INTRODUCTION

Since MacCannell (1973, 1976) put forward his thesis of authenticity, there have generally been two kinds of response to it. On the one hand, some scholars (especially Cohen) seek to refine, modify, or re-develop it; on the other, recent scholars either reject it altogether or seek to replace MacCannell’s concept with alternative concepts of authenticity. This paper has two, interlinked, objectives, one major, the other subsidiary. Swimming against recent trends, the major objective is to critically build upon MacCannell and Cohen as a starting point to argue for a concept of object authenticity. Having done that, the subsidiary objective is to situate our concept within the contemporary discursive field in tourism research in relation to the issue of authenticity, so as to specify its distinctive nature vis-à-vis other conceptions of authenticity.

In arguing that tourism functions like religion, MacCannell unwittingly implies two concepts of authenticity, which we refer to as relationship authenticity, pertaining to the issue of alienation from modernity, and object authenticity, pertaining to tourist objects. Tourist objects refer to everything ranging from life processes, activities, artifacts, and so on. For MacCannell, the two implied concepts are linked. A detailed scrutiny of the implied concept of object authenticity shows that it is insufficiently developed in the literature. We attempt to address this shortfall by examining the various senses of the word authenticity pertaining to object authenticity (which has rarely been done); extending the scope of tourist objects to non-social/cultural/historical objects; and so on.

Cohen (1979) initially takes up MacCannell’s thesis by modifying it into a phenomenology of tourist experiences, in which the implied concept of object authenticity is linked, not to alienation in particular, but to the concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning.
in general. In a subsequent analysis (2004), he implies that object authenticity could be dissociated from this concern. We argue for object authenticity to be made a completely independent concept instead of being made parasitic upon other concepts (alienation or concern with spiritual meaning). We then address the realist basis of our concept: first by providing a brief, illustrative defense of the concept against anti-realist poststructuralist challenges; and then by showing how, from the social realist perspective, such a concept can accommodate a role for construction and discourse for its own enrichment.

Finally, we situate our concept of object authenticity in the contemporary discursive field in relation to authenticity in tourism research. This is done by first examining Wang’s (1999) and Steiner and Reisinger’s (2006) theses to replace the concept of object authenticity by their (different) versions of existential authenticity. Without intending to reject such alternative conceptions of authenticity, we argue that it is important to recognize their being premised upon normative philosophical positions. Then, in the “Conclusion”, we observe that the contemporary discursive field on authenticity consists of Cohen’s phenomenology (incorporating MacCannell’s original thesis) in which object authenticity plays only a parasitic role, and concepts of existential authenticity which are premised upon normative philosophy. Our concept of object authenticity is a social realist concept with a wider scope than exists in MacCannell’s and Cohen’s analyses, which is a completely independent concept and in which construction and discourse play a role. Whereas it is up to researchers to decide which of these alternative conceptions of authenticity (Cohen’s incorporating MacCannell’s; the existentialist conceptions; and ours) is more enabling of fruitful research, a clear recognition of their different natures is crucial. Methodologically, this paper does not aim at a comprehensive survey of the literature; instead, we examine a number of discussions in detail, because of their significance and/or because they serve this paper’s purpose best. In formulating our thesis, diverse empirical references are drawn for illustration.

CONCEPTUALIZING AUTHENTICITY AS OBJECT AUTHENTICITY

MacCannell: two implied concepts of authenticity

In MacCannell’s (1973, 1976) view, borrowing Goffman’s imagery of front stage/region-back stage/region, moderns relate to one another by means of front-stages; he further argues that ‘once social structure differentiates into front and back [regions] … the truth can no longer speak for itself’ (1973:591). In other words, MacCannell sees the back region as a realm of ‘truth’, ‘reality’ and ‘intimacy’, whereas the front region is ‘false’ (1973 and 1976 passim). This, he contends, has generated ‘concern of moderns for the shallowness of their lives and inauthenticity of their experiences’ (1973:589-90). Thus, for MacCannell, authenticity refers
to truthful human relationships and the experience of such relationships. Such relationships, 
MacCannell believes, exist in peasant (see 1976:21) and ‘primitive’ societies: ‘Primitives [sic] 
who live their lives totally exposed to their “relevant others” [i.e. there is no separation 
between front and back stages] do not suffer from anxiety about the authenticity of their lives’ 
(1976:93). Being aware of this, moderns alienated from inauthenticity visit these places in 
search of authentic experience: ‘the generalized anxiety about the authenticity of interpersonal 
relationships in modern society is matched by certainty about the authenticity of touristic’ 

From this angle, tourism ‘absorbs some of the social functions of religion in the modern 
world … The motive behind a pilgrimage is similar to that behind a tour: both are quests for 
authentic experiences’ (1973:589-93). Tourism hence constitutes a kind of moral journey, and 
tourist sites holy-like places for alienated moderns. Thus, ‘Sightseers are motivated by a 
desire to see life as it is really lived’ (1973:592). ‘A tourist’s desire to share in the real life of 
the places visited, or at least to see that life as it is really lived, is reflected in the conclusion 
of one tourist’s report from a little Spanish town: “… It is a living village…”’ (1973:594). 
Similarly, MacCannell cites a tourist who has travelled on mail boats in the Bahamas: ‘mail 
boats offer a wonderfully inexpensive way to see life in the Bahamas – life as the natives live 
it’ (1976:98).

At this point, two different concepts of authenticity become apparent. On the one hand, 
hitherto, authenticity refers to truthful human relationships or individuals interacting on the 
basis of their real selves. We refer to this as relationship authenticity, and 
relationship-authentic experience refers to the experience individuals get in such relationships. 
On the other hand, when tourists come into contact with the life of locals (whether through 
sharing in or seeing), the question arises as to whether or not the life that tourists come into 
contact with is the locals’ real life. This real-ness or its absence introduces another concept of 
authenticity, which we refer to as object authenticity. By object, we refer to everything 
ranging from life processes (e.g. cooking and washing), activities (e.g. recreational games, 
religious rituals, cultural performances), artifacts, and so on. Thus, object authenticity is a 
property of a tourist object. In our view, this property is best conceptualized, not as either 
present or absent, but in terms of the degree to which a tourist object possesses it.

It should be noted that the line between sharing in and seeing is often very fine. For instance, 
a tourist who walks up the steep alleys of Rio de Janeiro’s hill-side favelas to see the slums is, 
by that very act, sharing in a slice of favela life, namely, the strenuous commuting to and from 
the favela. Similarly, a tourist visiting a local S.E. Asian wet market at peak hours to see it 
already shares in a slice of local life simply by being present since, the same as locals, she
will inhale the same often unpleasant smell as well as having to squeeze through the thick throng of people. So does the tourist who travels along River Chua Phraya to see Bangkok by taking a ferry boat, where taking the boat trip itself constitutes sharing in a slice of local life. Generally, sharing in and seeing should be regarded, not as a dichotomy but as a continuum in which both elements are present in different proportions, while at both ends of the continuum there is more of one element than the other (such as there is more sharing in for the tourist who stays in the favela for several nights).

MacCannell observes that many tourist settings are only staged settings, which do not constitute authentic local life. Here, the word authenticity clearly refers to object authenticity. With reference to the front-back stage dichotomy, he believes it possible to theoretically distinguish between six stages in the continuum of tourist settings ranging from the (fully) front region (Stage 1) to the (fully) back region (Stage 6). Naturally, ‘tourists try to enter back regions of the places they visit because these regions are associated with … authenticity of experience’ (1973:589).

MacCannell’s tourist places great importance on object authenticity because staged authenticity constitutes front regions from which she is originally alienated. Hence, relationship and object authenticities are linked in MacCannell’s framework. It should be noted that in arguing that ‘the generalized anxiety about the inauthenticity of interpersonal relationships in modern society is matched by certainty about the authenticity of touristic’ destinations, MacCannell seems to restrict the applicability of his thesis to peasant and ‘primitive’ destinations only. However, it is imaginable that on visits to other modern societies, if and when MacCannell’s tourist is able to penetrate the back regions of local life, she would still gain relationship-authentic experience. MacCannell does not state this explicitly, but it is congruent with his thesis.

Thus, there are actually two implied, interlinked concepts of authenticity in MacCannell’s thesis. In the present paper we argue that the implied concept of object authenticity should be made a completely independent concept; and provide a further development of this implied concept of MacCannell’s. Selwyn (1996:7-8) also observes that MacCannell uses the term authenticity in two different senses: (a) ‘an alienation-smashing feeling’; and (b) the tourist is after ‘some sort of knowledge about the nature and society of the chosen destination’. In the second sense, ‘authenticity refers to statements’ made by tour guides, etc., ‘which are more or less open to what we may call “Popperian” processes and procedures’. Selwyn terms the two senses ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ authenticity respectively.

Selwyn’s ‘hot’ authenticity is equivalent to the experience gained by tourists in MacCannell’s
implied concept of relationship authenticity. At first sight, ‘cool’ authenticity might appear to be equivalent to MacCannell’s implied concept of object authenticity. However, whereas ‘cool’ authenticity does pertain to object authenticity, it is not equivalent to object authenticity. We would like to examine this in some detail because a clarification of it is important to developing our concept of object authenticity. First, as mentioned, object authenticity is a property of a tourist object, which is not the same thing as knowledge about that object. To illustrate hypothetically, a tourist might be able to attend a local ritual unknown to her. The ritual is object-authentic, despite the tourist’s lack of previous knowledge of or about it. Of course, in a world of staged settings, a tourist’s knowledge about a tourist object would help ascertain the degree of its object-authentic property, but that does not change the fact that the property and the knowledge are two different things.

Second, whereas MacCannell’s tourist who seeks to share in/see object-authentic local life will certainly seek knowledge about local life such as by doing some prior reading, this seeking to gain knowledge about local life is, however, not done for its own sake, i.e. for the sake of making Popperian-falsifiable epistemological gains. Instead, it is done for the purpose of experiencing local life. That knowing more about an object enhances the experiencing of it should be obvious. For example, the motivated tourist visiting Cambodia’s Angkor Wat temples will certainly do considerable reading as preparation, because doing so will enable her to experience the temples in a much more satisfying and fruitful way, such as discerning the varying sophistication in construction and sculptural techniques among the different temples built in different times, or recognizing the Hindu motifs of the bas-reliefs. Similarly, a tourist keen on sampling local food who makes a trip to Sichuan, China, may read about Sichuan cuisine (such as on ingredients, cooking method, etc.), not as an epistemological exercise, but for the purpose of enhancing the actual experience of sampling the food.

To delve into the matter a little further, experiencing is a holistic fusion of the senses and thinking (knowledge), in which knowledge enhances the experience as one element entering into the fusion. To illustrate with the Angkor Wat example, ‘cool’ knowledge about the temples could be gained by reading about its history, architecture, and so on, without any visit. In contrast, in experiencing the temples, knowledge comes into play through interacting with the sensations gained from sight (e.g. to read about the massive scale of the temples is clearly a far cry from seeing and sensing it on site), feel (e.g. of the temples’ environment), and so on. In the case of Sichuan cuisine, knowledge fuses with the sensations of smell (e.g. smelling the aroma of the individual spices used), taste (e.g. the taste derived from the individual spices), feel (e.g. texture of food is dependent on the cooking method), and so on to produce a holistic experience of the cuisine.
Hence, knowledge does have a role to play in MacCannell’s implied concept of object authenticity, but it is important to note the exact nature of this role, which is, firstly, to assist the tourist in assessing the object authenticity of a tourist object (as a property of that object), and secondly to enhance the tourist’s experience of that object by entering the holistic fusion of the experience as one element. In other words, this knowledge does not constitute the object-authentic property of the tourist object, nor is it equivalent to the tourist’s experience of that object, whereas what constitutes MacCannell’s implied concept of object authenticity is precisely this property and this experience.

Thus, while Selwyn’s concept of ‘cool’ authenticity does pertain to the second sense (or implied concept) of authenticity in MacCannell’s thesis, namely, object authenticity, it constitutes a misinterpretation of it. Selwyn’s misinterpretation has apparently influenced the reading of MacCannell by a number of other scholars. For instance, regarding MacCannell’s authenticity concept as an ‘object-related’ concept, Wang (1999:352, emphasis added) endorses Selwyn’s concept of ‘cool’ authenticity and states: ‘authentic experiences in tourism are [for MacCannell] equated to an epistemological experience (i.e., cognition)’. The consequence of adopting what might perhaps be referred to as an epistemological/cognitive misinterpretation of MacCannell’s implied concept of object authenticity can be seen in the following arguments advanced by Wang, and Reisinger and Steiner. In contrasting MacCannell’s ‘objective’, ‘object-related’ authenticity to his own concept of ‘activity-related’ ‘existential authenticity’, Wang seems to imply that MacCannell’s tourist engages in no activity at all besides ‘cognition’. However, how would MacCannell’s tourist be able to share in/see local life without engaging in activity? For instance, traveling on a mail boat in the Bahamas, walking up the steep alleys of Rio’s hill-side favelas, sampling local food, etc. all constitute activities.

Apparently influenced by the same epistemological/cognitive misinterpretation, Reisinger and Steiner (2006:68-69) associate MacCannell’s implied concept of object authenticity to specialist knowledge: ‘in tourism literature, objectivists [such as MacCannell] usually refer to authenticity … as independently judged by experts’, probably having rituals or artistic performances in mind. However, tourist objects cover all everyday aspects of local life. The tourist who traveled on a mail boat in the Bahamas would not need to consult any expert to be quite certain that s/he was sharing in an object-authentic slice of local life. Similarly for a tourist taking public transport, or who attends a soccer match while visiting Brazil, and so on. Even for cultural festivals and the like, ascertaining object authenticity is often not difficult for the motivated tourist, as the case of Hong Kong’s Cheung Chau Bun Festival to be considered below shows. Hereinafter, for simplicity, although in other scholars’ discussions (with a few exceptions such as Wang) the concept of object authenticity is implied only (as it
is with MacCannell), this qualification will be dispensed with, unless mentioning it will be useful in the context concerned.

Various senses of the word authenticity

In the literature, the word authenticity is mostly taken for granted, and there is often a failure to realize that the word has a number of senses. The argument here is that, for instance, a tourist object may be object-authentic in a certain specific sense of the word authenticity but not in another sense; or whereas two or more senses of the word authenticity may appear to be relevant to examining the object authenticity of a tourist object, only one of these senses is actually appropriate; and so forth. In short, it is important both to be alert to the fact that the word authenticity has various senses when one examines object authenticity, as well as to understand that in every specific case, determining the appropriate sense(s) of the word to use is crucial, as the illustrations later in this section show. Of course, it would not be possible to provide a comprehensive coverage of all the senses of the word authenticity here, nor would that be necessary. Thus, in the following, we shall discuss a number of these senses only, which we believe to be of greatest use for our purpose.

With reference to the Oxford and Webster dictionaries, the various senses of authenticity include the following (the quotes are from Webster): (a) ‘Complete sincerity without feigning or hypocrisy’; (b) ‘A real actual character as contrasted with a fraudulent, deceptive appearance’; (c) That which is true or genuine; (d) That which is real or genuine, e.g. a real antique; (e) That which is original, not copied, e.g. a hand-written manuscript; (f) That which is ‘marked by close conformity to an original: accurately and satisfyingly reproducing essential features’, e.g. a portrait; (g) That which is ‘marked by conformity to widespread or long-continued tradition’, e.g. a custom; (h) That which is authoritative, authorized, or legally valid. The first three senses pertain to relationship authenticity: authentic connotes truthfulness and sincerity in contrast to feigning, etc. In MacCannell’s thesis, the untruthful and false front region hides the real selves of individuals – note the subtle conceptual transition: whereas a relationship-inauthentic act is untruthful or false, what this act hides is the object-authentic real self.

Senses (d) to (h) pertain to object authenticity. The word genuine carries the meanings of both true/truthfulness and real; hence to avoid confusion, it will be dispensed with hereinafter. Senses (e) and (f) partially overlap but are not identical. In Sense (f), a good reproduction (which copies from an original) that meets certain conditions will be regarded as authentic, whereas in Sense (e), only the original is authentic. As will be seen shortly, Sense (g) is overlooked by many commentators except Cohen. Poststructuralist-oriented commentators
focus on the sense of original, and, underpinned by their anti-realist perspective, often ignore the sense of real. Sense (h) is obviously relevant in relation to construction/discourse. It should be noted that not only is MacCannell unaware of the need to distinguish between his two implied concepts, he also fails to distinguish between the various senses of the word authenticity, and uses words such as intimacy, true, false, for show, real, copy, replica and so on interchangeably. This failure is shared by many commentators on authenticity.

Let’s illustrate the importance of being alert to the various senses of the word authenticity with a few examples. Bruner rejects the concept of object authenticity altogether. In one of his papers (1991:241), his reason is that object ‘[a]uthenticity implies the existence of a true original … and the French poststructuralists have shown that there are no originals’. It is unnecessary to examine simulation theory (Bruner’s reference point) here, for it is clearly problematic to reject the concept of object authenticity in toto simply by questioning it in relation to one sense of the word authenticity (original). For instance, in tourist activities such as traveling on a Bahamas mail boat or listening to jazz music in a club in Manhattan (the world’s ‘jazz capital’), which is a pass time of many local New Yorkers, the sense of original (and hence of copy too) is completely irrelevant, while it is the sense of real that is the relevant sense (the just mentioned examples constitute slices of the real life of locals).

The Cheung Chau Bun Festival of Hong Kong (http://www.cheungchau.org/; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheung_Chau_Bun_Festival) provides an illuminating illustration. Cheung Chau is an island of Hong Kong that used to house fishing villages. The Bun Festival was a part of a larger religious festival held annually, on which three conical pyramids were constructed with bamboo poles. On the surface of the pyramids were stuck thousands of edible buns. On the evening of the festival, some locals would climb up the pyramids, collect buns in bags and distribute them among other locals. In 1978, one pyramid collapsed leading to casualties, and the government banned the festival henceforth.

In 2005, the government ‘revived’ the festival to boost tourism. However, in this ‘revival’, the pyramids are no longer constructed with bamboo poles but steel rods; the buns have now been replaced with plastic buns for ‘hygiene reasons’; the climbers are selected from the whole of Hong Kong (instead of though including Cheung Chau) through elimination rounds; these climbers are now equipped with mountaineering paraphernalia. In short, the ‘revival’ is completely devoid of religious meaning and is more a spectacle-style sports event. The tourism authorities market it as an object-authentic ‘revival’ of the traditional festival. However, in the sense of original/copy, the ‘revival’ is clearly object-inauthentic as a copy of the traditional festival.
From another angle, this spectacle-style event does constitute a newly emergent social event (of Hong Kong as a whole) and as such it constitutes an aspect of real current local life. Can it therefore be regarded as object-authentic in the sense of real? To answer this, we need to note that in this context, the relevant sense of authenticity is not simply real, but also Sense (g), according to which a social practice cannot be considered object-authentic unless it is ‘marked by conformity to widespread or long-continued tradition’. In this connection, Cohen’s (2004:110) following argument is relevant: ‘an apparently contrived, tourist-oriented festival (such as the Inti Raymi festival in Cuzco, a “revival” of an ancient Incaic custom) may, in due time, become accepted as an [object] “authentic” local custom’. To conceptualize this, he proposes the concept of ‘emergent [object] authenticity’. Cohen’s may-in-due-time qualification corresponds to ‘long-continued tradition’ in Sense (g). From this angle, given the relative youth of the ‘revived’ Bun Festival, to regard it as object-authentic before it has stood the test of time seems inadvisable.

This reminds us of the vexatious issue concerning tourist-oriented ethnic art/handicraft objects, in relation to which it has recently become popular among postmodernist-oriented scholars to argue that they are object-authentic. For instance, Meethan (2001:109-110) approvingly cites Teague’s (1997) argument concerning Nepalese tourist art (which makes compromises to suit tourists’ taste) that it, in Meethan’s paraphrase, ‘represents a form of cultural syncretism where elements from “outside” cultures are combined with the traditional to create new forms, hence they are [object] “authentic”’. Meethan cites Cohen’s emergent authenticity for support, but ignores Cohen’s important may-in-due-time qualification. Moreover, in Sense (g), whether or not a social practice is widespread among the local population is also crucial. The production of tourist-oriented art/handicraft products may involve only a small number of specialized workers using non-traditional, more efficient production techniques, hence even if such production has been around for a long time, it represents a time-tested emergent social practice of these workers only, and not of local artists/handicraftsmen generally if these still adhere to traditional techniques in producing for local use. From our perspective, if this is the case, then the degree of resemblance (in design, appearance, materials used) of the tourist-oriented products to their local originals will determine their degree of object authenticity as copies; but their object authenticity as products of general local social practice (production methods) would remain low. Meethan’s argument is that tourist-oriented art/handicraft objects, as new (syncretic) cultural forms, are object-authentic because they are products of a real current social practice. However, in relation to these products, in addition to the sense of real, the two elements of Sense (g) (time factor, and degree of generality of the social practice producing the products) are also important. It is only by giving sufficient weight to Sense (g) that the object authenticity of
these products can more fruitfully be understood.

*Extending object authenticity to non-social/cultural/historical objects*

In the literature, the focus has been largely, even solely, on social, cultural and historical tourist objects. This seems unjustified. Take, for instance, the zoo which may not be appealing to many tourists. Singapore’s Night Safari (http://www.nightsafari.com.sg/) is a little better. However, though the animals are not in cages, they are still in highly confining captivity. Open-country safari is attractive to many tourists precisely because wild animals are in their natural habitat, and for some species, tourists have to go search for them, often unsuccessfully. Moreover, animal behaviors that occur only in the wild and not in the zoo can be witnessed only on safari trips. In May 2007, a tourist posted a video footage on YouTube (titled ‘Battle at Kruger’) taken on a safari trip in South Africa’s Kruger National Park (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU8DDYz68kM). This shows the struggle between a pride of young lions, two crocodiles and a herd of buffaloes over a calf initially captured by the lions. This is an especially dramatic illustration of how tourists can come very much into contact with real wild life on open-country safari in contrast to the zoo. Scuba divers will be able to testify to similar (underwater) experiences.

On Singapore’s Santosa Island, along Egypt’s Red Sea coast, and in other places, there are man-made beaches and lagoons. Many tourists may not mind these artificial creations, but there are certainly many other tourists who find them un-enjoyable in comparison to natural beaches/lagoons. In the sense of artificial as unreal, natural beaches/lagoons are object-authentic in the sense of real, in contrast to man-made simulations. It should be noted that while the above are simulations, they are not simulations of any specific beach/lagoon, but of beaches/lagoons in general; hence, natural beaches/lagoons are object-authentic in the sense of real, not of original. In general, natural scenery, even in the absence of simulated counterparts to contrast with, constitutes object-authentic tourist objects. This is because the contrast to natural scenery (‘wild’ nature) is not actual simulations, but the man-made urban environment, hence in the sense of man-made/artificial being unreal, ‘wild’ nature is real. Finally, it should be noted that real wild life and ‘wild’ nature constitute object-authentic tourist objects probably for moderns only, and not, for instance, for members of a tribe living in Paleolithic conditions. For convenience, hereinafter, we shall refer to non-social/cultural/historical tourist objects as ‘natural’ tourist objects.

*Dissociating object authenticity from the issue of alienation or the concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning*
In contrast to MacCannell, Boorstin (1964) argues that, unlike old-time travelers who search for authentic experiences, tourists are shallow consumers of ‘pseudo-events’. Cohen (1979) attempts to bridge Boorstin and MacCannell by offering a ‘phenomenology of tourist experiences’. His argues that both MacCannell and Boorstin are correct, because there are different types of tourists. Borrowing the idea of ‘centre’ from religion, he proposes that a society’s core cultural values constitute its spiritual centre of ultimate meanings (hereinafter spiritual meaning). As Parsons argues, individuals who commit to their society’s core values still require tension relief (from such commitment) in the form of recreation. Tourism is one form of tension relief. However, besides Parsonian conformists, there are individuals who are indifferent to their culture of origin’s spiritual meaning, and those who are alienated from it. Cohen obviously adopts the same framework as MacCannell. As he states: ‘I tackled [sic] the same problem which MacCannell addressed himself to’ (1979:193). There is, however, one difference: whereas MacCannell’s focus is specifically on the character of interpersonal relationships, Cohen’s focus is on a culture’s spiritual meaning (i.e. its core values) generally.

On this basis, Cohen argues that there are five possible modes of tourist experiences: recreational; diversionary; experiential; experimental; and existential. Recreational tourists are Parsonian conformists, for whom touring is for tension relief. Diversionary tourists are centre-less: they find no spiritual meaning either in their own society’s core values or in those of other societies; they tour not for recreation, but simply for diversion from routine. These two types of tourists are unconcerned about the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning, and they are those critiqued by Boorstin. Tourists in the other three modes are alienated from their own society’s centre. Whereas the experiential tourist is ‘content merely to observe the authentic life of others’, the experimental tourist ‘engages in that authentic life … hoping eventually to discover one [among the authentic lives of different places] which will suit his particular needs and desires’ (1979:190). The existential tourist is one who has finally discovered an “elective” spiritual centre. These three types of tourist are concerned about the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning. Cohen’s experiential tourist is often seen (including by Cohen himself) as being equivalent to MacCannell’s tourist. This is not exactly true because MacCannell’s tourist usually does not seek only to see (Cohen’s ‘to observe’) local life, but to share in it as well.

Cohen (1979:192-3) makes ‘two qualifications’ to his basic five-fold typology by mentioning two subsidiary types of tourists: (a) those whom Cohen calls humanists who find every culture ‘equally valid’, and hence may thus ‘travel in the experiential, or even existential, mode, without being alienated from their culture of origin’; (b) those whom Cohen calls dualists or more broadly pluralists, ‘who adhere simultaneously to two or more heterogeneous “spiritual” centres, each giving rise to equally authentic, though different, forms of life’.
These two subsidiary types are also concerned about the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning without being alienated from their own culture of origin.

Cohen also examines the ‘realizability’ of the various modes of touristic experience with reference to MacCannell’s concept of staged authenticity, where the reference is clearly to the (implied) concept of object authenticity. In this discussion, Cohen argues that the recreational and diversionary modes are easiest to realize, for the tourist in either of these modes ‘can achieve his aim even when he is fully aware that his experience was staged’ (1979:194). In other words, the implication is that because recreational and diversionary tourists are unconcerned about the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning, they are hence unconcerned about object authenticity. In contrast, because experiential, experimental, existential, and, by extension, humanist and dualist/pluralist tourists are concerned about object authenticity (due to their concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning), hence in a heavily staged tourist space, these five modes are much more difficult to realize. It can therefore be seen that whereas Cohen diverges from MacCannell by dissociating the concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning from alienation from the culture of origin (the cases of the humanist and dualist/pluralist), he maintains the link between the tourist’s concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning and her concern with object authenticity.

Cohen (2004) later begins to query MacCannell’s authenticity concept. He notes that MacCannell leaves authenticity undefined, though its meaning is clear: it is a borrowed existentialist philosophical concept (alienation) applied to sociological analysis. Regarding this as problematic, Cohen argues that authenticity is a socially constructed concept subject to negotiation. He examines how curators varyingly define authenticity; that some tourists accept commercialized reproductions of dance or ritual as authentic; and so on. In these discussions, Cohen’s focus is on the (implied) concept of object authenticity, the degree required of which varies between individuals.

Cohen’s 2004 paper is significant not only because it focuses more on the (implied) concept of object authenticiticy, but in what he says about recreational and diversionary tourists in relation to it. These tourists (or at least many of them), Cohen argues, are ‘neither superficial fools satisfied with the spurious, in Boorstin’s (…) sense, nor victims of a prevaricating touristic establishment which “stages” authenticity in MacCannell’s (…) sense’ (2004:109). In other words, Cohen now sees them, despite their unconcern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning, as also capable of being concerned about object authenticity, though their criteria of object authenticity is different from (less demanding than) individuals such as curators. This is exactly contrary to his position in his 1979 paper. Thus, Cohen implies, perhaps unwittingly, in his 2004 paper that the concern with object authenticity can be
delinked from the concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning altogether.

We think this implied delinking is a crucial step, for it is clear that there are tourists who are not concerned about the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning, but whose demand for object authenticity goes well beyond commercialized reproductions. For instance, spiritual meaning may be furthest from the mind of the tourist who visits Rio’s favelas, who would nonetheless be concerned that the alleys, paths, structures, etc. that she is visiting are real and not commercialized reproductions purposely built in the _favela_ for tourist consumption. Or consider a ‘natural’ tourist object: spiritual meaning is probably irrelevant to many scuba divers touring to dive, none of whom, however, would be satisfied with diving in an aquarium. In his 1979 paper, Cohen remarks in passing: ‘The narrower the scope of cultures given equal status, the closer the “humanist” comes to the “cultural” tourist’ (1979:192). Could Cohen be pointing towards the point that we are making here, at least vis-à-vis ‘cultural’ tourist objects? It is difficult to tell since Cohen does not develop his comment, while the meaning of ‘the narrower the scope…’ is unclear.

Hence, we argue that object authenticity should be dissociated from the issue of alienation or, more generally, the concern for spiritual meaning completely. Tourists concerned about object authenticity can be seen as gaining object-authentic experience through coming into contact with object-authentic tourist objects. Thus, traveling on a mail boat in the Bahamas, witnessing the ‘Battle at Kruger’, and so on constitute object-authentic experiences; so would, for instance, listening to jazz at the historic Village Vanguard (http://villagevanguard.com/) or other clubs in Manhattan enable the tourist to share in an object-authentic slice of the local life of many New Yorkers. In coming to this conclusion, we are not saying that Cohen’s phenomenology of tourist experiences is of little value. Quite the contrary, Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002), for instance, provide an interesting empirical application of it. Our point is simply that object authenticity is most fruitfully conceptualized as a completely independent concept, instead of being made parasitic upon other concepts. Finally, the demand for object authenticity of alienated tourists or tourists concerned about spiritual meaning need not necessarily be more stringent than that of non-alienated tourists or tourists unconcerned about spiritual meaning who are concerned about object authenticity. Any such assumption can only be made _a priori_, probably with little justification – think, for instance, simply of food connoisseurs for whom alienation/spiritual meaning is irrelevant sampling local food.

_Object authenticity as a social realist concept_

Object authenticity is a realist concept, hence challenges from poststructuralist and constructionist/discourse-theoretic angles can be expected. In this section, we first briefly
examine, as illustration, two substantive poststructuralist critiques to show that object authenticity faces up well to these anti-realist challenges. Next, we examine constructionism/discourse theory theoretically from the social realist perspective, and conclude that object authenticity, as a social realist concept, can accommodate a role for construction and discourse for its own enrichment.

In the literature, poststructuralist challenges to object authenticity are substantive, not theoretical, in nature, and come mainly from two angles: Baudrillard’s simulation theory and the anti-essentialist critique of origins. Ritzer and Liska argue from the former angle:

‘people raised and living in a post-modern world dominated by simulations increasingly come to want, nay to insist on, simulations when they tour … it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between the simulated and the real; indeed Baudrillard argues that the real has disappeared … the tourist would not know an “authentic” experience even if one could be found … many tourists today are in search of inauthenticity … How many actually go to the sea to view (say, by snorkeling) undersea life?’ (1997:107-108).

Whereas simulations are indeed popular among many tourists, with reference to Ritzer and Liska’s point about ‘natural’ tourist objects (undersea life), the evidence in tourism advertising (e.g. the use of such language as ‘pristine’ and ‘the last untouched’), travel writing (e.g. de Brito 2009, in which the author on a hiking trip in the Australian outback speaks of ‘the setting sun [is] a primordial [emphasis added] light show’ and the like) and so forth testifies that object authenticity is still an important consideration for many tourists. While there is no need to theoretically examine Baudrillard’s claim that the real has disappeared (though it might be observed in passing that Baudrillard, probably unawares, continuously switches between the senses of real/unreal and original/copy in his theory), many tourists will have little difficulty to tell that the simulated undersea life of an aquarium is not real, or that the ‘Rialto Bridge’ of the Venetian Macao Resort (http://photos.vegastripping.com/photo.php?photo=250) is simply a copy of the original bridge in Venice, even were they to find the aquarium and Rialto’s replica enjoyable. Generally, while there certainly exist postmodern trends in the contemporary world, Belhassen and Caton (2006:856) are certainly correct to remark that object authenticity remains ‘alive and well in the minds of many tourists, tourism brokers, and members of host communities’.

According to Meethan (2001:111), essentialist origins have become irrelevant under globalization, hence so is object authenticity: ‘The [object] authentic/inauthentic couplet … presuppose[s] the presence or absence of some essential, innate quality … this problem of
essentialism … [in a globalized environment] … to look for single origins, to be overly concerned about issues of provenance and authenticity is to miss the point’. In other words, under globalization, because emergent cultures of every society are multiply-originated there are no longer essential origins, hence every society’s culture loses its essential/originary distinctiveness; since the concept of authenticity assumes such distinctiveness, it ‘miss[es] the point’. It will be noted that the relevant sense of authenticity here is Sense (g) – that which is ‘marked by conformity to widespread or long-continued [local] tradition’, for it is such traditions that give rise to essential cultural distinctiveness.

To examine Meethan’s argument, consider Cantonese cuisine. Cantonese cooking often makes use of various herbs and spices, which historically originated from India and Melanesia (as can be seen, cross-cultural influences is not a recent phenomenon); in recent times, it has also absorbed contemporary cosmopolitan influences such as concern for healthy diet and in the food’s presentation. Despite that, however, object-authentic Cantonese cuisine essentially distinctive from other cuisines continues to exist – so long as certain historically developed, specifically indigenous, and widely practiced cooking methods (such as the use of large, oval wok or frying pan and intensely hot open-fire stove), principles (e.g. marinating and the use of ‘live’ ingredients such as fish taken directly from the fish tank), and so on remain. These methods, principles, etc., (which constitute essential origins) form the basis upon which cross-cultural influences are adapted and incorporated into Cantonese cuisine. Cantonese cuisine is distinctive, not simply because it is different from other cuisines (as anti-essentialism would have it), but more importantly because of its essence – how it actually tastes and feels. This is not to say that distinctively fusion food does not exist, but it is far from constituting the norm. Generally, whereas globalization has indeed engendered un-differentiable shopping malls and the like from Sydney to Cebu, it is far from obliterating object authenticity (essences and origins).

Let’s now examine constructionism/discourse theory, but before proceeding, a couple of preliminary notes are in order. First, in some important ways, discourse theory continues the heritage of 1960s social constructionism, hence we speak of them and use their terminologies interchangeably. Second, in relation to some tourist objects such as the ‘Battle at Kruger’, discourse seems to have minimal, if any, role to play. In constructionism, there are two positions concerning extra-discursive reality. The initial formulations bracket this reality as unknowable in the Kantian sense. Different ‘definitions’ of it compete with one another, and the ‘definition’ that comes out on top constitutes ‘common sense knowledge’ and is real in its effects, hence constitutes reality though not because it has any basis in reality. To illustrate, in a typical application to substantive sociological analysis, Fishman (1981) argues that crime waves are a pure media construction: if during a period, the media report on soaring crime,
people react as though crime has really soared, although if we take a look at crime statistics, crime may actually have remained stable. Thus, the discourse of soaring crime constitutes reality and becomes real in its effects (such as people dreading to go out at night), though it has no basis in reality.

Such arguments, however, commit the error of ‘ontological gerrymandering’ (Woolgar and Pawluch 1985). On the one hand, it is argued that a certain discourse constitutes reality, not because it accords with reality (which is unknowable), but simply because it has become hegemonic. In this first leg of the argument, the ontological basis of discourse is denied by saying that reality is unknowable. On the other, however, in the second leg of the argument, in order to show that the hegemonic discourse is a pure discourse with no ontological basis, the ontological grounding of crime statistics is self-contradictorily taken as given. Reacting to this, constructionists split into the strict and contextual camps. Strict constructionists stick to the original formulation and engage in the first leg of the argument only. Contextual constructionists regard strict constructionist practice as intellectually unrewarding and hence are willing to bear the cost of ontological gerrymandering on the grounds that it nevertheless enables the production of insights (Best 1989; Miller and Holstein 1989).

From the social realist perspective, the insights of constructionism/discourse theory need not be earned at the cost of ontological gerrymandering. Social realism (Sayer 2000) accepts that extra-discursive reality can only ever be known by means of human concepts (discourse). However, that does not entail the relativist position that all theories/discourses are equally (un)true. Theories/discourses can be tested against reality either singly or in comparison to one another (in social realism, the word ‘test’ is used in the non-positivist sense). For instance, Newtonian mechanics and Einstein’s relativity theory were put to the test when a total solar eclipse occurred on 21 August 1914, and the observations accorded with Einstein’s prediction. We need not say that Einstein’s theory constitutes the truth (the theory was soon found wanting at the sub-atomic level), but it did show itself to be of superior epistemological value in comparison to Newtonian mechanics in enabling future research.

Social realism accepts the importance of discourse, but seeks extra-discursive reasons to explain why a certain discourse becomes hegemonic; hence it also accepts the insights of Foucault’s power/knowledge perspective, according to which it is the comparative power of the individuals/organizations that advance competing discourses that determines which discourse is able to achieve hegemony. Foucault’s perspective is especially useful in the inexact sciences (e.g. psychiatry), the ‘soft’ sciences (social science in general), the humanities, and matters pertaining to values and judgment (e.g. art). Further, social realism agrees that discourse, regardless of its epistemological value, can become real in its effects,
and it is possible for a discourse of suspect epistemological value to become hegemonic and exert real effects for an indefinite period of time – for extra-discursive reasons. For instance, according to numerous studies of contemporary therapeutic discourse (e.g. Horwitz 2002), most conditions psychologically medicalized (constructed) into ‘disorders’ today are in reality, under the current state of knowledge, not mental disorders at all. Such a view accords with the social realist perspective: contemporary therapeutic discourse engages in constructing so-called ‘disorders’ (this is the constructionist/discursive part of the argument), though it is of suspect epistemological value (this is the realist part of the argument), and is becoming progressively hegemonic, thereby exerting real effects (e.g. more and more people turn to therapy), and no end to this is in sight.

Let’s illustrate with a tourist object of some complexity, namely, the New Salem Historic Site (Bruner 1994). This is a reconstructed village and outdoor museum in Illinois where Abraham Lincoln lived in the 1830s. Unsurprisingly, there are differing discourses concerning how New Salem in the 1830s was like, and the significance that Lincoln’s stay in New Salem had on his life and career. From the social realist perspective, these issues constitute objects that are in principle knowable, not as complete and final truth, but as capable of being subject to the test of reality (e.g. discovery of new reliable historical records) – although given the passage of time, the practical obstacles are tremendous, even insurmountable. Hence, in principle, the relative epistemological values of the various competing discourses concerning these objects can be assessed. However, the discourse of superior epistemological value need not necessarily become hegemonic due to extra-discursive factors such as institutional authority. Similarly, in the case of the ‘revived’ Cheung Chau Bun Festival, whereas according to the marketing discourse of the Hong Kong Tourist Association (http://www.hkta.org/eng/heritage/festivals/he_fest_cheu.jhtml), the contemporary festival is an object-authentic ‘revival’ of the traditional festival, for tourists sufficiently motivated to do some searching into the matter (see the websites cited previously), its differences from the festival of old are clear.

As noted, object authenticity is a property of a tourist object, and knowledge about the object would help tourists to ascertain its degree of authenticity. It is this knowledge that is subject to construction and discourse. However, from the social realist view, accepting the role of construction and discourse (a) does not nullify the concept of object authenticity as a property, and (b) does not mean that the relative merits of different constructions/discourses concerning a tourist object are, in principle non-assessable (as it is argued in the relativist position).

Let’s summarize our development of the concept of object authenticity so far. In MacCannell’s thesis, there are two implied concepts of authenticity of which we take up the
(implied) concept of object authenticity. Knowledge about tourist objects plays a role in the concept of object authenticity, but it is not object authenticity itself, which is a property, and tourists concerned about object authenticity seek such knowledge not for its own sake, but for the sake of helping them to assess the object authenticity of tourist objects, and to enhance their experiencing of such objects. The word authenticity has a number of senses pertaining to object authenticity. It is important to be alert to this fact, while determining the appropriate sense(s) of the word to use in examining the object authenticity of a tourist object is crucial.

Whereas the existing literature confines object authenticity to social, cultural and historical objects, we argue for its extension to ‘natural’ tourist objects. In MacCannell’s thesis, object authenticity and relationship authenticity (the issue of alienation) are necessarily linked. Cohen’s development of MacCannell’s concepts proceeds in two stages. In the first stage, whereas he partially dissociates the concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning from alienation from the culture of origin, he continues to make tourists’ concern with object authenticity parasitic upon their concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning. In the second stage, he unwittingly implies that the concern with object authenticity can be delinked from the second concern altogether. We take up this implication and argue that object authenticity should be constituted as a completely independent concept, instead of being made parasitic upon other concepts (MacCannell’s alienation and Cohen’s spiritual meaning). As a realist concept, object authenticity unsurprisingly faces poststructuralist and constructionist/discourse-theoretic challenges. The concept’s robustness against poststructuralist challenge is illustrated through examining two critiques from that angle. On the other hand, adopting the social realist perspective, we argue that our concept can accommodate a role for construction and discourse, which would actually serve to enhance its richness and usefulness.

We now propose to situate our concept in the contemporary discursive field of tourism research pertaining to the authenticity concept, in two steps. Firstly, in the next section, we examine two versions of existential authenticity which have been proposed to replace object authenticity; without rejecting the concept of existential authenticity, we underline the importance of recognizing that they are premised upon normative philosophical positions. Secondly, in the “Conclusion”, we delineate the different conceptions of authenticity (Cohen’s incorporating MacCannell’s; existential authenticity; and our own) in the contemporary discursive field, emphasizing that future research will benefit from a clear recognition of the difference in the natures of these different conceptions.

The implications of delinking authenticity from tourist objects
In recent years, delinking authentic tourist experience from tourist objects has gained popularity. Wang (1999) proposes a concept of ‘existential authenticity’ which is ‘germane to the explanation of a greater variety of tourist experiences’ than MacCannell’s thesis (1999:350). Wang’s concept has since been operationalized by Kim and Jamal (2007) into a case study of the Texas Renaissance Festival. Here, we would like to examine Wang’s concept theoretically. According to Wang:

Existential authenticity ‘involves personal or intersubjective feelings activated by the liminal process of tourist activities. In such a liminal experience, people feel … much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than in everyday life, not because they find the toured objects are authentic but simply because they are … free from the constraints of the daily’ (1997:351-2).

Existential authenticity ‘accents the naturalness … in response to the increasing self-constraints by reason and rationality in modernity … a sense of inauthentic self arises when the balance between these two parts of being is broken down in such a way that rational factors over-control non-rational factors … the factors of Logos rein and the factors of Eros are more or less constrained … Thus … the authentic self emerges as an ideal that acts to resist or invert the dominant rational order’ (1997:360-1).

Hence, Wang generally argues that having liminal fun constitutes experience of the authentic self. He speaks of two dimensions of existential authenticity: intra-personal and inter-personal, each consisting of two kinds of authenticity. The first kind of intra-personal authenticity pertains to ‘bodily feelings’: ‘In tourism, sensual pleasures, feelings, and other bodily impulses are to a relatively large extent released and consumed and the bodily desires (…) are gratified intensively’ (1997:362). In other words, in Freudian terms, authenticity comes when id is given free rein. However, the Freudian self consists of three integral dimensions: id, ego, and superego, which means that if we are to speak of the authentic self, it should refer to this integral self and not any one of its three dimensions. Thus, to argue that giving id free rein amounts to experiencing the authentic self seems to be doing violence to the concept of self. Although Wang mentions Freud, he seems to pay no attention to this point.

Wang’s existentially-authentic experience comes purely from non-work. However, work (especially fulfilling work) is clearly just as important to the integrity of the self. In the above second long quote from Wang, he talks about the balance between Logos and Eros being broken. To speak of balance is, of course, to imply that both are integral to the self. In other words, in making this comment, Wang seems to be undermining his own thesis. In sum, Wang’s thesis privileges one valued dimension of the self (id, non-work etc.) by regarding this dimension alone as authentic. Whereas doing so does not accord with social scientific
concepts of the self such as Freud’s or George Herbert Mead’s, it can be conceptually justified on normative philosophical grounds (Wang actually mentions Heidegger, though without elaboration). We think it is important that this is being clearly recognized by researchers.

Explicitly identifying the concept of object authenticity, Reisinger and Steiner (2006) call for both its complete abandonment and replacement by an ‘unusual’ Heideggerian “concept” of object authenticity’. According to them, ‘the different … perspectives on the authenticity of objects … are numerous, contradictory … the notion … is too unstable to claim the paradigmatic status of a concept … [hence] object authenticity as a concept and a term should be abandoned’ (2006:66, 81). They cite Thomas Kuhn for support: ‘According to Kuhn, a “basic concept” within any discipline is an idea accepted “once and for all” by all members of its community’ (2006:65). Belhassen and Caton (2006) critique Reisinger and Steiner’s call by noting that tourism studies is not a ‘hard’ science. In Kuhn’s terminology, in social science, as is recognized by many scholars and researchers, Kuhnian paradigmatic normal science does not exist; and many concepts are, to borrow philosopher W. B. Gallie’s (1955-56) phrase, ‘essentially [i.e. by nature] contested’. Reisinger and Steiner’s call would entail the abandonment of much of existing social science. Reisinger and Steiner then proceed to state that Heidegger’s ‘unusual perspective might [after all] allow a “concept” [note the quotes] of object authenticity to emerge’ (2006:74):

‘To him [Heidegger], whatever is given is a gift to be valued and appreciated for itself … If Heidegger used a term like authentic to apply to things, whatever appears would be authentic … Heidegger (…) sees human existence as a partnership with what-is. The human role in the partnership is to be open to what-is … Heidegger (…) suggests that people engage with possibilities in two ways: by being practical or by being theoretical (…). When practical, people are actively involved, hands on, with what is as it is. When theoretical, they [are] … not dealing with what is as it is … Tourists who approach their experiences with a head full of ideas about what is authentic … are being theoretical and closed to authentic experiences’ (2006:77-79).

In other words, tourists’ role is to be ‘practical’ or ‘to be open to what-is’, in which case, ‘whatever is given is … authentic’ in the Heideggerian sense. If on the contrary they took a ‘theoretical’ approach say towards the zoo, they would be closed to its ‘authentic experiences’.

This Heideggerian ‘concept’ might perhaps be commendable philosophically, but we are less certain about its value in social research, for to say that if tourists take whatever is given as object-authentic, then it will be object-authentic is certainly hence trivially true – by definition. But, as Belhassen and Caton (2006:858) ask, what if tourists choose, as many do,
to take the ‘theoretical’ approach? Whereas this poses no problem for a social scientific concept of object authenticity, how would Reisinger and Steiner’s philosophical ‘concept’ respond to this? The following comment might give us an answer: ‘scholars [and by extension tourists] should just let toured objects be as they are … there is … an ideological, even ethical, reason [to do so]’ (2006:81, emphasis added), which appears to simply constitute a normative plea.

Steiner and Reisinger (2006:306, 311) then proceed to argue for a Heideggerian concept of existential authenticity: if individuals ‘identify with others and project themselves as what Heidegger calls a “they-self” (…), they will have the same sort of possibilities as anyone else who projects that same identity (…). If they project a my-self, their authentic self, then they will have unique possibilities … conformity [projecting the they-self] which Heidegger calls inauthenticity … they are not fully themselves … authenticity … is always about free choices’. Applied to tourism: ‘Tourists being authentic would be uninterested in a tour guide’s explanation … [would] desire to get off the beaten track … [would be] interested in self-discovery’ (2006:307, 312). Apparently, both the they-self and the my-self are part and parcel of the self, since both constitute a ‘-self’, while individuals projecting the they-self are only not ‘fully themselves’, i.e. they are still acting their self though not fully. Of course, the they-self is devalued as inauthentic, while the my-self is valued as authentic. Such an authentic-inauthentic distinction again constitutes a normative (valuing/devaluing) philosophical position.

To conclude, in MacCannell’s concept of authenticity and Cohen’s development of it, relationship authenticity (MacCannell) or the concern with spiritual meaning (Cohen) are linked to object authenticity. In contrast, Wang’s and Steiner and Reisinger’s concepts of existential authenticity are delinked from object authenticity. The above shows what the implications of such a delinking are, namely, the delinking is done by premising the concept of authenticity upon normative philosophical positions.

CONCLUSION

MacCannell’s seminal thesis of authenticity has constituted a perennial theme in tourism research. Critically building upon MacCannell and Cohen, we propose a social realist concept of object authenticity with a wider scope than exists in MacCannell’s and Cohen’s analyses, which is a completely independent concept instead of (as it is in MacCannell and Cohen) being parasitic upon other concepts, and in which construction and discourse play a role. Examination of poststructuralist rejections of MacCannell shows that our concept stands up well to such challenges.
The contemporary discursive field in tourism research in relation to the concept of authenticity mainly consists of Cohen’s phenomenology of tourist experiences (which incorporates MacCannell’s original thesis within it) in which the (implied) concept of object authenticity plays a role but is parasitic upon the concern with the culture of destination’s spiritual meaning, and two different versions of existential authenticity both of which are premised upon normative philosophy. Our concept of object authenticity is a social realist concept with characteristics as explained in the previous paragraph. It is, of course, up to researchers to decide which of these alternative conceptions of authenticity (MacCannell’s/Cohen’s; the existentialist conceptions; and the present paper’s) is more enabling of fruitful research, but a clear recognition of their different natures is crucial.

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