

Response to a Questionnaire

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"To what extent, if any, has the supposed "uniformization" of the planet under the pressures of globalization and technological innovation altered or even rendered obsolete certain ways of traveling and writing about travel?"

My arrival in New Caledonia was disappointing. Having so long read about the mountainous "Grande Terre" rising out of the Pacific, I wasn't ready to see it appear--blue ocean suddenly brown--under the plane's wing.

In contemporary travel writing, the real experience begins only after landing. Nothing takes place in flight. Thousands of kilometers rush by, unnoticed from inside the machine: no sunsets from the promenade deck, no weeks of socializing with odd strangers, no liminal space or time. "The Airbus," by Luis Rafael Sanchez, is the only story I can recall where something (other than a hijacking) actually happens in the cramped seats and aisles.

Who, today, goes by boat on a long journey? (Cruises, going nowhere, don't count.) Only those desperate enough to stowaway in freight containers experience the temporality of ocean travel, but as a grim postmodern parody: hope wedged among commodities. . .

James Clifford