention to the nature of ethnographic knowledge and voice emerged from the recognition that anthropologists are themselves culturally and socially situated beings, and hence always experiencing and interpreting phenomena from a particular subject position. Such reflexivity—reflection on one’s own role in producing what had previously been accepted as ethnographic truth—led to a firestorm of debate over whether objectivity was possible, whether ethnographic research could ever be replicated and verified, and whether ethnographic texts could be divorced from the power relations, personal proclivities, and situated perspectives embedded in their production (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Kondo 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Fox 1991; Behar and Gordon 1995). As a discipline, anthropology became riven by two fundamentally different visions of the place for a researcher’s emotional and interpretive consciousness in the ethnographic endeavor: either reflexivity, subjectivity, and individual experience were to be minimized because they would distort the facts and hence knowledge itself, or those very
biases were methodological and analytical tools to be embraced as the social foundation of truth and an essential aspect of producing anthropological knowledge (Rosaldo 1989, 168–95).

The introduction of reflexivity in this methodological sense came somewhat late to the anthropology of tourism. Although the first wave of ethnographers clearly reflected on their own subjective positioning in their research, they did not use that reflexivity explicitly as a tool of analysis. In fact, while some of these scholars, including Valene Smith (2015; see also Nash 2007), drew on their subjective experiences as professional guides or travel agents, some recall doing so in an oblique fashion, lest their ongoing work in the tourism industry be perceived as compromising their legitimacy as scholars. Even so, the increasing acceptance of humanist and constructivist approaches in ethnography did not immediately lead tourism scholars to foreground their subjective experiences in their research and writing. In the ethnography of tourism, reflexivity in this form became fully accepted only via Bruner’s contributions: as a long-established scholar publishing in high-visibility journals, he was well positioned to make broadly persuasive arguments for the value of reflexivity to tourism studies.

Scholarly concern with reflexivity arose amid much larger changes in the intellectual and political climate of the time. By the late 1960s and 1970s, the core certainties of the modern era—the inevitability of progress, the righteousness of colonialism and Western domination, the infallibility and moral clarity of science—were questioned and challenged, not only on American university campuses, but in broader public and international arenas. Student protests and campus demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, or against university investments in apartheid South Africa, in tandem with civil rights movements (feminism, the Black Panther movement, the American Indian movement, the Grey Panther movement and, from the early 1980s, the gay rights movement), challenged the singular authority of the modern period, ultimately giving way to the doubts, fragmentary narratives, and highlighting of positioned truths that came to characterize what was termed postmodernity.

For our purposes, postmodernity is best understood as a widespread critique of approaches associated with modernity. The term is also used in reference to a historical era associated both with the rise of postcolonialism (a socio-political and intellectual critique of the continuing legacy of colonialism and maintenance of neocolonial institutions) and with capitalist transformations variously known as late capitalism, globalization, and neoliberalism.

For many anthropologists, these changes could not be ignored. On the one hand, scholars began to critically examine the role anthropology had played in processes such as nation building, colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism. Ethnographers could no longer view themselves as fundamentally separate from the people and phenomena they studied. On the other hand, technological changes in communications, transportation, mass media, and systems of representation heightened the condition of global interconnectedness, transforming the very experience of fieldwork. These changes also meant that in many parts of the world formerly silenced “natives” were finding new platforms that enabled them to speak for themselves to ever-broadening audiences. Ethnographers could no longer claim the unique authority to represent “other cultures.”

The rise of speedier forms of transport and budget airlines also enabled rapid expansion of the tourism industry, bringing ever greater numbers of travelers from Europe, North America, and elsewhere to destinations that anthropologists had long claimed as their own domain. The stories, photographs, and objects these tourists brought back and shared in their home countries further challenged ethnographic authority and exceptionality, as did the rapidly multiplying media representations of far-off places, including educational documentaries, television travel shows, magazines like National Geographic, and memoirs, novels, and films about other cultural worlds. Moreover, in response to the growing flood of curious travelers, “indigenous cultures around the world were reshaping themselves for presentation to a tourist audience” (E. Bruner 2012, 151). As more and more people, objects, ideas, and practices came unmoored from their points of origin and moved around the globe, the very concepts on which anthropology had been founded—above all, the concept of culture as a consistent, integrated whole, rooted in place, that defined and dictated the lives of others (Keesing 1990)—seemed to be breaking apart.

As Julia Harrison (this volume) shows, Bruner was a leading figure in the debates over reflexivity and postmodernism in the 1980s. These debates, in turn, paved the way for the transition he and others made into studying tourists and tourism. As one in a wave of anthropologists engaging with an interdisciplinary array of postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard, Bruner emphasized that “postmodern ethnography describes juxtapositions, pastiche, functional inconsistency, and recognizes, even celebrates, that cultural items originating from different places and historical eras may coexist . . . Contemporary ethnographers no longer try to mask outside influences, nor do they see them as polluting pure culture” (E. Bruner 2001, 899). Instead, they turned their gaze back on themselves as one such “outside influence,” exploring how their presence was interpreted by the populations they studied.

In the process, many found themselves reflecting on how ethnographers might resemble the tourists they had formerly dismissed (Crick 1985;Errington and Gewertz 1989; E. Bruner 1989b; 1989c). Indeed, in 1985 Crick
went so far as to suggest that perhaps one reason tourism had not yet become a major focus for anthropologists was “precisely because tourists are relatives of a kind; they act like a cracked mirror in which we can see something of the social system which produces anthropologists as well as tourists. More than that, tourists remind us of some of the contexts, motives, experiential ambiguities, and rhetoric involved in being an anthropologist” (Crick 1985, 78). A range of anthropologists began to recognize that cultural tourism and ethno- nography are parallel, cross-pollinating systems of representation, each exploring, documenting, and consuming difference (e.g., Clifford 1988; E. Bruner 1989b; 1995; 2001; 2005a; 2012, 150–51; Castañeda 1996; Kaspin 1997).

Building on their humanist-oriented readings of postmodern and poststructuralist theory, Bruner and his fellow travelers sought to reorient both the focus of ethnographic research and the culture concept itself. Describing his efforts in collaboration with Victor Turner, Barbara Myerhoff, James Boon, Renato Rosaldo, James Fernandez, Barbara Babcock, and others (E. Bruner 1984b; Turner and Bruner 1986), Bruner wrote:

We wanted to show how the newer processual postmodern theories actually worked in ethnographic practice. We thought of ourselves as not just talking about the postmodern project but actually doing it, utilizing the methods of ethnography. Moving beyond the questioning of ethnographic authority, which we accepted and appreciated, we stressed experience, performance, and narrative, as these concepts were based upon indigenous rather than the ethnographer’s conceptualizations. (2005e, 206)

A few years later, in an essay reflecting upon his career, Bruner underscored what these changes had meant for the study of culture:

The key point was to propose a revised concept of culture—to study culture not as it functioned, nor as a set of normative behaviors, but rather as it is experienced, to emphasize what is meaningful in people’s lives. By “experience” we meant what emerges to consciousness, as opposed to what people say or do. . . . Culture was to be seen as being generated as it was expressed, as emergent and contested, in polyphonic interplay, as always in production. (2012, 149–50)

It should be noted that by the 1980s, arguments for this reconceptualization of culture were pervasive throughout the discipline and in the social sciences generally (see, e.g., Rabinow and Sullivan 1979). The “opening up” of anthropology occurred precisely because anthropologists of diverse intellectual, theoretical, and analytical visions—including new waves of feminist and Marxist scholars—were simultaneously reaching the same conclusions about the shortcomings of the classic concept of culture and the importance of reflexivity. Thus, Bruner’s role is so important not because he single-handedly originated a shift to a new understanding of culture, but because he was among the vanguard articulating these arguments in the 1980s and played a leading role in creating symposia and collaborative publications on the topic (see, e.g., E. Bruner 1984a; 1984b; 1986a; 1986c; 1989c; 1993a; Turner and Bruner 1986). When he subsequently shifted his focus to tourists and tourism, his eloquent emphasis on experience and emergent culture would render him one of the most cited anthropologists in tourism studies during the 1990s.

We return to the concepts of experience and emergent culture, two hallmarks of Bruner’s approach to tourism, in the next part of this chapter. First, however, there is more to be said about the methods of anthropological ethno- nography in a rapidly changing world. By the late 1980s, some ethnographers, influenced by the changes of the previous two decades, began developing methods of studying the lived experience of mobile populations, among them migrants, refugees, seasonal workers, and transnational families (e.g., Appadurai 1990; Ong 1993). They also examined the lives of individuals who themselves stay put but are active participants in communities “whose bounds are limited by a social, not a territorial, field” (Kenny and Kertzer 1983, 6; Rouse 1991). Others sought to trace the circulation of ideology, imagery, objects, media, and strategies of governance across cultural domains and geographical regions (e.g., Martin 1994; Naficy 1993; Steiner 1994; Tsing 1993).

Describing such efforts in a programmatic review of the literature, George Marcus (1995) dubbed this nascent form of ethnography multitesse. Anthropologists, he wrote, were moving “out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (1995, 96). Multitesse ethnography addresses translocal cultural systems and processes, rather than studying a limited set of individuals or a particular circumscribed geographical location. For example, in a study of the multiple meanings of West African masks as they move through different types of markets, a multitesse ethnographer would follow the objects as they travel through venues of production, transit, display, representation, and sale, from the rural carver’s workshop to the market stall in the nearest city to the regional dealer to a high-end gallery in New York. Some such sites might be ephemeral or virtual, rather than physical—for example, discourses about “primitive art,” histories of imagery, widely circulating stories about the mask trade, and the like. Not all locations involved would receive the same amount of time and attention from the ethnographer. Instead, because the focus of multitesse ethnography is the condition of interconnectivity itself, understood through movement and traced as it is generated and experienced by the various actors involved, classical ethnography’s mandate of long-term residential immersion does not apply (Marcus 1995, 100).
Not all anthropologists of tourism today would describe their methods as multisited ethnography. However, Marcus’s statement on multisited fieldwork and its widespread, if tacit, endorsement by leading anthropologists paved the way for a younger generation of scholars to undertake ethnographic research on the move (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Combined with the opening up of anthropology’s scope, theoretical underpinnings, geographical range, and topics from the late 1970s to the 1990s, these methodological developments provided the conditions for a thriving new era of research on tourism, an era that would see it addressed as a system of representation, a locus of cultural production, and a multifaceted social field (Leite and Graburn 2009). Today, ethnographers interested in tourism focus their fieldwork not only on “host” populations or on the traveling unit, but on an open-ended array of spatially non-contiguous practices, images, sites, narratives, actors, and relations, including but not limited to those grounded in specific tourist destinations.

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORIES: THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF TOURISM ACCORDING TO BRUNER

In some ways, Bruner is an unlikely focus for a book on the ethnography of tourism. While his tourism work is widely cited in anthropology and beyond, he published fewer than a dozen fieldwork-based articles on the topic, many of them reprinted in Culture on Tour (2005a). For the most part, his writing does not directly engage the theoretical or ethnographic contributions of other anthropologists studying tourism. Why, then, has his work been so influential? In this part of the chapter, we sketch the major theoretical and methodological elements of his approach and indicate some of the ways they have been taken up by other scholars. These include his overriding interest in experience and meaning; his emphasis on tourism encounters and emergent culture as an analytic focus; and his innovative vision of how to conduct ethnographic fieldwork on tourism. We then turn to his contributions to a series of concepts and themes that lie at the heart of tourism ethnography today, each of which is taken up and extended by one or more chapters in this volume.

A Focus on Experience and Meaning

There are no raw encounters or naïve experiences since persons, including ethnographers, always enter society in the middle. At any given time there are prior texts and expressive conventions, and they are always in flux.

—E. Bruner 1986c, 12

In a review of Cannibal Tours, Dennis O’Rourke’s quirky 1987 documentary on primitivist tourism in Papua New Guinea, Bruner (1989b) argues that the film brings to the fore problems of practice, power, representation, and discourse that anthropologists and other tourism researchers had hitherto ignored. To underscore the point, he describes a telling moment from the film: “A New Guinea elder says, ‘We don’t understand why these foreigners take photographs of everything,’ which is a very good anthropological question” (1989b, 441). He would return to that question—at base, how and what tourists “see,” how local people interpret their looking, and what meanings all parties draw from the encounter—in many different guises over the ensuing decades, for it provided a point of entry into broader themes of anticipation and experience, cultural narratives and social identities, ambiguity and contestation that have become the hallmark of his ethnographic work on tourism.

Although Bruner’s 1989 essay does not offer an answer to the New Guinea elder’s question, we can find one possibility in a vignette he wrote two decades later, describing tourist behavior in a very different setting: “In Cairo on a crowded downtown street, with automobiles and busy pedestrians in modern Western dress going in every direction, there appeared a donkey cart driven by an old man wearing peasant clothes. A group of tourists rushed over to photograph the cart and its colorful driver, as it appeared quaint, possibly authentic, and somehow more ‘Egyptian’” (E. Bruner 2011, 198). This mundane photographic encounter is significant, he writes, because it reveals the “selective perception” that shapes tourists’ experiences: here, the cart “met the tourists’ preconceptions of what they expected to find in Egypt, but it was the tourist expectations that constructed their experience by selective perception. The tourists themselves made their experience congruent with their expectations” (2011, 198). In other words, through the narrowed focus of a camera lens these tourists momentarily created the Egypt they had come to see, the destination they imagined long before the trip began. The rest of the scene receded from view.

Bruner was not alone in highlighting the contrast between the tourist’s selective vision and that of the everyday resident. Sociologists Dean MacCannell (1976) and John Urry (1990) also examined aspects of how leisure travelers focus their attention on different things, and in markedly different ways, than they would in ordinary life. For MacCannell, this is because tourists are looking for an authenticity lacking in their day-to-day existence; they want to encounter something “real,” whether it be a rare, precious object (a piece of moon rock, the crown jewels, Elvis’s guitar); a hidden pocket of exotic culture or untouched nature; the site of important historical events; or a place to experience the simpler life of long ago. The tourist’s pursuit is aided, MacCannell suggests, by a process he calls site sacralization: the transforma-
tion of ordinary objects and landscapes into attractions, simply by virtue of their being marked in some way (1989, 41–43, 109–33). The actual marker may be on-site, in the form of a sign, a brochure, or an explanatory placard, but sources of information produced and circulated elsewhere are equally important. In MacCannell’s terms, guidebooks, travel blogs, newspaper articles, websites, maps, and even other people’s photos and souvenirs are “off-site” markers that direct and focus the tourist’s attention before, during, and after the tour. In the case of Bruner’s elderly Egyptian and his donkey cart, we might surmise that everything from guidebooks and postcards to Hollywood films and National Geographic-style reportage contributed to what those tourists in Cairo hoped to see—and did see, focusing their cameras upon it despite the absence of any on-site marker at all.

For Bruner, as for MacCannell before him, tourist attractions are not just naturally there, awaiting their visitors; they are made, created through various forms of human intervention and selective perception. A tree struck by a bullet in the attempted assassination of a nineteenth-century world leader, MacCannell (1989, 128) tells us, is just a tree—until there is a marker to commemorate the event. Yet it also takes a certain attitude, a kind of consciousness, for a passerby to notice the marker in the first place. We have all had the experience of not noticing some element of our everyday surroundings until an out-of-town visitor points it out. For Urry (1990), this alternative consciousness is a defining feature of the 

Although Bruner, MacCannell, and Urry share an interest in tourist motivation and aspects of tourist experience, Bruner’s approach diverges sharply from MacCannell’s and Urry’s in a crucial respect. The latter two formulated general theories, as did many other social scientists writing about tourism early on (e.g., Cohen 1979a; Graburn 1977; Gottlieb 1982). Bruner was among just a handful of scholars in the 1980s and early 1990s who eschewed grand theorizing to focus on ethnographic study of how individual tourists (and other stakeholders) experienced specific sites, performances, and encounters, as well as the diverse meanings they drew from the visit.

For example, in his (1996a) study of tourism at Ghana’s Elmina Castle and its dungeons—built by the Portuguese in 1482, used for centuries as a staging area for slave ships, colonized first by the Dutch and then by the British, and now a UNESCO World Heritage Monument—Bruner conducted extensive participant observation among various groups engaged with the site. He also conducted interviews, convened focus groups, and examined a wide range of representations of this tourist destination, including fiction and memoir. His multifaceted approach enabled him to tease apart the site’s diverse meanings for Dutch, British, African-American, and Ghanaian tourists, professionals working in tourism and heritage preservation, and local residents of disparate backgrounds. In the resulting article, he argues that each group has an interest in the castle, but for different reasons; and they are concerned with different periods in the castle’s long history, in effect rendering it several different destinations in one. Such a multiplicity of meanings, Bruner suggests, is equally possible at any tourist site, because of variations in what different visitors anticipate, imagine, and encounter while on tour (see also E. Bruner 1999b; 1994; 2005b; 2011). Put another way, not every tourist in Cairo would pause to photograph that picturesque peasant driving his donkey cart; indeed, some might not even notice him, their expectations having predisposed them to focus on something else altogether. It is only through careful ethnographic fieldwork among diverse groups of tourists that one can identify which is which.

Bruner’s long-standing interest in the nature of human experience, and how anthropologists can study it, is another factor differentiating him from his contemporaries in tourism research. In 1979–1980, years before he began studying tourism, Bruner and Victor Turner organized a symposium for the American Anthropological Association on what they dubbed the anthropology of experience. In his introduction to the resulting edited volume (Turner and Bruner 1986), Bruner emphasizes that the book’s contributors, like other anthropologists in the interpretive-humanistic tradition, are not attempting to document culture in the abstract sense of “generalized routines, clusters of
customs, norms, habits, and prevalent patterns” (E. Bruner 1986c, 4). Instead, their focus would be on specific incidents and events, moments involving expressive forms like narratives, dramas, or the visual arts, as a means to explore how individuals experience—that is, subjectively engage with, interpret, and draw meaning from—the world around them.10

Bruner and his colleagues drew from philosophers like Wilhelm Dilthey, who wrote that “reality only exists for us in the facts of consciousness given by inner experience” (Dilthey 1976, 161). Pointing to the dynamic relationship between “reality (what is really out there, whatever it may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated),” Bruner argued that the differences between these three components of human experience should be a primary target of ethnographic research (1986c, 6). The tripartite model of reality/experience/expressions would subsequently reappear in his writing on tourism: “the trip as lived, as experienced, and as told are never exact replicas of one another, and there is no precise mimetic correspondence” (2005b, 19). Yet they are inextricably linked, for “experience structures expressions and expressions structure experience” (1986c, 7; see also 2005b, 19; 2011, 199–200). Furthermore, our own “lived experience . . . is the primary reality to which we have access” (1986c, 5). This insight has important methodological implications. Because we cannot directly experience another’s experiences, we must make inferences based on their expressions: conversation, story, gesture, imagery, display of emotion, and the like. Discerning the meaning of such expressions is always an act of interpretation, whether as an ordinary individual simply making sense of another person’s words and behavior, or as a professional interpretive anthropologist examining cultural meaning.

Bruner’s analysis of the multiple meanings of Elmina Castle offers a clear example of how one might use the reality/experience/expressions triad in ethnographic research. In addition to participant observation, Bruner’s fieldwork included careful attention to relevant public debates, memoirs, newspaper articles, passing comments from visitors and locals, and the narrative arc of dramatic reenactments for tourists in the slave dungeons. These he interpreted as reflections of, and influences upon, diverse visitors’ experiences. Together with his own sensory and emotional experiences of engaging with the material realities of the site, these many expressions of others’ experience provided the evidence for Bruner to generalize about commonalities and differences in the meanings drawn by different groups. He also noted the embeddedness of those meanings in larger histories of slavery, ethnic relations, and social inequality in Ghana, the United States, and beyond. As he later reflected, “a site is not fully described from the actors’ perspective, but must be seen in its larger political context as mediating between the global and the local” (E. Bruner 2005b, 12).

Other ethnographers undertook similarly immersive, reflexive, and experience-focused participant observation among tourists during the 1990s—for example, on package tours to Holocaust sites (Feldman 1995; Kugelmass 1992), roots pilgrimages to West Africa (Ebron 1999), and independent visits to such famed destinations as the Taj Mahal (Edensor 1998) and the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela (Frey 1998). Like Bruner, these scholars examined diverse expressions that both reflected and contributed to tourist experience—among them memoirs, letters, stories heard and retold, photographs, visitor books, conversations on-site—and zeroed in on questions of imagination, embodiment, selective perception, and meaning. Nonetheless, Bruner’s work has been by far the most widely cited. There are a number of possible reasons for this. One is that these scholars were often more junior, some of them doctoral students (e.g., Beer 1993; Louie 1996; Tucker 1999); at such an early career stage, their research and writing were less likely to draw attention. Bruner was already a well-known anthropologist who had been elected to several prominent national leadership roles.11 Moreover, his studies of tourism arose directly from his earlier, widely read theoretical contributions on experience and expressive culture. As such, his contributions to tourism ethnography, typically published in leading anthropological journals, carried an in-built authority that sanctioned and smoothed the way for his contemporaries undertaking similarly humanistic and interpretive work on tourism.

Tourism as Emergent Culture

To many anthropologists of the 1960s and 1970s, international tourism represented a threat to traditional ways of life. Viewing culture as a unified whole that was vulnerable to contamination or degradation—via colonialism, tourism, or industrialization—they expressed grave concerns over shifts from local systems of exchange to participation in an international economy and the transformation of local traditions into performances for tourists. In the late 1970s and 1980s an alternative vision of culture began to take shape, wherein “the way of life of a people” was no longer thought to be fixed and timeless, but instead to be constantly in flux. From this perspective, culture could not be lost or protected, destroyed or preserved. It was always emergent.

The implications of this modified understanding of culture for the ethnography of tourism were enormous. If, as Bruner put it in the 1980s, “people construct culture as they go along and as they respond to life’s contingencies” (1989c, 113), then tourism could be approached as just one more social
space in which new meanings and experiences were generated. Attractions, performances, and souvenirs need not be dismissed as tacky imitations of "the real thing," but could be examined as meaningful incidences of cultural production. Moreover, from this perspective each tourist performance, visit to an attraction, or fleeting interaction would constitute a unique social context, prompting a unique experience for the visitor and for individual residents. In this light, "the final meaning for the tourists, locals, and producers is not given a priori but emerges in dialogic interplay during their interactions" (E. Bruner 2005b, 17).

As the above vignette of the New Guinea elder suggests, Bruner’s model of the dynamic relationship between reality, experience, and expressions situates tourism both as a domain of activity in the world-out-there and as a system of representation. This system of representation involves a powerful feedback loop: tourists, like ethnographers, interpret what they see and hear, and yet their interpretations of the people and places they encounter are shaped by layer upon layer of prior representations of others’ interpretations. At the same time, the diverse groups of actors engaged with tourist destinations—guides, performers, hotel workers, artisans, people living locally—bring their own assumptions, stories, memories, and expectations to bear in making sense of their encounters with tourists; and tourists’ expressions of their experiences can have a profound effect on the self-image and subsequent self-presentation of toured populations (E. Bruner 1991; 1996b; 2001; see also Abram, Waddington, and MacLeod 1997). In the tourism encounter, myriad influences conjoin to produce, or construct, place and people, self and other.

Broadly speaking, this vision of tourism as a creative process—a process in which participants’ experience of reality emerges as a cultural construction, in part through the influence of widely circulating narratives and imagery—is the cornerstone of what has become known as Bruner’s constructivist, processual approach. As he states, “Performances for tourists arise, of course, from within the local cultural matrix, but all performances are ‘new,’ in that the context, the audience, and the times are continually changing. To put it another way, performance is constitutive” (2005b, 5). To say that performance is constitutive or that reality is socially constructed is not to suggest that there are no material realities, no larger political and economic forces at work, but rather to acknowledge the complex ways that they converge and blend with participants’ culturally inflected imaginings, assumptions, expectations, perceptions, and senses to produce lived experience (Schütz 1962; Berger and Luckmann 1967; Garfinkel 1967; E. Bruner 1973; Graburn and Leite, this volume).

As Sally Ness (this volume) discusses in her chapter, constructivism focuses on the social and cultural production of meaning, experience, and self as continuously shaped and reshaped through an ever-changing array of factors. Here again, the relationship between reality as lived, as experienced, and as expressed is key. Do African American tourists really relive the long-dead slaves’ experience in the dungeons of Elmina Castle (E. Bruner 1996a)? Are the dances and crafts on offer at Mayers Ranch, a Kenyan tourist destination, real examples of Maasai culture (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994)? Is the dominant historical narrative presented at Abraham Lincoln’s New Salem, another site whose diverse meanings Bruner (1993b; 1994) has analyzed, true? Constructivists shift the terms of discussion, asking instead, by what criteria are they judged to be “real” or “true” in this particular context? From whose perspective? Through what series of interpretations? With what effects? The ethnographic task is thus one of learning whether the feelings and performances are real or the narratives true for specific individuals, as lived experience; how that experience takes form and evolves as people move through the destination and engage with one another; and how both the experience and the meanings attributed to it are culturally shaped.12

The (Touristic) Encounter

As a constructivist, Bruner has argued that tradition and heritage, like experience and meaning, are “not given before the touristic encounter but, rather, the encounter generates [their] definition” (Jules-Rossette and Bruner 1994, 405). But what, precisely, is a touristic encounter? The concept has long been central to ethnographic research on tourism, though it is rarely explicitly defined or even consistently used in the same ways with the same meaning (see, e.g., Karch and Dann 1981; V. Adams 1996; Conran 2006; Babb 2010; Simoni 2016b). Generally speaking, scholars use the term at an individual, micro level to refer to moments of contact “between people, between people and space, amongst people as socialised and embodied subjects, [and] between expectations and experience” (Crouch 1999, 1). At a collective level, the touristic encounter is often used by analogy with the colonial encounter to refer broadly to a characteristic form of cultural confrontation between “hosts” (“natives”) and “guests” (foreign travelers).

Most commonly, though, touristic encounter refers generically to any moment in which one or more travelers comes face to face with members of the local population or has a fleeting but meaningful engagement with some material or human aspect of the destination. Any such meeting involves political, cultural, moral, and economic dimensions that extend well beyond the individuals involved: “When the tourist-native encounter is referred to, one must not think of a person-to-person, one-to-one relationship, as if the focus were on an individual tourist interacting with an individual [native], for this masks
the world system and discursive dimensions that frame the relationship, a frame set by Western discourse and by the hegemonic tourist narratives” (E. Bruner 1991, 242). Any encounter, that is, gains its meaning in no small part from macro-level power relations, narratives, discourses, and representations, in addition to each participant’s prior imaginings and expectations.

In approaching the tourist encounter simultaneously as a unique moment of interaction between specific individuals and as a microcosm of larger systems of power and meaning, Bruner indirectly invokes the theoretical concept of encounter originally developed in symbolic interactionism, a strongly constructivist subfield of sociology. We know from Bruner’s own accounts that he studied symbolic interactionism as a doctoral student at the University of Chicago and was drawn to its emphasis on the situational and interactive nature of social meaning (see, e.g., E. Bruner 1989c, 113; 2005b, 17; Di Giovine, this volume). Symbolic interactionists, most famously Herbert Blumer (1969), with whom Bruner studied, and Erving Goffman (1959; 1961; 1974), seek to understand how human beings make sense of situations and interactions as they arise. They approach this question with four essential premises in mind. First, individuals act toward things or people on the basis of the meanings those things or people hold for them; second, every interaction is shaped by a unique, unpredictable confluence of factors; third, the meaning of an interaction or event is not predetermined, but arises from on-the-spot, contextual interpretations that participants make of each other’s behaviors and responses; and, finally, the meaning negotiated in any given interaction is always emergent, or coming into being, and thus liable to change (Denzin 1992; Fine 1993). In symbolic interactionism, encounter is a technical term for the basic unit of social organization within which an interaction takes place: it refers to “any joint act between two or more persons where the interactants are maintaining symbolic, visual, auditory, and at times tactile contact” (Denzin 1974, 270). In studying an encounter, the research goal is to tease apart how meaning is made, communicated, and understood, by “exploring its relationship to the larger social structure in which it is embedded” (E. Bruner 1963, 1416). A church service, a game of tag, or indeed a guided tour could each be analyzed in this light.

In a review of *Encounters*, Goffman’s (1961) short book on the subject, Bruner (1963) argued that anthropologists would do well to follow the symbolic interactionists’ lead. To do so, he wrote, would require systematic attention to micro-level encounters as meaningful events in their own right—a theme he and sociologist Jules-Rosette (1994) would underscore some thirty years later explicitly in relation to tourism. Urging social scientists to adopt a “more processual, fluid, and reflexive” mode of analysis, they argued that “the touristic encounter is less monolithic, more dialogical, more layered, more complex, more divergent, more processual, more experimental than previous scholarship has indicated . . . [It] must be considered as a moving border zone, a zone of creativity and emergence” (Jules-Rosette and Bruner 1994, 404, 406; see also E. Bruner 2005b, 18). This is the symbolic interactionist model of encounter, with all its indeterminacy, unpredictability, and emergent meaning. Thus, although Bruner mentions symbolic interactionism only rarely, its influence on his approach is profound. Whether in the form of tour group visits to packaged cultural performances or direct interactions between individual tourists and local people, encounters constitute Bruner’s primary analytical focus, and capturing their emergent meaning, his goal.¹⁴

Over the past several decades, an interdisciplinary array of tourism ethnographers have used encounter in ways very similar to Bruner, as an analytical context for examining the production and negotiation of meaning (e.g., Tucker 1997; 2011; Crouch 1999; Crouch, Aronsson, and Wahlström 2001; Crouch and Desforges 2003; Leite 2017; D. Picard 2011; Simoni 2016b). Contributors to this volume, too, place the meaning-making force of encounters at the heart of their analyses, from informal interactions between tourists and locals in Cuba (Simoni) and negotiations over purchases between textile weavers and tourists in Guatemala (Little), to the different ways returning Toraja migrants and their descendants experience the sensorial rush of visiting their rural Indonesian homeland (Adams) and even an anthropologist-turned-tourist’s challenging confrontation with the rugged natural landscape of California’s Yosemite National Park (Ness).

Fieldwork: Site and Method

In the 1980s and 1990s, Bruner’s use of encounters as the focal point of analysis offered a new model for how ethnographers might solve the seemingly intractable problem of long-term, immersive fieldwork among tourists. If one embraces the tenets of symbolic interactionism, as he did, then any given encounter can be approached as a microcosm in which diverse histories, discourses, representational structures, and systems of power and meaning combine with factors unique to the situation to produce new meaning. If this is so, then the encounter itself provides a coherent ethnographic field site. The ethnographer’s immersion comes not from length of time among a particular group of people, but instead from multifaceted, ongoing, in-depth engagement with incidents of a given type of encounter. To clarify the point, here we review Bruner’s own description of his methods and note how his approach diverges from that of others working in a similarly humanistic-interpretive vein.
In May 2005, Bruner published a brief essay in Anthropology News, the newsletter of the American Anthropological Association, as part of a series on the theme “Where do you do your fieldwork?” He answers the prompt with a deceptively simple statement: “In my tourism research I position myself in two different fieldwork locations, one with the tourists and the other in the travel destination” (2005f, 15). He goes on to argue that the ethnographer’s task is to understand the meaning and nature of the tourists’ journey, as experienced and as told; to that end, he suggests, one should accompany the traveling unit throughout the entire trip, beginning to end. He notes that he accomplished this by serving on multiple occasions as a tour guide or an academic lecturer, in addition to visiting the destination as an ordinary tourist, because “tourists were more likely to ask questions, to offer impressions, and to express their feelings directly to the tour guide than to another tourist” (2005a, 257n1; see also E. Bruner 1995; 1996b; 2005b; and Harrison, this volume). His research in the travel destination, on the other hand, focused on “the objects of the tourist gaze” (2005f, 16), via “traditional fieldwork . . . by staying in one place, sometimes for many months, to study the local performers and producers” (2005a, 257n4). There, his aim was to grasp “all the meanings of the site and to understand the perspectives of all relevant actors”—not only the tourists, but “the performers, the locals, tour agents, travel guides, business persons, officials in the national tourist bureaux, as well as those representing the airlines, hotels, and other international stakeholders in the tourist industry” (2005f, 16). He concludes that by conducting fieldwork both on the move with tourists and tourism professionals (guides, promoters, and so forth), and in an extended period of stationary participant observation at the tourist destination, he was able to develop a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted ways diverse stakeholders interacted with, and understood the destination.

Generally speaking, this two-pronged model of fieldwork accurately captures Bruner’s methods. However, it glosses over what was most innovative and, ultimately, most influential in his approach to tourism ethnography. Bruner’s research goal was neither a detailed ethnography of the traveling unit, nor a community study of the local population. His goal was an exploration of emergent culture in the encounter between the two. Thus, his focal unit of analysis was fundamentally different from that of most tourism ethnographers, both before and since. This is true even of those anthropologists who have similarly inhabited the position of tour guide as a central component of their research (e.g., Bunten 2008; 2015; Feldman 2016). For whereas the latter have been interested in capturing the lived experience of the (native) tour guide, and especially the practices involved in engaging tourist audiences and representing people and places, Bruner used his guid-
emergent culture, something to be taken seriously, a meaningful event that could be studied "much as any contemporary ethnographer would study ritual, even though these productions were not indigenous ceremonials but were designed for a foreign audience" (E. Bruner 2012, 151; 2005b).

In keeping with the analytical tools of performance studies, and particularly its overarching metaphor of cultural production as theater, Bruner argued that meaning lies not in the tourist production itself, but in people’s interpretations of it (1993b, 23; 2005e, 203). Hence the only way to locate that meaning is to focus on individual encounters. For Bruner,

it is only in the specifics of a particular performance that we may learn how the site and [its] story are actually produced and experienced. . . . Without a specified audience narratives have no meaning, because the meaning is only in the audience’s reading of the text. This privileging of the specific leads to a consideration of the complexity of forces and the multiplicity of voices and meanings at work. (1993b, 14; see also 1984a; 2005c)

It is perhaps for this reason that Bruner’s work has proved especially congenial for tourism studies scholars grounded in other disciplinary traditions.

Figure 1.1. Edward and Elaine Bruner interviewing Maasai performers at Mayers Ranch with Jane Mayers translating, 1984.
Photo credit: Edward M. Bruner.

His focus on fine-grained analysis of specific tourist productions might seem superficially similar to that of scholars who "do ethnography" by visiting a site once or by viewing a performance and chatting with or distributing questionnaires to others in attendance. However, to mistake Bruner and like-minded anthropological ethnographers as doing the latter type of research is to overlook the depth and breadth of participant observation involved, the investment of time required, and the careful compilation of multiple lines of evidence to capture diverse perspectives: traveling alongside multiple tour groups and joining in their experiences, listening to individual tourists’ stories during and after the journey, staying in place and repeatedly attending performances, spending time with performers before and after the show, observing and then hearing their accounts of what goes on, and simply living in the tourist destination. Above all, this approach to tourism ethnography entails a steadfast commitment to that time-honored anthropological goal of grasping the natives’ points of view, in all their variety and even mutual contradiction.13

The ethnographic material presented in this volume moves far beyond the bounds of the formal tourist productions that Bruner studied, whether it be Canadians’ stories about life at their summer cottages (Harrison); instances of strategic hospitality directed toward diverse types of foreigners in Madagascar (Picard); the embodied experience of hiking the arduous Yosemite Falls trail (Ness); or the interwoven events, stories, and representations of Mexico’s Chichén Itzá at play in regional and national politics (Castañeda). Methodologically, however, contributors to this book share with Bruner a reflexive, experience-near approach to tourism ethnography, one grounded in careful, detailed fieldwork and attuned to inconsistencies, ambiguities, and resonances across diverse expressions of human meaning.

Throughout his writing on tourism—much of which is republished in his book of collected essays, Culture on Tour (2005a)—Bruner draws upon the theoretical grounding and ethnographic methods outlined above to reveal processes through which experience and meaning emerge and diverge among different populations at diverse sites and cultural performances: in Indonesia, Kenya, Israel, China, and the United States, on package tours and among independent travelers, with both domestic and international tourists. In addition to his widely influential emphasis on experience and emergent culture in moments of encounter, several of the primary concepts and preoccupations of contemporary tourism ethnography—authenticity, narrative, contested sites, the touristic borderzone, embodiment—either arose from or were substantially developed in his work. In the remainder of this section, we address each of these themes and concepts in turn. Two further concepts, identity and mobility, are covered in chapter 2 and so are not discussed here.
Authenticity

Authenticity has been a prominent theme in tourism studies for more than half a century (Leite and Graburn 2009; Wang 1999; Cohen 2007). This is in part because it is a perennial topic of discussion among tourists, guides, and heritage professionals, but also because it is the focus of long-standing theoretical debates in the field. Although the term has been defined in numerous ways and the theoretical and empirical questions raised vary widely, scholarly debate over authenticity can be grouped into three broad areas: tourist motivation and the tourism industry’s response; the effects of cultural commodification; and the inherently contextual and constructed nature of “authenticity” itself.

Early on, social scientists sparred over whether tourism was best analyzed as the pursuit of shallow entertainment or as a serious search for meaning. For Daniel Boorstin (1962), tourism offered the prototypical example of the modern era’s mindless consumption of pseudo-events—inauthentic, contrived experiences and attractions. For MacCannell (1973; 1976), it represented the opposite, a serious quest for something more authentic—pristine, untouched, “real”—that was available to Western tourists alienated from their rootless, mechanized middle-class life. MacCannell argues that the tourism industry is aware of the tourists’ desire and responds with staged authenticity, simulating original cultural products, performances, and interactions as if they are not performed for financial gain. The tourists, ever suspicious that what they are being shown is fake, are doomed to continue their search.

Many ethnographers have responded to these generalizations by showing that there is significant variation across types of tourists and destinations. Not all tourist attractions are contrived, not all tourists are alienated, and not all tourists seek authenticity (Cohen 1979a; 1988; Wang 1999). Indeed, some travelers, dubbed “post-tourists,” are said to take great delight in fakery, for example playfully embracing the tackiness and humor of the Las Vegas Strip with its overblown imitations of Venice and Paris (Feifer 1985; Urry 1990). Others simply hold different criteria for enjoyment and are perfectly satisfied with cultural performances that are not “traditional” but nevertheless offer “a good show” (E. Bruner 2001, 883; 2005b, 3). Still others seek a form of authenticity that lies neither in the destination nor the people visited, but in the social, emotional, and embodied experiences they hope to have along the way (Selwyn 1996, 21–25; Wang 1999; Harrison 2003; Conran 2006; Cohen 2007).

Authenticity also features in debates over the impact of cultural commodification (Cohen 1988). A common argument has it that when local lifeways are made into tourist attractions they lose their intrinsic meaning, becoming pale, inauthentic copies performed by exploited natives (e.g., Greenwood 1977). Yet ethnographic work has revealed that demand for packaged performances and visitable heritage may in fact serve to perpetuate traditional cultural knowledge, landscapes, and practices that would otherwise be lost (McKee 1977; Crick 1989; Azarya 2004). “Performing oneself” for tourists can also provide leverage for cultural recognition and political representation (Greenwood 1982; Hiwasaki 2000; Sylvain 2005). Particularly for participants in indigenous-owned and operated enterprises, the presence of an appreciative audience can foster pride in and identification with marginalized or even long-abandoned practices, while also generating economic and political benefits; in such cases, indigenous tourism workers and their tourist visitors may value the “authenticity” of what is on display equally (Bunten 2008; Bunten and Graburn 2018; Giraudo 2018).

Both of these debates stem from what Ning Wang (1999) calls an objectivist understanding of authenticity: a given cultural element or object is real or fake, preserved or lost. For at least one side of the debate or the other, or for the tourists they describe, “culture” is a shared cluster of practices, crafts, knowledge, folklore, and language whose elements are more or less authentic, more or less true to “tradition,” and open to verification as such by elders or scholars with sufficient expertise. In this view, there is a “genuine” culture somewhere, hidden or in danger of being lost entirely, and its self-conscious enactment for an audience suggests it has already been lost.

The intellectual upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s introduced an altogether different angle on the question of authenticity, one that Bruner wholeheartedly embraced and developed in his work. If, as social scientists in the constructivist tradition argue, culture is not static but always emergent in the enactment, then no single practice or performance can be more or less authentic than any other (Greenwood 1982; Cohen 1988; E. Bruner 1989c; 1996b; 2001; 2005b; Crick 1989; V. Adams 1996; K. Adams 1997). Hence authenticity itself is a social construction, a quality variably attributed or contested by specific actors, in response to specific situations, using specific criteria. As Bruner puts it,

For ethnographers, tourists, and indigenous peoples the question to ask is not if authenticity is inherent in an object, as if it were a thing out there to be uncovered or unearthed, but rather the question becomes, how authenticity is constructed. What is the process by which an ethnography, a tourist performance, or an item of culture or practice achieves an aura of being authentic? (E. Bruner 1989c, 113)

The immediate context is especially significant here. Noting that debates over the authenticity of objects, practices, or people arise only when someone or something has called their genuineness into question and claimed authority to
authenticate, Bruner suggests that “ethnographers may then ask what segment of society has raised a doubt, what is no longer taken for granted, what are the societal struggles, and what are the cultural issues at work” (1994, 408; see also M. Picard 2008; Cohen and Cohen 2012). This grounded approach informs his study of divergent ways that tourists, museum professionals, historians, staff, and volunteer interpreters engage with the past at the New Salem Historic Site, a reconstructed nineteenth-century village and outdoor museum that aims to present an “authentic reproduction” of life at the time of Abraham Lincoln (E. Bruner 1994). While all of these stakeholders may be concerned with historical “authenticity,” they understand that term—and consequently experience the site—in notably different ways.

By turning his attention to the empirical, ethnographic questions of when and why evaluations or claims of authenticity are made, by whom, according to what criteria, and with what broader repercussions, Bruner sidesteps the objectivist view of authenticity altogether, declaring it “a red herring” (2005b, 5). Instead, he and likeminded scholars propose that we view authenticity as “a struggle, a social process” (1994, 408; see also Gable and Handler 1996; Selwyn 1996, 18–28; Macdonald 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). This constructivist approach is taken up and extended in the present volume by Walter Little and Valerio Simoni, both of whom explore instances in which emergent understandings of authenticity are constituted via interactions between tourists and residents. In the book’s concluding chapter, Mary Mostafanezhad and Margaret Swain address diverse ways the debate has been furthered in recent decades by scholars in interdisciplinary tourism studies, particularly with regard to questions of representation, voice, and time.

Narrative

Bruner is strongly associated with the use of narrative as an object of ethnographic study, a methodological tool, and a form of ethnographic representation. In a 1986 book chapter titled “Ethnography as Narrative,” he noted that all ethnographies are “guided by an implicit narrative structure, by a story we tell about the peoples we study” (E. Bruner 1986b, 139). Drawing on examples from Native American studies, he emphasized that “narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete; . . . with each new telling the context varies, the audience differs, the story is modified” (1986b, 153). At the time, he had already been experimenting—as had several of his contemporaries—with a more explicit form of ethnographic storytelling: narrating a single event from fieldwork and using it as a focal point for analysis (e.g., E. Bruner 1973; Geertz 1973; Myerhoff 1978). His long-standing interest in stories and cultural narratives, particularly their partial, shifting, and often contested nature, informed and shaped his subsequent methodological focus on the role of narrative in the dynamic interplay of meaning and experience at tourist sites and in specific encounters (E. Bruner 1991; 2005b; 2005c; Harrison, this volume). Here, we briefly summarize three distinct ways that narratives—which he variously refers to as stories, tales, narrative, metanarratives, and master narratives—figure in his tourism ethnography, then address the methodological place of narrative in his work.

First, Bruner stresses that tourists anticipate, imagine, experience, and reflect on their travels through narrative—that is, through stories in the broadest sense. He distinguishes three types on the basis of their temporal position along “the touristic cycle”: pretour narratives, the preconceptions travelers hold about the destination and the experiences they envision having, based on stories they read and hear before embarking; ontour narratives, the stories tourists hear, read, and tell while en route, whether in interactions with guides, guidebooks, local people, or fellow tourists; and posttour narratives, the anecdotes and travelogues they share after returning home, including those recounted only to themselves in memory (E. Bruner 2005c; see also 2005b, 19–27). These three types are not temporally separate in terms of shaping the tourist’s experience: the pretour narrative inevitably colors what one notices and experiences during the tour, just as the experience of traveling may be shaped by anticipation of how the trip will be described to others in post-tour tellings.

Second, throughout his work Bruner has been attentive to how official narratives contribute to the meanings tourists and other stakeholders derive from a site, as well as how they become internalized as a result of the encounter. One especially instructive example is his analysis, written with Phyllis Gorfain, of the story of the mountaintop fortress of Masada in southern Israel (Bruner and Gorfain 1984). A famed tourist destination, the site is firmly associated with the AD 70 Jewish revolt against Roman rule, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem. According to the Masada legend, hundreds of Jewish fighters escaped to the fortress, where they managed to hold back Roman incursions for three years before committing mass suicide to avoid surrender. Bruner and Gorfain examine how this story has been told and retold in a variety of contexts, showing that its character and emphasis shift depending upon the teller’s perspective on historical and contemporary politics in the region: it can be a heroic story of Jewish resistance in a hostile land, or a cautionary tale of the folly of absolutism, isolationist choices. For the tourist, physical presence on the mountaintop is a crucial component of coming to identify with the meaning he or she draws from the legend—whether that be the authoritative, heroic version or the countermapping offered by the
political left. As Bruner and Gorfain explain, "We move through the story as we move through the site... We return not just with the story of Masada but rather with my experience of Masada... A historical narrative is transformed into a personal narrative as we gain the right to tell the story. The consequence is to align individual biography with tradition, to incorporate national stories within the self" (Bruner and Gorfain 1984, 72–73; see also E. Bruner 2005b, 24).

A third way that narratives figure in Bruner's ethnography is in the overarching narrative structures, or cultural "scripts," that give meaning to travelers' otherwise disparate, potentially confusing experiences (Leite 2014, 266; Picard, this volume). Bruner illustrates this narrative structuring with a moment from his fieldwork as a guide. One rainy day, he took a small American tour group down a river in Thailand in an open boat. For protection they were accompanied by a Thai guard, who sat in the back holding a rifle. As the rain poured down, "the tourists were visibly nervous and somewhat disoriented until one said, 'This is like the movies about the Vietnam War along the Mekong [River].' The statement became the frame for the rest of the journey, for with that guiding narrative the tourists were transformed into American soldiers scanning the river bank for Vietcong" (2005b, 20). The tourist's invocation of a familiar storyline enabled participants to change their response to the ominous guard and the miserable weather, transporting them into a landscape of intrigue and playfully imagined danger.

Not all structuring narratives are so explicitly invoked. Bruner also highlights the generalized metanarratives about travel that shape one's vision of the journey, offering generic storylines like embarking on a voyage of discovery, time travel, a pilgrimage, or even the outdated vision of an anthropological quest for the vanishing primitive. Other narratives are more tethered to specific destinations. These draw on a combination of metanarratives and what Bruner terms master narratives (Hawaii as tropical paradise; Peru as land of the ancient Incas), the kind that circulate in tourism marketing, travel brochures, films, popular culture, and other media, motivating tourists and shaping their visions of what they will find (E. Bruner 1991; 2005b; see also K. Adams 1984; Selwyn 1996; Skinner and Theodoropoulos 2011; Salazar and Graburn 2014). As a result, a tourist's experience of the destination will have as much to do with overarching preoccupations and desires in his or her own society as with the site itself. Nonetheless, as a constructivist Bruner emphasizes that preexisting narratives do not determine the significance each individual will find in a destination (see Ness, this volume): meanings are always shaped by a unique confluence of factors, including prior life experiences, expectations, mood, weather, the people present, group dynamics, current events, chance interactions, and so on.

Although these terms—narrative, master narrative, metanarrative—also appear in other theoretical traditions, such as poststructuralist theories of text and discourse, Bruner's approach differs in three fundamental ways. First, he shows how narratives operate in specific cultural settings, drawing on the tools of ethnography, rather than invoking or analyzing them in the abstract as fixed texts. Second, and following from the first, Bruner's approach to narrative prioritizes the act of narration—that is, of storytelling, whether verbally or implicitly—in particular contexts, thickly described. Third, his primary interest in narratives is how they influence individual consciousness and, therefore, lived experience. In other words, for Bruner the formation, transmission, and contingent meanings of narratives are all objects of ethnographic description and analysis.16

Narrative also plays a role in Bruner's research methodology. In his fieldwork, he gathered stories told to him by multiple stakeholders in the tourist production—before, during, and after the encounter—in order to capture their diverse points of view (see Harrison and Ness, both in this volume). Believing that experiences and their expressions continuously shape each other, he argued that ethnographers should view narrative not just as a means by which people make sense of their own lives, but as essential fodder for understanding that sense-making anthropologically:

One can never know directly what another individual is experiencing, although we all interpret clues and make inferences about the experiences of others... As anthropologists, our first responsibility is to respect people's accounts of their experiences as they choose to present them. We may not necessarily accept their claims or representations, but we had better understand them. (E. Bruner 1984a, 7–9)

It is no doubt for this reason that Bruner also makes liberal use of stories in his ethnographic writing, not only as data for analysis, but as a means of conveying and illustrating his arguments. And, like other humanistic-interpretive ethnographers, he also recounts stories of other people's storytelling as a means of deepening his readers' understanding.

Every chapter in this volume grapples with narrative in one way or another. Four are especially noteworthy for their extended engagement with Bruner's writing on the topic. In his chapter, David Picard explores ways that local people draw upon master narratives of self, other, power, and (spirit) possession to make sense of their interactions with diverse groups of foreigners—not only tourists, but also Catholic priests, doctors, and conservation scientists. Addressing a very different kind of narrative, Castañeda's contribution examines how layer upon layer of stories told in and about a world-famous tourist site point outward, speaking not only to a tourist audience but to participants...
in political and ideological conflicts extending well beyond the site. Harrison and Ness, too, explicitly engage Bruner’s work on narrative, zeroing in on his use of stories in ethnographic research, analysis, and writing. Harrison narrates her personal intellectual trajectory in dialogue with Bruner’s, addressing the ways in which stories have been at the center of both his and her own research and writing; for Ness, the narrative of her own experience of a single day’s hike provides both the ethnographic material and the structuring trope of her argument, bringing the reader with her through the very meaning-making processes she describes.

Contested Sites

Narrative, experience, and emergent meaning also take center stage in Bruner’s approach to tourist destinations as contested sites. For Bruner, there will always be multiple, often conflicting interpretations of a site, based on divergent values and interests both within and across different groups of stakeholders (E. Bruner 2005b). His analyses of Masada, Elmina Castle, Lincoln’s New Salem, and Kenya’s Mayers Ranch, for example, show how local and national officials, scholars, staff, and various populations of tourists and residents bring different narratives to bear in making sense of the site and determining the stakes of their engagement with it. Whether the narratives involved are specific to the location—as in competing representations of life at New Salem or opposing political interpretations of the Masada legend—or more general, as in the master narratives about slavery and postcolonial history in play at Elmina Castle, these points of contestation are never solely about the site itself. As Bruner puts it, “it is precisely in the struggle over meaning in historic sites, museums, and tourist attractions that the diverse segments of a democratic society are able to express their interests and stake their claims” (1993b, 23–24). Moreover, as he points out, the process through which one interpretation achieves authoritative status over others has much to do with political and economic power dynamics.

As Castañeda (this volume) observes, Bruner’s emphasis on tourist sites as inherently emergent and multiple, in the sense of being interpreted and experienced differently by a wide range of actors, was a major contribution to the ethnographic study of tourism. Understanding that conflicts in meaning are natural, intrinsic, and inevitable enabled him to focus on the diverse factors generating different meanings for different audiences, without needing to assert that there was or was not culture loss involved or that one interpretation of the site was more valid or accurate than any other. Equally important was his recognition that seemingly site-specific conflicts—from debates over the content of explanatory texts and who should have the right to tell the story, to disagreements about appropriate activities in a given heritage site and what kind of historical restoration, if any, should be done—are often skirmishes in far larger political and social struggles.

Bruner’s distinction between soft and hard contestation is particularly useful in this regard. It designates Lincoln’s New Salem as an example of soft contestation, a conflict “not in the sense of a grand political conflict between colonial powers and the colonized, or between state power and the revolutionaries,” but instead “a soft struggle over meaning between the ‘official’ interpretation of the site and how that official view is undermined by the processes of its own production” (1993b, 14–15). Masada, on the other hand, he deems an example of hard contestation, because the meanings at stake have direct geopolitical consequences: “People fought and died over control of the physical Masada, and they are fighting and dying today for what Masada means. . . . The past merges with the present and time frames become blurred as the question is posed, then and now: Should the Jews fight or accommodate?” (2005b, 10–12; Bruner and Gorfain 1984). While the precise terms in which it is invoked have changed since Bruner studied the site—Masada has shifted, perhaps, to a softer form of contestation—more recent ethnographers report that for professional guides it continues to present complicated, politically charged terrain (Kelner 2010, 62–64; Feldman 2016, 145–46).

Bruner’s concept of contested sites has broad applicability. Although he applied it only to analyses of neatly bounded historical destinations, all of them clearly demarcated as tourist attractions, with professional staff, explanatory placards, and at least some degree of authoritative narrative framing, other ethnographers have taken a similar approach in a heterogeneous array of sites. Some, for example, have examined how amateur walking-tour guides of contrasting political persuasions construct entirely distinct experiences of a city through their choice of routes, the stories they tell, and the types of tourists they attract (Dahles 1996; Clarke 2000; Santos 2017). Others look more closely at the dynamic coproduction of the destination through interactions between guides or local people and tourists, emphasizing encounters where competing and suppressed narratives are in play (Tucker 1997; Chronis 2005; 2012; Leite 2007; Santos 2012).

Contributors to this volume enable us to extend the concept of contested sites further still. Kathleen Adams’s chapter, for example, follows different generations of Toraja migrants on return visits to their homeland, exploring the physical and emotional “disconnects” they experience in relation to their evolving sense of identity and belonging. Here the visit itself is a contested site, with struggles over meaning arising between visitors of different generations, between migrant-tourists and their local kin, and between the travelers’ anticipated and actual experiences of the encounter. Castañeda’s chapter
takes the idea of contested sites in yet another direction, looking beyond
struggles over the meanings of Chichén Itzá to examine diverse ways the site
has been mobilized in a range of conflicts involving and extending beyond its
geographical borders. Finally, in their concluding chapter Mostafanezhad and
Swain expand the discussion to include approaches from human geography
and interdisciplinary tourism studies.

The Touristic Borderzone

Perhaps Bruner’s most influential contribution to the ethnography of tourism
is his concept of the touristic borderzone. Building on his earlier work on
intercultural encounters, he developed the term in reference to the culturally
constituted space in which local people—as performers, craft sellers, and the
like—come into contact with tourists, not haphazardly, but “in structured ways
in predetermined localities for defined periods of time” (E. Bruner 2005b, 17;
1996b; also Adams, chapter 2, this volume). Less a physical location than a
context of encounter, the borderzone is best understood, in Bruner’s words,
as “a point of conjuncture, a behavioral field [conceived] in spatial terms”
(2005b, 17).

The concept has three essential characteristics. First, the parties who inter-
act in this behavioral field engage with it in very different ways. For tourists
the borderzone is a realm of leisure, but for locals it is a place of work. Moreo-
ver, while each group moves in and out of the borderzone—“the tourists
who come forth from their hotels, and the local performers, the ‘natives,’ who
leave their homes to engage the tourists” (2005b, 17)—they are not equally
mobile. The resident population stays anchored in place, witnessing “a recur-
ing wave of travelers” passing through, whereas individual tourists are pres-
ent only for a brief period, typically never to return (1996b, 158). Second, as
a field of interaction centering around cultural representation, the borderzone
is “a creative space, a site for the invention of culture on a massive scale,”
and therefore worthy of careful study (1996b, 159). Third, as with all touristic
encounters, even the most scripted performances in the borderzone generate
manifold meanings for diverse participants. Thus, in Bruner’s work the bor-
derzone is the temporal and behavioral space within which the tourist produc-
tion takes place. Marked off from everyday life for both the tourists and the
local people, it constitutes a distinct unit of activity for all involved, at least
in the types of contexts Bruner studied—Maasai performances in Kenya, Bal-
inese and Javanese dance dramas in Indonesia, and African-American tourist
visits to Elmina Castle, among others. By definition fleeting, the borderzone
in this view is the primary setting in which tourists, local residents, and the
destination itself come together in the coproduction of meaning.

Subsequent ethnographers have extended the concept of the borderzone to
address a broader array of contexts. For some, Bruner’s claim that “natives
have to break out of their normal routines to meet the tourists” in the border-
zone (1996b, 158) misses the extent to which tourism has become enmeshed
in everyday life for residents of destinations worldwide. As Little puts it in his
(2004) study of Maya handicraft vendors in Guatemala, “in [the city of] Ant-
igua the normal routine of local people is tourism,” and the entire city may
be seen as a borderzone of touristic engagement (2004, 87–88). Simoni (this
volume) takes the concept in a different direction, examining the complex
interplay between Cubans’ long-term aspirations and their pursuit of informal
encounters with tourists. Here the borderzone is indeed a distinct behavioral
realm, but an unstructured one, rife with ambiguity, that contains within it the
seeds to its transcendence: these locals and their foreign visitors sometimes
form romantic relationships that both parties hope will exceed the limits of
the borderzone and persist into a different life together. Picard (this volume),
also explores how local residents engage with the borderzone for purposes
that go well beyond the tourist encounter, in this case by using hospitality
to appropriate foreigners’ presumed power for their own self-empowerment
in other domains. Further discussion of the borderzone—its origins, applica-
tions, and similarities to approaches developed by ethnographers in other
disciplinary traditions—can be found in the chapters by Graburn and Leite
by Adams, and by Mostafanezhad and Swain.

Embodiment

In the 1990s ethnographers began to grapple with the role of the body in
the tourist experience (e.g., Edensor 1998; Frey 1998). Previously, sight
had been taken to be the most significant sense involved—as the term sight-
seeing suggests—and with it an implicitly male gaze (Leite and Graburn 2009
42). Overviews of the anthropology of tourism often point to Soile Veijola
and Eeva Jokinen’s “The Body in Tourism” (1994) as a turning point, as it
was the first publication to systematically demonstrate the absence of the
body from major works in the field and to argue for an experiential, multi-
sensory approach to touristic encounter. While the essay certainly paved
the way for a new trajectory of scholarship on the embodied tourist body and
the importance of senses other than sight, it neglected a more subtle form
of embodiment already at the heart of Bruner’s work: the central role of the
tourist’s physical presence at the destination, or what he describes as “the
sheer materiality of being there” (2005b, 24), in moving beyond the pretouri
narrative and into lived experience. As we saw in his analysis of Masada
for Bruner it is by moving through a site, experiencing it with all the senses,
that the tourist comes to incorporate its meanings into his or her individual biography.

This concept of embodied encounter must not be mistaken as a simply physical phenomenon of seeing the site in person, as opposed to in a photograph or on a website. At Masada, for example, many tourists choose to make the exhausting two-hour trek up the winding path to the mountain's summit before touring the fortress site and imagining the siege. Here, “the physical exertion maximizes the experience” (Bruner and Gorfain 1984, 73). Similarly, writing of tourist encounters with the slave dungeons at Elmina Castle, Bruner details the smells and sounds, the touch of surfaces, even the bodily positions visitors are placed in as they move through spaces where earlier generations suffered so terribly (1996a; 2005b, 25). In this way, he shows how tourism’s fleeting, ever-shifting conjuncture of bodies, narratives, imagination, and emotion serves “to inscribe the pretour narrative within the body of tourism” (2005b, 24; see also Crouch and Desforges 2003). It is precisely this sensory intensity that makes journeys to long-imagined, narrative-saturated sites so potent for tourists seeking connection to a particular historical event, a generalized past, or their own roots (Bruner and Gorfain 1984; E. Bruner 1993b; 1996a; 2005b; 2011; Leite 2005; Adams, chapter 7, this volume).

In their contributions to this book, Adams (chapter 7) and Ness each transport the concept of embodiment to a new environment and extend its analytical reach. Adams examines the “somatic dimension” of return visits to the Toraja homeland, where migrants and their families find that visceral responses to the tastes, sights, smells, and physical conditions of the visit reveal generational and cultural rifts within the traveling group. For Ness, at stake is her own bodily movement up an extremely challenging hiking trail. She describes an alternative, skeleto-muscular form of knowledge generated by the trek, made possible through the connected corporeality of herself and Yosemite Valley. The experience provides a constructivist case study in which meaning emerges not from the convergence of narrative and physical presence, but instead in her prelinguistic bodily and emotional encounter with the material demands of the landscape. This is embodiment at its most elemental, and it throws into sharp relief the validity of Bruner’s assertion that tourist sites are themselves active agents in the construction of meaning (2005b, 25–26).

Our aim in this exploration of key themes and concepts in the ethnography of tourism, viewed through the lens of Bruner’s work, has been to shed light both on the intellectual history of the field and on Bruner’s role in its evolution. While it can be difficult to trace the origins of ideas and their subsequent trajectories of influence, the theoretical and methodological approaches to tourism outlined here—as encounter, as experience, and as emergent culture—clearly underpin a wide swath of scholarship in tourism ethnography today. Moreover, the continuing currency of both constructivism (particularly in regard to authenticity) and the concepts of narrative, contested sites, the borderzone, and embodiment suggests that the theoretical agenda laid down by interpretive-humanistic anthropologists like Bruner in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s continues to inspire scholarship in the present. Importantly, the concepts and approaches discussed here have evolved through the contributions of a great many thinkers, not all of them Bruner’s collaborators, and as the afterword to this volume shows, they are continuously challenged, debated, and advanced across diverse disciplines. There can be no last word here, any more than there can be a single origin to enduring ideas.

BRUNER . . . AND BEYOND

No scholar or school of thought is beyond intellectual critique. While inarguably groundbreaking, Bruner’s approach to tourism does have its limitations. In this regard, each contributing author to this volume delineates, responds to, and builds upon specific aspects of Bruner’s work. In so doing, they provide critical commentary on his conceptual and methodological frameworks and highlight dimensions left underdeveloped. In this final section, we briefly review some of the critiques that have been leveled at Bruner’s contributions overall. We then turn to an overview of this volume, outlining the material addressed and, where appropriate, queries and challenges raised by each chapter.

Critical Assessments

A common critique of Bruner’s approach is that it affords only limited attention to political and economic forces that have shaped and structured tourist destinations. From the perspective of twenty-first-century anthropology and critical tourism studies, this is a shortcoming; there is no particular reason why a humanistic interest in meaning and experience should preclude systematic analysis of power dynamics, politics, and structural inequalities related to race, class, sexuality, and gender. Although Bruner’s ethnographic work provides ample insights into experiential and discursive conflicts over representation, authority, meaning, identity, and belonging, and although he was certainly attuned to asymmetrical power relations involving race, class, gender, and so forth, more often than not these dynamics serve as contextual framings for his primary interests: lived experience, subjective meaning,
embodied engagement, and the creativity of human expression in tourism’s borderzones. To make an analogy, we might say that had he written about dance, he would have focused primarily on just one performance or a series of performances, emphasizing the dancer’s embodied experience and the feelings and meanings generated among the audience, and making reference to social histories and broader systems of representation that inform them. He would not have offered a critical history of the dance form or an analysis of the political economy of dance as a profession or an exploration of racial or gendered barriers to participation.

Long before he turned to tourism, Bruner argued that ethnographers interested in experience and meaning should ground their research in specific instances of expressive culture—narratives, dances, dramas, rituals—because these were themselves a form of indigenous commentary: not only are they “people’s articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experience,” but they “leave the definition of the unit of investigation up to the people, rather than imposing categories derived from our own ever-shifting theoretical frames” (1986c, 9). It is in such expressions, he suggested, that a population’s presuppositions and core values will be most apparent. As he later explained in relation to tourism, “A key advantage of studying a specific attraction in a single place is that the researcher can examine local and world politics ethnographically as they manifest themselves in the site, as opposed to resorting to facile overgeneralizations” (2005b, 12–13, emphasis added). The extent to which his work engages such local and world politics is debatable, a point he has made himself (2005b, 13); indeed, a primary focus on expressive forms can leave the ethnographer prone to downplaying or even overlooking the significance of structural questions of power and inequality, particularly if they are not explicitly or implicitly highlighted by participants.

In short, Bruner’s primary ethnographic focus in studying tourism has been the “tourist production”—that is, the performance itself, both literally and in the anthropological sense of the socially situated enactment that constitutes all culture and meaning (Turner 1986; E. Bruner 2005b). Moreover, in much (though not all) of his work, the data arose from his travels as an anthropologist embedded within an organized tour group or as an independent traveler at tourist destinations. Thus, while we are given rich portraits of tourists’ and guides’ perspectives, we learn less about the ongoing quotidian, political-economic, and structural challenges facing people living in and around tourism destinations. In addition, the various meanings of these tourist productions are conveyed largely through brief yet memorable descriptions of places, interactions, and events, with only limited discussion of specific people. We lack the fleshed-out, ethnographically “thick” characterizations of participants and their lives that would convey more thoroughly the situatedness of their understandings and experiences. Hence, even as Bruner’s body of work provides a persuasive argument for a deeply humanistic, interpretive, and experiential ethnography of tourism encounters, it does not offer a full-fledged example of what his approach could accomplish via long-term ethnographic fieldwork. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that his turn to tourism research came relatively late in his career, at a point when most anthropologists are no longer embarking on new ethnographic projects; Culture on Tour is, after all, a collection of mostly previously published, stand-alone articles based on brief research trips.

An additional result of Bruner’s short-term fieldwork and narrow analytical aperture is that they do not permit him to trace concrete outcomes of the interactions and performances he observes, whether in individual lives or collectively for the various groups involved. Processual analysis, the exploration of cultural phenomena as they transpire moment by moment, can be extraordinarily powerful for understanding precise interactions and performances, but it does not easily translate to capturing long-term change. What practical consequences follow from the meanings tourists derive from a visit to Lincoln’s New Salem (E. Bruner 1993b; 1994)? What conclusions do Maasai young men who perform for tourists as warriors (E. Bruner 2001) draw about their own life possibilities, and how does that relate to future choices?

Bruner hints at the possibility of lasting change, but does not address the processes through which embodied experiences and subjective meanings might give rise to something new. Given the fleeting nature of tourism interactions, to answer this question the ethnographer must move beyond the immediate setting—the borderzone of encounter—to follow the arc of individual lives as affected by broader political and social forces in which tourism is enmeshed (see, e.g., Brennan 2004; K. Adams 2006; D. Picard 2011; Lehrer 2013; Simoni 2016b; Leite 2017; Meiu 2017). This is true of studying tourists and guides as it is for research on local people. While Bruner does advocate exploring how tourists integrate their experiences into their lives at home—for example, by attending tourist group reunions and listening to tourist recollections prompted by their photos (2005b, 26–27)—these are more programmatic suggestions than they are thoroughly incorporated elements of his ethnographic research, and they have been more effectively pursued by others working in a similarly humanistic vein (e.g., Frey 1998; Harrison 2003; 2013; Louie 2004; Kelner 2010).

Finally, scholars have questioned Bruner’s pithy generalizations about tourism, many of which are interpreted in a more sweeping sense than he evidently intended. His oft-quoted statements that “the tourist self is changed very little by the tour” (1991, 242), that tourists “really do not want an ethnographic perspective” and are not concerned with authenticity but will happily
accept “a good show” (2005b, 2–6), and that “the natives have to break out of their normal routines to meet the tourists” in the borderzone (1996b, 158) have all been tested by ethnographers, including contributors to this book, in a range of tourism environments. Not surprisingly, his general findings about authenticity, identity, and the borderzone have been critiqued for their grounding in the narrow forms of tourism encounter he studied: upscale package tours bringing wealthy American and European travelers into contact with “native” performers, and domestic tourist visits to heritage sites. This is, however, a limitation he has openly acknowledged (2005b, 258n8).

It may be useful here to recall a disciplinary mantra common in the anthropology of the 1980s and 1990s: all ethnographic knowledge is partial. It is partial in the sense of being subject to the politics and dynamics of the era in which it was conducted, as well as to the particular interests and identity of the ethnographer. It is also partial in terms of being incomplete, regardless of how comprehensive an ethnographer aims to be. This partiality and perspectival specificity are both a strength and a weakness. Thus we can identify limits to Bruner’s approach when it comes to rigorous analysis of the workings of power, politics, and history, as well as his method of situating himself primarily among tourists and, in most cases, only briefly among performers and other local residents, curtailing his full immersion in several of the destinations he studied (see, e.g., E. Bruner 1993b; 1994; 1996a; 2001). Yet we can also identify opportunities afforded by his emphasis on the specific, the immediate, the local, the felt, and the intertwining of narrative, experience, emotion, and subjective meaning: these are aspects of human social life that are difficult to grasp from a primary focus on power, politics, and history. Because it begins with fine-grained attention to specific moments of encounter and an empathetic engagement with diverse participants’ experiences, Bruner’s work stands as an influential model for how anthropologists and other qualitative social scientists can address tourism as a rich field of cultural production in the contemporary world.

This Volume: An Itinerary

This book has two tasks, one general, the other specific. First, at the most general level, the volume offers an in-depth exploration of key concepts, theoretical debates, and methodological concerns that characterize a major strand of ethnographic tourism research today: the experience-near, interpretive-humanistic approach widely associated with Bruner’s body of work. Second, individually and collectively, the chapters in this volume—each written purposefully for inclusion here—provide a rigorous assessment of how these concepts and theories take shape specifically in Bruner’s oeuvre, how they relate to broader trends in tourism ethnography, and how they can be challenged and extended through analysis of the authors’ own original ethnographic material. To assist the reader in using the book as a resource, each chapter carries one or more keywords highlighting its relevance to broader topics and approaches in tourism studies.

The volume is divided into five parts. Part I, “Orientation,” contains this introductory chapter. Part II, “Points of Departure,” situates Bruner’s tourism work in relation to his larger intellectual career and to anthropology as a whole. Chapter 1, “Always in Process: Edward Bruner, American Anthropology, and the Study of Tourism” (keyword: Formation), examines Bruner’s stature as both a pioneer and a product of broader anthropological trends that ultimately paved the way for ethnographic tourism studies. Written by Nelson Graburn and Naomi Leite, the chapter tracks how Bruner’s graduate training at the University of Chicago in the 1950s, his early research on social change and individual creativity, and his subsequent engagement with performance theory and lived experience together paved the way for his eventual turn to tourism research. In particular, Graburn and Leite identify antecedents and elaborations of themes that appear throughout Bruner’s work and widely in the ethnographic tourism literature—among them the arrangement of tourism social space, the cultural and contextual basis of meaning, and the centrality of narrative and imagination in shaping tourist experience.

With chapter 2, “On the Emergence of Identity and Borderzones as Key Concepts” (Genealogies), Kathleen Adams traces the continual interplay of three major foci in Bruner’s work since the 1950s: mobility and migration, cultural encounters, and social identity. While each of these foci is a classic topic in anthropology, Adams demonstrates that Bruner’s late-career emphasis on identity dynamics in the touristic borderzone is a direct outgrowth of his earlier work on the mutual entanglement of identity, mobility, and intergroup encounters. In turn, she suggests, this intellectual genealogy can be traced through subsequent generations of scholars, whose work takes the interplay of these three foci into new subject areas within the broad arena of the ethnography of tourism.

Considerations of influence continue in Julia Harrison’s chapter 3, “So in Effect I Was Studying Myself” (Influence). In tracing her own story of entering and pursuing field research on tourism, Harrison sketches how anthropology as a whole was shaken by the intellectual upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s, with Bruner a leading participant. She emphasizes the importance of narrative—the stories people tell one another, the stories they recount to anthropologists, and the stories anthropologists tell to and about them—for ethnographic research, interpretation, and representation. She concludes that Bruner’s work directly and indirectly gave rise
to themes that now resonate throughout the anthropological ethnography of tourism: the essential distinction between reality “as lived, as experienced, and as told” (E. Bruner 2005b, 19); the role of emotion and affect in shaping tourists’ experiences and their subsequent memories of travel; and the analytical importance of reflexivity about the anthropologist’s role—both personal and professional—in the tourist encounter.

The book’s third part, “Explorations: Concepts and Debates,” contains chapters centering on theoretical concepts and approaches that lie at the heart of Bruner’s contributions to tourism research. In chapter 4, “Whatever We Weave Is Authentic: Coproducing Authenticity in Guatemalan Tourism Textile Markets” (Authenticity), Walter Little revisits the perennial debate over authenticity in tourism studies, including Bruner’s contributions, and turns the question of whether tourists are seeking “authenticity” on its head. He approaches the problem not from the perspective of tourist consumers, nor that of local producers who create “staged authenticity,” but instead via an analysis of the mutual engagement of makers of tourist arts and those who buy them in negotiating very different ideas of what the term authenticity means. His closely observed, extended accounts of interactions between tourists and Maya textile weavers offer a tantalizing glimpse of the coproduction of authenticity, as he documents how cross-cultural dialogue gradually shifts participants’ understandings of what constitutes an “authentic Maya weaving.”

Valerio Simoni’s chapter 5, “Living in and Reaching beyond the Touristic Borderzone: A View from Cuba” (Borderzone), illustrates how Bruner’s concept has helped to turn ethnographic work on tourism away from the static hosts-and-guests framework to an approach that foregrounds tensions between discourses, narratives, and imaginaries at work in the encounter. Drawing on his long-term research on interactions between foreign tourists and Cubans in Havana and beyond, Simoni argues for greater attention to linkages between touristic borderzones and other realms of sociocultural creativity, (im)mobility, and personal aspirations. As he demonstrates, for some of his Cuban interlocutors the touristic borderzone is not at all separate from the “everyday life” they return to at the end of the day, as Bruner would have it, but rather provides a more valued social space to which they direct their energies and in which they prefer to dwell. Indeed, via their interactions with tourists, the borderzone offers them possibilities for self-reinvention and even the promise of a much-desired new everyday—to be achieved by the transformation of their interactions in the borderzone from “performance time” to “real life.”

With chapter 6, “I Can Feel Them Now, Even as I Write: Hiking Yosemite Falls with the Emergent Subjects of Tourism” (Constructivism), Sally Ness shifts the focus from key concepts to the overall theoretical underpinnings of Bruner’s work. Given his central preoccupation with how meaning is made and worlds created in touristic environments, she asks: What are the constituent elements of Bruner’s hallmark brand of constructivism, and what is its relationship to phenomenological, social-constructionist, and semiotic perspectives on experience and meaning-making? Taking seriously the idea that the ethnographer’s own experiences can be a rich data source, she approaches this question through an auto-ethnicographic account of how her consciousness of self and surroundings shifted while hiking an arduous trail in California’s Yosemite National Park. Using her narrative as both scaffolding and substance for analysis, she examines classic social constructionism’s opposition between first-world (material, environmental, precognitive) and second-world (cultural, linguistic, conceptual) realities, arguing that her experience on the trail suggests that the two may not be as separate as they seem. This, she contends, aligns neatly with Bruner’s “pragmatic constructionism,” as she calls it, because the latter emphasizes an embodied, phenomenological, always-emergent basis for meaning, one that is not determined by language but rooted in embodied and emotional aspects of any given encounter.

Part IV, “Further Afield: New Departures,” presents chapters combining multiple themes introduced earlier in the volume and extending them in novel directions. Building upon the work of Bruner and others in the interpretive-humanistic ethnography of tourism, as well as a wide range of scholars in other traditions, they demonstrate myriad ways that tourism is embedded in and contributes to a vast range of domains of human activity—economic, political, emotional, spiritual, and more. Chapter 7, Kathleen Adams’s “Being a Tourist in My Own Home: Negotiating Identity between Tourism and Migration in Indonesia” (Identity, Mobility, Embodiment), draws inspiration from Bruner’s explorations of Batak urban migrants’ use of their cultural pavilion at Jakarta’s Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park (Taman Mini) to connect with aspects of their own identity. Turning her lens to Indonesian migrants returning to their homeland for visits and vacations, Adams problematizes the classic divides between such categories as returning migrant and tourist, kin-visitor and (part-time) resident. She foregrounds visitors’ embodied experiences, as well as the ambivalence, attraction, and revulsion many experience, while embedding her analysis in broader economic and political issues (among them, how homeland tourists’ class and rank shape their experiences, as well as the role of government campaigns to harness returning migrant visits for political-economic gain). Adams’s chapter thus connects with and extends Bruner’s concepts of heritage tourism, identity, embodiment, mobility, and contested sites, integrating them into broader realms of political, economic, and social significance.
In chapter 8, “Beyond Dialogue: Hospitality and the Transformation of Self in Southwestern Madagascar” (The Self, Narrative, Borderzone), David Picard turns our attention back to the creative potential of encounters in the borderzone, here in light of Bruner’s abiding interest in self-formation as a dialogical process. Picard’s ethnographic focus is a Madagascar fishing village, where interactions with foreigners—tourists, missionaries, medics, conservation scientists, even spirits—are embedded in local strategies of hospitality as a source of individual and collective empowerment and well-being. Through cases of local figures whose interactions with foreigners have proved transformational, he shows that each individual understood these outsiders within the framework of master narratives of self and other, in which social relations with spirits, the transmission of qualities and substances, and the containment and channeling of power are brought to the fore. Thus Bruner’s concepts of overarching narratives, constructivism, the emergent and dialogical self, and the borderzone are, in Picard’s chapter, fruitfully brought into an exploration of local engagements with and experiences of witchcraft, religion, diagnosis and healing, and, above all, socioeconomic change.

The final chapter in this part, Quetzil Castañeda’s “Ideologies at War” at Chichén Itzá: An Ethnography of a Tourism Destination” (Contested Sites, Identity, Stories), revisits Bruner’s notion of contested sites to question its distinctiveness. Noting that a variety of other approaches to the study of place and space emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, all equally pertinent to contestation over meaning, Castañeda builds on and yet departs from and radicalizes Bruner’s analytical framework of Bakhtinian dialogism, performance, and storytelling in an analysis of the site of Chichén Itzá. He recounts a series of episodes that demonstrate the interweaving of economic meanings and cultural values ascribed to Chichén—as highlighted in events relating to the main pyramid’s selection for a new list of Seven Wonders of the World, the site’s expropriation by the state government of Yucatán, and “invasions” of the site by New Agers, handicraft vendors, and even Subcomandante Marcos—and shows that local identities, political-economic relations, and the stories we tell about people and place are inevitably mutually constitutive. In the process, he identifies and highlights contrasting elements between Bruner’s approach and his own.

Finally, part V, “Homecomings and Future Directions,” addresses the social history and possible future contours of the ethnography of tourism, as well as Bruner’s own intellectual history. Chapter 10, “Taking Tourism Seriously,” presents a lively interview with Bruner, edited and with commentary by Michael Di Giovine. This is followed in chapter 11, “Reflections” with a brief response to this volume by Bruner himself. The book concludes with an afterword by Mary Mostafanezhad and Margaret Byrne Swain. Their chapter, “Beyond Anthropology: Ethnography in Tourism Studies,” examines how Bruner’s concepts and methods—and, more broadly, those of the anthropological ethnography of tourism—have been taken up, challenged, critiqued, and extended by scholars far outside the bounds of anthropology as an academic discipline.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Graburn (1983a); Crick (1989); Stross (2001); Jamal and Robinson (2009); Leite and Graburn (2009); Stash (2017); Simoni (forthcoming).

2. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. By the 1950s, a growing number of anthropologists had begun to examine the interplay of local, regional, and international forces in shaping life for the people studied, including colonialism, industrialization, and labor migration. For an early, influential example, see Gluckman (1940).

3. Van den Berghe presented his lecture in one installment of a faculty seminar on tourism and ethnicity sponsored by the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. Many of the papers from the seminar were subsequently published in a special issue of Annals of Tourism Research (van den Berghe and Keyes 1984). For more on the seminar, see K. Adams (2016). For detailed first-person accounts of this early generation’s entry into tourism ethnography, including one contributed by van den Berghe, see Nash (2007).

4. For further examples of ethnographic essays and programmatic statements on the anthropology of tourism from the 1970s and 1980s, see Graburn (1976; 1983a; 1983b); Nash (1981); Crick (1989).

5. Another chapter in the volume focuses on tourist–toured encounters (Loeb 1977), but it is based primarily on observations in markets where the ethnographer was already doing long-term research with the local population.

6. In a related strategy, for his research on Japanese tourists Graburn (1983a) built on background knowledge gleaned during repeated visits to and leisure travel alongside his wife’s extended family in Japan (see Nash 2007, 103).

7. It is important to note that there is more than one mode of reflexivity in anthropology. The term encompasses a range of meanings, from an approach to collecting data in fieldwork to a framework for analyzing ethnographic evidence, a style of ethnographic writing, and a principle by which to formulate research problems (Castañeda 2008). For a reflexive exploration of the relationship between practices of note-taking in the field, the resulting corpus known as field notes, and the published ethnographic text, see Sanjek (1990).

9. Of course, Bruner's approach to the anthropology of tourism was not the only one on offer, and from the 1990s to the present anthropological ethnographers of tourism have worked in a wide range of other theoretical and methodological traditions. For example, applied, development, and environmental approaches have proliferated, but are not discussed here as they address a different set of issues. For overviews, see Nash (1996); Stronza (2001); Wallace (2005); and Chambers (2009).

10. At the time, theoretical factionalism was raging in anthropology, primarily between neopositivists (environmental determinists, including sociobiologists) and more humanistic scholars (interpretive and symbolic anthropologists). Bruner and Judith Becker neatly summarized the latter perspective at the time: "It is this domain of expressive culture, the domain par excellence of creativity and imagination, that is most revealing about the essence of society. It is in the realm of pure fantasy rather than in the ecologically determined that one can penetrate most deeply into the life of a people" (Bruner and Becker 1979, 9).


12. This constructivist approach to the variable meaning and experience of sites has been taken up by a number of scholars and applied to considerably more complex cases of narrative, embodiment, and experience in historical sites, including those where the destination is characterized by absence. See, e.g., DeLyser (2001); Chronis (2005; 2012); and Leite (2007).

13. For discussions of the concept of encounter in interdisciplinary tourism studies, see Crouch (1999); Crouch, Aronsson, and Wahlström (2001); Gibson (2010); and Mostafanezhad and Hannam (2014, 6).

14. A particularly clear example of this approach is "Tourism in the Balinese Borderzone" (1996b), Bruner's multilayered exploration of crosscutting expectations, interests, and understandings generated in an unforgettable incident involving an American package tour group, Balinese dance performers, a fellow anthropologist, and Bruner himself as tour guide.

15. For further discussion of ethnographic methods in anthropological research on tourism, see Graburn (2002); Frohlick and Harrison (2008); Simon and McCabe (2008); K. Adams (2012); and Andrews, Jimura, and Dixon (2019).

16. For similar uses of the concept of narrative in tourism ethnography, see Dahles (1996); Selwyn (1996); Ebron (1999); Harrison (2003; 2013); Chronis (2005; 2012); Leite (2017); and Picard and Zuev (2014).

17. As is standard in ethnographic writing, contributors to this volume have removed identifying factors and given pseudonyms to their respondents, unless explicitly granted permission otherwise.