“CASHING IN ON WHALES”: CETACEANS AS SYMBOL AND COMMODITY ALONG THE NORTHERN PACIFIC COAST, 1959-2008

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces shifts in how humans related to cetaceans in the late twentieth century. Economic transitions from whaling to whale watching revealed not only a growing affinity for whales, dolphins, and porpoises but also how humans recommodified animals from resources to objects of research, entertainment, and reverence. In the process new cultural and social fissures opened. Cetaceans divided people by class, geography, and race. Views about whales divided over proprietary rights, scientific discoveries, and regional identity. Humans' interactions with cetaceans revealed much about their relationship with nature and with each other. This thesis uses primary and secondary sources, including studies of wildlife and theme park experiences, news media reports, and oral interviews with whale watching workers, scientists, and activists.

Keywords: tourism; Pacific Northwest; cetaceans; aquariums; whale watching; conservation

Subject Terms: Tourism -- British Columbia -- History; Tourism -- West (U.S.); Aquariums; Whale watching -- British Columbia -- Pacific Coast; Whaling -- Washington (State) -- Neah Bay; Cetacea
DEDICATION

For my parents

who have shown the way in word and deed.
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My tremendous gratitude is due to many. First, Dr. Joseph E. Taylor III. The magnificent name, the history of which he takes obvious and rightful pride in sharing, befits the man. Dr. Taylor’s dedication has been exemplary, his work ethic inspiring, and his brilliance simply essential.

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CONTENTS

Approval .............................................................................................................. ii
Abstract .......................................................................................................... iii
Dedication ....................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................... v
Contents .......................................................................................................... vi
Introduction .................................................................................................... 1
Chapter One: From Rendering to Reverence .................................................. 10
Chapter Two: Protective Custody ................................................................. 29
Chapter Three: Watch and Learn ................................................................. 45
Chapter Four: How to Love a Whale ............................................................... 61
Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 74
Bibliography ................................................................................................. 81
Introduction

Summer in Victoria, British Columbia is defined by visitors. They throng to attractions around the harbour, their choices influenced by advertisements selling businesses or the city itself. I spent my undergraduate summers in Victoria, working behind a whale watching sales desk, answering phones, walking the harbourfront, and visiting hotels to attract tourists who, in turn, wanted to see visitors of a wholly different kind. Every summer the southern resident population of killer whales gathered around the southern end of Vancouver Island to hunt salmon and to socialize. It was a remarkable natural boon to the tourism industry that while winter offered only occasional chances to spot members of the clan’s three pods, named J, K, and L, many summer days found all these large dolphins together. It is a group whose population of around ninety could barely be called stable and whose births and deaths were agonized over by scientists and shopkeepers alike.

In the summer, these whales lived in a sort of wild zoo, penned not by fences but by geography and biology. They needed the area’s rich fishing grounds to survive, and they needed to congregate to mate and socialize. As salmon ran through the Gulf and San Juan Islands into their home streams, and killer whales hunted them, both were followed

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1 Killer whales live in three distinct populations along the Northern Pacific Coast, known as southern residents, northern residents, and transients. The northern residents spend their summers in Johnstone Strait near northeastern Vancouver Island and number over 200. Transients roam along the Pacific coast and are the least-studied of the populations. Residents eat mostly fish while transients hunt other marine mammals. Many of these whales are ‘dual citizens,’ crossing the United States-Canada boundary at least once during an average summer day, and probably venturing far out to sea in the winter, making them a transnational and international phenomenon.
by whale watching boats from Victoria, Vancouver, Bellingham, and many smaller communities. On an average day, there were many more people than whales on the water. Filling those boats was the easy part of my job on most long and bustling summer days. Far more challenging was sorting through the returning passengers and soothing those who were not sufficiently thrilled. For some, expectations simply ran too high. Many wanted an aquarium populated by constantly jumping whales, and the glittering ocean and fresh air could not compensate for the dearth of jumping. Others caught only glimpses through the fog, or found that other boats blocked their view, or saw only a few sleeping animals rather than the whole excited, socializing, hunting clan. Sometimes the whales were not there at all. Yet no experience was universally pleasing or disappointing. On a typical day a single boat-load of passengers could entertain both extremes. The difference often derived from what sightseers expected of the animals. For some, orcas were a mystical piece of pure nature, to be experienced at the edge of perception, humans and animals barely intruding on each other’s worlds. Others yearned to gain understanding through an up-close glimpse into the eye of an uncommonly charismatic creature. And then there were those who simply wanted a thrill ride.

Environmental historians have documented Western cultures’ obsession with contacting wilderness, and all the contradictions they have shown to be inherent in that quest are found in the case of cetaceans. The first whale to be filmed underwater, in its natural habitat, was tied up with rope by famed ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau.² Cousteau embodied the paradox of all wildlife-watching: we seek to make contact with

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wild animals as they really are, yet our very presence somehow makes them less wild. Furthermore, our experiences are always mediated by the culture we cannot escape. As William Cronon argues, when it comes to wild places, “we cannot help experiencing them not just as natural environments but as cultural icons.” This is all the more true when, as with cetaceans, those who sold access to them made every effort to convince their customers that buying a ticket was the best way to act in harmony with the animals and their environment.

Despite this persuasion, whale watching was far from universally favoured by, or accessible to, those who loved whales, dolphins, and porpoises -- known collectively as cetaceans. Such contests were not limited to whale watching. Other ways of using cetaceans produced at least as much turmoil. This thesis is an attempt to answer some of the questions arising from my curiosity about people watching cetaceans. Why is the Pacific Northwest so identified with cetaceans? How did passengers develop preconceptions about the animals? How did whale watching and other attempts to turn cetaceans into commodities change how people thought about and interacted with them? To what extent did division over cetaceans reflect human concerns and inequalities?

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3 William Cronon, “Preface,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 20. See also Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground*, 80-81: “If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. The place where we are is the place where nature is not.”

4 The waters of the Northern Pacific Coast are home to diverse species of cetaceans. On the water or in the aquarium tank, some species inspired more affinity than others. While the attention paid to a species could fluctuate -- for example, based on scientific discoveries and media reports -- some did generally have more hold over more imaginations. In this region, the killer whale or orca reigns. It is in fact the largest member of the dolphin family. Generally, however, differentiating between responses to species is not an element of this thesis, though that is not to say that the issue is not worthy of investigation elsewhere.
Answers are to be found, first, in understanding how people translate natural objects into comprehensible concepts. Sherry Ortner has argued that an object can be considered a key symbol for a culture when it meets at least one of the following criteria: that we are told by those being studied that it is important; that they have some opinion about it rather than being indifferent; that it appears in many forms in their culture including conversation, art, and symbolism; that there is a great deal of elaboration about it; and that rules or taboos surround its use.\(^5\) Ortner notes that living organisms often operate as key symbols.\(^6\) The notion that animals can act as a locus of belief about the world at large is well-established in anthropological literature. For example, in Mary Douglas’ classic study of the Lele of the Kasai, she found that the unusual characteristics of pangolins led to the belief that they were special mediators between the human and animal worlds. By investigating this concept, Douglas learned better how the Lele understood their relationship to nature.\(^7\) Cetaceans played this role for many North

\(^5\) Sherry B. Ortner, “On Key Symbols,” American Anthropologist 75, no. 5 (October 1973): 1339. Ortner, an anthropologist, refers to the subjects of study as “natives.” Not only does this distinction seem outdated in that it implies that such criteria can only apply to presumably ‘simpler’ non-Western cultures, but it is also implies a geographic limitation to the reach of an object -- i.e. the ‘natives’ of location Y think in way Z about object X. The broad geographic scope of this thesis and its focus on Western cultures indicates my belief that its usefulness extends beyond those peoples usually considered to be ‘natives.’


Americans, and the Northern Pacific Coast forms a peculiar, coherent cultural region in which to study the phenomenon.  

Over time, such symbols tend to acquire a “historical foundation” of their own whose connection to their reality is complex. Indeed, by the late twentieth century cetaceans had become laden with so much cultural baggage that they were “a metaphor [which] cannot be reduced to its ‘true’ referent.” The signifier no longer had a single message. Even within the Pacific Northwest, cetaceans were infused with multiple meanings, and the devotees of each signification battled for cultural supremacy. Roland Barthes has argued that an object becomes mythical when the associations between the object itself and the concepts it is believed to represent become tight enough that disputing them is no longer culturally acceptable. Cetaceans prove this definition too narrow. Contests over their meaning continue, and each competing ideal has mythic power for its believers. Such objects of myth are indeed “deprived of their history, changed into gestures,” but in the case of whales, there has been a multiplicity of gestures. Discourse on cetaceans has been continually redefined by contests over their

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8 The region hosted the birth of Greenpeace, a remarkable concentration of scientific activity, and cetacean populations which fed robust aquarium and whale watching industries. Nonetheless, cultural interest in cetaceans was not limited by such endeavours nor limned by whale-inhabited waters. This thesis thus investigates both tourists and residents in the region and works in the context of continent-wide fascination with the animals. As Joseph Taylor has shown for Pacific salmon, “human culture is not conterminous” with the ranges of wild animals in this region.


11 Barthes, Mythologies, 113-119.

12 Barthes, Mythologies, 122.
meaning and use. In this case as in others, to understand the discourse, we must pay attention to its disputed boundaries, for they probably define it better than its established interior.¹³

The key medium of this discourse has been commodification, the process by which nature is reduced to a consumable whose value is defined narrowly and strictly according to market criteria. During the twentieth century, many critics considered efforts to sell pieces of nature to be the inevitable precursor of its destruction. Carolyn Merchant has noted that these critics have sought to “rewrite the story of history as a decline from an Edenic deep past.”¹⁴ Donald Worster, for example, has been concerned with showing how humans must “find again the coherence, pattern, and integrity of nature,” which is a stable, unchanging beacon by which people should orient themselves.¹⁵ In such a view, the consequences of using nature by commodifying it are almost wholly negative. Worster’s story of the American Dust Bowl of the 1930s argues that capitalism led inexorably to “human alienation from nature.”¹⁶ In his history of Oregon between 1800 and 1940, William Robbins employs a similar critique of capitalism to overthrow the narratives of progress which continue to define the American

¹³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 46: “Discursive relations are not, as we can see, internal to discourse . . . . Yet they are not relations exterior to discourse . . . . They are, in a sense, at the limit of discourse.”


West in popular culture, seeking to replace them with a “darker view” focused on the
collateral damage of efforts to remake the state’s landscape.17

Commodification, however, takes many forms. On the northern Pacific coast,
whales were hunted for their oil and meat by commercial whalers until 1967. Here,
nature’s transformation into commodities is clear: whales were killed so that their bodies
could be traded around the globe. Yet these processes played out in far less conspicuous
ways too. We also consume the world as experience, and during the late twentieth
century, businesses on the northern Pacific coast discovered that selling the experience of
whales could be profitable. Aquariums took cetaceans from the oceans and moved them
to tanks, where their presentation could be carefully managed for eager consumers.
Whale watching operators soon found that many tourists preferred the apparently more
authentic, natural experience of coming into contact with whales in their own
environment. These subtler manifestations of nature’s commodification must complicate
our narratives of such processes.18

17 William Robbins, *Landscapes of Promise: The Oregon Story, 1800-1940* (Seattle: University of
Washington Press, 1997), 20. Bill McKibben has argued that the very idea of a natural world
apart from humanity is outdated because of our depredations of it: “these changes will clash with
our perceptions, until, finally, our sense of nature as eternal and separate is washed away, and
we will see all too clearly what we have done.” Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York:

18 Such diversifying commodification was not limited to the northern Pacific coast in the late
twentieth century. Worldwide, activities which were previously unknown or simply unorganized
became subject to fees for access and often required consumption of a growing constellation of
accessories. As a result, “many -- if not most -- tourism and leisure pursuits” were “transformed
into ‘experiences’ that can be marketed, sold and bought.” For much of the twentieth century, the
success of this industry was due largely to increased conspicuous consumption. To show their
superior taste, tourists wanted to be seen participating in the right activities in the right ways.
From the 1970s onwards, however, progressively more tourists became interested in “activity and
cultural holidays” which satisfied their “desire for stimulating experiences.” The dramatic growth
of this group was nearly simultaneous with that of cetacean tourism in the Northwest. Gareth
Shaw and Allan M. Williams, *Critical Issues in Tourism: A Geographical Perspective* (Oxford:
Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 11, 46-49, 244.
Since 1959, all the principal, and in some senses principled, relationships with
cetaceans along the Northern Pacific Coast have been developed by or in reaction to these
attempts to profit from whales. Many residents and tourists embraced the industries
which sold them new experiences and images of the animals. Others, however, strongly
objected. Nature tourism restructured Northwest landscapes and society, and those
adhering to unhelpful ways of understanding and using nature were pushed aside in
favour of new images of the animals and the region. The resulting disruption of
traditional ways of life, ecological impacts, and increased corporate control of nature
disturbed many. Growing consensus about the uniqueness of cetaceans and their close
kinship with humanity added to the rancour. The increasing pervasiveness of whales in
local culture, due in large part to their commodification, also generated efforts to preserve
the animals. All sides appealed to the credibility of science and the emotional power of
cetaceans’ sympathetic characteristics, working to turn new discoveries to their
advantage. Such cultural contests and social division fragmented the region by
geography, class, race, and belief.

This thesis considers these issues in a thematic and roughly chronological fashion.
Chapter One opens with the end of government-sponsored slaughters of cetaceans and
commercial whaling around the Northwest as well as fishers’ perceptions of the animals.
Taking the world’s first captive orca display in 1964 as the beginning of a series of rapid
changes which brought the animals into the human world through commodification, it
then details the orca-capture industry and those who reacted against it through new ideas
about cetaceans in science, activism, and popular culture. Chapter Two focuses on the
results of cetacean captures. As the animals were lionized in aquariums across the world from the 1970s to the 1990s, there was a backlash centred in the Northwest against their confinement and sale. Aquariums joined battle by transforming themselves to keep pace with changes in mainstream beliefs. Chapter Three explores the rapid growth of Northwest whale watching during the 1980s and 1990s. It shows that whale watching tours, like aquarium displays, were consumed by a relatively narrow social spectrum. There were similarities too between the cultural contests about aquariums and the whale watching industry, in which businesses tried to craft positive images and activists worked to undermine them. The chapter also details biologists’ and whale watching guides’ quest to understand and direct humans’ powerful responses to cetaceans. Chapter Four shows how cultural understandings of whales and First Nations combined to provoke intense opposition to the Makah tribe’s plan to hunt grey whales in the Pacific Northwest. Led by local whale watching employees, the confrontation pitted rival ways of using animals that had emerged only in the preceding few decades.
Chapter One: From Rendering to Reverence

During the 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between humans and cetaceans changed more dramatically than it had since the start of modern commercial whaling. Between 1959 and 1972, whaling ended, the United States and Canada promoted an international moratorium, and killer whales evolved from official public enemies to beloved friends. Alongside new knowledge and portrayals of the animals, recommodification divided people and ignited cultural conflicts that raged across the last quarter of the twentieth century. Though humans began to use whales in radically new ways, markets continued to structure environmental relations. Ironically, at the same time, whales were increasingly imagined as transcendent beings, as a way of finding something both like humans and yet completely natural. These processes divided people by culture, class, and geography.

The war against whales took several forms during the twentieth century. Commercial whaling occurred off British Columbia until 1967, when the Coal Harbour station on northwestern Vancouver Island closed because too few whales remained for the enterprise to be profitable.\(^\text{10}\) Meanwhile, in the summer of 1959 the government of Canada discharged its constitutional responsibility to manage the country’s fish stocks by installing a heavy machine gun on the cliffs at Seymour Narrows, in the middle of

Vancouver Island’s east coast, to target local killer whales. That gun was not used because of forest fire concerns and perhaps because complaints from fishers were at a low ebb that year, but weapons were nevertheless often aimed at orcas.\textsuperscript{20} North American air forces used pods for target practice until 1964.\textsuperscript{21} Local fishermen also assaulted their perceived competition.\textsuperscript{22} When killer whales were captured in the 1960s and 1970s, about a quarter had bullet wounds, and they were the survivors.\textsuperscript{23} A San Juan Islands fisherman remembered recognizing the whales’ arrival by the sound of gunfire spreading through the fishing fleet.\textsuperscript{24}

Such violence should not surprise us. As the Vancouver Aquarium’s founding director Murray Newman put it, in the 1960s many regarded killer whales as “the marine world’s Public Enemy Number One.”\textsuperscript{25} The United States Navy gave them the highest rating for danger to divers.\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Time} called them “[s]avage sea cannibals . . . with teeth like bayonets” when one hundred were killed by American soldiers stationed in Iceland. In a tongue-in-cheek tone which many readers a half-century later would have found

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item\textsuperscript{20} Murray Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl: Confessions of an aquarium director} (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1994), 81.
\item\textsuperscript{21} Rex Weyler, \textit{Greenpeace: How a group of ecologists, journalists, and visionaries changed the world}. (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004), 204-205; William Dietrich, “All Eyes on Orcas,” \textit{The Seattle Times}, August 13, 2000, http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=20000813&slug=4036613
\item\textsuperscript{25} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 81.
\item\textsuperscript{26} Erich Hoyt, \textit{Orca: The Whale Called Killer} (Richmond Hill, ON: Firefly Books, 1990), 85.
\end{thebibliography}
loathsome, the article called killer whales one of “the afflictions of everyday life” and reported that the slaughter was “very tough on the whales . . . but very good for American-Icelandic relations.” Whales, after all, had “destroyed thousands of dollars worth of fishing tackle, forc[ing] dozens of Icelanders out of work for lack of gear.”

Attitudes about cetaceans were actually more mixed, though. An observer reported that “opinions on the killer whales differed” among fishers around northern Vancouver Island in the 1970s and that First Nations fishermen generally believed there were enough salmon for humans and nature alike. One even used killer whales to enhance his fishing by setting nets so as to scoop up the salmon running scared before a pod. Yet many certainly thought that the “blackfish” were incompatible with a good day’s fishing. One scientist noted that in the 1970s a common reaction to his research on killer whales was “What for? What good are they? Shoot the fuckers, they’re eating our fish.” Even in the early 1990s, fishers killed eight orcas in Alaska’s Prince William Sound for plucking fish from longlines. The divergent attitudes between working fishers and recreationalists is striking. To those who directly competed with whales for

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salmon, the animals could be a nuisance, but to those who regarded them as objects of
entertainment and reverence, whales were anything but economic competitors.\textsuperscript{31}

The shift began in 1964, when Murray Newman and the Vancouver Aquarium
tried to harpoon a local killer whale to serve as a model for a grand sculpture that would
hang in the aquarium’s lobby.\textsuperscript{32} Newman’s views about whales diverged dramatically
from most officials, airmen, and fishers. He was offended that “marine mammals were
either being slaughtered for business or killed as pests,” and frustrated that society could
not “appreciate and protect” them. As a biologist, he believed his “mission” was to
present “animals to the public so that people would know and care about them.”\textsuperscript{33} In
Newman’s mind, such contact with animals would naturally spur viewers to protect the
environment. He was not alone. Many shared his assumption that in captivity or in the
wild, cetaceans could enlighten and mobilize advocacy.

Due to poor shooting, Newman and his aquarium accidentally found themselves
in possession of a live whale, “relatively uninjured despite the harpoon.”\textsuperscript{34} This was a
novel problem. Killer whales had never been kept in captivity long enough to be
displayed, so the aquarium was unprepared for their new arrival.\textsuperscript{35} Nonetheless, Newman
was loath to waste the opportunity. He found a temporary home for the animal -- named


\textsuperscript{32} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 83.

\textsuperscript{33} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 83.

\textsuperscript{34} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 81.

\textsuperscript{35} Marineland of the Pacific near Los Angeles had tried to capture killer whales in 1961 in 1962. The one animal which they managed to move into a tank survived only one night there. Hoyt, \textit{Orca}, 17-19.
Moby Doll, though the autopsy revealed it to be male -- at Burrard Drydock in Vancouver, and when the owners allowed Moby a day for public visitation, nearly 20,000 accepted the offer. 36 The event was eye-opening. Newman realized that “Public interest was broad and genuine.”37 He and others were also astonished by the animal’s “complete lack of ferocity or aggressiveness.”38 He thought this docility might be attributable to the whale’s young age, but in any case the killer whale’s reputation for “boldness and ferocity . . . contrasted greatly with the apparent harmlessness of the captive specimen.”39

The experience prompted Newman to persuade the scientific community to see the animals differently:

Killer whales have been benign to man. They are very common in the inside passage of British Columbia, with innumerable contacts between whales and fishermen, but they have never been reported to upset or damage boats of any size in the area, nor have they ever been reported to attack swimmers or skin divers.40

Newman reasoned that the whales’ long-overlooked peaceful nature, along with the intelligence indicated by their brain structure, meant that orcas could probably be trained safely in captivity.41 The argument laid out the internal tensions of a coming conflict over interaction with cetaceans. Since whales were intelligent and docile, Newman concluded


40 Newman and McGeer, “The Capture and Care of a Killer Whale,” 67. We might add that for an intelligent animal, this is somewhat remarkable given the harassment by fishermen discussed above.

that they were suitable for captivity, science, and entertainment, yet those very same traits, along with later research about their social structures, would lead others to believe whales must be freed.

Ambivalence and contradiction abounded as Newman made his case and as Moby Doll became a celebrity. This new way of commodifying cetaceans combined with new ideas to create rapid, chaotic change in the relationship between humans and whales. When Newman went looking for what he thought would be the animal’s favourite food -- whale meat -- he called the Western Canadian Whaling Company, still operating its last station at Coal Harbour. He got “a gory package of blubber and whale tongue.”

Despite the commercial whaling off their coast, the Vancouver Visitors Bureau named Newman its Man of the Year for trying to save and show Moby Doll. Moby soon died, but before its death an aquarium had offered Newman $25,000 for possession. Newman realized that he had begun “a new commercialism” for the species, as aquariums around the world soon demanded their own specimens.

The exhibition of a killer whale had started to transform the species from “undesirable predator to magnificent wildlife species” in the eyes of the public, but such changes seemed tenuous to Newman. Attitudes could easily revert. Therefore “consistent, stable presentation in institutions like public aquariums” had to continue.

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42 Newman, Life in a Fishbowl, 90. The discovery of the coast's distinct populations of killer whales, and their distinct diets, would come later. Newman and his staff were thus perplexed that Moby Doll -- a fish-eating resident killer whale -- refused to eat marine mammal flesh.

43 Hand, Gone Whaling, 33.

44 Newman, Life in a Fishbowl, 93.
Saving wild whales required sacrificing some to captivity. As the practice became increasingly controversial, his colleagues in the aquarium industry often turned to this argument to justify its perpetuation.

Though captivity was the most direct way for most North Americans to experience cetaceans, these encounters were often mediated and structured by portrayals of cetaceans in film and television. Video domestication allowed them to fit comfortably into society and to reflect human values. The movie and TV series *Flipper* about the escapades of a helpful, friendly dolphin, portrayed synergistic human-cetacean interactions between 1963 and 1967. Ric O’Barry, Flipper’s trainer, believed that the show so convincingly promoted new ways of thinking about cetaceans that he was largely responsible for subsequent captures of dolphins for aquariums.

Like the animals in other nature films of the era, such as Disney’s *True-Life Adventures*, cetaceans operated as wild reflections of human values, thus confirming that contemporary North American society reflected the natural order. Animals were shown living a recognizable family life to soften their image, but as research later revealed, killer whales really did live in tight families. In the 1966 film *Namu, My Best Friend*, an

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46 Heller, *The Whale Warriors*, 280. O’Barry says that he “knew dolphins were self-aware thirty years before the studies confirmed it,” and that when the show aired every Friday night, he strung a long extension cord down to the end of the dock in the pen where Flipper lived, and showed the dolphin her own image on television. “She loved it,” he remembers.

orca helps bring together his biologist protector with a local girl and her mother who need a father and husband. A filmmaker involved in a 1973 documentary on wild killer whales off northern Vancouver Island wrote of his team photographing a “pod at rest, a portrait of family togetherness . . . . killer whales in a pose that contradicted the image conjured up by their name.” Victoria’s Sealand had a standing policy that captives should live in mated pairs. In later whale watching excursions, guides compared cetacean and human life cycles to encourage passengers to identify with the animals.

Books portraying whales as sympathetic subjects also proliferated through the 1970s, including Farley Mowat’s A Whale for the Killing, Joan McIntyre’s compilation Mind in the Waters, and the English translation of Jacques Cousteau’s The Whale: Mighty Monarch of the Sea. Such works emphasized deep, emotional connections between cetaceans and humans. The similarities between concurrent changing images of wolves and cetaceans -- especially killer whales -- were many. As Tina Loo has shown, Mowat’s Never Cry Wolf and Bill Mason’s film documentaries on Canadian wolves transformed formerly fearsome killers into responsible members of a recognizable society. As more people came to know these animals through media and park or wilderness trips, older ways of interacting with them became unacceptable.

49 Hoyt, Orca, 103-104.
50 Hoyt, Orca, 123.
51 Sarah Jones, interview with author, Victoria, BC, September 12, 2008. This name is a pseudonym.
52 Weyler, Greenpeace, 259.
While dolphins had been shown regularly at Marineland in Florida since the 1930s, the heyday of cetacean exhibition did not come until after World War Two. The efflorescence of mass tourism in North America was fuelled in part by a steady supply of killer whales from the Pacific Northwest to theme parks seemingly everywhere.\textsuperscript{54} About fifty-eight were taken up to 1973.\textsuperscript{55} The \textit{Seattle Post-Intelligencer} called it a “black and white gold rush.”\textsuperscript{56} After Moby Doll, the next successful orca capture was near Namu, a British Columbia coastal town which also gave the whale its name. Fishermen trapped two whales in a bay with nets and called aquariums around North America to find a buyer. Murray Newman took one of the calls, but the winning $8000 bid came from Ted Griffin, an entrepreneur who had built the Seattle Public Aquarium in 1962.\textsuperscript{57} When Newman visited Griffin, he found himself sharing the pool deck with an MGM film crew led by the director of the \textit{Flipper} TV series. The whale became the star of \textit{Namu, My Best Friend}. The film’s central conflict arises when fishermen try to kill Namu, and the biologist who is caring for him -- and in the process finding out that his species are not mindless killers -- tries to stop them.\textsuperscript{58} As Griffin rode on the whale’s back, Newman

\textsuperscript{54} Susan Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 20: “Higher per capita income, the reemergence of leisure time in the 1950s, and the advent of the paid vacation in the 1960s gave the amusement park business new energy and direction. In the first two decades following the war, a building boom nearly doubled the number of amusement parks, from 400 counted in 1954 to 786 tallied in 1967.”

\textsuperscript{55} Hand, \textit{Gone Whaling}, 90.

\textsuperscript{56} Lyke, “Granny’s Struggle: A black and white gold rush is on.”

\textsuperscript{57} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 104-106; Lyke, “Granny’s Struggle: A black and white gold rush is on.”

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Namu: My Best Friend}, dir. Laslo Benedek.
writes, he realized that “a totally new perception was coming about, one that saw killer whales as large, friendly dolphins.”

Griffin went on to capture the first whale to be named Shamu by Sea World in San Diego, California. Continuing to hone his technique, he was soon selling each whale for nearly $20,000. In 1967, the Vancouver Aquarium bought its first long-term resident killer whale, Skana, and “Vancouver went whale-crazy.” More Northwest killer whales went to England, France, Texas, Florida and Ontario.

The whale-capture industry remained vibrant until 1976, when an ill-considered operation near Olympia, Washington turned opinion decisively. The episode occurred near the state capital while the legislature was in session. Washington’s future Secretary of State Ralph Munro, then an assistant to the governor, was one of the officials who heard the “screaming” orcas as they were corralled, so he led an effort to end the practice. A federal court soon ordered the animals released, and in less than a year, the state banned further captures. By that point, though, Griffin had left the business. He had been receiving death threats and took to wearing a bulletproof vest.

60 Sea World parks named many killer whales Shamu in an attempt to obscure their individuality and build a brand name. Davis, *Spectacular Nature*, 27, 174.
61 Lyke, “Granny’s Struggle: A black and white gold rush is on.”
63 Hoyt, *Orca*, 71, 118.
64 Lyke, “Granny’s Struggle: A black and white gold rush is on.”; Weyler, *Greenpeace*, 387-8.
65 Lyke, “Granny’s Struggle: A black and white gold rush is on.”
The Olympia incident symbolized the end of a short era. The captures happened during the first International Orca Symposium. Almost unbelievably, the hunters set their nets only a few kilometres from the conference site, and the captures became a coalescent moment for attendees, who fulminated against the penning of the whales and helped focus media attention on these harvests.66 One of the attendees was Paul Spong, a figure who embodies the developing connections and tensions between science, activism, and commodification. In the preceding years, Spong, whom Newman described as a member of the counterculture, wearing long hair and “a beret like that of Che Guevara,” had been a powerful advocate against captures and whaling.67 Spong came to Vancouver to work with Skana, the whale purchased by the Vancouver Aquarium from Ted Griffin. He had been hired by the aquarium and the University of British Columbia in 1967 based on his work on animal brains and intelligence at UCLA.

Spong quickly concluded that Skana and other captive cetaceans should be set free. He began to realize the whale’s intelligence when it deliberately subverted an experiment on its eyesight. Apparently out of boredom, it repeatedly failed a test which it had previously passed with ease. Spong was astonished when Skana then trained him to be unafraid of it. The whale waited until he was confident enough to dangle his feet in its pool when it was nearby and then gently raked its teeth over his skin without hurting him.68 When the aquarium refused to renew Spong’s contract, he held a demonstration demanding the right to continue to play music to and swim with the whale. He also

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66 Hoyt, *Orca*, 203-204.
formed the Legion of Orcinus Orca Friends to advocate for the release of captive cetaceans. In 1972, Spong contributed to the National Film Board’s ironically titled *We Call Them Killers*. Filmed at Victoria’s Sealand, it was the first “to depict whales as intelligent, sensitive creatures.”

Spong then joined Greenpeace after reading Bob Hunter’s *Vancouver Sun* column about their anti-nuclear protests in the south Pacific. Inspired by the macabre coincidence that whale oil was used to lubricate nuclear missiles, Spong contacted Hunter to discuss expanding the group’s campaigns to include cetacean protection. A first step was to speak with the newly-elected premier of British Columbia. When asked to support efforts to ‘save the whales,’ Dave Barrett indicated something of the zeitgeist around the animals by responding “Whales? No harm in that.” Then the United States unsuccessfully called for a moratorium on commercial whaling at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Greenpeace was there, holding its “first anti-whaling protest.” The same year, the United States also passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The MMPA “reflected the strength of a vocal movement to save whales, dolphins, and endangered species from whaling, overfishing, destructive fishing techniques, and human harassment,” and it regulated the capture of marine mammals.

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69 Newman, *Life in a Fishbowl*, 116. The name was changed to Killer Whale (Orcinus Orca) Foundation.


The MMPA faced strong resistance from aquariums, but the most spectacular conflicts involved the whaling industry. In June and July of 1975, front pages of Northwest newspapers reported Greenpeace’s interception of Soviet whalers off California. “Russian fleet routed?” asked the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, reporting that “the Greenpeace Foundation . . . is conducting its campaign to draw world attention to the danger of making whales extinct because of hunts by Soviet and Japanese whaling fleets.” When Greenpeace’s vessel pulled into San Francisco after the confrontation, they made the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and their film was featured on Walter Cronkite’s national CBS newscast. Paul Spong also grabbed attention during the International Whaling Commission’s annual meeting in London, putting on his travelling ‘whale show,’ which in part highlighted the Pacific Northwest’s killer whales, and holding a press conference to attack the IWC’s inability to stop steep declines in whale populations. Greenpeace frequently played on blossoming cetacean science. A spokesman “said it was hard to believe that civilized human beings were exterminating the whale just when scientists were becoming convinced that they are intelligent creatures capable of communicating with human beings.” Drawn by the dramatic display of Greenpeace zodiacs throwing themselves between the ships and their prey -- “Soviet Harpoon gives Greenpeace a scare,” teased the *Vancouver Province* -- many did indeed

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74 *Victoria Daily Colonist*, “Russian fleet routed?” July 1, 1975, 1.
75 Weyler, *Greenpeace*, 327-329.
76 Weyler, *Greenpeace*, 304-305, 323.
notice this irony.\textsuperscript{78} Whale advocates also leveraged the discovery that the oil of the jojoba bean of the American Southwest was chemically similar to sperm whale oil. Anything was mobilized that suggested the pointlessness of whaling in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{79}

Greenpeace also took up Paul Spong’s campaign to free Skana and other cetaceans. In late 1975, after the first of the famous high-seas expeditions, six killer whales were captured in British Columbia by the owners of Victoria’s Sealand. Greenpeace members approached the captives’ pen, recorded underwater whale vocalizations, and sent the tapes to radio stations. Despite ensuing demands to release the orcas, Sealand shipped one to their suburban park, where it died within months.\textsuperscript{80} The incident revealed the complexity of the region’s changing relationships with cetaceans. While Greenpeace and like-minded advocates believed that there could be no justification for keeping the animals captive, Sealand’s owners were confident that they would attract enough visitors despite the bad publicity to make the operation profitable. On the other hand, both Air Canada and BC Ferries sided with Greenpeace and refused to transport cetaceans.\textsuperscript{81} Captivity opponents could soon declare a victory: it was the last killer whale capture in British Columbia.

\textsuperscript{78} Vancouver Province, “Soviet Harpoon gives Greenpeace a scare,” June 30, 1975, 19.
\textsuperscript{80} Weyler, Greenpeace, 344.
\textsuperscript{81} Weyler, Greenpeace, 344.
After 1976, local aquariums outsourced orca captures to Iceland, and after 1989 they turned to acquiring them from other aquariums.\textsuperscript{82} Thus from Iceland came one of the most famous killer whales: Keiko. Known on movie screens as Willy, the animal had been exported from a country which still regarded the species as “competition for fish that sustain Iceland’s fragile economy.”\textsuperscript{83} To Icelanders, aquarium sales were a humane solution. Earlier, orcas “had no commercial value” and thus were killed.\textsuperscript{84} Through this process the consumption of cetaceans shifted elsewhere on the planet so mass amusement could flourish in North America without the disruption of local animal populations. Consequently, wages once paid to local labourers also migrated overseas, while aquarium entry fees still went into the pockets of North American businesses.\textsuperscript{85}

The blue-collar seascape was further transformed as scientists began to arrive in the Pacific Northwest to study orcas. Michael Bigg, on contract from the government of Canada, spent two years distributing questionnaires to coastal residents before beginning

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\textsuperscript{84} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 194. Neils Einarsson contrasts environmentalists’ favourite narratives “about cetaceans rescuing people” with Icelandic fisherman’s tales of “whales sinking boats and causing deaths, apart from destroying gear and eating scarce fish.” This cultural contest was not unique to North America. Neils Einarsson, “All animals are equal but some are cetaceans: Conservation and culture conflict,” in \textit{Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology}, ed. Kay Milton (New York: Routledge, 1993), 76.

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to count and classify orcas by photo-identification in 1973.\textsuperscript{86} Ken Balcomb arrived on San Juan Island in 1976, surveying some of the same whales on an equivalent contract from the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{87} Both scientists began to sense the fragility of local orca populations, which had no predators aside from humans. Their work also reinforced the whales’ familial quality by charting genealogic trees and documenting nurturing behaviour. The data became potent ammunition for anti-captivity activists.

When Ted Griffin was interviewed in 1997, he argued not only that he truly loved whales -- particularly Namu -- but that he had helped change public understanding by facilitating the appearance of orcas in aquariums. Griffin insisted that there was really no difference between himself and boat-based whale watchers, peering at the same pods whose members he had captured decades earlier.\textsuperscript{88} If Griffin loved Namu “passionately, perhaps with the same capacity and energy that often exists between women and men,” then perhaps only scientific evidence occupied the gulf between Griffin’s actions and the repugnance with which later whale-lovers regarded him. When Griffin was capturing killer whales, estimates of the region’s orca populations ran to over a thousand animals. If that were correct, removing a few individuals would have had little ecological significance.\textsuperscript{89} By the 1990s, though, concern for the viability of the region’s pods

\textsuperscript{86} Hoyt, \textit{Orca}, 68-69.

\textsuperscript{87} Dietrich, “All Eyes on Orcas.”; Ken Balcomb, interview with author.


\textsuperscript{89} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 114.
precluded the removal of their members for any reason, whatever one’s faith in the transformative power of an aquarium experience.\textsuperscript{90}

Northwest scientists built on the momentum generated by similar work throughout North America. In California, John Lilly had been exploring dolphin intelligence for decades. Though most of his later musings sprung from speculation and mysticism, Lilly’s work in the 1950s and 1960s excited a broad swath of the public about cetaceans.\textsuperscript{91} Alexandra Morton, a researcher and powerful advocate for the Northwest’s orcas and wild salmon, was first drawn to them by working with Lilly in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{92} Aboard the ship carrying those documentary filmmakers off northern Vancouver Island in 1973, “Lilly’s \textit{The Mind of the Dolphin} was easily the most-thumbed volume aboard. Scientists read him and so did the public.”\textsuperscript{93} Lilly had fired imaginations with his discussion of dolphin language and brainpower, and these insights were quickly extended to orcas, the largest member of that family.\textsuperscript{94}

The era was rife with romantic images of whales. Roger Payne and \textit{National Geographic} released recordings from his studies of humpback whale songs. \textit{Time} opened an article on the 1970 meeting of the International Whaling Commission by

\textsuperscript{90} For a summary of whale science in the early twenty-first century: Judith Lavoie, “Our Whales: Scientists admit that despite extensive research on marine mammals, relatively little is known,” \textit{Victoria Times-Colonist}, February 10, 2008, D1.

\textsuperscript{91} Eugene Linden, “An Uneasy Dip with the Dolphins,” \textit{Time}, November 27, 1989, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,959106,00.html: “[B]y the 1980s he was arguing that dolphins relayed extraterrestrial guidance toward a higher consciousness.”


\textsuperscript{93} Hoyt, \textit{Orca}, 44.

juxtaposing Payne’s discoveries of whale songs and temperament against the fact that “for all their mystery, whales have interested men mainly because they have oil within their hulks.”95 The magazine noted that Payne’s humpback recordings were designed to stir public imaginations and save the animals from extinction. They had even been part of a concert with the New York Philharmonic.96 The next year Jacques Cousteau aired his underwater film of cetaceans. A whale watching worker and scientist in the Northwest cited Payne’s recording as the inspiration for her lifelong dedication to learning about cetaceans and presenting them to the public.97 It was also in 1971 that whale watching made its tentative beginning in Canada on the St. Lawrence River.98 The animals were, if only by dint of volume, ever more prominent in the consciousness of a broadening constituency.99 In myriad ways western culture was reconstructing cetaceans as one of humanity’s closest kin and thus worthy of special attention. Like the pangolin


96 *Time*, “Sing, Cetacea, Sing!” June 22, 1970 http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,944103,00.html


99 Robbins Barstow believes that this period saw “perhaps the greatest growth of interest in a particular group of wild animals ever experienced in human society,” and cites “books, magazines, films, television shows, and works of art. Dolphins and small whales exhibited in aquariums captivated visitors...and became the most popular attractions.” Robbins Barstow, “Non-Consumptive Utilization of Whales,” *Ambio*, 15, no.3 (1986): 156.
for the Lele, they became a mediator between the human and natural worlds. They were also growing more accessible to greater numbers of people wanting to act out this special relationship, but the implications were not straightforward. Ways of presenting cetaceans as commodities kept pace with changes in public understandings that were themselves often crafted by business. Aquariums and whale watching vied with art, science, and mysticism. Conflicts between those who drew different conclusions from their experiences of cetaceans accelerated at least as quickly. Even whaling, the anathema that united so many otherwise bitter rivals, would reappear before the century’s end, bringing with it new alliances and enemies. In short, even when people agreed that they loved whales, they could not agree on why, or what to do about it.
Chapter Two: Protective Custody

In 1997, a Seattle headline writer described the problem for Northwest aquariums with the necessary brevity: “Vancouver, B.C., is on the leading edge of the environmental movement to save whales, a fact that makes the city aquarium's search for another orca particularly touchy.”100 Because of the public backlash over cetacean captivity, the aquarium needed to find a whale already living in a tank if they were to replenish their collection, but around the Northwest even that scenario was increasingly unpopular. Some expressed their distaste by working to bring a fantasy to life. The same year in an Oregon aquarium, Keiko -- as Willy, famously freed on film -- was being prepared to travel home to Icelandic waters and one day swim with his pod again.101 A lawyer for Seattle billionaire Craig McCaw, who donated millions to the effort, explained that it was “a lot of money if you think of it as one animal, but think of how many children might regain some faith in adults if the story has a fairy-tale ending.”102 Yet in the midst of this liberation story, Sea World marine parks reported that attendance was up thanks to the Keiko affair.103 Across the Pacific Ocean, Japanese exhibitors were preparing to capture more killer whales for display, and the conservative Seattle Times criticized protests by

100 Simon, “Wanted.”

101 Simon, “Wanted”. “Retraining this single orca for life in the wild has cost Seattle telecommunications magnate Craig McCaw and other donors more than $10 million so far.”


noting that “‘Save The Orcas’ Isn't An Exportable Value.”104 Soon after, two orcas arrived at Shirahama Adventure Park and four months later were dead.105 Around the Salish Sea aversion to aquariums fed a new industry. About 80,000 passengers watched whales from boats the previous year.106

This chapter explores the contest over captive cetaceans in the 1980s and 1990s. There was more money than ever to be made from cetaceans, but aquariums had to fine-tune their presentation to reassure their audiences. If the animals were to be taken from their social and natural environments, thereby shortening their lifespans, the sacrifice needed justification. Aquariums thus retired circus spectacle and emphasized natural behaviours. They merged cetaceans with their customers’ social and environmental aspirations to create a message of wholesome entertainment. Such efforts did not go unchallenged. Businesses with the resources to bring cetaceans into the human world were countered by people who opposed making animals into proprietary commodities. These cultural contests, though, were ultimately far more complex than a caricatural juxtaposition of “aquarium owners whose profits depend on keeping [whales] and


105 Bartley, “Two Whales Captured by Japan Now Reported Dead.”

animal-rights extremists whose karma depends on releasing [them].” The clash could only occur because there was in fact a vast middle ground occupied by those who loved cetaceans as much as animal-rights activists yet were eager to pay to see captive animals.

Responses to a 1997 PBS Frontline episode showed that the arguments of both aquariums and anti-captivity activists had filtered out to the public. One British Columbian wrote:

In my view, cetaceans have no place being in captivity. They have been shown to be highly intelligent, social animals, that can swim great lengths, dive to great depths -- none of which they can even closely approximate in the relatively tiny prison tanks they are kept in . . . . What exactly have we learnt from captive cetaceans? That they can swim around in a 13 meter pool, can dive to 10 meters or so, that their dorsal fin always flops because of the lack of water pressure, and that they become so dependent on humans that they can’t even remain underwater for longer than a few minutes.

The passage rehearsed common anti-captivity arguments: wild cetaceans had human-like intelligence, lived in human-like societies, and ranged over huge areas. Such capacities were inhibited by captivity and aquarium claims to science and education were phoney. The argument reprised Paul Spong’s anthropomorphic logic: “If you make a list of what they are and, therefore, why they should not be captive, you come up with the same kind of reasons that caused us to free the slaves.” A Seattleite added a general objection to the animals being commodified: “in reality, those animals are prisoners of the Amusement park business.” Ralph Munro, the Washington Secretary of State who had led the campaign to ban whale captures, had made a similar objection in 1991: “animals


belong to all of us, not to one or two moneymaking operations.”\textsuperscript{109} Another PBS viewer implicated consumers: “of course animals die in captivity, but we as an educated nation understand this, and still, Sea World is a multi-million dollar industry.”

Conversely, others argued that captivity was moral and reasonable. One viewer wrote that “performing killer whales . . . serve and [sic] incredibly important roles in reaching out to others and touching their audiences’ hearts, and only positive things can come out of that.” Similarly, a biologist suggested that “keeping whales may not be nice, but it serves an important purpose.” A viewer from Massachusetts challenged PBS: “when was the last time any of your viewers donated to any kind of marine research?” Finally, a viewer from Sea World’s original home in San Diego argued that even the most nebulous of benefits might be justification enough: “I bet that the majority of the people who leave Sea World go with some knowledge about animals that they did not know before, and it is up them [sic] to use it the way they see fit.” A viewer from Texas objected philosophically: “While these whales are tremendous, they are still just animals, no different from rats, deer, fleas, or fish . . . . Animal rights activists use cute animals to promote their causes.” A Vermonter agreed that whales were like other animals, but argued that this meant that all deserved more compassion: “whales have been romanticized garnering significant levels of support . . . . Yet, can we as a species face the pain and suffering we inflict upon billions of other creatures daily?”\textsuperscript{110}


The Northwest was the spawning ground for many anti-captivity arguments. In 1997, a marine theme park administrator underscored the region’s peculiarity in regard to marine mammals. “Almost all the ‘free the whales’ agitation is on the West Coast,” noted Angus Mathews. “You do a show in Ohio and they think a whale is a big fish.”

There had been protesters when Ted Griffin brought Namu to Seattle, and their volume -- in both senses -- only grew over time as they sought to frustrate aquariums’ arguments for their importance. Vancouver’s Coalition for No Whales in Captivity prominently quotes the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) on their website to the effect that the educational impact of captive cetaceans has never been studied. The Coalition argues that if there is any educational value to the aquarium experience, it is to teach children “to see animals as objects and servants to human needs and desires.” Paul Watson’s Sea Shepherd Conservation Society agreed. Like the British Columbian PBS viewer, the Coalition argues that the only useful research still to be done is in the wild. They also point out that aquarium breeding programs are largely unsuccessful and can only benefit aquariums themselves. Finally, they echo the PBS viewer from Seattle in

111 Simon, “Wanted.”

112 Lyke, “Granny’s Struggle: A black and white gold rush is on.”

113 Coalition For No Whales In Captivity, “Cruelty of captivity industry exposed,” http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cmeps/2.html. From Naomi A. Rose and Richard Farinato, The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity, Second Edition (Washington, DC: The Humane Society of the United States, 1999), 3: “There is little objective evidence to indicate that the public-display industry is furthering the public’s knowledge of marine mammals and their habitats... the main purpose of these operations is to display animals for entertainment rather than to convey information.” Most of the Coalition’s information seems to have been based on this report.

114 Linden, “An Uneasy Dip with the Dolphins.”
arguing that the aquarium’s non-profit status is merely a cover for the many staff who circulate between it and affiliated for-profit institutions.\textsuperscript{115}

In addition to undermining the aquariums’ justifications for existence, anti-captivity activists emphasized the barren nature of cetacean life in captivity. As the HSUS put it in their 1999 edition of \textit{The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity}, “there is more to consider in this debate than life-history statistics. Length of life is one thing and quality of life is another.”\textsuperscript{116} “Small cetaceans,” they noted, “are highly intelligent, extraordinarily social, and behaviorally complex.”\textsuperscript{117} Captivity limits their natural capacity for interpreting complex sonar soundscapes, swimming long distances, and socializing.\textsuperscript{118} Anti-captivity activists also made the high mortality rate of captives a key issue. The Coalition’s website lists twenty-six known cetacean deaths at Vancouver Aquarium and asks “How many more whales need to suffer and die before you do something about it?”\textsuperscript{119} The Humane Society accused Sea World of deceiving visitors about cetacean lifespans and cited studies showing higher mortality in captivity.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{115} Coalition For No Whales In Captivity, “The Vancouver Aquarium’s Four Great Myths,” http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cmepe/3.html; PBS, “Viewer Discussion.”

\textsuperscript{116} Rose and Farinato, \textit{The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity}, 2. Naomi Rose, one of the report’s authors, says that this 1999 edition is substantially similar to the now-unavailable first edition, published in 1995. Naomi Rose, e-mail message to author, February 8, 2009.

\textsuperscript{117} Rose and Farinato, \textit{The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity}, 16.

\textsuperscript{118} Rose and Farinato, \textit{The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity}, 15-17.

\textsuperscript{119} Coalition For No Whales In Captivity, “Cetaceans Deaths at the Vancouver Aquarium,” http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cmepe/14.html; Coalition For No Whales In Captivity, “Cruelty of captivity industry exposed.”

\textsuperscript{120} Rose and Farinato, \textit{The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity}, 30-34 and Rose, “Captive Cetaceans.”
Some Northwest scientists joined the anti-captivity movement. In the early 1990s, Ken Balcomb argued that Lolita, a Pacific Northwest killer whale in captivity since 1970 at the Miami Seaquarium, could be safely released. He thought that Lolita’s reintroduction to the wild would be an unprecedented opportunity to study the dynamics of local orca populations. He also believed Lolita to be a far better candidate for release than Keiko, with which he had originally been involved, because so much more was known about the animal’s pod. Though the effort was ultimately unsuccessful, Balcomb had such rapport with donors that he offered the aquarium one million dollars for the animal. Balcomb lamented that he and his colleagues were caricatured as “screaming animal-rights humaniacs” who “haven’t given a thought to it” and “just want to throw a whale back in the ocean.” As a scientist, he felt that maintaining an image of competence and objectivity was key to success. Indeed in 2008, Balcomb argued that he had only recently become a true activist on behalf of the populations that he had studied for more than thirty years, and that was in response to the crisis of their dwindling food supply.

Paul Spong, on the other hand, never tempered his colourful arguments for the release of captive killer whales. During the early 1990s he was particularly interested in the release of Corky, a female from a northern resident pod, then performing as Shamu at Sea World. Making the case for Corky, Spong pointed out that its mother was likely still

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121 Lolita is still alive and in Miami. It was the subject of the 2008 documentary *Lolita: Slave to Entertainment*, directed by Timothy Michael Gorski (Fort Lauderdale: Rattle the Cage Productions, 2008).

122 Bock, “Whale Watcher.”

123 Ken Balcomb, interview with author.
alive and reminded his audience how much killer whale pods resembled ideal human families: “They have learned how to share and work in a cooperative community.” In response, a Sea World employee attacked the alternative then becoming popular in Corky’s home waters. He noted that were the same number of people to see the animals in the wild as do in marine parks, they would need 2500 whale watching boats, each carrying thirty passengers and making daily trips for five months.124

Although they were unable to placate their most determined critics, aquariums did accommodate new mainstream attitudes. In a study of San Diego’s Sea World that remains the most comprehensive examination of a marine theme park, Susan Davis illustrated complex relationships between profit-oriented spectacle and environmental culture.125 As perceptions changed in the 1980s and 1990s, Sea World increasingly justified its existence by explaining the benefits of cetacean captivity, becoming “more explicitly environmental and educational,” and “selling people’s dreams back to them.”126

Under new protocols, animals could not be “humiliated” during the performances but rather had to be “respected.”127 Cetaceans, more than other animals such as pinnipeds, could not be treated like humans -- precisely because, as time passed, the


125 William Cronon has commented that Sea World “implicitly exemplifies one of the most powerful cultural constructions that shapes modern American attitudes toward nature: nature as commodity.” Cronon, “Introduction” in Uncommon Ground, 46.

126 Davis, Spectacular Nature, 17, 244.

127 Davis, Spectacular Nature, 165-166. “Although the producers insist that the whale must never be an object of ridicule, it is positively important that humans be the butts of jokes -- and not just so that animals retain dignity while humans lose theirs. Asking the audience to collude by laughing at an unwilling victim helps create commitment to the performance and the ideas it presents.” Davis, Spectacular Nature, 216.
public perceived them as more human and thus more deserving of sympathy.\textsuperscript{128} The park began to hide rather than boast of its cetacean capture expeditions. It also opened an affiliated, non-profit research institute and used other, subtler mechanisms to soften captivity’s edges and convince audiences of Sea World’s benevolence.\textsuperscript{129} New pool designs seemed more naturalistic, yet the changes had less to do with benefiting whales than making audiences believe that their theme park experience was suitably natural. For example, a Sea World official noted that although Sea World’s pool was larger, audiences responded better to the Vancouver Aquarium’s display since it had intricate rock work and Stanley Park’s large trees surrounding it.\textsuperscript{130} Similarly, Sea World audiences could see that there was a ‘backstage’ area where cetaceans rested out of public view, which had more to do with human perceptions of the value of privacy than the animals’ comfort.\textsuperscript{131}

Sea World’s education programs were similarly superficial. Davis noted how “incredibly weary” she was upon hearing a visiting school group told that “throwing away trash properly, not messing up the beach, and recycling” were the height of environmental activism.\textsuperscript{132} Education focused on minor, individual issues like these as well as isolated biological factoids rather than entrées to ecological action. Such glosses on environmental protection were more about corporate image than sustained

\textsuperscript{128} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 177-178, 181. Nonetheless, audiences still seemed to crave spectacle: when regular shows were in hiatus for the birth of a calf, for example, research showed that visitors rated the event well below average. Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 190. Pinnipedia comprises seals, sea lions, and walruses.

\textsuperscript{129} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 69.

\textsuperscript{130} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 107.

\textsuperscript{131} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 108.

\textsuperscript{132} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 122.
environmental consciousness. By presenting environmental degradation as an individual issue and obscuring the mechanisms by which power over the environment is won and lost in society, the park legitimized corporate stewardship of the environment and influence in public education -- which is a potent marketing tool.\textsuperscript{133} By all of these means, Sea World asked customers to accept the assertion that “Just by being here, you’re showing that you care,” a credo which seemed to inhibit rather than encourage further action.\textsuperscript{134} Sea World officials said that they expected an average visitor to retain no more than 30 percent of the information offered, the focus being more on the spectacular and the emotional, but they believed that was enough to justify their existence.\textsuperscript{135} The Humane Society has pointed out that when making the case for their educational value, aquariums simply proffer their attendance statistics, “apparently convinced that visitors learn more about marine mammals simply by walking through a turnstile.”\textsuperscript{136}

The Sea World context is crucial for understanding Murray Newman’s observation that the Vancouver Aquarium’s “whale shows became more and more naturalistic.”\textsuperscript{137} Newer displays emphasized “the environment and biology of the orca” instead of spectacular performances.\textsuperscript{138} Yet despite the most calculated staging, killer whales could not help but appear unnatural in aquariums. An orca’s natural habitat

\textsuperscript{134} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 228.
\textsuperscript{135} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 165.
\textsuperscript{136} Rose and Farinato, \textit{The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity}, 4.
\textsuperscript{137} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 156.
\textsuperscript{138} Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 200.
covered thousands of square kilometres; any attempt to represent its whole ecosystem could appear ridiculous.

It was perhaps due in part to this obvious dissonance that the Vancouver Aquarium was, according to Newman, made into a “Bad Guy” which wanted to exploit animals, destroy nature, and keep poor people out through high admission fees.\footnote{Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 191.} Protesters loudly and regularly demonstrated outside during tourist season and disrupted meetings of the Vancouver Parks Board during which aquarium business was considered.\footnote{Simon, “Wanted.”} Like Sea World, aquariums were challenged most when orcas died in captivity or trainers were killed, as happened at Victoria’s Sealand in 1991.\footnote{Sealand shut down and sold its whales after the incident.} The Vancouver Aquarium responded with a one-year moratorium on new cetaceans, yet a survey of Vancouver residents indicated that 70 percent favoured cetacean captivity in the city.\footnote{Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 210.} Thus in March 1992, the aquarium compromised by ending the capture of wild killer whales but keeping its animals and exploring exchanges with other facilities.\footnote{Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 211.} In 1996, the aquarium was forced to forgo the acquisition of any whale captured from the wild after that year.\footnote{Simon, “Wanted.”}

The power of family was used by all sides. In a sympathetic 2006 series on Granny, a matriarch in the southern resident killer whale population, a \textit{Seattle Post-Intelligencer} reporter noted:

\begin{quote}
\footnote{Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 191.}
\footnote{Simon, “Wanted.”}
\footnote{Sealand shut down and sold its whales after the incident.}
\footnote{Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 210.}
\footnote{Newman, \textit{Life in a Fishbowl}, 211.}
\footnote{Simon, “Wanted.”}
Her family travels together, porpoising in easy rhythm, their black fins slicing the surface like so many windmills. They hunt together, spread out in lines that stretch for miles. They talk, using chirps and whistles, squawks and squeals . . . . They play, surf boat wakes, toss jellyfish, sensuously rub and roll atop one another in sexual romps. Their bonds are strong and formal. They travel with their mothers for life. They are family.\footnote{M.L. Lyke, “Granny’s Struggle: Survival perfected by years spent navigating a changing sea,” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, October 2, 2006, http://192.251.222.20/specials/brokenpromises/287996_granny109.asp}

Similarly, the Humane Society insisted that “Small cetacean species are not merely gregarious; they form a complex society that is frequently based on kinship. Some cetacean species are known to retain family bonds for life.”\footnote{Rose and Farinato, The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity, 17.} Feature films such as Free Willy inculcated a generation with the message that killer whales should be free. The film’s climax reunites Willy with its family as a parallel reconciliation occurs between the human protagonist and his adoptive parents.\footnote{Free Willy, directed by Simon Wincer (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1993).} Sea World widened the family theme further by including its corporate ownership. During the ‘Shamu show,’ there was “a set of overlapping parallels between human families, whale families, and corporate ‘families.’ . . . The argument . . . is that by being at Sea World, we are doing family and being family in a valuable and responsible way.”\footnote{Davis, Spectacular Nature, 219.} When orca calves were born in 1988 and 1991, the park used the powerful images of mother and child to show how scientific research contributed to the baby’s well-being and humanity’s understanding of whales.\footnote{Davis, Spectacular Nature, 219-220.}

Opinions about captivity were not the only ways cetaceans divided people. Sea World customers were primarily white, upper-middle class, middle-aged, and college-
educated, but admission price alone did not account for the deviation of park visitors from the average residents of the surrounding county.\textsuperscript{150} Other theme parks in the region with similar ticket prices attracted more diverse demographics. The key difference was cultural. As Susan Davis notes, “the version of nature marketed by Sea World appeals positively to white people as part of being appropriately white and middle class.”\textsuperscript{151} The broadcast of country music, popular movies, and celebrities at the park, among other “unremarkable, middle-of-the-road, and overcirculated” cultural symbols, let some people feel “at home” at Sea World while having the opposite effect on others.\textsuperscript{152} Furthermore, the concept of the rejuvenating, educational power of pieces of nature has long been associated with the middle class in North America.\textsuperscript{153} Sea World leveraged this history.\textsuperscript{154} There was also a class dimension to the captivity controversy. Given that admission fees for aquariums were generally far lower than those for whale watching tours, the disappearance of cetaceans from marine parks certainly limited their accessibility.\textsuperscript{155} If at least some who felt unwelcome at Sea World and other aquariums nevertheless wanted to experience cetaceans, then even fewer got the chance when their

\textsuperscript{150} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 36.

\textsuperscript{151} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 37.

\textsuperscript{152} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 171.

\textsuperscript{153} Shaw and Williams, \textit{Critical Issues in Tourism}, 226-228. In the 1920s, for example, amenities around the Grand Canyon catered to upper- and middle-class tourists by invoking Western conquest and the pioneer spirit in comfortable, exclusive surroundings. Hal K. Rothman, \textit{Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West} (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 80.

\textsuperscript{154} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 37.

\textsuperscript{155} For example, compare the Vancouver Aquarium’s admission fees (http://www.vanaqua.org/visit_us/hours_and_rates.html) with a typical Victoria whale watching operator’s rates (http://www.greatpacificadventures.com/tours.php). Whale watching is about five times as costly.
only means was more expensive. Sea World officials used this fact to further justify their enterprise.\textsuperscript{156}

Cetaceans divided by geography as well. Despite Seattle’s environmentally-conscious image, some questioned the authority of Pacific Northwesterners to dictate the terms of environmentally responsible behaviour.\textsuperscript{157} A \textit{Miami Herald} writer commented on the campaign to release Lolita:

\begin{quote}
Washington’s dubious résumé includes damming the Columbia River and hacking down old-growth forests. Trusting those folks with a live whale seems dicey . . . . Being shamelessly exploited by a politician isn’t much better than being shamelessly exploited by an amusement park.\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

Nor did the fishermen who had first brought live cetaceans into contact with the rest of society always support the new uses. In 2006, some San Juan Island fishermen still complained about the “enviros” and whale watchers. A reporter noted that they hated “‘the stupid whales’ that take away their fish.” Fishers were powerless, though, to stem the tide of tourists who were “mad for the black-and-white celebrities.”\textsuperscript{159} As Susan Davis and others have pointed out, “Tourism is based on images of cultures and

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\textsuperscript{156} Davis, \textit{Spectacular Nature}, 236: “Sea World’s managers talk explicitly about their whale shows, for example, as a close-to-home, affordably priced nature tourism opportunity.”
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\textsuperscript{157} On Seattle’s environmental image, see Matthew Klingle, \textit{Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). 156-157, 163-164, 267. Seattle’s new tourism slogan “metronatural” might embody the city’s aspirations even more clearly than the old “Emerald City.”
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Marketers make a place desirable by “endowing [it] with the aura of unique experience.” The Northwest’s most enduring identity was as a paradise where visitors could easily contact nature, often without even venturing far from cities. Such a place had no role for fishermen who killed charismatic wildlife. They were forced to accept the new reality. Ken Balcomb reports that most fishermen were won over by the cetacean phenomenon, or at least that “from a practical point of view, they know that if it came down to shooting whales, they might get shot themselves.”

Some who worked with cetaceans and found captivity abhorrent nonetheless acknowledged that it served a purpose. Implicitly, they agreed that contact with cetaceans, in any setting, was transformative. Ken Balcomb conceded that “the personal contact . . . even in a captivity scene, it’s undeniable that there’s a strong draw . . . the captive industry makes billions of dollars just on that draw.” A Victoria whale watching worker and cetacean scientist said that “it did serve a very positive purpose,” that she “share[s] information that has been learned from captive experiments” on her tours, and that seeing captive whales often spurs people to go whale watching.

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160 Davis, *Spectacular Nature*, 47. Cf. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains* and Blake Harrison, *The View from Vermont: tourism and the making of an American rural landscape* (Burlington, VT, Hanover, NH, and London: University of Vermont Press and University Press of New England, 2006). Like the sites in the American West described by Hal Rothman and the Pacific Northwest described by Matthew Klingle, Harrison’s Vermont struggled to maintain ‘authenticity’ while also developing the infrastructure necessary to capitalize on the visitors attracted to it.


163 Ken Balcomb, interview with author.

164 Ken Balcomb, interview with author.

165 Sarah Jones, interview with author.
Telegraph Cove guide said that although “killer whales absolutely do not belong there,” aquariums were a boon in terms of public attitudes toward whales.166 “Rightly or wrongly,” a San Juan Island guide admitted, “they have created in many people a sense of awareness about just how intelligent these creatures are,” but “if I could go back and re-write history, I would never have seen them captured.” He “personally cannot go see any cetacean in captivity; it’s just too sad.”167

Many hoped to find something of themselves in cetaceans, and they succeeded in at least one way. North Americans reproduced old cultural fissures while also creating new ones. Conflicts over relationships with nature, the purposes of science, and the boundaries of capitalism were rehashed and reworked. Those who owned and sold access to cetaceans had obvious financial stakes in the process, yet growing numbers of people also invested in whales emotionally, spiritually, and philosophically. Increasingly, cetaceans held no single meaning. The popularity of captive whales suggests that many people were convinced by aquariums’ public relations, or at least that they were willing to overlook their qualms to make contact with charismatic nature. But as cetaceans began to disappear from parks in response to increasing opposition, new ways of using whales appeared, along with new ways for people to unite and divide themselves in response.

166 Helen Nagoya, interview with author, Port McNeill, BC, September 3, 2008. This name is a pseudonym.

167 Baltazar Kowalski, interview with author, Friday Harbor, WA, September 17, 2008. This name is a pseudonym.
Chapter Three: Watch and Learn

In 2001, 215,000 passengers spent just over nine million dollars on boat-based whale watching in British Columbia and 52,000 more spent over three million dollars in Washington state. There were an additional 70,000 land-based whale watchers in BC and 265,000 in Washington.\textsuperscript{168} The same year, killer whale captivity ended at the Vancouver Aquarium with the transfer of Bjossa to Sea World in San Diego, leaving the wild orcas around the Salish Sea and Johnstone Strait as the only killer whales in the region.\textsuperscript{169} The economics were impressive, but who were these whale watchers, what did they bring to the experience, and what did they take from it? Moreover, who were their guides, how did they understand their work, and what were their goals?\textsuperscript{170} Exploring these questions reveals the power of whale watching as a manifestation of North Americans’ obsession with the animals and need to contact nature. Cetaceans had been constructed as humanity’s closest kin, and whale watchers yearned to peer into nature and have it peer back. Guides hoped to use the power of these moments to instil in their passengers a conservation ethic, and many experts agreed that such “wild” experiences provided the perfect forum. As whale watching became a fungible spectacle, commodification and

\textsuperscript{168} Hoyt, \textit{Whale Watching 2001}, 15 and 25.

\textsuperscript{169} The aquarium was unable to find a partner for Bjossa because of the rule that they could not own another once-wild whale and therefore gave her to Sea World after finding other offers unsatisfactory. Chris Nuttall-Smith, “Chronic lung infection claims killer whale,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, October 9, 2001, http://www.captiveanimals.org/aquarium/bjossa2.htm

\textsuperscript{170} On-the-water whale watching workers self-identify and are identified by their employers by various titles, including guide, deckhand, naturalist, captain, driver, and skipper. For clarity, I will refer to any on-the-water worker as a guide. Two of the guides referenced here are also company owners.
consumption once again reworked the cultural and social relationships between cetaceans
and humans at the cusp of the twenty-first century.

The whale watching industry in the Pacific Northwest was centred in three areas: the Salish Sea, Johnstone Strait, and Tofino/Ucluelet. Boat-based viewing began in 1977 when skippers from Bellingham, Washington ferried tourists out to the southern resident orcas around Haro Strait and the San Juan Islands near southern Vancouver Island. Operations were at first small-scale, and there was no full-time whale watching business there until 1986. A similar process took place at the northern tip of Vancouver Island. In the late 1970s, two mill workers at Telegraph Cove, a tiny community near Port Hardy, developed an interest in the northern resident orcas while experimenting with underwater photography. This led them to campaign for the preservation of Robson Bight, a spot where local whales rubbed their bellies on the rocks, a behaviour apparently unique among cetaceans. They had not set out to create a whale watching industry, yet their dive charter company began an incremental turn towards cetaceans when a group of Toronto students hired them to find the killer whales.

As the industry grew, it became more and more a fixture of Northwest tourism, but whale watching was a classed activity that not everyone could enjoy. Among passengers surveyed at Telegraph Cove and Victoria in summer and fall of 2008, median


173 At least one whale watching guide was so convinced of whale watching’s transformative nature that she convinced her company to offer free tours to groups of local children. Helen Nagoya, interview with author.
household income was between 90,000 and 120,000 Canadian dollars, a figure substantially higher than any country’s average income. One long-time Victoria guide remarked that the cost of whale watching “certainly does weed out the people who just want to go kill a couple hours to see a killer whale, you know, it’s people that really want to see them . . . I think it’s definitely going to be a bit more of an affluent crowd.” Yet he also noted that “more people have been prioritizing going whale watching on their vacation.”

The educational level of whale watching passengers was also inordinate. In 2000, about 78 percent of passengers in Telegraph Cove, Tofino, and Victoria had at least some college or university education.

Given the high price of whale watching, it is unsurprising that one of the constant headaches for industry workers was the displeasure of passengers whose tour did not live up to their hopes. Financial considerations undoubtedly made the experience more stressful for those with relatively more invested, but such considerations actually created multiple tensions. Passengers wanted the quality of their experience to be commensurate with their expenditures, but for guides, these sorts of expectations seemed an incorrect mindset that potentially polluted the occasion. Part of whale watching, guides believed, was appreciating the uncertainty of the animals’ appearance. Chance enhanced the experience by reinforcing their wildness and thus the naturalness of the tour. For these paid guides, money became an ironic obstacle. A Victoria guide mimicked a demanding

174 Timothy Jansen, interview with author, Victoria, BC, July 3, 2008. This name is a pseudonym.

passenger, “I paid a lot of money, and I have a very selfish interest in getting as close as I can, and you folks just aren’t doing it for me.”

High hopes for wildlife experiences, frustrating as they may have been to some guides, were the inevitable result of cetaceans’ cultural stature. The affinity inspired by cetaceans was a subject of much curiosity among Northwest guides, but there was no agreement on its roots. Nor were guides the only ones to ponder the phenomenon. Many biologists believed that biophilia, a term coined by Edward O. Wilson, explained much about humans’ visceral reactions to nature. For Wilson, emotional connections to the natural world were “part of the programs of the brain.” Other scholars argued that strong affinities were due to “the image that humans have developed over their previous association” with the animal, an image fissured by “cultural, religious, national, regional and individual variations.” One author posited that zoos were monuments to Western society’s dissociation from animals with which humans had coevolved. Many biologists agreed with aquarium boosters and whale watching guides that contact with nature was transformative. As David Takacs put it, “biodiversity transforms biologists. Then biologists bring important people to biodiversity so that they will be transformed

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176 Bevan O’Connor, interview with author, Victoria, BC, July 17, 2008. This name is a pseudonym.


and will work to see that it not be transformed.”\textsuperscript{180} Initial encounters were not sufficient in themselves, however. Ecologist Gordon Orians cautioned that “aesthetic values” needed to be “enhanced by education.”\textsuperscript{181} Wilson agreed, arguing that emotion must be accompanied by an attempt to understand its origins; the combination could be used to “create a deeper and more enduring conservation ethic.”\textsuperscript{182}

This nicely summarizes the goals of whale watching guides. Passengers were encouraged to identify with animals, and an exploration of that identification became the springboard to education. Like aquarium boosters, many believed that such experiences were universally moving. One guide was sure that “it was just a matter of time before [resident orcas] were discovered and revered.”\textsuperscript{183} Another observed that “there is a certain impact . . . just by being there.”\textsuperscript{184} The power of many encounters supposedly sprung from the similarity of human and resident orca life cycles, including comparable life spans, recognizable family structures, and a delicious salmon diet.\textsuperscript{185} Guides also tried to identify and leverage the most consequential sensory components of wildlife experiences. Hearing animals breathe added visceral authenticity to the moment of

\textsuperscript{180} David Takacs, \textit{The Idea of Biodiversity: philosophies of paradise} (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 152-154. The important people here include United States senators and representatives, taken whenever possible by Thomas Lovejoy to spend a night in the South American rainforest. In the mid-1990s, Lovejoy had taken ten percent of senators to the Amazon. Such methods had a long history in North America. John Muir and William Colby sought to use the early Sierra Club to protect wild landscapes in California by bringing as many people to them as possible, believing that they would fall in love with nature and join the mission to protect it.

\textsuperscript{181} Takacs, \textit{The Idea of Biodiversity}, 155.

\textsuperscript{182} Wilson, \textit{Biophilia}, 119.

\textsuperscript{183} Bevan O’Connor, interview with author.

\textsuperscript{184} Timothy Jansen, interview with author.

\textsuperscript{185} Sarah Jones, interview with author.
contact, as did hearing underwater vocalizations with a hydrophone as whales swam nearby in the fog. A Victoria guide noted that “it’s actually seeing and hearing them breathe that has made a lot of my passengers cry.” They also got “quite excited about the stinky breath.” On the other hand, blind passengers were often less moved, suggesting that actually seeing whales was paramount. The visual impression of male orcas’ large dorsal fins was for some central to the animals’ appeal. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these were often the testimonies of the converted. Guides used their own experiences as examples of the power of contact. Whether it was the owner who became an “orcateer” after his first encounter or the guide who related her conversion experience while on a visit from Holland, many guides hoped that the animals’ ability to dramatically change lives was in fact a universal power.

Guides’ understanding of their work reached far beyond a simple recitation of epiphanies, however. They knew that their passengers’ culturally-rooted preconceptions offered both opportunities and challenges on the water. One guide believed that the weight of anticipation was such that passengers were “so expecting to be moved by these

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186 Helen Nagoya, interview with author; Alfredo Costa, interview with author. These names are pseudonyms.

187 Bevan O’Connor, interview with author.

188 Bevan O’Connor, interview with author.

189 Sarah Jones, interview with author. The preeminence of sight among the senses in the modern era is not limited to wildlife experiences. There is evidence that “the print revolution and the Enlightenment did, in fact, elevate the eye.” The ability to choose one’s auditory environment, however, has also been a status symbol. Perhaps the significance assigned to hearing wild cetaceans breathe was an iteration of this phenomenon. Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 21, 45.

190 Alfredo Costa, interview with author; Helen Nagoya, interview with author.
animals that as soon as they see them, they start crying.”¹⁹¹ After Free Willy, many children convinced their parents to take them to see Willy’s relatives.¹⁹² A veteran Victoria guide was able to exploit the childrens’ interest in Willy’s family “to make mom and dad care about the marine environment.” She was disturbed, though, by the trend in wildlife documentaries toward a Crocodile Hunter-esque staging which encouraged up-close challenges to animals rather than respectful admiration from a distance.¹⁹³ Another was similarly bothered that while documentaries could increase knowledge, they also inflated expectations. This could produce acrimony on tours because documentaries “pick the highlights out and they show the breaches and spyhops and people arrive here thinking that’s what they’re going to see. They think it’s a zoo.”¹⁹⁴

Guides’ catalogue of passengers’ changing understandings of relationships with cetaceans suggests a strong cultural component to encounters. As time passed an increasing number of passengers were sensitized to their impact on wildlife. While in the early 1990s passengers often demanded to get close to animals, by the early 2000s they were more likely to ask whether they were too close.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, a guide on San Juan Island noted that passengers rarely asked to get closer, whereas “there was some of that in

¹⁹¹ Bevan O’Connor, interview with author.

¹⁹² Bevan O’Connor, interview with author; Sarah Jones, interview with author; Helen Nagoya, interview with author. Keiko’s real relatives are in Iceland, but in the film, Willy is a Northwest resident killer whale.

¹⁹³ Sarah Jones, interview with author.

¹⁹⁴ Alfredo Costa, interview with author. A breach is an animal jumping mostly or completely out of the water. A spyhop is an animal poking just its head above the water.

¹⁹⁵ Sarah Jones, interview with author.
years gone by.” Another observed there were “a tonne” of questions about whale watching regulations and that the number of these questions was “ever-increasing.” Nonetheless, some also noted that passengers rarely arrived well-informed about what to expect. By 2000, Telegraph Cove attracted the most experienced whale watchers in BC. Those who ventured to this remote town tended to demonstrate the “strongest views towards environmental protection.” They also tended to be the least demanding in terms of seeing whales. Even here, though, two guides said that few passengers began as experts.

For many guides tourist ignorance was an opportunity. They insisted that whale watching’s educational potential was the best argument for its existence and their chief motivation. Tourism was thus quite literally a way to save the planet from humanity. “They may have a good biology background,” said one guide, “but most people don’t realize that whale societies are very unique in the world, they don’t realize they’re matrilines, mom is the boss, families stay very tightly together all their lives.” Guides used the female leadership of resident orca pods to encourage speculation about the comparability of killer whale and human societies: if orcas thrived in nature because of this structure, perhaps humans should re-examine their own hierarchies.

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196 Baltazar Kowalski, interview with author. This name is a pseudonym.
197 Javier Barroso, interview with author, Victoria BC, July 3, 2008. This name is a pseudonym.
199 Helen Nagoya, interview with author.
200 Bruce Bower has noted that the Northwest’s killer whale populations are a particularly persuasive case for analogizing cetacean cultures to human ones because they comprise distinct populations of the same species which live in the same area yet employ vastly different survival strategies. Bruce Bower, “Culture of the Sea,” Science News 158, 18 (October 28, 2000): 285.
one guide imagined himself pushing a “wheel of human sociology” which “takes a tremendous amount of pressure [to] turn.” He tried to “turn that wheel to the good side, which would be: we use less water, less electricity, less carbon in the atmosphere.” This was important because “the fate of the ocean is our fate.”201 Another added that “they can tell their friends back home in Missouri or Arkansas, and that word is passed . . . hopefully the guide gives them an appreciation of the area . . . . so a lot of education is being provided.”202

For whale watching to fulfill these goals, though, the sort of information passengers walked away with mattered greatly. How important was it, for example, that they learn about killer whale matrilines? If the goal was conservation, cetaceans’ ecosystems and humans’ quotidian impacts on animals were perhaps more important pieces of information. Certainly not every factoid was of equal critical weight. Guides often strove to emphasize such subjects, but when whale watchers in Telegraph Cove and Victoria were asked in 2008 what information stood out, fewer than 10 percent wrote about understanding their connection to the ecosystem. One Telegraph Cove passenger wrote that whale watching is “always a reminder of other life beyond humans and the dependency of each.” Another mentioned “toxic buildup problems, effects of human interaction.” The remainder, though, seemed more concerned with a very circumscribed collection of facts about whales: “orcas are separated in different populations with different behaviours;” “there are 3 types of killer whales;” “the reminder that animals are beautiful creatures;” “didn’t know they travelled in such large pods;” “how big they are;”

201 Javier Barroso, interview with author.

202 Timothy Jansen, interview with author.
“swimming patterns, feeding;” “learned a bit more about their behaviour;” “types of whales, eating habits, where they are, respect their space;” “how long they can hold their breath.” Such remarks seemed to share much in common with the outcomes of aquarium experiences, even if whale watching guides intended to inspire rather than inhibit action.

Despite their universal agreement on the importance of education in whale watching, guides remained uncertain about their own potency. A Telegraph Cove guide who described herself primarily as an environmental educator admitted that she was “not naive” and relied mostly on “anecdotal bits of evidence” such as “the tears” to tell her that “most people are intrinsically good and wanting to make a difference.” Two Telegraph Cove guides spoke of their company’s increasing efforts to direct passengers in how to abet the health of local ecosystems and to track the effectiveness of such a program. Yet a Victoria guide said that although there was “a massive awareness going on right now,” people generally had not changed their day to day behaviours. Rather, “we’re in the transition phase: people are aware, but I’m not sure if any one person, at least that has come out on my trips, I’m not sure they really went home and altered their lifestyle.”

According to a 2000 survey, whale watchers became only slightly more “conservation-oriented” in terms of cetacean management after their tour, with an even smaller shift towards conservation in general. This was either because passengers already had conservationist attitudes or because “the link between specific issues, such as toxins, 203 Helen Nagoya, interview with author.

204 Helen Nagoya, interview with author; Alfredo Costa, interview with author; Bevan O’Connor, interview with author.
over-fishing and forestry, and global environmental conservation was not made” effectively by guides. Moreover, small changes in attitude recorded immediately after a tour were no guarantee of lasting behavioural change once participants returned home. Thus tourist surveys did “not provide conclusive evidence that education” was a significant effect of the whale watching industry.

More research is needed to document the connections between ways of encountering cetaceans and tourist attitudes toward these animals and their environment. A 2001 study indicated that land-based whale watchers in the San Juan Islands were more concerned about the impact of whale watching boats on whale behaviour than were boat-based whale watchers. The findings are perhaps unsurprising. Whale watchers likely self-select into such groups. Those who want to see whales but are concerned about the impact of boats are unlikely to pay for boat-based whale watching, while those less concerned or, perhaps, unconscious about boats’ impact are more likely to choose this option. For the issues being examined in this thesis, a more fruitful process would be before-and-after questions posed to both cohorts about their intentions to change their lives to benefit whales. The survey would also need to monitor long-term behaviour change to document the relative effects of distance from the whales, the extent to which one feels part of an environment, and so on.


Biologists varied on how to generate interest in conservation. Some argued that “only through understanding ecological relations can we fully appreciate the value of biological diversity.” Many organisms crucial to ecosystems have little public appeal, however. One example is the tiny number of insects listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Many biologists thus believed that concentration on “charismatic megavertebrates,” “cognitively meaningful” species, and “cute” animals was the only realistic way to instil in the public a dedication to conservation. Environmentalists often agreed. David Takacs has argued that there is a sound conservational basis to this approach. These species tend to occupy high trophic levels and thus have large habitats. Taking steps to preserve them therefore has the side effect of protecting large landscapes or seascapes and other organisms living therein. Public interest in a few appealing organisms can thus be turned to the advantage of entire ecosystems without the need for precise ecological education. Killer whales fit this definition, so perhaps the most


210 Takacs, *The Idea of Biodiversity*, 57, 69. See also Ezequiel Lugo, “Insect Conservation under the Endangered Species Act,” UCLA Journal of Environmental Law and Policy 97 (2006-2007), http://works.bepress.com/ezequiel_lugo/3. Lugo argues that the lack of insects on the endangered species list is due to the lack of scientific data and petitions for inclusion, which suggests that such a bias also exists within the scientific community.

211 Takacs, *The Idea of Biodiversity*, 63. For examples of this phenomenon in action on a grand scale in North American history, see Kurkpatrick Dorsey, *The Dawn of Conservation Diplomacy: U.S.-Canadian wildlife protection treaties in the progressive era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998). The attractiveness of the species under consideration for conservation treaties was key to the success or failure of the endeavours. For example, seals were relatively easy to conserve because they are “undeniably cute by most human standards.” (112) Similarly, birds “of all the common wild animals . . . are somehow the most like humans.” (168) Fish, on the other hand, were much more difficult to conserve than either seals or birds, because “they were hard to find, they had neither fur nor feathers, and they did not sing.” (77)


realistic rationale for whale watching boosters is that whale watching’s dearth of comprehensive educational benefits is compensated for by its ability to inspire affinity which might create political pressure for conservation.

Nonetheless, evidentiary weaknesses in the case for whale watching’s educational effectiveness bolstered its opponents in the Northwest, who believed that any benefits it might have produced were outweighed by the harm it caused. Just as with commercial whaling and the aquarium industry, many critics were disturbed by the power of business to control access to nature, especially when whales were potentially harmed in the process. The director of the Orca Relief Citizens’ Alliance argued that *Free Willy* could have been named *Kill Willy* because of increased boat traffic’s impact on orcas.²¹⁴ The Alliance sponsored three scientific studies to determine the impact of whale watching on cetaceans in the region.²¹⁵ Ken Balcomb noticed that anti-whale watching sentiments were common in the San Juan Islands, a centre of both land- and boat-based whale watching. He called claims that whale watching was harmful “bogus” and proponents “misinformed.” To him, whale watching was “a plus,” and criticism diverted attention from “the issue” for the animals: the serious decline in their prey.²¹⁶ A letter-writer in the *Post-Intelligencer* in 2002 lent credence to Balcomb’s characterization of critics by arguing not only that the whale watching business ignored the animals’ well-being in favour of short-term profits, but also that investigating the industry should take priority


²¹⁵ “Orca Relief Citizens’ Alliance,” http://www.orcarelief.org/

²¹⁶ Ken Balcomb, interview with author.
since it was a relatively easy problem to address.\textsuperscript{217} In 2001, whale watch operators on
San Juan Island complained about just this problem: they were an easy target, and so the
“most heated discussions” concerned their business rather than other challenges for the
animals.\textsuperscript{218}

Concerns about consumption fused with other anxieties. In the early twenty-first
century, whale watching offices in Victoria often received phone calls from coastal
residents complaining about the whale watching fleet’s behaviour. Critics worried that
the boats were moving too fast or were too close to animals, but whale watching
employees often suspected that the callers were really more concerned for their ocean
view than for the animals, especially given that guides usually reported that their
behaviour had not been atypical when the complaint was lodged. At a basic level,
however, neither set of parties really engaged the other, leading to a situation of insularly
antagonistic perceptions about the industry and its critics.

Ultimately, conflicts over whale watching played out along similar lines to those
over the aquarium industry. Local businesses joined others across North America to
proclaim that they stood for responsible, proactive consumption. By buying their
products, they said, consumers did something positive for the environment.\textsuperscript{219} Because
many whale watching employees considered themselves environmentalists and
understood the challenges facing their ecosystem, they often appraised this strategy

\textsuperscript{217} Scott Milburn, “Whale-watching boats impact orcas’ survivability,” \textit{Seattle Post-Intelligencer},

seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/28566_orca22.shtml

Books, 1999), esp. 235-256.
explicitly, by weighing whale watching’s costs and benefits. As one Victoria guide said, “I have no excuse for burning fossil fuels . . . but my own feeling is that I can get a very few people . . . to a higher level in terms of the environment.” 220 In this sense, whale watching had a seeming advantage over its competition. Despite all of Sea World’s efforts, few customers believed they could fulfill all their expectations. It was all too obvious that the park existed primarily as a profit venture, whatever alluring messages it might use to increase its margins. For critics such as Susan Davis, Sea World ultimately disappointed, and they believed that North Americans had to “find another place and way to dream.” 221 If whale watching succeeded by becoming one of those other ways, perhaps this was so because it felt less like a normal form of consumption. Passengers hoped to leave civilization behind and encounter the animals as they really, naturally were. In this process, consumers could perhaps find the missing pieces of their own lives. 222

Unfortunately, there is little convincing evidence of the transformative and educational benefits to which the whale watching industry aspires. In 2000, whale watchers in British Columbia listed seeing whales as their primary motivation for taking the tour. Though education is “apparently a desirable part of the whale-watching

220 Javier Barroso, interview with author.

221 Davis, Spectacular Nature, 245.

222 Hal Rothman argues that in a “postmodern, postconsumption culture,” the goal of tourism “is not experience but fulfillment -- making the chooser feel important, strong, powerful, a member of the right crowd, or whatever else they crave.” Such tourists deluded themselves into believing that they had a “superiority of spirit and skill” expressed by their selection of more “authentic” experiences. This placed them “intellectually and morally above other tourists.” Paradoxically, this focus on fulfillment tended to make tourists less interested than ever in their surroundings and more concerned with personal development (see also note 220). Rothman, Devil’s Bargains, 14.
experience it always holds a lower, in some cases much lower priority” that ranked “below seeing whales, seeing whales in an uncrowded setting and seeing them in a respectful manner.” “Environmental education” was in fact the eighth most important element, out of eleven choices. Another study the following year found that “learning how one could help to protect whales had an extremely low importance.”223 Despite all the hopes guides invested in tourism, most whale lovers have not sought such lofty outcomes.224 The industry’s benefits seem more indirect, if not transitory. A day at the aquarium or on a whale watching boat was primarily a quest for a few fulfilling moments with a resonant piece of nature, and for most, it seems, that was enough.


224 Rothman observed that whale-watching tourists in Maui stomach the “outrageous sums such voyaging costs . . . as a part of the process of saving the planet for future generations.” In British Columbia, though, it is preponderantly guides, not tourists, who understand whale watching as a panacea. Conversely, Rothman also offered the most cynical view of such tourists: that they were interested in experiences focused on “placing the visitor at the center of the picture and encouraging concern with the self far beyond any interaction with the world.” Rothman, Devil’s Bargains, 1-2, 17. In the Northwest, the truth lies closer to the latter extreme, but the affinity inspired by cetacean tourism shows that personal fulfillment is not the only outcome of these activities.
Chapter Four: How to Love a Whale

“We believe,” wrote the editorial board of the *Victoria Times-Colonist* in 1995, “natives have to recognize that times have changed.” In the last years of the twentieth century, longstanding tensions between First Nations and non-natives erupted anew, this time not over salmon but over the Makah tribe’s intention to hunt grey whales from a stock only recently removed from the U.S. endangered species list. Many residents of the Pacific Northwest regarded the proposal as anachronistic. When the United States government approved the Makah petition, outrage erupted. Most opponents were mobilized by two related objections derived from the transformation in attitudes about cetaceans during the preceding decades. First, because indigenous peoples were often tightly associated with nature, many environmentalists felt betrayed by their desire to kill an animal which had become a symbol of environmental consciousness. Second, perceived collusion between the Makah and foreign whaling interests aggravated distrust. As the *Times-Colonist* scolded, “it seems that hunting whales has more to do with cash

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226 The “Ecological Indian” image with which the Makah had to contend coalesced in the 1960s and 1970s in imbrication with the environmental movement. Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 20-22. Richard White has cautioned that the association of indigenous peoples with the environment risks turning them into one-dimensional symbols: “At times this association of Indians and contemporary environmentalism came perilously close to a noble savagism more concerned with a deserved critique of American society than with any critical understanding of Indian people’s conception of or influence on the environment.” Richard White, “Native Americans and the Environment,” in *Scholars and the Indian Experience: Critical Reviews of Recent Writing in the Social Sciences*, ed. W.R. Swagerty (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 180.
than culture.”

That suspicion further tarnished the tribe’s image by associating them with a widely repugnant form of commodification.

The Makah tribe’s home was Neah Bay, a remote village near the tip of Washington’s Olympic Peninsula. Like many First Nations communities in North America, the Makah were plagued by high unemployment. In the mid-1990s, half of Neah Bay’s residents were jobless in summer and three quarters in winter. Per capita income was a depressingly low $5200. Makah elders hoped that by rebuilding their ancestral whaling tradition, even on a small scale, they could culturally and perhaps even economically revitalize the tribe. Although it had been nearly seventy years since the last Makah whale hunt, memory of the practice endured, and as one former tribal chairman insisted, their culture did not belong “in the museum.” Whaling had flowed throughout Makah culture for thousands of years. During their traditional marriage practices, for example, the groom symbolically harpooned the bride’s front door. Whale products had also made up about 80 percent of the tribe’s diet. All this remained missing for seven decades after commercial whaling so denuded the Pacific

227 “Native culture or greed?” Victoria Times-Colonist, April 15, 1997, A10.

228 Sullivan, A Whale Hunt, 41-42.


231 Miller, “Exercising Cultural Self-Determination,” 175.

232 Sullivan, A Whale Hunt, 49.

grey whale populations that the Makah were forced to suspend their hunts. The Makah struggled during the intervening period to preserve their whaling culture despite the hunt’s absence.\textsuperscript{234}

Thus when the eastern Pacific grey whale population was removed from the U.S. endangered species list in 1994, the Makah sought to resume whaling. After deciding to support the Makah petition, the U.S. government joined with Russia in 1997 to submit a request to the International Whaling Commission to allot indigenous peoples from both countries a grey whale quota.\textsuperscript{235} The IWC unanimously approved the request.\textsuperscript{236} In Victoria, whale watching workers responded by forming the West Coast Anti-Whaling Society. The WCAWS gave voice to many who shared worries about the Makah hunt, and the first meeting in 1998 was “packed to the rafters” at a local community centre. During the fall grey whale migrations, the group organized flotillas of up to ten whale watching vessels to thwart the hunt by patrolling the Salish Sea near Neah Bay.\textsuperscript{237} They joined the struggle alongside an array of groups, including Paul Watson’s Sea Shepherd

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\textsuperscript{234} Miller, “Exercising Cultural Self-Determination,” 247-249.
\textsuperscript{235} The Makah petition was not deliberated on by elected officials but rather arbitrated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. government. This is a common strategy for indigenous peoples seeking approval to hunt wild animals since they have generally found little sympathy within elected bodies because of their small numbers. Their opponents, on the other hand, usually succeed with precisely the opposite approach: conservation professionals often frown upon preservationist lobbies but elected officials frequently oppose hunts as an easy way to curry votes among animal-loving constituents. Oran R. Young, “The Politics of Animal Rights: Preservationists vs. Consumptive Users in the North,” Inuit Studies 13, 1 (1989): 50-51.
\textsuperscript{236} Miller, “Exercising Cultural Self-Determination,” 255-261.
\textsuperscript{237} Sarah Jones, interview with author.
\end{flushleft}
Conservation Society, the organization he had founded after leaving Greenpeace, which journalist Robert Sullivan called the “de facto lead protester”.238

Whaling disturbed many who felt an affinity with cetaceans, but it was doubly jarring to see indigenous people do the deed. In popular culture, North American indigeneity was associated with an environmentally purer past that contact with Europeans had imperilled.239 Europeans were often villains in this story, but by linking their identity to that past, First Nations were defined by non-natives as timeless and unchanging.240 In modernity, native peoples were drafted into service as touchstones of authenticity.241 The concept developed in part as a reaction to cultural disruptions caused by an increasingly globalized economic order. Indigeneity was defined by resistance to such forces.242 At Sea World, for example, the Shamu shows of the 1990s depended on indigenous cultural references to draw the audience into a story of deep communion between cetaceans and humans.243 In Free Willy, an indigenous character sides with the

238 Sullivan, A Whale Hunt, 59.

239 The tethering of indigenous peoples to the distant past is neither recent nor limited to North America. Johannes Fabian has shown how modern anthropology “promoted a scheme in terms of which not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a temporal slope.” The benefits of time were “unequally distributed among the human populations of the world,” and the Western world occupied the latest and best niche. Johannes Fabian, Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its object (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 17-18.

240 Cf. Patricia Pierce Erikson, “A-Whaling We Will Go: Encounters of Knowledge and Memory at the Makah Cultural and Research Centre,” Cultural Anthropology 14, 4 (November 1999): 556-583 for a discussion of these issues from the perspective of a scholar studying the Makah’s cultural centre, and Bruce Braun, The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada’s West Coast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) on the connection between nature and indigeneity and how eco-tourism in British Columbia can perpetuate these ideas.

241 Braun, The Intemperate Rainforest, 91.


protagonist against the aquarium’s greedy owners.\footnote{244} Furthermore, because nature has been portrayed as similarly timeless in North America, First Nations people are often reduced to “one of nature’s many elements.”\footnote{245} Thus an indigenous society -- seemingly backed by foreign commercial interests -- which threatened to kill an animal imbued with so many positive environmental associations represented a rupture of cultural norms. Put simply, the Makah whale hunt seemed a massively unnatural act. Factually, this was illogical. The Makah’s prehistoric culture \textit{was} focused on whaling, but facts were the first casualties of this conflict, because no justification would have stilled the anger of many whale lovers. One protester declared that she was as passionate about stopping Makah whaling as she had been about the Vietnam War, and some Makah received death threats.\footnote{246}

Critics relentlessly assailed the Makah as dupes, as unauthentic and unworthy of the legacy they claimed. It was Paul Watson’s “sincere hope that members of the native community will not be manipulated by Japanese and Norwegian commercial interests into soiling traditional native values.”\footnote{247} Another opponent insisted that he did not want

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Free Willy}, dir. Simon Wincer.
\item Braun, \textit{The Intemperate Rainforest}, 82. William Cronon has described this view of nature: “For many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth.” Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness” in \textit{Uncommon Ground}, 69.
\item Sullivan, \textit{A Whale Hunt}, 136-137; Miller, “Exercising Cultural Self-Determination,” 267. It was not only strident activists who sometimes seemed to put whales before people. In 1988, for example, there was a media frenzy in the Inuit community of Barrow, Alaska focused on grey whales trapped in the ice there. In the midst of this, three children died in a house fire which went unchecked because the town’s fire fighters had gone home, exhausted from working to free the whales. A reporter assigned to Barrow observed that “with few exceptions, none of us mentioned the tragic deaths in any of our stories.” Tom Rose, \textit{Freeing the Whales: How the Media Created the World’s Greatest Non-Event} (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1989), 74.
\end{itemize}
the Makah to jettison “their ancestry and their customs . . . but nowhere in their ancestors’ past did they have a 50-caliber machine gun . . . or power boats.” The Makah whaling captain grew “so tired” of the long line of outsiders, culminating in the whaling protesters, who were “pushing their cultural values on Makah and telling us how and how not to be Makah,” but the assault never eased. As late as 2007, Watson continued to argue that whaling was a lazy way of preserving culture, and that the Makah were therefore missing the truer cultural connection with nature. They had lost their way. He insisted that the Makah were evading the hard work required to revive art or language: “any coward can stick a harpoon into a defenseless whale.”

The perception that the Japanese government manipulated the Makah and other indigenous groups fuelled fears that the hunt was a ploy, an opening wedge for a thoroughly modern for-profit scheme which threatened to decimate the grey whale population once more. The Makah were guilty by association. “The Japanese are involved,” accused a WCAWS founder, adding that the Makah sat with the Japanese delegates at the International Whaling Commission. A spokeswoman for Sea Shepherd explained that “it’s about sushi.” The Makah were going to “make a ton of money.”


251 Sarah Jones, interview with author.
Another critic argued that by working with foreign commercial whalers, the Makah were in danger of losing their identities to inequitable commercialism, just as their ancestors had during contact with Europeans. The alliance was thus “as insulting as any would-be trade of plastic beads for furs.”

The *Times-Colonist* editors pointed out that a Vancouver Island First Nations man who had written in support of the hunt oversaw the local office of the World Council of Whalers, “which consists of aboriginal groups . . . as well as Japan and Norway.” Ironically, the Makah themselves were not members of the council precisely because they wanted to avoid foreign associations.

Some Makah members joined the chorus of concern about the tribe’s identity. They too craved authenticity and worried that some behaviours were not appropriate for whale hunters. One young man, the great-grandson of an esteemed Makah whaler and described by Robert Sullivan as “a bohemian whale hunter,” spoke about Makah whaling as an alternative way to relate to nature, just as it had been for his ancestors. Thus he objected to the egregiously untraditional behaviours of fellow members of the whaling crew, such as driving through Neah Bay with car stereos at top volume. Because of these beliefs, he was among the most relatable, perhaps the most authentic, of the Makah for protesters outside Neah Bay. Another Makah man expressed similar frustration:

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255 Sullivan, *A Whale Hunt*, 38, 90; Sullivan, “Permission Granted to Kill a Whale.”
“They’re representing our ancestors. Our ancestors were strong and pure and courageous. And these guys are fuck-ups.”

When crafting a justification for the hunt, the Makah and their supporters used the term “cultural subsistence,” a coinage referencing both necessary food hunting, which had precedent under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the cultural enrichment they hoped to find. To frame the hunt favourably in light of legal precedent, the American IWC Commissioner argued that even the historical cultural memory of whaling could justify a subsistence need for the practice. Though whale meat was not urgently required as an escape from starvation in the mid-1990s, it did have the potential to reverse the adverse health effects that had plagued the Makah and other indigenous peoples because of their shift to sedentary lifestyles and modern processed foods in the twentieth century.

Opponents of the hunt rejected these justifications. A WCAWS founder dismissed the subsistence argument by noting that Neah Bay had a convenience store just like any other small town. Others focused on the Makah’s 1855 treaty with the United States, particularly the phrase “in common with all citizens of the United States.” Ignoring nearly two centuries of constitutional law that stated otherwise, both Paul Watson and the WCAWS argued that because other citizens no longer had the right to whale, the Makah

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260 Sarah Jones, interview with author.
should also be prohibited. Such arguments misconstrued the circumstances under which the Makah treaty of 1855 was concluded. The Makah dealt with the United States as an independent sovereign, and in relinquishing claims to some territory and resources, they also retained or “reserved” their rights to others, including ocean resources and, explicitly, whales.

Critics also feared the precedent the Makah might establish. Were the hunt to be approved on the basis of its cultural significance, could Japanese and other commercial whalers not reasonably make the same argument? The IWC Commissioner insisted that the U.S. government’s position on whaling had not changed, that the non-commercial nature of the Makah hunt was a crucial distinction. “The U.S. has always opposed commercial whaling,” he said. “We have a written agreement with the Makah not to sell whale.” More than a restrictive agreement, though, the United States government paid the Makah $335,000 in the three years after they announced their intention to resume whaling in 1995. Opponents such as the WCAWS were mystified and suspicious of

261 Sullivan, *A Whale Hunt*, 174; Sarah Jones, interview with author. On legal interpretation of treaties in the United States, see Miller, “Exercising Cultural Self-Determination,” 190-199. The American tradition of judicial interpretation tending to favour tribes in ambiguous cases is in large part a response to the circumstances under which most negotiations took place. Translation problems, coercion, and dishonesty often defined these processes. In the Makah’s case, the treaty was translated from English to Chinook Jargon to Makah since the tribe had no facility with English.


the government’s motives.\textsuperscript{266} Such support, however, was not particularly unusual. The historical relationship of the U.S. government to tribes with which they concluded treaties was that of a “fiduciary guardian.” Inherent in that compact was the responsibility of the United States to “enhance and strengthen the authority of tribes and their practical ability to govern and manage tribal resources.”\textsuperscript{267} Once the government conceded the Makah’s right to the hunt, precedent suggested they should fund it. Moreover, financial support for unique ways of life in North America has not been limited to indigenous groups. Governments have frequently invested in “maintaining a cherished way of life, regardless of the ability . . . to turn a profit in conventional economic terms.”\textsuperscript{268}

Another source of anxiety was the hunt’s implication for a region broadly understood as a natural playground. Regional boosters worried that whaling could harm its reputation. A Friday Harbor port commissioner and a United States representative, both concerned that the hunt would “have a devastating effect” on tourism in the San Juan Islands, tried to halt the hunt through federal lawsuits and congressional resolutions.\textsuperscript{269} Others tried to convince the Makah to use whales in more enlightened ways. Following on the heels of his involvement in Keiko’s return to Iceland, Craig McCaw offered the Makah seed money to start a whale watching business and other projects if they would relinquish their hunting ambitions.\textsuperscript{270} Members of the Ahousaht

\textsuperscript{266} Sarah Jones, interview with author.

\textsuperscript{267} Miller, “Exercising Cultural Self-Determination,” 217.

\textsuperscript{268} Young, “The Politics of Animal Rights,” 49.

\textsuperscript{269} Shukovsky, “Makah Whale Hunt Bitterly Opposed.”

First Nation on Vancouver Island boasted about the profitability of their whale watching operations and dismissed the Makah hunt as nothing more than “a few people who want to do it and get their names in the paper.” An activist with the Progressive Animal Welfare Society contended that he and his colleagues knew whales better than the Makah because they had encountered them through whale watching, and that if the whalers opened themselves to this experience they would be more interested in other ways of using the animals.\textsuperscript{271} Perhaps the Makah resisted such proposals because they understood the effects that tourism can have on small societies. Unique cultural forms can easily lose their meaning when they are “repeatedly staged for money.” Even more disturbing, over time, locals can gradually lose the ability to differentiate between truly traditional culture and the “staged authenticity” presented for tourists.\textsuperscript{272} Many small communities in the American West faced such insidious fallout from embracing tourism during the twentieth century. Steamboat Springs, Colorado, for example, faced “a devil’s bargain: fight to maintain identity and risk the very fabric of the town or accept the new power and its money and acquiesce in the transformation.” The Hopi tribe experienced similar contradictory effects of their culture’s commodification for tourists at the Grand Canyon.\textsuperscript{273}

The louder the dissent grew, though, the more determined the Makah hunters became. A grey whale was finally killed in May 1999 when bad weather forced protest boats out of the area. Just after the hunt, the \textit{Seattle Times} heard from 400 readers.

\textsuperscript{271} Shukovsky, “Makah Whale Hunt Bitterly Opposed.”

\textsuperscript{272} Shaw and Williams, \textit{Critical Issues in Tourism}, 92.

\textsuperscript{273} Rothman, \textit{Devil’s Bargains}, 261, 72.
About 90 percent opposed the hunt, but the Makah had defenders as well. One Seattleite asked the rhetorical question: “Who is responsible for the current state of whale populations? Native Americans?” Listening to non-natives lecture the Makah on whale conservation was at best a cruel irony. “No, it’s because of the greed and butchery of white America.” Instead of stopping the Makah, he argued, the “eco-warriors” should concentrate on “the invaders who savaged natural populations and destroyed natural habitat.” A flotilla of canoes bearing members of other Northwest tribes created a more spectacular show of encouragement when they arrived in Neah Bay just before the successful hunt. These visitors had motives beyond simple moral support. Denial of the Makah’s treaty right to hunt whales would have set a differently threatening precedent for peoples with analogous claims.

At the end of the twentieth century, after decades of innovation in commodifying cetaceans, a very old way of using the animals had reappeared in the Northwest. Cetaceans were so beloved and lucrative that many residents believed it was impossible to justify such a radical and immoral regression. Anxieties were only exacerbated because the Makah so gleefully contradicted the association of First Nations with modern environmental consciousness. Rumours that their hunt would open the door to commercial whaling further poisoned the waters. Whale watching workers were at the forefront of the opposition to the Makah’s whale hunt not simply because they feared for their industry’s viability but because they fervently believed in the distinctiveness and value of cetaceans. Theirs was thus the only appropriate way to interact with the animals.

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274 “More Letters to the Editor: Whale Hunt.”

275 Sullivan, A Whale Hunt, 246.
The Makah hunt created a bitter contest between a commodified relationship with whales in harmony with decades of cultural and economic change and a far older relationship made anathematic by the very same developments. The assertion of rights settled 150 years earlier had exposed this fundamental shift in attitudes about cetaceans. To most residents of the Pacific Northwest, venerating whales by killing them no longer made sense.
A curious phenomenon had emerged by the dawn of the twenty-first century. The more people ventured to nature to see whales, the more the whales seemed to follow people back to civilization. They popped up on street corners and against buildings, in cars and on clothing. Cetacean imagery proliferated across the Northwest, showing how strongly residents identified their home with the animals. The National Hockey League’s Vancouver Canucks unveiled a stylized-orca logo in 1997. The Terrace Public Library used a reproduction of a 10,000-year old orca carving as its emblem. The Seattle Children’s Hospital created a “quintessentially Northwest” figure of a whale mother and child in 2008. The list could go on. A remarkable variety of organizations used cetaceans to excite, mobilize, and sell. The 2003 “Orcas in the City” venture coordinated by the British Columbia Lions Society was perhaps the grandest use of cetaceans. Local artists decorated life-size sculptures of orca calves and these works were displayed on Vancouver and Victoria streets. When finally auctioned off for charity, many of the groups and individuals who purchased pieces installed them in prominent public places, thus marking themselves as generous and in harmony with their community. The president of the Lions Society said there was “no magic” in their choice of orcas: they simply picked an animal that “was part of Northwest culture.”


277 Stephen J. Miller, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2008. Bears took second place in the deliberations.
Though residents were by then well-prepared to interpret whales as symbols, the history of cetaceans as commodities still disturbed many. In 2007, the former owner of Victoria’s Sealand, Bob Wright, donated eleven million dollars to the University of Victoria to support the construction of a new Ocean, Earth, and Atmospheric Sciences building. Speaking at the announcement event, the university’s president declared that “he and Wright solidified their friendship through their mutual love of the ocean.” Yet the laudatory 700-word *Victoria Times-Colonist* article covering the event omitted that Wright had once been the leading killer whale catcher in British Columbia and that Sealand’s captive orcas were a cornerstone of his business empire. When Wright embarked on that career, few residents were bothered that their region was the source for the entertainment world’s orcas. By the early twenty-first century, association with that business seemed inappropriate for an ocean-lover.

Though it made sense for the beneficiaries of Wright’s largesse to ignore his bygone exploits, opinions on cetaceans were not monolithic. The comments on a 2007 *Post-Intelligencer* story about how the U.S. Coast Guard accidentally conducted machine gun exercises near killer whales showed that cetaceans continued to symbolize a range of values. “Yet ANOTHER reason for the left to loooooathe [sic] the military,” said one commenter. “When they start caring about the innocent unborn HUMANS being slaughtered in the womb, I’ll start caring about some ‘fish.’” Another sneered that the whales must have been “very upset that the US was militaristic. They were very upset that the bullets were not ‘green’ and soiled the oceans.” Conversely, someone calling

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themselves 100pctLiberal spat, “They were shooting at the whale-watchers! That’s the only way to prevent those jerks from harassing the wildlife.”279 A similar clash occurred in Canada over a lawsuit demanding the federal government protect killer whale habitat. One critic remarked: “Typical far-left moonbats launching a frivolous lawsuit, all designed to raise money for their own self-interest . . . . Not only do they want to shut down BC, but jobs and vehicles and our way of life.” Finally, a reader used the Makah whale hunt to impugn all conservation: “Why bother protecting the habitat when the government lets Natives hunt whales as part of their ‘culture’?”280

The cultural history of cetaceans in the late twentieth century was as rancorous as these exchanges suggest. Commodification brought cetaceans so far into human culture that they became, in Sherry Ortner’s terminology, key symbols. Whales helped residents and tourists understand and act out appropriate relationships to nature in the context of constant change. Indeed, cetaceans met all of Ortner’s criteria. Many in the Northwest agreed that cetaceans were important and had an opinion about how best to understand and interact with them. Cetacean art and symbols were widely created and used. There were multifarious dimensions to these conversations, and many of those dimensions involved the rules that should govern humanity’s relationship with nature.

Unfortunately for the animals, the most contentious issues were not always the most consequential. This is not to say that all activism on behalf of cetaceans was


misguided, but rather that for those concerned with conserving the animals, much remained unaddressed. If we accept that division and debate are the necessary precursors to positive change, the point is still to eventually agree and act on things that matter. Too frequently in the Northwest, though, battles were fought only over the most conspicuous issues: whales violently taken from the oceans, whales confined to aquariums, and whales shadowed by boats filled with those who could afford the ride. These things mattered. Captures dangerously depleted populations, aquarium confinement increasingly seemed inhumane, and the sale of access to nature tended to limit experiences to those with a certain level of wealth. These have been results of nature’s commodification. Yet we must also reconsider Susan Davis’s warning against the “private, corporate production of public discourse around the environment.”

Ironically, enough people in the Northwest were similarly alarmed that the most obvious types of commodification themselves became focal points of concern, seemingly to the exclusion of other issues. But there is more.

Toxins may have been humanity’s greatest threat to Northwest cetaceans in the late twentieth century, but they were also, with apologies to Rachel Carson, a silent one. As a whale watching guide in Telegraph Cove said, “it’s all about chemicals.”

Evidence continues to mount that the bioaccumulation of persistent organic pollutants in

281 Davis, Spectacular Nature, 16.

282 Helen Nagoya, interview with author.
the bodies of killer whales is a serious threat to their survival. Toxins come both from locally resident prey and from Pacific salmon which spend much of their lives in the open ocean. This means that some of the toxins originate in Asian waste. Although such salmon comprise 92 percent of the orcas’ diet, locally resident prey contains eight times more PCBs. Furthermore, the southern resident orcas have higher toxicity loads than northern residents because they spend more time closer to major cities and industrial centres. Thus humans are connected to cetaceans by consumptive links of extraordinary spatial convolution. Locals contribute toxins through industrial employment and the electrical grid, but they also contribute to Asian contamination through global commodity chains and atmospheric telecommunications. If cetaceans are to survive for future generations, Northwest residents must inspect every aspect of their lifestyles. As Matthew Klingle notes, useful critiques of consumption rely on seeing connections at many spatial scales between producers and consumers on one hand and between nature and culture on the other. Hard decisions seem inevitable.

Ken Balcomb believes that toxicity can be better addressed by dealing with another of the complex issues facing whales, the decline of wild salmon. This is because it is only when food chains fail, when whales need to consume their own blubber to

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286 Klingle, “Spaces of Consumption in Environmental History,” 110.
survive, that toxins stored in adipose tissues are released in fatal amounts. And it may be starting to happen. The deaths of seven southern resident killer whales in 2008 probably resulted from a prey shortage. Though it was a particularly bad year, Balcomb predicts that such mortality will continue unless commercial salmon fishing in the Northwest is stopped for ten years and fish farms banned. Wild runs might then rebuild enough to support whales. But while a hiatus in fishing might be somewhat simpler than probing global commodity chains, its enactment would be no less difficult.

Cetaceans’ charisma and visibility were only magnified by the strife between those who commodified the animals and those who rejected or remained aloof from those processes. The consequences were contradictory. Whales reveal so much about our relationships with nature not only because they divided us so dramatically, but also because the less visible aspects of those relationships remained largely obscure. North Americans still encounter nature predominantly as a consumable good, but then, all the goods we consume begin as nature. For as long as this system endures, some will critique its ramifications for nature, as is entirely correct. If cetacean species are to be saved from today’s threats, and if we are to develop more sustainable relations to nature, profound curiosity and thoughtfulness are mandatory. Nature tourism can play a role. Despite their troubling aspects, the aquarium and whale watching industries altered human attitudes about cetaceans and fostered a sense of affinity that will be needed to conserve them. Given that moments of connection and inspiration do not necessarily lead to sustained behavioural change, however, much more is required. Every person must

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287 Ken Balcomb, interview with author; MSNBC, “7 killer whales missing from Wash. waters,” http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27372059/
investigate their own connections with nature, especially those not easily visible, and all
must insist on a legal framework to make this possible. We should define our wishes as
consumers and citizens on that basis. Only with such dedication can we save the whales.
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83


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