

DISSERTATION

CONNECTING TO NATURE VIA ECOTOURISM AS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation presents a case study of ecotourism as sustainable development focused on the potential of the tourist as agent of sustainable development when she returns to the global North. This possibility is framed in terms of a tourist “connecting to nature” and thus becoming an agent of sustainable development. This potential is investigated via the comparison of a “real” rainforest and its “simulation” and this also investigates the role of the biophysical in shaping this connection. After describing an initial period of data collection the author explains why he adopted the framework of “environmental imaginaries” as a language to describe the multiple and often conflicting natures to which tourists connect. Using this framework two forms of connecting are identified, “recruiting” and “reinforcing”. The role of the biophysical is explored for both forms of connecting as well as the implications for both upon the tourist’s return home.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother

Mary Margaret McCarthy McLane

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Chapter One: Introduction

Rooted in the insights of authors like Donella Meadows (1972) and Rachel Carson (2002) sustainable development seeks to balance economic, social and environmental considerations when evaluating the long term effects of a policy or set of policy decisions. By balancing these factors development should meet “...the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987: 15). Perhaps due in part to the ubiquity of the phrase “sustainable development” in so many fields, and its attachment to policies that were not sustainable in any meaningful way, it has been pilloried as nonsensical; especially the ambiguity of “needs” (Redclift 1993). It has also been called oxymoronic given the inherent tension between economic development (Schnaiberg 1980) and the environment (Lele 1991). Still, as Sharpley (2000: 3) points out, “...the inherent ambiguity of the concept is, paradoxically, its strength”, in part because the concept provides, “...a forum at which a multitude of viewpoints can be addressed” (Sharpley 2000: 2).

It is in this latter spirit that I frame this discussion of “connecting to nature” as a force of sustainable development in the North. My focus on the North (or rather Northerners) is unusual as sustainable development has traditionally been understood as a North to South process, providing economic and intellectual capital to alleviate poverty while not destroying the environment in the global South (McMichael 2011). Interestingly, the rare use of the term applied to the United States has often been linked to studies in Appalachia (e.g., Glasmeier and Farrigan 2003) that some literature refers to using Bailey and Flores’s (1973) “internal colony” model (e.g., Lewis 1978; Walls 1978).

Critics of Northern development patterns have long argued that in order for our economic, social and environmental policies to promote sustainability real changes must occur in not just how internal colonies, but society at large relate to the environment (Commoner 1973; Ehrlich, Ehrlich and Holdren 1973; Leopold 1986). Environmental sociology has examined the degree to which cultural and social forces can shape, and make more sustainable, a society's environmental, social and economic policies (Catton and Dunlap 1978). While many forces shape environmental orientations there is evidence that if individuals feel more a part of the environment they are more likely to take it into account in their voting, advocacy, purchasing and lifestyle decisions (Cottrell 2003; Dunlap and Van Liere 2008; Steel 1996). A sense of connection to nature may not be a sufficient condition to make policies in the North more sustainable it may be a necessary one. It is following this insight that this dissertation joins the conversation, exploring the phenomenon of tourists "connecting to nature" while on an ecotour in the global South and thus possibly returning to the North as agents of sustainable development.

As my investigation unfolds the language used in this document may seem to stray far from that of development for a number of reasons. Firstly, in order to examine this question the paper has a second task of developing language to describe, sociologically, the phenomenon of "connecting" as well as "nature" as described by the study's participants. The challenges in developing this language are first, to acknowledge the diverse understandings of nature as presented by individual participants while establishing commonality, secondly to incorporate the non-social biophysical aspects of nature and thirdly define "connecting" in such a way as to make it a comparable and useful concept in development and environmental literature.

Another reason for leaving much of the traditional development language is a result of my focus on tourists as potential agents of change in their own home country. From its inception as an area of study, most literature concerning tourism as sustainable development has focused on the host nation, and with good reason (see Budowski 1976; Ceballos-Lascurain 1991; Hunter 1997; Mowforth and Munt 2008; Weaver 2001; WTO 2012). The very concept of ecotourism or sustainable tourism arose from harsh critiques of tourism development that had destroyed communities as well as ecosystems. The first promise of ecotourism was that it might counteract the exploitive destructive essence of much of mass tourism and empower communities to protect their cultures and environment (Honey 2008).

A second promise of ecotourism visible in many advertising campaigns promoting excursions in the global South is to the tourist: the promise that she will connect (or reconnect) with nature. This second promise is rarely explicitly linked to the first, with the tourist acting as an agent of sustainable development upon their return to the North, although the possibility is mentioned in some literature (Buckley 2009; Honey 2008; Weaver 2001).

Before beginning this journey, I want to acknowledge the very real concerns that some might have about this work sidestepping the unequal, and historically exploitive, power relations that have characterized tourist/host relations. These concerns inform much of my research and I in no way mean to diminish these critiques of tourism as development. Rather I feel that there exists sufficient evidence to explore the possibility that while tourists might journey on the paths created by Northern exploitation of the

South, they may still develop or reinforce their sense of counter-hegemonic agency. This sense of agency I believe is an essential element of sustainable development.

This dissertation is an exploration of the phenomenon of “connecting to nature” in the context of ecotourism and sustainable development through a case study of a rainforest preserve in Costa Rica, a museum exhibit based on that rainforest and the many common discourses shared by these locations. Presented here are a research project and the story of a research project as my initial inquiries and an iterative research process shaped my initial assumptions.

The idea for this dissertation came from two pieces of insight during my time as a graduate student of sustainable development in Costa Rica. The first moment occurred during an evaluation exercise of a smallholder coffee farm. As students we had learned the three pillars of sustainable development and worked to develop indicators that would help us establish whether a farm or community would persist and remain healthy ecologically, socially and economically. On one of these field exercises we were interviewing a farmer who had decided to pursue an organic form of farming despite lacking the funds necessary to pay for organic certification that would have made his decision profitable. What struck me that day was that this farmer described his decision as good for the land but also good for his children who played in the fields as well as for the health of he and his wife. In his description he often referred to the physical experience of working with the coffee plants and the way the earth smelt without chemicals. Finally he said that not using pesticides and herbicides was a “right thing” morally. After our day at the farm, as per our usual routine, I developed a series of indicators and wrote my report. As I did so a number of

things stuck with me about the farmer's description of his decision to not use petroleum based fertilizers or pesticides. The first was the repeated use of sensual terms to describe his connection to the land, his plants and his decision. He spoke of the touch of the leaves, the coffee itself, and the smell of the ground. The second was his belief that he was doing the right thing, as a moral standing. As I looked through earlier reports and spoke with my colleagues I started to think that there was an element to sustainability that we were not measuring. That somewhere between the environmental and the social was this farmer's personal sense of connection to his land but also to nature in general. After all, his moral stance was not merely that he should not use chemicals on his plot of land but that they should not be used in general. If we were looking to determine sustainability of particular systems I felt we were sidestepping something about connection but I wasn't sure what.

The second insight came later in my time in Costa Rica while I was working at a small private biological reserve called Tirimbina (the setting for the study presented in this document). My primary work at the time was related to environmental education of local students designed to have them develop an appreciation of the forest for its biological diversity, its ability to generate income from tourists and also a sense of the forest as their heritage, their "patrimonia". Tirimbina's main goal is, and was, to serve as a research area for biologists of all stripes (entomologists, ornithologists and chiropterologists being the most common) and to help provide funds for the preservation of the area the management team had developed an ecotourism program. At the time the Tirimbina's own tourism facilities were modest and attracted mostly serious backpackers off the beaten path. A tentative partnership existed between Tirimbina and a neighboring upscale (for the region)

lodge and some tours and tourists came through the trails of Tirimbina that could not be considered backpackers including some Elderhostel groups.

As I would sit in the Tirimbina main office I caught bits and pieces of tourists' conversations about their experience in the forest whether that day or over the course of several days and kept hearing language about connecting to nature, feeling close to nature and other language that was getting at a similar point. Time in the forest seemed to give a sense of connection to nature. Could this sense of connection be the same phenomenon that had been so hard to place in my reports measuring sustainability? If so, the implications were intriguing to consider. If a connection to nature could be understood as an element of sustainability and experiences in nature like an ecotour at Tirimbina could develop that connection then could I argue for a sort of development that occurred during ecotours that moved from the South to the North?

While intrigued, my position at the time was deeply skeptical to say the least. Having lived in Costa Rica for a little while I had come to see myself as sort of "more local than you" North American who approached the tourists at Tirimbina with a little scorn. Here they were in jungle-Jim outfits recently bought for the trip from REI, covered in sweat after a day in the forest about to return to a comfortable air conditioned room and talking about how they had "connected to nature". As a lot of literature I would later read would agree with my feeling at the time that these tourists were merely re-enacting relationships that exoticised and othered both the nature and peoples of the global South (Plumwood 2003). That any language of "connection" was merely the conspicuous consumption of a foreign landscape that then could be brought home to the United States and retold in terms

that defined the teller as now more connected and more advanced than the listener (Mowforth and Munt 2003).

Still, I wasn't totally ready to abandon the idea that connecting to nature was an essential element of sustainability and that the language employed by these tourists could imply something about one particular path toward cultivating that connection. I held on to these parallel interests as I left Costa Rica and began to design my PhD dissertation. Happily for my conflicting impulses (the idea that creating connection to nature was possible and discomfort with the relative privilege of those going there) Tirimbina had an established partnership with the Milwaukee Public Museum that had resulted in the creation of a biology hall modeled (quite literally) on the forest in Costa Rica. I was drawn to these parallel forests and the idea of comparing the role they played in the lives of their visitors, including any possible effects on a sense of connection to nature. My initial hypothesis was that the visitors to Milwaukee would describe more change via their visit to the rainforest than visitors to Costa Rica. The assumptions behind this hypothesis were that visitors to Costa Rica, in addition to their financial wherewithal had already connected to nature and were making vacation decisions based on that connection. Whereas the visitors to the museum might be more likely to wander through the rainforest exhibit and discover a new topic or connection that had not previously been a part of their identity.

To ask these questions this dissertation first explores "nature" and then "connecting" as phenomenon in the particular case study of Tirimbina. While implications can certainly be drawn as to how someone might describe connecting to nature in other contexts this research is firmly grounded in this particular setting with its particular

discourses and materialities. This limitation is due of course to practical reasons but also as I describe later on it is theoretically consistent with the argument presented here that on some level there is not one nature to which tourists, or people in general, are connecting but rather multiple, overlapping and competing natures. I ground my findings in over fifty in-depth interviews in Milwaukee and Costa Rica as well as hundreds of hours of participant observation conducted over a three-year period as well as dozens of informal conversations with visitors to either the museum or the forest. This qualitative grounded research is also meant to participate in environmental sociology's call to "bring nature back in" (Catton and Dunlap 1978).

This dissertation unfolds in a traditional manner. Chapter two outlines the research questions, methods used in this study, provides some background on the partnership between Milwaukee Public Museum and the Tirimbina Biological Reserve as the setting for the study. While giving specifics about gaining entrée, performing participant observation and conducting interviews the chapter also lays out the iterative process that while a requirement of researching around my teaching schedule became an essential element in shaping the development as I learned from each excursion to the field.

Chapter three serves as a review of the foundational literatures with which this study interacts. Given its starting place in on an ecotour I discuss the sociology of tourism literature and acknowledge the historical skepticism concerning the tourist as an agent of social change. I then review literature concerning ecotourism as development to further acknowledge the concern that this study may simply be studying an expression of neo-colonial conspicuous consumption. Because of the iterative evolving nature of this project

and this document other literatures concerning nature and society are left to their relevant chapters.

After reviewing the relevant literature and describing my research methods and process, the first chapter of findings explores the problem of understanding nature as a social and biophysical reality to which respondents are connecting. In plain terms this chapter deals with the multiple meanings that respondents had for nature. Its not a surprise that Raymond Williams is often quoted in literature exploring this topic because of his observation that “‘nature’ is perhaps the most complex word in the English language” (Williams 1983:219). Williams himself divided the term into three interrelated concepts of nature referring to the essential characteristics of a thing, universal laws (i.e. “Mother Nature”) and the external non-human (my term) world (Williams 1983). To some degree all three of these definitions can be found in this study’s respondents’ interviews.

As discussed in chapter four, Carolan (2005) adds an essential component of the force of the social to shape nature in his 2005 tri-furcation of the concept into “nature”, nature and Nature referring to a descending order of “ontological depth” (393). In doing so Carolan is responding to previous schematics of how society and the environment or nature are intertwined (including Bell’s ecological dialogue and Latour’s challenge that all is hybrid) (2005). The findings presented in chapter four contribute to this discussion by exploring the non-unified and often competing definitions of nature, arguing instead that this study’s respondents are connecting to natures that are comprised of both discourses and materialities. This chapter emphasizes the deeply personal ways that individual respondents weave together disparate elements (including *Avatar*, *Dora the Explorer* and

being bitten by ants) to describe a nature as well as their connection to that nature. I then employ (and stretch a bit) Peet and Watt's term "environmental imaginaries" (1996). The term is rooted in post-Marxist considerations of conflicts over natural resource use that are seen as simultaneously conflicts between stories rooted in societies about human-natural relationships and responsibilities. Chapter four then takes time to describe the story of nature and humans' relationship with it that is proposed by both the museum and the forest in Costa Rica. Some consideration is given to how these narratives are situated with broader discourses concerning the mythologized rainforest.

Chapter five considers the role of material, non-human elements of both locations. The concept of environmental imaginaries has as a central claim the idea that places shape societies (Peet and Watts 1996). This chapter provides space for the ways in which respondents describe their interaction with the biophysical elements of either the museum or forests. Ant bites, slippery paths and rain as well as glass cases, howler monkey recordings and wheelchair accessible ramps are all elements of the biophysical spaces that have been shaped and mediated by humans but also, to differing degrees stand apart from the social. Visitors to both locations use the biophysical to confirm or deny their sense of experiencing the "real" rainforest and draw very different referents for Costa Rica versus the museum. While Costa Rica is sometimes compared to the Amazon by those seeking to diminish its authenticity, it is also a place of surprise and some level of discomfort that provide embodied, sensual evidence to the participants that they are experiencing a place outside of human control, and that, in their imaginary, reinforces the sense that they are connecting to nature.

On the other hand, the respondents in the museum were much more likely to compare the material aspects of the experience to other very human experiences like Disneyworld or the Rainforest Café. Because the museum does not change in the way a forest does (even during a stay of a few days or a multi-hour hike) it can fail to surprise and not invite visitors to re-examine what they think they know. However, chapter five explores that perhaps the most powerful material aspect of the museum experience is its location in downtown Milwaukee where it is able to host thousands of visitors that will never travel to Costa Rica. Unlike respondents at Tirimbina, those in Milwaukee have a sense of connection to the exhibit that in some ways is much more personal and developed over years of repeated visits.

Chapter six picks up on this point and explores the phenomenon of “connecting”. In both the museum and Costa Rica tourists existed on a spectrum of in terms of how they described the connection to nature before their visit. Some were dyed-in-the-wool “environmentalists” who saw a trip to the rainforest or an afternoon in the museum with their children as part of their deeply held identities, or how their environmental imaginaries were expressed. Others, especially in Milwaukee, were less likely to identify themselves as individuals who were particularly connected to nature. However, as I detail in this chapter, I came face to face with my own environmental imaginary and the language that I used to describe someone who was connected to nature.

One of the first big changes I made in my iterative research process was to stop using the word “environmentalist”. Having grown up in a conservative farming community in upstate New York, I should have known that “environmentalist” carries with it a

connotation of a variety of left-leaning political and social positions that many avid outdoors people, farmers and others reject while still holding onto a love of nature. I emphasize this point to illustrate that just as there are as many natures as respondents, there are as many paths of connection. Still, I identify two main findings in this chapter.

The first was an absence of any data that showed a role for the forest or museum as a way to recruit individuals into what Sellers (1999) refers to as the “environmentalist” imaginary when a visit is considered as a one-time event. However, I do explore the possibility that the museum might recruit visitors incrementally over time. Also considered are observations of visitors accepting information from tour guides in Costa Rica that they might not accept in the politicized context of the United States.

The second and largest finding of the project is the role that the forest in Costa Rica or the museum plays in reinforcing individuals’ sense of connection to nature. I had begun the study assuming that connection to nature (or what I initially termed being an environmentalist) was a steady state, that once someone had adopted this position it was more or less a fixed identity. My interviews, however, suggest otherwise as so many respondents described a sense of reconnection, of strengthening connection. A related phenomenon was parents who were passing on their own sense of connection to their children while at the same time reinforcing their own.

Rooted in the interview data, chapter seven presents individuals as what the imaginary literature refers to as “world creating agents” (Taylor 2003). Respondents are telling their own story of nature, how they and their family related to that nature. I argue in this chapter that individuals are deeply shaped by their social understandings of nature

but also act as creative forces that are simultaneously constitutive of and creating an environmental imaginary. This concluding chapter also explores the limits to individual responses to environmental concerns and wonders whether the commodified, purchased and consumed way that tourism happens reinforces the idea of individuals. I return to the initial insights of the possibility that connecting to nature is an essential element of sustainability, that the sensuous and biophysical can affect that sense of connection but that these elements must be understood within a social context (an environmental imaginary). Having laid out our map, let's get started by describing the iterative evolving nature of this project.

Chapter Two: Research Question/Setting/Methods

Writing in 2002, Morse et al. argued the value of iterative research methods for ensuring rigor in qualitative research in part because by “...focusing on strategies to establish trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln’s 1981 term for rigor) at the end of the study, rather than focusing on processes of verification during the study the investigator runs the risk of missing serious threats to the reliability and validity until it is too late to correct them” (Morse et.al. 2002: 14). This dissertation is certainly testament to this insight! For reasons I describe below, my fieldwork took place over the course of many years with data analysis occurring in the weeks or months between journeys to either Milwaukee or Costa Rica. This iterative process revealed that my initial theoretical framing was inadequate to the actual data and the search for an adequate frame became a central theme in the work. Once I found an adequate framework in my data could I return to my initial questions concerning “connecting to nature”, ecotourism and sustainable development now reconceptualized via Peet and Watts’ concept of environmental imaginaries.

THE INITIAL QUESTION

My initial research question that launched this iterative research process was, “What, if any, potentials exist for ecotourism to shape the worldviews of tourists, connect them to nature and send them home as agents of change to contribute to the sustainable development of the North?” While this question of potential arose through my personal experiences in Costa Rica, it is rooted in claims central to the discourses of ecotourism. For example, academic and ecotourism proponent Martha Honey, author of *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?*, defines ecotourism as “Travel to fragile

pristine and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and human rights” (Honey 2008: 25). While connection to nature is not explicit in this definition, we do see, in between being low-impact and providing funds for conservation that Honey has placed the promise of ecotourism as an educational tool. What is this education for? While some authors (including Honey) emphasize that, in part, the tourist is being taught to be a better, more ethical, tourist, the claim also operates on another level. For proponents of ecotourism-as-development, there is the potential to connect the tourist to nature and send them back to their homes better environmentalists because of that connection. For example, in *Ecotourism Principles and Practices*, a text designed for ecotourism practitioners, Ralf Buckley writes:

lessons about environmental management issues and personal environmental impacts, learnt during an ecotourism experience may be translated to changes in the ecotourists lifestyle once the holiday is over. For example it might lead people to consume less water, energy and resources, recycle more, but more environmentally friendly goods, contribute time or money to conservation efforts of various kinds, or give greater weight to environmental and conservation efforts of various kinds, or give greater weight to environmental and conservation issues when voting in elections or taking part in other political processes. (204)

Buckley goes on to state that, “Whether this is of any global significance would depend on how many people are affected and how much they change” (Buckley 2009: 204). While there has been considerable studies of the effects of ecotourism on host communities Buckley points out that, “To date there seem to have been no published studies on the degree to which changes in individual attitudes and behavior while on holiday carry over to changes in individual attitude or behavior back at home and at work” (Buckley 2009: 204).

However, there have been studies that suggest that if a holiday could affect a person's sense of affective attachment to nature this could lead to changes in environmentally 'friendly' behavior (For example, see Cottrell 1997, 2003).

Most academic work examining ecotourism experiences and the fostering of pro-environmental attitudes (e.g. Russell 1994, Orams 1997 or Lee and Moscardo 2005), relies on the use of models such as Cottrell's (1997) that examine specific environmental attitudes before and after exposure to a situation. My initial research questions were designed to supplement these investigations with qualitative data from tourists about their relationship to their destination, how it interacted with their lives in general. Specifically I wanted to explore the idea that tourists could become advocates for a worldview that engaged in a critique of contemporary economic, industrial and ultimately cultural systems that underlie environmental degradation.

ROLE OF THE AUTHENTIC

My second question was whether it was necessary (as some literature and ecotourism advocates suggested) to visit the actual rainforest or would a simulated rainforest with the same discourses suffice? This claim comes in two forms, the explicit and the implicit. Its explicit form is most likely to be found in literatures pertaining to outdoor education especially recent publications concerning child development, for example, Louv's *Last Child in The Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* (2008) or his even more recent work *The Nature Principle* (2011), which applies this theory to adults. Louv argues that children, and adults, are increasingly spending a great deal of their lives indoors rather than being out in nature and because of this only know

nature in an abstract form. The argument in his work is that television shows about nature are not a sufficient connector, and neither, one presumes, are museums or, say, rainforest-themed restaurants. Other environmental writers such as Bill McKibben (e.g., *Age of Missing Information*, 1993), David Orr (1992), Edward Abbey (1998) or Wendell Berry (2002) may not explicitly argue for the claim of authenticity for tourism as a connector but they certainly would not disagree.

The implicit version of the authenticity claim, on the other hand, is more directly linked to the promotion of tourism destinations; after all, if the actual Amazon isn't more "real" than say the Houston Museum of Natural Science's display on the Amazon, why would a tourist seeking to connect with nature, go? A quick perusal of advertisements for natural destinations reveals that the tour providers themselves certainly believe that the tourists are seeking a connection with authentic nature and thus emphasize phrasing along the lines of "Experience the real rainforest" (For examples, see amazonadventures.com, amazonecolodge.com among many others - accessed May 2013). Still, I wondered if there might be ways that the "fake" rainforest would be a more effective tool for creating environmentalists? Folded into this second line of inquiry, I was thus also asking questions of how the biophysical (as opposed to discursive) elements of a place affect a visitor's sense of connecting.

As I describe in this , I discovered fairly early in my research that there were flaws in the ways that I conceptualized "nature" as well as "connecting". Simply put, after my first round of fieldwork in Costa Rica, I listened to my interviews and realized (to my initial horror) that the concept of nature with which I entered the field was woefully inadequate

to deal with my data. It was far too unified, static and simple. My interviewees had widely divergent ways that they described nature in terms of its location, its constituent elements and, crucially for my research questions, their relationship to it. This highlighted the second flaw in my initial research questions: my equating of “connecting to nature” with “becoming an environmentalist”. As I describe below, I had been too long away from the conservative farming community where I grew up and forgotten that for some, “environmentalist” presumes a political and social orientation far beyond opinions on, say, energy policy. An even deeper flaw in my initial research question was the presumption that “connecting” was a fairly uniform process that produced a fairly uniform result. While I listened to my first round of interviews I knew that not only did I need a different way of understanding nature, I would need a way of understanding “connecting” that could account for the very personal and yet socially embedded ways that respondents described the role that a visit to the forest or museum played in their lives.

The findings chapters in this dissertation interact with my initial research questions but are better framed by the emergent questions that arose from the iterative nature of the work. Firstly, how can the varied ways that respondents understood nature and their relationship to it be understood in a sociological sense? In other words: Where is the social in the individually very different descriptions of nature? Secondly, how can the varied ways that respondents understand connecting be understood in a sociological sense while allowing for the wide variation in descriptions of that process? Finally, a related question that was held over from the initial research design: What is the role of the biophysical/non-social in shaping a sense of connection? And, staying true to that theme of

the biophysical shaping the social, we should describe the research setting and how they shaped the investigation.

RESEARCH SETTING

Tirimbina is a 375-hectare private rainforest preserve located in the Sarapiquí region of the Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica. This once remote region in Costa Rica's northeast frontier is named for the Sarapiquí River, which flows to the Rio San Juan and forms the border with Nicaragua. For much of its history as a Spanish colony, Costa Rica's small farms were settled in the country's central valley, leaving Sarapiquí as a relatively untouched area with a few subsistence farmers interspersed with the forest. Puerto Viejo was (and still is) the region's largest town acting as a way station for crops moving along the river system that connects to the sea and a series of trails, then roads that connect to the capital city of San Jose. A combination of population growth in other regions of Costa Rica and a governmental program of resettlement led to dramatic deforestation and increased agricultural productivity starting in the mid-20th century (Butterfield 1994). A visitor to the region today will see many small patches of forest (outside of larger swatch in private reserves), but the majority of land is planted in banana, pineapple and other crops that thrive in the intense heat and moisture of the basin.

During this initial period of rapidly changing settlement and land use patterns, some of those buying farms in the region were North Americans, including Robert Hunter who had come to the tropics as an agronomist linked to the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). The IICA was a new organization created during Second World War to develop Latin America as a source for vital crops such as rubber that the

Allied powers had lost access to during the conflict in Asia (IICA). Hunter himself was a specialist in sugar beets from Wisconsin who purchased the land that would become Tirimbina from one of Costa Rica's "presidential families" in the early 1960s (Young, 2004).

The property was initially part of a three-farm system, including one growing cacao in partnership with the Hershey company and yet another attempting to grow vanilla and allspice in partnership with the Coca Cola company (Young 2004). Hunter's quest to develop profitable farming techniques for growing spices in this region was described by his friend and scientific partner Allen Young as "at best, a mixed reality of failures and some moderate success" (Young 2004: 32). During the same years that Hunter was working as an agronomist, the same broad forces that brought him to Sarapiquí also brought US experts of a different sort. Martha Honey writes of Costa Rica's (and the forests south of the San Juan river's) role as "Honduras south", a training ground and base of operations for "contra" forces backed by the United States in its military effort to stymie the forces of communism in Nicaragua (Honey 1994). In my own research, I have occasionally struck up conversations with locals who remember those years with a nervous energy and there remains some tension around border issues with Costa Rica's neighbor to the north.

While Hunter's farm was modestly successful in terms of techniques for black pepper, cacao and vanilla, his lasting legacy seems to have come about mostly from his continuing role as an educator for undergraduate students from Wisconsin who would perform fieldwork at Tirimbina with Allen Young, a scientist now attached to the Milwaukee Public Museum. It was Young who encouraged the museum, along with a Wisconsin-based conservation group (Riveredge) to purchase 800 acres for use as an

educational center and conservation area that could be used for research. The plausibility of using Tirimbina as a research forest was aided by its proximity to La Selva, an already established and now famous biological research station, as well as Hunter and Young's respective research in the setting.

The forest took on a new life when it was used as the basis for the Milwaukee Public Museum's "Exploring Life on Earth" exhibition. A team of scientists visited Tirimbina and over the course of weeks took samples, made plaster casts of trees and used this collection to create the exhibition in Milwaukee which opened in November 1988. While the museum and Tirimbina maintain a cordial friendship, the ownership of the land and the day-to-day running of the operation began a process of separation in the mid-naughts. This process culminated in 2009 when Tirimbina completed the process of becoming an entirely Costa Rica-run enterprise owned by a non-profit organization and managed by Carlos Chavarria.

Tirimbina today hosts research scientists from around the world, but especially from North and South America. In addition, the reserve continues its educational programming with schoolchildren from the surrounding communities visiting to learn about the forest and its biological systems. Finally, and of central importance to this study, Tirimbina has grown its capacity to host tourists with the revenue from its tourism program, providing critical support to the overall goal of preserving the forest.

Tirimbina's history then has always been centered in discourses of development and later sustainable development. It is important to acknowledge this history because (to use Wallerstein's language) many critical theorists (a good example is Britton 1991) argue that tourists arrive at Tirimbina following in the footsteps of the forces of US power and

wealth and the subsequent flows of international development that have delineated Tirimbina as the destination on the periphery and the United States as the origin in the core (Honey 1994). Tourists arriving at Tirimbina are, for the most part, unaware of this history even as it enables their journey. They have followed advertisements; discourses that promote Costa Rica as a natural paradise; even as nature itself. Adams and Infield (2003) remind us that while visitors are experiencing a particular forest along a particular river but also, like the scientists investigating the forest, they are visiting a generalized “rainforest”. Similar to the Eiffel Tower or even Las Vegas, the visitor is walking and experiencing a unique place, but unlike those destinations, this one is understood as a sample of a much larger idea. In some sense even the training of guerillas in the forests to the north wasn’t about Nicaragua per se but the idea of communism writ large. Because Tirimbina is simultaneously itself and an example of something, Robert Hunter was able to learn techniques there that could be used throughout the tropics. Allen Young was enamored of the particular insect diversity within the mix of cacao trees and larger forest, but his findings were to be generalizable. It is for this reason that the museum was successful in creating its biology hall based on Tirimbina; because Tirimbina is a rainforest and the idea of a rainforest, nature and an idea of nature.

Constructed in 1988, the biology hall is housed on the second floor of the Milwaukee Public Museum in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Visitors can enter from two directions, and the exhibit is linked in a larger loop to another major draw at the museum; The Third Planet, which explores the geography of the formation of the earth through the age of the dinosaurs and ends with the ice age. Visitors thus enter the rainforest either following dinosaurs and the ice age or before. The exhibit is marked with a neon sign on

the exterior entrance to the lobby that reads, “Welcome to The Rainforest! Exploring Life on Earth”. The exhibit is designed to teach the basics of biology (with an emphasis on biodiversity and evolution) by situating the visitor as accompanying the scientists from Milwaukee who worked in Tirimbina. For example, there is a jeep that the scientists used to get around in the often-muddy lowlands. There is a wooden shack through whose windows visitors can see “Allen Young” peering through a microscope at the specimens he has collected that day.

The exhibit is two stories high with the second level allowing visitors to ascend into the canopy of the rainforest and read more about the diversity of life there. Figures of scientists wait in in suspended scaffolding among the trees peering through binoculars at macaws. The birds are gathered together along the side of a waterfall which pours to the levels below. This formation is based, as all the displays are, on the physicality of the forest in Costa Rica. While I will return to this in chapter five, it is important to note that even now following the dissolution of the formal partnership between Tirimbina in Costa Rica and the museum, visitors receive very similar discourses concerning the forest. As I mention above, they are walking simultaneously through a specific place but also through a place that is being explored because it is a sample of the rainforest as an ecosystem writ large. In both locations, the forest is the domain of scientists. The museum exhibit contains a rarely visited corner that shows scientists working in a high tech (for 1988) laboratory to develop medicines. While the Costa Rican location does not contain any corollary, visitors walk by dozens of small clear specimen bags hanging at research stations on their way into the forest and are often led by a scientist and told of the research going on there. In both locations, the scientists are presented both as explorers and “the locals”. They are the

experts on what the visitor is seeing; they know species names in Latin and can describe how various elements of the forest interact. If nature is a foreign country, then the scientist is its citizen.

Finally, both the Costa Rican and the Milwaukee discourses contain elements that the forest being visited is under threat. In Milwaukee, the threat is deforestation with a section of the forest represented by a stump sitting next to a chainsaw and the sounds of chainsaws in the distance. The messages in Costa Rica concerning threats to the forest are often more subtle and dependent on the guide. Because visitors to the forest often arrive with their own guide as part of a larger tour package, there is no standardized script. Some guides on tours I accompanied did not mention threats to the forest at all while others referred to issues such as climate change or land use as central themes. Again, I will return to these discourses in chapter five but here wanted to emphasize that the discourses are sufficiently similar that the two locations begged the question of what role their location and composition had on visitors and their sense of connection to nature.

EVOLVING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As I described above, this project changed over the course of three years of research. Shaped by the realities of teaching at a university as a way to fund the research, the process was characterized by a month or two in the field followed by a time of coding and analyzing, normally two to three months, and then a return to the field. This schedule initially seemed to be to my, and the project's, detriment. After all, it took years of return trips to both locations of the study to acquire the fifty or so formal interviews, the hundreds of hours of participant observation and the dozens of informal interviews that make up the

findings chapters. What I discovered early on in the process was that periods of reflection (even lengthy ones like those required by teaching) allowed me to realize mistakes in my own conceptualization of key concepts and other elements of my design that might be flawed. For example, one unexpected change that had occurred since my time living at Tirimbina in 2004 was in the visitors themselves. In 2004, most visitors were students or individuals who would readily identify as “environmentalist”. Upon my return in 2009, there was an increased diversity of visitors, including tourists visiting from cruise ships that would dock in the Caribbean port of Limón. Conforming to the literature, these visitors were less likely to be concerned with connecting to nature as a goal of their travel (Klein 2002; Quartermaine and Peter 2010). Additionally, Tirimbina had become much more popular with packaged tours that brought in tourists other than adventurous backpackers. With this increase in variance of the type of tourist coming to Tirimbina came an increased variance in worldviews (or what I will refer to as environmental imaginaries).

For example, in a trial interview I asked a late middle-aged woman from the United States who was visiting Costa Rica if she was an environmentalist. She looked a bit annoyed and asked what it was I was studying again. When I told her I was an environmental sociologist studying whether ecotours created environmentalists, she, in a few short sentences, brought our discussion to a close. She told me she was not an environmentalist and did not care for “the environmental agenda”. One other similar (but not nearly as contentious) interaction was with a man visiting Tirimbina from a rural area of the Midwest. He told me in no uncertain terms that he was not an environmentalist but then went on to say he was concerned about the increasing use of pesticides and other chemicals in agriculture, especially how these chemicals might enter the water systems.

Following this encounter, I dropped all language of environment and even stopped describing myself as an environmental sociologist as I felt it might too strongly affect my data.

While the possibility of ecotours acting as a sort of development of the North was tantalizing, based on my work at the Tirimbina Biological Reserve in 2004 my initial hypothesis was in the negative for visitors to Costa Rica. That is, I believed that tourists arriving already had a sense of themselves as environmentalist and that any ecotour experience was a matter of preaching to the choir or engaging in a sort of staged authenticity (MacCannell 1999) where the tourist could return home with photos (Urry 1992) and tales designed to impress her peer group and reinforce her social and cultural capital. I initially sought to contrast experiences at Tirimbina in Costa Rica with the exhibit based on the forest at the Milwaukee Public Museum. I believed that visitors to the museum would (on the whole) experience more change in their sense of connection to nature due mostly to the museum's location in the heart of a city. I speculated that visitors to the museum were much more likely to not already identify as environmentalists who were connected to nature and thus have more room to change. Additionally, my initial research design asked visitors to both the museum and forest whether they knew a great deal about nature, whether they lived in nature and how much time they spent in nature.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

Given time constraints, a longitudinal study wasn't practical (although it is a topic I'd like to explore in future research), and I couldn't measure change per se. I could, however, explore it potentially in both locations by asking respondents what role the

location played in their lives by asking about their motivation in visiting, how they described their time in the forest and what they felt they might take away from the experience.

Interviews in Costa Rica were conducted either at an outdoor cafeteria area on the edge of the trail system, in the neighboring eco-lodge or in a few cases while visitors waited for public transportation. Interviews in Milwaukee were conducted either at a table just outside of the exhibit or in the cafeteria on the first floor. In both locations, I sought to interview only adult US residents or citizens in order to make the populations in Costa Rica and Wisconsin uniform. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed and coded. I visited both locations at a variety of times of year based on breaks in my teaching schedule. An artifact of researching when I wasn't teaching and sampling the locations during different seasons, I think, increased the diversity of my respondents in terms of their pre-existing orientation toward nature and the environment. While there was little variation in types of respondents at Milwaukee throughout the seasons, I did find more variation in Costa Rica with more visitors seeking to escape the cold winters of the United States when I visited in December and January and more families and backpackers when I visited in May, June or August. I was far more likely to interview non-environmentalists in the winter months than summer.

Recruitment was not difficult in Costa Rica in the sense that visitors were willing to talk but also challenging because when a bus arriving from a cruise ship or packaged tour arrived I only had time to interview perhaps two people before the whole group had to re-board their bus. At the most there might be two buses in a day and some days there were

none. Other visitors to the forest in Costa Rica would stay for a few days and give great interviews at the end of their stay, but there was not a steady stream of visitors.

In contrast, Milwaukee had an abundance of visitors but they were less likely to want to stop and talk for any length of time. Most visitors to the museum were with friends or family or had come to see a traveling exhibit and had to keep moving to make their entrance time. After my first stay, I decided to purchase tickets to the planetarium shows at the museum (at a discounted rate supported by the museum) and use these as incentives. This dramatically increased participation and, with the exception of one or two interviews, didn't adversely affect the quality of the responses in the sense that most respondents didn't want to rush through the interview to get the ticket and move on .

Combining the two locations, I formally interviewed 54 individuals. This convenience sample was evenly split between the two locations and about half and half in terms of gender and, with one or two exceptions, was all white. While the racial homogeneity of the sample was reflective of American visitors to Tirimbina, it did not reflect the visitors to the Milwaukee Public Museum especially on Mondays when admission is free. On those days, the museum is dramatically busier and has a much greater percentage of African Americans visitors, generally in groups of adult females with children. The presence of children complicated the recruitment process. Parents that I did recruit either had another parent or adult present to take the children to go see another part of the museum, or they asked for planetarium tickets for everyone and to have the children involved. A scarcity of tickets made me reluctant to accept the latter until later in

the study. At the museum race seem to correlate with the presence of children, and I lost this valuable population.

Interviews ranged from twenty to ninety minutes and averaged approximately forty minutes. In addition, I interviewed two main staff members of Tirimbina, the executive director and the head of ecotours, and conducted one formal and several informal interviews with scientists, staff and curators in Milwaukee.

For visitors to both locations the interviews were semi-structured based on the following prompts:

1. "How far would you say you are from nature where you live?" This question accomplished a few things. In my initial design I was interested in whether the person came from a rural or urban background and how that might affect a sense of connection to nature. Because of the wide variation in understandings of nature (as described in chapter four) I kept this question but used it as a proxy for understanding the physical location of nature.
2. "Would you say you spend a lot of time in nature?" In the initial interviews, I again was looking to get a sense of whether the person was an outdoorsy type (hiking, hunting etc.) and thus already connected to nature. I hypothesized that visitors to Costa Rica would be more likely to answer something in the affirmative and visitors to Milwaukee the negative. Instead this interrogative prompted some of the most wide-ranging answers and gave good data about the different ways that respondents understood the discursive as well as biophysical location of nature.

3. “What brought you here?” This opening question began the conversation about what role the visited location was playing in the respondent’s life. Was he or she just passing through? On a sort of pilgrimage? This question and its ensuing conversations make up a lot of the data presented in chapter six, “Connecting”. Many respondents did talk about visiting either Milwaukee or Costa Rica as part of an overarching identity as someone who was connected to nature. In these cases, I would follow up by asking them to tell me other ways that this connection was manifested in their lives. The responses from these follow-up questions are the basis for chapter seven, “Imagining Something New”.

4. I also asked interviewees to describe how it felt to walk through the forest. If time permitted, I would ask them to describe their walk, where did they stop? What did they read or listen to? In one sense, I was interested in their literal responses but got a lot of richer data from the words they used to describe their time, especially as it concerned the sensuous reality of being in either the exhibit or Costa Rica.

While in Costa Rica or Milwaukee, I also gathered data through participant observation and informal interviews. During my stays in Costa Rica, I would accompany English language tours as often as possible when not conducting interviews. Some tours were through the forest only while others were centered on a chocolate theme and exploring the rainforest while also learning the natural history of chocolate. While accompanying the tours I paid special attention to the small conversations that visitors would have with each other and with the guide as well as their physical interactions with the forest. Detailed notes, written or recorded were taken either at the time of observation or immediately following, depending on circumstances. Photos, sound recordings and

videos were also collected as part of the observation. Notes, videos, photos and sound recordings taken either during time in field or immediately after were analyzed either in the field or later when I returned to the United States.

At the museum I would either sit on one of the many out-of-the-way benches and watch visitors interact with particular elements of the exhibit and with each other, or I would (to the extent that I could) follow a particular group, couple or individual through the exhibit. I performed approximately a hundred of these follow-throughs, paying attention to the variety of ways that visitors experienced the museum's forest, noting for example how many signs they read, which displays held them the longest, which were often skipped or ignored.

I conducted approximately forty informal interviews. These were opportunities to chat with visitors without having to sit down and record them. These were much more frequent while on hikes in Costa Rica (where in all cases I had been introduced to the group as a researcher who wanted to come along). Informal interviews at the museum occurred generally following a formal interview when whoever was accompanying the interviewee returned for them but didn't have time or interest to sit down themselves.

In terms of initial entrée, I initially came to Tirimbina Biological Reserve in Costa Rica in 2004 as an intern while pursuing a master's degree. I wrote an English language trail guide and helped with programs that worked with local schoolchildren. I remained in contact with some of the staff and leadership there and used those connections to smooth my way in agreements from the Milwaukee Public Museum. The summer and fall of 2009 were spent visiting both locations and gaining the necessary permissions. I also informally

interviewed tourists, spent time in the exhibit and accompanied tours of the forest to help plan the study. IRB approval was granted in 2010, and my first interviews were conducted that spring. As described above, this project was iterative in nature, changing over the course of three years of research. Shaped by the realities of teaching at a university as a way to fund the research the process was characterized by a month or two in the field followed by a time of coding and analyzing, normally two to three months, and then a return to the field. This schedule initially seemed to be to my, and the project's, detriment. After all, it took years of return trips to both locations of the study to acquire the fifty or so formal interviews, the hundreds of hours of participant observation and the dozens of informal interviews that make up the findings chapters. Before moving on to the discussion of how to sociologically understand multiple and competing natures, the next chapter reviews the sociological literature within which this research was initially grounded: tourism and development.

Chapter Three: Ecotourists as Agents of Development

While this dissertation is investigating the phenomenon of “connecting to nature”, it is also in its own way answering the call to “bring nature back in” as put by Carolan (2005c). One of the main theses of this investigation is that nature is multiple and interwoven with society. Based on this insight, this chapter serves as an initial literature review to explore the specific context within which my initial conception of “connecting to nature” was being explored: ecotourism and sustainable development. A central conceit of the dissertation is evaluating both the museum and the forest in Costa Rica as ecotourism destinations. Admittedly, while the exclusion of insights from scholarship on the role of museums to shape society, centering the investigation in ecotourism allows me to focus on my initial research question of whether that development mechanism, so long applied only to the global South, can be thought of as a development tool for the global North. To evaluate this potential, I will review sociological literature concerning ecotourism and the ecotourists, as well as the context of sustainable development.

It is no surprise that over the past two decades ecotourism has been a regular part of development plans from non-governmental as well as inter-governmental development agencies (Brohman 1996; Butler 2004; Stronza 2008; Sharpley 2008; Weaver 2001). After all, it has been touted as a sustainable mechanism because of its promise to provide a non-extractive, low impact, culturally sensitive revenue generator for communities in ecologically fragile areas, often in the global South (Ceballos-Lascurain 1991; Honey 2008; UNEP/WTO 2005). The vast majority of study on ecotourism as development has focused on this promise and where it has (Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster 2002; Xu, Wan and Yang

2007) or has not been (Pleumarom 2012; Sharpley 2000) realized. Others still have argued that this may have been a false promise from the start (Mowforth and Munt 2008).

Another promise of ecotourism visible in many advertising campaigns promoting excursions in the global South is to the tourist: the promise that she will connect (or reconnect) with nature. This second promise is rarely explicitly linked to the first, with the tourist acting as an agent of sustainable development upon her return to the North, although the possibility is mentioned in some literature (Buckley 2009; Honey 2008; Weaver, 2001).

THE TOURIST IN SOCIOLOGY

Sociological theorizing of the contemporary tourist can be characterized by an increasing differentiation of types. Earlier theorists differed on the nature of the tourist but generalized a single type or motivation. Later theorists sought to develop a more nuanced typology eventually positing a traveling public made up of atomized individuals engaged in self-creation (Elsrud 2005). Not surprisingly, this proliferation of types coincides with a larger theoretical reorientation within the discipline away from a modernist to a post-modern orientation (Uriely 2005:200).

One of the earliest social scientists to take tourism somewhat seriously as a topic was the historian Daniel Boorstin. Writing in the 1960s, Boorstin anticipated Baudrillard when he placed the tourist within a broader culture of “pseudo-events” (Boorstin 1962/2012). Criticizing American culture as a “thicket of unreality which stands between us and the facts of life” (Boorstin in Cohen 1988:30), Boorstin saw tourism as an extension of this culture. A hypothetical tourist flipping through the pages of a magazine in her

dentist's office would be attracted to promotional materials and, according to Boorstin, travel in order to see those materials made real. She could perhaps choose Tirimbina as a destination based on her desire to see the Costa Rican forest as it was portrayed in glossy color and evaluate her experience in terms of the hyper-real (to borrow from Baudrillard) portrayal of nature as a referent to a referent and never a referenced. The tourist in this conception does not realize, and does not particularly wish to realize, the false nature of her interactions with her destination. Rather she remains safely ensconced in her American safety while observing the strange, just like in the magazine (Boorstin 2012).

In contrast, Dean MacCannell describes the tourist as a seeker of authenticity. In seeking to theorize the reason for travel, MacCannell problematizes the modern condition as inauthentic, thus agreeing with Boorstin, but posits the tourist as participating in a genuine search for the authentic (MacCannell 1976:9). MacCannell bases his argument on Goffman's (1959) differentiation between a "front region" and "back region" to social life (MacCannell 1976; 589). He describes the tourist in her respective homeland as living life in the front region; characterized by performed society and involving particular roles that are often seen as inauthentic.

He argues that "the concern of moderns for the shallowness of their own lives and inauthenticity of their experience parallels concerns for the sacred in primitive society" (MacCannell 1976:590). Despite this difference in motivations, MacCannell for the most part is worried that Boorstin may be right about the outcome of travel. Unlike the pilgrim who arrives at her goal of, say, a particular temple or holy site, the tourist is trapped in a virtual world where no matter her effort the authentic cannot be reached (1976).

MacCannell argues that when the tourist journeys in order to resolve his peculiarly modern dilemma she cannot but help entering into a realm of staged authenticity; thus, what was to be a journey into the back region of authenticity in fact ends in another front region of the performance of authenticity that for the most part the tourist is unable to perceive (MacCannell 1976:592). MacCannell's overall thesis: "Sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived...and at the same time they are deprecated always failing to achieve these goals. The term 'tourist' is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences" (MacCannell 1976:592).

Judy Cohen disagrees with MacCannell, "Authentic experiences are not now, and have never been, the sole purpose of travel. Many travelers of old tried to insulate themselves from the 'picturesque' local people. This was in part because they were more interested in pleasure, relaxation, and/or status, but also because of a simple lack of interest in and even disdain for 'natives'" (Cohen 2002:33). Cohen draws on Boorstin's characterization of tourists to critique MacCannell, but by emphasizing that a search for authenticity has never been the *sole* purpose of travel, she actually highlights a strong similarity of Boorstin and MacCannell; they both create one singular type of tourist. As research continued to add information on tourist motivations, the number of types increased. For example, Eric Cohen proposed a four-category typology of "the drifter", "the explorer", "the individual mass and "the organized mass" (1979). These types were based on empirical data, including interviews that revealed a variety of motivations for travel. This data-based phenomenological diversification of typologies continues into very contemporary literature (e.g., Wickens 2002, McCabe 2005). Not surprisingly, this proliferation of types coincided with increasingly specific marketing campaigns to attract

tourist to different destinations (e.g., Dolnicar and Leich 2008 or Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele and Beaumont 2008) based on their type's motivation for travel.

One of those motivations that have influenced the theorizing of tourists is alluded to in MacCannell's use of the term "sightseers". John Urry proposed the tourist as a visual consumer of landscapes (1992). He wrote that as tourists, "we look at the environment...we gaze at what we encounter...and that gaze is socially constructed" (Urry 1992:1). This inclusion of the gaze being socially constructed (à la Foucault) allows for a great difference in how tourists are seeing, but they are obviously all performing the same basic action of consuming visually. In his earlier versions of the tourist gaze, Urry concentrates on the purely visual interaction that the tourist has with historical sights, museum artifacts, artwork, landscapes and even the people inhabiting those landscapes. Urry's use of the gaze as medium of interaction should also be placed in historical context as part of a broader narrative within postmodern sociology of the textualization of life (Jameson 1993).

Despite this difference in positioning on the modern/post divide, Urry's tourist, as with Boorstin and MacCannell's and the variety of types proposed by Cohen, remains part of a divide common in all their literature: the host and the destination. Whether she is traveling as an authentic searcher for the authentic or to take pictures and thus visually consume the landscape, the tourist remains a separate entity from the host or host community or destination. Urry himself recognized and critiqued this divide in his later work. After all, his gazer, through her interaction with a destination before arrival, hinted at yet another change in the theorizing of tourism: that of the tourist as a reflexive active

participant in the creation of the place to be visited. Crouch (among others) posits an understanding of the tourist as a performer “agentive” who “encounters space/place” and co-constructs the meaning of that place (Crouch, Aronsson and Wahlstrom 2001:253).

Johannesson writes:

The performance turn in tourism studies has shifted the focus of research away from the one-dimensional narratives, be they of static networks or the visual gaze. This development in tourism research can in some way be seen as an attempt to bypass the polarization of the field around tourists and hosts or consumers and producers. It seeks to grasp the fluidity and multidimensionality of tourism without signing up to the reduction of tourists to visual consumption of signs and images or of places to territorial containers. (Johannesson 2005:136)

In this co-construction of place, a hybridity of materials (magazines, trees, airplanes) and an agentive traveler, we can see the possibility (theoretically) that the tourist might be simultaneously shaped and shaping her encounter at a rainforest preserve in Costa Rica or an exhibit in Milwaukee. However, very little of the initial theorizing of the tourist includes any overt discussion of how she might be a broader agent of change or what might be termed development, focusing rather on how the destination rather than the visitor will be changed by tourism.

TOURISM AS DEVELOPMENT

Many traditional development schemes emphasized nation states fitting together into a global division of labor where each took advantage of their respective strengths (cheap labor, natural resources etc.) to best maximize their contributive and developmental potential. For many nations, tourism filled that gap perfectly. As Telfer and Sharpley (2002) point out, tourism is a growing industry that sidesteps trade barriers and “utilizes natural” infrastructures while possessing the potential to redistribute wealth

(2002: 17-19). The wealth in question is not inconsiderable. Tourism is one of the world's largest industries, generating in excess of US\$1 trillion in 2011 (WTO 2012). While the top ten destinations in 2011 did not include any least developed nations, there were three destinations in the global South (China, Malaysia and Mexico). Additionally, tourism remained an extremely important part of many developing economies bringing in much needed foreign capital. The UNWTO reports, "tourism is the first or second source of export earning for 20 of the world's 48 least developed countries" (WTO 2012).

However, there are many problems of tourism as development. Tourism can be a fickle source of income dependent on international politics, fashions and economic winds. For example, tourism receipts dropped in the Middle East and North Africa following the Arab Spring of 2011 (WTO 2012). However, tourism as a long-term investment is a solid one that has dramatically increased over time (Huybers 2007). Of course, that may be small consolation to a family that cannot keep a small business afloat while the global economy works itself out (Mowforth and Munt 2008). However, the rise of the BRICS seems to have provided new tourists from China and increasingly Russia (WTO 2012). Outside of the possible economic fickleness, a large concern for those promoting tourism as development is the amount of capital that remains in the host country, a concept referred to as "leakage". A tourist flying from New Jersey to the Dominican Republic aboard an American airline and staying in a resort run by an international conglomerate is not leaving much capital behind in the Dominican economy. What money that may be left may be for illicit activities such as drug use or prostitution, which leads to a third concern of tourism as a development scheme: the destruction of the host community's integrity. Host destinations of the global south are rife with examples of coastal communities that have

been transformed from sleepy fishing or off-the-path surfing destinations to perpetual spring break strips fueled by illicit drugs and sex for sale.

On a less dramatic note, but potentially no less devastating, rural or indigenous communities whose cultures are the attraction can find themselves providing what McCannell (1976) referred to as “staged authenticity” as their traditions are commodified and sold to visitors. While scholars such as Shepard (2002) have argued that commodification is itself a troubled term implying a pure or authentic culture pre-tourist arrival, the possible dangers of selling access to, say, religious ceremonies remains as salient for Catholics in the cathedrals of Europe as it is the Khoisan of the Kalahari .

Finally, tourism, especially nature-based tourism, if not planned for and developed properly, can result in the destruction of the very elements that drew visitors. Heavy foot and vehicle travel can degrade the beauty and integrity of a natural area. In recognition of this, some national park sites within the United States use the idea of a “sacrifice zone” (a concept lifted from land management literature) around very popular sites like Old Faithful in Yellowstone. By treating the museum exhibit as an ecotour destination we can see it as, in some ways, the ultimate sacrifice zone and certainly the destination with the least environmental impact for residents of Milwaukee!

In a desire to embrace the positives of tourism as development but minimize the negatives, some tourism development policies began to adopt what was alternatively referred to as sustainable tourism or, in the case of nature-based tourism, ecotourism. A phrase coined by Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin the 1980s initially to discuss sustainable nature based tourism, the term later became a catch-all for tourism that helped the

environment, the host community and even the tourists themselves. The last of these three is the subject of this research, and the literature pertinent to this study was mentioned in chapter two.

WHY “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”?

As I began a study examining the effect of an ecotour on the participants’ sense of connection to nature, I wondered whether or not to frame the discussion in terms of development. Given the immense weight of history and study of that history, did the use of the term obscure more than it revealed? I have decided to frame this investigation as one related to development (and even more perilously, sustainable development) for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it provides a rubric with which to ask questions about social change that is contextualized in a set of norms, practices and existing discourses. McMichael places the roots of the term in the nineteenth century, saying that it meant “the improvement of humankind” (2004:2). Traditional development models rooted in modernization theory accepted this definition and framed the subsequent transfer of technology, cultural orientations and economic systems from the North to the South as driving the goal of any developing country to become like the nations of North America and Western Europe. Rostow (1967/1990) emphasized that poor countries could adopt the methods and cultural tools by which rich countries had become rich. All nations were placed on a growth timeline of sorts with poor countries seen as simultaneously young (or less developed) and ancient in that they lived in the past and hadn’t come along far enough on a journey that

would move them toward modernity and a more mature economic and social way of existing.

While modernization theory has its critics both in the global South and North, it remains the central motif of development whether being practiced by nation states or facilitated through a combination of IGOs and private enterprise (see McMichael's "globalization project" 2011). I am cognizant and sympathetic to the critique that leads many to find this definition objectionable saying it does not tell the truth about development; that development was never truly about making the South better, only about exploiting it. In using the term now I am not seeking to sidestep a history of unequal power and exploitation; in fact, that history is essential for my story but it is not the entire story.

I argue that the normative sense of a need for progress can be a powerful rhetorical tool especially when combined with the Brundtland definition of sustainable development as providing for the needs of the present while not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While most of the application of this linkage between improving the human lot and preserving the environment has been geared toward the global South, it needn't be so directed exclusively. As argued by many environmentalists, resource use in the global North is affecting the ability of future generations to meet their needs and so perhaps it is the North that needs developing.

McMichael also puts forth the argument that development should be understood as a "project", not merely a phenomenon. His argument is that the processes of development are embedded in a network of specific interests and worldviews. So too can be the sort of development explored as a possibility in this paper. The tourists themselves are often

active participants in this project of developing the North and using the unique resources of the South to do so. As with traditional understandings of development, the one explored in this paper involves the flow of ideas as well as various forms of capital and materials.

In this sense the concept of development I am using here is not so different from the argument that Fair Trade products are developing the North by creating linkages to the South and altering consumers' sense of themselves in the world. However the product being "exported" in tourism is an experience, an experience for which a body must arrive from and return to the North. This profound difference both allows for new aspects of connection to be developed but also puts the Northern tourist directly in the footsteps of colonizers and first world powers that have come before.

While sustainable development as a concept and practice sought to change some elements of Rostowian-modernization-based development, it left intact the North to South direction (Lele 1991). The large entities driving what McMichael refers to as the development project (USAID, World Bank, IMF etc.) remain focused on flows of capital to the South from the North while emphasizing that new projects should pay attention to the "triple bottom line" sometimes referred to as the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental (Elkington 2001). This emphasis sidesteps the reality that the economic pillar is the one that initially instigates development. This may seem an obvious point, but the World Bank has never offered a loan to the United States to cut its consumption of fossil fuels or perhaps lessen the amount of meat eaten by its citizens (nor has any such funding been sought, obviously). Further, there have been no development projects that have been initiated in developing countries and enacted in the developed

(aside from perhaps a few acts of charity from Venezuela to low-income New Englanders seeking heating oil). There have been numerous influential scholars and leaders from the South whose ideas of a more sustainable lifestyle find purchase in the North, but this exchange of ideas would not generally fall under the rubric of “development”. However, as argued above, the possibility seems to exist for development flows to be reversed.

In seeking to create this space theoretically (and to limited extent empirically), I want to clearly state that I am not trying to sidestep the very real concerns that tourists are arriving in the footsteps of conquistadors and colonists. An ecotourist arriving from Minneapolis in Costa Rica is traveling from what Wallerstein (2011) described as the core to the periphery. Wallerstein’s framing of the world system allows the critique that positing the tourist as an agent of change is preposterous not because of the tourist but because of tourism. This critique places the tourist as riding on waves of history and well established flows of capital and raw materials leaving the periphery to enrich the core (see Clancy 1998, Mowfort and Munt 2008). It is true that individuals travel (for reasons that would be understood as touristic) from both the North to the South and vice versa. What makes this flow of bodies one sided is not the actions of a few wealthy elite. It is not just the elites of the North arriving in the South; in fact, the elites of the South already regularly visit Miami, Las Vegas and New York. To the extent that there are few working-class Costa Ricans arriving in the United States for a week or so on the shores of Lake Michigan and holding money that their hosts need, while the hosts are not holding a product that the tourist *needs*. However, the host may hold something that can help change the tourist’s society. I will leave many of these topics here and return to them in chapter seven when I explore the possibilities of linking any sort of change in a sense of being connected to

nature to a broader sense of development. First, though, we must find a way to reconcile my respondents' complex contradictory understandings of nature with the sociological literature.

Chapter Four: Natures Rather Than Nature

Using the tools of environmental sociology, this chapter begins by exploring nature as a social/biophysical reality to which respondents connect. Grounded in the interview data, the main finding I present in this chapter is that respondents on an ecotour understand and experience nature in different ways and that it is more accurate to talk about connecting to natures rather than a single nature even when they are being interviewed in the same place about the same experience. In some ways this finding fits with Jan Dizard's observation that, "Nature might well be thought of as the original Rorschach.... Each of us has a version, a set of beliefs about nature. Some versions fit more closely with the one that is commonly accepted by experts as 'true', but the truth of one or another version is, after all, a matter of conventions—what others agree to ratify as 'reality'" (1999: 160). As this chapter will demonstrate, my findings can be used to support this statement, while the findings in chapters five and six add the context of embodied biophysical experiences on the ecotour and how those affect a sense of connection to nature.

To contextualize the findings presented in this chapter I want to first review how sociology as a discipline has understood nature and by inference society's relationship to nature, ranging from a firm split between the social and the biophysical to more recent attempts to describe nature-society relations. I then explore my own data from Costa Rica and Milwaukee to reveal the plural, at times seemingly individualized, meanings of nature held by my respondents.

SOCIOLOGY'S SINGLE NATURE

To some, sociology as a discipline may seem an odd fit to study nature. For example, most introductory courses now include a section on environmental problems but rarely include explicit consideration of how the classical sociologists understood nature as a force in shaping human affairs. This is an understandable exclusion given that sociology was defined by Durkheim (1982) as the study of social facts through other social facts. However, the classical theories of early sociology all included understandings of nature/society relationships; while they were certainly not their main focus, the foundational theorist allowed for nature to shape society. Earlier theorists like Comte or Spencer after him saw social physics as a continuation of evolutionary understandings of the human story from undifferentiated cells to deeply complex social forms (Greene 2000).

It can be argued that Durkheim is perhaps the most central figure in the history of sociology, providing the central thesis that a science could be built on the study of social facts shaping other social facts (1982). In doing so, he posited that sociology was a distinct science from the natural sciences but also distinct from philosophy, psychology or other disciplines. He argued in *The Rules of Sociological Method* that a “science can justify its existence only when it has for its subject matter an order of facts which the other sciences do not study” (1982: 145-146). Durkheim’s sociology though was infused with nature as both a context for society and a driver of social change. As Jarvikowski (in Hannigan 2006) points out, Durkheim’s definition of social fact is rooted in but not caused by “human nature”. “It is evident Durkheim does not wish to refute the significance of psychological factors, but rather subordinate them to social facts within the discipline of sociology. The

same also pertains to biological factors and to the physical milieu” (Jarvikowski in Hannigan 2006; 79). For Durkheim, nature was a precondition and setting for human society and, as Jarvikowski points out, he saw nature as unchanging of its own volition but malleable by humankind (for the better) and as such Durkheim was reflective of his age. While Durkheim’s understanding of nature as pre-existing society and subsequently non-social precludes it from being a social fact, it and its rules or patterns are still the prime drivers of social change. Durkheim’s *The Division of Labor in Society* is predicated on the argument that increasing the increasing “dynamic density” of a society must give rise to increased differentiation within that society in the same way that biological life had become more differentiated (Durkheim 1997). So, while Durkheim argues that nature pre-exists society and society is not reducible to biology or human nature, it is still subject to the deeper patterns of the universe (i.e. increasing diversification etc). Finally, perhaps the biggest driver of social change for Durkheim is what underlies dynamic density itself, which is population growth. Interestingly, Durkheim’s theories of increasing diversification are predicated on an increasing population that he sees as a natural force, much as tides.

While Weber did not address nature-society relations directly in his work, emphasizing instead the power of culture and social structure to shape human lives, as Dunlap (2002) points out, “Although Weber’s work is well known for its subjectivism—with its emphasis on how people interpret their circumstances—and for showing that such interpretations could have real, material effects, this did not lead Weber to underestimate the objective reality of the natural world” (9). In fact, “Weber had no reluctance to admit the causal significance of non-social factors for social processes” (Albrow 1990 in Murphy

2002: 73). While Murphy makes a compelling case for the utility for environmental sociology of theoretical tools provided by Weber, Weber himself did not explore the ways in which humans might connect with nature except to say that they were doing so.

Of the classical theorists, Marx has been most frequently employed by theorists seeking to understand environmental problems. Perhaps this is not surprising given the many negative outcomes in terms of environmental problems often linked to capitalist development. In seeking to account for these outcomes, many contemporary environmental sociologists have returned to the original works of Marx for theoretical insights. For example, John Bellamy Foster has emphasized what he terms Marx's understanding of a "metabolic rift" (2011) which, while initially cast as a split between city and country, is now used by some scholars as a way of describing the split between social and natural systems (see Moore 2000 for an example). Additionally, James O'Connor builds on Marx's understanding of contradictions within capitalism (between labor and capital) to argue for a second contradiction between capitalism as a system and the natural world upon which it is based (1988).

Writing in the late 1970s, Catton and Dunlap argued that sociology as a discipline had, for a variety of reasons, left society-nature relations out of its list of potential areas of inquiry to the detriment of the discipline and society at large (Catton and Dunlap 1978; Dunlap and Catton 1979). Field and Burch tie this move away from nature to sociological studies to a broader movement within the discipline to studying both in Europe during the industrial revolution and within the American tradition of documenting the lives of immigrants and industry (1988). Perhaps it is not surprising that in studying the human

condition and the power of culture to shape lives that Berger and Luckmann argue , “ ...the human organism manifests an immense plasticity in its response to the environmental forces at work on it.... While it is impossible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply that man produces himself” (1966: 48-9). Writing in the late sixties Berger and Luckmann’s thesis found purchase in societies that were undergoing rapid change. Whether arguing for changing roles for women, a destruction of racist systems of domination or the end of colonial exploitation, the idea that human nature was a human construction was and remains a powerful tool. After all if patriarchy, for example, is not the result of men naturally being better leaders, then all the more space exists to overthrow such a system and dream up a newer, more equitable one.

The tradition of a social construction of reality provided many insights when applied to the relationship between society and nature. For example, Thomas Greider and Lorraine Garkovich (1994) explored the idea that what they termed “landscape” was a “symbolic environment created by a human act of conferring meaning on nature and the environment of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs” (1). Greider and Garkovich’s orientation is a useful one, helping to explain, for example, how leaders of the Southern Paiute understood their landscape and radiation in very different terms than did the US Department of Energy seeking to bury nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain (1994; 3). The critique of this emphasis on meaning and human constructions of nature was expressed by Latour’s (1996) concern that the material world is turned into nothing more than

replaceable mediums for human meaning. That the rocks, mountain or, for that matter, the radioactivity of nuclear waste all are symbols rather than independent biophysical realities.

Catton and Dunlap voiced this same concern fifteen years before Greider's 1994 article when they described the Human Exemptionalist Paradigm that they saw as dominating the discipline (1978). In this paradigm, humans had essentially risen above the rules of the natural world and so inclusion of nature or the environment as factors in an analysis were unnecessary at best, and at worst inclusion of such factors was apologizing or even supporting systems of stratification (race, gender etc.) that had been naturalized. Still, there is growing awareness of environmental harms being done by humans to the environment (and subsequently harming the least powerful members of a national or global society disproportionately). As Murphy puts it:

Sociology has correctly emphasized the importance of the social. But there is a point beyond which the rightful place of the social becomes an exaggerated sense of the social, beyond which the enlighten focus on the social becomes a blindness to the relationship between the processes of nature and social action, beyond which sociology becomes sociologism. The assumed dualism between social action and the processes of nature, with sociology focusing solely on the social as an independent variable, has misled sociology into ignoring the dialectical relationship between the two (1995; 694).

This call to not merely include studies of environmental problems and environmental politics but also to include biophysical non-social variables in analyses is presaged and echoed by Catton and Dunlap, Redclift and Woodgate Freudenburg, and Frickel and Gramling, among others. This is no easy task as sociology is all too aware of the Kuhnian insight that knowledge (including scientific knowledge of ecology) is culturally embedded. As Lidskog writes, for many European (although not exclusively) scholars, this insight led to an emphasis on sociology whose task is to "address what ideas of society have

been reproduced, legitimated or transformed through appeals to nature and the environmental” (2001: 118).

Dunlap argues that this “constructionist” form of inquiry has increasingly given way to a critical-realist perspective that reflexively and critically engages with scientific knowledge (2010). Importantly for my research and orientation as an environmental sociologist, the realist or critical-realist understanding of nature has to be correct! My entire initial framing of this research was predicated on the idea that there is a genuine environmental crisis and that perhaps one area of interest to research would be whether connecting people to nature (a particular, real and endangered nature) would at some point in the future alleviate the crisis as individuals strove for change based on that connection.

Dunlap, whose worldview is not so different from my own, argues that realism needn't be reductionary (removing sociology's value as all reality is simply applied physics) nor provide a slippery slope to apologizing and supporting science or nature-based systems of stratification like race or gender. He especially applauds the work of Carolan (2005a, 2005c) who links the critical realism of Roy Bhaskar to sociology. In doing so, Carolan employs Bhaskar's argument that reality is stratified, knowledge claims fallible and importantly that “causal tendencies between strata are multidirectional, going both ‘upward’ and ‘downward’” (2005a: 2). Carolan uses this idea of stratified reality to argue for a trifurcated understanding of nature reflecting different strata of ontological depth (2005b: 393). Carolan's categories are “nature” in quotes reflecting the most socially constructed discursive (but still inclusive of materiality in a Latourian hybrid sense) that

has been used to justify exiting social relations like colonization, development or (presumably) race. Carolan's second category is nature with a small "n" that, "is the nature that has been of particular interest to environmental sociologists...the observable sociomaterial nature that is the basis for conceptions that are socially constructed. This is the nature of field and forests, wind and sun, organisms and watersheds, and landfills and DDT" (2005b: 403). Thirdly Carolan describes Nature with a capital "N," "Deep strata nature is the Nature of physicality, causality...of gravity, thermodynamics and ecosystem processes" (2005b: 406). This trifurcated definition was the one that I carried with me to Costa Rica and Milwaukee with the goal of exploring qualitatively empirically how respondents connected to nature, in a sense answering the call to "bring nature back in" via an exploration of how exactly my respondents that process.

VISITORS' MULTIPLE NATURES

The first and primary problem I had once in the field was linking these theories of nature to my interview and observation data. Rather than one nature to which individuals were connecting, I was initially stymied by how diverse my respondents' understandings of nature were. Whether discussing its physical location, how and where it is experienced or humans' relationship (including ethical obligations) to nature, I found multiple, often competing understandings of nature.

Physical Location of Nature

One of the challenges in examining the phenomenon of tourists connecting to nature is the variance in how the tourists describe and understand nature. I had entered into this research with what became obvious to me, a huge blind spot. I had assumed the

respondents would have a fairly unified definition of nature. I understood that there are variations across cultures in terms of how a society thought of nature, but I had not expected the diverse set of responses within a fairly homogenous response group: overwhelmingly white, middle class, North Americans who had made the decision to visit either an actual rainforest or an exhibit about the rainforest.

The first example I encountered of the differing definitions of nature visitors described very real differences in the location of nature. Most of the responses cited below came from my asking visitors to characterize where they live in terms of distance from nature. Two couples interviewed in Costa Rica who both described their home communities in the US as suburban had very different senses of how close they were to nature:

I don't think we feel very far from nature at home. We have a bird feeder outside, we get to see the birds and enjoy that. And there's a lot of green and we have wonderful walking paths.

This couple agreed that walking these paths and simply being outside of the house was being in nature. In contrast the husband of another couple said that his suburban home was:

Far, far away from nature, we're in a suburb in a major metropolitan area, we're in a near suburb. We have some parks that you could visit but I would say we're pretty far from nature.

As another example, a young mother from San Francisco said that she felt that:

We're not too far I would say. It's a nice street with lots of trees and I can bring him (referring to young son) to see the zoo and the animals there. He loves that and so do I.

For her, the zoo, because it contains animals, is seen as part of nature and thus her home in a major metropolitan area is “close to nature”. In contrast, a couple from the rural Northwest felt that recent arrivals to their remote valley were making them feel “too crowded” and no longer close enough to nature. As most of my interviews took place with couples, I did notice a tendency for the respondents to cohere onto a particular answer. However, a couple interviewed in Milwaukee, who shared a residence, disagreed with each other whether where they lived was close to or far from nature. Another woman disagreed with her children who assured me that they lived in nature and were in nature all the time:

The kids play outside in the mud all the time. We have a park right down the street. Sometimes they’ll play tag, some make believe. As a kid I grew up outdoors. We lived north of Green Bay with a tree farm behind our house so I was always outdoors all the time. Much more than these guys.

When I first sat down with interviews like this, I was stymied as to how to link it to a sociological literature that wasn’t based in a social construction of reality literature. It seemed as if personal experiences were shaping individualized understandings of nature in such a way that no common answers were emerging.

Where Nature Can Be Experienced

As described in chapter two, I asked participants how far they lived from nature, and this question predictably prompted answers describing the physical location of nature. When I asked participants whether they were in nature, often the answers became even more diverse. This disagreement over the location of nature can be in part explained by differing understandings of what constituent elements make up nature. Highlighting the disparate elements that are drawn into respondents’ understandings of nature, a

respondent Margaret in Milwaukee answered the following when asked if her family spent a lot of time in nature:

I'd say so yes, formally and informally. My son just read *Manfish* by Jacques Cousteau and he was like, "I want to be a man fish I want to swim in the water." We read a lot, our family reads a lot incessantly. My son started reading at eighteen months and really reading on his own by three.

So like being to Africa we go outdoors whenever we go someplace we read about it before we go. We run a non-profit in South Africa—we work with HIV prevention, life skills, rape prevention and so it's called African Youth Outreach.

Anyway we do safaris there, you know work hard and play hard so we've done Umfolozi and we work a lot in Kwazulu Natal so we've been to Mkhuze a lot. We've been to St. Lucia and seen the hippos and all that stuff and uh, so we've done a lot of that and we take pictures too. It's a stunning country.

In Africa of course we're there, going on walks in the safari parks and being on foot and we've taken the photos where we're fifty feet from the elephants and the ears are up so that's experience and our son went with us when he was twenty-one months old, so he's done things like touched a lion and been on top of (unintelligible).

Also my son loves science so we read a lot of science books and so he asks a lot of questions. He loves space too so that's another thing but he loves nature.

I include this quote because it highlights the incredible diversity of elements that respondents draw on to describe nature and their distance from it. Margaret's answer contains biophysical, intellectual and social elements of nature. For Margaret, nature is a place that can be experienced not just physically but intellectually (or as she says, "formally" and "informally"). Perhaps this is not surprising in a family that obviously takes great pride in reading and experiencing the world through books. By reading she feels that they have, at least in a sense, been in nature. She provides evidence for this through her son's reading of *Manfish* and wanting to be in water, or reading about space, which she

initially includes and then separates from nature. Books for Margaret and her family are an essential element of nature; they augment and perhaps complete an experience in nature, “Whenever we go someplace we read about it before we go”. An interesting omission in Margaret’s answer is any experience of nature (outside of reading) in Wisconsin where she lives! With all the examples given, nature seems to be a distant place, whether in space, under the sea or in Africa where their non-profit works. I’ll return to this theme in chapter six when discussing “connecting”.

Margaret had no problem including the experience of reading as being in nature, and she was not alone in her use of diverse indicators of being in nature based on activity. For example one young woman I interviewed in Milwaukee changed her mind over whether she had been to the rainforest on a recent trip to Costa Rica:

When I was in Costa Rica we didn’t go to the rainforest...but we did go zip-lining... which was a lot of fun cause... yeah, we were in the rainforest.

Not wanting to take this aside too far, this young woman does seem to reconsider her answer based on the experience of zip-lining or riding in a harness along a wire which has been hung on an incline, which in many promotional materials for visiting Costa Rica is presented as a fantastic way to see the rainforest. While zip-lining may seem a strange way to gauge whether or not one is in nature (or the rainforest), other respondents used hunting and fishing:

I’m nature a lot. I’m into hunting and fishing and doing all those kind of outdoorsy activities I’d say I’m in nature a lot

Snowboarding:

I'm in nature a lot but not as much in winter obviously, but I'll go out and do like snowboarding or something like that.

Farming:

I grew up in nature, everyday out in cornfields with nobody around.

In informal conversations some tourists referenced the film *Avatar* that had been released during the years of the study and contained what my respondents considered an anti-industrialization pro-nature message. Another visitor referenced an episode of Oprah Winfrey's daytime talk show. One gentleman responded that his walk in the forest reminded him of his audition for the show *Survivor* where contestants live in a remote location away from the comforts of the developed world. Parents of children referenced the television show *Go, Diego, Go* in which a young boy, Diego, helps animals in danger. In some cases not only did respondents reference different media, they sometimes used other respondents' media references as examples of what was definitely not nature. For example, the gentleman who had auditioned for *Survivor* felt it was a show squarely about experiencing nature but scoffed at the idea that someone would think the same about *Avatar*, which is set on a fictional alien world.

When I asked visitors about nature and their visit to either the rainforest or the exhibit, another complication arose in defining nature: the very unique associations based on the memories and emotions of the tourist in the moment. Each individual was not just walking through the forest or exhibit thinking only about the forest or nature but also about his or her own life's narrative. Jeannette, who grew up in Milwaukee, told me about returning to the museum for the first time since a school trip as a child:

I've been to—don't remember it from when I was a kid. I know it as a fact that I was here but I don't remember the rainforest. In fact the only thing I remember is that I know I threw up at the museum. I forgot that until we came back today. They had to get me a different shirt. It was horrible.

Jeannette's experience that day was a vaguely humorous one reminding her of the indignities of childhood, but every visitor to the museum or forest was experiencing a deeply personal journey. These personal orientations shaped how visitors embraced (or didn't) the forest or exhibit. For example, Max was upset over his perception of the prominent placement of a diorama concerning deforestation in part because it reminds him of his father:

I liked that right away they had all the trees and stuff and like that so you get to feel like you're in there.

I don't as much that like that right away they talk about deforestation like right when you walk in like that's the first thing you read about is like deforestation. My dad is always going on about that and the environment and stuff.

Yeah, I didn't like that as much because it's kind of like the sad part of the rainforests history you don't want to see that right when you walk in maybe put that in the back, hidden.

While Max was thinking of his father other visitors like William were imagining themselves as characters in a movie:

I do like it that you walk in and it's not very well lit because where you get in under the canopy in the rainforest there's very little sunlight and the trees are huge! There's like three different layers.

Every time I walk through there I go back to *Medicine Man* with Sean Connery, and I start speaking with a Scottish accent.

William is having a very different experience in the forest from Max. Listening in on conversations on dozens of tours and hours in the exhibit confirmed that this semi-present

state was the norm. Visitors to Tirimbina were not just on a walk on a trail but on a trip thinking about a sick relative back in the States, a fight they had with a significant other the night before, a possible promotion at work, etc. Visitors to the museum were not merely at the museum: they were also, for example, on a date or getting ready to host family members for Thanksgiving (when many of the interviews took place). All of these elements seemed to shape an interaction with nature, an understanding of nature. William is presumably having a positive experience speaking with a Scottish accent while Jeannette remembered the uncomfortable experience of being sick on a school trip.

Relationship to Nature

A final difference that stood out to me when initially looking for the nature that visitors were connecting to was the variation in their own orientation toward that nature.

Harper, interviewed at the museum gave me the following anecdote:

My favorite place to be in nature though is in the ocean. Snorkeling. I grew up going for a month every year to the Florida Keys, so a lot of my experience was based off of what's going on and that's scary too watching Florida from when I was a kid to now. It's night and day.

The reefs are gone, beat up from the population and people not respecting a reef and thinking they can walk on it.

I remember being in Hawaii, in Kauai and it's a lot of international travelers and you can't communicate with them because of a language barrier. Anyway, there was just hundreds of people at this beach crawling all over the reef and I'm like, "Have you no concept of what a reef is, like you're walking and killing animals!" It is what it is but I didn't know how to say that in Japanese so....

One on level Harper's frustration is based on her sense that if only these tourists knew what they were doing, if they understood what the reef was they would stop walking on it. She is presuming that they share her ethical orientation and only lack knowledge

about the consequences of their actions. In many ways at the start of my research I shared Harper's hope even if I was much more skeptical. Although I added the component of being in nature, my interest was whether information and that physical experience could lead to a sort of "Aha!" moment that would lead individuals to push for changes on how their societies interacted with nature. As I looked at my notes and interviews, I became worried that this might not be the case. Not only did respondents not agree on the location or composition of nature, there was significant divergence on what an ideal relationship with nature might be.

When I pressed Max about why he thought he and his father disagreed on environmental issues like deforestation, he said, "My dad's just always trying to make me feel bad about everything. He...I think he thinks everything's our fault. You know? The planet can take care of itself. We're not to blame for everything." This quote highlights a split in understandings of human relationships with the non-human that I will explore in much greater detail in chapter six. But here I'm going to have Max and his father stand in for the differing views on an ethical orientation toward nature even based in a common understanding of nature.

CONSIDERATION OF PLACE ATTACHMENT

The questions I was asking regarding connecting to nature were of course not new ones, and many had been asked for decades in the literature surrounding place attachment. Beginning with early works from Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) who explored residents' sense of attachment to their neighborhoods (they found that social ties and time in residence were the best predictors), place attachment literature has sought to understand

the ways in which social meaning interacts with the physical places of human existence. Setha Low and Irwin Altman edited a volume in 1992 that sought to establish the concept's intellectual foundations and shape the field. They called for an investigation into "homes, neighborhoods, plazas, landscapes" (1). In the twenty years since the publication of this work, the literature concerning place attachment has grown in scope and volume. Of particular interest to my work are investigations into attachment to natural settings or, given my framing of ecotourism, those settings away from home.

Place attachment scholars have investigated recreational homes (e.g., Williams and Van Patten 1998), the natural setting of a community (e.g., Burley et al. 2007) and landscapes and natural areas (Fishwick and Vining 1992; Kelly and Hosking 2008; Smaldone 2006). Many of these studies describe the natural world as a place to be filled with meaning by its visitors or residences (again see Burley et al. 2007). Lewicka (2011) explains this emphasis on the social construction of nature by pointing out that, "Environmental research in place attachment...is basically a continuation of community studies" (214). Some scholarship allows for the place to be "active" in the process of attachment (Brehm, Eisenhauer and Krannich 2000) by being a particularly appealing environment or a location particularly suited to a certain enjoyed activity (e.g., Bricker and Kerstetter 2000).

This literature offers considerable insight, case studies and valuable quantitative data to environmental sociology. Some challenges arise in its application to other literature. Firstly, its primary concern is with individuals or communities connecting to a particular place. In contrast, my work examines connecting to "nature" that exists

simultaneously in multiple physical and discursive places. It would be of course possible to inhabit the literature of place attachment and re-imagine the concept of nature as a place. This may be an idea I return to in the future. The second difficulty in applying this rich literature to my case study is that while most place attachment works are interdisciplinary, they feel “at home” in journals of environmental psychology because, although many are describing communities, their unit of measure is the individual. In many ways this is a fit for my own work, but as I try to place the visitors in networks, some stretching of the literature is required—not an impossible task, but with this particular study, I have found value in a Latourian conception of material and discursive hybridities (Latour 1993). As explored below, the language of assemblages or imaginaries within which tourists performatively create allows me to leave behind binary language of people and place.

NATURE AS ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINARY

I was tempted to initially dismiss these deeply personal idiosyncratic understandings of nature (and experiencing nature) as so much noise in the data. I didn’t for two reasons: the first was that every interview was idiosyncratic, and the second was more theoretical. If I am interested in people connecting to nature, then I had to make space for people not merely as vessels through which a social understanding of nature flows but rather active as creative elements that are creating a social understating of nature, society, and the relationship between the two. In doing so, I found the concept of an environmental imaginary a useful tool.

Based in the work of Castoriadis (1998), who drew on the insights of Jacques Lacan, an imaginary can be understood as a particular worldview that is perpetually in the

process of being created by people acting as “world-making collective agents” (Gaonkar 2002:1). The language of imaginaries as employed by Charles Taylor is designed “to get at something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode” (Taylor 2003: 106). Rather than just the abstract theories of how society works, imaginaries are “carried in images, stories and legends” (Taylor 2003: 106) and as a correlate are not just held by a few elites but rather shared by large groups (Taylor 2003: 106). Importantly for my consideration of social change, imaginaries as a worldview contain obligations that individuals have toward the group and vice versa.

Drawing on Marxist consciousness theory as well as insights from Foucaudian discourse, Peet and Watts (1996) describe environmental imaginaries as “a way of imagining nature, including visions of those forms of social and individual practices which are ethically proper and morally right with regard to nature” (p. 263). Peet and Watts put forth the term because of a perceived “need to counter-balance the ‘social construction of nature’ with a profound sense of the ‘natural construction of the social’” (p. 263). They point out that because of the Marxist roots of the concept, environmental imaginaries, discourses and practices are “grounded in the social relations of production and their attendant struggles”; therefore, it is not a surprise that environmental imaginaries can be “the prime site of contestation between normative groups” and that issues related to property rights or “aesthetically offensive uses of nature can spur political opposition to the hegemonic social order” (p. 268). Importantly for the question of sustainable development, they argue that these political movements can be based initially in what a society might term an environmental conflict. This environmental conflict can be said to

have a corresponding epistemic conflict about how nature is known as well as conflicts concerning human ethical obligations to nature. Given these many layers, the fruition of the struggle over natural resources or the environment can call into question the fundamental ordering of that society.

The concept has been used in recent scholarship concerning environmental conflicts (see, for example, Mitchell 2011, Davis 2010, Bryson, 2010, Whitridge 2012, Martini 2012, Heise 2012). The appeal of the concept for my work is that it allows for the places themselves to matter (whether a museum or forest), it embeds the tourists in pre-existing power structures, and dovetails nicely with Carolan's trifurcated understanding of nature. There is nothing in Carolan's work that precludes the idea of multiple "natures" or natures, and setting environmental imaginaries within Carolan's use of Bhaskar's critical realism allows for the fallibility of an imaginary that is rooted in the biophysical while harmonizing with Carolan's inclusion of Latourian hybridity even in what he terms "nature". Finally the environmental imaginary literature creates room for the consideration of power and competing "natures" that are not addressed explicitly in Carolan's 2005 work and thus allows me to link the tourist experience to social change or, as I'm framing it, sustainable development.

Peet and Watts also define an environmental imaginary as being shaped by place, "Nature, environment and place" are sources of thinking, reasoning and imagining: the social is, in this quite specific sense, "naturally constructed" (1996: 263). I will explore to what extent I find evidence for this claim in chapter five. With this in mind, visitors arrive with their own environmental imaginary and actively weave their imaginary with the one

presented by the forest or exhibit. Applying the imaginary concept to an ecotour experience requires that I stretch the concept from its earlier uses in a number of ways. Firstly, rather than basing the imaginary in a singular geographic place, I instead emphasize that it draws on a multitude of places, woven together by the tourist, to which an ethical orientation is developed. I include multiple places to make sense of interviews wherein a single respondent might refer to the region in which they grew up, a second place where she now lives and also the rainforest in which the interview is taking place. The language of environmental imaginaries also acknowledges actual narratives and social understandings that were woven through respondents' interviews. For example, many respondents understood nature as a place where people were absent but also a place was under threat from human actions. A few even cited specific stories or films (*Avatar* was mentioned twice, as was *Medicine Man*) that illustrated this aspect of their imaginary.

It is perhaps revelatory of the relatively homogenous backgrounds of my participants (all Americans, etc.) that no one questioned my setting the rainforest as an equivalent to nature. Despite their varied ideas on the physical location, understandings where nature can be experienced and human relationship to nature, all respondents implicitly agreed that the rainforest was an unproblematic proxy for nature. I believe this can be explained by the mythology of the rainforest in US culture as an Edenic garden requiring protection (Altran and Medin 2008; Escobar 1996; Grieder and Garkovich 1994). This concept of a pure and threatened nature has been used to great effect by conservation advocates (see, for example, Clapp's [2004] consideration of Greenpeace's use of the "Great Bear Forest" construction to slow logging in the American northwest). It also harmonizes with a broad cultural tradition of understanding nature as being where people are not. As

described above, both the museum exhibit and the forest in Costa Rica are devoid of local Costa Ricans except those aiding scientists in their work. Considered in this light, it is not surprising that no respondents questioned the choice of rainforest as a proxy for nature and the characterization of nature being where humans were not. Of course, theorists, especially in the political ecology literature, have severely criticized this worldview (see Peet and Watts 2006) and even explored how this worldview can shape the ways that biologists and ecologists understand their own subject matter. For example, Hecht writes of the “invisible forests of El Salvador (Hecht in Peet and Watts 2006). Her argument is a fascinating one: that rumors of El Salvador’s deforestation have been greatly exaggerated by scientists looking for vast swaths of trees away from human settlement. When she herself reexamined data from El Salvador, including trees that grew in villages and cities, she saw positive signs of forest resurgence (Hecht in Peet and Watts 2006). Her argument, that biologists were reluctant to “see” these newer forests because they were not “virgin” is a powerful example of the same forces that shaped my respondents’ concepts of nature. If trained biologists and ecologists engaged in what Gary Fine (1997) refers to as “naturework”, or the transformation of nature into culture, it is no surprise that visitors to Tirimbina in Milwaukee or Costa Rica did as well. While beyond the scope of this paper, it will be interesting to explore differences in this aspect of environmental imaginary across cultures.

Examining the Costa Rica interviews first, the tourists arriving at Tirimbina are arriving in the footsteps of scientists, broad forces of development, capitalism and international political forces as described in the history of Tirimbina in chapter two. Tirimbina, and many parks like it in the global South, has been shaped and in a very real

way created by an environmental imaginary (Adams, 2003; Young, 2004). The tourists I interviewed had arrived ready to participate in the ongoing creation of an environmental imaginary. How could they have not? Planning a trip involves a certain amount of research and investigation. Additionally, many tourists chose Tirimbina because of their interest in learning more about tropical rainforests. Many respondents mentioned that part of what they enjoyed about being in the forest was comparing the reality to the information they already possessed; information that itself is contained in an imaginary. This common sentiment was expressed by one respondent:

Seeing all the flora and the fauna it's like it really is the rainforest just like in the books.

John, a biologist visiting from the American West, told me:

I like to cross the river. That's the real primeval forest. I can remember years ago taking classes about vertical stratification in the forest.... This lives and here this lives here and this lives here. You got all these things up in the canopy tropical ecology and here you can really see it—the zone of decomposition on the forest floor, I mean it kind of means a lot.

John was referring to his pre-existing scientific knowledge, but his use of “primeval” hints at the myths or what Taylor (2003) refers to as stories that shape the imaginary of the rainforest. Many of the American tourists visiting Tirimbina are to some degree aware of a modern cultural tradition of seeing the rainforest as a sort of Eden that stands in critique of the modern world even as it is imperiled by it. “Save the rainforest” became a catch phrase that contained a worldview and reflected an environmental imaginary (Bryant and Goodman, 2004). It's not a surprise then that some tourists referenced the film *Avatar* as its aliens and alien planet essentially stand in for wilderness, the rainforest and indigenous peoples. Tourists arrive simultaneously at the forest and the story of the

forest. The story also means they arrive with an orientation about the relationship between themselves and nature, which will be discussed in greater depth in chapter six when considering “connecting”. But visitors to the museum are not merely arriving at a set of narratives, they are coming as a corporeal being to a specific physical place. The next chapter explores the ways that the different physical natures affect the way visitors experience these two locations that share a discourse.

Chapter Five: Bodies in the Biophysical

As I mentioned in chapter two and explore in greater detail in chapter six, Tirimbina in Costa Rica and the exhibit of Tirimbina in Milwaukee present themselves as very similar environmental imaginaries in terms of discourse. However, this discourse is intertwined with two very different physical realities. Accepting Peet and Watts' argument that place shapes society, these different locations and their respective biophysical elements should shape different connections to nature.

TWO FORESTS

The Milwaukee Public Museum is housed in a series of large grey buildings in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin, about a mile from the shore of Lake Michigan. Milwaukee's downtown has, like many US cities, seen a bit of a revival in recent years after a fall from its industrial heyday but still carries with it more than a few empty storefronts. Milwaukee is a deeply segregated city in terms of residency, but downtown sees a mix of black and white visitors during the day and this is reflected in the museum's attendees. Visitors to the museum enter either from the street or the parking garage onto the first floor. Depending on which entrance they take they may pass by the museum's gift shop or a reconstructed mammoth skeleton that faces the main entrance from the street. The first floor also has a food court, tables for eating, an information kiosk, and windows to purchase day passes and tickets to any traveling exhibits. After paying admission (or on free day after demonstrating that they are residents of Milwaukee) visitors receive a wristband which is checked by a security guard stationed at the base of the stairs on the north end of the first floor. Ascending the stairs, visitors first see a small diorama of a

dinosaur that existed in the Milwaukee area during the Pleistocene, then the suspended skeleton of a blue whale (which during my visits around the holidays was covered in Christmas lights and decorated with a giant Santa hat). The whale is suspended over a seemingly random assortment of preserved wild animals and historical relics. The display is meant to highlight the museum's history, which as an institution dates back to 1870. Many visitors take the escalator to the third floor to visit displays showing cultural and natural life in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Arctic as well as exhibits on the oceans and Egyptian mummies. Throughout the museum, the ages of the exhibits range widely, some having had little updating since the museum's construction on its current site in 1962, while others are very new and in the words of many of my interviewees, "interactive". The exhibits on the third floor are classic mid-twentieth century displays. For example, one large diorama shows traditional Masai warriors hunting a lion; an accompanying plaque describes this as a rite of passage into manhood. The visitor is given a great deal of visual "data" with relatively little context into the lives of the people displayed. These sorts of older displays have been criticized as part of a tradition of exoticizing Africans and contributing to a broader narrative of race and progress (Jones 2010). Throughout the museum, the visitor is interacting with physical objects and narratives that physically and discursively place the visitor. In the Africa exhibit, the visitor is standing in a broad hallway perhaps leaning on a railing peering into a frozen-moment-in-time sort of diorama. While this type of diorama presentation is less frequent in newer exhibits (including the rainforest), the visitor is still placed in a position as a visual consumer. I will later contrast this with the experience of visiting the forest in Costa Rica where much of the life in the rainforest is hidden entirely or perhaps only heard.

A visitor might then descend via escalator to the second floor, which contains exhibits centered on the human and natural history of Wisconsin and North America, with an emphasis on the history and cultures of native peoples. Many of these exhibits are newer and incorporate critiques offered in tourism literature that too often native peoples have been presented in museums as though they were part of the consumed landscape, much as the flora and fauna (McNaughton 1996). Newer exhibits highlight the present-day lives of native peoples in Wisconsin and how they continue many traditions into the twenty-first century. The second floor also holds whatever special traveling exhibit the museum is hosting. Some of my respondents had come to the museum to see *Cleopatra: The Search for the Last Queen of Egypt* or before that *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Most visitors to a special exhibit like Cleopatra will also wander through a few exhibits while at the museum, but their main focus was the special exhibit, whether getting ready for it or chatting about it afterward. In this way the rainforest in the museum, moreso than the forest in Costa Rica, was a place that because of its physical location was more likely to catch a casual passerby. This was a core reason why I believed the museum might have a greater effect on changing its visitors' sense of connection to nature.

Leaving the second floor, the visitor finally arrives at the floor with the rainforest. This floor contains the newest permanent exhibits including a live butterfly garden that is paired with an exhibit on bugs and butterflies. Designed largely for children, the exhibit includes interactive, immersive activities ranging from the construction of bug costumes to lab activities. Many museum scientists, one of whom had been of the group that journeyed to Costa Rica and helped design the biology wing, were understandably proud of these bright modern interactive exhibits, and even wondered if I would like to switch my study to

examining them instead of the Tirimbina exhibit. In addition to the *Sense of Wonder* that features the humpback whale as well as a vast array of other specimens, the central area of the first floor contains several much newer dioramas that show the museum's scientists working in the field on archeological digs around Milwaukee or collecting biological specimens.

The *Sense of Wonder* exhibit lies in the center of the lobby with the entrance to the rainforest on one side and one of the museum's most popular attractions, the *Streets of Old Milwaukee*, on the other. This exhibit is actually linked to another called *European Village*. Both contain three-quarter sized houses and figures, with *European Village* depicting houses from the various countries that sent European immigrants to Milwaukee, and the *Streets of Old Milwaukee* showing businesses and houses typical of life in Milwaukee in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many visitors that I chatted with, especially on my visits around Thanksgiving and Christmas, would tell me that if they were home in Milwaukee visiting family or if they were hosting relatives for the holidays that *Streets of Old Milwaukee* was a must for them. For a few, an emotional attachment was obvious as they told me that it just made it feel like Christmas to walk through the exhibit (which it should be noted, does undergo changes to reflect the holiday season with different lights, Christmas trees etc.).

In a similar vein, if a visitor leaves the *Streets of Old Milwaukee* and begins walking toward the loop that contains the *Rain Forest* and *Third Planet: Earth*, they will pass by a recreation of a western lowland gorilla that was housed at the Milwaukee zoo for many years. As my interview table was relatively near to the giant on display, I would hear again

and again as older visitors would describe the terror that “Samson” struck in them at the zoo when he would rush the glass, slapping it and roaring. It was obvious watching visitors wander this first floor that the museum is, for many residents of Milwaukee, a central part of their collective identity, their collective narrative.

The rainforest exhibit itself is 12,000 square feet with a ground floor, a ramp to a second story with walkways around the edges designed to allow visitors to walk up and into the forest’s canopy. Around the walls on both levels are displays generally with specimens collected during the 1986 expedition to Costa Rica. Snakes, beetles, and butterflies, most identified, are all safely displayed behind Plexiglas. Larger pieces of taxidermy including a jaguar are preserved in Plexiglas display cases that rise from central areas on the ground floor toward the darkness of the canopy like so many crystals. One of the exhibit’s designers told me that the Plexiglas was necessary to prevent the decay of the real specimens while those “animals” that were completely human-made did not need the protective cover. She expressed a sense of irony that visitors could get physically and in some cases visually closer to the various forms of life that were completely fabricated in the United States (including a flock of macaws, a giant Amazonian fish, and the diorama of a caiman and anaconda locked in battle) than the actual specimens they traveled so far to obtain. The need to protect the specimens from the degrading power of harsh lighting also necessitated that the rainforest (like many areas of the museum) is a relatively dark place. I will return to this below but it is interesting to note that many visitors (understandably) took this darkness as a condition of the rainforest, many even using it as a signifier of authenticity.

There is a waterfall modeled on one in the park in Costa Rica, and a ceiba tree is also modeled (literally) on one in Costa Rica. Walking in from the lobby, the visitor can venture to the right toward a display on deforestation or left toward a window showing a mannequin of a researcher at work at the museum in Milwaukee who is analyzing bugs collected in Costa Rica. A few steps past this display, the visitor can peer through the window of a wooden cabin to see the same scientist (who the curator told me was modeled on Alan Young, the museum scientist who encouraged the purchase and subsequent study of Tirimbina) sorting bugs while in Costa Rica. Signs on both displays describe the process of categorizing and studying insect life. In a small nook in between the two, a video highlights Linnaeus's development of a taxonomy that is used by the scientists.

These displays help to emphasize the narrative of the forest being a place for scientists, a narrative that as I mentioned earlier is very much the same at the forest in Costa Rica. Interestingly, a second curator at the museum, who was not involved in the development of the rainforest exhibit, told me that while she liked many things about the biology hall she was troubled by the absence of any human societies besides Northern scientists in the forest. When I mentioned this critique to the first curator, she responded that exhibit designers' job had been to tell the story of the rainforest and biology, not Costa Rican cultures, and that they had been true to their experiences as field biologists at Tirimbina. I include this exchange to highlight the multiple and competing definitions of nature (environmental imaginaries) that existed not just with visitors to the museum but with its staff as well.

The story of this forest is one of scientists exploring and learning about nature. Near the entrance of the lobby, along with other equipment, sits a blue jeep that was used in the journey to collect specimens. The jeep's radio plays a loop of "La Bamba" followed by a brief weather report in Spanish: hot and rainy. The radio is one of many sounds that fill and sometimes collide with each other throughout the exhibit. A favorite stop for younger visitors is a button that shines a spotlight on a previously hidden howler monkey that roars through the canopy. Near the monkey hang oropendola nests, looking like heavy raindrop-shaped baskets that have been stopped in time as they sink toward the floor. Oropendolas have a complicated yet easily recognized call that can be heard throughout this area. Just below the nests sits a trunk of a tree that has been cut down in the display concerning deforestation, and periodically the sounds of a chainsaw fill the air. Additionally, various films (like the previously mentioned video on Linnaeus) are often playing as visitors press their start buttons. There are also the sounds of running water, narrated displays on sunlight bringing energy to the forest and the cries of the macaws nesting at the top of the waterfall. Depending on how many buttons have been pushed, which does correlate to the number of children in the exhibit, the museum can be a very sonically crowded experience.

WEAVING DISCOURSES AND MATERIALITIES

As I write in chapter two, visitors can enter the rainforest one of two ways. If they enter through the Third Planet exhibit, they will first walk through a dark exhibit showing the forces that created and then cooled the earth. The feeling is one of being underground before eventually emerging into one of the highlights of the museum, especially for children, a huge diorama of a tyrannosaur devouring a slain triceratops. From here,

visitors walk through an ice age exhibit, including a glacier into which visitors can walk and examine smaller exhibits. Only then, potentially after Africa, Asia, Plains Indians, dinosaurs, gorillas, butterflies and the streets of old Milwaukee, does our visitor enter the rainforest. The rainforest is in the heart of Milwaukee but also in the heart of a museum's narrative that simultaneously tells a story about the exhibits being viewed and experienced but also a story about the viewer; she is arguably at the pinnacle of civilization. The *Streets of Old Milwaukee* and the houses of Europe, the plains of Africa have sent her forth to this moment of modernity where the knowledge of scientists helps to understand and appreciate the world. In some ways, the narrative of the rainforest exhibit conforms to this sense of who the visitor is and in some ways it strikes a discordant note questioning the "progress" that has made the city, the museum and its exhibits possible. Respondents did link the rainforest exhibit to the other places they stopped (or were going) to see and blended its exhibits into the museum's broader narratives, often weaving their own. For example, this woman links the forest to the Third Planet exhibit, identifying that the forest is contemporary and as such is under threat:

We go to the rainforest exhibit about every time we come here because we love the dinosaurs. It's part of that loop and we do it backwards, I love doing it this way because it's past and present into the present the rainforest. It's disappearing but at the same point we still have the rainforest here at the moment as long as we don't mess it up so it's something you can kind of see where the planet has gone.

This placement of the forest in a global evolutionary narrative was an understandably common response. Many visitors actively filled in perceived gaps in the narrative in order to solidify its coherence. For example, this man seems to initially

struggle with the location of the dinosaurs in relation to the rainforest but decides that it is close enough to work for him:

You get just from how long ago to today in one loop and it's just the full nature aspect different animals, different reptiles everything. However, it'd be kind of interesting if they did.... (Pauses to think)

Y'know with that exhibit it's kind of a rainforest of one specific era and they do that with Third Planet as well where they get to touch on a few different dinosaurs. But the dinosaurs they have I think but it was mostly what was around in Montana, Kentucky you know North America type area and you go from North America to Costa Rica....

Actually I guess you don't really lose that connection because it's all western hemisphere so it doesn't do too bad. Actually it really works well together.

I will return to the sociological role of individuals as a creative force in my employment of environmental imaginaries but will pause here to note that the museum is chock full of different and sometimes competing discourses and materialities that are combined and woven together by individuals sometimes in very unexpected ways. For example, one gentleman, Frank, told me that he felt the main purpose of the exhibit was to show us that fires and hunters were endangering the rainforest. The hunters, he said, weren't much interested in the meat of the animals but sold them as pets. I happen to know that in the case of songbirds on the edges of Costa Rican forests this is indeed a problem for some parks there, but there are no displays about this issue in the exhibit in Milwaukee. Frank was bringing his previous imaginary concerning the rainforest and weaving it together with his time in the exhibit. Just as several respondents wove in the film *Medicine Man* or an episode of *Go, Diego, Go*, Frank drew on some other discursive element, perhaps an article or a television program, and combined it firmly enough into his

experience in the exhibit that when I asked about his time in the exhibit it was part of his response.

I should also point out that I overheard several young adult visitors say to their companions something like, “Let’s go into the rainforest and see the dinosaurs,” and kids who referenced *Jurassic Park* (which, to further confuse things, is set in Costa Rica). A sentence like, “Let’s go into the rainforest and see the dinosaurs,” makes sense in terms of pure logistics (they *can* enter the rainforest exhibit and then see dinosaurs) but also reveals something about the imaginary of the “rainforest” itself. As I mentioned in previous chapters, it is a “primeval” place (a phrase used by one respondent in Costa Rica). The idea that dinosaurs might roam this foreign and mysterious place is not so ridiculous given their similar placement in some social and environmental imaginaries. In this way the Third Planet exhibit and the Tirimbina exhibit’s placement near each other affect how individuals creatively combine elements of both. This supports a central theme of this dissertation, that imaginaries are not simply discourses but what Latour (1994) would describe as hybrids of discourses and materialities that are rooted in and affected by specific places. I should note that, in contrast to Latour, I am reasserting the primacy of humans as a creative force in forming what he would term networks and I, imaginaries.

However, visitors to the museum are not themselves outside of imaginaries picking and choosing elements to create ex nihilo. Rather they (we, I) are all both woven and weaving. They bring with them to the museum their discourses (*Go, Diego, Go*; *Save The Rainforest*; *Jurassic Park*; *National Geographic*; Al Gore) but also arrive as material

biophysical realities. It is no surprise then that they experience and describe their time in the forest in sensuous terms.

For example, if a visitor enters the *Rain Forest* from the lobby, she could read a sign explaining the educational goals of the exhibit:

Nowhere on earth is life more abundant than in the American tropical rainforest. This makes the tropical rain forest an ideal place for the study of living organisms. For this reason the Milwaukee Public Museum chose an American tropical rainforest as the setting for its biology hall. Here we learn about the origin of life and its basic elements and processes.

In the surroundings of the American tropical rainforest we discover how living things are similar, what makes them unique and what living things must do to survive. Through the exhibits in this hall we learn how all plants and animals, including humans depend upon and interact with each other and their environment to meet the challenges of life on earth.

As one curator explained to me, the exhibit, through displays that use the rainforest as a way to ground the lessons, is designed to contain much the same material as an introduction to biology textbook. For example, some displays contain signs that give information about a particular topic: “Can you see a termite nest hanging from the tree branch above you?” and “The termites reach their nest through covered termite walkways. Termites are social insects that feed on wood.” Other signs link rainforest specifics to broader processes. For example, in a dramatic rendering of an anaconda crushing a caiman (a small alligator), the description of how anacondas consume their food is followed with, “Even though the caiman will die it will become nourishment to sustain the life of the anaconda. You can read more about the life cycle from the exhibits to your left.” Those exhibits show different “strategies” that allow species to survive, including cooperation, with ants as an example, and “defense adaptations” like camouflage or mimicry.

Still, when I interviewed visitors, they were most likely to favor descriptions of the exhibit that drew on their senses as they drew on the discursive elements of the exhibit. For example, in the following quote, Celeste combines her senses (the sounds of birds and monkeys, the darkness) with the imaginary (being a scientist) with her own knowledge of the forest as presented in the physical space:

What I like is that when you first enter in you hear the birds screeching and the monkeys. It's dark, which is what the forest is like so you actually feel like you're one of the researchers in the field team because you can see them up in the canopy as well as down in their little satellite offices or work stations. You can see the types of things that they are interested in gathering and kind of put yourself in their shoes, like the day in the life of a researcher in Costa Rica.

I also really like that you can see that it's multi-dimensional and you can see several different layers of the rainforest as opposed to just the ground floor you can see like mid-range and then the canopy level and you can see like what kind of animals live at each station in the rainforest like one of the researchers would.

The physical reality of the museum interacts with the discursive elements of the exhibit and are woven together with the pre-existing imaginaries of the visitor. This process is repeated for visitors to Tirimbina in Costa Rica. Visitors arrive at Tirimbina either by first flying to one of the two major airports in Costa Rica and then renting a car or traveling by bus to either a variety of other stops around the country or in a few cases directly to Tirimbina. Whether on a tour or traveling independently, most visitors had come to Costa Rica as a nature destination rather than a cultural or historical one. The small Central American country has done a superb job positioning itself as a nature lover's paradise. In fact, during one of my trips to study at Milwaukee, I stayed with acquaintances in Chicago and commuted via train a for few days to Milwaukee, thus daily passing by gigantic ads for vacations in Costa Rica that stood out as green and warm in the grey cold of

a Great Lakes winter day. The text read, *Natural Wonders: Costa Rica No Artificial Ingredients*. Now with non-stop from O'Hare with a picture of Volcán Arenal in the background. As I described in chapter three, a visitor to Costa Rica arrives carrying the imaginary of Costa Rica as a pure, natural place that in many advertisements is also relatively empty of people except rainforest guides or surf instructors.

Other visitors arrived at Tirimbina following a three- to four-hour bus ride from the port city of Limón where they disembarked their cruise ship. My interviewees told me that the day before they had been in Panama at the port of Colón visiting the locks of the Caribbean side of the canal. They then re-boarded the ship and during the night several brochures for add-on excursions were slipped under their door. One of the brochures was for Tirimbina's Chocolate Tour. Other brochures were for a zip line experience and a beach excursion. Passengers who did not choose any of these packages were free to explore on their own for the day and meet back on the boat by its time of departure that evening.

Many of these passengers were at a different Tirimbina than the visitors who were traveling exclusively in Costa Rica. They described their journey as a Caribbean cruise rather than an ecotour. While most were very laid back, pleasant to interview and polite to the Tirimbina staff, on the occasions that I saw sharper or angrier exchanges between visitors and guides or staff, it tended to come from visitors from the cruise. In one example, a couple had arrived without close-toed shoes and refused to wear the shin-high rubber boots that are standard footwear in the lowlands during rainy season. Tirimbina requires all hikers to have closed-toed shoes to avoid painful, injurious or possibly deadly encounters with army ants, bullet ants, hog-nosed pit vipers or the deadly fer-de-lance that

also use the forest's trails. This particular woman and her husband, who it should be said had been consuming alcoholic beverages on the bus ride from the ship, refused the boots, refused a refund and, after a long back and forth, agreed to sign a hastily created document agreeing that they had been warned and that they would not sue if harmed on their hike.

It struck me that a charitable interpretation of this encounter could be that the couple was having a hard time transitioning out of a frame of mind that this was "their vacation" and that they should be able to do what they want. Cruise ships and many of their ports of call are notoriously designed to create idealized destinations with interesting souvenirs, friendly locals, and as much as possible, the complete absence of danger. Experienced hikers and outdoorspeople will sometimes refer to "respecting" nature or wilderness in the sense of preparing for the ways that it can harm you. This couple, by refusing the boots in the way they did, were in one sense not just disrespectful to the guide but also to the forest. They confused the genuinely non-human elements of the forest with other elements of their voyage that could be controlled, argued with and brought to heel. Perhaps the lure of vacations like cruises or resorts is the sense that you the visitor are in control and that things like the forest do not move of their own volition.

In terms of human physical constructions, Tirimbina has a main administration building with two floors that contain the main information and booking desk, some administrative offices on the second floor, and a small library used by researchers, volunteers and visiting school groups. There is a tiny gift shop that sells some locally produced handicrafts. In interviews, Tirimbina staff said this was one area they hoped to

increase in the coming years and were beginning training programs linked to local women's groups.

Tirimbina has beds for about forth visitors ranging from air conditioned private rooms with private baths to shared researcher cabins that have a small kitchenette and in my experience are often strung with cords upon which are hanging plastic specimen bags of bugs or leaves. These same bags greet visitors as they start the trail to the suspension bridge across the Sarapiquí. There is a small lean-to that is used by researchers working in the forest as another area to examine and classify specimens. Some guides noted this workstation and explained some of the individuals passing by with bags, nets and binoculars; others did not. Still, these sorts of physical elements intertwined for many visitors I spoke with as proof that they were in the real rainforest, a place of science and discovery. The scientists did not wear uniforms, but most guides did, in styles of clothing often mimicked by the tourists themselves with vented fishing type shirts (I confess that wear these myself in the tropics) and hiking pants. They would often also carry with them bird guidebooks and binoculars. I mention these because I noticed that most visitors (especially those who were visiting briefly) wove these physical elements together with their preexisting imaginary to confer a sense of authenticity on the guides and the forest. In contrast, some of the rangers who were directly employed by Tirimbina, wearing rubber boots and old t-shirts and carrying machetes, were either invisible to tourists or assumed to be groundskeepers.

These rangers were groundskeepers in a sense, helping out with various projects around the campus (thus, they were wearing old shirts that could easily be replaced). They

were also, however, deep wells of information on the forest and were sought after by researchers to help provide identifications and other information. Additionally, having grown up in communities where residences intermingled with the forest and relied on it for food and home remedies, these rangers were, in my experience, some of the very best at spotting birds or wildlife like sloths, for example, that can be hard to find, especially in the rainy season. But, again, in addition to language barriers, their physicality and that of their clothes were not what most visitors were looking for in their imaginary, and so they were almost never “woven in” to their imaginary. The forest remained for most a place whose most authentic natives were scientists whom tourists could encounter in the café or occasionally on the trails.

After crossing Central America’s longest suspension bridge over the river Sarapiquí, one reaches nine kilometers of trails that range in physical difficulty and highlight different elements of the forest and the Robert Hunter’s former farm areas. The trails closest to the suspension bridge are the most traveled, receive the most maintenance and are generally in the best repair. Trails further out are more likely to be not yet repaired from a recent heavy rain or have wooden bridges slippery from moss or rotting from the forest’s constant moisture. Tirimbina staff told me that the trail system only uses a tiny portion of the larger protected area in order to leave the maximum space undisturbed by large groups hiking through on a daily basis. However, it is easy to be alone on the trails if one is not with a group. When I lived at Tirimbina and later when I returned as a researcher, I would walk on my own in the forest daily to establish my own sense of connection with nature and learned quickly that even if there were several tours on the trails it was easy to, even accidentally, avoid all other humans. Because I do not mention it in the data below, I will

point out here that this possibility for solitude lies in contrast to the exhibit at the museum, unless one came very late in the day just before closing or were one of the day's first visitors. Also, interestingly, because of my own environmental imaginary, I never felt alone while wandering the trails in Costa Rica, but my time alone in the museum felt eerily isolated amidst the recordings of bird calls and chainsaws.

Having described each location physically and how those respective material realities interact and shape broader imaginaries, for the second half of this chapter I will return to my interview data in order to explore how these different materialities shaped my respondents' experiences, relationships with these places and also their imaginaries.

ACCESSIBILITY: GETTING TO AND THROUGH THE FOREST

While not a theme of my interview data, I do want to begin this section by stating that to experience the Tirimbina forest in Costa Rica requires that one be able to walk independently and sturdily (especially in muddy areas). This, however, is just one way in which a natural experience that has high levels of human mediation (buildings, ramps, air conditioning and heating, displays, etc.) can be more accessible than traveling to an ecotour destination. All of the types of access explored below are rooted in the location and materiality of the place.

Cost

In my initial hypothesis of the museum's effectiveness at connecting, or at any rate increasing the sense of connection, to nature I believed that the cost of arriving in Milwaukee (at least for people of the northern Midwest) was dramatically lower. Traveling

to any far flung destination is a costly endeavor. A trip to Costa Rica, including a plane ticket to Costa Rica from the United States, when added to the cost of car rental, food and incidentals, is certainly going to be over a thousand dollars for an individual. Add to this the cost of taking time off from work, and the trip becomes impossible or at least highly unlikely for the majority of residents of the United States. Add to this the cost of transporting multiple children; families are rarely able to visit the forest in Costa Rica.

Many of my respondents in Milwaukee were very aware of this potential of the museum (or places like it) to reach populations that would never or could never travel to the rainforests of Central America. Monica mentioned that her family wasn't able to afford a trip to Costa Rica and felt that this exhibit might stir a desire to care for nature but perhaps also the aspiration to travel to Costa Rica (which is not something that had occurred to me):

It would be great if everyone could fly to Costa Rica. That would be awesome, you know, but we can't. Especially for people of lower economic status this is crucial because if they don't know it exists it's harder to care about it.

So it's really important for kids of all levels of socioeconomic status as well as just people to be able to see this.

I feel a lot of kids will go through this exhibit as they're growing up and wind up going to Costa Rica someday and that could be directly related because they learned something and they saw something and said, "I really want to do this", just like when you read a book.

Another respondent at the museum pointed out that its accessibility also allowed school groups to visit and broaden the horizons of children living in Milwaukee regardless of their family's income:

A good point is that especially here in Milwaukee we have a lot of inner city kids that may never ever have the opportunity to experience something like that, that brings the outside world to them from outside of their own little realm of Milwaukee because they will come on field trips or with a youth group or something like that and this makes other parts of the world more accessible to them.

The majority of interviewees at the museum had been taken here as schoolchildren, which illustrates an obvious but very important difference in the ways visitors interact with the museum as opposed to Tirimbina in Costa Rica.

Repeated Visits

As alluded to above, visitors to the museum were almost never on their first visit. They had been coming since they were kids or were now coming very often with their own kids. The museum, and the rainforest were a part of their proverbial backyard. My younger respondents often had a difficult time telling me when they first heard of the forest. It was always there, always a part of their lives. For example, Beth told me, “The rainforest has just always been here, you just start coming when you’re younger going with school groups. I’ve been here like five times and twice within the last three years now. Those are the most recent and the others when I was younger.” In contrast, Sylvia, whom I interviewed in Costa Rica, had no sense of history with Tirimbina before beginning to plan her family’s vacation:

I researched online different places to visit. And I read about Sarapiquí and that it was a really interesting area to visit and then I found Tirimbina—somehow. (Laughs) I don’t remember exactly how, but somehow on the internet and then started reading about it and I really liked how it sounded and how it looked, so, that’s how we ended up here.

Returning to Milwaukee, another woman told me that she couldn’t recall ever not having known of the exhibit, “The *Rain Forest* exhibit has just always been here as long as

I've ever come here I think. I think I've been here like four times I guess. I came with school when I was little. We went through twice today though." The second part of this quote highlights a different sort of repeated visit. I was surprised how many respondents would come through more than once on a single museum experience. Perhaps because the forest exhibit allows a wide variety of paths it invites repeated walks through even on the same day, visitors sometimes use it as a bracket, visiting on the way up and again on the way down. Some respondents were called away to other activities like an Imax showing or their scheduled time to see a traveling exhibit and would return after. I wondered how this ability to return affected the dramatically shorter time that most visitors spent in the exhibit.

One young woman, Vanessa, explained to me that her presumption of familiarity with the exhibit seemed to make her repeat visit quicker and less interactive:

I've been here two or three times but when I was younger, like middle school and lower school. I probably move faster through it because of that. Because I've seen it many times and it's not like its anything new so you just got of look around, you don't read anything, you just kind of move through it really fast. But I don't know because the first time I saw it I was probably in the fourth grade so it's like of just the age attention span.

That was with a school group but then I was here like two years ago for the Titanic and went through everything again so I think it builds upon how old I am and how much paying attention I am and caring to see.

She emphasized that since nothing changes in the exhibit it essentially isn't really worth her time to slow down and re-experience the exhibit, but interestingly she admits the last time she really paid attention she was in the fourth grade. She was in her mid-twenties when I interviewed her and certainly would have a different understanding of the

information presented throughout the displays. Still, she followed what I came to understand as the life cycle of a visitor to the *Rain Forest* exhibit. This woman had come as a child feeling very excited about the exhibit and, if not learning all it had to offer, then certainly experiencing it. Or as David told me, “I like all the trees and everything they have built in that gives a good feel, and if you’re like a little kid that’s really exciting. I imagine they’d really enjoy it. When I was a kid I was a lot more into it. Running around screaming and all that.”

Both David and Vanessa still came to the museum as young adults but less often and seemingly with less interest in the exhibits. While not at all the focus of my research, I believe that depending on how David and Vanessa’s life course plays out, there is significant evidence that within the next ten years they might may start coming again to the museum with greater frequency and paying a lot of attention to the exhibits. Which leads me to the next type of accessibility.

Children

I alluded to the presence of children above when describing the cacophony that can fill the museum exhibit. Especially on days when multiple school groups were visiting, the exhibit seemed to roil in a barely contained chaos. For me, those days were some of my favorites in terms of watching the fascination, the often rapt attention paid to the wonder of being in a place that for the kids was a mix of real and unreal. One day while sitting on one of my usual out-of-the-way perches within the exhibit with my notepad in hand, a little boy approached me with his head cocked a little to the side as he gave me a long look over and asked slowly, “Are you real?”

Having taught elementary-school-aged children, I wasn't that surprised by his question, but when I realized that I was sitting with my notepad observing the forest and not too far to my immediate left was a mannequin of a scientist with her notepad studying the oropendolas, the question seemed perfectly reasonable. I said, "Yes."

He accepted my answer and rejoined his group. Baudrillard would have been proud of the whole scenario. In some ways kids were asking the same questions I was. How does the material and discursive combine into a coherent imaginary? Or as they might wonder, "Is this sloth the same as the one in Diego?"

While children's experience at the museum were purposefully put outside of the purview of this study, they certainly shaped how their adult parents experienced the physicality of the exhibit much more so that the few parents I spoke with in Costa Rica. Both Donna and Frank from two different families describe the way that the safety of the museum (no hog-nosed pit vipers) allowed a place where their child or children could lead the way. When I asked Frank about how they were spending their day at the museum, he told me:

When we come to the museum he gets to pick where we go first, so today he wanted to go to Africa first, because we work in Africa so that's where we went first, then we came down to go to the bathroom and then came in here.

Similarly Donna told me that her four-year-old son was leading them. However, what was interesting to me was that he had not yet internalized what the interesting parts of the *Rain Forest* were supposed to be. He also had not yet entered sufficiently into a particular environmental imaginary as to automatically exclude stairs as tourists in Tirimbina did local workers. (I will also mention here that while sitting in the lobby I

watched innumerable interactions of parents trying to convince their children that the escalator was not what they had come to see). For Donna's son's experience of the exhibit not only includes stairs, they are a highlight. His parents let him lead while including information about what they are seeing:

Whenever we come in I guess we kind of walk straight back and he runs up the stairs, of course he's four and he really likes stairs so we're kind of driven by that (laughs).

He likes to look at the animals, so any of the exhibits that are lower to the ground that of course show the frogs and the er uh bromeid (sic).

I'm trying to think of the plant with all the animals in it so we go look at that and he finds them all and stuff but he just, he just likes animals so we go through most of it before we come out unless he gets tired or something. We walk around the whole bottom then go upstairs and we'll talk about how we're actually going up to the next level and stuff like that so he actually gets the process, but otherwise we kind of go where he wants to go so we kind of hop around.

This mix of "hopping around" while shaping the environmental imaginary of the child was very common. I will discuss this more in the next chapter but here want to emphasize that parents were consistently the most involved, interactive and connected to the exhibits. The physical reality of the museum allows children not just to be present but also to lead in a way that would be impossible and dangerous in the Costa Rican rainforest. The parents seek to augment their child's experience and in doing so become very knowledgeable about the physical setting through which they walk.

Well, we came with our four-year-old. A very precocious five-year-old.

So he likes it and we read all the descriptions for him and he asks questions and he likes looking at all the different animals and asking questions and it's just enjoyable because it goes through all the different levels you know of the rainforest and going up into the canopy and stuff. He's just excited about learning about all that stuff so

we enjoy coming to the exhibit. Costa Rica's not someplace we've been able to get to yet so it's nice

Quoted above, Beth's description of her time in the forest contrasts with that of Vanessa, who in her mid-twenties and without children, moved quickly through the museum on the presumption that she had already seen it and knew that nothing was changing (unlike say a repeated walk down a favorite trail in the forest). Parents like Beth "read all the descriptions", answer questions, and by becoming teachers, experience the exhibit in a very different way than if the children were not present. Beth told me that "not someplace that we've been able to get to yet" which may allude to the financial realities of her family. These issues of access overlap and intersect leaving the physicality of the museum shaping environmental imaginaries in the most basic of ways: People can get there.

DISTANCE AND DIFFERENCE

Of course, ease of access and the familiarity of a location are not always or perhaps even often, what a tourist is seeking. For example, two different couples I interviewed in Costa Rica had come for the rainforest but also for the adventure; the desire to get away from the places they knew and place their bodies in a new location. For example, Bonnie, half of a retired couple I interviewed on a group tour at Tirimbina, told me directly:

We came here because we were wanting an adventure. We were experienced with Grand Circle Travel, we had gone to Egypt with them and it was a very enjoyable experience. So, this seemed like it was out of our comfort, not comfort zone, but it was something different. This was going to be an adventure for us and to see something we had not seen before. So, we figured at this point in our lives before we get too old and infirm, we would do it. So, that's kind of what brought us here to Costa Rica.

Just as visitors to the museum were in the rainforest but also “on a date” or “hosting company for the holidays”, the location, the specific place of Tirimbina allowed many visitors to not just be in the rainforest but “on an adventure”. The actual location of Costa Rica also served as a draw for another reason:

We were looking for something warm to get away from the winter in Kansas City. Which is another reason why we ended up down here, but we’ve also wanted to see different countries and experience the countries.

Getting away from winter was a recurrent theme in Costa Rica, especially during my December and January visits. Of course, warmth is available in a lot of different locations, and even types of activities within Costa Rica. One woman explained all the elements, including warmth, that went into her decision to visit Costa Rica. She picked and chose what elements she wants to be sufficiently different from home (including warmth) but also the material elements of nature that she did not want to be a part of her experience (including malaria):

And I think rather than going to a warm climate and walking on the beach or just to a resort or something, this way we learn about the country and we experience it more than you would just going and having a rest at a hotel on the beach, so...I was researching vacation places and did a lot of research and decided on Costa Rica for a number of reasons. It sounded fun, it sounded exciting, our son really likes animals and he’s not that into the beach, but we are going to the beach too. And then no malaria.

I will return to this negotiation of just how much nature visitors to the museum and Tirimbina wanted to experience, but before moving on I wanted to highlight that the physicality of difference and distance also affected how respondents interacted with the museum displays. Of course, to some extent the exhibit is all about distance and difference, but a repeated theme in my interviews was the power of the color of collected specimens to

arrest even casual passerby. Some told me that the displays of bright blue and iridescent butterflies stood out in sharp contrast to the often grey reality of Wisconsin in the winter. But some respondents like Margaret told me that even though she tended to move through the rest of the museum quickly these bright creatures brought from far away and placed under glass here slowed her down because they were different:

I think what stood out is just all the different breeds of things that we don't see around here. Like the Indian exhibits and stuff like that that you see, well you see what we see here in Wisconsin so we just breeze through it 'cause it's so familiar. In here though, it's just the different species, varieties, birds. I liked the butterflies I thought they were very pretty.

For those who told me they knew something about the varieties of life in Wisconsin, the specimens carried in from Costa Rica drew their eyes and attention. I want to emphasize again that I am talking about the actual physical experience of being in the forest or exhibit that has a power to shape the visitor's experience outside of just the ideas. This gentleman told me that he know quite a bit about different species in Wisconsin and Costa Rica but to have them physically present brought a new embodied physical element to his visit:

I think just being that close to the different species. We have the same insects and frogs around here but there's just different species over there. It's just kinda cool to see the different butterflies that they have in the rainforest. We have tree frogs at our house and stuff so that's always neat to see but its really cool to just be close to the ones from Costa Rica.

I will return to this theme of experiencing place as bodies (seeking warmth or being close to something strange) below, but first I want to explore the idea that while this man was close to frogs, real frogs, they were also dead frogs. For some of my respondents, that was just fine with them and may have even helped them feel physically at peace in "nature".

ALIVE AND NOT ALIVE

It's nice that you can have this exhibit, get to see it and not have the animals alive. You know? Let them stay where they live and let this be educational in a different way.

-James visiting Milwaukee Public Museum

When I would chat informally with visitors to Tirimbina in Costa Rica about my study and comparing the experience in Milwaukee to the one in Costa Rica, invariably they would tell me that the real rainforest, the one that was alive, would have a much greater impact on its visitors. To some extent (as I explore in chapter six) this is true. The forest in Costa Rica was much more likely to be described in embodied sensuous terms. Rita, whom I interviewed after she and her husband had finished a four-day stay at Tirimbina, told me that:

Having to slog a distance makes you feel more a part of nature, because nature is just not watching a video or looking at a diorama with rocks inside it. However if you come out of the bus with high-heeled shoes on, I'm not sure you'll enjoy being bitten and walking through mud!

Other visitors mentioned bug bites, being rained on, slipping on muddy trails, having tired legs from a long hike or being thirsty. All of which when written down sound like negatives but were rarely put in terms of complaints. Rather they described these embodied interactions with the forest in terms much closer to Latour's concept that the body is, "an interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements. The body is thus not a provisional residence of something superior—an immortal soul, the universal or thought—but what leaves a dynamic trajectory by which we learn to register and become sensitive to what the world is made of" (Latour; 2004 206). Fatigued and sore legs are a way of learning the forest, how steep it

is, how big, in a very human sense, it is. The distance around a trail can be measure in kilometers but also in sore legs. The moisture of a rainforest can be given in millimeters and also wet clothes, a slip in mud or the sounds of a rushing muddy river. With this definition, it was not surprising to hear many people describe changes in how their bodies interacted with the forest as they spent more time. Sam described the difference of what he could sense in the forest after visiting Tirimbina for two days:

I seemed to be aware of more. Somehow. You know, there were different smells that I could notice. You'd walk into an area with a particular smell and I had no idea these smells were. Back home, I kind of have some idea of what they might be in terms of plants. Maybe some animal that had just been there. And here it was—I had no idea.

His body is becoming attuned (again to draw on Latour) to the forest. Latour (2004) describes the process of becoming “un nez” (literally “a nose”) who can distinguish fine differences in perfume through training with an odor kit that highlights different elements that may be present in a perfume. In the same way Sam’s body is learning to be affected by the smells of the forest. His wife agreed with him but also added that they were getting better at spotting birds. It is hard to know whether they were or not, I’ve seen visitors claim agreement on being able to see a bird only to not feel left out. But when Sam’s wife talked about being better able to sense the forest, it was what I am personally familiar with. I’ve been fortunate to travel to the tropical rainforest once or twice a year since 2004. With every visit I, can feel my body remembering how to walk in the forest, the smells of water or dry grass, and most notably how to distinguish the shapes of sloths or monkeys or birds in the branches overhead. I emphasize that this is not a conscious process. My body

readjusts and learns of its own accord. For some visitors to the forest, this can be an almost overwhelming experience:

I felt like the whole time we were walking at first it was like, umm, sensory overload almost because we had so many things going on. We were looking at insects or we were looking at a bird or you'd be looking over here and then suddenly see something over there.

This process of tuning and becoming more aware the more time a visitor was in a place stands in contrast to visitors to Milwaukee who (parents with children aside) who seem to become less affected by the exhibit the longer they stay or the more times they visit. I interviewed one woman in Milwaukee who had recently returned from a trip to the Costa Rican rainforest (not Tirimbina). Her contrast with the museum helps to understand something of the difference in how the respondents described their experience in bodily terms:

What I remember about the forest is that the activity, there is activity all around you and stuff's moving and you see monkeys, you actually see toucans, you see other birds, you see butterflies.

Here I didn't get too much of a sense of the monkeys or the toucans or the ants, you know?

There the ants are amazing! At first I thought it was a trail of green bugs but then I looked and we learned about the leafcutter ants and how they're carrying little leaves.

Because the jungle is like, my sense from being in Costa Rica and where we were is that the jungle is just planning to take over everything at any moment and everybody has to keep beating it back so you can live there you know? The jungle is constantly on the move, things can grow two feet overnight. The time we were there unfortunately for us, not the jungle, it rained every day and every night so everything just grew like a foot overnight and we had this house that we had rented.

There was a little caretaker family 500 feet away from the house and the little children they would get up in the morning and talk to the monkeys and make the noises and the monkeys would talk back.

And then of course we heard the howler monkeys which are I guess the second loudest mammal in the world. It just sounds like you're being attacked by a herd of rhinos or something.

So I guess just the sense of the vastness and the movement of the jungle but I know that's expensive stuff to put in an exhibit.

In this quote (some hyperbole aside), I think we can see the essential difference of how bodies interact with the museum and the forest: the forest moves on its own. It is unpredictable, it grows, animals arrive and leave without warning. When children talk to the monkeys, they talk back (or don't). In this movement there is, of course, a latent sense of threat. Some visitors to the museum had no desire to be around the creatures they saw under glass if they were allowed to move independently and unpredictably. Here is my transcription of a conversation with a couple I interviewed in Milwaukee who had decided that day that based on what they saw at the museum they had no desire to visit the "real" rainforest:

Britta: Actually when we were in the exhibit we were discussing today whether we'd want to go to the rainforest. I asked him if he'd ever want to go?

Me: What did you say?

Joe: I wasn't sure really (laughs) too many big bugs! It's crazy down there.

Britta (laughing): Too many bad things there

Joe: Yea 'cause when I see some big creatures like that and she asks me if I'd want to go... I'm like yeah, no. I'm not going

Britta and Joe were not uncomfortable at all spending time looking through the glass cases at, say, giant elephant beetles but were certain they did not want to be somewhere

where such bugs and other possible “bad things” were alive and moving unpredictably. Seymour, interviewed in Costa Rica, tried to put his finger on what was different about animals in the forest versus more contained settings. As a side note, a fer-de-lance is one of the deadliest snakes in the Western Hemisphere.

The experience of a terrarium is wonderful, but to see something in the forest is very different. Even seeing a sloth in a zoo and seeing a sloth when it comes—when you’re underneath it. Or seeing a toucan. Or learning how to recognize things as they’re going by.

Then there’s the separate experience to see a snake, but when you see a fer-de-lance on the side of the trail, which we did, it’s a, it’s a...very different feeling.

The forest moves unpredictably and can startle visitors into the realization that while the hike is guided and mediated it is not fully under control of the guide. I think it’s also worth considering that in the museum exhibit the greater sense of connection to the exhibit reported by parents of children is due not just to the assumption of a teacher role but also to the unpredictable paths that children choose through the exhibit. The parents’ bodies are in a sense being re-enlivened by the energy and leadership of four-year-olds.

The predictability of the museum exhibit is of course based in its having removed living unpredictable living forces (except other visitors). Unlike the forest in Costa Rica, the museum was often compared to other human creations with the museum described as being more immersive, more interactive. For example, one woman told me the exhibit reminded her:

...of Vegas at the MGM Grand, of the rainforest café, but that was just me. Cause it’s very realistic, the water and the birds and looking around you just kind of get lost in the exhibit and you feel like you’re there.

Another visitor expressed similar, very common feelings of the exhibit being real because of the darkness, the sounds of birds, the freedom to wander (as opposed to other exhibits where there is essentially one path and one direction through).

You hear the birds screeching and the monkeys. What I like is that when you first enter in it actually you feel like you're one of the researchers in the field team because you can see them up in the canopy as well as down in their little satellite offices or work stations and you can see the types of things that they are interested in gathering and kind of put yourself in their shoes, like the day in the life of a researcher in Costa Rica

Most of my interviewees in Milwaukee had not been to a tropical rainforest but almost to a one describe the darkness of the exhibit as a signifier of its reality. However the rainforest exists in their imaginaries, they wholeheartedly agreed it was a dark, often overgrown and claustrophobic place. Phil put it this way:

I feel the exhibit is good because it feels really closed in and if you're in a rainforest it is very closed in because of the density of the plants and animals and stuff so you know I like that it is closed in and dark and not open and light because you know it isn't open and light and the bottom of a rainforest so I appreciate that it's much more realistic.

I like that they have to have the little lights so that you can read stuff because it is dark at the floor of a rainforest and as you get up higher it gets more light because there's more lights in the exhibit so that's appreciative.

The darkness of the exhibit and difficulty seeing were sometimes a complaint from those interviewed and in some sense an ironic one given that, compared to the forest in Costa Rica, the ability to see different species in the exhibit is orders of magnitude greater. In the museum the forest has been found, captured and delivered to be viewed with ease. Remember that a curator told me that the darkness is designed to preserve the specimens,

but it seems to have a second effect of keeping some level of mystery in a forest where everything is laid bare from the layers of the canopy:

I like that you can see that its multi-dimensional and you can see several different layers of the rainforest as opposed to just the ground floor you can see like mid-range and then the canopy level and you can see like what kind of animals live at each station in the rainforest.

To the microscopic:

One thing I love is that you take it down to the cellular level. I'm about cellular biology and your information is spot-on, it's unbelievable.

I love that you have the microscopic viewing area so you can see neurons and you can see skin cells and all different types of cells, that's great.

It was a rare visitor to the forest in Costa Rica who complained about not seeing animals. I did enjoy one guide trying to answer the question, "When is the jaguar?" asked by a teenager visiting from a cruise ship. The guide initially didn't understand the question thinking the young woman meant *where* are jaguars. It is possible that someone on the ship had promised her that she would see a jaguar and she was disappointed, but such complaints were very rare. This is in part because the guides were very good at finding birds and making whatever was encountered fascinating (leafcutter ants, walking trees, edible termites, etc.) but also because visitors understood that animals and birds came and went of their own accord. Those that stayed longer came to understand the rhythms of the forest:

Phil: On some tours it was like, "There's something and there's something and there's something" especially in the mornings and late afternoon/evenings. That second hike, the one in the afternoon, that was a little calmer.

Janet: Yeah, in the middle of the day...not as much going on.

Phil: Not as much activity... but then lots of sounds at night.

As I wrote in chapter three, visitors to Tirimbina tended to be unaware of how mediated a human experience they were having in terms of broader forces that enabled them to visit Costa Rica and wander through a forest they saw as pristine and either ancient or ahistorical. For most visitors to Costa Rica, if there was an issue in seeing animals or some other elements of their time in the forest, it was described as luck, as forces beyond anyone's control. In contrast, the museum was seen as very much a human creation under human control, and I was surprised by how often interviewees gave perhaps what they saw as constructive criticism that seemed at times arbitrary:

I think in general it's pretty well presented. Although I don't know what I thought about the two story thing I think I'd like it maybe more if it was one story.

'Cause we came in here to the right and walked around and then you know you walk in one circle and then you got to walk upstairs and walk in another circle whereas it would be better if you had one big circle.

In a sense this quote, and the young man's seemingly arbitrary desire to have the exhibit be one big circle rather than two smaller ones, bring *us* full circle. The museum's location, its accessibility, its ability to lay bare for inspection the species and processes of the rainforest all derive from it being a very human place. The jaguar will always be seen but he will be seen still, frozen in time behind Plexiglas. Because of this, visitors' bodies are not poked, prodded or surprised upon each entry. For some, this is a good thing, something that makes the museum preferable to a forest in Costa Rica. It allows children to be the leaders and those who are made nervous by giant bugs to learn about the forest. But because the displays don't change, many, if not almost all, of my interviewees at the museum gave me suggestions on what they felt should be done differently. This was not part of my interview schedule, but I have pages and pages of ideas for improvements: more

noises, less noises, more interaction, more light, more water, more focus on deforestation, less focus on deforestation, etc. I wonder if some of this desire to have change—it would seem sometimes for change’s sake—gets at the nagging sense that something crucial is missing. That movement outside human control that is present in an unexpected cold breeze as one walks along a sidewalk in Milwaukee. Something that, as Tanya said, is, “expensive stuff to put in an exhibit”.

Chapter Six: Connecting

Having established a definition of nature as multiple, comprised of both discourse and materialities, and using the language of environmental imaginaries to emphasize that these natures are sites of contestation, I now turn to the phenomenon of connecting. The word implies the creation of a previously non-existent bond. In my initial thoughts on this project, I had hoped that the core problem was how to create this bond between humans and nature. Although it sounds naïve at this point in my writing, my hope is echoed by many scholars and advocates of ecotourism (see, for example, Honey, Weaver, Johansen).

My challenge is an obvious one. Having clarified (but also made more complex) the natures to which tourists were connecting, I had to grapple with the question, what meaning does connecting have when viewed through the lens of environmental imaginaries? And since this is not a longitudinal study, what I am really exploring is the potential for such connection by examining the role that an ecotour (whether in Milwaukee or Costa Rica) played in the lives of the tourists. Had they come seeking connection? Were they disconnected to begin with?

To explore this issue, I first look at how my respondents describe the sense of connection in their lives outside the forests of Costa Rica and Milwaukee. Do they consider themselves knowledgeable? Do they spend a lot of time in nature? Do they think about nature when making purchasing decisions? Do they incorporate it in their political decisions? Much of the data for this first section came from questions I had initially included in the interview schedule and which were linked to my first research question of whether the museum might create more change in sense of connection to nature because

its visitors (I hypothesized) would be farther away to begin with. Once I was forced to abandon my linear unified understanding of nature (and thus connection), this data was useful in establishing the many environmental imaginaries that my respondents were actively engaging and creating. I close this section by arguing that the language of environmental imaginaries helps to reveal that we are all in and performing in an environmental imaginary at all times. The framework requires in fact that by definition one cannot be outside of some form of imaginary. I then divide connecting experiences in the forests into two types: connection through recruitment and connection through reinforcement. I characterize connection through recruitment as the challenging or changing of one's environmental imaginary and reinforcement as the re-connecting or strengthening one's participation in an imaginary.

EVERYWHERE AN IMAGINARY

In order to explore the process of connecting, I've developed a rough typology that I hope reveals more than it hides. I will divide my participants into two groups based around use of the word "environment" or its variants. I do this because after I dropped the use of the word "environment" or "environmentalist" from my language while in the field, I found that some respondents included it on their own, while others did not. Still others included it but framed it in a negative light. In analyzing the interviews as well as my field notes, I've found that use of the word was a fairly reliable indicator of participation in one of two broad environmental imaginaries. Those who self-identified as environmentalists or used the word "environment" as a stand-in for a nature that they see as under threat by current social and economic systems, I will call "environmentalists". I also included a

couple of respondents who did not use the term “environment” but did express a clear sense that nature was under threat from human action and that broad-based change was required to alleviate that threat. This group participates in what Christopher Sellers also calls the “environmentalist” imaginary which he describes as having roots that “stretch back through the centuries” but “has a surprisingly recent provenance” that he places in the late 1950s through the mid-1960s (Sellers 1999: 31). Sellers argues that DDT was a singularly important issue in the formation of the imaginary, and while none of my participants mentioned DDT as an issue, they certainly echoed concerns that surrounded DDT, that the United States is developing in an unsustainable manner (my words) and must change its direction.

The second group were those who used the word “environment” and its variants in a negative sense or otherwise omitted its use in our discussions. For lack of a better term, I will call them “non-environmentalists”. I will describe their environmental imaginary below, but it suffices to say that they do not perceive nature to be under dire threat from human activity. Also, as I discuss below, they may be concerned with some issues of pollution or endangered species but not necessarily link that issue to a broader critique of socio-technological systems.

Looking back now, I realize that when I asked a number of individuals if they considered themselves environmentalists and they reacted very negatively I had come face to face with my own imaginary. What I had failed to see was that “being an environmentalist” is participating in an environmental imaginary that presumes, among many other things, that society’s relationship with nature has gone awry. Reflected in the

works of Rachel Carson or Donella Meadows, I participate in what McGregor (2004) would call a “survivor” imaginary that presumes that nature is fragile and under threat. Broadly speaking, in this imaginary, the threat to nature, and also humanity, is rooted in contemporary economic, industrial and social systems. For some participants in this imaginary, the solutions to this threat are mostly technological. For example, if we know that carbon emissions are contributing to global warming, then we can substitute cleaner sources of energy (see Mol and Spaargaren for a more robust discussion of this type of argument). Others see the threat as so deeply woven into the essence of socio-technological systems that the level of change required is profound (see, for example, Bill McKibben’s activism, Greenpeace, etc). Various other environmentalists stake out a sort of middle ground (for example, the World Wildlife Fund or the Nature Conservancy).

As it turns out, one aspect of my initial hypothesis was accurate: most visitors to Tirimbina in Costa Rica were “environmentalists”. I found that often our conversations were comfortable making references to loss of habitat, biodiversity, climate change, global warming and many other elements of discourse that created a space of agreement about society’s troubled relationship with nature, or as we were more likely to put it, the environment. In these conversations, we agreed on the language of science and that science was a valid way of knowing that the earth was in crisis. In many ways, ours was a worldview very much in harmony with that of the museum and Tirimbina. These were the members of the choir, so to speak, who were already sold on the idea that there was a problem with our current development path and that urgent action was required to address it. Not surprisingly, many respondents’ sense of connection to nature, of being environmentalists, brought them to Tirimbina in the first place. Seymour and Rita were

actually at Tirimbina for the second time because of their profound interest in and connection to nature:

This is our second trip. We like it (Tirimbina).... I'm really into natural history. It's a combination of finding reptiles, birds, mammals and like, we like to study the interrelationships between things. I have the book *The Tropical Rainforest* in my pack and it's the second reading and...hours on the bridge checking birds. I just saw a sloth coming back.

When I asked Don and Ginger why they came to Tirimbina, they told me:

Don: This is what we like.

Ginger: Why not? I don't know where else I would go. Yeah, our friends say, "I can't believe you aren't going to the beach when you are in Costa Rica and lay on the beach", and we're not going anywhere on this trip where we can go lie somewhere on the beach, so...

Don: I can't lie still for more than twenty minutes.

Ginger: Neither one of us are beach people, so we'd be bored out of our mind! We like animals and so, and we like seeing new things and we like nature, so.... I don't think we're ever—maybe sometime later in life, we'll be able to take a calm vacation, but we don't take sedentary vacations very often. Never! Ever! So, but actually when you're here you're not thinking about work while you're walking through the forest at all.

They went on to describe other vacations that were centered on hiking, camping, and being outdoors. So while Seymour and Rita enjoyed their intellectual sense of connection to nature, Don and Ginger enjoyed the physicality of being in the forest, moving through it and experiencing the peace that movement provided. Where I was wrong in my initial guesses of comparative imaginaries for visitors to Costa Rica and Milwaukee was in believing that those individuals participating in an environmentalist imaginary would be more prevalent at Tirimbina and less at the museum. Instead, I found them to about 60% of my interviews at both locations.

The other 40% were in some ways a more diverse group. In Costa Rica, they were arriving as part of a group tour or by cruise ship. I want to emphasize that I found many “environmentalists” arriving by cruise ship as well, but I found no non-environmentalists among those who had come solely to spend time in nature at Tirimbina. For ease of describing preexisting imaginaries, I group them together based on their not describing themselves as environmentalists at same point in our conversation. It’s possible that some would have been comfortable with the term, but others were concerned that I not associate them with the term.

Even after I dropped the language of “environmental” and stopped describing myself as an “environmental” sociologist, some other interviewees were concerned with not being perceived as “environmental” which in various, often informal, discussions they described as being alternately dishonest, “pie-in-the-sky” and often as connected with a variety of countercultural activities. One man told me, “Now I’m not some environmentalist. I like fishing and all that, being out in nature, but I just don’t agree with the rest of their agenda”. As I mentioned previously, Al Gore was sometimes a repeated symbol of who and what they were against. A few saw him as the quintessential dishonest broker. Having struck up a conversation with a George, a friendly, talkative man in his 60s who was part of one of the package tours, I was surprised to stumble onto his very strong feelings about Gore. George raised his voice a little when talking about Gore’s “giant house”, personal wealth and “private jets”. Gore’s opulent lifestyle (my words) contributed, or confirmed, George’s feelings that Gore was not just hypocritical but purposefully duplicitous. This man believed that Gore had set himself up to profit from others’ perception that there was a crisis. He saw environmentalism and especially climate change

as essentially con jobs designed to take advantage of the little guy. I mention this encounter not to suggest that George was representative of all “non-environmentalists” but because I knew from our hike earlier that he deeply enjoyed being outside (after all, he is on a hike in the rainforest in Costa Rica!). He hiked and went bird watching with his wife near his home in Ohio and mentioned concern for loss of habitat when it came up on the tour. For visitors like George, it was difficult to settle on a particular coherent environmental imaginary with which he was participating.

Still, looking back at my notes and observations I have chosen to describe two different natures (broadly speaking) for the “non-environmentalists” at the museum and in Costa Rica. For some, nature is not under any sort of dire threat. Theirs is a nature that is simply too big to know anything about conclusively and, consistent with this worldview, too big for humans to place in any sort of true peril. One woman I spoke with (also at Tirimbina) told me that she had “faith” and that nature had a way of “working these things out” when one of the other tourists mentioned the rapid growth of tourism in the area and whether it might lead to too much pollution. The notes I took at the time listening to this conversation indicate that she had said a few other things about the role of God in her life. From what I could piece together, her nature had a path and plan that was not alterable by humans, and I believe that this understanding of nature was deeply influenced by her religious views. Future research is required to explore the ways that concepts of divinity or what Viladesau (2000) refers to as the “dimension of intimacy” interact with understandings of and obligations to nature. It is possible that this woman’s faith that life was all part of God’s plan may have been part of her assurance that nature was too big, too powerful to be under threat by humans. In a contrast to this embrace of the divine, a

woman I interviewed in Milwaukee described to me her husband as an atheist whose views were firmly Darwinian. Still, he was fatalistic about human-nature interactions. She described it this way:

It's more different with my husband. We just have different life philosophies—he's more into Darwin. He's an agnostic, atheist, whatever, and I'm not heavily religious, but I have a different perspective about it. So he just thinks it's going to happen anyway, the earth's going to change anyway, whether we impact it or not.

With or without God, the atheist husband and the religious woman in Costa Rica can be said to share at least several aspects of an environmental imaginary. They both believe that whatever is going to happen is “going to happen anyway” and is out of human control.

The second nature I found in my conversations with “non-environmentalists” was a conflicted and sometimes incoherent one. In some of my conversations, visitors felt that some harms to nature were real dangers but others not. Depending on the conversation, the individual might mention concerns around GMOs, water pollution and over-fishing but then exclude others like loss of biodiversity or, very commonly, climate change. This conflicted sense of nature was interesting to me because it echoes Taylor's description of individuals within an imaginary as “world creating agents” (1995; 234). These conflicts within a worldview indicated to me the ongoing continuously creative essence of an imaginary. The seeming incoherence of an imaginary is alleviated when one remembers that one is examining an ever-changing social world. For example, imagine taking a snapshot of the social imaginary surrounding issues like immigration, human rights or race within the United States. These contradictory elements are what drive change in an imaginary.

They also highlighted that an environmental imaginary is embedded within broader social and cultural discourses and structures that shaped who an individual found trustworthy, thus accepting that, say, fisheries were being depleted but global warming was a hoax. Both of these phenomena are what Carolan (2006) or Hick (1973) might refer to as “epistemically distant” and known through discursive intermediaries. Put simply, an individual who accepted, say, overfishing but not climate change seems much more likely to be responding to the messenger rather than necessarily the message as both of these environmental problems imply a finite non-human nature that is being negatively affected by human actions. Drawing lines around different imaginaries within a culture and creating anything like a true typology is beyond the purview of this study, although McGregor (2004), as mentioned above, gives an example of what that looks like. When I describe an environmental imaginary as incoherent I mean not merely that there are differences on some particular topic but on the nature of nature and the ethical orientation of humans toward nature.

Still, these inconsistencies are part and parcel of the idea of an imaginary, a worldview not made ostensibly coherent by academics but rather dispersed in the folklore of a society and thus fluid and at times contradictory. Before moving on, I want to acknowledge that these imaginaries exist in a deeply stratified social world where not all voices carry anything like the same impact (see Dunlap and Jacques’s recent work on the role of conservative think tanks shaping popular discourse on climate change). I will return to this idea later in this chapter and again in chapter seven when concluding and re-embedding the idea of connecting to nature in the literature of sustainable development. It suffices to say for now though that, as Peet and Watts proposed, it would seem that the

environmental imaginaries of my conversation partners at Tirimbina and Milwaukee are a site of contestation.

Returning to the “environmentalists” for a moment, we can see that this contestation is not merely discursive. Just as discourses preclude as well as include topics and acceptable ideas, they do so in combination with physical material realities. As a starting point, let me introduce you to Richard who answered the following when I asked him about his relationship with nature:

I think about the environment every day, with everything. I try to recycle 100% of my garbage. I watch the packaging I purchase to make sure it's recyclable.

The fabrics in the clothing I buy. Pretty much everything. I watch how much gas I use in my car. Every decision I make in life is about the environment and the future of the planet. It's just everyone's responsibility. The way the world's turning out, it's just got to be done

Richard works in a white-collar job in Milwaukee where he grew up and went to college. He is a member of the museum both for the educational and cultural benefits he feels he derives from it as well as his sense that as a proud native Milwaukeean he should support public institutions. I spoke with him the day before Thanksgiving as he came out of the rainforest exhibit and milled around waiting for friends who were in the special exhibit upstairs. After a few open ended conversational questions and then some discussion of his time in the rainforest, I asked him about whether he thought much about nature in his day-to-day life, and he answered as above. He was passionate, almost angry when he emphasized, “it's just got to be done.” It was obvious that in Richard's worldview the earth was in crisis. In our conversation, he mentioned climate change as an existential threat, the overuse of pesticides and herbicides (especially in the production of cotton) as

morally wrong. He self-identified as an environmentalist and was firmly within what McGregor (2004) would refer to as the survivor imaginary characterized by an understanding of the world as finite, fragile and under threat. As is evident in the quote, he feels he incorporates “the environment” into everything he does.

But look closer at what he and many other respondents describe as thinking about nature during their day-to-day lives. As a second example Janet, also interviewed at the Milwaukee Public Museum, told me:

Instead of using the throwaway cups for coffee every day, I use a regular cup with the screw-on lid. I feel bad when I don't. Sometimes I get the throwaway, you know, every once in a while if I'm going someplace cause I don't want to carry my dirty cup around, and then I feel bad for that. I also try to use recycled paper products, and bringing your own grocery bags to the store, I do that all the time so that you're not using all the plastic.

Both Richard and Janet participate in their imaginary via personal consumption behaviors. Janet never made Richard's claim that he incorporates the environment into everything he does, but it would seem that these personal daily choices are where they feel they have the most room to affect change. After all, surely there are areas of our lived reality that are not about consuming or removing products, and ways to affect change that are not a series of individualized decisions. I want to interject into my narrative here that I don't mean to be critical of Richard or Janet for not going far enough or anything similar. Rather, I want to use their answers to illustrate how an environmental imaginary is embedded and intertwined with other material and discursive forces. For example, Seymour whom I interviewed at Tirimbina told me:

I'm an environmentalist. We don't own a car. We use the subway. When we go hiking, we rent a car. We have the funny shaped light bulbs that use less energy.

Umm, we give to various conservation organizations. I switched to using Seven Generations, which I think may be bullshit.

Seymour mentions not owning a car and buying the funny shaped light bulbs and switching to a brand of household supplies that markets itself as environmentally friendly even though it “may be bullshit.” These are all descriptions of actions of someone who feels that his personal consumption should reflect his worldview that the earth is finite and human actions need to be curtailed. However, Seymour and his wife Rita live in Manhattan ,where many people do not own cars and instead take the subway for many non-environmental reasons. For many people in Manhattan or the other boroughs, owning a car in the city is both unnecessary and prohibitively expensive. Seymour describes his actions as being linked to his environmentalism, but the material world in which he lives enables such actions, even curtails acting otherwise! Helen, interviewed at the museum, understood this point when she told me,

In 1970, I wore an armband to school on the first Earth Day and knew Gaylord Nelson. My whole life, I’ve lived in the city or the first ring of suburbs. So I walk all my errands. I’m very conscious of trying not to drive very much. My car gets pretty good mileage but I don’t do as much as I should.

But when I go to places like Costa Rica where they’re building an entire economy around environmentalism and everywhere you go people are doing like...bathrooms are on the limited flow and it’s just a way of life there versus here...or their little teeny cars. Or going to Europe is much the same thing, they’re much more conscious than we are.

When Helen describes the teeny cars of Costa Rica or low flush toilets, she is describing what Michael Bell refers to as “virtual environmentalism—environmentalism you don’t have to worry about because you find yourself doing it anyway” (2009; 267). The people of Europe or Costa Rica may or may not be more conscious individually, but some of

their systems make it easy for them to be so. Some of my interviewees participated so strongly in their environmental imaginary that they would struggle against the material strictures in order to perform what they saw as actions required in their imaginary even when those around them would not. For example, one couple I interviewed in Costa Rica used a bit of humor to describe themselves in contrast to their neighbors:

Don: There's no recycling in the town where we live, so we dump everything out the window! (Laughs)

Ginger: Seriously though, we know someone who does! No... but when we travel to the larger city, we take all of our recycles with us. So, yeah. So, we're some of the only crazies in the area where we live, and we don't make a special trip because we don't want to waste the energy to do that either, but whenever we do go, we take that with us. For where we live, that's a big thing.

Don: We have...well, we pay for our trash, but you have the option of paying per trashcan which if you do the three trash cans maximum per week, it's a lot more money.... It seems like everyone around in our little town has...at least two trashcans weekly, and we get by with one maybe every three or four weeks.

Ginger: Yeah, and maybe even longer in some cases.

Don: I don't know what people buy.

Don and Ginger save up their recyclables until they make a trip to the city where it is possible to have them recycled. In doing this, they are highlighting the degree to which environmental imaginaries are performed as much as they are told. When Don and Ginger's neighbor throws garbage out the window, he is participating in an imaginary. The concept of nature that is implied is one big enough to not need recycling. Perhaps if we could interview Don and Ginger's neighbor, he would tell us as much. Perhaps his description of nature would harmonize with his actions and in some ways be similar to an aforementioned imaginary that nature has ways to take care of it. Growing up in a rural relatively unpopulated area of upstate NY, I'm very familiar with families having a

particular ridge over which they would throw garbage. Others would have a barrel or just a designated area where garbage would be piled and burned. Many of these same families I'm thinking of were small-scale dairy farmers who were very connected to nature. They paid a great deal of attention to weather and the seasons and spent their days in intimate connection with plants and animals in a way that many of my "environmentalists" in this study never do. It would seem strange to someone visiting a farm to watch garbage being burned or, like Don and Ginger's neighbor, "dump everything out the window". But, in one way their understanding of nature is completely coherent and rooted in place. Upstate NY does not have the vast big sky feeling of Don and Ginger's home in eastern Oregon, but a lived experience there does support the idea that nature is vast, powerful (few understand the seemingly cruel whims of nature better than farmers) and, when looking around the foothills of the Adirondacks, largely unpopulated. What harm can there be in burning or dumping some garbage? Forsyth uses the tools of critical realism when he employs Peet and Watts' definition of an environmental imaginary to add a healthy corrective that, "...critical realists can criticize" Peet and Watts; initial definition of environmental imaginaries as regional forms organized by natural contexts for "repeating the epistemic fallacy, or the belief that local discourses and knowledge might provide accurate insights of a biophysical reality that operates independently of human experience" (Forsyth 2001; 2).

So a regional form organized by local natural contexts may not be accurate, but what if when we interviewed Don and Ginger's neighbor, he said, "Look buddy I'm not thinking about nature at all. I'm just not. Maybe nature will be ok, maybe not. I don't care, I just love throwing garbage out my window"? Can he be said to be participating in an imaginary? To answer this, let's return to the argument that we can overlay Carolan's

(2005a) trifurcated definition of nature on an environmental imaginary giving that imaginary levels of ontological significance. Within any imaginary, then, somewhere between Carolan's nature and Nature, it doesn't matter what discourses surround an action. Somewhere in between nature and Nature, that action it can be described in terms of physics and chemistry. In this sense, regardless of what meaning we give to actions, they carry their own. Our friend who loves throwing garbage out the window is passively participating in an imaginary that has already been imagined for him. Just as in Bell's concept of virtual environmentalism our material worlds have been designed in harmony with some environmental imaginary. When I walk into a building that is air conditioned, that building is woven into a vision of nature and society's orientation with it. It is woven into a discourse of cheap abundant energy, of buildings that can be built regardless of sun or wind direction, of human bodies that are comfortable at only certain ranges of temperature. In this sense one is never *not* participating in an environmental imaginary.

In other words, whether my respondents described any sense of connection to a nature previous to coming to Tirimbina, they were connected. This helped clarify what forms connecting could take. After all, if all my respondents arrive already woven into some imaginary, then the process of connecting is not from an absence of connection to the presence of connection but rather changing connections within or between an environmental imaginary. Given this framework, in my interviews about connecting two themes emerged: that of recruitment and that of reinforcement. In other words, an ecotour could contribute to an individual rethinking her participation in a particular imaginary and instead move toward another (remember, in this framework one is never outside of an imaginary). An ecotour could also reinforce one's participation in a particular

imaginary. The latter form of connecting was much more common in the data but, as I started this project hoping for more of the former, I shall start with recruitment.

RECRUITMENT

Having explored the environmental imaginaries of the tourists, before we continue, I want to remind the reader of the environmental imaginary of the destinations. As I've described in previous chapters, both the museum and Tirimbina in Costa Rica present a vision of nature as a diverse and harmonious, if violent, place with its own order. The museum highlights this in a display showing a clearing within the forest caused by a storm and describes the order of succession that in about a hundred years will bring about a new set of giant trees. These giants will someday fall to the forest floor, returning vital nutrients and beginning the cycle again. Almost the very same story is told on many nature hikes around Tirimbina and is one of the themes that run through the walking guide that visitors pick up at the gift shop if they choose to have a "self-guided tour". Full disclosure: I am technically the author of the guide. I wrote it while working at Tirimbina and based it on dozens of educational hikes I accompanied. Although I didn't see it that way at the time, it does serve as a sort of distillation Tirimbina's environmental imaginary. Of course, the second half of this story of succession and order is the introduction of humans who do not understand the forest, who disturb and damage the forest. As I've mentioned, the museum has a large display illustrating rapid deforestation. Tirimbina has no such display but almost every guide will emphasize the need for a preserve such as Tirimbina to save the forest from the forces of development. In both locations, saving the forest is linked to a drive to know it scientifically first. In both locations, this knowledge is linked to human

benefits such as medicine. This, therefore, is the imaginary that both the museum and the location in Costa Rica are trying to recruit for, or into.

In order to illustrate recruitment as an ideal type, let us imagine a visitor to the museum or Tirimbina who believed global warming to be a hoax in part because of her belief that nature is too vast and powerful to be affected by humans. While on a hike through the rainforest, because of the feel of being in the forest or while visiting the museum and seeing the delicate wings of a morpho butterfly, our visitor becomes attuned to the biophysical around her and then receives a message via tour guide or sign in the exhibit that unless humans change their use of fossil fuels, many species and beautiful ecosystems will be destroyed. She leaves ready to prioritize changes in her personal life and work with other likeminded individuals and organizations to change the world. Needless to say, these “road to Damascus” moments were as rare as jaguar sightings at Tirimbina.

I’m being a bit facetious here, but the idea is not so far out. It’s echoed in some literature and by many scholars who are believers in ecotourism and the idea of connecting to nature, but as argued above it is very often found in the rhetoric of practitioners. One man I interviewed at Tirimbina who was himself a biology teacher in Wyoming put it to me this way, “This is great. It would have helped my students to have access to a rainforest, don’t you? You see eighteen-year-old kids and get them out in this stuff and really get a feel for it and so on. You could probably get some that would be addicts and really be upset and maybe carry a message with it. I would think, wouldn’t you? And that would be, well it should be, a feather in your hat as a teacher”. Unfortunately this sort of “getting addicted”

to nature, and thus being recruited into a different imaginary, had either already happened before arriving at the museum or forest or didn't seem to happen at all.

The closest I came to seeing actual recruitment as a form of connection was while watching Costa Rican guides interact with tourists at Tirimbina. For example, while on one tour, I had been chatting with a gentleman whom I will place in the non-environmentalist category. He was one of the many visitors who told me that he had come to Costa Rica to get away from the cold winter in the United States. When describing his hometown, he said it was a conservative place and identified himself with that label as well. I watched him then with great interest as we paused on the suspension bridge over the river and the guide described how Costa Rica was experiencing changes in its precipitation patterns because of global warming. The guide explained that Costa Rica, as a country in the tropics experiences a dry season and a wet season and that while there had historically been some variation in the arrival of what is termed "winter" and "summer", in recent years the seasons had been less predictable. The forest, he said, needed to function in a unified rhythm of flowering, creating fruits and food for mammals and birds that then distribute seeds to continue the forest. I watched the man and his group for any reaction to the repeated mentions of climate change but saw none. He, and they, listened intently, with none of the resistance to climate change that I had come to expect from at least some members in these groups. Perhaps they were simply being polite, but as I watched faces for some reaction to the "hoax" of climate change, I saw none. I saw this pattern repeated on hike after hike that mentioned climate change, even with individuals with whom I would speak with afterward and who would reject climate science. As a side note, when I told some people I was from Colorado State University, some asked if I knew William Gray, a

meteorologist famous for his hurricane predictions and his distrust of models for climate change. In some cases, I believe that my association with him helped my fellow hikers feel comfortable discussing topics like “climate-gate”. Still, when the subject of climate change came up on a hike I believe that the word landed differently. Told by a seemingly apolitical polite Costa Rican biologist, climate change came across as a part of an overall story involving flowers, seasons, bats, birds and the stability of a forest. I can go too far with this, but I do think that the idea of an “honest broker” who was seen as not being affiliated with conspiratorial forces dramatically affected the way information about climate change was received. I plan to return to this possibility in future research.

That possibility aside, many of my respondents said they did not think that the museum or Tirimbina had the potential to recruit visitors away from a non-environmental imaginary and into an environmental one. Or as nineteen-year-old Dani at the Milwaukee Public Museum told me:

I feel that this could help people like nature but not the environment because it doesn't stress anything about how you can help the environment.

It's just kind of teaching you about it and if you go through the time to relate that back to what you've been taught then it could help but right now it's just like, oh that's cool, look at the jaguar and you leave.

I think this is a remarkable quote for a few reasons but primarily because of the split Dani makes between nature and the environment. Her argument here is that the museum may “connect people to nature”, which she sees in the displays on evolution and types of butterflies, but that has little to do with “the environment”, which she associates with the sense that the dominant environmental imaginary is flawed and needs to be changed. She doesn't think that the museum can't do that, just that it's not trying to. Luis agreed:

I think like if you wanted to make a stronger connection between like the human effect on nature like on beauty like that it would be good to have a section that did just that. Like by cutting stuff down this is what's happening because now we see the idealistic side of it but I don't know what's going on.

Like if there is something like, for instance in Africa they're talking about poachers so you see like "Oh my god something horrible is happening there and I can help that not happen by doing this".

We don't really get a sense of if there is something negative going on within the rainforest, like how we're impacting it. Like is the rainforest through like acid rain or something like that? Are we ruining some type of the ecology within the rainforest?

Luis felt that the exhibit didn't discuss human effects on nature and didn't tie in ways that humans could try and change things. In other words, the exhibit left visitors comfortable within their existing imaginary, whatever that may be.

I think they could incorporate something about how to live greener cause that's just the way that everyone is going—reduce, reuse, recycle, go green. They could tell how all that incorporates in the nature how you can preserve nature, whether it's local stuff here or rainforest stuff. It pretty much all ties into one.

Shortly after Luis spoke, another man summed up his opinion succinctly, "I don't think it has much of a chance to change people. I guess they're thinking show 'em neat stuff and hope some of it sticks?"

Essentially Dani and Luis argued that the museum would not change visitors' environmental imaginary because it wasn't trying to. The idea was to show nature, not recruit visitors away from one imaginary into another. Other interviewees felt that perhaps that was the museum's intent but the embodied sensuous experience of the museum prevented that. Jesse told me:

I think to say this exhibit connects people to nature is a step too far. It's an intellectual exhibit. They have the trees and some plastic leaves around but it doesn't smell like the rainforest smells.

It smells a little antiseptic it smells a little plastic.

You have a lot of things going on, you have the researchers, but if you walk into a rainforest you're smelling leaves and it's an oxygen-rich atmosphere because of the trees and the chloroform (sic) and you can smell that in a rainforest. You can even smell that up here in a deciduous forest you can smell all the pine needles, you can smell that, but you can't in the exhibit.

For Jesse the difference was a physical experience he saw the exhibit as trying to connect with people to draw them in but ultimately failing:

There's a lot of noises going on which that is accurate but to the same point you're hearing kids around and everything echoes.

I mean in the rainforest there's not a lot of kids around and everything you say doesn't echo, there's too much sound deadening in the forest with trees and bark and porous materials versus plastic and glass cases, hard surfaces.

One woman felt that the exhibit had little to no effect because the displays and the topic were too strange and exotic for her to link to her everyday experience. She remained unmoved in her imaginary because the discourses and materialities of the forest seemed themselves to have no connection to her lived reality:

I think if there were more facts that tied it to nature that they would be familiar with it'd be more interesting for them, maybe because it's a little too exotic, not that that's a bad thing but like if they wanted to, if it was more connected, it might be easier for them to usually connect it to what they know

Perhaps the most common theme that emerged from visitors to the museum was that they were so solidly in their imaginary, after years, perhaps a lifetime of participation that the museum exhibit, even if it was its intention to recruit them, was simply not powerful enough an experience. Here we return to Pete who, in contrast to Dani and Luis quoted just previously, felt the exhibit had far too much of an emphasis on deforestation

and human impacts on nature. He wondered if perhaps the exhibit might affect others. He understood in an intellectual sense that the exhibit might be able to recruit but he, like most visitors to both locations, was solidly in his imagination:

I mean it didn't really affect me but it'd be different if I grew up in the city and then I'd come here and be like, "oh, how cool is this", but I grew up in like the middle of the country, so I just walk outside and I was in the middle of nowhere already.

My data showed no big results in terms of recruitment in the "aha! moment" type.

No one in Tirimbina or Milwaukee described being on the ecotour as having changed his or her worldview. But that doesn't mean that recruitment wasn't happening in other ways.

Especially at the museum:

I think a lot of kids wouldn't be aware of it if this didn't exist. Maybe if you look at children's programming on TV, there's some things, but this (the exhibit) is much better. Without that, some kids who live in a city environment, they're not going to have access to that. They're not going to see that, I guess it just makes it more real.

It piques their interest. And it's a lot easier to come to than to get to Costa Rica! Although we'd love to do that, that would be awesome. But they'll make connections to when we walk around. We're here all the time, we just love it. I think I might decorate their bedrooms like this.

Because, as I described in chapter five the museum is a place visitors can come to often and visit throughout their lives, a lot of respondents told me that it helped to recruit them to at least an interest in nature over time. When Jesse is complaining in a previous quote about the exhibit being full of children, it highlights that the exhibit is almost always full of children. Many of the people I spoke to had returned as young adults, then parents themselves. In chapter five, I wrote a great deal about the museum's accessibility and highlighted many quotes that described the cultivation of a relationship between the exhibit and the visitor. Its power to connect in terms of recruitment should be measured

over years of multiple visits. The possibility is hinted at here but would require further research to examine fully.

REINFORCEMENT

In some ways the findings in the previous section were not a surprise to me. Perhaps going in to the study I had hoped that the museum might produce a few more “aha!” moments, but I do believe my interviews provide evidence to support the contention that the museum can work as part of an informal, perhaps spontaneous, network that might include parks, movies, a teacher or two, and so on. More tenuously, I look forward to exploring in future research the idea of information that can make its way in to an imaginary because it is not linked to other more contentious discourses. In other words, I’m interested that a Costa Rican guide who is perceived as being outside of political suspicion can deliver much the same information that would be seen as political and suspicious if presented in the United States.

Going in to the study, I had thought that if Tirimbina and the rainforest exhibit weren’t bringing in new recruits, they were simply preaching to the choir. As I mentioned in chapter two, I saw this initially was at best harmless and at worst reproducing and reinforcing international systems of exploitation. It had never occurred to me that ecotours or museum exhibits might have a value in keeping the choir in the choir. I had assumed an environmental identity was a fixed state, that once someone was in, they stayed. When I started my investigation, I found that visitors reported that both locations played a profoundly important role in keeping them in their imaginary. Becka, whom I interviewed in Milwaukee, put it this way:

Every time we spend some time here I'm reminded of the urgency of taking care of it (nature). But that's something I'm always reminded of cause that's just something that we think about. Still, just being here again and just seeing it again helps refresh that urgency.

I asked Becka why she thought she lost that sense of urgency and needed to be reminded. She told me, "You just get going with school and work and everything. Just everyday running around. You don't think about this stuff." In her everyday running around, Becka may drive a car, watch television, and talk with her co-workers. During the "everyday running around", she may maintain her participation in an imaginary concerned with "the urgency of take care" of nature, an imaginary wherein nature is under threat and needs protection. But certainly a great deal of contemporary life in the United States is not participating in this imaginary. Many of the food systems, energy systems or economic systems that Becka participates in during her "everyday running around" are themselves her inherited environmental imaginary. All these systems and their artifacts contain an implied, if not explicit, argument about the nature of nature and society's relationship with it. The dominant imaginary is that nature is vast, fertile, bountiful and resilient. Every building, vehicle, piece of clothing, computer screen and supermarket that Becka encounters reflects an inherited environmental imaginary that is telling a story that nature is strong and society's relationship with it is working.

Given this context, it is not surprising that so many "environmentalists" described their visit to the museum or Costa Rica or time in nature as "renewing" or refreshing. Even one man, who was having a hard time trying to think of any changes in his behavior that might arise after visiting Tirimbina, felt he already incorporated nature into most of his decisions:

I don't know. I guess I might be less inclined to get bananas. (Laughs) When we drove by the banana plantation and they told us—I mean it was not this particular area—they told us they spray them all the time and stuff. I was thinking, I don't know if I should keep buying them. But other than that, I can't think of anything here that....

I guess what it does is reinforce what we're already doing.

This use of “reinforce” highlights the role that places like Tirimbina or the exhibit play in the lives of “environmentalists”. They provide a place where counter-hegemonic imaginaries can be reinforced and strengthened. Without (discursive and material) spaces like these, those whom I have categorized as environmentalists might lose their sense of urgency or might simply get tired. One of my favorite quotes was from Jennifer describing her psychological state coming in to nature from the business of her outside life:

Yeah, I feel closer to nature and I feel that I want to do more camping. I was thinking that this morning, “Oh we should try to go camping more with Kai (their son)”.

Whenever I'm in nature, I like it and I'm happy, but it's hard to make the effort to get out into nature, so I felt....

We had—I got my purse stolen on the first day in Costa Rica—so we had a bad start to our trip, so I was a little bit like—that was just two days ago or something. Three days ago, maybe. So I was like, “Uh should I even be here?”

I sort of did all the planning and I was like, “Does anyone else even care?” And then, but then getting here and being in the rainforest has helped me feel more relaxed and I feel like it's worth it.

For Jennifer the forest, and nature in general, is a soothing place where the anxiety over a lost purse and the feeling that maybe her family doesn't appreciate the work she did in planning the vacation fade away after two or three days and she can feel relaxed. Of course, as I discuss below, this experience is not unique to “environmentalists”. Also, let us remember visitors to the museum in Milwaukee who considered themselves

“environmentalists” but had no desire to travel to the forest they saw as full of bugs and malaria.

For many visitors to Costa Rica, the sensuous embodied experience of walking in the forest contributed a great deal to their sense of reinforcing, of reconnecting. Seymour and Rita were the only couple I spoke with who described donating money to organizations that work on environmental issues. Rita made a direct link between the sensuous experience of being in the forest with a renewed desire to participate in her environmental imaginary but cautioned that it could work in the opposite direction for “big bucks contributors”:

You know this is a place you might want to bring contributors, big bucks contributors, to organizations, but then they don't want to walk very far in mud.

If you get people like college students and us, the more we're walking in the mud, we're more than happy to donate.

The more we're becoming, we're feeling it. We're going to use less plastic and think of some other thing maybe. We're feeling it.

We might change our contribution level, but it's not going to save any organization if we do, so.... You're not going to have much mud to expose people to. You're not going to have people have to go to places where they risk sliding and flopping in the mud, so you can't bring that to a museum.

What Rita is saying is that the same experience that gets her and Seymour more interested in donating could have the opposite effect on someone who didn't want the mud and physical discomfort that can come along with an embodied experience in nature. The biophysical shapes the imaginary but not in anything like one direction. This is because of the complexity of visitors themselves. One of my more fascinating, although brief, interviews was with Fred who had seen combat in the U.S. war in Vietnam. This came up

when I was interviewing him and his wife after they had hiked through the forest one morning:

And it's interesting to me because I spent time in Vietnam during the war. And the Philippines, because we came out over there and did survival training in the Philippines.

These jungles, this forest is fairly similar. Although I think the Philippines and Vietnamese ones, I was telling my wife had more undergrowth. I hadn't been back to a forest like this since the war. It's amazing.

It's so good to smell the forest and see it again.

Fred looked happy, peaceful, as if he had just sighed. I imagine that for someone else the sensuous reminders of a place with these memories could be disturbing or unpleasant. Fred loved his visit to Tirimbina because it reminded him of fighting in the Vietnam War. I was happy he was at peace with this visit, but I have no idea what elements he wove together in his environmental imaginary, only that they speak to the complexity of humans as a creative force within an imaginary.

Most of the elements that visitors to the museum and Tirimbina wove into their sense of reinforcement were not so dramatic and often discursive rather than sensuous. For many, the museum contributed information about nature that strengthened ties within an imaginary. Jennifer and her husband told me that although they considered themselves quite knowledgeable about nature, their time at Tirimbina contributed to that knowledge base:

We understand some about birds and some of the mammals and those kinds of things and I understand basic principals about how ecosystems function and things like that, but it's really neat to come to someplace like this where I don't—I'm not familiar with all the animals and their interactions—and to learn about new things too.

This acquisition of new information broadened and deepened Jennifer's nature to which she was connecting. It gave more depth, made it all the more interesting and appealing. For Becka, this connects information about the rainforest and her home state of Wisconsin, and it also helped to strengthen a sense of commitment to the need to change society's relationship with nature:

I mean I've seen things today I hadn't seen before. When you learn about things here, it's like the next step from a book because you're like walking so its important to talk about it, read about it and go learn it and touch whenever you can so I think it's important to have places like this.

What's great in there is just the Wisconsin/Costa Rica comparison, which is just really nice considering Costa Rica's a lot smaller than Wisconsin.

So I think that is actually a really good reminder to come through and see that, yes, we have lots of life in Wisconsin but we don't have anything compared to what's found in a rainforest so that's why it's so important.

All life is important but like when you take one little plot of the rainforest away, you've taken a lot more life away you know.

Gerald told me that he considers himself, "very much an environmentalist" and enjoyed picking up new bits of information in Tirimbina, including some difficult wildlife management decisions:

We see things we never thought of before. I earned something that was particular and I don't know what I think of it.

When the hydroelectric companies flood the areas here and they try to capture all the wildlife and the snakes, so far they have been in favor of destroying the venomous ones....

I'm not sure what I think of that. You don't want kids here getting hurt but also those snakes are part of the ecosystem.

Gerald is reinforcing his participation in his imaginary by applying it to a new and interesting problem concerning how humans should act ethically toward nature.

In addition to adding new knowledge, many visitors described their reinforcement in terms of linking previously existing knowledge to their experience at either the museum or Tirimbina. For example, Jennifer described an unexpected element that contributed to the decision to come to Costa Rica:

Jennifer: Diego was also part of our decision. Diego, as far as we can tell, used to be from Costa Rica. Kai loves Diego.

James: They talk about the cloud forest and we haven't been to the cloud forest. Diego seems to be in the cloud forest.

Jennifer: He goes back and forth between difference climates, depending on what they want to put in there. But it was interesting because there was this whole thing about Diego saving a sloth—he was high up in a tree—and the other night, I was telling the story and in my story I said the sloth was on that hanging bridge and then Adam went out in the night....

James: And there was a three-toed sloth.

Jennifer: He saw the sloth last night!

Jennifer and James (and Kai) had heard about and learned about the forest through the adventures of Diego (as I described in chapter four, Diego is a boy in various children's media who helps save animals in the rainforest). Diego had been shaping the family's imaginary through stories and television programs in the United States and now here in Costa Rica was a sloth, just like in the stories. These sorts of encounters of discursive elements of an imaginary experienced as biophysical were a common theme with those who described their experience in terms of reinforcement.

Finally, I will close with the variable that had (to use quantitative terms) the greatest predictive power over whether visitors interacted heavily with the museum exhibit or the forest and described either location as having a role that was crucial to either

reinforcing or in one case recruiting visitors into the “environmentalist” imaginary:
children.

I think coming here is good to remind you of something like that and just the density of life in a rainforest. Things like the length of time it takes things to recover when it’s been cut down.

It also makes it really important for us to teach our son about the rainforests and why it’s important to care.

This quote was typical for parents that I spoke with at either location (as a reminder there were far more parents with children at the museum than in Tirimbina). Doing participant observation on parents with children at the museum revealed them to be far more engaged with the exhibits (reading signs, opening lids, pushing buttons) than any other demographic except the children themselves (who were not officially a part of this study). I saw a few reasons for this. The first being the children themselves. I’ve already described the way that children physically move through an exhibit; their unpredictability enlivens the experience for parents. Additionally, for the younger children, it was because they asked questions about everything: *What? Why? Who?* I often watched parents scan the display looking for answers to these questions or drawing on their own knowledge. I believe some made things up. Parents with school-age children were more likely to use museum-provided activities like scavenger hunts.

Amanda: We have these pamphlets and you walk through and it gives you different things to look for and as museum members for the IDs it brings new things to life. For us too!

Ben: It’s like a different exhibit.

Amanda: It gives them something else to look for which is good because we come here all the time. How many? (laughter) All the time, way more than forty.

Ben: And every time we go through we end up seeing something new. I don't know if things get added, but it seems I always see a new little animal or bug or something.

Amanda: I learned about the kingfisher and that it doesn't continue to grow, that was something I didn't know

Ben: I read about how after the tree dies all these animals go in and live in it, you know, so after it dies there was toads, bats, cockroaches, everything started living in the hollowed-out rotting tree. Really interesting.

Ben and Amanda had mentioned that they had made the decision to join the museum because they were on a tight budget but could afford the family membership, and it gave them a regular, accessible and fun family outing. So, as they reference, using the museum's scavenger hunt activities maximizes their financial investment or as Amanda points out, "It gives them something else to look for which is good because we come here all the time". Even if visiting for financial reasons, the pamphlets engage the parents deeply in the exhibit as Ben describes when talking about the role that hollowed-out trees play in the forest's ecology. I don't want to exclude the many ways that children could, and did, make experiencing the forest impossible for adults. At the museum I saw fatigue (from parents and children), tantrums or other disciplinary issues, and fascination with the escalator at the expense of what they were "supposed to be" looking at, all detract from an adult's ability to connect to the exhibit. As far as Tirimbina, as I described in chapter five, the cost of getting to the forest for a family with multiple children is often prohibitive, and the forest is a place with lots of rules about what not to touch, about staying on the path. The heat, bugs and slippery paths that an adult incorporates into a sense of authenticity might simply be irritants and possible dangers for a young child. Still, the interviews speak for themselves in terms of the powerful role children play in boosting a sense of connection

to nature in general. When parents are turned into teachers, they must engage the subject matter in a way that non-parents might, but aren't obliged to.

In addition to being teachers for younger children, parents of slightly older children often spoke of the knowledge they learned from their kids. This mother was pleased her son was linking the forest exhibit to lessons at school:

He actually studies the rainforest at school last year, and he's the one that told us that was a rhino beetle and he was able to apply some of what her learned at school outside of the school setting, which to me was important because then you know he's carrying that away from the school environment.

When her son connects what he learns at school to the exhibit, or for that matter when young Kai links Diego's sloths to the ones his dad saw in the forest, they are participating in the ongoing creation of an environmental imaginary. They are weaving together information, stories, physical experiences, and ethical orientations as participants in an ongoing conversation that is shaped by and shaping nature. In this sense then, it is not surprising that the presence of children seemed to be the biggest driver in an adult's active participation in an environmental imaginary (as opposed to passively participating in an inherited imaginary). As parents visit the museum, they are doing so with their children, whom they are preparing for the future. One of the central themes in counter-hegemonic environmental imaginaries is a concern for future harms. In this sense, when weaving their own imaginary, parents are forced to answer the common rhetorical device used when discussing issues like climate change, "What kind of world are we leaving our children?"

Chapter Seven: Imagining Something New

To bring this exploration full circle, I want to return to the initial question that sparked this dissertation. Not just whether an ecotour can foster a sense of connection to nature in tourists but whether that connection might contribute to sustainable development. To do that, I want to “follow” my respondents home as they drive away after a day at the museum with the kids sleeping in the back seat or look out a window of a plane as San José disappears, the plane rises and Costa Rica is once again a green far away destination. In previous pages, I’ve presented my findings that visitors to the museum or Costa Rica are better said to be connecting to *a* nature rather than nature. I’ve adopted Peet and Watts’ term “environmental imaginaries” as a way to describe these multiple and competing natures with a language rooted in post-structuralist and post-Marxist scholarship, thus allowing for these imaginaries to exist with hybrid discursive and biophysical elements while also placing them in a stratified social world. In doing so, I posited that individuals are always participating in an imaginary whether consciously or unconsciously through inherited socio-technological systems. The very same inherited systems carry them home from their visit to the forest in Milwaukee or Sarapiquí, where I wondered if they might act as agents of sustainable development.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Having re-conceptualized change on an ecotour as in terms of “recruitment” away from or “reinforcement within” an environmental imaginary, why return to the language of sustainable development? After all Peet and Watts themselves have derided the term:

In this term we suggest “development” essentially means the economic growth that fuels ever-increasing consumption, the main marker of mass happiness and contentment in neoliberal societies that also provides jobs and income. “Sustainable” we think has now to be understood ideologically as the effects of growth that the majority of people can be persuaded to find tolerable (Peet and Watts 2002: 4).

Peet and Watts provide a devastating critique of sustainable development in a phenomenological sense: that is, how the term has been used (in their view) by institutions like the WTO or World Bank as a way of institutionalizing and disarming environmental critiques of development. These critiques are part and parcel of the discourse on sustainable development. My use of the term, however, is rooted firstly in my own roots as a scholar; before coming to sociology, I studied international affairs, natural resources and sustainable development. Given this background, holding on to this language allows me to in a sense “put my cards on the table” in terms of my own location within an environmental imaginary.

As I have described throughout this paper, the research process helped remind me of what nature I am connected to. It is one that is imperiled by local, national and development practices and requires changes in social technological and political structures. In a sense my normative agenda is in perfect harmony with “development’s” discursive if not political roots as creating positive change or “making things better” (McMichael 2011: 34). Escobar (1996), along with many others, would argue that my use of development language (sustainable or otherwise) is participating in a long history of the use of hegemonic discourses that subject many peoples of the world to a Western power-knowledge. Escobar argues as eloquently as any that the normative desire and purported

ability to “make things better” is a path to power (Escobar 2011) often to the detriment of the lives of those who are being improved.

Still, rather than abandon this language because of its history and adoption by the world’s powerful, I argue that it allows a path into the environmental imaginary of modernist development. After all, once “sustainable” has entered the lexicon of development agencies, local planning boards or national legislatures, there exists a discursive foothold for a counter-hegemonic imaginary. A town board may argue the details of a policy based on its sustainability, but the environmental imaginary that accompanies the term is one of a finite nature that must be managed in such a way as to not be depleted or destroyed. As Peet and Watts themselves propose:

The contradictions embedded in terms like “sustainable development” can be employed in the interests of environmental protection through a combination of radical political interpretation and mass political action. In terms of interpretation, the meaning of “sustainable” can be directed through critique of its use by organizations like the WTO toward its radical extreme—zero environmental damage. Likewise, the meaning of “development” can be turned from consumptive growth to the satisfaction of human needs.” (Peet and Watts 2002: 4).

This appropriation of the term also allows it to be used as a critique of socio-technological systems in the global North, a complete reversal from how the term is often used in development discourse, but fully consistent with its discursive origins. I will return to the role of overlapping discourses below but will leave it here that my use of sustainable development language is a tactical decision that keeps this work linked to broader literatures employed in development circles. With this reorientation in mind, I can address my question of whether these returning ecotourists and their reinforced environmental imaginaries can be agents of sustainable development.

FOR PRACTITIONERS

Returning again to the theme of tourism as sustainable development, I would like to briefly explore the concrete implications of my findings for ecotourism practitioners. Doing so based on this particular study may seem presumptuous. I understand that the use of case studies has its critics especially within the field of tourism research. Oppermann (2000 in Xiao and Smith 2006) wrote, “it is time for tourism researchers to take on ‘new’ challenges, namely systematically add knowledge to the field rather than continue engaging in producing more and more case studies of limited additional scientific value” (738). However, because of the type of theoretical findings produced by this case study, I will explore a few areas where an understanding of tourists as existing in competing imaginaries (that can be reinforced or recruited from/to on an ecotour) might shape how practitioners see themselves and perhaps how scholars see those practitioners and sustainability. To highlight the novelty of inclusion of tourist environmental imaginaries in considerations of sustainability, I will first revisit traditional definitions and applications of sustainability.

Because my emphasis has been entirely on connecting to nature, what follows is heavily focused on the environmental aspect of the “triple bottom line” (social, environmental and economic). Writing for the international Centre for Ecotourism Research, Buckley (2009) provides a thorough traditional understanding of elements that must be examined in order to determine the environmental sustainability of a tourism enterprise. He first reminds the reader that “ecotourism typically involves three components: travel to and from the site; accommodation on site or on tour; and specific

activities that may involve local travel by various means” (379). For each of these stages Buckley argues that any understanding of sustainability must examine impacts on soils, vegetation, invertebrates, reptiles and amphibian, birds, mammals, aquatic biota and marine mammals. He emphasizes leave-no-trace guidelines and that, “Impacts can be reduced by the environmental management practices of ecotour operators, environmental education of clients by ecotour guides, and land and visitor management practices by landholders and land management agencies” (390). I should note that Buckley’s inclusion of environmental education for guests is intended to increase their buy-in regarding conservation-minded practices while on tour (Ballantyne, Packer and Hughes 2009). This ecology-centered approach is valuable for practitioners, and we see similar advice and considerations throughout the traditional literature aimed at practitioners (see Blamey 2001; Cater and Lowman 1994; Font 2002; Hill and Gale 2009; Mieczkowski 1995; Swarbrooke 1999; Wall 1997; Wight 1993). An example of this type of evaluation in practice can be seen in de Haas’s “Sustainability of Small-Scale Ecotourism: The Case of Niue, South Pacific” which finds that tourism on the small island was environmentally sustainable despite some issues related to overfishing and “damage caused when natural sites are altered to improve access for tourists” (157).

An analysis like de Haas’s places considerations of global tourism beyond its scope. In other words, the environmental sustainability of Niue is evaluated as though Niue is a closed system, which on one level is quite reasonable given that it is an island. On the other hand, such an evaluation, and indeed the template laid out by Buckley, seems to sidestep the airplane in the room of contributing to climate change by flying to far-flung destinations in search of nature. Critics of global tourism like Gossling include climate

change in their analysis, and for Gossling and Hall (2006) at least, the conclusion is clear: regardless of offset programs or other attempts to balance the carbon footprint of a flight, global tourism is contributing to the destructive nature of nature-based tourism. As a true critic, Gossling's criteria would find a destination unsustainable if development contributes to change in land cover, energy consumption, exchange of biota invasive species, or the exchange of diseases. A fascinating and challenging aspect of Gossling's work, and most salient for my desire to include environmental imaginaries, is his assertion (2002) that changes in a traveler's psyche resulting from travel contribute to environmental degradation. One element of his argument is straightforward: that travel can detach travelers from their sense of connection to a particular place and that this lack of attachment correlates with increased resource use (2002b: 296). More damning is his assertion that even if travelers become increasingly enamored of the natural world, they will only want to travel more and thus participate even more in the destruction of that natural world (2002b: 296). In this view if one must travel, a sustainable option in terms of invasive species, changes in land use or spread of disease might be to stay in the "sacrifice zone" of an all-inclusive resort away from fragile natural areas! It is here that I begin to argue for the usefulness of involving environmental imaginaries in evaluations of sustainability as well as best practices for tour providers. I will elaborate below, but it suffices to say here that Gossling's evaluation of tourists becoming increasingly "environmentalist" does not match my data, and he misses what I think may be an essential element of an ecotour: keeping the choir in the choir, or the reinforcement of an environmental imaginary.

Gossling's analysis, however, stands apart from the majority of literature addressing practitioners because its basic message is, "Stop!" His message also falls on the unhearing ears of tourists, who will not stop. Tourists are coming to natural areas in increasing numbers and represent the fastest growing segment of the tourist industry (WTO 2012). What draws them? As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Dean MacCannell (1976) suggested a futile search for authenticity. His work has moved out of fashion and is often described as simplistic as it attempts to subsume all tourists under one conceptual umbrella. For example, Crick wrote in 1989, "Scholars do a disservice to the study of tourism if they opt for a single conceptual scheme that may obscure other vital perspectives" (333). Many of my respondents, however, would have been very comfortable with MacCannell's language and as described in earlier chapters sometimes used very similar language themselves. The use of imaginaries may be useful here in helping practitioners understand the variance as well as the commonality in tourist motivations. Imaginaries allow a linkage between an ecotour and the tourist's life before (and after) the tour. Tourists may come in search of authenticity (or a reinforcement of their existing imaginary) or they may come to get away from it all but be open to messages of recruitment to a different imaginary. Either way, the tour provider or park manager has an opportunity to work towards sustainability beyond the scope of their destination.

There are of course concerns for hosts in reinforcing existing imaginaries as ideas of authentic nature intertwine with the "exotic" and often come interwoven with threads of colonialism and ideas of the noble savage (Tavakolian in Gould and Lewis 2009). Tourism often succeeds financially by reinforcing existing imaginaries, environmental or otherwise. I will admit to cringing when a visitor emphasized excessively what a "happy" people Costa

Ricans were, and I recalled a work by Mellinger (1994) that examined postcards that depicted happy African Americans working in the fields and were sent north by tourists visiting the American South in the early twentieth century. Those tourists, too, were having their imaginaries reinforced. Indeed, Kim and Jamal (2006) go one step further in their study of visitors to a Renaissance fair determining the authenticity of an entirely simulated destination. Having presented the pitfalls that exist, and before we go too far into the idea of imaginary imaginaries, I want to pull back to the value of using the language of imaginaries for practitioners. If hosts in the global South are aware that visitors may arrive with ideas of the exotic or even with very firm conceptions of nature and forests as places without humans they can better address those imaginaries. For example, some of the best guides at Tirimbina would discuss local and national level issues, and some tourists took the opportunity to visit nearby banana plantations. In doing so they saw the limits of the forest and de-eternalized it; they placed it in a specific place and time. Because my conception of tourists as active weavers of imaginaries accepts that imaginaries are fluid, and thus determinations of authenticity also fluid, there is room to reveal new elements and surprises to visitors while still allowing them to reinforce an imaginary and experience the authentic. With this advice, practitioners should not seek to merely reflect back to tourists exactly what they have come to see (the picture in the brochure, the sites that the guidebook told them are a must, etc.) but should feel license to link the destination to its place and its time. Of course, some of the best practitioners are already doing this because they have seen that the unexpected can be the best indicator of authentic.

Before moving on to another way in which my work might apply to practitioners, I should mention the possibility that tourists might be “surprised” to discover pro-

environmental messages or practices when at a traditional resort (I am not referring here to merely “green washing”). Indeed, Luo and Deng (2008) mention just this possibility writing, “A destination can play a central role in functioning as a factory through which all tourists...can be remoulded and shaped to become ecotourists, responsible travelers, and environmentally or socially conscious citizens” (400). I would not use the language of a factory but agree with the sentiment that tourists are active creators of their journey and that activeness opens opportunity.

An additional way that tourists can be surprised and weave new authentic imaginaries is by revealing the “behind-the-scenes” or what Goffman would refer to as “backstage” aspects of a destination. Lee and Moscardo (2005) examine exactly this potential in their pre- and post-test study of visitors to a resort in Australia. Similar to my respondents at Tirimbina, “the resort attracts guests who already had a high level of environmental awareness and concern”, thus their pre- and post-test study, “found few significant differences in respondents’ environmental awareness, attitudes and preferences” (562). However, the authors do mention that guests were interested in the actual practices of the resort with regard to water treatment or electricity use (554). I saw this in visitors to Tirimbina as well in that technology that was usually behind the scenes (composting, gray water re-usage, waste reduction measures, etc.) was often very interesting to those tourists who were able to explore it further. Conceptually this links with the previous point about practitioners having license to expand what visitors might find interesting, from the natural attraction itself to how they seek to live in harmony with that environment. Some national parks in the United States already do some of this; for example, on a recent trip to Canyonlands National Park I was happy to find that bottled

water was not available for sale. A series of signs explained why the park had made this decision and included the beliefs of the rangers themselves and how they lived at the park.

This sort of modeling behavior could be possible on a scaled-up version as, say, Cuba readies itself for what many analysts see as an eventual opening to American tourists (Henthorne and Miller 2003). Visitors to Cuba from the United States will certainly enjoy its beaches, warm weather and beautiful old cities, but a provider interested in sustainability might also describe organic gardening successes or green roof systems. It is not unthinkable that the inclusion of such “behind-the-scenes” exploration might allow a visitor to add new elements to the environmental imaginary of her own home. This inclusion of new ideas can strengthen discussions of sustainability in local development (see Valentin and Spangenberg 2000). In doing so, we can see an interesting possibility for tourists to reinforce elements of their existing environmental imaginary while drawing in new ideas simultaneously.

Such modeling behavior needn't occur only internationally or at large national parks. It can also occur in domestic (US) rural tourism enterprises. Rural tourism is big business in the United States that now has its own department of the USDA, which helps rural communities and farms tap into the potential revenue of visitors seeking an “authentic” experience. Writing for the USDA, Dennis Brown points out that rural tourism is a multifaceted sector, with tourists seeking a variety of activities. These experiences can be agritourism (ranging from pick-your-own operations to extended stays on a farm or ranch), heritage tourism or nature-based tourism. In all of these cases, practitioners who engage in sustainable practices and who are seeking to shape the imaginaries of their

visitors should consider revealing more of the back stage and not merely present what they believe the tourist has come to see. If then we can envisage the tourist as creatively participating in an imaginary and allow for the possibility of that imaginary to be shaped by time in an ecotour, it is not so far fetched to imagine that tourists can act as agents of sustainable development. While most of my respondents described their time in the museum or Costa Rica in terms of reinforcing an imaginary or what I termed “keeping the choir in the choir”, imaginaries are not static things, and modeling new behavior could be a tool in shaping existing imaginaries.

Finally, my research suggests that the idea of reinforcement should not be left out of evaluations of sustainability. Most evaluations currently are along the lines described above (various aspects of ecosystems, etc., à la Buckley) in addition to social and economic indicators for the host community. Some scholars have begun to suggest that sustainability evaluations take into account the creation of pro-environmental attitudes, knowledge and behavior (see especially Ballantyne and Packer 2013). My use of environmental imaginaries and the argument that we are always participating in an imaginary of some kind should give pause to those who are not as concerned with those already converted, as it were, to environmentalism. They are surrounded by a lived reality that often encourages the abandonment of that very identity, if not discursively, then behaviorally. I have not yet developed measurements for this reinforcement of existing imaginaries as an indicator of sustainability, but for now will say that based on my research this element of ecotourism’s contribution to sustainable development should not be overlooked.

IMAGINING SOMETHING NEW

My study examined the potential for ecotour experiences to contribute to sustainable development in the North; I wasn't able literally to follow my visitors home. I couldn't see if their renewed sense of commitment to their environmental imaginary changed the way they participated in the communities, their children's education or whether it faded like a tan. One way of exploring what happened to my respondents after we parted ways is to examine other literature that uses the rubric of environmental imaginaries as a factor in social change. The concept as first proposed in 1996 was rooted in Peet and Watts' own work in the developing world. Based on their interest in discourse theory and post-structural accounts of power as diffuse, they saw the possibility to link discourse to place and create a theoretical space for regionally based counter-hegemonic discourses (Peet and Watts 1996). Other literature following this tradition has explored the power of an environmental imaginary to rally a community in the developing world. For example, Hyndman (2001) showed that a unified environmental imaginary rooted in the Ok Tedi region of Papua New Guinea helped empower an ecological resistance movement.

Examples like this one, while interesting (see also the superb volume of essays *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, Davis and Burke, eds.), don't provide a great deal of insight into what might have happened to my tourists, in part because their experiences in the forests were so diffuse. Their visit may have reinforced their participation in a particular imaginary in one of my two roughly hewn camps but was not a rallying cry around a particular regional or even global issue. Climate change did

come up on hikes through the rainforest, so did habitat loss and biodiversity. These different ways of engaging the forest make it difficult to link the forest's environmental imaginary to literature based around a particular issue. At the museum, where there is a clear unified goal of the exhibit, visitors still wove in their own experiences to create their own sense of what the museum was trying to get across.

For example, one visitor told me that the museum was linking deforestation to loss of biodiversity (in a statement that I think harmonizes with the curators' stated goals for the exhibit beyond teaching the basics of biology):

This exhibit, they're not just trying to get people to think about the disappearance of the rainforest. They're also trying to get people to think about what's in it and that it's not just trees, that a rainforest is an entire habitat for these certain animals, for these certain bugs and butterflies that you will never see anywhere else in the world.

Another visitor, though, did not latch on to that interpretation, feeling in part that it was no longer an issue:

I think the exhibit is more about the destruction of the rainforest which was something that was going on at the time the exhibit was built, and now there so much reconstruction of the rainforest going on that I think that connection's just lost.

As a final example of the museum not creating a unified clear issue for departing visitors to rally around, this visitor did not see the exhibit as containing any particular call to change, instead:

I think that the rainforest attached to the dinosaur exhibit has a lot to do with evolution, and so I think seeing the dinosaur progression and how that changed that way and then go into the rainforest.

Given these disparate encounters with the exhibit, it's hard to link my departing tourists to the sort of action taking place in a study like Hyndman's of mining in Papua New Guinea.

Considering Peet and Watts' background of studying the developing world, it's interesting that much of the other literature that draws on the environmental imaginary concept examines conflicts in the developed world. For example, Huyber (2007) describes conflicts between imaginaries as the city boundaries of Portland, Oregon, shift. Foster and Sandberg (2004) use imaginaries as a framing device in the argument that they can sometimes preclude non-humans in the study of a development plan in Toronto. These examples and others like them in the literature do provide some evidence that becoming more firmly a participant in an imaginary can lead to social change, but not necessarily sustainable change. For example, Nesbitt and Weiner (2001) describe environmental conflicts in central Appalachia that are rooted in conflicting environmental imaginaries which are themselves rooted in experiences of place as a biophysical reality. Nesbitt and Weiner describe communities that have worked the mountains for generations, seeing them as resources to be used (including especially for coal's extraction), while newly arrived residents see the mountains as beautiful and seek to curtail mining operations (2001). While interesting uses of the concept, these sorts of studies are different from mine in their adherence to a concept of nature possessed by a society that is rooted in a region. Whether describing Portland, Toronto or a broader region like Appalachia, all are examinations of conflicting place-based discourses. My visitors are returning to particular places but have visited (literally or metaphorically) a tropical rainforest that is far from their homes.

This contrast of my use of the term and other literatures comes about in part because I employed environmental imaginaries as a way to make sense of my data that presented understandings of nature that were similar enough to compare but contradictory in fundamental ways. In doing so, I stretch the concept of environmental imaginary to consider societies as existing in networks of discourses and materialities, rather than just regions. This allows for a single region to have many imaginaries at work simultaneously. My tourists do have a sense of place and participate in an imaginary about their home regions, but they also draw on *Go, Diego, Go*, *Avatar*, *Medicine Man* and *Survivor*. They also draw on their experiences in a museum or a trip to Costa Rica. This shift to considering societies possessed of an imaginary as existing in networks allows the concept to be employed not just in considerations of regional environmental conflicts but global challenges like climate change. In this use of environmental imaginaries I come closest to Andrew McGregor's discourse analysis of Australian environmental imaginaries within the environmentalist community (2004). Although he doesn't emphasize a language of networks, McGregor's respondents also draw on disparate elements in their participation in an imaginary that is global rather than regional. McGregor's work, while fascinating, emphasizes the role of imaginaries as discourse to the exclusion of the material or biophysical.

My respondents are returning to discursive worlds but, as I have mentioned, they are also returning to biophysical realities. The power of the biophysical gave me some hints as to the difficulties in participating in what I've termed the environmentalist imaginary in a world shaped by non-environmentalist materialities. For some, like Dani, the challenge to act as an agent of change was her sense of that her society does not care for

the environment, so why should she? She told me that she “knows” a lot about the environment, but when that knowledge isn’t linked to her daily material reality she makes no apparent effort to force that link:

I know a decent amount about the environment but it’s probably different with what you know about it ‘cause I’ve grown up with more like global warming and all that. Kids my age have always been taught about this.

It’s like recycling is more pushed and I think they’re trying to be more aware of the environment so I feel like I learn more about it but then it’s also that everyday people push it aside.

I don’t really make any decisions about what I know either. I’m the kind of person who will flip on all the lights and not think about it. I can’t walk anywhere, I have to take the car. I feel like society doesn’t pay attention about it, so why should I?

Dani does not want to think about how many lights she’s turned on, the time she spends in a car; her society is doing these things. I appreciated Dani’s candor (perhaps tied to her being nineteen) and the way that she weaves material elements with her sense of Mead’s generalized other.

Other respondents did engage in behaviors they felt were consistent with their imaginary. As explored earlier in this paper, they purchased organic products, drove less and tried to create less waste for landfills. Still, when I spoke with them about actions like these in their home settings, I noticed that many of these actions were contextualized as movements away from hegemonic practices but not always towards something else. For example, Gene told me:

We buy organic food for our family. That’s for health reasons and the environment. We buy local as a rule whenever we can so that decreases the footprint and stuff. We vote based on a lot of things that affect you know clean water...that’s why Wisconsin’s in trouble right now, but I would say yeah we think about the big picture as much as possible. Obviously you can’t pick every battle, you’d be naked and hungry but you have to like pick as many as possible.

Here is a series of actions all consistent with an environmentalist imaginary, but when Gene considers the realities of his biophysical world, he worries that if taken to their extreme such environmentalist actions would result in his family being “naked and hungry”. Another respondent echoed this, telling me:

We moderately take nature into account while still being comfortable, we recycle, we talk to the kids about their eco-footprint so if we can bike somewhere we’ll bike, but you know if it’s unrealistic we ride in our car, if the weather’s bad we ride in our car. But as far as going outside foraging for food and stuff, no, we don’t do that.

Again the movement is away from driving cars, away from putting garbage in landfills, away from a big “footprint,” but this respondent was also not sure where this was going and suspected it was outside foraging for food. I don’t want to paint with too broad a brush here, but the importance of creating alternative ways of organizing human/natural relations is clear. Some communities are well on their way with gardens, alternative fuels and vibrant local economies. For some of my respondents not returning to those sorts of communities, their sense was that if they went down this road of withdrawal, they will be outside, naked, hungry and foraging for food! On the other hand a couple from California told me:

I don’t know if we think about nature when we do our shopping. But we live in Santa Cruz in California, which is a very hippy town, everybody recycles so we have a lot of vegans so like everything in the stores is healthy and organic and I think, we do recycle. We do not compost, but we do use environmentally friendly detergents whenever we can, so we do take the environment into consideration whenever it doesn’t interfere with our lives.

In some ways this answer is not so different from Dani’s above. This couple is not particularly concerned about how their action links to the environment but feels comfortable that because of the systems around them that they are probably

environmentally friendly. They may be right. As Carolan discusses in his *Society and the Environment* textbook, many people participate in environmentally friendly behaviors not out of a connection to nature but because it's the path of least resistance (Carolan 2013: 7). The couple above is not sure if they recycle. They may not at home, but it's very likely that if they buy a soda and throw the can in a receptacle around town it may be recycled because of the inherited biophysical environmental imaginary through which they are walking.

Which leaves us with a final challenge if we are to think of our visitors returning home. They must act as agents of change collectively and not just through individual action. As I've described it, an environmental imaginary is not merely one's individual concept of nature but the biophysical reality in which one lives. I write this on a laptop in an air-conditioned office having driven fifty minutes one-way to work. However, I engage in other collective actions to try and shape my society's biophysical reality so that it is more in harmony with my conception of nature. I try to take my words to heart that the environmentalist imaginary cannot be just a movement away but also a movement toward.

Ecotourism may have a role to play here that can be explored in later research. Perhaps if the forest were less mythologized and repopulated with real people who get food and medicine from it, visitors would see not just an idealized counterpoint to their inauthentic lives but start a journey toward exploring what other futures might look like. For example, Costa Rica (while certainly not an ideal example of an environmental society) does have some interesting policy initiatives like a tax on gasoline that is used to fund payments for environmental services. Perhaps by linking an ecotour to broader realities

surrounding the natural destination (like the teeny cars), our visitors can return home reinvigorated and ready to start literally building a different imaginary.

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