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PERFORMING WHALE-WATCHING IN JUNEAU, ALASKA

By

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Alaska Southeast, Juneau, Alaska, 2014

Thesis

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Performing Whale-Watching in Juneau, Alaska

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Nature-based tourism activities provide special contexts for human-wildlife interaction. In Juneau, Alaska, summertime tourists seek encounters with humpback whales, hundreds of which feed seasonally in Southeast Alaska's coastal waterways. Tourists support a thriving whale-watching industry in the region. Voices in nature-based tourism studies, departing from prior rigid conceptualizations of tourism, have identified the need to investigate activities using innovative frameworks to address the tourism experience as an ongoing and fluidly constructed phenomenon. The purpose of this study is to construct a new understanding of nature-based tourism using a performance metaphor. The flexibility provided in a metaphorical approach allows for a return to the geographical basis of space in both tangible and intangible forms. A set of in-depth interviews with Juneau whale-watching customers and industry professionals reveal how space is portrayed, navigated, and experienced during whale-watching. Here these elements appear as performative components of script, stage, and action. The whale-watching performance involves a lively and often awe-inspiring stage upon which human and non-human actors interact. Results uncover how such a production in wild spaces may produce an immersive wildlife experience.

*Key words:* nature-based tourism, performance, space, whale-watching, Alaska

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## **Foreward**

O'Connor et al. (2009: 23) indicate that between 1998 and 2008 the whale-watching industry has “grown at an average rate of 3.7 percent per year, comparing well against global tourism growth of 4.2 percent per year over the same time period.” This growth translates to significant direct expenditure figures worldwide and points to an increasingly globalized whale-watching industry. Practices of this nature-based tourism activity are dependent on both the ecological and cultural contexts of where it takes place. This study focuses on whale-watching in Juneau, Alaska. The foundations and research questions are geographical and interrogate notions of space and place in this specific whale-watching context. The following paragraphs seek to provide contextual details for understanding whale-watching in this popular destination.

### *Setting*

The panhandle of Alaska, also called “Southeast” or “Southeast Alaska” (Figure 1), is the region of Alaska spanning along the North American Pacific coastline, situated between British Columbia to the south and interior Alaska to the north. Composed of coastline, islands, and intricate waterway networks, Southeast is home to a rich diversity of life, both terrestrial and marine. A glacial past carved its rich waterways and steep mountainscapes, and glaciers continue to shape both the landscape and the livelihoods of the region’s inhabitants. Steep terrain, icefields, and water restrict settlement patterns, confining communities to islands and narrow coastline. These unique geographic barriers also obstruct road access, which does not reach beyond the immediate surrounds of the community. The region therefore heavily relies on ferry and barge systems for transportation and exchange of goods and services.

Modest population centers dot the region, with Juneau, Alaska's capital city, as the largest of these (Figure 2). In 2016, Juneau supported a population of 34,468 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The striking landscape, opportunities for recreation, and the infrastructure to support both a capital city population and a cruise ship economy drive a major tourism sector within the economy of Juneau. 61 percent of Alaska's entire visitor market consisted of cruise ship visitors in 2011, and Juneau serves as one popular cruise ship port for this group (McDowell Group, Inc. and Sheinberg, 2014). Over the last several decades, the "economic engine" that is Juneau's tourist economy has driven the intensive development of tourism-related services for accommodating visitors (McDowell Group, Inc. and Sheinberg, 2014).

While Juneau remains a frequent destination of ferry system travelers, business convention-goers, and off-season visitors, cruise ship tourists overwhelmingly constitute the largest visitor group in Alaska's capital city (McDowell Group, Inc. and Sheinberg, 2014). The cruise ship season takes place from early May to late September each year, with one to six cruise ships occupying the docks in downtown Juneau daily. Although the ships do not stay in port overnight, they remain docked for six to twelve hours at a time, allowing passengers to disembark and explore this destination. Tourists encounter downtown Juneau's bustling storefronts, lively saloons, and colorful wharf immediately upon leaving their ships. The downtown area serves as the center of Juneau's tourist activity in this capacity and also as a transportation hub for shore excursions. Departing from downtown, cruise-goers may choose to spend part or all of their day on exciting daytrips that whisk them away from the downtown scene.

### *Whale-watching tours in Juneau*

Juneau offers a diverse array of day tours for cruise ship customers, but whale-watching remains among the most popular of activities. O'Connor et al. (2009) report that 519,000 individuals went whale-watching in Alaska in 2008, a sizeable increase since the 76,700 whale watchers recorded only ten years prior in 1998. With forty-five of Alaska's sixty whale-watching companies located within the Southeast region of Alaska, Juneau and nearby Gustavus served as the most popular whale-watching destinations in the state in 2008 (Harms et al., 2013).

Humpback whales feed in this northern reach of the Inside Passage for fifteen weeks during the summer season before beginning their movement south for their winter migration. This active time of year yields spectacular sights for whale watchers, including heightened breaching activity and displays of cooperative bubble-net feeding. While humpback whales headline whale-watching tours, visitors often enjoy the sights of other marine wildlife observed along the way such as orcas, Steller sea lions, sea otters, porpoises, bird life, and terrestrial wildlife spotted along the shoreline.

The Juneau Convention and Visitors Bureau names several water-based tours in its comprehensive list of Juneau tour operators (see Table 1). Several of these operators distinguish themselves as whale-watching tours, although others, like fishing charters, also facilitate whale encounters and provide wildlife viewing opportunities for their customers (JCVB). Operators follow similar formats and procedures in conducting their tours. Buses pick up customers from the cruise ship docks in downtown Juneau, after which they drive customers roughly twenty miles to the Auke Bay harbor where the majority of whale-watching tours depart. Generally, tour boats departing from Auke Bay spend approximately three hours out on the water, motoring through Lynn Canal where much of the humpback feeding activity takes place. The twenty-mile

drive to and from Auke Bay may be broken up by various detours. For example, Gastineau Guiding offers combination tours in which customers enjoy a hike around the Mendenhall Glacier after their whale-watching tour. Alaska Travel Adventures takes their whale-watching customers to an outdoor venue for a meal of Alaskan salmon. Other companies may choose to pull over for customers to take photos of the Mendenhall Glacier.

Despite diverse tour formats, several Juneau whale-watching companies are voluntary partners in responsible whale-watching under the Whale SENSE program (Whale SENSE). This NOAA-sponsored program has several visions for commercial whale-watching vessels. The program acknowledges regional guidelines for whale-watching, encourages ocean stewardship among staff and passengers, and asks vessels to report if they observe whales in distress. In Juneau waters, guidelines specify that boats should not purposely approach whales closer than 100 yards. Rules also limit the number of vessels that can surround whales at any given time. Guidelines also restrict the amount of time that each vessel may spend with a group of whales. The practices of each company generally borrow from these rules, along with maritime rules and courtesies.

### *Why whales?*

The popularity of whale-watching speaks volumes about the captivating hold that whales have on human imaginations. In a conservation context, this appeal often inspires use of the term “flagship species,” which refers to a species’ “ability to capture the imagination of the public and induce people to support conservation action and/or to donate funds” (Walpole and Leader-Williams, 2002: 544). Flagship species are generally large (Smith et al., 2012) and mammalian (Barua, 2011). Conservationists note that human interactions with flagship species generally

“stimulate a connection to a species and promote pro-conservation behaviors” (Skibins et al., 2013: 959). The term “charismatic megafauna” often appears alongside “flagship species” (Walpole and Leader-Williams, 2002), specifically referring to a species’ large size and dramatic presence. In the context of this study, “charismatic megafauna” serves as the phrase of choice when describing whales. This term operates under the same principles as flagship, keystone, and umbrella species (Barua, 2011; Walpole and Leader-Williams, 2002) in that they all refer to species with a special allure for audiences.

Tour operators have similarly grasped the enchanting qualities of certain wildlife species as reflected by worldwide whale-watching trends, which also play out in the microcosm of Juneau. This study seeks to uncover the details of space which may contribute to a Juneau whale-watching experience, and results have potential to directly influence tour operators. The content that follows has been prepared as a manuscript for later submission to a journal. It provides further context for the study with nature-based tourism literature and the theoretical framework of performativity. The manuscript formally introduces the research questions and details the qualitative methods used to address these. It presents the study’s results and provides conclusions about the Juneau whale-watching experience.

## Introduction

*[Whale-watching] gave me a sense of serenity. I think the excitement of seeing [whales], and the fact that I knew we hadn't disturbed anything or caused them any kind of disruption in their lives, just made me feel like I was a part of a bigger universe or a part of them, or their community in a sense.*  
(Emily, study participant)

Growing participation in nature-based tourism activities has increased human interaction with wildlife. Hill et al. (2014) suggest this trend provides transformative input into modern society-wildlife relationships and perceptions. Research shows that wildlife encounters in tourism activities can inspire strong emotive responses (Curtin, 2009), psychological benefits (Kaplan, 1985), and ecologically-minded changes in behavior (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Society may position itself as relatively removed from the 'natural world' (Macnaghten and Urry, 2000), but encounters in wildlife tourism can construct new meaning for participants and transform the broader 'culture-nature' division in modern discourse.

Voices in recreation management (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Duffus and Dearden, 1990) and wildlife tourism studies (Curtin, 2009) have identified the need to build a conceptual framework of nature-based tourism. Products of this task often depict useful but static conceptualizations or visualizations, segmented by notions of supply and demand (Moscardo and Saltzer, 2004), tourist and operator typologies (Curtin and Wilkes, 2005; Mehmetoglu, 2007), or prior motivations versus *in situ* experience (Curtin 2005; Curtin and Wilkes 2007). While a significant foundation is in place for these conceptual conversations, the spatial-temporal dimensions of all tourism phenomena are rapidly changing in today's world. Our understanding of the tourism experience must adapt in all tourism contexts.

Forces of globalization transform the speed at which we travel, experience place, and exchange information, a concept that Harvey (1990) calls "time-space compression." Germann

Molz (2006) applies this notion to tourist experiences and adds “time-space expansion” as another byproduct of globalization. Wildlife tourism contexts offer their own subjective experiences of time and space. The initial purchase of a wildlife tour is cloaked by intangible socially constructed images of what it is supposed to be (Curtin, 2005). Then, the lived experience distorts this image further. Curtin (2009: 464) explains, “When wildlife enters the picture, traditional, linear time is dismissed and replaced with a cyclical, qualitative, subjective dimension.” This geographical study specifically focuses on the other component of the “time-space” pairing and interrogates the modern-day wildlife tourist’s dynamic experience of space.

Tourism studies have sought new vantage points to account for multidimensionality, namely by recognizing tourism as a “product” of experience (Curtin, 2005; Judd, 2006) and, from a theoretical perspective, as an ongoing, co-constructive process (Chronis, 2005; Tucker, 2007). The following study takes an approach consistent with these new conceptions and examines whale-watching in Juneau, Alaska, as a constructed activity of nature-based tourism. *Explicit attention is given to its spatial dimensions as I question how space, in tangible and intangible forms, is portrayed, navigated, and experienced in whale-watching.*

The approach taken in this study is metaphorical and departs from previous static conceptualizations of nature-based tourism. Here, the experience of whale-watching is presented as theatrical performance. The performance metaphor has previously been exercised in tourism studies (Edensor, 2000), and its components are useful for achieving fluid and nuanced understandings of tourism experiences. “Culture” and aspects of this in tourism studies have received attention from performance theorists (De Groot and Van der Horst, 2014; Minca, 2007); however, there is a necessity for a concrete example and full theoretical application of the performance metaphor in nature-based contexts. It requires application in a holistic, relatable,

and creative engagement. This study addresses these needs through a thorough and inventive narrative of whale-watching performance. Additionally, special considerations of geographic questions allow us to re-examine spatial foundations of immersive nature-based tourism experiences. Elements of immersive experience uncovered in this study address this conceptual gap and provide insight for the Juneau whale-watching industry.

This study draws upon performance theory's engagement with critical tourism geographies and positions its use in a nature-based context. I use qualitative data from in-depth interviews collected over the 2016 whale-watching season. The data provide multiple perspectives, including those of whale-watching customers and industry professionals. In combination with the discussed performance concepts from the literature and research questions of space, the multi-perspective data underwent coding for emergent themes. The resulting triangulation of the whale-watching experience is presented using metaphorical components of script, stage, and action.

## **Literature review**

### *Foundations of tourism*

The concept of encounter constitutes the core of tourism (Gibson, 2010). Individuals travel with intent to meet new landscapes, cultures, traditions, wildlife, and more. Deconstructing this notion lends insight into the very building blocks of a tourist experience and prefaces a deeper interrogation of tourism's purpose, functionality, and future challenges. A recent shift towards acknowledging the complexity of the tourist experience illuminates underexplored

agents and contextual details of encounter. Space and place are two such foundations that warrant conversation.

Tourism is inherently geographical. Individuals travel to immerse themselves in spaces of difference (Gibson, 2010), be it for purposes of escapism, spiritual renewal, or pursuit of knowledge. In their travels, tourists themselves become everyday geographers (Crouch, 2000), negotiating new cultural and natural spaces and extracting meaning. Additionally, the essence of the tourist experience derives from the strong and distinctive sense of place permeating any tourist destination (Griffin and Hayllar, 2007). Critical tourism geographers have taken interest in the composition of “touristscapes” (Edensor, 2007). This play on landscape speaks to the layouts of tourist destinations, occupied by carefully planned details which fluidly facilitate and construct tourist encounters. Destinations repeat this general formula worldwide, serializing the tourist stage and its comforts (Edensor, 2007).

### *Performativity theory*

Post-structuralist performativity theory has provided further critical insight into the touristscape and the actions and mobilities of tourists within (Edensor, 2001; Edensor, 2007); it uses a metaphor of performance for imagining human experiences and behaviors. Bourdieu’s (1985) *habitus* provides insight into the theory’s sociological underpinnings. *Habitus* describes how human behaviors are motivated, regulated, and perpetuated both objectively (by societal forces) and subjectively (by the actions of individuals) (Cresswell, 2013). That is, while human behavior is largely learned via observation, imitation, and repetition within societal frameworks, these external forces do not fully define it (Swartz, 2002). The individual maintains a certain amount of agency around inherited behaviors. Because these forces are engaged in an ongoing

dialogue, they play mutually constitutive and constructive roles (Cresswell, 2013). When an individual reiterates learned behaviors, societal constructions undergo further reinforcement.

Butler's (1988) engagement with performativity and gender was an early and foundational application of this metaphor. Through the stylized performance of the body – via movements, gestures, and acts – gender identity undergoes social construction. This gendered performance consists of individuals executing ritualistic and repetitive acts, guided by learned behaviors and societal gender conceptions. The sedimentation of these acts reinforces the gender normative that scripted these behaviors in the first place. Butler (1988: 526) explains, “just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted, corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.” Directives are embodied in the touristscape, just as other directives are in existing structures of society.

Tourism is increasingly part of our everyday world, and with this familiarization comes the assembly of appropriate behaviors and ordinary expectations within touristscapes. Individuals possess a tourism script before walking onto the tourist stage, which facilitates the prescribed performance. For example, the heightened convenience of various products within touristscapes reduces a tourist's need to remain reflexive. Edensor (2007) contends that tourist performances are essentially mundane, completely disparate from the perceived spontaneity of the experience. Because the tourism industry seeks to promote encounter within an image of carefree movements and adventure, it plays a highly regulatory role (Gibson, 2010). To generate appeal within travel destinations, space becomes a medium for shaping encounter. Realistic spaces are hidden, and alluring spaces are constructed. Rich sensory detail abounds, directing movements and overwhelming an individual's capabilities to move freely (Edensor, 2001). The everyday cultural

norms and restrictions, which tourists seek to escape, are simply replaced by the prescribed norms of tourism (Edensor, 2007). Unbeknownst to tourists, the touristscape is a carefully controlled and appropriated stage, perceived as manageable, safe, and consumptive.

A comparison of two historic waterfront tourist districts illustrates the role of space appropriation in this capacity (Griffin and Hayllar, 2007). One district's well-defined tourist circuit created a satisfactory experience for visitors seeking ease of access to cafes, shops, and attractions, all within close proximity to the waterfront. Other tourists who identified as "explorers" voiced dissatisfaction in this setting, noting a lack of pathways which navigated away from the mundane waterfront district. The other district offered a less restrictive layout, with both visually stimulating tourist routes and visible access to the "backstreets." The variation between these two districts demonstrates the impact of space appropriation as it applies to those tourists following the "script" versus those seeking more "adventure." The nuances found on the tourist stage have the power to dramatically alter the performed experience.

Social implications of sanctioned tourist spaces are evident worldwide across tourist destinations. Places known for mass tourism commonly face criticism for their "low wage labor, environmental damage, and cheap cultural stereotypes," which is often the subject of ethical tourism initiatives that seek to "overturn a binary between oppressor (tourist) and oppressed (host community, tourism labor, nature)" (Gibson 2012: 523). The spatial manifestation of this division is visible. The everyday life of local populations are often hidden or sanctioned behind tourist zones. Local populations follow their own performative script and follow prescribed behaviors and duties in the touristscape. At a smaller scale, critical tourism geographers have uncovered micro-geographies of this same nature. For example, Boon (2007) examines dynamics of hotel room attendants in front-of-house versus back-out-house spaces at a resort. This critical

view is also reflected in a push for an ethical tourism standard. “The new moral tourist [seeks] non-intrusive encounters” and sensitively navigates through cultural settings (Gibson 2012: 522). However, this too poses risks of “othering” as “ethical” travelers, companies, or destinations may use this banner of morality as a way of distinguishing themselves.

### *Spaces of wildlife tourism*

While critical tourism geographers have focused heavily on the ethics of social encounter in touristscapes, similar research on human-non-human encounter in tourism contexts still remains underexplored (Gibson, 2010), although critical attention has arisen with the practice of ecotourism. The concept of ecotourism first emerged in response to an “increased recognition of, and reaction to, the negative impacts being caused by mass tourism to natural areas” (Orams 1995: 3). Ecotourism strives to facilitate outdoor recreation in a way that minimizes environmental disturbance, promotes long term ecological health, and inspires ecologically oriented attitudinal and behavioral changes within tourists (Orams, 1995).

The incorporation of wildlife within ecotourism practices has taken on its own definition. Duffus and Dearden (1990: 215) define non-consumptive wildlife-oriented recreation (NCWOR) “as a human recreational engagement with wildlife wherein the focal organism is not purposefully removed or permanently affected by the engagement.” For example, birdwatching, wildlife photography, wildlife viewing, nature walks, and whale-watching fall into this category (Duffus and Dearden, 1990). Responsible whale-watching standards focus heavily upon minimizing the harassment of whales, following distance guidelines, encouraging scientific data collection, and educating whale-watching audiences about marine stewardship (Harms et al., 2014). These common objectives resonate nicely with the goals posed for non-consumptive

wildlife tourism. However, the critical geographic lens being brought to the social tourism contexts brings other ethical considerations for non-consumptive wildlife-oriented tourism scenarios into focus.

The critical tourism geographer's role in this wildlife tourism discussion, as in the cultural realm, involves a discussion of space. Within nature-based tourism, fixed boundaries may have the effect of reinforcing nature as an objective other, on the outside of the safety of the safari jeep (Hill et al., 2014), the other side of fence, or underneath the hull of the boat. A study by Finkler and Higham (2004) examines the experience of whale-watching with this consideration in mind, studying whale-watching experiences from land-based versus boat-based platforms. Similarly, Skibins et al. (2013) study the classic jeep safari and compare it to a zoo-like experience, shaped by the physical boundaries put in place by the tour operator. According to these studies, the tourist "stage" created by the tourism company has notably different effects among tourist experiences with wildlife and may play an important role in shaping human-wildlife relationships.

Post-structuralist thinkers in the field of animal geography critically explore nature/culture boundaries by unpacking human-animal relationships across a geographic continuum. Urbanik (2012) explains that across time, space, and culture, the division between humans and non-humans varies, constantly changing with individual and collective experiences. Philo and Wilbert (2004: 5) explore the many ways in which animals are placed "by human societies in their local material spaces (settlements, fields, farms, factories, and so on), as well as in a host of imaginary, literary, psychological, and even virtual spaces." In the context of this study, touristscapes may play their own unique role in shaping human-animal relationships, especially those with wildlife.

Jones (2000) illuminates the impacts of landscape and place in shaping human-animal coexistence. He states, “Within the complex spatiality of human-animal relations, there are folded constructions of appropriate and inappropriate presences of animals in particular places” (Jones, 2000: 285). Critical animal geography anthologies (Philo and Wilbert, 2004; Wolch and Emel, 1995) present cases echoing Jones’s (2000) sentiments and frame the formation of human-animal relationships across an urban-wildland continuum. Wolch (1998) addresses how pets and pests are controlled under capitalistic, anthropogenic terms in urban settings. And Yarwood and Evans (2004) study how rural communities have perpetuated productive uses of animals in rural spaces and contributed to the imaginations of humans from non-rural landscapes.

In a detailed examination of one end of this continuum, Alec Brownlow (2000) brings attention to wild spaces. His analysis traces human-wolf relationships in the Adirondacks according to historic landscape use. Brownlow chronicles the shift of this region from one labeled “wild” to one functioning as a recreational space. The Adirondack region was transformed into a playground for New York’s elite in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and shifted from a landscape of sanctuary for wolves to a region deemed wolf-inappropriate. Whatmore and Thorne (1998: 437) contend that “‘wild’ animals have been, and continue to be, routinely imagined and organized within multiple social orderings in different times and places.” Curtin (2005: 5) identifies the spaces of nature-based tourism as important sub-contexts for human-non-human interaction: “Wildlife tourism resides in this shaded domain with humankind seeking communion with nature by glimpsing the shared but often secret spaces of the animal kingdom.” This study imagines the whale-watching context of Juneau as a special landscape along animal geography’s continuum.

The question of immersion accompanies this study's notion of wild spaces. Literature on authenticity in tourism has alluded to this question under the performative framework (Knudsen and Waade, 2010; Wang, 1999; Zhu, 2012), some specifically describing nature-based settings (Curtin, 2005; Markwell, 2001). Wang (1999) identifies a sense of "existential authenticity" in nature, meaning tourism experiences in natural contexts inspire feelings of closeness to the natural world through the mind and body. Markwell (2001) found that rainforest tourists in Borneo experienced heightened existential authenticity without the presence of human-made boundaries. But whale-watching requires use of a viewing platform at the very least, and usually involves much more tour coordination and construction than this. Questioning immersion in the whale-watching context benefits from these starting points found in the authenticity literature but requires deeper exploration as a special context for human-wildlife interaction.

The outlined literature offers important assumptions which shape the approach taken in this study. Juneau whale-watching will be viewed as a constructed tourism performance. The spaces of whale-watching tours are laden with the detail that shape encounter. While adherence to responsible whale-watching practices is a frequent topic of discussion in the whale-watching industry, spatially informed nuances of experience require similar attention. Wildlife-tourism spaces provide distinct opportunities for humans and wild animals to interact. And, according to performance theory, the effects of these encounters can sediment and perpetuate broader societal discourse. Built on these premises, the proposed study will contribute to a relevant and solid foundation of previous study.

## **Research methods**

The following study adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods seek to unearth and understand meaning (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011); in this case I seek to extract the meanings embedded in the Juneau whale-watching performance. A post-structuralist theoretical perspective informs the research methods, which explore individual experiences and inductively arrive at the presented performance. This perspective informed deconstructive interviewing methods and the analysis process. Whale-watching experiences were questioned, recollected, discussed, and interpreted in order to address broader questions of nature-based tourism experience.

This study utilizes two datasets acquired after the close of the summer 2016 whale-watching season, which took place from May 1 – September 30. I maintain a working relationship with a locally owned and operated whale-watching company in Juneau, here referred to as WWC. Juneau cruise ship visitors are presented with a number of excursion options through the cruise lines. WWC offers several tours, each including 2-3 hours of on-water time. I worked as a naturalist aboard a total of 40 whale-watching excursions during the 2016 season, and the datasets of this study originate exclusively from WWC's clients and personnel. The Juneau whale-watching industry offers a wide variety of tours from over a dozen companies, all with varying tour lengths, boat capacities, and brands. Although this study utilizes the experiences of tourists and personnel from one company, the data were analyzed according to broader questions under scrutiny. Without focusing on company specifics or analyzing WWC's particular tour delivery, similarly generated data from any such company could coalesce with this study's data.

The first dataset derives from 20 in-depth interviews conducted with whale-watching customers within 1-2 months after returning home from their cruises. Clients were self-selecting directly after the conclusion of their tour, providing their contact information and consent to be interviewed at a later date. The second dataset originates from eight in-depth interviews conducted with industry professionals, including boat captains, guides, and managerial staff. I took care to randomly select interviewees from a list of WWC's employees, although the employee list was first purposely segmented by job title to obtain participation from a number of industry perspectives. Table 2 presents brief profiles of all study participants, including pseudonyms assigned in this study, along with their genders and roles in the whale-watching experience.

In total, 28 in-depth interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Introduced as two datasets, the interviews underwent analysis as one large body of data. To navigate the variety of details provided by diverse whale-watching perspectives, interview guides served an important purpose. Four interview guides were developed to guide the semi-structured interview process and to ensure that the same topics were addressed for customers, guides, boat captains, and management. Questions tailored to each of these roles prompted interview subjects to walk through the whale-watching experience from their perspective, addressing sensory details and prominent feelings during tours. Few questions explicitly addressed notions of space and place; it was anticipated that spatial themes would emerge from the interview content.

Alongside the interview data, the performance metaphor and *a priori* research questions served as inputs into the study's triangulation, although these additional elements did not restrict the analysis process. Transcribed data were coded, or organized, based on common words, phrases, and concepts, so that latent themes emerged. I performed several iterations of the coding

process and progressively refined the results into an arrangement consistent with the details sought by the research questions. The metaphor of performance guided the resulting creative product, which details the whale-watching performance and its implications of space.

The resulting reconstruction of the whale-watching experience, imbued with geographic considerations of space, is organized below to correspond with metaphorical components of performance (i.e., script, stage, action). Here, the metaphor serves as a mode of relatable and creative presentation. Derived themes are organized according to the components of the whale-watching performance and are distinguished in each section. Literary concepts, verbatim quotations, and my interpretation weave together in the sections that follow.

Throughout this study, I was aware of my roles, both as a naturalist guide and researcher. As a guide, I interacted with guests for the entire duration of their tour. It was my responsibility to provide guests with running narrative and interpretation as we encountered elements in the local landscape, culture, and ecosystem. I also engaged guests individually and shared in storytelling and conversation. Guests were not aware of my research until the conclusion of the tour, and data were not gathered from guide-guest interaction prior to this. However, it is inevitable that my time spent building connections with the guests, per the requirements of my job, contributed to my interpretation of the results. Additionally, the data from my guests were unavoidably informed by their interaction with me. During the season, I also maintained relationships with the interviewed industry professionals, who were my coworkers and managers. However, I conducted interviews with these subjects after the conclusion of the whale-watching season, like the guest interviews, without subjects' prior knowledge of my research. Several details related to my roles, and the effect these roles had on the experience, emerge in my results.

While these factors are embedded in my study to some degree, I remained self-reflective in the interview and analysis process. The preparation of interview guides, with careful editing from unbiased sources, equipped me to interview participants deliberately and carefully. The timeline of data collection, which began after my role as tour guide was complete, allowed my role as researcher to take precedence. These objective aspects of the study's methodology were important to systematic data collection. This research also benefitted from my insights and personal involvement with the whale-watching industry. Curtin (2005) explains that an inside perspective of the researcher is important to gain a truly rich and nuanced understanding of wildlife tourism experience. Markwell (2001: 8) takes a similar research position to my own and describes its limitations as a "price to be paid in exchange for minimizing 'epistemological distance' between researcher and subjects." My involvement in the facilitation of the whale-watching tours under scrutiny provided closeness to the study participants. Interviews were comfortable and open-ended, allowing for nuanced and thoughtful details of experience to emerge.

The presented metaphor depicts the whale-watching performance, as imagined through experiences of the customers and staff in the Juneau whale-watching scene. The metaphorical approach offers a strong degree of transferability to other nature-based tourism activities and contexts. The performative framework developed and illustrated is not exclusive to this study.

### **The whale-watching performance**

Theoretical underpinnings of performance explain that experience is an ongoing, co-constructive process. Subjective and objective forces interact in a continuing dialogue. To capture the lively nature of the whale-watching performance, I use three metaphorical parallels to

organize results, although these headings operate in nonrestrictive capacities. These organizational headings provide the reader with a creative and illustrative look at whale-watching performance. Content in each section is grouped by, but not restricted to, this placement. Additionally, these sections are not ordered hierarchically and should be considered equal. Temporally, the presentation order of *script*, *stage*, and *action* imitates their logical order in the theatrical performance context. Actors first receive the script, then step onto the stage, and finally act. Despite this deliberate ordering, topics under these headings are not constrained to this timeline. Finally, I do not limit any topic of discussion to a subjective or objective role, as several of the emergent topics take on both. For example, the stage fills a structured, objective role as a backdrop to the action, and it later takes on a subjective role of its own. Therefore, the following experiences of Juneau whale-watching tourists should be envisioned creatively and considered flexibly.

### *Script*

Whale-watching is an experience transcending spatial and temporal boundaries. During interviews, participants recalled their perceptions preceding their tour and discussed when their experiences diverged from expectations. Here, I draw the first metaphorical parallel between theatrical performance and whale-watching. Actors in a production read lines and follow stage directions from a script, which they learn and interpret creatively. The whale-watching script is similar. Customers used incoming “scripted” information as a baseline for expressing travel motivations and experience. The *meta-script* conceived in this study is a fluid combination of several specialized scripts. I also highlight notions of space (like imagined proximity to whales)

and place (attached meanings to spaces like Alaska), as they intertwine through the following results.

Throughout the interview process, details of personal identity emerged to explain whale-watching motivations and to describe the experience individually. Discussions of personal identity have been central to performance theory (Butler, 1988), although similar discussions have emerged in tourism studies. Edensor (2001) stresses the importance of understanding tourism as a ubiquitous sight in the world, which generates collective tourist identity. In Butler's (1988) terms, identity parallels a script that dictates acceptable behaviors and conduct. With tourism increasingly situated within everyday life, tourist norms are inconspicuously observed, imitated, and perpetuated in the public.

Tourists may also strive to transmit a particular type of tourist identity. For example, backpackers may seek to differentiate themselves from the common tourist, and will do so by perpetuating an image of individualism in their style of travel and choice of activities (Edensor, 2001). Edensor (2000) also inserts that tourists maintain personal touristic assumptions and identities, derived from individual cultural contexts. At several scales, iteration of identity partially informs the content of the tourist script.

In Alaska, Hoyt (2001: 21) describes Alaskan tourists: “[They] include a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and interests, but nature and wildlife are a big part of every tourist’s reason for coming to Alaska.” In this study, staff interviewees observed trends in the personal identities of their clientele, noting interest in science and the natural world. Customers discussed details of their identities consistent with staff observations, especially regarding motivations for whale-watching. Customers shared details of everyday life or childhood to provide context for their motivations. For example, participants who identified as science enthusiasts described their

occupational backgrounds in scientific fields. Others provided anecdotes from their childhood. One customer recalled, “I studied whales a zillion years ago in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and that always had an impact on me. So there’s a little bit of fascination” (Michelle). Some called whale-watching a “bucket list” experience or described their love of whales as an untraceable, intrinsic “animal lover” trait.

Staff observed that customers’ experiences were dependent upon personal beliefs. Jenna explained:

I think people who are already inclined to be interested in wildlife or attached to wildlife seem to obviously have really powerful experiences and I think people who just see whale-watching as another consumptive activity will smile and have a good time, but it doesn’t seem like it has any special meaning for them.

Just as customers referenced their incoming relationships with nature, staff members identified natural connections as paramount to shaping the experience. Additionally, experience hinged upon the home contexts of customers, who may or may not have had prior experience on the ocean or boats. One customer said, “I was born in Utah, raised in Colorado, and lived my adult life in Nevada. So I just didn’t know what to expect” (Theresa). Several guests from California, whose home context included whale-watching activities, provided a different perspective and discussed whale-watching as a casual activity.

Beyond identity, the tourist destination also writes the script. According to Edensor (2001: 60), “particular tourist contexts generate a shared set of conventions about what should be seen, [and] ... done.” I conceive this “place-based” script as one embedded in mediated depictions, along with general discourse and place-myths surrounding Alaska. Customers described whale-watching as an “Alaskan” activity, and referenced it as “the thing to do” when in Alaska. Interviewees painted a picture consistent with common “Alaskan” place-myths. They recalled the mountainous and glacier-filled scenery, viewed from their cruise ships. Aileen said

the views were increasingly spectacular around every corner. Customers also associated Alaska with bountiful wildlife, which informed their excursion decisions.

Impressions of Juneau were consistent with incoming expectations for “typical Alaskan towns,” characterized by isolation and “little civilization.” Juneau culture was termed quaint and “real,” especially regarding its lack of connection to outside road networks. For study participants, these perceptions were engrained in the “Alaskan experience.” Undesirable weather conditions were more exciting based on the place-based script. As one study participant put it:

I'd rather be out there on a beautiful warm day, but I think some of the people come to Alaska for an adventure. So when the weather is rough, and it's really rainy and cold, it fits their expectations more of an Alaskan adventure. (Luke)

Similar to the place-based script, the “activity script” is the knowledge and conceptions individuals attach to whale-watching. Participants anticipated certain whale proximities, behaviors, and numbers. Customers consistently used these metrics to describe their varied expectations. Whale-watching is a worldwide activity and differs based upon whale species, time of year, and location. One guide commented on the differences in whale-watching practices: “People that have gone and seen them before are used to seeing whales in Hawaii or Mexico. They're right up on top of them. And we don't do that” (Sam). Customers with prior experiences bring diverse expectations. In general, customers used past interactions with whales as a baseline to both measure and convey their experience. For example, Michelle recalled her closer encounter with whales in California as they repeatedly travelled under the tour boat. Customers with no whale-watching experience often expressed few concrete expectations to see whales.

Mediatized depictions of whale-watching also write the activity script. Staff and customers discussed prior exposure to whales in both print and digital media. One interview highlights the influence of viral videos:

Now people go online preparing for their Alaskan cruise...Even if they just go on Google and Google Alaskan cruise, they're probably going to find some sort of viral video which is viral because it's abnormally engaging. So it's probably going to be some up close or abnormal whale behavior...They come and their expectation with social media is ... much more extreme. (Jenna)

Such depictions, according to most industry interviews, frequently show whales in close proximity, in great numbers, and displaying seldom-seen behaviors. Customers who discussed what they saw on advertisements, brochures, television, or the internet typically had higher expectations for their encounters. Additionally, customers and staff discussed word-of-mouth advertising from friends, family, or online review sites as sources of information when picking their whale-watching tour.

Over a dozen operators provide whale-watching tours in Juneau, and each fills a particular niche. WWC possesses its own distinguishing merits. Customers identified WWC as a company that delivers an above-average whale-watching experience. The "average" experience was imagined from prior experience, images, or hearsay. The research-focused, professional, and small-scale experience delivered by WWC motivated customers to select WWC. These identifying features of WWC's niche added to scripted expectations.

The whale-watching script is a fluid composition of personal identity, notions of place, and perceptions of the activity. Tourists arrive with script in hand, and it provides instruction for what to expect: the lines that should be said, the directions that should be taken, and the reactions that should be given. However, upon entering the stage, scripted expectations undergo a process of revision.

## *Stage*

The stage serves as the backdrop for the performance. Stage management thoughtfully designs the stage and set, which provide context and aesthetic elements for the performance. The drama begins once the curtains pull back, the spotlight turns on, and the stage is illuminated. Emergent themes of the whale-watching stage included absolute dimensions and relative characteristics of whale-watching spaces. Perceptions of the stage were partially influenced by careful stage management, although the qualities of the spaces also spoke for themselves.

Participants discussed the nature of the tour space without attaching specific, place-based details. Most commonly, participants designated the space as wilderness. They characterized wilderness by perceived isolation, vast area, and by a sense of freedom and adventure. Ocean space, while similarly characterized in sublime terms, took on additional connotations, especially for those leery of water. The constant sight of shoreline during the tour was welcome for some. Superlative dimensions assigned to wilderness and ocean space coincided with participants' strong reaction to the immense size of humpback whales, a surprise to most customers and one of the study's most emergent themes. The whale-watching performance took place on a stage where the set and its non-human actors felt wild and indescribable.

Participants also characterized the small space of the WWC vessel. Vessel dimensions were attractive to customers when choosing an excursion. This, in conjunction with other design elements, like the boat's peripheral seating and one-room design, contributed to an intimate environment where conversation and sharing among staff and guests was encouraged. Window design, deck access, and the low-lying profile of the vessel contributed to the water level perspective of the guests. Other observed vessels, described by their tall, double-decker design, provided a bird's eye view. Participants also expressed the benefits of having an "outside

experience while inside” during inclement weather. Guests enjoyed mobility and choices to move to the outside decks. Amenities, such as the vessel’s marine head, stability design, and comfortable seating, fostered an experience where customers focused on wildlife.

Other non-natural elements filled the whale-watching stage. The presence of other vessels had multiple effects on customers. Some welcomed the sight. Similar to the security of shoreline, other vessels gave customers reassurance that the vast wilderness/ocean stage was safe. On the other hand, some customers lamented the presence of other vessels and wished for isolation.

In any performance, the stage requires careful set construction and management. In the case of whale-watching, stage managers include the guides, captains, and operations staff. They provide instruction for safety on the stage, while also interpreting. WWC staff members were described as highly qualified and selected carefully based on personal interests and experience in the natural world. WWC always trains staff thoroughly and emphasizes this as it puts together their seasonal team. Teamwork amongst this highly practiced staff, according to several interviews, is paramount to delivering successful tours.

While captains focus on operating the vessel for safety, guides provide important interpersonal bridges between customers and wildlife. Guides stay with tour groups during entire trip durations. They capture the attention of guests by telling entertaining stories, sharing information, and engaging on individual levels. Guides field questions and step in to interpret much of what the customers encounter. While they too operate as if from a script, their roles are rather improvisational, and their actions depend on how the performance unfolds.

Paramount to the success of a tour is that guides manage customer expectations. Industry interviewees discussed the importance of keeping expectations in check, especially concerning whale proximities and behaviors. Although customers hold a script with often-unrealistic

expectations, the guide must consistently inform them. Interviewees revealed how they accomplish this, namely by educating guests about whale behaviors and about safety precautions, rules, and regulations put into place by the industry. Sharing knowledge in this way checks expectations. It can simultaneously rebuild expectation. Jenna explains, “They come with the social media expectation, the social media reality, and it’s our responsibility to bring them down to our reality, and it’s our responsibility to tell them that real life actually is more exciting.” Ordinary behaviors or distant proximities previously scripted in disappointing terms can be built back up through management practices.

The role of captains focuses less on mediating between customers and wildlife and manifests as spatial-temporal management, necessitated by the complexity of whale-watching settings. The stage requires careful navigation of natural features, water depths, wildlife, and other vessels. Captains discussed their strategies for maneuvering through these spaces safely and deliberately. Cindy provided a common scenario:

So we’ll be watching these whales in North Pass, and we know they’re going to travel from the Southern end to halfway up to what I call the 360. Then they’re going to turn around and go back to the Southern end. And they’re kind of doing that right in the middle... I can’t just go to them... So I’ll try and position myself ... from my constant knowledge of their behavior... [T]hey’re actually maybe travelling away from us at the time I position myself. But I’m pretty sure, and it doesn’t work 100% of the time, but I’m pretty sure they’re going to make that turn and come back, and they’ll be close to us.

Captains must also navigate under temporal restrictions. This often requires forming a plan before the tour. Customers observed captains communicating with one another on the radio, a method for quickly learning the locations of active whales. Prepared with prior knowledge, captains consider their routes before leaving the docks. They carefully manage their time according to the spaces they intend to navigate and strive to minimize “empty time” (Cindy).

Spatial management also requires careful attention to proximities, as dictated by the rules and regulations from the Whale SENSE program and NOAA. Captains describe their job as striking a careful balance between facilitating close-proximity encounters while also following the “100-yard rule.” Captains must put engines in neutral once a whale is within 100-yards of the vessel. After gaining this proximity, the whales may come closer at no fault of the captain. Customers often observed this management practice. If the proximity at first seemed disappointing, guides provided mediation, which consequentially reshaped guest expectations and encounters.

This portion of the results delineates cultural and natural stages from the whale-watching performance, which received more explicit discussion from study participants. Several customers referenced the ocean as a “different world,” sometimes conceived of at higher order. Gloria explains, “I felt like I had peeked in as I said on this special world, and that it’s almost like I shouldn’t be there. Like I felt a little guilty for watching this because I didn’t belong there. And there they were, doing what they do.” The tour allowed people to “look in,” as if “through glass” (Christine). Participants also referenced the water’s surface as a boundary line between two worlds.

Interviewees’ adamancy about responsible whale-watching practices expressed concern for the natural world, conceived as an entity separate from themselves. Individuals hoped that their presence on the vessel would not “invade” or “disturb” the world of the whales. From a guide’s perspective, Sam expressed that in certain whale-watching contexts, this is a legitimate concern. He explained that whale-watching activities hold the damaging power to build up a sense of entitlement and ownership in humans, depending on the practices of the operation.

Explicit commentary spoke to a division of cultural and natural stages, but several implicit ways of bridging spaces of culture and nature emerged too. Several boat space qualities removed barriers between participants and nature. Special window and deck design opened the boat to the elements, and the vessel's low profile placed customers at the "boundary" between two worlds rather than above. The interpretive work of the guides provided mediation between the worlds. As guides stepped in to describe whale behaviors and provide explanation for natural phenomena, they informed the expectations of guests. Guests could revise their scripted expectations and become more immersed in the natural world.

Captains worked to mediate absolute space by navigating and maneuvering the vessel. They sought to strike a perfect balance, facilitating close proximities safely. Close proximity speaks explicitly to bridging worlds. Without close encounter, the vast and inconceivable wilderness stage, along with its large inhabitants, seemed distant. For Linda, close proximity made the experience immersive: "It just really adds to the experience instead of just looking into the horizon... You feel like you're right there with them."

The stage and its mediation greatly inform the entirety of the whale-watching experience. Vast wilderness dimensions contrast with the small and intimate setting of the WWC vessels, and at times, these spaces are bridged by practices of stage management.

### *Action*

Action begins when tourists disembark from their cruise ships and step onto the docks of downtown Juneau. Their guide greets them at the end of the gangway. From there, tour buses will take them to Auke Bay, where whale-watching vessels await. Here, the embodied experience of the tourist emerges. This section specifically draws from *in situ* experience, which

is exciting, unexpected, and somewhat overpowers the script and stage. The embodied experience involves the tangible acts of the body as it follows the script and moves upon the stage. The “acts” of performance may range from highly disciplined modes of action, to completely unbounded and improvisational action (Edensor, 2000). Just as the motions of daily life, filled with iterative practices, movements, and relationships, shape an individual’s “lay geographical knowledge” (Crouch, 2000), the embodied action of whale-watching shapes its meaning.

Corporeal experience eludes easy description. Nash (2000) addresses the abstract by linking performance with non-representational theory (NRT). This serves as a method for envisioning the world fluidly. NRT suggests that the world is “lively and in a state of becoming” (Cresswell, 2013: 227). As an illustration, Nash delves into the fluidity and creativity of dance. The performance of a tourist, like that of a dancer, includes choices made in motion, time spent dwelling in one place versus another, and the language of the body.

This study also recognizes the agency of both human and non-human actors. Modern studies of animal geography use a network schematic (Latour, 1999) or hybrid approach (Whatmore, 2002) to visualize human and non-human life on an equal playing field. Latour (1999) contends that human-animal relationships are in ongoing construction. This process, like performance, is dependent on the actions of all involved parties, and the spaces with which they interact. This conceptualization opens up the definition of “actor” to non-human life and also casts space in an active role. This portion of the performance envisions action as embodied, fluid, and involving diverse actors.

The natural “wilderness” stage, previously discussed as a mostly passive backdrop, is now cast in an active role. Study participants recalled ways in which they interacted with the

lively whale-watching stage. Forces of rough and stormy weather articulated tour routes, time management, and customers' perceptions. For example, low visibility made spotting whales more of a challenge, and "travelling hard" to find whales was a thrill (Luke).

Humpback whales, as the star performers, demonstrated their own agency in the performance. Whales were described in terms of their movements and decision-making, like when they chose to approach the vessel. Customers were compelled by the actions of the whales and independently used metaphorical language of performance to describe this. Displays of diving and breaching appeared as graceful choreography. One customer felt amazed by the power behind their motions, in "shooting from the bottom all the way to the top," but still appearing as "the most graceful animal you've ever seen" (Christine). To another, tandem motions of diving whales looked like "an orchestrated ballet" (Emily).

Witnessing the acts of whales, especially their feeding methods, strategic movements, and approaches to the vessel, inspired realizations among customers. Such lively demonstrations and charismatic behavior revealed a glimpse into whales' lives. One customer recognized, "You're not just watching whales. You're watching living, breathing, thinking animals that are out there you know existing in a dangerous environment" (Richard). These results suggest that the action of whale-watching held transformative power. When the agency of whales was witnessed by guests, perceptions of whales transformed from "object" to being. Experiences of non-human charisma aid in elevating the status of non-humans and establish grounds for a common sense of being (Lorimer, 2007). Curtin (2005: 6) explains this phenomenon in terms of anthropomorphism: "As animals cannot reveal their thoughts to us, we impose our own interpretations of their world. Therefore, we tend to understand animals in terms of our own human experience, language and emotions."

Other wildlife took on supporting roles. Participants frequently noted bird life on the water. Seagulls followed groups of humpbacks, flying in large formations and cohesively diving to feed on surfacing herring. Customers eagerly anticipated where the herring, and then whales, would surface next. Watching and learning to "read the birds" was exciting and memorable for customers. Other wildlife, like sea lions, bald eagles, and orcas, took on other active roles. For example, the sea lions, often lazing atop red buoys in the water, were remembered by their comical antics.

Nature provided a dynamic stage for interviewees and non-human actors. Cultural elements, like the guests, captains, guides, and separate whale-watching tours took on active roles in the performance. Much of whale-watching was described in terms of shared experience, which involved the interaction of several cultural elements. A sense of intimacy emerged within whale-watching groups, who collectively witnessed spectacular sights. Customers described their shared "oohs and ahhs." Customers and staff worked as a team to find whales and ensure good views for all. Participants also described the experience of taking part in research, which provided hands on involvement with staff and wildlife. Photographing and identifying whales based on their unique fluke patterns was central to this shared learning.

Customers cast guides and captains in leading roles, which have been examined previously from a sociological perspective of tourism (Cohen, 1985). Captains were experienced, trusted, and skilled. References to the captains' actions described their impressive knowledge base, and customers often revered their captain's abilities to locate and navigate around wildlife. Guides took on esteemed roles too, although guests perceived them on a more personal level given their interaction, which "made the experience" for some guests. Guests credited this to their conversations and connections they made with their guide.

Close proximity encounter emerged as one of this study's strongest themes, a factor which intensified the drama of the performance. Participants discussed the memorability of close proximity encounters more than seeing spectacular whale behaviors or large groups. Jenna recognized the important relationship between experience and close proximity:

The excitement level has an exponential relationship I think with distance. If it's something you don't have to use binoculars or strain your eyes to see, you can see the scratches or the barnacles on the animal. People feel like they are communing with these animals. And I think that for me evokes stronger feelings of awe for sure.

Interviewees described close proximity as a way of getting a "real sense of how huge [whales] are" (Cindy). Additionally, details of the whales – like the whale's markings, or features like its “nostrils” (Sam) – become tangible to the onlooker. Close proximity encounters also created a more intimate experience for some customers:

I mean you're part of ...the experience instead of watching it at a distance...It's like going to a sporting event or a concert...instead of just watching it on TV or something like that. It's just not the same. And when you're close and intimate it's even better. I can compare it also to a small concert. You're really close instead of far away. (Michelle)

This quotation demonstrates how the action of whale-watching transforms customers' conceptions of whales. The customer's incoming script had several inputs, including mediatized depictions of whales. Close proximity transforms this space from imaginary to an absolute, concrete experience of tangible distance. Once “faceless,” whales gained perceived identities through interaction. Close proximity also elicited feelings of disbelief and speechlessness. Customers felt stunned by their close presence and expressed desire to get as close as possible to the whales, to "reach out and touch them," (Bill) or to see distinct features, like their eyes (Emily).

The engagement of the senses also heightened customers' experiences. Tourism studies have examined the sensory details which trigger and inform decision-making, interactions, and

emotional responses (Gibson, 2010). One study stresses the relevance of multisensory environments to “the perceptual process through which individuals shape and add meaning to their experiences” (Agapito et al., 2013: 226). Visual cues tend to dominate the discussion, although the experiences of tourists also hinge upon sounds, smells, tastes, and other embodied senses (Hill et al., 2014). Larsen and Urry (2011) criticize the outdated and singular focus on visual consumption and argue for the inclusion of multisensory detail in the performative theory turn, a gap which has been partially filled by studies of tourist smellscape (Dann and Jacobson, 2003), food tourism (Everett, 2009), music and tourism (Lashua and Spracklen, 2014), and haptic geographies of tourism (Obrador-Pons, 2007).

Results consistently highlighted visual details; however, guests also experienced the wildlife in other ways. Some vessels made stops to pull a crab pot from the water and brought sea creatures aboard; customers passed them around and had a tactile experience. Other interpretive aid items were aboard the vessel. One customer remembers touching a plate of baleen, passed around by the guide. They also felt elements of weather and rough water, which shaped their comfort levels and perceptions of adventure.

Auditory experiences emerged as well. Use of a hydrophone amplified the calls of the whales as they fed underwater and provided guests with access to underwater life. Above the water's surface, hearing the breaths of whales in close proximity transformed the experience, similar to seeing up-close views of whales. Sam explained, "These numbers... [the whale] blowing out at 200-300 miles per hour, having a lung 16-18 feet long, being able to exhale 90 percent of their lung capacity... those are all naked statistics that, when you actually hear the spout, become real." The spray of the spout also received mention as an olfactory experience and

was termed “whale breath” (Sam). Multisensory experiences provided additional avenues for customers to connect with wildlife.

The corporeal charisma of whales, intensified by close proximity and multisensory encounter, elicited “affects” (Lorimer, 2007), in observers. Affect refers to emotive responses triggered through encounter, whale-watching inspired feelings of compassion for wildlife. Participants sought a balance between closeness and respectful distance. Customers experienced the action of the scene, received interpretation and information, and often emerged with feelings of responsibility. Guests often held on to these sentiments after their trip. One customer later critiqued the closeness of a different whale-watching vessel: "I remember one night when we were on the cruise ship and there was a whale-watching group... you couldn't help but notice that they were way too close. [My husband] said 'I know he's trying to give them their money's worth, but they're way too close...I don't think that's right.'" (Aileen). Also beyond the immediate experience, customers desired for their children, grandchildren, and future generations to have the same whale-viewing opportunities.

Other reflections discussed ecological connectivity and health. Customers recalled what they learned about glaciers, the marine food chain, and the life cycles of whales. These thoughts spoke to the connectedness and fragility of nature. They also incorporated, to some extent, the lives of the customers themselves as they contemplated their own place in a larger system. However, the degree of immersion felt by customers depended on several components of the performance, ranging from the proximities on the stage to details of multisensory encounter. Immersive affects emerged as a product and co-construction by all performative elements; however, notions of exclusivity and privilege from the interviews provided additional insight into how immersive experience unfolds.

WWC's tours were described as taking guests "off the beaten path." The small group size also provided individualized attention and greater connections with the staff and wildlife. Some guests said that the presence of other vessels removed feelings of exclusivity and immersion in nature, and guests purposely avoided including other vessels in their photographs. Several guests felt their experience was special and serendipitous – that they saw the closest whales, in the highest numbers, and giving the most spectacular performance. They felt honored and privileged to be present during the performance, or to be granted such "exclusive" access to the world of the whale. Guests also excitedly discussed instances when they saw something that not everyone got to see, or expressed their desire to spot a whale first.

Experiences of the unexpected often related to feelings of being privileged or honored. When the action deviated from the incoming script, excitement peaked. This included instances when whales approached closer than expected or customers caught exclusive glimpses. They perceived their experiences as different from conventional experiences of other groups or guests. The literature discusses "subversive experience" similarly. Edensor (2001) examines the broad range of cynical, resistant, improvisational, and occasionally involuntary performances of tourists. Tourists taking on a deviating role may question the staging of activities, attempt to escape from guided tours, or engage in spontaneous activities. For example, bartering with locals in spaces outside of the carefully planned touristscape calls for a different performance. Tourists must think on their feet and make decisions more freely outside of scripted and staged restrictions.

Whale-watching tourists who sensed their experience was subversive, or perceived it as exclusive, privileged, or unexpected, may have felt more immersed in an authentic experience with wildlife. This phenomenon is described in cultural tourism spaces, where "not knowing

what to think and how to act gives these endeavors their potency, [and] calls upon the resourcefulness of the performer to act according to contingency” (Edensor 2001: 77). In essence, experiences of the unexpected resonated with whale-watching customers who reveled in the unpredictability and improvisation of these moments.

## **Conclusion**

The task of this research was to isolate and highlight aspects of space in the whale-watching performance. Ultimately, these emergent spatial details inform a nuanced understanding of whale-watching tour construction and experience. The performance metaphor offers a flexible approach for analyzing and organizing the study’s qualitative interview data and results. Whale-watching was analyzed without adhering to temporal boundaries. Incoming expectations, *in situ* experience, and post-tour reflections were considered and reconstructed within the metaphorical components of the script, stage, and action. Concepts of space were not restricted to tangibility or a set scale.

The major findings of this study illuminate specific modes of spatial management which facilitate immersive whale-watching experiences in Juneau. Qualities of the cultural stage, or boat space, minimized barriers between customers and wildlife and provided a water-level perspective. Customers felt physical closeness to the wildlife because of the boat’s design and layout. Through the acts of the captain, close physical proximity to wildlife was carefully gained while adhering to regulations. Finally, the interpretive acts of the guide were essential to managing expectations of the experience and constructing an understanding of the natural world during the encounter.

Previous studies of wildlife tourism conclude that wildlife experience is lived long after the conclusion of the tour. Tourists relive their experiences as cherished memories and are usually eager to share their experience with others (Curtin, 2005; Patterson et al., 1998). By doing so, tourists reprise the whale-watching performance for others. Highlights of their experience are emphasized again and again, and their script, which was transformed throughout the experience, remains under revision. The revised performance of whale-watching tourists also informs scripts of spectators. Just as Butler (1988) explains how the sedimentation of individual acts constructs societal gender norms, the post-tour performance of whale-watching customers informs a larger societal narrative about Alaska, whale-watching, and humpback whales. Providing truly resonating experiences for individual whale-watching customers has potential to perpetuate broader impacts.

Thinking about space critically and creatively under performative theory provides insight into how this may be best accomplished in the Juneau whale-watching context. However, managerial elements identified in the results explicitly speak to the broader spatial foundations of experience and tourism as well. Greater understanding of these foundations may offer solutions for increasing tourism-related issues at sites around the world. For example, World Heritage Sites are UN designated landmarks selected for their historical, cultural, or scientific significance. They are also popular tourist destinations, warranting a careful balancing act of heritage conservation and tourism interests. Borrowing from the language of this study, I pose this question: how might World Heritage Site managers balance and connect the cultural stage of tourist with the culture stage of the site?

The underlying bases of space identified in this study, especially regarding proximity management, accessibility, mobility, and interpretation, uncover the foundations for connecting

tourists with their environment, cultural or natural. In all tourism contexts, one “world” meets another, and the health of the site, relics or wildlife may be at risk. But this meeting of worlds also provides opportunity for immersion and a cultivation of greater stewardship. The results of this study, while certainly transferable to other whale-watching contexts and other nature-based tourism activities, inform any tourism activity which seeks to provide immersive, resonant, and transformative experiences.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1. Southeast Alaska regional locator map

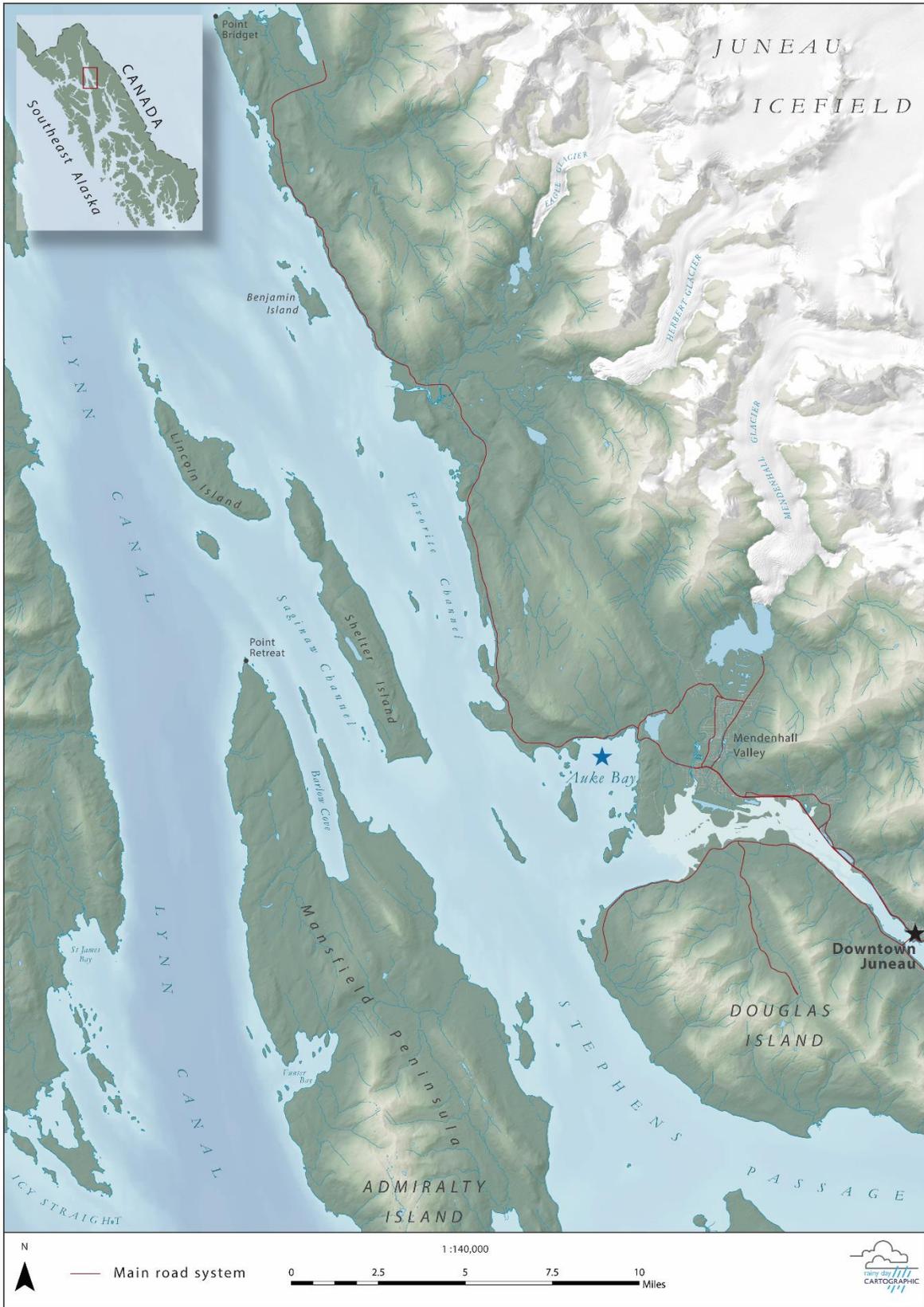


Figure 2. Juneau, Alaska landscape map

Table 1. Compiled List of Juneau Whale-watching Operators\*

<b>Company Name</b>	<b>Tour Length</b>	<b>Tour Size</b>	<b>Key words</b>
Above & Beyond Alaska, LLC	Day or Overnight	n/a	Exclusive, guided, sea kayaking, other wildlife viewing
Access Alaska Charters	Custom	Small group	Affordable, private, family, small group, customizable, fishing
Adventures in Alaska	“Long-length”	12 max	Inclusive, personalized, uncrowded
Alaska Fjordlines Inc.	3-hour	48 max	Up close, narrated tour, custom vessel
Alaska Galore Tours	2.5-hours or 6.75 hours	4 – 19	Accommodating, other wildlife
Alaska Shore Excursions	n/a	n/a	“The best shore excursions in Juneau”
Alaska Travel Adventures	n/a	n/a	“Most experienced” whale-watching company, up close, unique perspectives
Allen Marine Tours	n/a	150 max	Cruise-charter events, private
Dolphin Jet Boat Tours	n/a	Small group	“Original” whale-watching company, comfortable, eye-level encounter, local, small groups, heated and enclosed
Gastineau Guiding Company	n/a	Small group	Small group, fully guided, wilderness experiences, adventure, quality interpretation
Glacier Bay Lodge and Tours	8 – 9 hours or 3 hours	n/a	Boating adventure, spectacular scenery and wildlife
Harv and Marv's Outback Alaska	n/a	12 max	Personalized, honest, sincere, and friendly, small, local, low emission vessels, safe
Jayleen’s Alaska	Custom	6 max	Safe and honest, personalized, fun, “truly Alaskan experience,” small size, flexible
Juneau Tours & Whale Watch	n/a	28 max	Custom built vessels, heated and enclosed, unrestricted views, viewing decks
Liquid Alaska Tours	n/a	n/a	Guaranteed sightings, “whale-watching at its finest”
The Local Guy Charters & Sightseeing	2.5-hour, 4-hour, or full day	6 max	Private, personalized, heated, comfort
Lost in Alaska Adventures	2.5-hour or 4-hour	6 max	Personal, satisfying adventure, safety and comfort
M & M Tours of Juneau	n/a	n/a	Experience all of Juneau in 1 tour
Moore Charters, LLC	n/a	n/a	Fishing charters and whale-watching adventures, taxi transport
Rum Runner Charters	Custom	Small group	Affordable, private, family, fishing

Southeast Charters, Inc.	n/a	n/a	Comfortable, secure, remote, luxury
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\*Searching for "whale-watching" on the Juneau Convention and Visitors Bureau website yields this list of companies. Tour lengths, capacities, and key words from each short tour description are listed when available (JCVB).

Table 2. Study Participant Profiles\*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Whale-watching Role</b>
Mara	Female	Customer
Katie	Female	Customer
Eva	Female	Customer
Becca	Female	Customer
Aileen	Female	Customer
Emily	Female	Customer
Gloria	Female	Customer
Michelle	Female	Customer
Linda	Female	Customer
Christine	Female	Customer
Anna	Female	Customer
Theresa	Female	Customer
Beth	Female	Customer
Eric	Male	Customer
Jordan	Male	Customer
Bill	Male	Customer
Richard	Male	Customer
Randy	Male	Customer
David	Male	Customer
Alex	Male	Customer
Jenna	Female	Management
Megan	Female	Management
Lisa	Female	Boat captain
Cindy	Female	Boat captain
Luke	Male	Guide
Sam	Male	Guide
James	Male	Guide
Erica	Female	Guide

\*Study participants were assigned pseudonyms, listed here. Genders and whale-watching roles of each participant are listed.