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Tourism earthly attachments in the Anthropocene

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ABSTRACT

This paper rethinks tourism and its spatial implications under the terms of the Anthropocene. This rethinking recognises our intricate dependencies with each other and the places and spaces we make in the everyday. The paper argues for the need to create thick and rich stories, stories which can counter the current dominant consumptive desires. Herein stories of 'earthly attachments' and 'conviviality' are proposed, centred on care, responsibility and reciprocity. The place of tourism geographies is arguable in valuing multiple perspectives from the more-than/non-human world and the other in their myriad manifestations and geographical variability. Realising the virtual potential of earthly attachments, makes each and every place rich, meaningful and a source of inspiration for us all. Telling stories thereof, enlivens the senses and thereby offers a way to penetrate the desiring machine of consumptive capitalism which at current animates our needs and wants and is leading to the climate catastrophes of the Anthropocene.

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Introduction

In the opening editorial of *Tourism Geographies*, the founding editor Alan A. Lew (1999) announced that the journal intended to carve out a 'place' for tourism geographies in the domain of tourism. This place has taken shape in the past 25 years on the pages of this journal, but how we understand this place is of great importance to me. This importance goes over and beyond where we find ourselves in the academic world as tourism geographers. A place matters in the sense that what we do, here and now, matters for each other, the whole of the planet and well into the future. This comprehension and the challenges it entail is wrapped up in the notion of the 'Anthropocene' as I will outline. The concept comes from a paper thus entitled by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) at the start of the century. As such, it was presented simply as a recognition of the fact that mankind (the anthropos) is by now

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transforming the global ecosystem with impacts legible in the geology of the Earth for longer and shorter periods of time.

Geology defines shifts from one period in geological history to another through so called 'stratigraphic markers'. These mark a notable shift or change in the qualities, properties, or content of particular rock layers under our feet, layers which stretch billions of years back. Based on these markers, geology defines its time scale and geochronological units. The smallest units of these periods are the epochs and ages. For instance, approximately 12.000 years ago, when the last ice age ended, geology talks of a shift from the Pleisto-cene epoch to the Holo-cene. Now another shift has occurred, whereby we enter the Anthro-po-cene epoch. The stratigraphic marker of this shift is the spike in radioactive isotopes following surface and oceanic nuclear testing in the wake of WWII. This marker prompts geologists to state that the Anthropocene started on 16 July 1945 (see Zalasiewicz et al., 2019). This geological marker, however, coincides with another fundamental socio-economic shift of great relevance. This is one where an ever more globalising and interconnected world shifted into consumptive overdrive after WWII, fuelled by the enormously productive apparatus put in place during the war effort. The development of inbound international tourism in numbers demonstrates this 'Great Acceleration' of consumption clearly. Seen in tandem with the onset of the Anthropocene, it is evident how Earth System trends are being decidedly thrown out of kilter at our behest through this boom in consumption. The Anthropocene thus marks a shift into a novel and perilous epoch whose signature is irreversible human impact on the Earth and nigh all life processes. Recognized thereby with the Anthropocene is not only the dawn of a new epoch in geology, but the fact that mankind is entering a new climatic regime, albeit on very varied terms, which profoundly challenges the ways in which we have done things.

These varied terms hint at geography. The argument to be presented in this contribution is about how to rethink tourism and its spatial implications under the terms of the Anthropocene, maintained and partly brought about by rampant globalised consumerism (Lewis & Maslin, 2018). This rethinking recognises our intricate dependencies with each other and the places and spaces we make in the everyday. About these places we need to create thick and rich stories, stories which can counter the current dominant consumptive desires. Herein stories of 'earthly attachments' and 'conviviality' are proposed, centred on care, responsibility and reciprocity. The place of tourism geographies is arguably in valuing multiple perspectives from the more-than/non-human world and the other in their myriad manifestations and geographical variability.

What is in a word?

Albeit a relatively recent term, the Anthropocene has already spawned a raging debate across the humanities and social sciences as to the driving force of our newly realised geological prominence. A fundamental point of critique is what 'mankind' is being referred to? If the post-war great acceleration is scrutinised, it will reveal that it is not driven by the force of an *Anthropos* anonymous, but by an un-proportional and

particular few. The relatively rich and affluent part of the Anthropos called tourists who enact their mobilities for pleasurable reasons for instance, are surely different from subsistence farmers in the Sahel when it comes to planetary geological impacts. So, perhaps it is the uneven geographies of “the Capitalocene” (Moore, 2016) rather than the Anthropocene that should be the primary concern for tourism geographers? Moreover, mankind is driven by a multitude of beliefs, morals and ethics that are connected with everyday sense-making, feelings of belonging and emotional attachments to life and land. These are attachments thus informed by earthly entanglements which highlight how place and geography matters.

In figuring what these concerns might be about in the context of tourism, my Swedish colleague and I published in 2016 an edited volume on what we saw as ‘an urgent emerging encounter’ of tourism and the Anthropocene (Gren & Huijbens, 2016). We concluded the volume with an outline of three tentative tourism destinies which all must be sustained by what we termed ‘geo-ethical’ decisions, centered on the Earth as our foregrounded matter of concern. The proposed destinies of stay-home tourism, non-carbon travel and an augmented sense of relationality through destination stewardship, were justified based on a nuanced ‘geo-logisation’ of hospitality ethics. These are ethics transgressing issues of equity (e.g., of access and participation), professionalism or other human-centred ethics. These are to be approached by incorporating geo-resources at its core, their origins and usage, and their co-option into value creation in tourism. Think for instance of aviation fuel and what its co-option might mean in understanding tourism’s impact and relational span. Later, we summarized our take, putting forward a research agenda for tourism geographies. Therein we conclude;

The role of tourism in the fate of the geographically differentiated Anthropos as one with the Earth is unneglectable. Planetary environmental issues and sustainability, limits and boundaries, climatically safe operating spaces in terms of politics, science, ethics, materialities, practices and ways of being and doing, all represent only some of the important tourism geography research angles. The Anthropocene tourism geography map is one never complete and in essence unscalable. It is to us the journey, not the destination that matters, as the latter can never be finally reached. (Gren & Huijbens, 2019, p. 125)

This tracing of relations as an on-going journey straddling human intentions and the more-than/non-human world centered on the ‘geos’ I later explored and outlined in terms of ‘earthly attachments’ and the necessity to develop these in the face of the challenges brought by the Anthropocene (Huijbens, 2021). Therein I concluded;

Each place matters and we cannot be alienated from it, nor render it abstract for purposes of capital gains. The here and the now for each and everyone of us is valuable and meaningful. Folded into every here and now is the whole ecology of the place, extending into the depths of time and bringing together a wealth of trajectories we are entangled with at each and every moment. These entanglements are more than us, augment us and expand us ... (p. 178, see also Abram, 1996, p. 216)

These entanglements I illustrated with stories about steam, stones, sand, bikes and peat in Iceland and the Netherlands, emphasising their respective aliveness and thereby how we can attach to the elusive Earth there and then. Looking through contributions on the Anthropocene in the pages of *Tourism Geographies* one can

certainly find some indications of explorations into these entanglements, albeit only after 2019. Gibson (2021) in his call for an 'integrative upgrade' of critical tourism studies uses the Anthropocene challenges as a leitmotif in getting beyond binaries and flattening hierarchies of thought with a planetary perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic features through the lens of the Anthropocene in a few publications, either thinking it as paradigmatic example of our interconnected world consuming the planet to the extent that it is fighting back, or thinking it as the opportunity to reset tourism practices, education or mobilities towards a more regenerative and inclusive tourism. More-than/non-human entanglements also feature as an avenue of research in a couple of papers. Therein, thinking through souvenirs and animal relations in exploring entanglements of meaning and matter between places and humans mediated through the other is the focus.

As hinted at in the introduction, in the Anthropocene, our current mode of economy and society is wholly untenable and the future is profoundly uncertain in the hands of an Earth which can longer be considered a stable backdrop for our undertakings, but a dynamic relational entity at one with our undertakings in a myriad of place specific ways. The Earth we need to thus reckon with and relate to is through place-based enactments and specificities. This geographical nuance diverts ideas from seeing the Earth as subject to a technoscientific enterprise of fixing a planetary engine gone faulty. For earthly attachments and through recognition of our place-based entanglements, we need to seek further afield than the rational abstractions of planetary holism, yet maintain an earthly outlook. As the timescales of geological and human history coalesce in the Anthropocene, the question is how tourism geographies becomes useful in negotiating and navigating futures in this context. By now, and in the Anthropocene, the becoming-Earth in each place and time needs to be incorporated into the power geometries of global tourism and here, most certainly geographies matter.

The imperative of earthly attachments and storytelling

At our core we are storytellers and we make sense of our world through stories and sense-making that to a large extent feed the abstractions and ideals that we cultivate. It is important to understand which stories are being told where, why, by whom and for whom? Abstract reasoning does not really do justice to cultural nuances and sensibilities, and the fact that humans emerge from and are imbricated with the relational meshwork we call place. Yielding agency from us to these entanglements may evoke a sense of compromising our ability to act and be. Whilst indeed entanglements connote a situation that is difficult if not impossible to escape, to me, they connote deep involvement. Through coming to terms with these entanglements we realise they are virtually full of potential in their multiplicity. Thereby, all that comes together to make for a place is far beyond what we can grasp or realise through cognition as it is merely a fraction of what we are and can become. The question is, how can we make sense of that?

One starting point would be to provide a counter point to business as usual. What drives us to the climatic crisis with its profound impacts on all biophysical processes is consumerism which has become a ubiquitous way of life for humanity facilitated through ever tighter globalised mesh of connectivity and digital integration. By now,

'capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable' (Fisher, 2009, p. 8). This particular mesh is profoundly premised on the logic of capital accumulation with its implicit logic of perpetual growth and expansion (see Harvey, 2017). In the process, *everything* is being commodified and consumption is emerging as a privileged site for the fabrication of self and society. Culture and identity on an individual level and life itself are becoming fictitious commodities to be traded and sold, and tourism most certainly plays its part. These dynamics in themselves are worth interrogating, not least the significance of the unconscious and irrational or affective aspects of tourism consumption and how these relate to libidinal economy, the production of desire and its impossible attainment and satisfaction, propelling further growth and diversification in seeking gratification (see: *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 84).

Developing earthly attachments, as opposed to libidinal ones, is however premised on a more horizontal way of looking at our relations to each other and our material surroundings. Over and above a 'geopolitical turn' and 'geographical imaginations' (Mostafanezhad, 2018) the idea here is to pursue things and people in action and the ways in which spaces and places are made for by these actions and activities, imbricated with earthly biophysical processes. Whilst this "means placing the design question on each of our shoulders as to what assemblages to associate with and/or extricate from" (Bennett, 2010, p.112), we need to be attentive to "the complexities, frictions, intractabilities, and conundrums of 'matter in relation'" (Abrahamsson et al., 2015, p. 13).

This open and emergent sense of the human, enmeshed with matter in relation, sets the world as neither a subject nor object of representation. Thereby one must enter into a more active 'sense' of the world, ultimately revolving around spacing with the Earth. Studies in tourism geographies already give indications of the role of encountering the material, whereby critical practices are interrogated in developing regenerative tourism (Cave & Dredge, 2020). But from a more explicit geographical angle, inspiration for spacing with the Earth can be drawn from the recent call for developing 'speculative maps' involving patiently following things in their movements. Making for such geographies "requires the tool of walking, taking a journey as a way of grasping the world (sometimes quite literally, and physical contact with the ground as a characteristic of living beings." (Ait-Touati et al., 2022, p. 80). Tourism geographies on a quest to develop narratives and such maps of life require us to turn the globe inside out and reveal the thickness of the mesh of life within each plot of land or parcel of space. The focus is thereby squarely on the 'critical zone' where life unfolds and persists, ever on-going, weaving stories through maps that act as thick descriptions of the living landscape to inform the politics of the encounter with each other and the more-than/non-human other. These are emergent stories of earthly attachments, whereby the productive potentialities often hidden within the materialities of a place and potential destinations are recognised and worked with precipitating a more critical and imaginative mode of being.

These emergent stories are premised on a strategic distinction between people and planet, people and nature in tracing where things come from and where they go. Indeed our deliberations, the stories we tell, the myths we create and the meanings we make have profound impact as debates around the Anthropocene should make clear. This strategic distinction helps us maintain a clearer sense of the Anthropocene challenges—yet making sure we see the 'anthropos' as the differentiated

species that it is. Acknowledging certain forms of human exceptionalism is thus no impediment to recognising more-than/non-human relations. It is precisely because we make for the places which in turn make for us, that we need to distinguish between the different elements at play to meaningfully understand the relations that constitute their inter-relation through tracing these in action.

How these tracings can create spaces and maintain stories of other ways of being and doing is the design question that Bennett (2010) has placed on each of our shoulders. The stories we tell make matter *matter*, making for speculative maps of scrumpled spaces wherein alternative world views can be forged and gain hold, informing the myriad ways in which life can be reconceived together with the places and spaces we hold dear.

Future trends

The Anthropocene is a geological epoch of our making, meaning we are entangled with forces far beyond our grasp and even control. The way to address the challenge of making living in the Anthropocene bearable is through knowing history, most particularly when trying to reimagine the future of geography. We need to embark upon a 'pluralistic rediscovery' of other geographies and the ways in which they come to matter. Not only is the idea then to create a 'more hopeful and more interesting story' (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021, p. 3), but one that is informed by geographical richness and detail featuring people as nurturing and care-giving, countering some of the 'mythical substructures of our 'social science' (*ibid*, p. 525) informing individualised, consumptive and competitive capitalism at current. Through a recognition of earthly attachments through a careful tracing of our place-specific entanglements, knowing and understanding inextricably fuses with world-making. For this, awareness is not enough. Caring is crucial "... to exhibit the concerns that attach and hold together matters of fact [and] is to enrich and affirm reality by contributing further articulations" (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 39).

Stories help reorient our values and what we hold dear. A story offers a conceptual grasp of complexity and the capacity to build emotional interest in it. Similarly, Abram (1996, p. 120) maintains that "stories, like rhymed poems or songs, readily incorporate themselves into our felt experience." But these are stories that can only be "judged according to whether it makes sense" as in enlivening the senses for earthly attachments (*ibid*, p. 265). To take a tourism example; the ultimate paraphernalia of the fridge magnet can thereby "serve as an object that links temporality, site and materiality, offering a location around which affective experience, sensory belonging, stories and memories accumulate." (Edensor, 2022, p. 115).

Taking cue from Abram (1996) stories to me have a more profound role than expanding our consciousness in the here and now as we fondle a fridge magnet. Stories are carriers of our capacity for symbolic thought, which accounts for our exceptional capacity for cultural evolution into the future. As Wilson et al. (2023) outline, this capacity along with prosociality and social control, accounts for the fact that we as a species have thrived in the context of highly co-operative groups whence our complex societal systems of present have emerged. Tourism geographies can thereby explore how stories of care for the other and more-than/non-human matter

in making for places and the role tourism and hospitality play therein. These are thus stories of conviviality in the broadest sense, generated to deliberately counter the predominant individualism and rampant competitive capitalist ethos which has permeated notions of self in the Global North in particular. Thereby tourism can re-centre the human through naming and spacing animated by care, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity and conviviality. This is a responsibility for each other *and* the more-than/non-human world, an explicit recognition of our inter dependencies. When it comes to tourism, these notions harken to the need to recognise that our ideas of the world, intentions and actions of spacing matter, but they do so resting on the gift and surprise that is the Other, which can only occur when that space is open.

By giving in to place, allowing for its openness, the art of paying attention to the possible can be cultivated, precipitating an experimental form of everydayness that relies on creative energies and desires whereby people are not consuming individuals, but individuated parts of place as it is made and remade every day through varying degrees of intent. We are indeed relational beings spawned of our earthly attachments and we need to allow for that to foster more local, positive, spontaneous, co-creative and emergent processes which make living in the Anthropocene bearable. Can we submit to this, be attentive, caring and spontaneous? What would tourism geographies of care look like?

The future research directions for tourism geographers thereby coming to terms with our earthly attachments would revolve around at least five things. Firstly, tracing matters making for the places and spaces we hold dear could be studied. This tracing can focus on the way we relate to certain artefacts, foods, weather or the buildings accommodating us. Secondly, the things that make us able to travel can be similarly recognised and their spatial stretch and duration. Thirdly, research can focus on the ambivalence of the encounter in a tourism setting and what is put to work to make places hospitable. Relatedly, how geo-ethics can be placed at the core of hospitality would be a worthwhile research ambition and thereby unveiling how the Earth can be a foregrounded matter of concern in every place-specific tourism encounter. How to move tourism practices into such a direction would be a story to tell. Fifth, a focus on embodied, affective and sensory togetherness with others and material places and what mediates and animates this presence can be envisioned. These tentative research directions can also be extended into the digital realm and virtual spaces. Here we could critically interrogate how digital technologies reshape the production of everyday spaces, territories, and places and the agencies and materiality of technology. This would be highly pertinent in the context of tourism as social media makes for places of consumption to an ever-greater extent. In terms of methodology, what is being advocated here are creative, speculative, and artistic methods, digital geographies, critical visual methods and new twists on old techniques of participatory mapping which can provide rich representations of lived experiences of individuals and groups of their socio-spatial environment.

Conclusion

To deal with our Anthropocene present, I argue for a shift of perspectives, to that of the ground under our feet, to that which is small, mundane and near at hand—but

to which we are intricately bound. In essence, earthly attachments in the Anthropocene are about how to become convivial mediated through dynamic/vibrant materiality and reinstating use-value as central to our economic systems. Realising the virtual potential of earthly attachments, makes each and every place rich, meaningful and a source of inspiration for us all. Telling stories thereof, enlivens the senses and thereby offers a way to penetrate the desiring machine of consumptive capitalism which at current animates our needs and wants. As made clear, the challenges of the Anthropocene are intricately linked with our current mode of globalised consumer capitalism, and this particular mode can only partially be explained by some evil conspiracy of a global elite (Ekberg et al., 2023, p. 36). It is a mode also animated by our desires which play out in often unconscious and irrational or affective aspects of tourism. This is why the experience economy of tourism is so great for business as usual, there is no limit to the turn-over time of capital, which is at the heart of surplus value creation, when it comes to experiences. Tourism as such plays a profound role in the ways in which capitalism is colonising our lifeworld and meaning of self. The only way to wrest free of these debilitating entanglements is to come to terms with our earthly attachments. For that we need stories of places and peoples in their myriad multiplicity on and of this Earth. What better task for a tourism geographer? And what better place for tourism geographies to come?

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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