Contradictions in Tourism

The Promise and Pitfalls of Ecotourism as a Manifold Capitalist Fix

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ABSTRACT: This article reviews an interdisciplinary literature exploring the relationship between tourism and capitalism focused on ecotourism in particular. One of this literature's most salient features is to highlight ecotourism's function in employing capitalist mechanisms to address problems of capitalist development itself by attempting to resolve a series of contradictions intrinsic to the accumulation process, including: economic stagnation due to overaccumulation (time/space fix); growing inequality and social unrest (social fix); limitations on capital accumulation resulting from ecological degradation (environmental fix); a widespread sense of alienation between humans and nonhuman natures; and a loss of "enchantment" due to capitalist rationalization. Hence, widespread advocacy of ecotourism as a "panacea" for diverse social and environmental ills can be interpreted as an implicit endorsement of its potential as a manifold capitalist fix as well. The article concludes by outlining a number of possible directions for future research suggested by this review.

KEYWORDS: accumulation; body; capitalism; desire; ecotourism; neoliberalism

I stand on the pier waiting for yet another group of tourists to arrive and be loaded onto the 12-person zodiac. This will be the Moby Dick's fourth voyage of the day, its two hundred twenty-fourth of the season—and we are only two months in. It is June and if all goes well the season should last until early October. The tourists come walking down the pier, already wearing their inflated life vests—and over them their video and photo cameras, hats, sweaters, backpacks, and raincoats, despite the fact that it is a perfectly sunny day. They are eager to come onboard though I can see from their dangerous bouncing on the zodiac's bow that they are not used to being at sea. After a considerable amount of disorderly excitement they finally sit down and we leave port.

That day it takes about two hours to find the whales. Far more than usual, and to make matters worse, there are no dolphins to be found on the way to distract and amuse our tourists. This is too bad. Some of the tourists are on gravol (seasickness medication) and by the time we reach the whales they are a little slow in reacting. The crew came prepared. A bit of coffee soon has everyone back on track. The skipper Rita (a former whale hunter) and his first mate Louisa (a marine biologist) tell the tourists where to look. In the middle of the ocean it is not that easy to spot a sperm whale. When the sun is this bright and the air is misty all one can see is a dim whale spout. Other than that, one sees only a bit of a mass almost the same color as the water. Whale watching rules created to protect the cetaceans do not allow the boat to get too close, otherwise one might get a better glimpse; the whale may choose to come closer of course, but that rarely happens.

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The tourists wait, not sure what to see, or how to enjoy what to them looks like a nondescript floating blob. They tell me "It's not quite what I expected" … "I can hardly tell it's a whale" … The skipper and his mate try to explain what is so interesting about the whales and what they are doing, and how the passengers might enjoy just sitting there observing them. They tell everyone they should be excited! Thrilled! Happy! They do it passionately, even though this is their fourth voyage of the day, their two hundred twenty-fourth of the season … Their efforts fall on mute ears. Even though these tourists are on their first trip, the marketing ads, internet, word of mouth, and so on have convinced them that the truly cathartic and spiritually meaningful moment of this trip will happen when the whales fluke while diving deep into the ocean. They are eager to experience that moment. They are also getting tired, and a little seasick. The skipper gives in and even though he is not supposed to, he gently navigates the boat such as to "guide the whales into fluking." As if led by an invisible orchestrator the cameras flash in unison for a few moments until the last bit of fluke submerges. Every single tourist displays a smile of satisfaction and victory. They are all done.

The preceding vignette, from Neves's long-term ethnographic research on cetacean tourism (e.g., Neves 2004, 2006, 2010) captures one of the main dynamics we address in this article: ecotourism's capacity to transform bodies into sites of virtually limitless capital accumulation by promising a satisfying experience yet usually delivering instead a mere "pseudocatharsis" (Neves 2009a) that paradoxically stimulates a desire for further experience in pursuit of the fulfillment continually deferred. Documentation of this dynamic adds a new dimension to previous research analyzing ecotourism's impressive capacity to provide a "fix" of sorts for a variety of contradictions inherent in the accumulation process. In this state-of-the-field review, we describe this and other research investigating the multidimensional relationship between ecotourism and capitalism, in keeping with this journal issue's special focus on capitalism and the environment. Rather than provide an exhaustive review of the ecotourism literature as a whole, we focus on the research most pertinent to this specific theme.

After surveying the current literature exploring the ecotourism-capitalism relationship we push the analysis further by drawing on our own ongoing ethnographic fieldwork to describe several more aspects yet to be addressed by this research, one of the most intriguing of which involves treating the human body as a prime site of generative accumulation through commodification of a particular affective state. We conclude by highlighting the implications of our analysis for further research concerning the conjunction of ecotourism and capitalism, outlining several productive avenues that might be pursued in future study.

Explaining Ecotourism

The ecotourism industry has been growing rapidly over the past several decades. By 1998 the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that ecotourism comprised 20 percent of the US$441 billion global tourism market and was growing approximately 30 percent per year (versus 4% for the industry as a whole) (UNWTO 1998). In 2004, the UNWTO reported again that ecotourism was continuing to develop at three times the industry average (The International Ecotourism Society 2006). In short, Honey observes, "Ecotourism is often claimed to be the most rapidly expanding sector of the tourism industry" (2008: 6).

Of course, how the industry is measured depends on how "ecotourism" is defined. In its popular usage, the term is virtually synonymous with nature-based tourism broadly conceived, and thus "covers many activities: visiting a national park in Montana, diving in the Caribbean, seeing Mayan ruins, staying at a village lodge in Papua New Guinea" (West and Carrier 2004:

491). Yet a growing movement seeks to conceptualize ecotourism more narrowly as only nature-based tourism that confers significant social and environmental benefits (see esp. Honey 2008). Hence, The International Ecotourism Society, in a widely cited definition, characterizes ecotourism as "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (cited in Honey 2008: 6).

Our aim here is not to endorse either position but rather to analyze the type of activities that comprise ecotourism's common quest for encounters with nonhuman natures;[1] hence we define the phenomenon broadly for purposes of this discussion. Regardless of one's preferred definition, it is clear that ecotourism has become a global industry of significant proportions. As a result, it has become a popular strategy for sustainable development and environmental conservation around the world, enthusiastically promoted by international financial institutions (IFIs), national governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academic researchers, industry professionals, and innumerable local community members alike (Mowforth and Munt 2008). Honey summarizes:

> Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist, and, some claim, build world peace. (2008: 4)

Further emphasizing this potential, the United Nations declared 2002 the International Year of Ecotourism (see Butcher 2006b), highlighting the "the need for international cooperation in promoting tourism within the framework of sustainable development."[2]

Several explanations have been offered to account for ecotourism's dramatic surge in growth and popularity over the past several decades (see Fletcher 2011). From the demand side, researchers point to the behavior of "new" or "alternative" tourists (Mowforth and Munt 2008; Poon 1993) from wealthy industrial societies who, since the 1970s, have become increasingly "[t]urned off by overcrowded, unpleasant conditions" at home and have thus began seeking "serenity and pristine beauty overseas" (Honey 2008: 12; see also Fletcher 2009; Mowforth and Munt 2008). On the supply side, ecotourism is widely considered a superior alternative to conventional mass tourism, ostensibly compensating for the numerous negative impacts (including increased crime, drug use, prostitution, leakage—flow of most revenue out of the local area—and environmental degradation) conventional tourism development commonly entails (Honey 2008; Mowforth and Munt 2008). Ecotourism is considered particularly conducive to small-scale sustainable development in rural areas of less developed societies because it generally targets precisely these areas, which will lose their competitive advantage if overdevelopment occurs (West and Carrier 2004). In this spirit, ecotourism is championed as a model sustainable development strategy for areas that have not experienced significant benefits from conventional development measures, leading Munt (1994: 49) to describe it "as a last-ditch attempt to break from the confines of underdevelopment and get the IMF to lay the golden egg of an upwardly-mobile GNP."

In this article, we explore a third, complementary line of analysis that attributes both demand- and supply-side aspects of ecotourism's growth in popularity to its function as a particular form of capitalism that offers "fixes" for a series of contradictions inherent to the process of capitalist accumulation. In this sense, the many dimensions of the lofty promise commonly attributed to ecotourism, as highlighted by Honey (2008), can be interpreted as implicitly referencing the manifold fix that ecotourism promises for the capitalist world economy. We contend, therefore, that in the contemporary era ecotourism development has become an important means by

which capitalism endeavors to overcome its own contradictions (see Duffy 2012; Fletcher 2011). We also argue that this process is itself contradictory because ecotourism attempts to overcome these contradictions by using the very mechanisms and capitalist processes that created them. Paradoxically, therefore, not only does ecotourism development reproduce fundamental contradictions of capitalist accumulation, it also generates a series of further contradictions. We describe these, observing the common construction of an ecotourism "bubble" or "script" intended to conceal inconsistencies from potential clients and funders in order to preserve an image of success and keep the finances flowing.

Although our ethnographic research focuses on particular, fairly dramatic forms of ecotourism (whale watching and whitewater rafting), we believe our analysis applies to a wide range of nature-based tourism pursuits. Many of the dynamics we describe can be found in more conventional, mass forms of tourism as well (see Fletcher 2011). Yet given this special issue's focus on capitalism and the environment we limit our analysis to ecotourism specifically.

Ecotourism as an Accumulation Strategy

The tourism industry as a whole has long been described as "a product of metropolitan capitalist enterprise" (Britton 1982: 331) and "a major internationalized component of Western capitalist economies" (Britton 1991: 451). Ecotourism in particular is often considered the cutting edge of this trend, facilitating the increased commodification of natural resources around the globe (Bandy 1996; West and Carrier 2004). In this analysis, ecotourism is commonly categorized as part of a "third wave" of tourism development as the industry has evolved in concert with global capitalism (Lash and Urry 1987; Urry 2001). In its origins as a small-scale, elite enterprise, tourism of the nineteenth-century Grand Tour variety reflected early liberal capitalism's nascent entrepreneurial structure. The rise of mass tourism centered on collective prepackaged holidays in the post–World War II era, by contrast, coincided with the consolidation of an "organized," Fordist regime of accumulation emphasizing increasingly larger, vertically integrated firms. Finally, the 1970s witnessed the rise of "new" or "alternative" tourism offering a variety of flexible, individually tailored trips concurrent with capitalism's shift toward a novel "disorganized," post-Fordist form centered on "flexible accumulation" (Harvey 1989) through diverse structures. This has led to the development of a myriad "niche" or "boutique" markets designed to offer an outlet for every tourist's particular taste, including such diverse (and disturbing) products as war, sex, and slum tourism (Gibson 2009; Munt 1994).

In this sense, ecotourism is implicated in the emergence of what Martin O'Connor (1994) calls capitalism's "ecological phase" transitioning from the "formal" to "real" subsumption of nature within production (Smith 2007). This new ecological phase, of course, is itself part and parcel of capitalism's neoliberal turn since the 1970s (Brockington et al. 2008). Ecotourism, therefore, has been described as an expression of neoliberalization as well, embodying such paradigmatic free market principles as decentralization and deregulation of natural resource governance (or, more precisely, *re*regulation from states to nonstate actors) as well as resources' marketization, privatization, and commodification as tourism "products" (see Bianchi 2005, 2009; Carrier and Macleod 2005; Cater 2006; Davis 1997; Duffy 2002, 2008, 2010, 2012; Duffy and Moore 2010; Fletcher 2009, 2011; Mowforth and Munt 2008; Neves 2010; Vivanco 2001, 2006; West and Carrier 2004). West and Carrier (2004: 484) thus characterize ecotourism as "the institutional expression of particular sets of late capitalist values in a particular political-economic climate," while Cater (2006) similarly labels ecotourism a "Western construct" expanding the hegemony of global capitalism. Duffy (2012: 17) goes further to contend that ecotourism "is not just reflec-

tive of global neoliberalism, but constitutes one of its key drivers, extending neoliberal principles to an expanding range of biophysical phenomena."

This analysis is part of a growing body of research describing an increasing trend toward neoliberalization within natural resource management in general around the world. Initially this research centered on conventional forms of resource extraction and processing (e.g., Bakker 2009; Castree 2008, 2010; Heynen et al. 2007; McCarthy and Prudham 2004). However, more recently it has turned its focus to environmental conservation in particular (e.g., Brockington and Duffy 2010; Brockington et al. 2008; Büscher 2010; Büscher et al. 2012; Dressler and Roth 2010; Fletcher 2010b; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Neves 2010; Sullivan 2006, 2009). While extractive industry creates value by transforming natural resources into commodities that can be transported to their point of consumption, conservation, by contrast, seeks to commodify resources in situ, necessitating particular mechanisms to generate value sans extraction (Büscher et al. 2012). By transporting consumers to the point of production where they pay to interact with preserved resources, ecotourism thus serves as an—currently perhaps the most—important financing mechanism for neoliberal conservation.

Ecotourism's promotion as a conservation strategy is often based in an explicitly neoliberal approach to human governance in general, which asserts that if sufficient economic value is attached to in situ resources local stakeholders will be incentivized to preserve rather than extract them (see Fletcher 2010b). Honey (2008: 14) calls this the "stakeholder theory" asserting "that people will protect what they receive value from." This perspective is repeated ad nauseum in both academic literature and popular press (Fletcher 2009; Stronza 2007). As but one example, Crapper (1998: 21) contends of an ecotourism project in Peru, "As more native communities start to reap direct economic benefits as owners and partners of tourism services, locals will have more of an incentive, and a challenge, to protect what the tourists come to see." In reality, however, researchers have shown that such benefits are usually spread unevenly, often deepening preexisting social inequalities, and even introducing serious problems of equity and social justice (Brockington et al. 2008; Fletcher 2012; Neves and Igoe 2012; Stronza 2007).

The tourism industry as a whole has been described as an important means by which the capitalist world economy has sought to sustain itself through geographic and temporal expansion in the postwar era (Fletcher 2011); and as an expression of neoliberal capitalism, ecotourism in particular is seen to offer a number of potential "fixes" (Harvey 1989, 2006) addressing contradictions inherent to the accumulation process (Cater 2006; Fletcher 2011). As Marx (1973) observed, at the heart of the capitalist economy stands a central contradiction between competing motives of production and consumption. Capitalists' aim to extract maximum profit from the production process periodically precipitates a crisis of "overaccumulation" or "overproduction" in which workers, in aggregate, lack funds to absorb the fruits of production, causing profits to fall and production to stagnate. To transcend this crisis in the short term, excess accumulated capital must be reinvested in profitable production, through geographic expansion (what Harvey calls a "spatial fix"); through a "temporal fix" entailing either investment with the promise of future return or reducing turnover time so that "speed-up this year absorbs excess capacity from last year" (Harvey 1989: 182); or through a combination of these (a "time-space fix") primarily involving international money lending.

This expansion in response to Marx's central contradiction precipitates another crisis, which James O'Connor (1988, 1994) calls capitalism's "second contradiction" following from the reality that production is ultimately predicated on a finite natural resource base. Eventually, increased production in order to recover profit in the face of an overaccumulation crisis will degrade this resource base, causing costs to rise and profits to fall once more. This second contradiction can be addressed—and profit temporarily restored—through what Castree (2008) calls a series

of "environmental fixes," involving commodification and trading new forms of "natural capital"; replacing state control of resources with capitalist markets; intensifying exploitation of a given natural resource to yield increased short-term profits; or transferring resource governance responsibility (and thus revenues) from states to nonstate actors.

Ecotourism offers opportunities in relation to all these fixes (Fletcher 2011).[3] Development of new ecotourism destinations delivers a spatial fix, while investment in new ventures provides a temporal fix. By selling a transient event that is instantly consumed, ecotourism offers an additional temporal fix through reducing turnover time for the recovery of invested capital to a minimum. International lending for ecotourism development, such as provided by the World Bank, presents a time-space fix as well. In its status as a service industry, ecotourism offers a further opportunity for addressing overaccumulation crises (Fletcher 2011). Service work separates producers from consumers, allowing capitalists to extract maximum profit from the production process without compromising the consumer base necessary to forestall crisis by facilitating the transfer of a portion of accumulated capital to service workers—who are then able to absorb production—in exchange for the latter's provision of an additional valued benefit.

Ecotourism in particular offers a number of potential environmental fixes (Fletcher 2011; Robbins and Fraser 2003). It creates new markets for natural capital by expanding into the relatively noncommodified spaces that are its ideal destinations. Through privatization (such as in the widespread development of private nature reserves; see Langholz and Lassoie 2001), it transfers resource control from states to capitalist markets. Increasing visitation augments the revenue that can be generated from a given destination and the resources therein. The growing centrality of NGOs and private consultancy firms in the ecotourism development process (as intermediaries, for instance, in the transfer of funds from IFIs to local communities) helps to further shift the locus of revenue generation from states to nonstate players (Butcher 2006a). Ecotourism can be seen to provide a further environmental fix, which neither Castree nor James O'Connor predicted, by actually harnessing resource degradation itself as an additional source of value (Fletcher 2011; Neves 2010)—a process resonant of Klein's (2007) description of neoliberalism in general as a strategy of "disaster capitalism." As resources grow scarce, the remainder become increasingly valuable, and ecotourism destinations are in fact frequently marketed by emphasizing the likelihood that they will cease to exist in the future (Mowforth and Munt 2008). This trend is exacerbated by recent growth in "extinction tourism": the visitation of sites (e.g., glaciers, small island states threatened by sea level rise) whose value derives explicitly from the prospect of their imminent disappearance (see Leahy 2008).

Pushing this line of analysis further, ecotourism development can be seen to provide a variety of other fixes to problems intrinsic to capitalist development. For instance, Doane (2010) describes "fair trade" coffee as offering a "social fix" in its aim to deliver a living wage to producers and thereby redress to a degree the inequality and attendant social unrest created by capitalist markets. Through fair trade, then, inequality is actually harnessed as a source of increased value (in the form of the higher prices that can be charged) resulting from fair trade's very promise to assuage this inequality. In the demand that it redress inequities of uneven development and enhance the well-being of poor, rural community members bypassed by conventional development, ecotourism can be seen to offer a similar social fix.

Ecotourism is commonly marketed specifically as a means to connect humans with nonhuman natures (Braun 2003; Fletcher 2009; West and Carrier 2004), and in this respect it can be understood to offer yet another fix to problems wrought by capitalism (Neves under review). As Marx (1973) observed, capitalist production tends to create a "metabolic rift" whereby both producers and consumers are increasingly divorced from the means of production and the nonhuman natures in which this production is grounded (Bellamy Foster 2000). As a result, capi-

talist subjects come to experience themselves and the human sphere they occupy as alienated from nonhuman natures altogether. In offering an experience of "nature-culture unity" (Neves under review), ecotourism promises to resolve this division and the alienation it precipitates (Braun 2003), and thus can be described as providing something of a "psychological" fix for this existential crisis created by capitalist development. A further psychological fix can be found in ecotourism's common promise to deliver an extraordinary experience of mystery and enchantment felt to be lacking in everyday life (Arnould and Price 1993; Arnould et al. 1999; Fletcher 2008; Palmer 2004; Stranger 1999). This, too, can be seen as a response to problems of modern capitalist development, which has promoted the progressive disenchantment of the world and establishment of a rational, ordered society devoid of unpredictable elements (Escobar 1995; Tambiah 1990; Weber 1930). Similar extraordinary experiences are of course available through a wide range of activities, from marijuana use (Becker 1953) to spiritual snake handling (Covington 1995), and the problems they address are certainly not limited to the neoliberal age (see Campbell 1987), yet ecotourism in an increasingly prevalent means by which such experiences are pursued in the contemporary period.

In short, ecotourism offers the potential to provide an impressive variety of (partial) resolutions to contradictions of capitalist accumulation, promising spatial, temporal, time-space, environmental, social, and psychological fixes in one concise package. Hence, when Honey (2008) and others describe the multiple dimensions of the potential benefit that ecotourism is commonly called upon to provide, we suggest that this can be interpreted as an implicit recognition of ecotourism's potential to deliver a manifold capitalist fix.

Ecotourism and the Phenomenological Alignment of the Body as a Site of Capitalist Production and Consumption

In this section, we take the preceding analysis one step further by highlighting an additional intriguing dynamic by means of which ecotourism may assist in the quest to overcome limitations to capitalist accumulation, providing what might be called a "bodily fix" (Guthman and DuPuis 2006) to complement the others.[4] In other words, in addition to expanding geographically, ecotourism transforms the human body into an important site of capital accumulation (Harvey 2000; Guthman and DuPuis 2006). This occurs in a number of ways. First, there is the requirement to purchase appropriate equipment to outfit the body for one's excursion. As Brooks (2000: 213) facetiously observes, ecotourists cannot merely interact with "nature" directly but must "master the complex science of knowing how to equip yourself, which basically requires joint degrees in chemistry and physics from MIT." The proper shoes, socks, underwear, pants, shirt, sweater, jacket, hat, scarf, sunglasses, sunscreen, insect repellent, water bottle, headlamp, and backpack—not to mention all of the specialized equipment needed for one's particular pursuit—are required to bring the body into equilibrium with the "natural environment."

In addition to encouraging the consumption of protective and enhancement layers to prepare the body for one's excursion, ecotourism reaches into the body itself as a site of accumulation. In effect, the production of ecotourism as a commodity often requires a high degree of bodily engagement by tourists. Without the active and often strenuous participation of participants, most whitewater paddling trips, for example, would likely not occur at all and would certainly be in much greater risk of entering into dangerous mishap (Fletcher 2010a). Successful whale watching experiences, similarly, require that many tourists overcome the discomforts of motion sickness, learn "how to observe whales at sea," and become skilled at roughing the ocean on a

zodiac boat (Neves 2010). In both cases ecotourists actively deploy their bodies to coproduce the very "experience" (i.e., commodity) they consume, in the very location where the experience takes place, although the participatory and capitalist nature of these processes tends to remain invisible to tourists due to fetishization (Neves 2010: 731).

We contend that these processes amount to the phenomenological alignment of the body as a site of capitalist production and consumption (Neves 2009b). By this we mean that in ecotourism, experiences of "being in the world" are scripted and choreographed such that tourists adopt specific kinds of embodiments while they engage in the coproduction of ecotourism commodities, with tour guides frequently acting as coaches, with varying degrees of commandership (Fletcher 2010a). Tourists are told where and when to sit, stand, look, walk, move, stay still, and so on. They are also told which senses to use, how, and when. They are often told what to feel and when. In whitewater rafting, for example, guides commonly manipulate the experience in order to enable passengers to experience the proper level of perceived risk conferring a sense of stimulating excitement without debilitating fear, with the guides providing often explicit instruction concerning how to "correctly" interpret the experience (Fletcher 2010a; Holyfield 1999). In whale watching, there is a privileging of the visual gaze (Urry 2001) over other forms of embodied engagement with whales (instead of, for instance, an auditory perception of whales, attuning to their rhythms and tempos, or paying attention to the experience from the perspective of a more holistic communicative interaction between whale watchers and whale; see Neves 2004, 2006). As noted at the outset, many whale watching tourists are also predisposed to "feel" specific emotions during their encounters with whales due to expectations they have acquired through popular discourses and myths about cetaceans.

The phenomenological alignment of the body as a site of capitalist production and consumption in ecotourism is further extended through the mediation of technology. The production/consumption of whale watching as commodity is mediated by photo and video cameras, as are whitewater rafting and kayaking trips. For a large percentage of ecotourists a defining activity of whale watching as a commodity is to photograph a whale fluke—some companies will actually refund clients if there are no such photo opportunities on a trip (Neves 2004, 2006). Whitewater rafting clients frequently purchase photographs of themselves in the midst of challenging rapids as documentation of their experience.

In short, we argue that, however subtly, the orchestration of ecotourist experiences amounts to a disciplining of the body (Foucault 1975) whereby ecotourist bodies become sites of capitalist accumulation and tourists become participants in the ongoing cooptation of socio-natures (Hinchliffe 2007) within a neoliberal mode of capitalist conservation (Büscher et al. 2012). In this sense, tourists are simultaneously coproducers and consumers of ecotouristic commodities, while the experience is packaged such that its capitalist nature is fetishized via the construction that the experience actually transcends the shortcomings of capitalism. Ecotourism provides a realm of further accumulation in its commodification of a particular bodily experience achieved during the transitory event of the excursion. In essence, what ecotourism sells most centrally is a particular affective state—excitement, satisfaction, peace, contentment, pleasure, and so forth—attached to the outdoor, generally "wilderness" experience it offers. Commodification of this experience can be seen as yet another attempt to harness crises created by capitalist society as a source of value, promising to compensate for the routinized, alienating nature of most labor within a capitalist mode of production. Ecotourists, indeed, frequently describe their pursuits as an attempt to escape the ostensive monotony, anxiety, dissatisfaction, alienation, sense of fragmentation, and stress of life within modern capitalist society (see, e.g., Arnould and Price 1993; Arnould et al. 1999; Fletcher 2008; Mitchell 1983; Ortner 1999) in pursuit of an experience often characterized as "flow." As Csikszentmihalyi describes:

> Flow refers to the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. It is a kind of feeling after which one nostalgically says: "that was fun" or "that was enjoyable." It is the state in which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next in which we are in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future. (1974: 58)

Insofar as ecotourists seek to reenchant their lives by engaging in experiences that purport to provide them with deep affective responses, even spiritual cleansing (Arnould and Price 1993; Arnould et al. 1999; Fletcher 2008; Palmer 2004; Stranger 1999), a certain emotional catharsis is part of the package that is offered for sale. Such a "product" is in fact ubiquitous in ecotourism marketing campaigns. Whitewater rafting outfitters commonly promise a transformative if not life-changing experience (Arnould and Price 1993; Arnould et al. 1999; Fletcher 2010a; Holyfield 1999), as evidenced by one prominent outfitter's promotion of its excursion as a "Trip for a Lifetime." Whale watching advertising is so replete with the promise that encounters with whales and dolphins can radically transforms one's life that a new "cathartic healing" industry of swimming with dolphins has been booming for the past decade. Overall, our research shows that tourists seek to reintegrate themselves as "enriched" full persons thus overcoming a sense of fragmentation they feel in their—mostly urban middle class—daily lives within a capitalist society.

Yet this promise of resolution conferring a state of oneness with nature in response to the alienating character of capitalist society is largely an illusory one. The ecotourism experience is a temporary state that invariably returns one to the same everyday life conditions from which one sought to escape. As Mitchell describes, the flow experience is generally fleeting, after which:

> Clarity is replaced with confusion, simplicity with alternatives to be considered, confidence with trepidation, selflessness with self-consciousness. What was moments ago unambiguous now becomes complex; decisions are not clear-cut; the way to go is uncertain. The conditions of the everyday world reimpose themselves on the climber's consciousness. (1983: 168)

In other words, the affective release offered in ecotourism is transitory, and hence rather than delivering an enduring satisfaction of existential angst the experience usually provides merely a "pseudocatharsis" that paradoxically leaves the subject even more dissatisfied through deprivation of the previous stimulation. Yet the fleeting flow experience provides enough pleasure that its subsequent withdrawal inspires a desire for further experience in the hope of recapturing the previous "high" and thereby achieving the enduring resolution thus far denied. In this way, an opportunity for further accumulation is created as tourists seek to reexperience the desired emotional stimulation in search of a continually deferred satisfaction. As the object of this process is an ephemeral affective state that passes quickly with little residual impact on the body, this accumulation process can be virtually infinite, facilitating continual capitalization without significant limit or consequence.

To understand how this dynamic functions, it may help to draw on Slavoj Žižek's idiosyncratic synthesis of Marx and Lacan. Žižek emphasizes the important role of fantasy in sustaining desire for an impossible satisfaction that paradoxically enhances the very desire it inevitably fails to fulfill. As he describes, fantasy "constitutes the frame through which we experience the world as consistent and meaningful" (1989: 138), constructing the ideals that we strive to attain in our own experience and the rewards we believe them to offer. Fantasy thus stimulates desire for what Lacan called *jouissance*, usually translated as "enjoyment" but more properly a mixture of pleasure and pain that promises a satisfaction it can never deliver. This impossible promise ensures, paradoxically, that

unresolved desire is sustained rather than resolved, for as Lacan asserted, desire is always at root a desire for desire itself. Hence, "In the fantasy-scene desire is not fulfilled, 'satisfied,' but constituted" (Žižek 1989: 132).

Ecotourism, we assert, tends to operate in just this manner, offering a fantasy of fulfillment that stimulates the desire it promises to resolve while in reality commonly withholding resolution by delivering merely a pseudocatharsis via stimulation of a temporary *jouissance*.

A Whale of a Thing

I (Neves) conducted fieldwork on whale watching in Lajes do Pico from 1998 to 2000 and have been going back frequently since then. I have accompanied endless whale watching trips and interviewed countless tourists during this time. In addition to the ways in which tourists use their bodies to coproduce whale watching commodities, one of the topics that has most interested me in this context is their search for cathartic experiences in whale and dolphin watching. The experience described in the opening vignette represents circa 60 percent of tourists who visit Lajes do Pico (the remainder are local high school students, highly educated tourists, scientific researchers, and health tourists). Despite the fact that many of these tourists take motion sickness medication before embarking on a whale watching trip (as many as 25%) they seek a deeply emotional experience from their encounter with whales. Although the environment of a small zodiac boat is far from intimate, they imagine that their encounter with the whale will provide a "unique one-on-one" experience that will forever change their lives; "that somehow," as one tourist stated, "there will be a connection there that will bring new meaning to life, a clarity that has been missing."

Interestingly, although the majority of these tourists end up seeing only the whale's fluke, and only through the camera's peephole, when I interview them about the experience they do describe it as "magical," "transformative," "cathartic." But they also quickly add that the experience came with limitations. People I interview state that "well … it wasn't all that it could have been … it was great, it was special … but … next time …" and then add a list of conditions that will allow them to improve the experience. These include: "tomorrow I will come back and try the morning trip—I heard whales are more active in the morning"; "next time I am going to try the other boat, I heard you can see much better than from a zodiac"; and "I shouldn't have been on gravol." Although these are all accurate statements on how to improve a whale watching experience, the tourists I have followed on subsequent trips systematically display a pattern of returning with new ideas on how to improve future experiences in order to obtain deeper catharsis ("Next time I will try canoeing among humpback whales in the Antarctic"). There appears to be an escalation of consumptive demand as one pleasurable experience of whale watching increases the threshold of expectations for the next experience. Each experience provides sufficient satisfaction and pleasure to partly fulfill its promises of catharsis, but not enough to be fully meaningful, thus demanding another better fix from a subsequent experience.

Contradictions in Contradictions

In promising a series of fixes for contradictions of capitalist accumulation, ecotourism offers the prospect of continual accumulation without conceivable limits. This prospect, in turn, stimulates further fantasies intrinsic to capitalist ideology, namely the twin promises of accumulation without end and consumption without consequence central to the growing global enthusiasm

for employing neoliberal market mechanisms to address the environmental degradation widely seen as exacerbated by capitalism itself (Büscher et al. 2012; Fletcher 2012). In the second fantasy, so-called "ethical consumption" claims to resolve the contradiction between increased consumption and ecological/social crisis by ostensibly linking purchase to social programs that actually redress rather than stimulate such crises (Carrier 2010; Igoe 2010; Igoe et al. 2010; West 2010); while market environmentalism claims to resolve the parallel opposition between economic growth and environmental limits by promoting ostensibly sustainable—even "nonconsumptive" (West 2006)—resource exploitation (Brockington et al. 2008; Büscher et al. 2012).

Both of these fantasies are linked to the meta-fantasy at the heart of neoliberalism itself, which Dean, drawing on Žižek, calls the "fantasy of free trade," describing:

> The fantasy of free trade covers over persistent market failure, structural inequalities, the violence of privatization, and the redistribution of wealth to the "have mores." Free trade sustains at the level of fantasy what it seeks to avoid at the level of reality—namely actually free trade among equal players, that is equal participants with equal opportunities to establish the rules of the game, access information, distribution, and financial networks, etc. (2008: 55)

Central to this fantasy, we have shown, is the neoliberal claim that "that capitalist markets are the answer to their own ecological contradictions" (Büscher 2012: 12), and hence that the free market can redress problems of "market failure." This claim is itself contradictory, as researchers increasingly point out (Brockington et al. 2008; Büscher et al. 2012; Fletcher 2012; Fletcher and Breitling 2012; West 2006). Indeed, close investigation demonstrates that ecotourism's claim to resolve contradictions conceals a series of further contradictions inherent in the process of ecotourism development itself.

First, and most significantly, ecotourism's common claim to enhance rather than degrade natural environments belies the significant ecological impacts involved in ecotourism development (Carrier and Macleod 2005; Duffy 2002, 2008; Neves 2010; West and Carrier 2004). Central to this is the fact that ecotourism largely depends on long haul air transport, a significant contributor to the greenhouse gas emissions exacerbating climate change (Carrier and Macleod 2005; Duffy 2008; Hall and Kinnaird 1994). As a result, Hall and Kinnaird (1994: 111) contend, "The extolling of ecotourism development in faraway lands … may thus be viewed as paradoxical"—particularly when ecotourism takes places in destinations, such as small island nations like the Maldives, threatened by climate change itself.

Ecotourism development embodies a number of other evident contradictions as well. As Butcher (2006a, 2006b) points out, while ecotourism claims to constitute a form of development (what West [2006] calls "conservation-as-development"), it really delivers what might be more properly described as "de-development"; that is, the freezing of rural areas in a reified, undeveloped state that precludes the introduction of changes inconsistent with the idealized ecotourism landscape (see also West and Carrier 2004). In addition, while claiming to value traditional knowledge, ecotourism tends to value only that knowledge consistent with its aims; local knowledge conflicting with the interests of ecotourism (advocating resource extraction, for instance) must on the contrary be transformed (Butcher 2006a; Neves 2004).

West and Carrier (2004) identify a further series of contradictions in ecotourism development. First, they highlight ecotourism's "tendency to lead not to the preservation of valued ecosystems but to the creation of landscapes that conform to important Western idealizations of nature through a market-oriented nature politics" (Ibid.: 484). Second, they note an "apparent contradiction between a rhetoric that appreciates and supports exotic local communities and a practice that encourages the socioeconomic values associated with capitalistic individualism" (Ibid.: 485). Third, they highlight a common pressure "towards subordinating concern for envi-

ronmental conservation and respect for local communities, which ecotourism is said to encourage, to concern for attracting ecotourists and their money" (Ibid.: 491).

Van den Bremer and Büscher (n.d.), finally, add several more contradictions to this discussion. Ecotourism development, they contend, "renders Western culture both the problem and the solution to environmental degradation." This places local stakeholders in a bind in that "when indigenous people 'develop' they become a negative influence to their environment, while this same 'development' in the West has led to the noble ideas of environmentalism and sustainability." Further, the commodification of local landscapes through ecotourism means that "'authentic' and locally particular ecotourism expressions and actor dynamics can simultaneously acquire tendencies that transcend the local and the 'authentic'" by "acquiring global semblances."

These various contradictions are commonly obfuscated via what Carrier and Macleod (2005) call the "ecotourism bubble" and Van den Bremer and Büscher (n.d.) an "ecotourism script." As Carrier and Macleod (2005) point out, ecotourism is commonly marketed as a transparent practice clearly revealing the backstage (MacCannell 1999) infrastructure generally concealed within mass tourism operations (by highlighting, for instance, the social and environmental impacts of tourists' own activities and thereby bursting the "bubble" in which most conventional tourists are immersed during their trips). But in reality ecotourism commonly creates its own tourist bubble by obscuring negative environmental and social consequences in conflict with the virtuous image operators wish to present.

Our own research again illustrates the issue. For instance, most of the tourists who arrived in Lajes do Pico Azores for whale watching between 1989 and 1999 left the tour bus near the village's main pier right by the whalers' museum. The museum was located right beside the most modern whale watching company on the island. The majority of tourists were dazzled by the prospect of the whale watching trip itself, happily shopping while they waited at the company store enjoying its brand-name clothing, postcards, stuffed toys, and so forth. In this bubble of branded whale and dolphin bliss they never noticed the old whale hunters sitting on the benches outside the museum and near the pier who had lost their source of income with the end of whaling in 1983. Ironically, these were the former whalers to whom the government had not provided the opportunity and financial support the aforementioned company had received a few years later to start its own business (Neves 2004, 2006). Most of these ex-whalers had been living on meager early retirement plans since 1983, barely able to make ends meet. From inside their bubble fewer ecotourists would guess the existence of serious tensions in the village between the owner of this whale watching business and local companies trying to develop alternative practices based on what they believed were much sounder and more sustainable relations with cetaceans and a more socially equitable distribution of income (Neves 2004, 2006, 2010).

In addition, and perhaps most important, observations over a period of more than two years indicate that the average marine ecotourist is caught in a bubble in her/his relations with cetaceans, oblivious to potentially damaging environmental effects on at least two levels. First, in many places of the world whale watching clients are expected to act as coenforcers of whale watching rules and regulations. Most of these rules are simple—looking for signs of whale distress such as rapid breathing; refraining from chasing whales; keeping specific distances—but most whale watchers are too preoccupied with securing a good picture, onboard safety, and staving off motion sickness to fulfill this duty. Most simply lack knowledge of cetaceans and are hence unable to enforce cetacean protection rules they have just learned. Second, for the majority of clients the main goal of a whale watching trip is a picture of a fluking whale. Often the best angle to obtain such a picture is right behind the whale. Unless the whale happens to "naturally" decide to dive, however, whale watchers often frighten whales to expedite the process. In the

safety of their bubble most tourists are oblivious to the disruption this may cause a whale as they happily click away with their cameras (Neves 2010).

Hence, despite its claim to demystify the tourism experience, ecotourism often functions as a form of commodity fetishism itself (Carrier and Macleod 2005). Van den Bremer and Büscher (n.d.) go further to contend that obfuscation of contradictions within a self-congratulatory "ecotourism script" is in fact essential to ecotourism's success, as admission of negative impacts would compromise operators' ability to present the celebratory image necessary to attract the clients and funders vital for survival. Hence, ecotourism development presents a strong incentive to conceal its inconsistencies beneath a veneer of unequivocal positive benefit to environments and communities alike. In this manner, the neoliberal fantasy of free trade facilitating an infinite process of capital accumulation sustainable along economic, environmental, social, and psychological axes simultaneously is maintained.

Conclusion

We certainly do not intend to deny that ecotourism can at times produce positive results in particular circumstances. Previous research has documented a variety of cases in which ecotourism has in fact contributed to conservation as well as community well-being or empowerment (see, e.g., Almeyda Zambrano et al. 2010; Honey 2008; Krüger 2005; Nyaupane et al. 2006; Stronza 2005, 2010). Neither is this to deny that tourism can at times be employed as an instrument of social justice, even anticapitalist struggle (Higgins-Desbiolles 2006, 2008). Rather, our analysis questions the extent to which ecotourism can truly fulfill its overarching promise to facilitate sustainable development on a global scale by reconciling economic growth with both environmental protection and poverty alleviation within a capitalist framework. As we have shown, although the process of ecotourism development purports to reconcile a number of contradictions intrinsic to capitalist accumulation, the process is itself contradictory in many respects, not least in terms of its ambition to harness the same market mechanisms in large part responsible for many of our social and ecological problems to resolve the very same.

Future research is needed to assess in greater specificity aspects of this analysis presented in largely abstract terms. First, research would be useful to empirically investigate the ways in which ecotourism opens new arenas for capital expansion and accumulation, detailing how this process actually occurs on the ground in particular times and places. Second, study would be valuable to assess how well our analysis of ecotourism as a "bodily fix" resonates with other experience elsewhere. Third, research could explore how contradictions implicit in ecotourism development are "sutured" by the ecotourism script, analyzing the specific discourse employed in this process in particular contexts (Van den Bremer and Büscher n.d.). Finally, analysis might assess the limits to ecotourism's capacity to function as a manifold fix, weighing the benefit derived from this process versus the cost incurred via problems generated in the course of ecotourism development itself. Through this effort, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of ecotourism's potential to fulfill the lofty promise commonly attributed to it.

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NOTES

1. Our use of the term "nonhuman natures" follows from contemporary social theory that is sensitive to widespread critique of dichotomous "society/nature" conceptualization. Best articulated in Bruno Latour's book *Politics of Nature* (2004), this critique demonstrates that the ontological distinction between "society" and "nature" is a highly problematic, arbitrary, and hierarchical modern construct. Moreover, the critique reveals that throughout modernity this ontology has constituted the grounds on which the domination and exploitation of "nature" (as well as humans who are deemed to belong to nature, e.g., "tribal peoples") has been politically and ethically justified. Use of terms such as "human natures" and "nonhuman natures," by contrast, evoke the continuum/entanglement, plurality, and heterarchy of "society and nature."
2. http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1998/eres1998-40.htm; accessed 12 August 2010.
3. This is certainly not to endorse a functionalist perspective holding that such fixes are the principle reason for tourism's existence, merely that tourism often fulfills such functions as a component of its development. Nevertheless, our research does indicate that the outcomes of ecotourism have been able to offer such fixes, and indeed, that national governments often use the promise of such fixes to justify further investment in and even subsidization of the ecotourism sector (see, e.g., Neves 2004, 2006).
4. This analysis builds on research addressing the role of bodily experience in tourist activity (e.g., Cater and Cloke 2007; Desmond 1999; Graburn 2004; Veijola and Valtonen 2007), responding in part to studies such as Urry's popular *Tourist Gaze* (2001) that neglect to emphasize this important dimension of the experience. Again, this dynamic is not unique to ecotourism yet for purposes of this article we limit our analysis to nature-based pursuits.

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