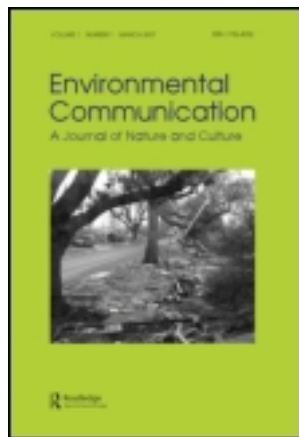


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# Transcorporeal Tourism: Whales, Fetuses, and the Rupturing and Reinscribing of Cultural Constraints

Tema Milstein & Charlotte Kroløkke

*We focus on the expressive performative eruptions that often mark interactive and embodied humanature events, on the discourses that surround and entangle them, and on ways such extra-discursive communicative moments might point us to new understandings about the intersections of nature, culture, and the body. Using the frameworks of tourist as spectator, notions of transcorporeality and intersubjectivity, and environmental communication concepts about material-symbolic mediation of humanature relations, we explore how whale tourism and elective ultrasounds at times appear to rupture Western human–nature binaries and notions of contained human bodies, yet also provide surveilled and disciplined moments in which particular cultural constraints are reinscribed. We envision ways such rapturous-rupturous experiences can help inform a transcorporeal environmental ethic centered on vulnerability and openness, arguing such moments must be paired with embodied, constitutive, and structural recontextualization to allow for ecocultural transformation.*

*Keywords: Spectator; Transcorporeality; Intersubjectivity; Humanature; Ecoculture; Ultrasounds; Whale Watching; Tourism; Boundary Creature*

The drive to materially experience the largest mammal in the sea or to visually encounter the small developing fetal body inside the pregnant one can lead to complex and often highly orchestrated encounters. The encounters provide interactive embodied events that we authors view as particularly salient in exploring not only how communication mediates ecocultural relations but also how ecocultural relations mediate communication. In this paper, we focus on the expressive performative

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Tema Milstein is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of New Mexico. Charlotte Kroløkke is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Literature, Culture, and Media at the University of Southern Denmark. Correspondence to: Tema Milstein, MSC03 2240, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque NM 87131, USA. Email: tema@unm.edu. Or to Charlotte Kroløkke, 55 Campusvej, University of Southern Denmark, DK 5230 Odense M, Denmark. Email: charlottetro@litcul.sdu.dk

eruptions that often mark such encounters, on the discourses that surround and entangle them, and on ways these communicative moments might point us to new understandings about the intersections of nature, culture, and the body.

Our comparative case studies, whale watching and nonmedical ultrasounds, are touristic settings that offer heuristic comparisons. Both cases present elective packaged encounters with nature, yet both also involve the “tourist” not merely as a spectator but also as what Bowman (2006) terms a *spectator*, evidencing interactive and intersubjective (Cramer & Foss, 2009) performance and experience in these sites. Both sites also share the conveyance of water, a medium that implies permeability, providing opportunities for boundary shedding moments in oceanic worlds that both relay and constitute human and whale bodies, making them sensible and responsive to naked or technologically assisted eyes.

We argue the highly sought after fetuses and whales are what Bryld and Lykke (2000) identify as today’s new “boundary creatures,” mammalian life that represents the border zones between inner and outer, water and air. In studying internatural<sup>1</sup> interaction in these liminal spaces, we explore how such dialectically internal–external encounters at times appear to transcend Western culture–nature binaries and notions of contained bodies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), eliciting profoundly expansive experiences, and, at the same time, often serve as discursive moments in which cultural constraints may be reinscribed.

In analyzing these encounters, we also attempt to shed light on a transcorporeal approach to different forms of humanature interactions (Alaimo, 2009)—in the process, strengthening environmental communication notions of mediation and adding empirics to help lead to a transcorporeal environmental ethic centering on the vulnerability inherent in recognizing one’s corporeal openness to, and interdependence within, the biosphere. We use compound terms, including humanature and ecoculture, throughout our essay as a way to reflexively engage the convergence of human and nature, ecology and culture. In doing so, we trouble the boundaries of these interdependent systems (Gray, 2010) and put them into integral conversation in research as they are in life. These symbolic moves parallel the work done by boundary creatures. They are heuristic turns away from Western notions of humans as separate from “the environment” and turns toward lexical intertwining in league with Haraway’s (2008) use of “naturecultures” to encompass materially and symbolically interrelated historical and contemporary entities.

In what follows, we outline our critical analytical framework, informed by tourism, performance, feminist science studies, and environmental communication scholarship. As cultural critics fascinated by whale and fetus communication events, yet also critical of the ways in which these encounters take place, we engage in what Bryld and Lykke (2000) call a “balancing act” between “cultural critique and cultural amazement” (p. 23). In particular, we focus on what some study participants termed “orcagasms” and what we term “ultragasms,” the expressive, potentially boundary-transgressing moments that mark the human–whale and adult–fetal encounter.

We highlight contextualized examples from our respective fieldwork: One case a several summers-long field study of communication about endangered orcas and

their ecosystems in Canadian and American Pacific waters in the world's highest concentration of whale tourism; the other a six-month field study of communication during elective ultrasounds in Denmark and the Southwest USA. Finally, we discuss ways both whale and fetus tourism allow for *rapturous-rupturous* moments that serve to breach culturally constituted boundaries, yet at the same time produce spaces for reassertion of these boundaries. As such, we argue the transformational potential of transcorporeal experiences is limited unless paired with ideological re-contextualization—an embodied, constitutive, and structural internalization and externalization of ecocentric and feminist engagement with nature.

### **Humanature Tourist Spaces**

In this section, we discuss the making of touristic spaces and the performances that go into them, foregrounding the notion of tourists as *spectactors* and creating a framework for understanding tourist encounters with whales and fetuses. Second, we engage parallel cultural studies, feminist science studies, and environmental communication conversations about the transcorporeal, intersubjective, discursive, and extra-discursive elements that intricately entwine humanature relations, touching, too, on the normative forms of surveillance at work in disciplining the socioculturally constructed boundaries of culture and nature.

#### *Touristic Performances*

Tourist spaces are fluid and dynamic, created interactively and through embodied performances, as much as through spatial staging and directing (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004; Löfgren, 1999; MacCannell, 1999). As such, tourist spaces are both material and social practices, involving the orchestrated and collective movement of bodies, technologies, and things.

The practice of tourism itself is environmental, ascribing meaning to places (Todd, 2010). At the same time tourists are key agents and actors, not simply spectators who passively consume touristic images. Rather, they can be understood as co-performers or *spectactors*, “interactive co-creators of the performance” (Bowman, 2006, p. 104). During whale watching or ultrasound sessions, tourists not only gaze, they are constitutive actors in the meaning-making process. Whale tourists jostle for position, exclaim to humans and whales, and aim cameras (Milstein, 2008, 2011); pregnant women massage their bellies, jump up and down to change fetal position, and imitate fetus facial movements (Kroløkke, 2011). The experience is not only about a particular way of seeing, although sight is prioritized, but also about a particular type of performance tied to conventional ideas of how to do tourism in that setting.

Tourist spaces, usually socioeconomically elite spaces,<sup>2</sup> promise encounters with whales and fetuses in their “natural surroundings.” The encounters are of course highly staged, simultaneously and paradoxically interrupting the “natural” environments. We do not know the effects, if any, that ultrasound waves have on the fetus, but we do know the quest to get ever closer has its share of likely detrimental effects on cetaceans (Orams, 2004).

Today's new "boundary creatures" (Bryld & Lykke, 2000) are liminal mammals who not only symbolize a kind of harmony between inner and outer spaces but who also stimulate cultural transformations. We pose that fetuses and whales transgress boundaries among culture, nature, and the body, providing a synchronized space for transformed human nature understanding. At the same time, they serve as cultural icons discursively and technologically transformed for aesthetic consumption. The orca is reinscribed as a spiritual, matriarchal, and ecological icon (Milstein, 2008) and the fetus as not just any baby but "my baby," a gendered, intelligent being (Kroløkke, 2011). Guides represent whales as encouraging tourists to transform into more ecologically aware advocates and fetuses as encouraging pregnant women to transform into "mothers" engaged in disciplined maternal consumption behaviors. In both cases, the staging of inner and outer spaces can be referred to as acts of "translation" (Haraway, 1991, p. 164), translating the encounters into both profoundly meaningful and culturally comprehensible moments.

Inspired by Bryld and Lykke (2000), we also see human nature tourist encounters as a postindustrial form of colonizing nature. Nature is, according to them, both a technoscientific and commercial project while simultaneously a sacred, sublime experience. The new wilderness areas of the inner spaces (the oceanic or amniotic depths—the "deep frontier") and outer spaces (the cosmos or "high frontier") have replaced, Bryld and Lykke argue, yesteryear's vast and inhospitable mountains, forests, and deserts, while they continue to produce sublime responses in the observer and to be re-embedded with patriarchal mastery narratives.

In our cases, marketing material intertwines the commercial and the sacred into promising consumable sublime experiences. Whereas ultrasound marketing features normatively ideal facial photos, including perfect little noses, whale tourism marketing features close encounters with whales, generally pictured above water, mid-breach, entirely exposed to the tourist gaze. The tourism industries depend on such images to make their particular service compelling, yet their technicians and guides must also negotiate this quest and ensure tourists do not leave feeling disappointed, cheated, or perhaps even judging the experience inauthentic. Whale watch excursions, for instance, fall short when whales simply are not present—tours that "guarantee" whales can only guarantee taking tourists until whales appear. Whales, even when present, may not perform to expectation—spectators often express disappointment in whales who keep their distance or do not perform according to spectacular desires. Ultrasounds also may not meet clients' expectations: "We really can't show these photos to anyone. It looks like the elephant man right there," one prospective dad notes. As with whales, companies may invite clients back for additional opportunities. The fetus, always present, can be revisited until it does perform according to expectations.

Fetus and whale tourism offer comparative performances that both define and rupture boundaries between self and other. During our fieldwork, tourists in both cases often performed boundary-rupturing moments by no longer speaking but instead emotionally engaging in a "body-speak" of sorts (Bryld & Lykke, 2000). In what often appeared to be the most meaningful or climactic moments of

encountering whales or fetuses, words did not suffice. We see these body-speak moments as reinscribing a conventional tourist performance, yet at the same as representing and exposing an excess of meanings—a slippage—regarding co-existence with boundary creatures. In investigating our case studies, and encounters with nature or familiar other, we perceive these ineffable moments as extremely significant. During these moments, participants appeared to move from conventional discursive framings to “discourse beyond language” or “an expressive co-existence with nature” (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2011, p. 114.)

### *Transcorporeality and Normativity*

This investigation is in league with efforts in cultural and environmental communication studies to examine the imbrications (Cox, 2007) of human and more-than-human worlds by embracing discourse studies and, at the same time, charting new waters in the study of discourse beyond language, or the extra-discursive. By exploring constitutive elements of language as well as materialist, performative, embodied, and emotional dynamics, we further inquiry into the notion that communication more broadly defined not only constructs meaning but also in a more internatural (Plec, forthcoming) manner serves to *mediate* perception and practice among human and nonhuman communities (Abram, 1997; Carbaugh, 2007; Milstein, 2008; Rogers, 1998).

Thus, in expanding the exploratory foundation from which communication can be defined and analyzed, we attempt to “explore ways of understanding and articulating environmental co-presence” (Milstein, 2009). Such an approach opens up analytical possibilities in investigating a range of communicative humanature intersections. In our cases, for example, we argue it is of consequence that mammalian human–whale and adult–fetus intersections take place via water, our main ingredient as biological entities and the enabler of markedly transcorporeal commingling.

Salvador and Clarke (2011) argue that such embodied approaches to environmental communication research heighten focus on “the resonant, corporeal dimensions of the human-environment interchange” (p. 253), enlivening one’s senses of the more than human world (Abram, 1997), “re-minding” one to heed vital bodily connection to the lifeworld (Killingsworth, 2007), and textually refocusing one on “codes of the body and the broader ecologies in which we swim” (Condit, 2006, p. 370).

Other concepts help us further articulate environmental co-presence and expressive co-existence within the framework of this study. Cramer and Foss (2009) discuss a mutual humanature *intersubjectivity* that recognizes “the natural world has agency and that humans are not in control of the world around them. Rather, we exist in a non-hierarchical, mutual, and interdependent relationship” (p. 312). Intersubjectivity, as a strategy, awakens humanity to a reciprocal present moment filled with mystery and possibility, even ecstasy. In such present moments, Cramer and Foss argue, informed by Baudrillard’s notion of magic, language and its meanings are often elusive and even random, indicating one should privilege

modes of communication capable of multiple layers of meaning that engage and express various modes of experience.

In introducing the notion of *transcorporeality*, or “the recognition of the substantial interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human world” (p. 23), Alaimo (2009) poses the question of whether the vulnerability that arises in acknowledging one’s corporeal openness to and interdependence with the material world can foster an environmental ethic. Such a recognition challenges dominant Western cultural metaphors of humans as bounded and contained bodies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), impenetrable and separated from nature, as well as positivism’s scientific claims to god’s eye perspectives on nature (Haraway, 1991).

Similarly, Salvador and Clarke (2011) argue, by studying humanature via purposeful embodied listening, one can gain perspective on material-symbolic tensions that underlie particular environmental relationships and issues, and open the door to ethical reconsiderations of human inhabitation of the world. Such ethical reconsiderations can be further informed by Lykke’s (2009) expansion on the notion of transcorporeality, using Haraway’s (1991) epistemology of situated knowledges to embed the knower’s gendered, classed, raced, sexualized, and geopolitically positioned body in the material emergent earthly world. To Lykke, the interrogation of human and nonhuman actors—a “human/earth-other axis” (p. 39)—opens up possibilities for new alliances.

Framing our cases as spaces of possible environmental co-presence, transcorporeality, intersubjectivity, and embodied ethical reconsideration, and our participants as spectactors and boundary creatures, puts the focus on transformative potential, yet normative elements are at work here, as well: From the hushing that goes on during an event to keep performances in line with convention to the conventional acceptance that intense experiences are good for us (Löfgren, 1999). To this extent, our cases are not only social but also socializing events. Normative elements serve as a type of surveillance, fostering moralistic concerns, self-discipline, and controlled bodily expressions. The function of surveillance thus lies in keeping performances in check (Foucault, 1976/1979). During the ultrasound session, for instance, prospective parents are encouraged to express joy about the baby-to-be. Similarly, whale watchers are expected to express excitement when seeing whales; those who sit inside and never rise to view whales are often commented upon and those who are properly exuberant and ask informed questions are often praised.

### **Case Studies: Climactic Humanature Tourism Moments**

Among key similarities between whale and fetus tourism is tourist anticipation of an enjoyable time in encountering a boundary creature. Such pleasant expectations inform communication about and within the experiences. In these settings, meetings with both whale and fetus are framed as encounters with familiar friendly others and as showcasing the other. Salmon-eating orcas drop their “killer whale” moniker and are described as wild animals who are intelligent, gentle, and matriarchal. Fetuses are described as babies parents will soon be holding, with their own distinct personalities,

playfully “naughty” at times, and, most importantly, as gendered beings. In addition, spectactors are reminded of their own embodied presence—mother and infant are at times physically prodded for preferred views; people carefully heed the ocean as they pursue whales on and off shore.

In the following case study sections, we explore the climactic moment of encountering the embodied other. These performative moments, foregrounded and framed by discourse, are often emotional and elusive, and we argue they can be intersubjective and transcorporeal events. In the case of whale watching, insider participants, such as island locals and tour naturalists, had a name for such moments: “orcagasm.” These unpremeditated events were expressed unselfconsciously, often collectively, as joyous, sensual, generally wordless (with the exception, for instance, of whispered or shouted repetitions of “Oh my god!”s), extended, undulating exclamations as whales swam near. In ultrasounds, though we, and not participants, name the exclamations “ultragasm,” the moments were also often expressed collectively, and filled with tears, presumably of joy. In the following sections, we describe and provide contextualized examples of orcagasm and ultragasm. In these sections, we switch from the use of “we” to “I” to speak as the researcher who did the respective case fieldwork, referring to Milstein in the whale watching section and Kroløkke in the ultrasound section.

### *The Orcagasm*

“Orcagasm” refers to the outburst of thrilled, sometimes ecstatic expressions many people have when first near one of the definitive boundary creatures, cetaceans—in this case, wild orcas. I observed countless orcagasm on whale watch boats in Canadian and US waters, as well as on Washington State’s San Juan Island’s coast where orcas often travel very near the public shoreline. Before hearing the term “orcagasm,” in my fieldnotes I described the expressions I repeatedly heard as excited, breathy, and at times boisterous sounds, usually in the form of “Aaaaah!” “Ooooh!” and “Oh my god!,” as whales first surfaced nearby. I noted other embodied elements: the silence marking tourists’ collectively focused attention as orcas approached, my quickening pulse, the exclamations as whales rose explosively exhaling from the water, the forgetting of one’s self and people around, the electrified concentration as whales slid their huge shiny bodies out of and back into the water and then left us behind. One tour naturalist described the expressions as “this involuntary pleasurable sound people make.”

The tourism industry provides the discursive framing for the orcagasm with marketing brochures and web sites picturing orcas leaping from the ocean, or naturalist and captain narratives that touch on endangered species status,<sup>3</sup> matriarchal family structure, salmon diet, and ways to identify orcas as individuals. The most effective naturalists design their narratives to help visitors connect the emotion often evidenced by orcagasm to caring for whales and their ecosystem beyond the confines of the tour.

Industry staff and tourists both engage as spectactors. Boat captains are in constant radio and phone contact with other captains to locate whales and to move with

whales, repeatedly positioning paying passengers for best vantages. On shore, visitors scout out best vantages, at times climbing onto rocks jutting into the sea for closest possible experiences. Compared to boat tours, textual framing on shore is reduced, ranging from state park signage that describes local marine life to no framing at all in public land with shoreline access.

Boat naturalists explain they often halt their narratives when whales come into sight so tourists can experience the moment in silence without guides directly interceding. In discussing their communication strategies, naturalists also emphasize the importance of foregrounding encounters with information to counteract popular culture framings of orcas and following encounters with more information as tourists might then have more interest. On shore, with no naturalists, waiting tourists exchange whale information (which ranges from the somewhat accurate to the wildly inaccurate). Almost always, if whales approach, conversations come to a halt; as on boats, on-land silence appears to provide space to experience the whale–human moment.

While the generally unselfconscious orcagasm is common during first whale sightings or particularly exciting encounters, the term “orcagasm” is used solely among whale insiders,<sup>4</sup> people who regularly encounter orcas in the transnational waters of this Pacific Coast region. Their extensive talk about “orcagasm” helps illustrate both the centrality of the orcagasm to this humanature encounter as well as its cultural positioning. Two whale researchers who learned about my study introduced me to the term.

Whale researcher 1: Sounds interesting. How people communicate around them. Well, I have one word for you – it’s going to be the title of your study. One word, it’s the term we use: “orcagasm.”

Me: (not sure if I heard right) Orcagasm?

Whale researcher 1: You’ve heard it. The sound people make. “Ooh! Aah!” Orcagasm.

Whale researcher 2: (*leans in with a smile*) Multiple, shrieking.

The climactic expressions align with other embodied and performative aspects of the experience. For instance, on the ride back to harbor, boat tourists zone out and sometimes fall asleep after whale encounters, a kind of postorgasmic drowsy bliss. Insiders at times describe favorite whales as physically attractive or describe having crushes on particular whales. The whales, boundary creatures in these daily repeated interactions, can be viewed as transcorporeal co-participants, with their presence and behavior conducting spectators’ exclamatory and synchronized orgasmic responses.

Whereas whale insiders, who repeatedly observe human–whale encounters, often discuss “orcagasm” among themselves, tourists rarely, if ever, are privy to the backstage term. Very young tourists typify the exclamations very differently. For instance, when hearing an orcagasm on video, a 10-year-old boy said: “Sounds like

someone is having a heart attack”—something a child might think when accidentally hearing sex, noting the corporeal intensity of the encounter but misplacing the source.

Tourists, however, often implicitly note the synchronicity of whales rising and people exclaiming, most often with analogies to fireworks shows (e.g., “It sounds just like the Fourth of July—‘Oooh! Aaah!’”). Such comments generally come from tourists who do not take part in the orcagasm but instead keep their bodily experience contained—from the start, holding cameras between themselves and the whales and commenting on others’ exclamations around them. This framing of the orcagasm as resulting from spectacle positions whales less as transcorporeal or intersubjective co-participants and more as fantastic show for the entertainment of detached humans. Other tourists, who only use cameras *after* the climactic first appearance of whales, also inevitably cut short their orcagasm—unselfconscious thrilled exclamations are replaced by contained ocularcentric concentration on camera lens, cursing at missing a shot, and even cursing at whales who dive into water before being captured on film.

Relatedly, whale insiders describe the orcagasm as signifying the intensity as well as authenticity of humanature encounters. One State Park ranger showed a video of whale watching from shore.

That’s the perfect example of a reaction of how people just fall in love with these whales. They just love them. They get so excited and happy. And you should hear the whole clip. When the whale breaches, it’s like a climax. They don’t get that way about foxes.

Such comments also highlight the iconic status of the whales, revealing an array of animals, plants, and processes that often are ignored, or downgraded, in favor of ecstatic focus on the iconic boundary creature. Insiders also characterize orcagasm in ways that point to differences in authenticity and intensity between experiencing wild whales versus captive or mediated whales. Another ranger said:

People are nuts for them. They go nuts. The whales come, and they go, “Oooo! Oh!” – you know what it sounds like. . . There’s a big difference seeing a whale breach or spy hop in nature as opposed to at Seaworld or on TV.

On far rarer occasions, tourists applaud when seeing whales, which some insiders view negatively, as signifying inauthentic, or flawed, humanature encounters.

Tour naturalist: Yeah, applauding for tricks. Applauding is weird. The “oohs” and “aahs” are more natural. The applauding implies that they did it for them, like a show. It’s like Seaworld.

Orcagasm, therefore, are characterized as representing appropriate spectator responses within a wild humanature intersection. In addition, orcagasm can represent sublime responses.

Tour boat captain: The whole world makes sense for a moment seeing these whales. A lot of people would call it a religious experience, but it’s more than that. All the puzzle pieces fit together. And you try to explain it to someone and it’s gone – but you never forget it.

Such descriptions point to ways in which the explanatory tools available in this Western setting are in some ways insufficient to convey more profound feelings, including perceptions of understanding and harmony between inner and outer spaces that whales initiate as “boundary creatures.” At the same time, the wordless performative orcasms provides a rupturing of such discursive constraints.

It should not come as a surprise, then, that orcasms are often the subject of jokes and surveillance. For example, as one park ranger shows a preteen fieldtrip an orcasms section of a whale watching video, he says, “We see people all the time, laughing and crying and screaming and praying. (*Orcasms sounds explode from the speakers.*) You wouldn’t stoop to that; you would never do that, right? Like you didn’t do that just a bit ago when you were on the kayaks with the whales.” A 12-year-old with a fuzzy mustache looks at the ranger and earnestly shakes his head, “No.”

Relatedly, whereas some whale insiders allow themselves orcasms during particularly intense whale–human encounters on their own personal time, orcasms are considered inappropriate on the job. Some insiders typify one tour naturalist assistant, for instance, who often takes part in orcasms with tourists on boats, as eccentric and improper. The assistant also remarks on her own behavior, often apologizing after she involuntarily and excitedly shrieks during a whale’s appearance.

### *The Ultracasm*

Unlike in encounters with whales, the term “ultracasm” was not used by any participants in the ultrasound site. Nevertheless, we find the term aptly captures the climactic extra-discursive and performative communication that commonly unfolds during elective ultrasound experiences among technicians, prospective parents, and fetuses. As a researcher, I was party to numerous ultracasms taking place during ultrasound sessions, as well as afterward when technicians would frame a particularly “cute” image and parents would view and comment on photos. The following excerpt illustrates a common transcorporeal moment between prospective parents, technician, and fetus as boundary creature:

Technician: Now can we get her to move her hand away from her face is my question.

Mom: She is stubborn (*laughter*).

Technician: Oh so who does she take after?

Mom: I don’t know. Probably me (*everyone laughs*).

Technician: How wise of you to say that you know. How kind of you (*laughter*). So you know what I am going to do. I am going to do just a little bit of poking on her bottom here. I don’t want to push on her face too directly because I am afraid that she may crawl up into a little ball. But if we can get her to move that arm down, she is in a great position for us to get good pictures of her. Come on, come on sweetness (*technician is poking on the belly while everyone is looking at the image projected on to the wall*). So let’s try this.

Dad: She is shy.

Technician: Sometimes. I am going to do a little bit of tapping on you. She can hear that at this point (technician is tapping on the belly. The fetus promptly moves her arm away and her face becomes completely visible for a brief moment).

Mom and Dad: Oooh (everyone laughs).

Technician: Well hello (addressed to the fetus, everyone laughs). And it (the arm) came right back. She is so like . . . I want to do what I want do. There is your daughter (Prospective parents are looking at the big image while the technician is orienting herself on the computer screen).

Mom and Dad: Oooh.

Technician: There is your sweet girl (the image becomes clearer again, prospective parents laugh).

The ultrasound session is a highly mediated and staged event. Inner space is revealed through the intricate interplay between ultrasound (technology), amniotic fluid (water), body mass (fetus), and technical expertise (human). It is in the trinity among technology, water, and fetal body that the fetal image is produced and simultaneously made human by the technician. The technician, like whale watching's boat captains and naturalists, helps physically and perceptually guide the boundary creature encounter, inscribing a desire to merge with the baby-to-be, and shifting attention away from the mother and her embodied feelings of pregnancy to the visual display of the fetus and the technology that makes it possible. For a brief moment, the fetus is "our perfect baby" and excitement unfolds.

Although fetal encounters are always clearly technologically mediated, the performance throughout the sessions is focused on presenting only familiar forms of mediation, as parents turn toward the flat screen TV or the image projected onto the wall in front of them. Thus, they move away from the less familiar technology and the technician who produces the image and instead turn to a real-size (or bigger) fetus. As noted by one prospective father when referring to the session's entertaining aspects as well as the technician's client-oriented communication style: "It feels just like the movies." The fact that the prospective parents and the technician communicate directly with the "baby" demonstrates on one hand a de-mediation of sorts, a more direct encounter with "our" baby, yet on the other hand demonstrates how prospective parents comfortably find avenues to express themselves through technology in meaningful ways.

Instead of whale watching's journey into the beautiful yet endangered wild, the ultrasound session is framed as a pampering experience and journey into the womb. The technician welcomes the pregnant woman: "You get the table of honor," for example. Joyful aspects associated with pregnancy and future parenthood are emphasized in other welcoming phrases such as "This is just so special" and, directed to the father-to-be, "Now you finally get to see your sweet little girl." Attentive to the intimate character of the ultrasound session and the fact that this is a

postorgasmic, postsex session of sorts, technicians, in their communication strategies, promise and emphasize a more woman and relationship centered approach, frequently also complimenting pregnant women who embody pregnancy in legitimate ways: “You are such a great one to do an ultrasound on, because you are so slender,” one technician notes.

Key themes in setting the stage in these fetal encounters are bonding and communion with the fetus as well as with other family members. Tears of joy, as technicians note, are always welcomed and not uncommon. The tour is indeed designed to elicit ultragasms from prospective parents and grandparents alike. Comments like “Isn’t this wonderful?” and “Oh, look at her: She is just so cute” invite and discipline parental performative participation. In fact, technicians state that an earmark of a good session is an enthusiastic parental performance. While the prospective mother’s enthusiasm is expected, a respectable and desirable father performance displays affection toward the pregnant woman as well as awe and excitement toward the new role as a father. In this manner, parents are positioned as joyfully participating in conventional ways.

The technician skillfully frames and improves the fetal image, turning and softening the representation, while deleting any “noise” such as the umbilical cord draped in front of the fetus’ face. As a result, parents “see” and “meet” the fetus when it looks its most photogenic. The fetus is technologically removed and separated from any maternal environment, resembling instead a baby ready to be held, smelled, and kissed by its parents, as well as a baby already engaged in playful and stereotypically gendered behaviors. For instance, one technician typified a male fetus as watching a soccer game and another typified a female fetus as chatting on the cell phone. The editing process and narration continues when the technician, with help of a photo program, finishes, frames, and prints photos selected by the parents-to-be.

Throughout the session, the technician frequently engages in ultragasms of her own while also teasing the spectators and playing hide-and-seek with the fetus. Unlike the self-disciplining of guide orgasms in whale watching, the ultrasound guide’s enthusiasm is greatly appreciated and comforts the expectant parents in a situation where silence is likely to raise concerns about potential fetal health problems. Aware of this context, ultrasound technicians skillfully put on a show for parents, inviting them to engage in this pleasure-oriented session as well. In interviews with technicians, it became clear how central the expression of enthusiasm is in mediating the human–machine interaction and in believing that it would promote bonding between family members and “baby,” and even help prevent postpartum depression. In this more female dominated environment, prospective fathers and grandfathers frequently comment on the ultragasms the technicians and other women collectively enjoy and cast them as a conventional performance of sorts: “I am so much swimming in a sea of estrogen right now,” one father notes. In doing so, the men discursively separate themselves from the transcorporeal moment, much like the whale watching camera users, yet at the same time acknowledge their embodied immersion in the event.

The climax of the setting is the first 3D facial image. The technician starts the session, orients herself in 2D but then shifts away from the now familiar black and white image to showcase the much improved 3D fetal image. Tension builds as the technician tours the womb and shows what looks like a fully grown, chubby, gold-colored baby: the sought after prenatal portrait. Visitors are frequently silent during this part of the session, adding intensity and concentration, and thus authenticity, to the experience, culminating in the outburst of excitement common when first seeing the 3D image: “Oooh,” “Aaah,” “Oh, my God, she looks just like you!” or repeated exclamations like “fascinating . . . just simply fascinating,” as well as laughter.

While the technician positions pregnant women doubly as both tourists and those toured upon, the tour is especially designed for visitors to not only “meet” the fetus but also to be entertained by—and fall in love with—*their* baby. Fathers frame the ultrasound session as a boundary-transgressing prebirth experience of sorts, one they finally comprehend, and technicians help reframe less complimentary statements (for example, when one dad compares the fetus to a “meatball” and the technician reframes it as a “petite dollhouse baby”). Mothers seem relieved their hard pregnancy work is paying off; grandmothers engage in an intergenerational communication of sorts and tearfully watch fetal movements; while grandfathers express transcorporeal surprise: They had no idea about “all the stuff that goes on in there.” A bit more skeptical, siblings note the gold-colored appearance of the fetus and seem to recognize life will never be the same.

Ultragasms are common when entering not only the inside of the womb but also the inside of the smaller body within the womb. For example, when viewing the four chambers of the fetal heart, the ultragasm is extended to the technology that makes it possible: “This is just incredible,” one grandmother notes when seeing the fetal heart and hearing the fetal pulse. The pulse, a computer-mediated sound frequently mistaken as the “actual” pulse, elicits other water-mediated responses like: “It sounds entirely like when you are diving.” Throughout all these mediations, the technician is careful to highlight details that simultaneously impress participants while also positioning the mediated image as “natural” and the technician in light of her expert knowledge:

Technician: Here is the heart and I can clearly see that there is no hole in the heart. I need for him to be positioned a little better though. He is a troublemaker (smiles). He is right now drinking some of the amniotic fluid. He has done that since week 8.

Mom: Oh my goodness (smiles).

While awe is associated with the technology, affection is displayed when viewing the fetal face and giggles or laughs accompany seeing fetal genitals, particularly when it comes to boys. At this point, participants do not engage in their own ultragasm but, rather, display another conventional performance—they resolutely comment on and discipline the fetus. This is particularly notable when it comes to fetal boys who are frequently positioned as “showing it all” or “playing with themselves,” and thus positioned in conventional, more sexualized, boy performances. As noted by one grandfather: “They start earlier and earlier, don’t they?”

Throughout the session, parents' communion with the fetus is displayed in their interactions with, and comments on, the fetal image: "He looks sleepy, just like I did this morning," one pregnant woman notes, or "Come on out to the photographer," a father tells twin fetuses. While expectant parents are not the ones directing the camera or doing the recording, the technician rhetorically portrays it as a mutual session. The communion with the fetus is manifested nonverbally, as well, when expectant parents and technician mimic facial expressions and movements of the fetus such as sucking or smacking of the lips. As such, behavior mirrors conventional parental performances and demonstrates transcorporeal and intersubjective engagement with the baby (image), as well.

While fetal encounters are highly visual in nature, other embodied elements are strongly present, too. Expectant parents touch the pregnant belly; technicians gently pat the pregnant woman on her hand; the warm gel, necessary for viewing the fetus, is carefully crafted as a circle on the pregnant belly. All of these corporeal experiences also speak to the fact that the elective ultrasound is not a hurried diagnostics exam but more of a bonus, collectively oriented, session. Additionally, the more relationship oriented session is displayed in the physical affection frequently demonstrated between the prospective parents throughout the session, speaking to the notion that at the center of the session is the re-establishment of the heteronormative nuclear family.<sup>5</sup>

Ultragasms are largely the result of a re-framing of the ultrasound session from a diagnostics exam to an elective bio-tourist experience (Kroløkke, 2011). In these semi-private encounters, paid for by prospective parents or grandparents, pleasure is vital. Technicians strongly encourage clients to relax, enjoy, and take pleasure in "meeting" their new baby. On their part, expectant parents let fantasy move them through different mindscapes: From pregnancy and prospective parenting to communion with the fetus to communion as a family, and intergenerational links. The ultrasound session is, in this manner, an embodied, transcorporeal, and social event in which participants are encouraged and expected to experiment with their new identities.

## Discussion

Readers have likely noted that despite this study's topic of "orcagasm" and "ultragasm," sex and sexuality appear only peripheral to these experiences. The "gasm" aspect of these experiences is centered in the rapturous momentary rupturing of one's separated sense of self. The orca/ultragasmic dissolving of boundaries, even if momentary, temporarily repositions humans to be centered in Lykke's (2009) "human/earth-other axis" (p. 39). We argue such *rapturous-rupturous* moments with boundary creatures can be restorative and can point to forms of communication based on possibly new alliances. Such moments mark the vulnerability, Alaimo (2009) argues, that arises from acknowledging one's corporeal openness to and interdependence within the material world. And such acknowledgements can help counteract

dominant environmental paradigms anchored in a rigid impenetrable corporeality of fear that forefronts refusals to acknowledge humanity's role in ecological destruction.

We also argue that while the sexual connotations of "orcagasm" mark the rapturous-rupturous moment as intense and authentic, they at the same time mark the rupture as largely socioculturally inappropriate. This performative marking is fundamental in locating practices of disciplining embodied humanature relations. Indeed, the gasm is more expected and coaxed in the *human-human* ultrasound—and remains unnamed/unmarked—while it is consistently remarked upon as noteworthy, significant, and at times improper in the *human-nonhuman* setting. While the "gasm" may be a tear in the cultural veil between humans and nature, and inner and outer spaces, revealing a way to give voice to what Carbaugh and Boromisza-Habashi (2011) describe as ineffable expressive co-existence, the social translations and uses of such intersubjective moments are wrapped up in cultural constraints and cultivations.<sup>6</sup>

As demonstrated in our fieldwork, the tendency in communication scholarship to focus on purely constitutive theory and in the process to disregard the interplay of the extra-discursive, the phenomenological, and the material may fail to illustrate some of the most discerning communicative moments during humanature encounters (Abram, 1997; Carbaugh, 2007; Milstein, 2008; Rogers, 1998; Salvador & Clarke, 2011). In our cases, interconnected and interdependent bodies, places, elements, systems, and technologies engage and transgress material-symbolic boundaries and, in doing so, define and redefine the ways humanature is perceived. We present this in a number of ways in both cases, first and foremost through the mediation of water. Water, the vital stuff of ocean and womb, creates in its own codes the possibilities for boundary crossing—allowing for and mediating unique transcorporeal and interspecies events marked by extra-discursive moments essential in ethically reconsidering humanature.

In addition, this study shows how the failure to pay attention to the constitutive in favor of the purely material may equally fall short of demonstrating the framework through which the material is interwoven. While the watery touristic intersections of whale watching and ultrasounds encourage rapturous performances of orcagasm and ultragasms, at the same time dominant ideological discursive framings discipline rupturous interactions into the mundane and decidedly conventional. Once ways of articulating environmental co-presence leave the individual and enter the realm of public discourse, we see reassertions of particular cultural boundaries. The detriments of such dominant cultural push-back are numerous and, in cases of both critically endangered whales and ecosystems, and gendered and disciplined fetuses and women, cultural movement is imperative.

Despite the cultural wrappings and reassertions, however, these performances mark an important instance, a present and elusive moment, that can be a foundational to the dismantling of culturally constituted separations between self and other, human and nature, body and environment—what Gray (2010) describes as a troubling of divides that one realizes are muddy when experienced at close and intimate range. Understanding whale and fetus tourists as spectators further highlights the intersubjective dimensions of these ruptures, as well as their

performative potential to trouble or reconceptualize culture-nature distinctions (Gray, 2007).

A transcorporeal ethic can emerge from these touristic spaces, in which humans often face their own openness and vulnerability, becoming boundary creatures in themselves, if only for a moment. The ultragasm, perhaps in part, is expressed because of a momentarily induced realization that being human *is* being nature—biologically reproducing, creating, growing, feeding, and being fed upon. The orcagasm, in contrast, marks a momentary realization of transcorporeal trans-species encompassment, mammalian cetacean pods sliding around humans, human and whale breath intermingling, the vulnerability of sensing oneself as a small terrestrial creature floating in or on the edge of an open ocean populated by giants.

A transcorporeal environmental ethic also must take normative processes into account. The fact that these encounters are often largely staged and framed by guides and technology, as well as disciplined by fellow spectators, is generally forgotten in the process. Instead, each event takes on the appearance of an unmediated intersubjective encounter of sorts. In whale and fetus tourism, however, spectators are encouraged to enter different mindscapes.

For instance, the cultural trappings of visual technology frame the orcagasm and ultragasm. Cameras block or break off orcagasm, reinscribing the human-whale encounter through a narrowed lens, the sublime transcorporeal moment replaced with the more culturally weighty task of recording the spectacle. Conversely, the ultragasm is made possible by visual technology; instead of capturing the experience, the technology is a portal that releases images, often to be normatively framed. As noted by Löfgren (1999), documenting happens simultaneously with experiencing and at times becomes more important, often becoming an experience in itself.

Further, boundary creatures achieve in these encounters an iconic status. The orca symbolizes a potentially enlightened and harmonious humanature. Tourists are described as falling in love with whales, leaving naturalists with hopes that this type of communion will lead departed visitors to feel, and advocate for, new ecocultural alliances. However, the iconic status is also problematic and can serve as a potential dead-end where whale-centered focus blocks out other interconnected forces and processes of nature that must be integrally appreciated to restore healthy ecosystems (Milstein, 2008). Similarly, the iconic status of the fetus has been problematized by feminist scholars who argue that, as the fetal image gains cultural recognition, the pregnant woman and her embodied experiences are minimized and perhaps even made invisible (Duden, 1993; Franklin, 1991; Rothman, 2004). The fetus gains personhood and citizenship, while the pregnant woman becomes carrier and filtration system for the perfect child.

Indeed, such lopsided notions of transcorporeality can be used to discipline and surveil behavior. This is noticeable, for example, when pregnant women's transcorporeal behaviors, such as consumption patterns, are both scrutinized and disciplined in terms of constituting healthy fetal environments. In contrast, however, we see little behavioral scrutiny or discipline of whale tourism spectators

in terms of constituting a healthy environment for whales. Transcorporeality may be easy to comprehend in the pregnant body in a culture where the female body is incessantly disciplined and scrutinized, but anthropocentrism, Western human–nature binaries, and notions of bounded and contained bodies are too deeply ingrained to allow for ready scrutiny of humanity as an integral part and process of the environment of other animals.

Envisioning a transcorporeal environmental ethic, then, parallels ongoing work in environmental communication to overcome the constraints of constitutive theories. Simply momentarily dissolving the boundary between human and nonhuman does not magically lead to heightened ecological consciousness. In other words, rapturous–rapturous moments, and the extra-discursive forms of communication that occur in their wake, are in themselves not an automatic ecocultural good. While these experiences are important moves, also required is a particular type of ideological recontextualization—the merger of material-symbolic engagement with nature.

Transcorporeal experiences can help inform new cosmologies, decentering and desegregating humans within nature and providing restorative ways forward, only if they are paired with an alliance of transcorporeal ideologies, such as those provided by feminism and ecocentrism. Indeed, where a feminist scrutinizing problematizes ultrasound performances and outcomes, an ecocentric scrutinizing of humans could lead to more ecologically sound results—helping people tie health of cetaceans and oceans to wellbeing of their own views, bodies, and practices, and those of the institutions and structures they contribute to and depend upon.<sup>7</sup> Rapture is fleeting, but cultural ruptures can last if accompanied by an ideological wellspring that continues to flow until transcorporeality becomes understood as a way of being.

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### Notes

- [1] Plec's (forthcoming) concept of internatural communication opens up ways of envisioning communication as that which takes place within and among natural communities and nature classifications.
- [2] The exclusive nature of these spaces is readily seen in our whale case in which tourists must pay to reach the whales' international island region and, if on tour boat, must pay another average \$85 each. The argument, however, can also be extended to elective fetal ultrasound imaging, which ranges from about \$100 to more than \$300.
- [3] The Southern Resident Killer Whales are the most sought after cetaceans in the area by the tourism industry and are the first orca community in the world to receive endangered status. They are designated as endangered in both Canada and the USA.
- [4] Whale insiders who used the term included tour boat naturalists and captains, park rangers, whale researchers, island locals, and marine monitors of the tourism industry.
- [5] While all of the couples present in the observed ultrasound sessions were heterosexual couples, the notion of the heteronormative nuclear family may extend to LGBTQ couples as

they also may be expected to engage in performances framed as appropriate “motherhood” and “fatherhood” performances.

- [6] Carbaugh (1996) argues that comparative case studies such as these enable assessment of available means for conceiving of, and evaluating, human nature situatedness and meanings, and “the attendant attitudes that these cultivate, and constrain” (p. 55).
- [7] For instance, as top oceanic predator, orca endangered status is due to unsustainable transcorporeal conditions in which humans perceive: (1) oceans and rivers as resource and decimate salmon populations orcas prey upon (Morton, 2002), (2) Earth as dumping ground and pollute with deadly persistent chemicals that orcas bioaccumulate to toxic waste levels (Ross, 2006), (3) and ocean habitat as playground and highway and interrupt orca biorhythms with excessive vessel traffic (Noren, Johnson, Rehder, & Larson, 2009).

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