

# THE TOURIST AT HOME

*This village loves this village because its river banks are full of iguanas sunning themselves and its fishes love to bite.—SANTIAGO CHUB*

**W**“HAT’S HERE?” asked some friends from Maine as I walked them through the New Mexican village I live in. They had seen the place written up in a guidebook as “picturesque.” “Nothing,” I said with a certain mendacious pleasure, thinking how opaque the village’s surface is.

“Is there anything over there?” asked a couple I met on the bridge; they were staying at the local inn. “Depends on what you’re looking for,” I replied, secure in the knowledge that there was nothing over there they would see.

Yet when I give my own walking tours through the rutted dirt streets (and few of my visitors escape them), it seems to me that everything is here: culture, nature, history, art, food, progress, and irony. There is the old village itself and its vestigial claims to “authenticity”; the church (relatively new as southwestern churches go, having replaced an older one in 1884); the 18-year-old upscale development to the west for contrast (and for an architectural tour of another nature; it’s a good survey of imagined “Santa Fe style”); the movie set in the distance; the curan-

*Manuel and Clara Anaya with replica of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, Galisteo, New Mexico (photo: Lucy R. Lippard). The miniature church was made by Mr. Anaya; the actual adobe church, with the same distinctive double cross (which he helped to construct), is just below the hill on which this stands.*



dero's "office" with its skull on a pole; what used to be here and there (scattered adobe ruins); the quite new community center and the brand new firehouse (partially built by community work parties); yard art; an extensive petroglyph site; the cloud shows and encompassing light on ranchlands and mountains; the (diminishing) biological diversity of the creek and bosque; the mouth-watering tamales at the Tienda Anaya; and, of course, the people. We have it all, but for an outsider, it's hard to find.

The next question is, should it be easier? What's in it for a town like this, with few local businesses? Who would profit from a higher profile? Will signs begin to proliferate along the highway? Will local artists lend themselves to making this place a "destination" rather than a fly-through? Will a proposed café/gallery and/or restaurant change our identity? We may soon have to answer these questions, as the state and county tourism bureaus look farther and farther afield for attractive "authenticity." Dean MacCannell has said that the concept of the authentic is a potential "stake driven into the heart of local cultures."

**THE LOCAL IS DEFINED** by its unfamiliar counterparts. A peculiar tension exists between *around here* and *out there*, regional and national, home and others' homes, present and past, outsiders and insiders. This tension is particularly familiar in a multicentered society like ours, where so many of us have arrived relatively recently in the places we call home, and have a different (though not lesser) responsibility to our places than those who have been living in the area for generations. Jody Burland has remarked on the "peculiar reciprocity of longing" at the heart of tourism which binds outsiders to insiders. Tourists may long for warmth, beauty, exoticism, whereas locals may long for escape, progress, and an improved econ-

omy: "Between us there can be a moment of strange, perhaps misleading comprehension." Local residents both possess and *become* a "natural resource which produces more pleasure, and tourists are necessary to its conversion to wealth." Smiles and solicitude are part of the negotiations. The exchange contains the contradictions that define a multicentered society.

Tourism is the apotheosis of looking around, which is the root of regional arts as well as how we know where we are. Travel is the only context in which some people *ever* look around. If we spent half the energy looking at our own neighborhoods, we'd probably learn twice as much. When we are tourists elsewhere seeing the sights, how often do we stop and wonder who chose the sights we are seeing and how they have been constructed for us? We do often wonder about the sights we're not seeing—houses and gardens glimpsed behind the walls, historic sites and natural wonders sequestered on private property or closed on Tuesdays.

The tourist experience is a kind of art form if it is, as Alexander Wilson says, its own way of organizing the landscape and our sense of it. "We tour the disparate surfaces of everyday life as a way of reintegrating a fragmented world." It is an art form best practiced domestically, challenging artists to work in the interstices between the art scene and local audiences. This can mean demythologizing local legends and constructing antimyths that will arm residents against those who would transform their places in ways that counter local meaning (which in itself is unstable). So the resident who accepts the role of tourist at home becomes responsible not only for the way the place is seen but for how it is used. Jim Kent, a sociologist based in the legendary Colorado ski town notes, "So many people complain about the people who bought Aspen.

