

TOUCHING CREATURES, SENSING NATURE

The Sensorial 'Consumption' of Cetaceans

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INTRODUCTION

I vividly remember it sitting on the left-hand corner of the kitchen sink unit in my parental home: a little brown bottle containing a magic potion considered to be particularly wholesome for young children. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, I had to ritually consume a spoonful of the syrup every night. Dutch kids commonly loathed *levertraan* (literally: liver oil, for that is what I am referring to), but I actually quite liked its yummy taste. *Levertraan* was reputed to be a product of slaughtered whales. Although this is a myth,¹ I had no problem with it whatsoever. *Levertraan* was just another healthy vitamin supplement and I much preferred it to, for example, oranges or tangerines. The image of a chopped-up gentle giant did not unsettle me at all. At the time, whaling was generally uncontroversial. It even conjured up a romantic image that was fed by sentimental and heroic reports of the hardships whalers endured in their man-to-animal struggles. In 1955, the Netherlands had launched a whale factory vessel – the 'Willem Barendsz' – which, along with eighteen subsidiary catcher boats, was designed to cater for the domestic need of animal protein and oil.² The venture was nothing short of a source of national pride and the media extensively covered the whalers' fortunes, without raising any critical questions. However, with catches dwindling, the 'Willem Barendsz' was sold in 1964. Following the Greenpeace Save the Whale campaigns, commercial whaling became highly controversial in the 1970s and *levertraan* fell into disgrace, which had much to do with the flawed perception of it being a whale product. Eating any part of marine mammals became strongly tabooed, as did killing the animals. If I were to tell my daughters today that they had to consume some part of a whale before going to bed,

they would be appalled and outraged, and they would definitely refuse to taste it. To them, whales are what they currently are to most Western children – and, for that matter, adults: stuffed toys and cute pets captured on films and photographs. At present, whales, not whalers, are heroes of popular culture.

Arguably, within a single generation the perception of whales has shifted from edible commodities to sacrosanct symbols of nature. With whaling having come under increasing scrutiny from environmentalists and with the media exposure their campaigns received, public resistance to whale hunting has swiftly emerged globally. Cetaceans – the order of wholly aquatic marine mammals – have become potent symbols of environmentalism and the poster child for conservation. They represent iconic value and are saturated with polyvalent meaning. Since a few decades ago, whales and dolphins have been imbued with special rights and moral values. They are ‘a symbolic fixture in contemporary western society’ (Stoett 1997:28), ‘a metonym for nature’ (Kalland 1992:21) and invoked ‘as a metaphor for all that is sublime in nature’ (Gupta 1999:1742). At present, cetaceans are at or near the pinnacle of a symbolic hierarchy human beings project onto the animal world (Sanderson 1990, 1994; Kalland 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Einarsson 1993; Ris 1993; Broch 1994; Mathisen 1996; Epstein 2003; Lawrence and Phillips 2004; Oslund 2004; Pritchard 2004; Peace 2005; Brydon 2006). Whales are believed to be inherently special and therefore inappropriate for consumptive use by humans (Bridgewater 2003:556). Coterminous with this perceptual transition from ‘objective’ natural resource into ‘subjective’ key symbol, the image and status of whalers has also changed profoundly. From culture heroes, they have turned into reputed villains, who wantonly and brutally slay the ocean’s gentle giants for human consumption, which, we are told by whaling opponents, is completely unnecessary as well as morally and ethically wrong. This chapter will address the negative stereotyping and stigmatizing of whalers that has accompanied the swing in attitude towards whales. Moreover, it argues that whales are still ‘consumed,’ albeit in different ways, and they continue to be constructed as beings to be acted upon by humans. The senses are obviously important in creating, experiencing and consuming the symbol of ‘the natural’ par excellence. However, as with some animals being more equal than others, so are some senses more important than others.

OUR CETACEAN BRETHERN: CREATING THE SUPER-WHALE MYTH

The anti-whaling discourse initially focused on the dangers of overexploitation and extinction. However, following the discovery that not all whale species were threatened by depletion, the emphasis shifted from ecological concerns to the ethical aspect of cetaceans being distinctly and unequivocally valuable in their own right. This re-conceptualization had far-reaching consequences for the image and representation of whales in popular culture (see, for instance, Lawrence and Phillips 2004:697ff.). In several thought-provoking articles, Norwegian anthropologist Arne Kalland (1992, 1993a, 1993b) examines the diversion of the commodity path of whales and the creation of a mythical 'super-whale.' The environmental movement has converted cetaceans into totems that have come to represent the 'goodness' of nature (and also prove to be excellent iconic fundraisers). Although not all whale species are threatened with extinction, they are often lumped together as *the* endangered whale that needs human protection. Various traits of different species of whales are projected onto this mystified, non-existent super-whale: 'By talking about *the* whale, an image of a single whale possessing *all* these traits ... emerges' (Kalland 1992:20). Moreover, certain characteristics – including intelligence and sentience – are usually attributed to this fictive beast (also see Epstein 2003:316-17; Peace 2005) and supposedly make it akin to human animals. It is not unusual to find designations like 'our friends' or 'our kin in the sea' and 'the humans of the sea.' The iconic status of whales and dolphins that emanated from the environmentalists' campaigns thus led to the anthropomorphizing of cetaceans: 'whales can only be thought benign if they are converted into pets or quasi-humans. This attitude is endemic in accounts of whales, forcing them (metaphorically) into human social structures' (Pritchard 2004:390). With all these positive characteristics, who would not want to have a whale for a companion, friend or relative?

A good example of this re-conceptualization is a recent report on whaling (Brakes *et al.* 2004).³ Arguably, various species of whales show social behaviour 'similar' to that of humans: they have social bonds, adults look after calves and protect them, they communicate, coordinate and cooperate, they are compassionate and intelligent and defend each other, and some species live in families or even matrilineal groups. Whales also trans-

mit learned behaviours, they possess language – even dialects – and some species sing and have personalities and individual identities. As three contributing authors contend: ‘Clearly, there is considerable evidence that culture exists in cetacean societies, even in great whale species. Culture was previously considered to be the province only of humans, or at best, higher primates. The exhibition of culture in cetaceans, therefore, adds to the argument that they are, indeed, highly intelligent animals’ (Parsons *et al.* 2004:21). In thus portraying cetaceans, ‘whalekind’ comes to closely resemble mankind and consequently, feasting on the super-whale borders on cannibalism (Kalland 1992:34). Some even go a step further, as in the following statement: ‘Killing a whale is a more serious sin than killing a human because whales are superior beings to us. They have brains much larger than ours. They are simply better creatures. [...] Killing whales is more barbaric than cannibalism.’⁴ Admittedly, this is a rather extreme example, but many whale protectionists believe that there is indeed a very thin line dividing human beings from whales. Nature is thus incorporated into the cultural realm, and culture into the natural realm.

That many people deem cetaceans majestic and awesome and, in an act of ‘speciesism,’ rank them higher than other animals, is thus inextricably linked with the scientific and popular assumption that whales and dolphins are intelligent, compassionate and sentient creatures, who avail of a vocal proclivity: language, dialects, conversations and, hence, ‘culture.’ However, although some cetacean species have a big brain, this in itself is no proof of intelligence. Based on recent detailed neuro-anatomical research, Paul Manger demonstrates ‘that there are no neurological correlates for the purported intellectual abilities of cetaceans’ (2006:332). Likewise, there is no dolphin or whale ‘language’; merely a limited set of species-specific vocal and non-vocal communication signals. Cetaceans share this capacity with many other animal species: ‘The vocalisations are not a complex interwoven tapestry providing a basis for communication of thoughts and feelings, and they do not exhibit the higher order entropies typical of human language’ (*ibid.*:294). Language cannot be imposed on cetaceans, nor can humans decipher their vocalizations (*ibid.*:318). In conclusion: ‘the evidence in favour of significant intellectual capacities of dolphins is tenuous, and based upon untested, unproven, unquestioned, and anthropomorphic assumptions’ (*ibid.*:298).

It would seem, then, that cetaceans are animals, not *humanoid* animals, after all. Perceptions of whales are based upon imagery and cosmology rather than evidential fact. It is well-known that historically, whales have been classified as ambiguous animals and have been subject to myth creation (Kalland 1992:20-21, 1993b:127-28). This ambiguity has taken on new significance. 'Whales,' writes Karen Oslund, 'have become boundary creatures in anthropological terms – part human, part animal, part domestic and part wild' (2004:79). The meaning the anti-whaling movement has instilled in the super-whale has turned it into a 'cultural object in the imagery of modern urbanites,' comments Charlotte Epstein. She adds:

the symbolic whale is inscribed in the visual environment. In a sense by making the whale so 'present' a relationship is recreated, or rather, simulated, between the whale and the global urban dweller. This relationship is nurtured in the consumption of images and the symbolic values projected onto the whale, and essentially founded in commercial exchange: by purchasing a whale's photograph you adopt it (2003:317).

Indeed, several environmental organizations have offered whales for adoption which is, again, indicative of the human image of cetaceans. If they are not real kin, then at least fictive kin. Get out your wallet and you become a foster parent. In several cases, whales have been given names and attributed personalities. Thus, they are individualized and personalized – although they are at the same time still perceived as members of families. The recent anthropomorphic, socio-centric and subjective representation and interpretation of cetaceans has obviously had profound consequences for the manner in which whalers are usually depicted and engaged.

In contemporary Western societies, many people consider killing whales as an act of barbarism. Therefore, whaling usually kindles fierce aggression on the part of its opponents. This is inextricably linked to the ideological framing of both whales and whalers. Whales are portrayed in favourable terms (they are 'friendly,' 'gentle,' 'peaceful,' 'benign,' 'graceful,' 'magnificent' and so on). By totemic association, whale defenders are equally 'good.' The environmentalists and animal rights campaigners are the self-constituted and self-appointed vigilantes of the innocent gentle giants. In contradiction, whalers are depicted negatively: they are 'evil.' Whereas whales

are humanized, whale hunters are demonized as savage beasts. The activities of the ignoble whalers are believed to be 'inhuman' and incompatible with any 'civilized' society. Through the process of demonizing and binary reasoning, 'the anti-whalers create a totemic dichotomy of mankind, with whales as the totem for themselves and with money as the totem for the whalers' (Kalland 1992:23). However, financial greed need not always be involved in the wish of some peoples to whale.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC BEHEMOTHS AND 'THE SICK DOGS OF CIVILIZATION'

An illuminating case in point is the non-commercial pilot whale drive which Faroese Islanders deem an inalienable part of their culture.⁵ The drive, *grindadráp* in the vernacular, is not pre-planned, as it depends on the sighting of whales near the coast. Nevertheless, it is a highly ritualized and 'remarkably orderly business' (Wylie 1993:352). It consists of herding a pod of pilot whales into shallow bays with small boats, inserting steel gaffs into their blowpipes, hauling them ashore and then swiftly killing them using long knives. Upon concluding the slaughter, the whales are moved to a quay for counting, measuring and butchering. The parts are distributed, free of charge, to participants in the drive and the region's inhabitants. Meticulous regulations, originating in old Norse laws, deal with driving procedures, beaching, killing methods, valuation, distribution and beach cleanup. The *grindadráp* is a communal activity rather than a commercial venture. Harking back to the Viking age, pilot whales have provided the islanders with an important part of their staple diet ever since. Today, they still account for some fifteen per cent of the islanders' meat consumption.

Since the 1980s, Faroese pilot whaling has met with mounting international criticism. Graphic news stories, pictures and video footage of the *grindadráp*, which is invariably accompanied by the spilling of animal blood, have shocked many people. Environmentalist organizations have staged protests, attempted to disrupt the pilot whale hunt and launched pleas to boycott Faroese products. Despite the fact that pilot whales are not an endangered species and as small cetaceans are not covered by the regulations of the International Whaling Commission (IWC),⁶ whaling opponents and animal rights campaigners condemn the custom as being

cruel and inhumane. They argue that the Faroese no longer need the whale meat as they are a modern and affluent society with a high standard of living, and that much of the meat is wasted. They also claim that the hunt is no longer 'traditional,' since it involves using modern tools and means of communication. For example, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) counters the Faroese claim that there is a need to sustain their cultural identity through whaling by stating that the inhabitants of Orkney and the Shetlands had similar whaling traditions, but that 'these islanders have survived the cessation of these practices without detriment to their culture.'⁷ The argument is that Faroese culture has evolved and the islanders are firmly embedded in the global economy today, so that there is no need for self-sufficiency and consumption of whale meat for sustenance.

Several organizations have launched a fierce battle against the whale drive. For example, Cetacea Defense deems the *grindadráp* 'a cruel, barbaric indulgence by the Faroese. It is wholly unnecessary it has no place in this world and must end.'⁸ The organization refers to 'islanders from hell' and 'bloody Faroese.' According to the self-proclaimed representative of the 'Cetacean nation' and 'whalekind,' Paul Watson, the islanders are 'the most ruthless and barbaric whalers' he has ever encountered.⁹ Watson, the founder and figurehead of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, writes that the whale drive 'is one of the bloodiest, most cruel, and most savage traditions in the world. ... It is ritualized brutality and traditional torture, punctuated by public drunkenness' (Watson 2000). His diatribe contends that the Faroese kill more whales than they can consume, inferring that the hunt is done 'for fun, not survival': 'Today it is a sport, big-game hunt, and an orgy of blood, providing entertainment and an outlet for aggression, an excuse to get together, drink, and indulge in a community festival' (ibid.). Some other environmental organizations, including the Environmental Investigation Agency, have also embraced the argument that the slaughter is merely recreational or emphasize the supposed 'carnival atmosphere of entertainment.'¹⁰ Whaling opponents do not see any practical or subsistence need for whale hunting in a modern society. Therefore, they depict the *grindadráp* as an obsolete leisure activity.

Keywords in anti-pilot-whaling actions and public responses pertaining to the *grindadráp* are: 'blood-sport,' 'butchering,' 'maiming,' 'sadism,' 'sick-

ness,' 'murder,' 'murderous killing,' 'wanton brutality,' 'massacring,' 'mass slaughter,' 'unbridled cruelty,' 'medieval cruelty and bloodshed,' 'wholesale torture' and 'persecution.' Such characterizations are often accompanied by epithets such as 'wasteful,' 'senseless,' 'inhumane,' 'brutal,' 'cruel,' 'gruesome,' 'merciless,' 'repugnant,' 'horrific,' 'barbaric' or 'satanic.' With respect to the whale hunters, it is said that they are 'criminals,' 'the sick dogs of civilization,' 'barbarians,' 'a brutal group,' 'sadists' 'bloodthirsty Vikings,' and that they are 'ignorant,' 'ferocious,' 'savage' and so on.¹¹ This is just a random sample of the anti-whalers' pernicious vocabulary. In the binary opposition of 'good guys' versus 'bad guys,' it is crystal clear where the Faroese belong in the view of militant anti-whaling campaigners. There is a steady stream of vitriolic hate mail, directed not only at official institutions but also at ordinary citizens and even school children. Several letters state that the Faroese ought to be bombed out of existence and should rot in hell (see the examples quoted in Sanderson 1994:196-97; Forrestal 2004). What these remarks amount to is that the Faroe Islanders are dehumanized and should be eliminated.

Such labelling is also evident in *Pity the Pilot Whale* (Minasian 1994), a Marine Mammal Fund video, that in binary fashion pits the 'cruel' practices of the Faroese against the 'noble' deeds of New Zealanders who try to guide stranded pods of pilot whales back to the ocean. The real protagonists, however, are the pilot whales, who, unlike the Faroe Islanders, are humanized. The anthropomorphic narrative states that they communicate, interact and cooperate, are intelligent, establish tight communities and lifelong friendships, have complex lifestyles and social structures – qualities 'we should admire, embrace and emanate.' The stranding of a pod of whales in New Zealand usually causes massive (international) media coverage and evokes the response of whale rescuers to save the cetaceans. Emotions often run high, particularly when the efforts prove to be in vain or the whales succumb before they can be rescued. For example, when in November 2004 fifty-three pilot whales out of a pod of seventy-four had already died upon discovery near Whangamata, it purportedly looked like a 'mass funeral.' Attempts to save the surviving twenty-one whales took hours, and all but one made it back to the sea. There was a burial ritual for the dead whales. As the online edition of the *New Zealand Herald* (December 1, 2004) reports:



FIGURE 1 Pilot whales killed in a *grindadráp* near the village of Hvalba on the Faroese island of Suðuroy, 2002 (photo Erik Christensen, reproduced with the photographer's permission).



FIGURE 2 Pilot whale stranding on Urutiti Beach, New Zealand, 2006 (photo Jane Pares, reproduced with the photographer's permission).

Anglican minister Walter Wells arrived to farewell the dead with a *karakia* [Maori prayers and incantations]. 'They are the children of Tangaroa, the god of the sea. They breathe the same air as us and blood runs through them just like humans,' he said, spraying each dead animal with water before it was dragged by tractor to a mass grave down the beach. 'Their spirit is just like ours,' Mr Wells said. Soon after a cheer and cries of 'Go you beauty' and 'Go Jonah go' rang out.¹²

Here, too, it is evident that whales are anthropomorphized. It is pretty much the inverse way of dealing with, thinking about and relating to cetaceans as encountered in the Faroe Islands. Concomitantly, whalers and whale rescuers are, in totemic association, at opposite ends of the classificatory gamut, as the narration and visual rhetoric of *Pity the Pilot Whale* unequivocally explicate.

However, the fiercer the opposition and the more the Faroese are vilified, the stronger they want to defend, legitimize and continue the *grindadráp* (Nauerby 1996:164).¹³ Recent opinion polls show that 95 per cent of the Faroese support the whale drive. They regard the environmentalists' attacks as 'offensive and untruthful and intended to besmirch [their] reputation' (Joensen 1988:18). Interestingly, the fact that the Faroese whale drive is non-commercial has not worked to the advantage of its practitioners. The free sharing of whale meat and blubber is regarded as an 'unnecessary indulgence' (Sanderson 1994:198), irreconcilable with a cash-based economy. Kate Sanderson argues that '[t]he reasons for the persistent and aggressive campaigning to stop Faroese whaling can be found in the nature of *grind* itself and the ambiguities it presents in relation to predominant cultural perceptions of nature and human society found in the urbanized western world' (1994:189). Limiting myself to the latter argument, she points out that the slaughter is conducted in public by many hunters performing their work simultaneously. The *grindadráp* 'retains the characteristics of the precarious exploitation of an untamed environment of pre-modern times, as opposed to the controlled and industrialized exploitation of nature characteristic of modern Western societies today' (ibid.:195). Nonetheless, it happens in a modern and wealthy society, with modern tools, and it is highly regulated, making for ambiguity between the wild and the social. In the view of urbanite Europeans, 'the hunter is at one with

the unspoiled wilderness in which he hunts and must not therefore display any of the incongruous trappings or influences of “modern civilization” (ibid.:198). However, for the Faroese, [e]ating meat from whales or seals is as natural ... as eating pork, beef or poultry is to others.¹⁴ They put themselves on a par with indigenous peoples who seek the right to take whales for subsistence. The Faroese also claim to be closer to nature than people living in Europe’s metropolises, where the direct human relationship to nature has been thoroughly repressed (Joensen 1988; Nauerby 1996). Not only do the islanders kill the pilot whales; they also prepare, cook and eat them. In contradistinction, Western urbanites are disconnected and alienated from the killing and butchering of animals (see, for instance, Vialles 1994). Still, they, too, desire to be in close touch with nature, mimetically or actually, and they consume cetaceans in several (sensorial) ways. According to Jeremy Cherfas, ‘people have a powerful urge to get close to wild animals, to be near them and to feel them. The reasons for this are many and complex, and probably involve evolutionary memories of hunting and a sense of power over nature’ (1984:36). Nowhere is this more clear than in settings where animals are held captive for the human gaze and touch.

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH ‘NATURE’: LEVIATHANS AS SHOWCASE

The confinement of marine mammals first came about in the late nineteenth century. However, it was the popularity of the 1960s *Flipper* films and television series that significantly enhanced the entertainment value of dolphins in marine theme parks. Bottlenose dolphins and orcas in particular were and are made to perform for audiences that gaze in awe at their magnificence and ‘radical bodily difference’ (Desmond 1999:146). As metonymic exemplars of the wild (ibid.:147-49), they are consumed with the human eye. Viewing walls enable continual watching, and during opening hours dolphins cannot escape the stressful sights and sounds of visitors. In some cases, the designation of cetaceans as pets should be taken literally. For example, SeaWorld San Diego boasts a Petting Pool, dubbed the Dolphin Encounter, where visitors can meet their apparent urge to make physical (tactile) contact with dolphins, while keeping their feet dry. A SeaWorld television commercial explicitly used ‘Touch the Magic’ as its title

(Davis 1995). The audience are made to believe that they are in close *touch* with 'nature.' In fact, however, the park is a thoroughly tamed, planned, engineered, controlled and sanitized cultural environment where animals 'perform' a fictive naturalness (Davis 1997; Desmond 1999:150-51). Despite this 'culturalization of nature,' intricate 'visual and rhetorical structures' invoke the concept of the natural (Desmond 1999:177).

However, visitors can go a step beyond this and share the same medium as the captive cetaceans in the Dolphin Interaction Program. SeaWorld's online brochure promises 'an incredible eye-to-eye look' at dolphins, and visitors can 'feel their smooth skin, give training signals and even feed them.'¹⁵ The experience is profoundly commercial: admission fees amount to US\$150. In her highly critical book on SeaWorld, folklorist Susan G. Davis writes that as a 'piece of industrial magic,' it 'represents an enormous contradiction. Using living animals, captive seas, and flourishing landscapes, the theme park has organized the subtle and contradictory cultural meanings of nature into a machine for mass consumption' (1997:30). Since the animals are confined, the visitors' desire to experience nature may result in a sense of mastery (Davis 1995; Desmond 1999). The SeaWorld parks are by no means an exception. 'Swim-with-the-dolphin' opportunities are available in many other marine theme parks across the world – a dozen or so in the USA alone – and corporeal human-dolphin encounters are increasingly popular. According to a recent report, such physical proximity and cross-species intimacy with captive cetaceans harbours unacceptable risks for both the cetaceans and the public and leads to animal welfare problems (see WDCS and HSUS 2003). It is an example of a purported 'green consumerism' that instead of bridging the nature/culture gap seems to be widening it.

However, even in 'real' nature, so-called ecotourism offers excursions to observe, touch, feed and swim with cetaceans. Whale-watching tours have increased dramatically over the past few decades. Environmental organizations have stimulated this development because: whale watching precludes whaling and is a viable economic alternative; it allegedly induces conservation; whale-watching boats enable the carrying out of research; and viewing free-ranging whales is preferable to watching captive marine mammals (Corkeron 2004:847; see also Ris 1993; Hoyt and Hvenegaard 2002; Neves-Graça 2002). Such tours are a multi-million dollar business and – taking a free ride on the super-whale myth – their organizers attempt to

'sell' a green image. Participants are invited 'to reach out and touch nature' (Kalland 1992:28). Although there is a dearth of knowledge about the motivations and cultural and environmental values of whale watchers (Higham and Lusseau 2007), circumstantial evidence suggests that encounters with whales bring about profound sensorial and emotional sensations. Whales are consumed with the eye and captured in images for re-viewing. Whale watchers also stress the fact that whales look *back*; they are believed to be observing human beings in their unnatural environment (and also to be 'waving' to them with their flukes or flippers). As in marine mammal parks, the urge to feel the animals appears to be deep-seated. Touching whales in the wild is invariably reported to be an exhilarating experience. Many literally feel at one with nature. In fact, however, cetaceans are relegated to the sphere of spectacle and entertainment, 'still a consumption' (Pritchard 2004:387; also see Peace 2005:194). It is an orchestrated and controlled event. The tour operators *guarantee* whale sightings, the whales have to perform their act, the whale watchers are under the impression that to view whales means to be environmentally aware and contributes to their conservation: 'Throughout, the emphasis is on socialising, being interactive, and getting "eyeball to eyeball" with the whales because it is in the realization of this purported intimacy that this encounter with nature becomes an extraordinary, unique or unprecedented experience' (Mühlhäusler and Peace 2001:376).¹⁶ Interestingly, under the discursive guidance of tour operators the anthropomorphic image of the super whale is refracted during the encounter: the whales observed are experienced as 'egos' not unlike the individual observer (Peace 2005:205).

The encounter often triggers intense emotions. For some, meeting whales in the wild is nothing short of a spiritual or religious experience; a pilgrimage to the sacred sites of saintly cetaceans: 'Whale watching at sea perhaps exploits semi-religious feelings of awe and the sublime that are lacking in the modern secular world' (Pritchard 2004:172). The pilgrims are in search of 'relics' – that is, whales – to heal their concerns about the predicament of nature and the ritualized procedures provide the fantasy of becoming part of the 'purity' and 'truer real' of nature (Ris 1993:161; Desmond 1999:190). New Age adepts, in particular, imbue whales and dolphins with special significance and powers; there is a widespread belief that cetaceans possess therapeutic and healing capabilities, that they want to talk

to humans and that one day unlimited interspecies interaction, sociability and communication will be feasible (Neves-Graça 2002:257ff.; Pritchard 2004:391ff.; Servais 2005). New Age books and websites abound with reports of remarkable and mystical or enchanting encounters with whales or dolphins, in which the authors experienced kinship and 'oneness' with them. Many claim they have been transformative events in their life. Take, for example, the following account by Teresa Wagner, a US citizen who saw her first whale – a humpback – in 1988 and was immediately 'smitten':

I knew I was with family. I knew I was somehow home, though I didn't yet understand why. I also knew I was in the presence of a great being. [...] I was at one with this whale, a profound oneness I never before experienced with anyone, any species, anywhere. As I cried soft tears of ecstasy, telling him over and over, 'I love you, and thank you for coming,' I distinctly heard him speak to me. He gently and very knowingly offered detailed, loving guidance on very personal issues in my life, and said he would be honored to continue to be available to assist and guide me through my life.¹⁷

After relating how meeting the whale changed her life and how she longed to see more whales, Wagner continues saying that she 'remembered having many lives as a humpback, and that my first lives on earth were as a humpback. So the yearning to be "home" with them as I struggled with being human made more and more sense and was less confusing.' This account is by no means exceptional or atypical (see Servais 2005). New Age authors cast dolphins and whales as gentle, spiritual, wise and superior creatures; they idealize them to godlike status and often recount 'miracles' and tales of wonder.

Still, this conceptualization of the 'supernatural' cetacean – whether in diabolical or divine guise – is reminiscent of similar beliefs attributed to indigenous whaling peoples. Perhaps surprisingly, such complete identification with whales can also be found among traditional whalers in Europe. As Katja Neves-Graça (2005) notes in her fascinating anthropological account of whaling in Lajes do Pico (Azores, Portugal), the whale hunter has to become one with the whale in order to be successful: 'A whale can only be killed by another whale. In any other circumstance it is butchery.'

What connects man and beast is ‘the bodily-sensory exchange of information.’ Complete understanding can only be achieved by ‘tuning into’ whales and ‘the notion of resonating with whales translated into acquired practical knowledge whereby the whaler could, at an unconscious level that was not rationally articulated, guess (sense) the behaviour of whales’ (Neves-Graça 2002:164). When the harpooner strikes a whale, man and beast are literally tied together. It is an intensely physical and emotional experience: ‘The whale’s throe is the whaler’s agony’ and when the ‘whale is dead, the whaler is mortified’ (Neves-Graça 2005). The author continues: ‘yet, it is at this very moment where life and death meet, that the whaler glimpses the sublime and senses it with all his being. [...] For a whaler of Lajes, it is a fundamental truth that “nobody loved a whale more than a whale hunter.” For them, this truth is sacred.’ Unlike the experiential encounter of whale gazers and huggers, the traditional small-scale whalers’ engagement with nature was a fully sensed and embodied relation.¹⁸

CONCLUSIONS: MAKING SENSE OF NATURE

In what appears to be a rapid sequence of twentieth-century popular culture imagery shifts, the general public conceived cetaceans first as utilitarian resources (documentary films glorifying industrial whalers) and subsequently as icons (for example, *Flipper*, *Free Willy* films) or symbols of ‘nature’ in their authentic state (New Age literature and audiovisual recordings). This perceptual and conceptual transformation impinged upon the image of whale hunters. The framing process in the anti-whaling discourse is easy to discern: derisive comments are made referring to the barbarism of whale hunters, depicting them as drunken brutes, criminals, murderers, sadists and so on. At best, they are said to be uncivilized and a rung or two below on the evolutionary ladder. It is a fairly typical example of a classificatory process of denigration and dehumanization – the taxonomic tropes that whalers are beasts whereas whales are surrogate kin – and even discursive and mimetic elimination – as in the hostile remarks that whalers and whale eaters ought to be bombed. With such close identification with whales, anti-whalers depict whaling as an illegitimate and morally corrupt activity, and whalers as a bunch of bloodthirsty cannibals who devour ‘our

brethren in the sea.' In totemic association, whale protectionists identify with the innately 'benign' whale and, by extension, they themselves are 'benign.' However, militant anti-whalers are waging fierce battles against whalers and pro-whalers, using the metaphor of war and designating themselves as 'warriors,' 'police,' 'defence' and so on.¹⁹ Protecting whales, their totem animal, has become their 'sacred duty' and they target anyone who seeks to kill and consume cetaceans (Kalland 1993b:129).

As Claude Lévi-Strauss would have it, totem animals are good to think not good to eat. In most Western societies consumption of whale meat and oil is currently inconceivable. Eating any part of a whale conjures up an image of savagery – for some it is even worse than cannibalism. In the sensorial consumption of cetaceans, tasting whale meat is strongly tabooed. However, although corporeal whale products are shunned as commissariat and have been decommmodified, whales are still consumed in myriad ways: in gaze, in images, in language, in touch, in symbols, in iconography. Cetaceans are now mainly for watching, definitely not eating. Along with it have come new forms of commodification. Nowhere are visual consumption, 'touching experiences' and commodification of whales more apparent than in marine theme parks and in whale-watching tours. The former assure visitors that their way of seeing nature is 'natural.' However, sight is unimpeded and purified and visitors get to see nature in a way that would be highly unlikely in the 'real world' (Davis 1995:209). Moreover, the marine parks' rendition of whales is as nature/culture hybrids. Confined and trained cetaceans are transformed into giant pets that simultaneously embody and transcend the dissimilarity between animal and human, wild and tame, nature and culture. In this artificial realm, the natural is thoroughly de-contextualized, cultivated, conditioned, disciplined and staged, temporarily closing the gap and crossing the border between nature and culture through a set of anthropomorphically framed behaviours or performances and marine mammal physicality: 'The mind/body binary that underlies the culture/nature division is overcome ... in this framing as the whales are given the attributes of reason and emotion' (Desmond 1999:237).

Pretty much the same applies to watching whales in the oceanic wilderness. The immersion in 'nature' is deemed an authentic experience of the natural. However, the desire of whale watchers 'to "experience" the "real" whales' (Pritchard 2004:378) obscures for them the unrealities of eco-tour-

ism. Like gazing at trained marine mammals, whale watching is in fact a deeply cultural, theatrical, aesthetic and commercial representation of the 'natural': a visual spectacle that is a simulacrum of sensing nature. This visual obsession would seem to epitomize the Western aesthetic appreciation and 'spectacularization' of nature as part of our ocularcentrism (Peace 2005:205; also see Franklin 2001). Cetaceans are perceived to be 'on display' to satisfy our visual 'needs.' Both marine theme parks and whale-watching tours 'rest on hyper-sensory experiences in which certain senses, especially that of vision, are reduced to a limited array of features, are then exaggerated and come to dominate the other senses' (Macnaghten and Urry 1998:123). It would thus seem that vision has become the most powerful of the senses in sensing nature. Thoroughly estranged from the whalers' epistemology of practice and total sensorial experience, whalekind is now predominantly in the eye of the beholder. However, visual practices are intertwined with sensorial modalities of the body that inform and infiltrate the experience of vision (Bishop 2004:118). Moreover, it is through looking that people are *in touch* with nature and the tactile experience of whale petting and hugging is the emotional zenith of all sensorial sensations.

NOTES

- 1 The common English designation, cod liver oil, is more appropriate since the substance is predominantly produced from the livers of gadoids.
- 2 An overhauled freighter that began whaling in 1946 preceded this factory vessel. A documentary film of its operation (*Walvis in zicht!* [Whale Sighted!]) was produced by Polygoon-Profilti in 1947 and screened in cinemas across the country. It attracted a record audience of over 400,000 viewers. The film's protagonists are the whalers, while whales are radically objectified and reduced to the litres of oil and the packets of margarine they yield.
- 3 Also see Kalland (1992). Notably, d'Amato and Chopra (1991) hyper-sentimentalize whales, which they deem 'entitled to consideration as moral entities' (ibid.:61).
- 4 <http://mindprod.com/feedback/animalsracist.html>. Accessed November 17, 2004.
- 5 For anthropological accounts, see Joensen (1976, 1988, 1990), Wylie (1981, 1993), Sanderson (1990, 1994) and Nauerby (1996). See also Gibson-Lonsdale

- (1990). Data derived from these publications is supplemented by 'netnography.'
- 6 In 1986, the IWC introduced a ten-year moratorium on commercial whaling, with an exemption for 'aboriginal subsistence whaling.' The pursuit of small cetaceans like pilot whales was not banned. In 2006, the moratorium was deemed 'no longer necessary,' as scientists agreed that many whale species and stocks are abundant.
 - 7 <http://www.wdcs.org/dan/publishing.nsf/allweb/83FE72454D061D4E80256DAA0035F570>. Last accessed July 21, 2004.
 - 8 <http://www.cetaceadefence.org/index.php?option=news&task=viewarticle&sid=9>. Accessed July 21, 2004.
 - 9 Interview with Paul Watson, September 1, 2003. http://www.canis.info/interviews/paul_watson_english.htm. Accessed October 5, 2004. In an open letter to Norwegians, Watson wrote: 'I am speaking to you on behalf of the Cetacean nation. I am representing whalekind in an effort to reach a state of co-existence with humankind.' See: http://www.highnorth.no/Library/Movements/Sea_Shepherd/le-to-th.htm. Accessed January 11, 2007.
 - 10 <http://www.faroer.org/>. Accessed October 5, 2004. Organizations like Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund do not oppose the drive because pilot whales are not an endangered species.
 - 11 See, for example, <http://www.ecop.info/english/e-faroe.htm>; <http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/info00/0032.html>; http://www.uci-endingcaptivity.org/from_dr__ann_west.htm; <http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/info00/0032.html>; <http://www.inkokomo.com/dolphin/faroer.html>; http://www.highnorth.no/guestbook/guests_2000_1.htm; http://www.lysator.liu.se/nordic/scripts/feedback/new_database/_nordic_scn_faq361.txt. Accessed August 31, 2004 and January 11, 2007. See also Joensen (1988:19), Kalland (1992:22-23), Sanderson (1990:196, 1994:197-198). Interestingly, in public discourse the Faroese refrain from using similar pernicious designations to describe whaling opponents.
 - 12 http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/story.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=8501137. Accessed November 25, 2006.
 - 13 Similar resistance is kindled in other 'pro-whaling' societies, including Iceland (Brydon 1990, 1996) and Norway (Broch 1994; Mathisen 1996). For example, the consumption of whale meat in Norway increased following anti-whaling protests. A news reporter noted that a meal of whale meat 'developed into a kind of Norwegian Communion - a Holy Meal where we were eating into the Norwegian part of ourselves' (quoted in Mathisen 2006:122). Heini Olsen, a Faroese man interviewed in a documentary (Leith

- 1991), says that pilot whaling is 'not a matter of to be or not to be, but *how* to be.'
- 14 Lyngø, O. (2001) How Can Anyone Kill a Seal? How Can Anyone Possibly Kill a Whale? Available at: <http://www.maninnature.com/MMammals/Whales/Whales1b.html>. Accessed July 21, 2004. Their remarks amount to saying that they are (in) nature, whereas 'civilized' Westerners are thoroughly detached from nature.
 - 15 http://www.4adventure.com/SWC/sp_dolphin_interaction_program.aspx. Accessed January 5, 2007. In the mid-1990s, the four SeaWorld theme parks, owned by the Anheuser-Busch corporation, entertained 11.6 million paying visitors per year (Davis 1997:27). SeaWorld San Diego alone accommodated three million visitors annually and produced fifteen to twenty per cent profits. Although it sells an image of being an educational and entertainment facility, it is in fact a profit-oriented corporate business. The management of many such theme parks now legitimize their existence by emphasizing their research facilities and breeding programmes, melding 'commerce with the salvage paradigm of a vanishing wilderness' (Desmond 1999:148).
 - 16 Although research into the impact of whale- and dolphin-watching tours on cetacean behaviour is still in its infancy, evidence suggests that the effects are negative (Constantine *et al.* 2004; Orams 2004; Richter *et al.* 2006). Because of their vulnerability to disruption, the US government is attempting to 'deter feeding, touching and swimming with dolphins in the wild' (WDCS and HSUS 2003:8).
 - 17 <http://www.animalsinourhearts.com/whales/twhales1.htm>. Accessed January 9, 2007. Some have also testified feeling 'one' with cetaceans in 'swimming-with-the-dolphin' programmes (see Kalland 1992:30; Servais 2005).
 - 18 For a similar argument in regard to hunters, see Franklin (2001). On 'sensing nature' more generally, see Macnaghten and Urry (1998:104-33), who devote particular attention to the 'spectacularization' of nature for aesthetic consumption. I do not contend that sensory experiences of whale gazers are entirely restricted to seeing and – if possible – touching. As Rebecca Bishop argues in respect of zoo-gazing, 'practices of looking are accompanied by sensory modalities of the body which inform and infiltrate visual experience. The verbal responses of audiences to enclosed animals are woven into an embodied, visceral and sensory choreography: a "making sense" of the animal spectacle' (2004:118).
 - 19 For instance, Cetacea Defense, World Whale Police, Ocean Defense International and the Greenpeace vessel 'Rainbow Warrior' (also see Kalland 1992:21). 'Captain' Paul Watson likes to dress in uniform with insignia and his boats – among them the 'Ocean Warrior' – fly a pirate flag.

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