

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS: YOUTH TRAVELLERS IN WHISTLER

**INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS:
BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF
IDENTITY AMONG YOUTH TRAVELLERS
IN WHISTLER, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

By

NICOLE HAYES, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by Nicole Hayes, November 2001

MASTER OF ARTS (2001)
(Anthropology)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Insiders and Outsiders: Construction of Identity Among Youth
 Travellers in Whistler British Columbia

AUTHOR: Nicole Hayes, B.A. (Wilfrid Laurier University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Ellen Badone

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 168

ABSTRACT

Whistler is a popular tourist resort set in the heart of the Coast Mountains of British Columbia. Among the many people who are attracted to Whistler every year are the youth travellers who come to work in the resort for a season while they ski its slopes and mountain bike its trails. Youth travellers are extremely conscious of their identity as residents and dissociate themselves from tourists and others more recently arrived or more transient than themselves. Nevertheless, the boundaries between tourists, youth travellers and locals are very fluid in Whistler. I argue that youth travellers experience this instability as a threat to their identity and respond symbolically through “disidentification” with others and a manipulation of insider-outsider dichotomies. An analysis of youth travellers in Whistler reveals that their need to reinforce the boundaries between themselves and others is reflected in their perceptions of Whistler, tourists, fellow youth travellers, and the “extreme.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Ellen Badone and Dr. Petra Rethman for unhesitating support of a thesis whose topic has raised eyebrows and prompted amusement in other quarters. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Ellen Badone, for her valuable advice and skills as an editor, both of which have been of material service to in the writing of this thesis.

I would also like to recognize the warmth and hospitality of my hosts in Whistler, whose unstinting generosity and unquestioning acceptance have made this thesis possible.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my brother, Kieron Hayes, who left his heart in Whistler.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One:	Introduction	1
Chapter Two:	Youth Travellers' Perceptions of Whistler: "A Big Disney World That You Don't Have to Leave"	19
Chapter Three:	Youth Travellers' Perceptions of Tourists: "Bread and Butter?"	49
Chapter Four:	Youth Travellers' Perceptions of Themselves: "The Lifestyle of One Year"	78
Chapter Five:	Youth Travellers' Perceptions of the Extreme: "Tough But Good"	108
Chapter Six:	Conclusion	142
References		163

Chapter One

Introduction

The midday sun was hot on the dusty mountains when I stepped out of the car. It was July 1997 and I was in Whistler at last. I had been hearing stories about Whistler for almost three years, ever since my older brother had packed his bags and left Ontario to become a ski instructor and trail guide in the resort. Now I was visiting him, eager to see if Whistler was as “cool” as he said it was. As I got out of the car and looked around I began to understand why he had not come home.

The mountains surrounding Whistler were warm and green, but they looked faintly hazy in the dry heat of a summer’s day. Small snakes of water glistened sharply in the distance as they caught the sun before plunging down the mountainsides. The Village itself seemed to match the alpine setting; its quaint streets of interlocking brick were lined with small buildings that all looked like snug ski chalets. The atmosphere of Whistler was relaxed and the courtyards thronged with carefree young people sporting vaguely alien sunglasses and perfect tans. They called out to one another from across the streets and lounged in laughing groups around patio tables. There seemed to be a disproportionate number of bicycle stands, all full of expensive mountain bikes, and everyone gave the impression of having just ridden into town after casually riding up a mountain or two.

As I looked around this tiny gem set in the side of the mountain, I thought, “There’s something almost surreal about this place – something indefinably strange,” and as I tried and failed to put my finger on the concept that I was looking for, I demanded with some frustration, “What *is* it about Whistler, anyway?” A two-week vacation proved insufficient to unravel this question and, in fact, only added to my initial mystification by prompting a host of related questions about the young inhabitants of Whistler and what they were doing there. It was this failure to arrive at an intellectually satisfying understanding of Whistler that piqued my interest and ultimately led me to launch the fieldwork that resulted in this thesis.

Whistler was much colder when I stepped out of the car in May 1999, ready to begin my ethnographic research at last. The record snow pack of the 1998/99 ski season thickly blanketed the shoulders of the mountains and here and there patches of snow lingered even in the valley. I was stiff from a five day drive across seemingly endless miles of forests, lakes, prairies and mountains, and I wished my brother were there to help me carry my boxes of clothes and books up the stairs of my new apartment, but he had left Whistler the year before.

As I walked around Whistler I noticed that it was even busier than it had been two years previously. Young people were still everywhere and, if anything, their tans were better and their sunglasses more outlandish than I had remembered. There were not as many mountain bikes to be seen, but people poured off the slopes and into the picturesque streets with equally expensive

snowboards and skis. They all looked as if they had spent the day nonchalantly throwing themselves from cliffs into large drifts of snow. I was happy to see that the atmosphere of Whistler was still as bizarre as I had remembered and even “cooler” than my brother had always said it was.

Context

Prior to any discussion of my research, it is necessary to provide a brief description of the town in which I conducted my fieldwork. Located in the Coast Mountains of British Columbia, approximately 140 km north of Vancouver and near Garibaldi Provincial Park, Whistler is nestled in a valley at the base of Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains. It is a popular year round travel destination, particularly among those who ski, snowboard, mountain bike, climb or hike. The town, which is frequently referred to as “The Village” by those who live there, exists exclusively for the purposes of tourism and consists primarily of hotels, chalets, shops, and the homes of those who work in the tourist industry. The driving force behind this industry is Intrawest, or “the Mountain, ” owner of the Whistler/Blackcomb resort and consequently also the largest employer in the town.

No description of Whistler, however brief, could be considered complete without some reference to its strikingly postmodern aura. Lacking any sense of history, Whistler seems almost to have invented itself. It gives the impression of having sprung fully formed from the mountain, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus. Its winding red brick streets and old-fashioned buildings are paradoxically

shining with newness and it is populated entirely by the young and strong. A miracle of urban planning, Whistler presents a façade of tasteful uniformity to the outsider. The secret of its appeal is that it is reassuringly standardized, yet expensively (and therefore acceptably) quirky. Foremost among those attracted to Whistler are the young ski and mountain bike enthusiasts who finance their season in the mountains by working on the slopes or in the resort's restaurants and hotels. Although Whistler's resident youth travellers are drawn from the four corners of the globe, they nevertheless project a kind of animated sameness, reinforcing Whistler's atmosphere of cosmopolitan homogeneity. Tanned and fit, these young people are as much a part of the Whistler image as groomed ski runs and hot tubs in the snow.

Terminology

For the purposes of this research I have divided the Whistler population into three arguably distinct groups: tourists, youth travellers and locals.¹ With a resident population of only 9,600, Whistler opened its doors to two million tourists in the 1998/99 season (Whistler.com Systems Inc.:2). Tourists, easily the largest of the three groups listed above, are people who come to Whistler for a vacation. They do not work or live in Whistler, and although some may own property there, none of them, with very few exceptions, stay longer than three consecutive weeks.

¹ The population of Whistler is far less static than this simple division suggests. However, these categories are intended more to provide an entry point into the discussion of the complex issues surrounding identity in Whistler than to impart an inflexibly accurate description of the composition of Whistler's population.

Youth travellers, on the other hand, come to Whistler for the express purpose of living and working in the resort for a season or two while they decide what they want to do with their lives. Most are less than 25 years of age when they arrive in Whistler and the majority are under 30. The youth traveller population can be further subdivided into newcomer youth travellers and established youth travellers. Most youth travellers have lived in Whistler for less than a year; hence they are newcomers. I refer to the remainder as established youth travellers because they have lived in Whistler for over a year.²

Finally, there are locals. The category of “local” is problematic because most youth travellers, established youth travellers *and* newcomers, consider themselves to be locals. Even tourists occasionally refer to themselves as locals, especially if they come from nearby Vancouver. Moreover, very few adults now living in Whistler can claim to have been raised there. I have chosen to define “local” simply as someone who lives in Whistler and considers Whistler to be his or her primary home. According to this definition the category of local comprises many established youth travellers, some former tourists and even a few newcomer youth travellers. For reasons of clarity I will therefore try to use “local” only in conjunction with other identifiers, except in rare cases when no other label is appropriate.

Methodology

² See Chapter Four for a discussion of the significance of this one year boundary marker to youth travellers.

From May 16th to August 9th, 1999, I lived with two established youth travellers in Pemberton, British Columbia, half an hour's drive away from Whistler. The bulk of my time in the Whistler area was spent in participant-observation research among youth travellers, which, as H. Bernard Russell (1995:136) succinctly notes in *Research Methods in Anthropology*, "involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives." Most of the time I was a "participating observer," (Bernard 1995:138). I lived with youth travellers, hiked with them, rode my bike with them, went to parties with them, and laughed at their tourist jokes. However, the line between youth travellers and myself occasionally blurred and I became an "observing participant," (Bernard 1995:138). For example, like most youth travellers I obtained a part time job with Intrawest. With my name on the Intrawest payroll, I effectively *was* a youth traveller. Moreover, as I worked in the Employee Experience Department I not only attended most of the official youth traveller events in Whistler, but also I helped to organize them. I even found myself telling the odd tourist joke.

In addition to living, working and playing among youth travellers, I conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with 20 youth travellers.³ Of these, four were newcomers and 16 were established youth travellers. To my knowledge,

³ The discrepancy between the number of interviews and the number of youth travellers is due to the fact that two people were interviewed twice, and that three people (including one of those who were interviewed twice) were present at two of the interviews.

eight of the 16 established youth travellers were also locals. This bias toward established youth travellers resulted from the fact that, when I arrived, all of my contacts in Whistler were established youth travellers. Most of those with whom I worked at Inrawest also happened to be established youth travellers.

Additionally, the majority of newcomers leave Whistler after the official close of the ski season, an event that happened shortly after my arrival in Whistler. For these reasons I dwell on the views of established youth travellers in my thesis.

In carrying out my research I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews rather than unstructured ones because, with only three months to conduct my fieldwork, I knew that I would not have the opportunity to interview my research participants more than once and I therefore wanted to make sure that I covered as much material as possible in each interview (cf. Bernard 1995:209). I did not want to conduct structured interviews because I believed that youth travellers would find such formality unnatural. With two exceptions, I used the same interview guide in each interview, focusing on issues of youth travellers' perceptions of themselves, tourists and Whistler.⁴

In conjunction with semi-structured interviews I collected personal narratives, or "prose narrative[s] relating a personal experience" (Stahl 1986:12).

At the end of each interview, I asked my research participants for "stories" or "anecdotes" about tourists, youth travellers or personal encounters with the

⁴ The first of these exceptions was an interview conducted with an established youth traveller who wanted to share her impressions about my research proposal. The second exception was an interview conducted with three established youth travellers during a picnic on top of a mountain. I simply turned on my tape recorder and asked them to tell me stories about tourists, youth travellers, and the extreme.

“extreme” in Whistler. In *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative*, Sandra Dolby Stahl (1986:15) comments, “[t]he advantage of the personal narrative is that the storyteller chooses the specific situation (plot) that aptly expresses a covertly held value.” My goal in this exercise was to examine how youth travellers construct identity through narrative structure.

The narratives I received in response to my request for stories were unexpectedly rich and varied, and as a result I have made youth travellers’ stories the focal point of my thesis. Each chapter contains at least two youth traveller stories, which are used to illustrate the main themes of the chapter. In addition to youth travellers’ stories, each chapter also contains at least one reconstructed personal narrative from my field journal. These personal recollections, which appear in italics, are my attempt to situate myself in my field data (cf. Bruner 1986; Clifford 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Okely 1992; Rosaldo 1989; Tyler 1986). Interview material and observations drawn from my field notes are used to round out the narrative analysis.

Themes

In this thesis I explore some of the ways in which youth travellers construct their identities in the shifting environment of Whistler. Among the issues I examine are youth travellers’ perceptions of Whistler, of tourists and of themselves. I also consider youth travellers’ manipulation of the concept of the “extreme” in their pursuit of authenticity. In each of these lines of inquiry, I

highlight youth travellers' need to reinforce the boundaries between themselves and others.

Before I introduce the themes to be explored in the ensuing chapters, it is first necessary to provide some background to the ideas of identity and community that inform this thesis. In *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Anthony P. Cohen (1985:12) defines "community" as "members of a group of people [that] (a) have something in common with each other, which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups." Cohen's (1985:12) concept of community thereby simultaneously indicates both similarity and difference – insider and outsider. Community is therefore a relational concept, one in which insider implies and constructs outsider just as insider can itself be inferred from, and indeed is maintained by, the notion of outsider (Ilcan 1999:244). These ideas about community can be traced to the seminal work of Fredrik Barth (1996[1969]:79), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, in which he states:

The identification of a person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgement...On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers...implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed understanding and mutual interest.

Although Barth's focus is ethnic groups, his ideas are applicable to the study of community formation in general, and to the analysis of Whistler in particular, because the same principles of division into insiders and outsiders operate in all three instances.

The applicability of Barth's work to Whistler is evident in Jacqueline Waldren's (1996) examination of identity in Deià, a small community and popular travel destination in Mallorca that in some ways resembles Whistler. In *Insiders and Outsiders: Paradise and Reality in Mallorca*, Waldren (1996:139) defines the insider-outsider dichotomy that acts as the framework for her ethnography as follows: "Insider-Outsider is a binary opposition which allows a group to define itself, establish an image, an identity, or community in contrast with another with whom it shares physical space." Her description, like those of Cohen (1985) and Barth (1996[1969]), at once implies similarity and difference, or self and other.

In the process of establishing their identity as members of a group, individuals not only associate themselves with one set of people, they also distance themselves from others (Cohen 1994). Abram de Swaan (1997) refers to these twin processes as identification and disidentification. According to de Swaan (1997:101), "identification is a cognitive and emotional process in which people increasingly come to experience others as similar to themselves." Disidentification, on the other hand, is the process whereby group members deny the negative attributes of their own community by projecting them onto other communities, increasingly coming to experience others as different from themselves (de Swaan 1997:106).

The articulation of group identity through identification and disidentification occurs at the boundaries between groups because this is where they encounter each other (Barth, cited in Cohen 1994:10). It is not the centre, but rather the

boundary that “encapsulates the identity of the community” (Cohen 1985:12). Boundaries, however, are not always as solid as they seem. In her analysis of insiders and outsiders in Deià, Waldren (1996:140) notes that, after a long history of coexistence, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two groups – a situation that is replicated in Whistler, where tourists, youth travellers and locals “rub shoulders” 365 days a year. Indeed, in Whistler, just as in Deià, coexistence with outsiders is part of what it means to be an insider (Waldren 1996:141). This boundary confusion is a problem not only for anthropologists bent on classification, but also for the inhabitants of Whistler and Deià. The existential threat posed by an apparent similarity between insiders and outsiders provokes those at the boundary to assert their identity with greater vigour (Cohen 1985:40). Anthony P. Cohen (1985:50) summarizes this position as follows: “Our thesis has been that the symbolic expression of community at its boundaries increases in importance as the actual geo-social boundaries of the community are undermined, blurred or otherwise weakened.” In other words, structural blurring that is perceived to occur at the boundary between one group and another leads to the symbolic reinforcement of that boundary (Cohen 1985:44).

In this thesis I examine the conceptual haziness that occurs at the boundaries between youth travellers and other groups of people and consider youth travellers’ perception of this haziness as a threat to their identity. I pay particular attention to youth travellers’ symbolic strengthening of insider-outsider dichotomies through their identification and disidentification with others. My goal in this investigation

is not to reify the categories of insider and outsider that exist on either side of the admittedly fluid boundary between youth travellers and others, but to examine how youth travellers themselves construct and manipulate these categories in order to assert their identity.

In Chapter Two I consider how youth travellers' impressions of Whistler reflect their need to establish boundaries between themselves and others. First, I explore Jay Vogt's (1978) work on gathering places in order to underscore youth travellers' perception of Whistler as a gathering place. In "Wandering: Youth and Travel Behavior," Jay Vogt (1978:33-34) identifies five characteristics of gathering places: they are tolerant of youth travellers' self-indulgent behaviour; they offer a number of activities that youth travellers are interested in; they are easily accessible to the average youth traveller; they are within youth travellers' usually slender means; and they already support a large youth traveller population. Youth travellers' comments indicate that they think of Whistler as a gathering place, but not all youth travellers experience this as a good thing. Established youth travellers, forgetting that they were once newcomers themselves, criticize newcomers for their attraction to the things that make Whistler a gathering place. Established youth travellers reinforce the conceptual boundary between themselves and newcomer youth travellers with their disdain for newcomer behaviour.⁵

⁵ I try to avoid reification and homogenization of youth traveller categories in the body of my thesis, however the Introduction employs numerous generalizations in the interest of simplicity. Particular voices speak for themselves in the succeeding chapters.

Youth travellers also conceive of Whistler as a playground. In the classic *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, J. Huizinga (1955:12) outlines the characteristics of play. He describes play as a voluntary activity not considered part of the player's ordinary life. Play is not undertaken for any material benefit. Furthermore, he states that play occurs within set spatiotemporal boundaries and proceeds in accordance with given rules. Finally, Huizinga (1955:12) believes that play promotes the formation of social groups that exclude others. Youth travellers' descriptions of youth travel to Whistler match Huizinga's description of play, however the position of established youth travellers within this framework is ambiguous. Established youth travellers think of Whistler simultaneously as home and playground, a duality that heightens their scorn for newcomers, whose association with Whistler is not believed to run as deep.

Chapter Two highlights the division within the youth traveller population but Chapter Three draws attention to the sense of unity constructed between established youth travellers and newcomers in the face of tourists. First, I examine how Whistler's tourists and youth travellers fit into traditional tourist typologies, focusing on the work of Erik Cohen (1972), Jay Vogt (1978) and Pamela J. Riley (1987). Whistler's tourists are easy to place in the theoretical literature, but its youth travellers, while they share many of the characteristics of Cohen's drifters, Vogt's wanderers and Riley's budget travellers, elude categorization by standard tourist typologies. The theoretical ambiguity of youth

travellers' position in Whistler is reinforced by youth travellers' own inability to distinguish satisfactorily between themselves and tourists. While youth travellers indicate that there is a world of difference between themselves and tourists, they seem entirely unable to articulate this difference. In fact, many of the qualities youth travellers attribute to themselves they elsewhere acknowledge to be tourist traits.

Youth travellers compensate for their conflicted sense of identity through their attitudes toward tourists, which project a rigid insider-outsider dichotomy. This dichotomy is exemplified in their stories, in which tourists are invariably portrayed as hopelessly ignorant and inexperienced while youth travellers are depicted as knowledgeable and competent. Youth travellers freely admit the financial contribution made by tourists to the Whistler economy but this candour does not indicate resignation to the tourist presence in Whistler. Youth travellers subvert the politeness forced upon them by their jobs in the tourist industry by mocking tourists behind their backs and unfavourably contrasting tourist behaviour with their own. Youth travellers bolster their sense of identity by disidentifying with tourists and characterizing them as unworthy of the Whistler experience.

In Chapter Four I consider the ways in which established youth travellers distance themselves from newcomers through a discussion of the ritualistic aspects of youth travel in Whistler. In his analyses of liminality, Victor Turner (1969; 1974) underlines several characteristics of the liminal phase of a *rite de*

passage: it is transitory; it is “betwixt and between” two different states of being; it requires the suspension of ordinary social roles; and it is preparatory to the assumption of greater responsibilities. These descriptors also apply to youth travel. The link between youth travel and *rites de passage* is made yet clearer by Nelson H. H. Graburn’s (1983) analysis of rite of passage tourism, which bears many similarities to youth travel. However, liminal behaviour such as that in a *rite de passage* cannot be maintained forever, and established youth travellers tend to renounce overtly liminal behaviour over time. In order to reinforce their change in status, established youth travellers dissociate themselves from newcomers by frowning on liminal behaviour.

The liminality of most youth travellers in Whistler is also evident in their sense of *communitas*, a concept developed by Victor Turner in his work on liminality. Turner (1969; 1974) examines spontaneous, normative and ideological *communitas* in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* and *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Spontaneous *communitas* refers to intense feelings of community felt by liminal ritual actors. Normative *communitas* refers to the normative structures that arise to promote spontaneous *communitas* in places where spontaneous *communitas* is expected. Finally, ideological *communitas* refers to the institutionalized *communitas* of certain model societies and organizations. In Whistler, spontaneous *communitas* is associated with newcomer youth travellers while established youth travellers are more likely to experience normative *communitas*. Both kinds of youth

travellers participate in the ideological *communitas* of the resort. Established youth travellers are generally facilitators of spontaneous *communitas* rather than participants in it, because they mentally associate spontaneous *communitas* with newcomers. The exception occurs when established youth travellers are at play on the slopes of Whistler. Play is a liminal state that established youth travellers find it acceptable to indulge in. Liminality is also a factor in the ritual reversals that characterize youth travel in Whistler. This investigation of the links between ritual and youth travel highlights the ways in which established youth travellers attempt to distance themselves from newcomers.

In Chapter Five I consider how youth travellers use the concept of the “extreme” to authenticate their identity. First, I examine the links between authenticity and tourism in the works of Erik Cohen (1988) and Dean MacCannell (1976). I also investigate the connection between youth travel and authenticity that is explored in “‘Checking Out the Planet:’ Global Representations/Local Identities and Youth Travel,” by Luke Desforges (1998). Among Whistler’s youth travellers authenticity manifests itself in the “extreme,” a term youth travellers use to describe their high-risk, “no holds barred” approach to life. Youth travellers’ most obvious expression of the extreme is their participation in extreme sports, however they also extend the extreme into other aspects of their lives, simultaneously practicing what they feel to be extreme hedonism and extreme asceticism. That is, on the one hand they boast of wild parties, drugs and alcohol, and on the other they speak bracingly of poverty and “sacrifice.” These

extremes of self-gratification and self-denial are particularly indicative of newcomers. Youth travellers consider their experience of Whistler to be very spiritual, which they contrast with the materialism of tourists. Youth travellers disidentify themselves with tourists using insider-outsider dichotomies that highlight youth travellers' authenticity while calling into question that of tourists.

The battle for authenticity is fought on two fronts. The first of these lies between youth travellers and tourists and the second exists between newcomers and established youth travellers. Established youth travellers feel that newcomers do not possess true insight into Whistler because they have not yet served their apprenticeship in the town. More importantly, established youth travellers say that newcomers are not as extreme as they think they are. According to established youth travellers, newcomers go crashing about the mountains in search of the extreme with no appreciation for the risks involved. Established youth travellers' own understanding of this risk is demonstrated by their stories of the dark side of the extreme. Established youth travellers generally maintain that their understanding of the extreme is more nuanced, and therefore more authentic, than that of newcomer youth travellers. In their characterizations of newcomers, established youth travellers betray an intense consciousness of the perceived status difference between themselves and newcomers. Their response to this status difference is an attempt to disidentify themselves with newcomers.

In Whistler, the boundaries between youth travellers and other groups of people are shifting and indeterminate. As a result, youth travellers in Whistler are

extremely boundary conscious. In this thesis I examine some of the ways that youth travellers construct identity in the context of their perceptions of Whistler, of tourists, and of themselves. I also consider youth travellers' use of the extreme to devalue and negate the identities of others while asserting their own authenticity. In each of these areas of inquiry, I explore youth travellers' attempts to symbolically maintain the boundaries between themselves and others through their participation in the process of disidentification and manipulation of insider-outsider dichotomies.

Chapter Two

Youth Travellers' Perceptions of Whistler: "A Big Disney World That You Don't Have to Leave"

Introduction

In this chapter I examine youth travellers' perceptions of Whistler through an exploration of the relevant theoretical literature on gathering places and playgrounds. First, I explore Jay Vogt's (1978) work on gathering places in order to highlight youth travellers' conception of Whistler as a gathering place. I investigate the different attitudes held by newcomer youth travellers and established youth travellers toward the gathering place phenomenon. Second, I explore works on play by J. Huizinga (1955) and James W. Lett, Jr. (1983) in order to underscore youth travellers' understanding of Whistler as a playground. In particular, I focus on the ambiguous position of established youth travellers, who look upon Whistler as both home and playground, and who disidentify themselves with newcomers owing to the perceived shallowness of their connection to Whistler. My aim in this chapter is to consider some of the ways in which youth travellers' perceptions of Whistler, and attitudes toward these perceptions, reflect their need to strengthen the boundary between themselves and other

Whistler as a Gathering Place

In his paper “Wandering: Youth and Travel Behaviour,” Jay Vogt (1978:33-34) identifies an aspect of youth travel culture that he terms “the gathering place.” The gathering place, according to Vogt (1978:33), “is a popular center, on any scale, where youthful wanderers congregate.” Vogt claims that there is always at least one city favoured by youth travellers in every country, and that within each of these cities there are certain locations that are preferred. While Vogt (1978:33) believes that the popularity of such sites is promoted through media such as television and guidebooks, he claims that the best advertising occurs via the “verbal inter-traveller network.” However, whether the travel decisions of youth travellers are more influenced by *The Lonely Planet* or by word of mouth, youth travellers are all, according to Vogt, attracted to gathering places for the same reasons.

Vogt (1978:33-34) identifies five traits characteristic of gathering places. First, gathering places, no matter where they are located, are known for their liberal values: “The populace may be willing, for example, to accept transients, provide cheap lodging, or permit lenient drug laws,” (Vogt 1978:33). Gathering places must also have a certain appeal for young people on the move. Youth travellers will be attracted to them for their beauty, their impressive array of potential activities, or both. The third feature that Vogt discusses is that gathering places must be readily accessible. Gathering places should also be inexpensive places for youth travellers to sojourn, either because these locations are cost

effective, or because special arrangements are available for students and/or transients. Vogt claims that where these four characteristics are found, a large transient population is certain to gather. The transients themselves are the fifth and final distinguishing feature of gathering places as a heavy concentration of youth travellers within a given area acts as an inducement to other travellers (Vogt 1978:33-34).

There are numerous connections between Vogt's work on gathering places and youth travellers' perceptions of Whistler. For ease of analysis, I will examine Vogt's identifiers one by one, comparing them with the youth traveller discourse on Whistler. The first trait that Vogt (1978:33) establishes is that of "liberal climate." The liberality of Whistler's social climate is perhaps most apparent in the tacit acceptance of recreational drug use among many of its inhabitants – newcomers and established youth travellers alike. Neil, an apprentice electrician and avid snowboarder, speculates that one of the reasons why so many people of his generation are attracted to Whistler is that they have all heard that it is an "outrageous time."⁶ He does not hesitate to add that this state of affairs is at least partially attributable to the availability of "excellent pot," although he personally avers that he lost most of his taste for marijuana while at university, prior to his arrival in Whistler. Neil's comment about drug use in Whistler spans several layers of youth traveller discourse. Neil is an established youth traveller, but he speaks as someone who was once a newcomer and, moreover, as a person who

⁶ All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

previously had extensive experience with recreational drug use. He acknowledges the attraction of Whistler's drug scene to newcomers, but distances himself from them through a subtle indication of the immaturity of their attitudes toward drugs.

The relatively casual attitude toward drugs that prevails in Whistler is exemplified by the story of Susan, a three-year resident of Whistler from Australia.

Susan: ... I suppose you could probably talk for ages about roommate stories and –

Me: (Laughter)

Susan: Because...it's kind of like [university] residence here. You know, you live in Staff [Housing]... And I lived with a couple of really gross pot-smokers who were guys.

Me: (Laughter)

Susan: ...And one of these guys one day rang me at work and he said, "Did you leave anything really funny in the fridge?" "No." And it actually turned out, he said, "I'm feeling really weird. I've been feeling weird all day, and I grabbed something out of the fridge this morning and I ate it. I thought it was a chocolate." Well it turned out it was his brother, who was the other dude that we lived with, had put some chocolate covered magic mushrooms –

Me: Oh!

Susan: - in the fridge, and this dude had just grabbed one and thrown the whole thing in his mouth, being quite *potent*, he'd just gone nuts all day. And just was completely out there, operating the *gondola* as well, which is even *scarier*.

Me: (Laughter) Oh no!

Susan: Completely freaking out on magic mushrooms...Silly stuff like that can happen. So I think there's a line sometimes that I've seen people step

over in the past year because it's quite an unstructured environment as well. And young people being away from parents for the first time, or in an environment where they feel comfortable, surrounded by friends, kind of *do* do some really silly stuff sometimes.

When asked, youth travellers grin wryly as they recall occasions on which they, or people that they know, have come to work either hung over, high, or both after partying all night long. Newcomers are particularly eager to relate the details of their latest adventures, and even established youth travellers such as Susan enjoy boasting of past exploits, although they have fewer to boast of as time passes.⁷ Susan's humorous anecdote is therefore by no means the only representative of the "working under the influence" theme that I encountered in my fieldwork, although it is undoubtedly one of the best. The analysis that she offers at the end of her narrative is particularly telling as it draws attention to the atmosphere of permissiveness that characterizes Whistler, an atmosphere she describes as "unstructured." This permissiveness is what gives Whistler its reputation for liberality. In Whistler, operating a gondola while "freaking out" on magic mushrooms is seen as inappropriate – or "silly" – rather than criminal.⁸ Susan, an established youth traveller, speaks indulgently of her newcomer roommate's behaviour, adopting the manner of a tolerant older sibling. Susan's pose of maturity, like Neil's, is a distancing technique. Newcomers, on the other hand, are more likely to express admiration for such behaviour. Susan

⁷ While established youth travellers enjoy reminiscing about the parties of yore, they distance themselves from the behaviour of current newcomers by giving the impression that excessive partying is something they are thankful to have outgrown.

⁸ Of course, the authorities are not as casual about drug use, however, it seems that not many youth travellers pay much attention to the stiff fines imposed by police for possession of illegal drugs.

characterizes her roommate's mishap as "silly" whereas a newcomer would be more likely to refer to it as "cool."

It appears that there is a widespread formal acceptance of transients in Whistler. For example, the Whistler Survival Guide (Woods 1998) is full of tips for transients about where to find cheap lodging, "hang out," and get "good deals" on everything from snowboards to pizza and beer. The Guide is produced by Mountain Community Health Alternatives, a division of the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW), and is designed to orient the newcomer to life in Whistler. A very positive attitude toward youth travellers is displayed at all times by this publication:

Living here means that you'll have a chance to get really good at boarding, skiing, blading, hiking, biking and communing with nature. You'll probably also get really good at downing shooters, arguing with roommates and breaking up with your partner. It's all here for you and the trail you take is completely up to you (Woods 1998:2).

The RMOW needs to attract young seasonal labourers; therefore its tolerance of most forms of behaviour associated with youth travel is understandable. The result is a liberal climate that makes the town a haven for youth travellers from all over the world.

The second property of a gathering place is that it must appeal to the youth traveller for its beauty, its range of activities, or both (1978:33). In his analysis, Vogt separates this attribute from the previous one, that a gathering place must have liberal climate, but in Whistler the two are inextricably linked. Part of the appeal of Whistler, for newcomers, at least, *is* its liberal climate. Whistler has a

reputation as a “party town,” a reputation that is made possible by its (in)famous liberality. Of course, Whistler also boasts a wide array of outdoor activities for youth travellers to engage in. The appeal of Whistler to the average youth traveller can therefore be broken down into two categories: a) the party scene, and b) the athletic scene. Although I have separated them here, these two spheres of activity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Part of Whistler’s charm is that it affords the youth traveller the opportunity to ski all day and party all night.⁹ While youth travellers in Whistler, particularly newcomers, pursue both forms of recreation – often concurrently – I will examine them separately here.

When asked to speculate about the presence of so many young people in Whistler, my research participants frequently pointed to the resort’s reputation for unbelievable parties. Neil, the apprentice electrician whose comment on the availability of “excellent pot” in the region has already been quoted, states that Whistler is known around the world as a “party town,” although as an established youth traveller he also conveys a sense of world weary disdain for the Whistler party scene. Most of the people that I interviewed concur with Neil’s assessment of Whistler’s reputation, Laura referring authoritatively to Whistler’s “party culture,” and newcomer Nicki enthusiastically describing the “big party atmosphere” in Whistler. Established youth traveller and confirmed local Kelly

⁹ It should be noted that skiing all day and partying all night is more a *theoretical* than an *actual* possibility for the average youth traveller. Employment schedules generally interfere with the desire for constant dissipation. However, many youth travellers come to Whistler armed with the *perception* that this is the kind of lifestyle that they will be leading in Whistler. While the reality of this situation does not bear them out in this belief, most newcomer youth travellers still manage to combine quite a bit of both partying and skiing when they are not working.

shakes her head disapprovingly as she notes that some youth travellers come to Whistler *exclusively* for the party scene, with no interest in participating in any of the town's other activities. Whistler's reputation for parties seems to be well deserved, as Michael, an established youth traveller, affirms with the following story of his days as a newcomer.

Michael: ...I've never been to a party like some of the parties I've seen up here. I used to live in this old house called the Bridge House.

Me: Mmn hmn.

Michael: It's right next to a stream, right next to a bridge, which is why it's called the Bridge House. It's got a *huge* flat roof, and probably one of the most scenic, panoramic balconies in Whistler. I mean, you can see everything right from Black Tusk all the way over to Mount Curry.

Me: Mmn hmn.

Michael: It's got about a 270 degrees panoramic view and it's up on a hill. And we used to get people to come up there on the weekend and just party with us and be up on the roof. Sometimes they'd try to jump off the roof with varying degrees of success (laughter).

Me: (Laughter) How many storeys up was this? Just, like, one or two?

Michael: Two, maybe three, by the time you hit the ground –

Me: (Laughter)

Michael: - at the back. But there was a little bit of a slope so they'd try and – they'd jump off with their snowboard –

Me: Uh huh.

Michael: - in the summer. We'd build a pile up sometimes of dirt, and – see some pretty good bails (laughter). Nobody ever seriously, seriously hurt themselves. We had a couple of broken arms and a dislocated shoulder...

Me: (Laughter) But people still did it.

Michael: (emphatically) Oh yeah.

Me: (Laughter)

Michael: I guess it's a good thing that no one was thinking about liability, or I'd have been sued numerous times.

Parties such as the one described by Michael have made Whistler famous, and although they are mainly the preserve of newcomers, established youth travellers do put in an occasional appearance. Parties are an integral part of Whistler's liberal climate, not merely tolerated, but indulged by most officials in Whistler. Indeed, Intrawest, the largest employer of newcomers and established youth travellers in Whistler, is the sponsor of some of the wildest and most keenly anticipated parties in Whistler. A full-time Events Coordinator organizes all Intrawest staff events. To my knowledge, at least one of Intrawest's staff parties was so out-of-hand that it had to be broken up by the police (the involvement of the police was *not* arranged by the Events Coordinator). It is also interesting to note that Michael's narrative was produced in response to a request for stories about youth travellers, not about parties. Several other people I interviewed made the same mental association, telling me about parties when I had asked to hear about youth travellers. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that parties and youth travel are linked in the minds of most people in Whistler, newcomer youth travellers and established youth travellers alike.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is possible that established youth travellers make the connection between youth travel and partying only because they no longer conceive of themselves as youth travellers.

Until this point, I have focused on the boundary between established youth travellers and newcomers, however, it should not be surprising that Whistler's party scene also marks the boundary between tourists and youth travellers. In *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Anthony P. Cohen (1985:50) notes that ritual occupies "a prominent place in the repertoire of symbolic devices through which community boundaries are affirmed and reinforced," and he focuses particularly on calendrical rituals such as fairs, fiestas and saint's days (Cohen 1985:53). The officially authorized parties of Whistler, such as those held by Intrawest, follow a seasonal cycle that is similar to the agricultural cycle of more traditional societies. Additionally, both established youth travellers and newcomers attend these parties because both are employed by Intrawest. For the same reason tourists are excluded. This division communicates the boundary between tourists and youth travellers on a number of levels:

At the level of group-as-a-whole, of orthodoxy, [rituals] say something about the relation of the group to others. At the level of individual participant, they speak of the individual's relation to his group and to the world as mediated by his group membership. Both construct and allow the individual to experience social boundary (Cohen 1985:54).

Interestingly, some of Whistler's wildest parties are openly framed in ritualistic terms. For example, the police involvement referred to above occurred at an annual celebration of the official start of the ski season, a party dedicated to "Ullr," the putative snow god of Whistler.¹¹ Like Santa Claus, "Ullr" is viewed as

¹¹ "Ullr" seems to be the creation of Intrawest.

an imaginary figure, yet the involvement of even a fictitious god lends a ritualistic quality to what would otherwise be an entirely secular event.

Nevertheless, parties are not the only option open to youth travellers seeking diversion. Michael's story, with its reference to snowboarders so dedicated to the sport (or so drunk) that they board off rooftops into piles of debris during the off-season, introduces the second category of recreation – sport. However much of an inducement the party scene is to newcomer youth travellers, sport is the main reason why most newcomers select Whistler over other locations, and why established youth travellers choose to remain there. Kelly, an established youth traveller, is a living testament to the draw of Whistler's athletic scene: "Actually, I came out here because there was a big mountain bike race, so I planned my vacation around this particular race in September of '96, and then came back in February of the next year to snowboard, and then decided, 'Ok, I'm going to live here.'" Kelly is not alone in her decision to come to Whistler to experience the breadth of athletic opportunities it has to offer. As Jason, Kelly's established youth traveller neighbour, comments: "[Whistler's] the number one in North America and everybody knows it." Jason further suggests that anyone who is at all familiar with skiing, snowboarding, or mountain biking will have heard of Whistler.

It is interesting to note that the commentary of established youth travellers on Whistler's athletic scene is far less ambivalent than their commentary on its party scene. In the latter discourse they couple clear-eyed recognition of the

existence of a party culture with a kind of unspoken disapproval for those who participate in it too heavily. In contrast, established youth travellers discuss the athletic possibilities of Whistler with enthusiasm. It seems that excessive partying is associated with newcomers and is therefore scorned by established youth travellers trying to distance themselves from their former behaviour. Athleticism, on the other hand, is laudable and established youth travellers assert their “seniority” by claiming greater skill in this domain than newcomers – although part of this skill lies in avoiding the foolhardy excesses of newcomers. Similarly, both established youth travellers and newcomer youth travellers are contemptuous of what they believe to be the paltry skills of tourists on the slopes. Perceptions of athletic ability are manipulated by established youth travellers to strengthen the boundary between themselves and newcomers, and by all youth travellers to reinforce the barrier between themselves and tourists.¹²

Vogt (1978:33) maintains that youth travellers are attracted to specific gathering places because they are renowned for their beauty, however, this does not appear to be the case in Whistler. Youth travellers come to Whistler in search of parties and sport, not in search of scenery. Once in Whistler, youth travellers are nevertheless not blind to the beauty that surrounds them:

Neil: [Whistler is] world-renowned for skiing and snowboarding. I mean that is obviously the number one draw, but, I mean, the nature and scenery here is so beautiful I would hope that if [youth travellers] didn't come for it that they would at least appreciate it.

¹² See Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of identity as expressed through athletic prowess.

Although youth travellers may not come to Whistler to enjoy the spectacular scenery, they are alive to it when they see it and many develop a taste for it. Certainly established youth travellers know where all of the best views are to be found in Whistler, hiking long distances in order to gaze upon the stunning mountain lakes and meadows. They do this not so much for the joy of the hike, but so they can enjoy the scenery in places where a mountain bike cannot go.

The appeal of Whistler for the youth traveller is perhaps best summed up by Jon, who, in his own way, unites everything discussed so far:

Jon: ...I think, first of all, people – different people come here for different reasons, like, people who are most – the youth travellers and the really transient people I think are coming more for the reasons that *we* described. Like –

Me: (simultaneous) Right.

Jon: -- because it's like, a scene, it's a –

Me: (simultaneous) Party town.

Jon: party, and their friends are here and it's, it's kind of a safe place to come to. And then, the people who are, like, more like us who are inclined to stay, I think are coming here for the reasons that Kev described, because it's just such (laughter) a good place. Like the riding kicks ass, the mountains are amazing here, and, you know, there's so many reasons to stay.

Jon speaks with utter conviction. It is clear to me that, by staying in Whistler, he is living his dream, but to give the reader a more visceral sense of Whistler's appeal I offer a small vignette of the interview from which the above statement is taken:

I sit on the living room floor across from Jon and his roommate Erin. The window is open and the warm summer air blows softly through the room. Jon's other roommate Jason is in the kitchen preparing spaghetti, and he participates in the interview by shouting his answers across the peninsula that separates the kitchen from the living room. Jason and Erin work for the same landscaping company and I pass them almost every day as they plant things in the grounds of our housing complex. Jon is an old university friend of Erin's and has only just moved in. They live next door to me. I often see one or the other, or sometimes two or all three of them, setting out for a ride on their mountain bikes. My roommate Kelly delights in discussing the condition of the trails with Jason, due to the frequency with which he employs words like "gnarly" and "aggro" in his descriptions. On this particular evening, we discuss Jon's most recent mountain biking accident, which he dismisses easily despite the livid bruise that covers his entire knee. I know without asking that he will experience no hesitation getting back on his bike when his knee is healed. The trail holds no fear for him, despite this temporary setback. Like Jon, I am familiar with the lure of the trail, although I prefer to go on foot. In the kitchen Jason finishes the spaghetti and everyone is served, sitting on the floor or the couch with plates of food and glasses of wine. It is my last night in Whistler and as I watch the alpenglow forming over the snow-capped mountains framed by the window, I feel that I can understand Jason and Erin and Jon. The attraction of Whistler is very present for me as I listen to them

talk and I wish I did not have to leave tomorrow. It seems that I too am a youth traveller.

The third characteristic of gathering places identified by Vogt is accessibility. Whistler is a *resort*, and therefore depends on being as accessible as possible. It is only two hours from Vancouver on the scenic and very well maintained Sea to Sky Highway. However, Whistler's status as a resort contradicts the fourth property of gathering places, that they must be inexpensive. The cost of living is very high in Whistler. Although wages in Whistler are competitive with those in other resorts, the majority of jobs available to youth travellers are in the service industry, which does not pay particularly well *anywhere*. Additionally, most jobs are only part time. Isabel, a co-op student from the University of Victoria who is working for the Whistler Housing Authority, shakes her head with disgust as she discusses the pitfalls of house hunting in Whistler. She describes the practice of house owners who hollow out their crawl spaces and rent out the resulting room as a two-person apartment, outrage threading her voice as she announces the exorbitant rent demanded for such diminutive lodgings. Isabel does not hesitate to add that this rent will double in the winter. Even food is expensive in Whistler. I was appalled by the size of my bill the first time I went grocery shopping in the town. Kelly, an established youth traveller, assures me that the "big joke" about Whistler is that, in this playground of the rich and famous, most inhabitants work at least two jobs in order to support themselves.

Nevertheless, Whistler is not as expensive for youth travellers as it is for everyone else. For example, residents of Whistler get 10% discounts at most retail stores. Further, all people who work for Intrust receive an additional discount at Intrust stores, and 50% off at Intrust restaurants when they are on the job. Anyone who works or volunteers for Intrust also gets a free ski pass. *Relatively* cheap apartment style housing is also available for first year employees at Intrust and several of the large hotel chains make similar provisions. Finally, the RMOW has set up the Whistler Housing Association (WHA) in an effort to legislate the construction of affordable employee housing in Whistler. Therefore, while the cost of living in Whistler is still quite high, most youth travellers find it manageable. Certainly, owing to the number of special arrangements that are made for them, youth travellers pay much less than the average tourist for the privilege of staying in a resort town.

Vogt's fifth and final defining feature of the gathering place is the youth travellers themselves. Richard, a newcomer from Australia, describes Whistler as a "very, very youth-oriented place." Newcomer Nicki agrees, noting, "Everyone's so young here." Once again it is Jon who provides the best insight into this phenomenon: "I think [youth travellers come to Whistler] because there *are* so many young people here already, like. I mean, it's like showing up at a party, kind of thing. Rather than trying to go to an empty house and make one

yourself.”¹³ Whistler is a desirable destination for potential youth travellers because they are all aware that it already supports thousands of their kind. If nothing else, they know that they will not be alone in Whistler. Of course, a draw for some youth travellers is a source of irritation for others. Forgetting that the large transient population is an integral part of what attracted them to Whistler in the first place, established youth travellers complain that, as a gathering place for youth, Whistler is simply becoming too popular.

Established youth travellers’ attitudes toward newcomers, visible in established youth travellers’ perceptions of Whistler, suggest their disidentification with newcomers. In “Widening Circles of Disidentification: On the Psycho- and Sociogenesis of the Hatred of Distant Strangers – Reflections on Rwanda,” Abram de Swaan (1997:106) describes the process he refers to as “disidentification.” This process is elsewhere known as “projective identification,” (de Swaan 1997:106). Those in the grip of this process project the negative tendencies that are forbidden in their own group onto other populations, experiencing these tendencies vicariously through their existence of these shadow communities. Conscious of their status as long-term residents of Whistler, established youth travellers project what they feel to be their own inappropriate traits onto newcomers, characterizing them as immature and foolhardy. This is not to say that newcomers are not immature or foolhardy, but they are probably

¹³ Interestingly, with this comment Jon reinforces the connection between Whistler, youth travellers and parties.

neither as immature nor foolhardy as established youth travellers believe them to be.

Youth travellers' comments indicate that they tend to conceive of Whistler as a gathering place, although not all of them think that this is a good thing. Laura suggests that the reason why youth travellers congregate in Whistler is that they have all heard of it: "You know, you can go grape picking in France, you can come and work for a ski season in Whistler. It's one of those places that's known to be here." Nicki elaborates on this theory by stating that Whistler has become an accepted stop on the "tour" of youth travellers: "I know for the travellers, from what I've heard, is, especially for Australians it's, like, if you're going to go travelling, you go to Whistler." Youth travellers and potential youth travellers from around the world see Whistler as a gathering place for young people, and so, if their bent runs to mountains, they come to be with others of their kind and to have a good time. Most of these youth travellers leave with the snow but those who remain don the mantles of established youth travellers, defensive of their new identity and slightly resentful of Whistler's success as a gathering place.¹⁴

Whistler as a Playground

There are few uncontested sites of agreement between newcomer youth travellers and established youth travellers, but one of these is a shared

¹⁴ See Chapter Five for a more complete analysis of established youth travellers' resentment of the newcomer presence in Whistler.

understanding of Whistler as a playground – although established youth travellers must balance this perception with their simultaneous awareness of Whistler as a home. Indeed, the idea of the playground has already been introduced in this chapter. Two of the main pursuits of youth travellers – parties and sports – are forms of play. In the following discussion I will use some of the theoretical literature on play as a framework to explore the behaviour of newcomers and established youth travellers in Whistler, and to highlight the differences in their approach to life in a playground setting.

One of the most important works on play is J. Huizinga's 1955 classic, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. In this book, Huizinga begins his analysis of culture and play with a detailed discussion of the attributes by which play can be recognized. Rather than paraphrasing this discussion here, I will offer Huizinga's (1955:12) own summary:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interests and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to its own rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

Huizinga's theory of play has influenced the work of many other theorists, among them James W. Lett, Jr. (1983), who has used Huizinga's work as an analytical framework for his own research on charter yacht tourism in the British Virgin

Islands. I intend to follow in Lett's footsteps, using the work of Huizinga and of Lett himself to highlight the ludic aspects of youth travel in Whistler.

Lett breaks Huizinga's theory into its constituent elements, beginning with Huizinga's (1955:12) statement that "play is a free activity." According to Huizinga (1955:8), play is superfluous, an activity that "is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty." Lett concludes that charter yacht tourism meets this criterion as tourists enter into it voluntarily (Lett 1983:38). Moreover, yachters in the British Virgin Islands are free from all demands, even those usually associated with tourism, such as making hotel reservations (Lett 1983:40). Youth travel to Whistler is also completely voluntary, however, youth travel is not as hassle-free as charter yacht tourism. Unlike yachters, youth travellers have to work to support themselves. Charter yacht tourists are, in some respects, more like the moneyed tourists of Whistler than like its youth travellers. Even newcomer youth travellers, alternately reviled and envied for their carefree behaviour by established youth travellers, must find a way to pay rent in Whistler. Nevertheless, few would deny that youth travel is freely undertaken. Newcomer youth travellers see Whistler as a haven free from adult supervision where, with minimal interference, they can temporarily indulge their twin bents for snowboarding and partying.

The presence of established youth travellers, however, complicates the discussion of play in Whistler. When does youth travel cease being the "free activity" of play and become daily life? Established youth travellers who have

become locals occupy the ambiguous position of *living* in a playground and they must juggle the concept of play with the fact that Whistle has become home. The borderland between playground and home is another boundary between established youth travellers and newcomer youth travellers. Established youth travellers feel that newcomers are presumptuous in their assumption of local status. Having lived in Whistler for six years, established youth traveller Jason scoffs: “You know, like an Australian that’s here working for six months, and calls himself a local, well... ‘What do you mean? You’re a tourist too; you’re just, you know, working here for a couple of months.’” Established youth travellers deny newcomers the right to think of Whistler as a home and then use the fact that newcomers *only* see Whistler as a playground to stop some of the gaps in the otherwise permeable membrane separating the two groups.

Huizinga (1955:12) also states that play stands “quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life.” Not only is play a temporary state, it is recognized by the player as not “real,” (Huizinga 1955:8). Lett (1983:41) comments that no matter how absorbing play is, the player always knows that he or she is only playing. As the yachters in Lett’s study cavort in the British Virgin Islands, they comment on their unwonted decadence with glee, contrasting life on the yacht with the way things are at home (Lett 1983:41). By distinguishing between the two, charter yacht tourists demonstrate their awareness that yachting is something different from ordinary life, that it is play. Youth travel, like charter yacht tourism, is ordinarily also a temporary state, and like yachters, youth travellers are also aware

that their time in Whistler is only play. They comment implicitly on the playful character of Whistler:

Me: Why do you think so many people are attracted to come and work in Whistler?

Will: Fantasyland. It's a big Disney World that you don't have to leave.

This characterization of Whistler offered by Will, an established youth traveller, is not an isolated one. Tom, another established youth traveller, describes Whistler as “a big playground for adults,” while Kelly refers to it as “an athlete’s playground.” It is interesting to note that established youth travellers, many of whom are also locals, are perfectly willing to recognize Whistler’s status as a playground despite the fact that they also view it as a home. Through such references as these, youth travellers separate Whistler and “real” life. Whistler is a “playground” and therefore what happens within its borders is “only” play, an admission that undoubtedly takes its toll on established youth travellers’ already conflicted sense of their purpose in Whistler.

It is the summer of 1997 and I have come to Whistler to visit my brother, a ski coach and trail guide, as it is it seems increasingly unlikely that he will ever return to Ontario. We walk in the dazzling sunshine of an August day, weaving our way through a maze of pedestrian streets. The trendy boutiques lining the interlocking brick boulevards are set against a backdrop of lush mountains. Each store is clearly different from the one next to it yet together they give the impression of uniformity, the bland newness of each trim stone and timber façade melting seamlessly into the one beside it. Their sameness nags at the outer edges

of my conscious awareness until I am completely disoriented and can no longer remember the way out. Everywhere I look laughing groups of tanned young people are lounging on patios, playing hackey sack in the squares, and coasting through the Village on expensive bicycles. My gaze slides past them to the mountains beyond. My two-week vacation is almost over and it seems as if I can never see enough of these mountains to satisfy my horizon-bred Ontario eyes. My brother, perhaps noting my rapt silence, says, "It doesn't seem real does it? It's like Disneyland. I've lived here for three years and I can still hardly believe it." His statement strikes me as strangely appropriate.

Another aspect of play is that it is "connected with no material interests," (Huizinga 1955:12). Play, according to Huizinga (1955:9), is an end in itself. Charter yacht tourism, like play, is also its own reward. Not only does the yachter gain no tangible benefit from yachting, he or she must pay a substantial amount of money for the privilege. While charter yacht tourism does have a certain amount of cachet, it is not the sort of prestige that is likely to garner the yachter any extra consideration with his or her employer, or anyone else for that matter (Lett 1983:42). Youth travel to Whistler is also without material motivation. Although it is possible, indeed necessary, to get a job in Whistler, it is not possible for the youth traveller to save much money there, a situation that frustrates many established youth travellers who would like to become locals. The prestige gained by a youth traveller as a result of a season spent in Whistler is also negligible. Members of the returned youth traveller's peer group may be

impressed to discover that a person has been to Whistler, but this information has little impact on adults in the “real” world. In fact, employers may even consider a season spent in Whistler to be drawback. Tara, who works for Whistler/Blackcomb, suspects that most employers look at an application from a returned youth traveller and ask themselves: “Well, they’ve been doing nothing for a year, what’s their work ethic going to be like?” Additionally, job experience gained in Whistler is largely irrelevant outside the tourist industry, and most youth travellers do not intend to pursue careers in this field. In fact, job experience obtained in Whistler is only useful to the relatively small percentage of youth travellers who choose to remain there. Most youth travellers therefore do not appear to reap any sort of material reward from their trip to Whistler.

Huizinga (1955:12) further notes the limited nature of play, which “proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space.” To speak first of the element of time, Huizinga (1955:9) points out that play occurs always within a given time frame. Charter yacht tourism fits this description well, as its temporal boundaries are clearly marked by airline tickets: “Everything that occurs between the departure and the return flights is ‘free’ time, time given to play,” (Lett 1983:42). Youth travel to Whistler, at least initially, is similarly demarcated. Newcomers in particular are conscious of the time constraints that govern play in Whistler. They take full advantage of their time in Whistler because they know that all too soon the time for play will be over and they will have to return home.

either to complete their studies or to shoulder more serious responsibilities in the “real” world.

Established youth travellers are not at play in the same sense. They have made the decision to remain and are therefore not driven to experience every single moment in Whistler to the fullest. The temporal boundaries that govern the play of established youth travellers are therefore less like those of someone who is on vacation and more like those of someone who is at home. These temporal boundaries are, of course, exploited by established youth travellers as another sign of their dissimilarity to newcomers. Stuart, a local speaking of the heedless behaviour of newcomers, comments with exasperation: “I’m here to like the town; I’m not here to kill myself in one year.” He thus contrasts his own presumably long-term appreciation of Whistler as a home with newcomers’ vision of Whistler as a playground for transients. The force of the contrast is driven home by his implication that the behaviour of newcomers is beneath him.

Play also has spatial boundaries: “All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course,” (Huizinga 1955:10). The play space of Lett’s charter yacht tourists is confined to the British Virgin Islands: “The charter yacht tourists, then, perceive the British Virgin Islands to be a play-ground – an exceptionally attractive play-ground designed for sailing, swimming, snorkeling, scuba-diving, sunning, and sightseeing, and one explicitly advertised as such” (Lett 1983:43). The spatial dimensions of play in Whistler are equally obvious. As I mentioned

earlier, youth travellers openly refer to Whistler as a playground. Newcomers come to Whistler to play as they cannot at home, and established youth travellers stay because the continued opportunities for play outweigh all other considerations, although their play behaviour shifts after they have accepted Whistler as home, becoming more regulated. This shift will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Five. Both spatially and temporally, then, youth travel to Whistler resonates with Huizinga's discussion of the attributes of play. Spatially, Whistler is a playground, a place within which it is appropriate for youth travellers to play. Temporally, time spent in Whistler is time consecrated to play, at least for newcomers.

Huizinga (1955:12) theorizes that play is ultimately an ordered phenomenon, that it proceeds "according to its own rules and in an orderly fashion." The rules of play govern such things as how and when and where a person can play, setting up an ordered play world that is outside 'ordinary' life in the "limited perfection" that it offers to the player (Huizinga 1955:10). Play also has a character of tension; it tests the ability of the player to perform according to its rules (Huizinga 1955:10). Interestingly, Lett does not consider this aspect of play in his analysis of charter yacht tourism in the British Virgin Islands. Perhaps Lett feels that charter yacht tourism is not an ordered phenomenon. This is not the case for Whistler. If rules of play indicate where, when and how it is appropriate to play, then play in Whistler is indeed ordered. People choose Whistler as their playground because it is not appropriate to play in the same

manner elsewhere. For example, a schedule designed to maximize the opportunities for skiing and partying might not be as desirable at home as it is in Whistler.¹⁵ People who come to Whistler are also primarily *youth* travellers. A senior citizen could not come to Whistler to “catch some big air” and “hang out” for a year smoking the “excellent pot” without being considered extremely bizarre. The sort of play that happens in Whistler is also regulated by geography. People come to Whistler to ski, snowboard or mountain bike, not to snorkel. Additionally, play in Whistler demonstrates the character of tension spoken of by Huizinga (1955:10). Youth travellers pit themselves against the rules of play when they arrive in Whistler: “hucking” themselves off thirty foot cliffs; riding grueling, technical sections of trails over and over until they “clear” them; drinking until three in the morning before getting up for work at seven just to prove that they can. These are the rules of play in Whistler, and youth travellers, especially newcomers, strive to live by them. Of course, the rules of play change over time, and established youth travellers play by a slightly different set than newcomers, taking greater responsibility for their own safety during athletic activities and frowning on the hedonistic social lives of newcomers.¹⁶ Nevertheless, for a youth traveller to come to Whistler and refuse to abide by these rules is to cheat, to refuse to play the game.

¹⁵ Whistler *is* home to many established youth travellers, and it is for this reason that they curb excess in both the party scene and the athletic scene in Whistler.

¹⁶ The different rules of play followed by newcomers and established youth travellers are elaborated in Chapter Five.

Finally, Huizinga (1955:12) claims that play “promotes the formation of social groupings,” thereby also reinforcing categories of insider and outsider. Lett (1983:44) notes that charter yacht tourists show a “pervasive camaraderie” with one another, that they are “gregarious” and “convivial.” Additionally, he says, yachters band together in loose, informal groups to which other tourists are not admitted. Yachters are also easily distinguished from other tourists by their behaviour: “On the whole, charter yacht tourists tend to talk more loudly, joke more profanely, and dance more suggestively than other tourists,” (Lett 1983:44). Of the camaraderie of youth travellers more will be said in Chapter Four, but I will briefly note here that youth travellers are similarly gregarious and convivial. Newcomer youth travellers and established youth travellers band together in tightly knit, albeit completely separate, groups that actively exclude tourists. Youth travellers’ creation and manipulation of boundaries between insider and outsider in Whistler are made clear by their play behaviour, which consists of established youth travellers snubbing newcomers and all youth travellers putting aside their differences to collectively shun tourists. Finally, just as charter yacht tourists are more vivid than the other tourists in the British Virgin Islands, youth travellers project the Whistler lifestyle with much greater intensity than regular tourists, although established youth travellers, as a result of their disidentification with newcomers and their sense of Whistler as home, tend to be somewhat more sedate. The play of youth travellers creates a bond between them that excludes tourists.

Both newcomer youth travellers and established youth travellers recognize Whistler as a playground, although established youth travellers see it also as a home. Youth travel to Whistler is a free activity engaged in by youth travellers, who easily distinguish between their activities in Whistler and their ordinary lives, at least initially. The longer a youth traveller remains in Whistler the more likely he or she is to become a local, which blurs the fineness of his or her distinction between Whistler and the “real” world. Neither newcomers nor established youth travellers are attracted to Whistler for material reasons, and the behaviour of both populations is tacitly governed by a number of rules, although the rules for established youth travellers are somewhat different than those for newcomers. Finally, the shared activities of youth travellers in Whistler promote the formation of social groups from which others are excluded.

Conclusion

Newcomer youth travellers and established youth travellers have conflicting views of one another but their perceptions of Whistler are largely shared. Both newcomers and established youth travellers conceive of Whistler as a youth traveller gathering place and their remarks indicate that Whistler amply satisfies the five criteria for gathering places identified by Vogt (1978). Whistler has a liberal climate that is well-suited to the youth traveller lifestyle; it appeals to the youth traveller through the range of activities it has to offer; it is readily accessible; it is relatively inexpensive because of the number of special arrangements that have been made for youth travellers; and a large population of

youth travellers is already collected there. Although both newcomers and established youth travellers refer to Whistler as a gathering place, established youth travellers disidentify themselves with newcomers and express subtly negative opinions of Whistler's gathering place status among newcomers.

Established youth travellers and newcomer youth travellers also characterize Whistler as a playground. Youth travel meets the six characteristics of play outlined by J. Huizinga and explained by James W. Lett, Jr. Youth travel is a "free activity" set aside from daily life that is not pursued for any material gain. It is temporally and spatially bounded, enacted according to a set of rules, and engenders exclusionary social groups. Additionally, youth travellers openly refer to Whistler as a playground. Discussion of Whistler's playground identity, however, is complicated by the existence of established youth travellers who live in Whistler year-round and relate to Whistler simultaneously as home and playground. Established youth travellers characterize newcomers' connection to Whistler as tenuous and therefore exclude them from the established youth traveller community. Perceptions of Whistler as gathering place and playground are common to both groups of youth travellers, but established youth travellers' impressions of Whistler are partially shaded by their feelings about newcomers and the perceived need to reinforce the boundaries that separate the two populations.

Chapter Three

Youth Traveller's Perceptions of Tourists: "Bread and Butter?"

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the crossroads of tourism and youth travel in Whistler, and to consider some of the impacts that this intersection has on youth travellers' perceptions of tourists. Using traditional tourist typologies, I highlight the ambiguous nature of youth travellers' position in Whistler. Seemingly aware of this ambiguity, youth travellers themselves have difficulty distinguishing themselves from tourists. I explore some of the ways in which youth travellers recognize the similarities between themselves and tourists while attempting to maintain a separate identity. Youth travellers' conflicted sense of identity is reflected in the ambivalence of their attitudes toward tourists. While acknowledging the economic importance of tourism to Whistler, youth travellers perceive tourists as incompetent and inexperienced fools whose sense of Whistler is utterly pedestrian and lacking in authenticity. They contrast this with the perceived dynamism and genuineness of their own experiences. My objective is to examine youth travellers' attempts to strengthen the boundary between themselves and tourists.

Tourist Typologies

Prior to considering youth travellers' perceptions of tourists, it will be necessary to distinguish between the two. I believe that this distinction will itself illuminate some of the perceptions to be discussed later. An early typology of tourism can be found in Erik Cohen's paper, "Toward a Sociology of International Tourism," which was published in 1972. In this paper Cohen (1972:166-167) remarks that while all tourism affords the tourist the opportunity to experience the "strangeness" of other lands and peoples, not all tourists are capable of enjoying this experience to the same degree. Cohen (1972:167) therefore suggests four ideal tourist types that he rates according to the degree of novelty sought by the tourist.

At the lowest end of the novelty scale are the two tourist types that Cohen (1972:168) refers to as "institutionalized." The first of these is the organized mass tourist, who experiences the greatest degree of familiarity and the lowest degree of novelty. Such tourists are frequently on guided package tours wherein they have very little responsibility (Cohen 1972:167). The individual mass tourist is much the same as the organized mass tourist except that a slightly higher degree of novelty is permitted. Individual mass tourists have greater control over their itineraries, as they do not travel as part of a group. Nevertheless, familiarity is still the dominant theme in the voyage of the individual mass tourist (Cohen 1972:167-168).

The next two tourist types fall closer to the novelty end of the spectrum hence Cohen (1972:169) refers to them as “non-institutionalized.” The first of the non-institutionalized tourists is the explorer. Explorers plan journeys that get them “off the beaten track” as much as possible. They also typically attempt to learn a little bit of the local language in order to make contact with residents. However, explorers seek degrees of familiarity in the comfortable accommodations and reliable modes of transportation they favour (Cohen 1972:163). At the farthest end of the novelty scale lies the drifter, who “shuns any kind of connection with the tourist establishment, and considers the ordinary tourist experience phony,” (Cohen 1972:163). Drifters make an effort to get away from the everyday experiences of their home culture and try to live like locals, often taking odd jobs along the way in order to finance the next leg of their journey. Cohen (1972:175-176) describes the typical drifter as follows:

He is often a child of affluence, who reacts against it. He is young, often a student or a graduate, who has not yet started to work. He prolongs his moratorium by moving around the world in search of new experiences, radically different from those he has been accustomed to in his sheltered middle-class existence.

For the drifter, novelty is at its highest and familiarity almost non-existent (Cohen 1972:163).

Most tourists in Whistler fall squarely within one of Cohen’s two categories of institutionalized tourism. They are either organized or individual mass tourists who have come to the resort for a world-class ski vacation. Whether part of a tour group or not, little attempt has been made by any of these tourists to get “off the

beaten track” as Whistler is a very popular travel destination for people who are interested in skiing or snowboarding. Whistler’s youth travellers are more ambiguously positioned within Cohen’s typology. While they appear most like drifters, Cohen’s definition fails to account for numerous aspects of their behaviour. In some ways they surpass Cohen’s requirements. For example, they not only live like locals, many, especially established youth travellers, consider themselves to *be* locals. Additionally, the jobs that they take in Whistler, while usually less than full-time careers, are certainly more than the “odd jobs” described by Cohen. Youth travellers in Whistler do not pick up a few days of work here and there as they run out of money, they work for the duration of their time in Whistler. In other respects youth travellers in Whistler fit Cohen’s description perfectly. The majority of them are indeed middle class students or graduates who are temporarily “slumming” in Whistler. However, there are key areas in which Cohen’s criteria do not encompass the experience of youth travellers in Whistler. Although they typically feel that the ordinary touristic experience of Whistler is “phoney,” they make no attempt to shun the tourist industry as they depend upon it for their livelihood. Moreover, very few of Whistler’s youth travellers, with the possible exception of the sizeable Australian population, actually “drift.” For most youth travellers Whistler is not just another stop along the way; it is the sole intended destination.

In the paper “Nomads from Affluence: Notes on the Phenomenon of Drifter Tourism,” Cohen (1973, cited in Riley 1988:314) paints a dark portrait of drifters,

characterizing them as hedonistic, anarchistic, scavenging drug users who have a negative impact on the cultures with which they come in contact. Again, Whistler's youth travellers are only partially delineated in Cohen's sketch. While they are undoubtedly hedonistic and there is no question that many use drugs, they are hardly anarchistic, nor are they scavengers. In fact, most youth travellers in Whistler are hard workers who cheerfully submit to the authority of their employers, considering this a small price to pay for the privilege of living in Whistler. While the impact of youth travellers on Whistler's local culture is debatable, it is undeniable that they have an important role in the local economy. Neil, a youth traveller who has recently decided to settle in the area, comments on the role of youth travellers in Whistler's economy:

Youth travellers don't have nearly as much money [as tourists] but at the same time they fill up so many of the low-income jobs here that are *needed* to make this town *run*. So, you know, it's like a symbiotic relationship there. You know, you need your big money tourists coming in and dumping all their money, skiing the powder in the evening. Then you need the, you know, the youth travellers, the transients, to, you know, come in here and whatever – serve the coffee or be a liftie.

Youth travellers' continued presence in the area is an important part of the resort's success, without which most locals would be unable to maintain their lifestyle in Whistler. Additionally, youth travellers in Whistler outnumber locals, the large percentage of whom were once youth travellers themselves.

Another tourist typology is developed by Jay Vogt (1978) in his paper "Wandering: Youth and Travel Behavior." One key difference between the two typologies is that Vogt refers to Cohen's institutionalized tourists simply as

tourists, and Cohen's non-institutionalized tourists as travellers. Vogt also replaces the negatively charged "drifter" with the slightly more positive, although still somewhat vague, "wanderer." This difference is not purely stylistic for Vogt (1978:21), while agreeing with Cohen that this category of traveller is most often composed of middle class Western students or youths on tight budgets, disagrees with a number of Cohen's other characterizations of youth travellers. Vogt's wanderer is not at all like the scrounging, drug addicted, socially dysfunctional drifter described by Cohen. Rather, according to Vogt (1978:22), "[wanderers] are intent upon a quest of personal growth – learning about and understanding themselves, other people, and other cultures." For the wanderer, "the travel experience is seen as providing the necessary challenges and opportunities to expand oneself in areas valued by adventurous youth: independence, adaptability, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, to name but a few," (Vogt 1978:22).

Much of what Vogt says about wanderers resonates with my experience of youth travellers in Whistler. Many youth travellers, particularly newcomers, genuinely *have* embarked on a "quest of personal growth." For most, it is their first time away from home and they are eager to prove themselves equal to the challenge of living on their own. They get jobs, pay their rent, and learn to make a little money go a long way – not an easy task in a resort town. However, while youth travellers in Whistler may work hard, they play harder. In fact "Work Hard Play Harder" is the one of the most visible slogans around Whistler's administrative offices, particularly the Recruiting and Employee Experience

Departments. The hardcore drinking, partying, and recreational drug use that is characteristic of the newcomer youth traveller lifestyle in Whistler is difficult to reconcile with Vogt's starry-eyed portrayal of wanderers and seems more in keeping with the hedonism described by Cohen.

Yet another scholar who has focused on youth travellers is Pamela J. Riley. In her article "Road Culture of International Long-Term Budget Travellers," Riley (1988:317) rejects the labels of both Cohen and Vogt, opting for the more neutral "budget traveller" as this is the term that the travellers themselves seem to employ. Her view of youth travellers is more balanced than either Cohen's or Vogt's. Cohen describes a situation in which youth travellers are fleeing their home culture in order to postpone the onset of serious work, whereas Vogt believes that youth travellers leave home in search of personal growth. Riley, in the words of Paul Theroux (1975, cited in Riley 1988:317), suggests that youth travellers' motivations are "equal parts escape and pursuit." She defines these motivations as "push factors" and "pull factors," (Riley 1988:317). Budget travellers are at a transitional stage in their lives; they have reached the age of an adult without having to assume adult responsibilities. Riley (1988:317) feels that this situation is one of the push factors experienced by budget travellers. Most have finished school; many are unsure what to do next; and all want to travel before they are prevented by other obligations: "They are escaping from the dullness and monotony of their everyday routine, from their jobs, from making decisions about careers, and desire to delay or postpone work, marriage, and other

responsibilities,” (Riley 1988:317). Some of the pull factors for budget travellers are a desire to experience freedom and adventure, and also to satisfy curiosity about other places and other people (Riley 1988:318).

This description of budget travellers comes closest to describing Whistler’s youth travellers, particularly newcomers, as it acknowledges both their temporary moratorium on adult responsibilities and their quest for independence. However, many of the specifics of youth travel to Whistler remain unaccounted for in Riley’s model of budget travel. For example, it is clear that Riley’s paper is based on interviews with a more peripatetic type of youth traveller than those encountered in Whistler. This description is not an accurate reflection of the travel pattern of Whistler’s youth travellers, the majority of whom travel straight to Whistler and remain there until they return home – unless, of course, they decide to stay and become locals. Additionally, while Riley’s theory of push and pull factors accurately describes many of the latent motivations of newcomer youth travellers, it fails to account for the manifest motivation behind most youth travel to Whistler:

You know, like, say you work in a bar. You can make huge money working at a bar, and you’re working nights. So, say you volly [for Intrust] one day a week, get your [ski] pass [for free], and still go skiing or snowboarding six days of the week if you want.¹⁷ I don’t know, it’s a pretty nice living arrangement if you can swing it.

Whatever more complex desires they may have, most youth travellers, as Neil says, come to Whistler for the slopes.

¹⁷ “Volly” is a local slang expression meaning “volunteer.”

At the 1991 International Conference on Youth Tourism several authors proposed typologies of youth travel itself. Pastor (1991, cited in Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995:828) suggests a five item typology consisting of: travel to educational teenaged holiday centres; athletic, outdoor or nature travel; humanitarian, social or scientific travel; language learning travel; and trekking. Pastor's second category best accounts for the athletic scene in Whistler. Theuns (1991, cited in Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995:829) adopts a less complex three item typology: conventional mass tourism; youth exchange programs; and alternative tourism. The latter classification best describes Whistler's youth travellers, although this category is similar to both Cohen's drifters and Vogt's wanderers.

The most detailed youth traveller typology to emerge from the 1991 International Conference on Youth Tourism has been J. Hartmann's (1991) seven-part taxonomy of youth travel. The first category identified by Hartmann (1991, cited in Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995:829) is the moratorium traveller, who "take[s] the opportunity to travel extensively before entering a career and family life." This characterization is applicable to most youth travellers in Whistler. However, Hartmann further stipulates that moratorium travellers seek a relaxed and comfortable travel experience that minimizes potential risk. As most of youth travellers in Whistler live in crowded dormitory style residences they scarcely measure up to the high standards of the moratorium traveller. Additionally, many youth travellers in Whistler are thrill seekers intent upon demonstrating their

prowess on the slopes. Whistler's youth travellers actively pursue risk. To further complicate the issue, a number of youth travellers end their moratorium on responsibility by deciding to settle down in Whistler.

Hartmann's (1991) second type of youth traveller is the ascetic traveller. The ascetic traveller seeks to test the limits of his or her endurance, something that youth travellers in Whistler know how to do rather well. Most travellers nevertheless do not look for ascetic experiences in Whistler. Whistler would be anathema to the solitary ascetic traveller, who would not last long bunking with eight outgoing Australian snowboarders who like to play drinking games on the deck with their buddies from Ski Patrol.

Hartmann's (1991) third youth traveller division is the adventurer. While adventurers are also eager to test the limits of their endurance, they are willing to spend more money than the ascetic traveller and they like to plan their trip in advance. Additionally, they seek the company of others as they like an audience for their exploits. I think this category provides the best account of youth travel in Whistler. The fourth category that Hartmann (1991) lists, the goal directed traveller, does not provide an accurate description of youth travellers in Whistler as most of them do not come to Whistler to fulfill any educational or work-related aims. This category *does* account for *my* presence at the resort, though.

Hartmann's (1991) fifth classification is the next most appropriate designation for Whistler's youth travellers. This is the party traveller, who "see[s] the whole trip as a large party and an opportunity to meet new people and to do the things one

would never do at home.” (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995:829). While I think most youth travellers in Whistler are adventurers at heart, there are also a significant number of party travellers as well as a high degree of cross over between these two classes of youth traveller in Whistler, especially among newcomers.

The sixth category described by Hartmann (1991) is that of the *alternative traveller*, a kind of youth traveller that seeks new experiences well off the beaten track of mainstream tourism. Whistler abounds with tourists and therefore does not seem a likely destination for the alternative traveller. Hartmann’s (1991, cited in Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995:829) final classification is the *Peter Pan traveller*, an older traveller who sets out in search of a second youth. This description hardly fits Whistler’s youth travellers as most of them are not yet out of their *first* youth.

The Difference Between Tourists and Youth Travellers?

My goal in this lengthy discussion of travel typologies has been to demonstrate the ambiguity of youth travellers’ status in Whistler, an ambiguity that impacts directly on their perceptions of tourists. None of the traditional distinctions between youth travellers and tourists accurately captures the relationship between tourists and youth travellers in Whistler. Youth travellers themselves seem to be aware of the indeterminacy of their position. When asked to distinguish between themselves and tourists, their answers are often muddled.

Most fall back on obvious physical or material differences. Richard, a newcomer from Australia, comments:

I think they're – they're – well, they're probably different in terms – virtually in terms of their average age. I mean, people who come here as tourists are generally going to be older. People have managed it, because I mean, most people can't afford to be tourists here. It's quite expensive, whereas you *can* kind of get by being a traveller. You know, getting a minimum wage job and scrimping and saving, you can get by.

As Richard points out, a ski vacation in Whistler is beyond the means of many younger tourists. Most young people in Whistler are either youth travellers or day-trippers from Vancouver. And youth travellers have been able to afford Whistler only because they do not mind “scrimping and saving” for a season or two – or longer if they are established youth travellers.

Laura, an established youth traveller from England, similarly focuses on the physical differences between tourists and youth travellers:

You'll find that you'll go to places on certain nights with staff and know everybody there. And you can walk around, like, *Garf's*...on a Thursday night during the winter...and you'll see half the people there that you know, and you can look around and you can just go, “Tourist, tourist, tourist, tourist.” Because all the Whistlerites are in their hiking boots, their jeans and their fleeces, and all the tourists are in those little party dresses and their high heels, which is totally impractical for walking around in the snow.

Laura's remarks set up the boundary between youth travellers and tourists very clearly. According to Laura, youth travellers are insiders. They all know one another and behave in a manner that is appropriate to the setting in which they find themselves. Tourists, on the other hand, are classified as outsiders. They are unfamiliar with the customs of Whistler and their behaviour is therefore gauche and awkward. Note that established youth traveller Laura identifies herself with

all youth travellers – newcomers *and* established youth travellers. Discussing ethnicity and identity, Anthony P. Cohen (1985:107) states: “Ethnicity, couched in the rhetoric of kinship, implies a degree of commonality sufficiently high to override intervening sectional interest in a given situation.” Although youth travellers do not form an ethnic group, their community seems to function according to the same principles. Established youth travellers lay aside their differences with newcomers to unite with them against tourists. The unity of established youth travellers and newcomer youth travellers under these circumstances resonates with Abram de Swaan’s (1997:106) work on identification:

Identification is the emotional complement of group formation. It entails the affective realization that others are similar to oneself, and belong to one’s own group, and that still other people are different, do not belong and must therefore be excluded.

In the presence of tourists, established youth travellers identify with newcomers in order to exclude tourists more completely. Identification and disidentification is therefore situational in Whistler, as established youth travellers identify with newcomers in some contexts and disidentify with them in others.

Lest it be thought that Laura’s clothing-based distinction is somewhat trivial, I should mention that numerous youth travellers assured me that everyone laughs at tourists for getting “dolled up” before going out to the bars at night. Based on physical characteristics, Laura’s comment on the difference between tourists and youth travellers also contains an implied critique. This critique appears in many different guises in youth travellers’ conversations about tourists.

For example, youth travellers often conceptually distance themselves from tourists with the somewhat nebulous notion of “experience.” Susan remarks that “youth travellers are here for the *experience* whereas tourists are here for the skiing or the weather or the snowboarding or the mountain biking,” implying that the *experience* of living in Whistler is worth much more than the mere sum of Whistler’s attractions. Tom similarly contrasts the “wilderness experience” sought by the youth traveller with the “world-class ski vacation” pursued by the tourist. He additionally comments on the negative impact tourists have on this “wilderness experience,” although he fails to note the impact that a high concentration of youth travellers necessarily also has on the wilderness. The most explicit critique of tourists comes from Dana, an established youth traveller:

Me: Is there a big difference between youth travellers and tourists in terms...of their attitude or their approach to being in Whistler?

Dana: They’re more open-minded to *surviving* in a place.

Me: Mmn hmn.

Dana: Whereas I think the tourists just come up here to do whatever. They don’t have the actual *care* that even a travelling person would have...I mean, there’s some travellers that are assholes and stuff, but...

Me: (Laughter)

Dana: But it’s like they’re on a journey... Tourists have already made it from A to B, whereas I think travellers are *on* their way to A and B. But the traveller’s on a different journey altogether. I don’t know, more of a spiritual journey or a pilgrim of something. That’s why they’re travelling.

Me: Mmn hmn.

Dana: Whereas the tourists are just going somewhere to have fun and they’re going home again.

According to Dana and others, the youth traveller comes to Whistler searching for an experience that is categorically different from that sought by the tourist.¹⁸

And yet, as Neil says: “I mean, they’re kind of coming for the same thing. You know, they’re coming for a chance to – play, you know.” Nicki, who works for Intrawest, concurs:

I don’t know that there’d be much of a difference [between tourists and youth travellers]. Because the people who come here just for, like, a week, *know*, like what Whistler/Blackcomb is all about and have heard so much about it, and they want to come here because it’s supposed to be this fantastic place to go skiing, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But that’s why the youth travellers come here too.

Despite this equation of youth travellers with tourists, both Nicki and Neil profess to be able to tell the difference between the two. Similarly, after clearly distinguishing between tourists and youth travellers based on relative age and disposable income, Richard comments: “I think everyone’s, kind of, pretty much a tourist [in Whistler].” However, his perception could be coloured by the fact that, as an Australian, he only has a one-year work visa. Nevertheless, Will, an established youth traveller who has lived in Whistler for seven years, echoes his view: “I think most people feel that the young travellers that come here are just a different type of guest... You know, the only difference is some guests are paying to be here, and we’re paying other guests to be here, you know, to help us serve our other guests.” But then, Will’s view is not that of the average youth traveller. As a young man who has made a career for himself in Whistler, who

¹⁸ Again, note how Dana identifies with newcomers, despite the fact that she considers some of them to be “assholes.” in order more clearly to disidentify herself with tourists.

moreover has lived in Whistler for seven years, he has a legitimate right to think of himself as a local. Will can therefore afford to say that tourists and youth travellers are the same thing because this comment is no longer a reflection on his situation.

Will and Richard, however, are exceptions to the rule. Most youth travellers strenuously object to the label of tourist. Nevertheless, they are frequently unable to distinguish themselves from tourists. In a continuation of her discussion of the Whistler “experience,” Susan remarks:

...the tourist is here staying in their nice motel and forking out however many dollars a day on food and drink and things like that, whereas the youth traveller is here...for the experience of working for the Hill or skiing every day. So yeah, I think there is [a difference between tourists and youth travellers].

Susan’s observations display the confusion common to most youth travellers. She is clear that there is a difference between the two populations, and that this difference lies in the “experience” sought by youth travellers, but she is not sure what this “experience” is. The youth traveller’s experience of “skiing every day” is not substantially different from the experience of the tourist, who, as Susan herself says, is there “for the skiing or the weather or the snowboarding or the mountain biking.” This leaves only the fact that youth travellers are “working for the Hill,” or Intrawest, while they are in Whistler. While “working for the Hill” may be an important part of the youth traveller experience in Whistler, it is not the experience youth travellers are in quest of when they come to Whistler. For, as

Neil has stated, youth travellers, like tourists, are coming to Whistler for “a chance to play.”

So what *is* the difference between youth travellers and tourists? Youth travellers themselves seem to be unsure. They remain convinced, for most part, that there *is* a difference and that this difference goes beyond the quantitative indicators of age and disposable income. Although many admit that youth travellers and tourists are attracted to Whistler for the same reasons, almost all feel that that there is some qualitative difference in their experience of Whistler. Additionally, this difference is important enough to temporarily erase the conceptual boundary between newcomers and established youth travellers and place them in a common category opposed to tourists. Youth travellers’ inability to articulate the difference between tourists and themselves is an indication of boundary blurring. Anthony P. Cohen (1985:44) states that the perception of a *structural* breakdown at the boundary between two groups is linked to the *symbolic* reinforcement of the boundary. Youth travellers cannot physically reinforce the boundary between themselves and tourists because they work with tourists every day, but they symbolically brace the boundary through their attitudes toward tourists.

Attitudes Toward Tourists

While some of the youth travellers that I encountered in Whistler object to the term “youth traveller,” preferring to think of themselves as locals, not a single one of them, with the possible exception of Richard, was willing to accept being

defined as a tourist. This refusal to be identified as tourists is consistent with the tourist literature. Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995:826) note that youth travellers “perceive a role difference between themselves and mass tourists, who [are] viewed as seeking unadventurous, comfortable Westernized holidays.” Similarly, Elery Hamilton-Smith (1987:337) comments that those who participate in the form of tourism he describes as “tourism-as-quest” refer to themselves as travellers and never as tourists. In her research on budget travel Pamela Riley (1988:321) encountered perhaps the most telling example of this youth traveller characteristic: “When asked if they are ‘travelers’ or ‘tourists,’ 100% of long-term travelers reject the tourist label.” While they may not be sure exactly what distinguishes them from tourists, Whistler’s youth travellers are convinced that they are not tourists.

Youth travellers desire to distance themselves from tourists results from the boundary blurring referred to above. Anthony P. Cohen (1985:40) believes that a community will strive to assert its separate identity in the face of a threat to its boundaries:

Indeed, such assertiveness is likely to intensify as the apparent similarity between forms on each side of the boundary increases, or is imagined to increase. For the *appearance* of similarity may dissuade people for accepting its *reality*. Those who feel, in consequence, that their boundary has been blurred by the confusion, have then to expose the contradictions between appearance and reality.

It is likely that tourists are perceived as a threat to youth travellers’ identity not only because they are somewhat similar to youth travellers, but because they are so numerous. According to Cohen (1985:109), the encroachment of too many

outsiders upon an individual's community is threatening to that individual's sense of self, which is bound up in the community. Youth travellers' disidentification with tourists, apparent in youth travellers' attitudes toward tourists, is an attempt to reinforce the boundaries between the two groups.

When asked about tourists, youth travellers in Whistler typically open the discussion with a blunt acknowledgement of the fact that, as Dana says, "They support us." Youth travellers are quite pragmatic about this aspect of life in a resort town, referring to tourism as "the bread and butter" or "the meat and potatoes" of Whistler's economy. Again it is Richard who provides the most candid example of this understanding:

Me: How does the tourist industry affect the experience of living in Whistler?

Richard: I think the tourist industry is completely responsible for the experience of living in Whistler really. (Laughter)

Me: (Laughter) Yeah.

Richard: Without it what would be here? Virtually nothing.

Me: A shack. (Laughter)

Richard: Yeah. I think really the whole place is the tourist industry.

Me: Mmn hmn.

Richard: Everywhere you go and everything you do revolves around the tourists so I think it's, you know, 24 hours a day. (Laughter).

This acknowledgement of the contributions of tourism to Whistler is not, however, indicative of widespread appreciation for tourists themselves. Youth travellers may be resigned to the presence of tourists but they are not always

gracious hosts. This is indicated by the vehemence with which Tom, an established youth traveller in a position of some importance at Intrawest, answers a mildly asked question about youth travellers' attitudes toward tourists:

You've hit on kind of a passionate subject of mine, a kind of sore spot as well. Because it puts a real smile on my face to see people who are genuinely kind and helpful to people, both inside and outside of work. And I'm very big on people not being two-faced. So if you've got a guest at the Guest Relations counter and they've pissed you off for whatever reason then...you should be dealing with that with the guest, not pitting your wits against the guest. But you shouldn't be being all nice to the guest and very smiley, very helpful and then turning around and saying whatever. "What a wanker," or... "I hate Brits," or... "Aren't those Americans stupid?"

Tom's diatribe indirectly sheds quite a bit of light on what youth travellers really think about tourists. Instead of answering the question in a straightforward manner, Tom complains about youth travellers who are "two-faced" with tourists – serving them with a smile and then making fun of them after they have left. The fact that this behaviour is a "sore spot" for Tom suggests that it is fairly typical. However, most people are more forgiving of such insincerity. Nicki, who also occupies a position of responsibility with Intrawest, believes that under the circumstances a little disingenuousness is understandable:

... if you've been asked the same question, like 40 times in one day, like, "Where's the bathroom?" where it's *right* in front of you. I think that our staff have been trained, and just the kind of people that they are, is that they'll totally answer with, like, a smile on their face and help the person out and walk them over, even though it's, like, the 100th person they've done. But, everyone – it's natural – they'll turn around and be, like, "Oh my God! Idiots!"

Susan, who works in an office across the hall from Nicki, even admits to indulging in such thoughts herself: "Like, you know, you'll have *the* dumbest

question and the person will walk away from you and you'll just think, 'Bloody tourist!'"

It is the summer of 1997 and I am spending the second last day of my vacation in Whistler idly glancing through the souvenir shops in the Village. I have wandered about in the blinding sun for almost an hour trying to find the store that my brother's roommate works in, but I cannot get my bearings amidst the seemingly endless rows of chalet-inspired boutiques. At last I find it. My brother's roommate is behind the counter talking to a middle-aged couple bristling with paper shopping bags and cameras. I pass the time by examining an ugly picture frame adorned with a small resin lizard. The tourists are commenting loudly on the weather in American accents. They had not expected it to be so hot in Canada and they are confident that this must be a Canadian heat wave. My brother's roommate tells them that warm weather is normal for this time of year, even in the mountains. She catches my eye and we grin at one another as she describes the unbearably sticky heat of a typical summer in her hometown of Montréal. The tourists are sceptical of the ballpark conversion from Celsius to Fahrenheit that she makes for their benefit. I move a little closer and assure them it is true. Moreover, I can tell them from personal experience that it gets just as hot in Toronto, another Canadian city. They look mildly incredulous. Do they know, I ask, that the southern tip of Canada is actually further south than many U.S. states, including the northern border of California? They smile at me in the infuriating manner adopted by people who are just a shade too polite to tell

you that you have got it all wrong. I realize that there really isn't any point and feign sudden interest in a display of ornamental birdhouses on the other side of the room. After they leave I approach the counter and greet my brother's roommate. She looks at me and says, "Tourists," as if this sums up the entire exchange. "I know," I reply, forgetting for a moment that I am also a tourist.

The popular perception of tourists is that they are remarkably ignorant. Aaron, an established youth traveller, provides the most succinct example of this view when he comments: "It seems to me that tourists shut their brains off as soon as they cross that 'Welcome to Whistler' sign." Although Aaron understands that this behaviour is a natural part of being in a new place and that he behaves in the same fashion when he is a tourist, he does not seem to feel that this admission is any reason for tolerance. Youth travellers such as Aaron typically show no mercy when asked to relate their most memorable encounters with tourists. In fact, youth travellers usually respond to a (relatively) neutral request for tourist anecdotes by enumerating the most idiotic "tourist questions" they can think of. Laura best explains the specimen most often offered for my collection:

"Where is Dual Mountain?" Because on the season passes it says "Dual Mountain Pass" because at one point [before the two mountains merged under Intrawest] you had a Whistler Pass and a Blackcomb Pass, and if you had a Dual Mountain Pass you could use either, so, "Where is Dual Mountain?" That's always a good one.

Other contenders for the prize of most outrageous question ever asked by a tourist include: "Where do the moguls go in the summer?" and "Do you take British

pounds here?” The former question is most often asked by mystified southerners who have difficulty grasping the properties of snow, and the latter by Americans who have been misled by the word “British” in “British Columbia.”

The other genre of tourist narrative favoured by youth travellers centres around the foolish things that tourists do. The best example of such a narrative comes from Kelly, who relates the following story with unabashed glee:

Kelly: I don't know if I every told *you* this story. I was volunteering at the Pontiac Race Centre, and it's like a recreational racecourse, right? It's got, you know, basically a little ski course. So you have the starting gate, and it has a little wand that you have to put your ski poles, if you have them, or your – you have to put your ski poles over them, right? And then just stand there. And for the snowboarders we had these metal spikes that stick in that they can hold with their hands. Well these two guys show up, and Bob was with me that day. (Laughter) Oh my God! These two guys, one guy was on skis and the other one was on a snowboard. And the skier comes up to the entrance, the start gate, and he asks how you do this, so we tell him: “Well just put your poles on the other side of the wand.” So he has his hands *through* the straps, so now his poles are dangling from his arms, and he grasps onto the metal things. And he's standing there and he's waiting. So his obvious poles are useless, right? The snowboarder is now standing, like, *parallel* to the start gate with his hands on the thing: “Ok!” (Laughter) He doesn't have his snowboard directing down through the gate. So (for the rest of this passage Kelly is convulsed with laughter) Bob and I were sitting there and we're, like “Ok! Three – two – one – go!” And the skier goes through and the poles are flapping around. The snowboarder tries to *jump-turn* into the entrance. Does a full-on cartwheel down the first two gates. And Bob just looks at me and goes (laconically), “Tourists.”

Kelly, Aaron, Jennifer and I: (Laughter)

Kelly: It was *too* funny. (Laughter) And then, “I guarantee they'll be back.” And sure enough, they came back. Like, “Ok, you did pretty well last time (Jennifer is gasping with laughter in the background), but now take your hands and put them on your *own* ski poles. Put your snowboard *between* the gate.”

Kelly, Aaron, Jennifer and I: (Laughter)

Aaron: "Let`s try this with a little bit more *flair* this time."

Kelly: (Simultaneous) Give this a second shot. Exactly.

Kelly`s story displays all the hallmarks of a typical tourist story. In these stories, youth travellers, independently of whether they are newcomers or established youth travellers, are depicted as repositories of local wisdom, frequently as guides. In this particular instance Kelly and her friend Bob are in a position of power as they are supposed to instruct tourists on proper racing procedure. Like contemporary trickster figures, Kelly and Bob subvert the process by allowing the tourists to decide when they have been suitably prepared. The result is mayhem, as the tourists predictably have no idea what they are doing. Kelly`s story overlooks the irresponsibility displayed by herself and her friend Bob in their failure to correct the tourists` obvious misapprehensions, and focuses instead on the incompetence of the tourists. The ignorance of the tourists stands in sharp contrast to the knowledge possessed (and withheld) by Kelly and Bob. Tourists and youth travellers are usually depicted in this dichotomous manner in the tourist narratives of most youth travellers. Youth travellers are symbols of knowledge and wisdom, although they may occasionally, as in the case of Kelly and Bob, abuse their power in a humorous fashion, whereas tourists represent ignorance.

These dichotomies indicate youth travellers` disidentification with tourists because the negative traits are attributed to tourists while youth travellers claim the positive ones. Characteristics that are unacceptable among youth travellers

are projected onto tourists and experienced vicariously through tourists' presence in Whistler (de Swaan 1997:106). Disidentification necessarily creates a "binary opposition" similar to the one spoken of by Jacqueline Waldren (1996:139) in her work on insiders and outsiders. Those with desirable qualities are insiders while those demonized as inferior are outsiders. Insider and outsider create one another, because an individual is placed in the category of insider or outsider not just because of the qualities he or she possesses, but the qualities he or she possesses are themselves determined by the category the individual is placed in (Ilcan 1999:244). Youth travellers' manipulation of dichotomies clearly sets up the boundary between insider and outsider in Whistler (Waldren 1996:139). They construct themselves as knowledgeable and competent insiders and demonize tourists as hopelessly inexperienced outsiders.

One of the criteria that youth travellers use to determine their superiority in relation to tourists is the notion of prestige. In the article "Prestige-Worthy Tourism Behaviour," Roger W. Riley (1995) identifies two sources of prestige in travel. The first source of prestige is related to the travel destination. Certain locations confer prestige on the traveller either because of their uniqueness – not many other people have been there – or because of their symbolic significance – they have religious, historic, or cultural import (Riley 1995:632-633). The second source of prestige relates to the manner of travel: "Spontaneity and adventurism seem to be valued but rarely manifest themselves in travelers' behaviors," (Riley

1995:633). Riley (1995:633) notes, “In both cases, travelers have differentiated themselves through engaging in relatively uncommon behaviour.”

While Whistler is hardly a unique travel destination, it does have symbolic meaning: “Contemporary symbolic centers can be prestige-worthy because they reflect sociocultural vogues that symbolize the ‘good life.’ Some ski areas in the United States and Europe exemplify this contention,” (Riley 1995:633). The “sociocultural vogues” represented by Whistler, however, can be accessed by all who travel to Whistler, youth travellers and tourists alike. Youth travellers differentiate themselves from tourists through the manner of their travel, which they believe to be more prestigious than that of tourists. Youth travellers view themselves as adventurers, relating personal near death experiences on the slopes, or gruelling odysseys over difficult terrain, with relish.¹⁹ Tourists, on the other hand, are seen to be seeking a level of comfort disdained by most youth travellers. Tourists are repeatedly characterized as necessary by-products of the resort that exist solely to pump money into the local economy. To return to Susan’s earlier comment: “I think that the youth traveller perhaps feels a little bit more of a connection with this place, whereas the tourist is here staying in their nice motel and forking out however many dollars a day on food and drink and things like that...” The near death experiences of tourists are almost as common a narrative theme as the near death experiences of youth travellers, but they are not framed in the same way. Youth travellers’ near death experiences are thrilling narratives of

¹⁹ See Chapter Five for examples of this youth traveller personal narrative genre.

daring and resourcefulness (and sometimes luck), whereas tourists are seen to endanger themselves by their inexperience. Tourists, moreover, usually require the services of a youth traveller to extricate themselves from their predicaments.

One of the reasons why youth travellers feel that their mode of travel is more prestigious than that of tourists is that they perceive it to be more authentic. The connection between youth travel and authenticity will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, but a small discussion of this issue is warranted in the context of youth travellers' attitudes toward tourists. Youth travellers' manipulation of the notion of "experience" hints at the equation youth travellers make between tourism and inauthenticity. Youth travellers and tourists both sojourn in Whistler, but only youth travellers are seen *truly* to experience it. Laura's scornful remark about the tourists "in those little party dresses and their high heels" also conveys a sense of tourist inauthenticity. "Whistlerites" wear "their hiking boots, their jeans and their fleeces," whereas tourists wear the most impractical of outfits, reflecting their frivolous approach to the serious business of getting from place to place in a mountain community. The contrast between youth travellers and tourists is made most explicit in yet another comment from Laura:

A tourist here will not, I don't think, go to the extremes that a youth traveller will. A youth traveller's looking for that out of body experience, that whole idea of authenticity that we were talking about before. The idea of finding the best powder and being the first one down the run and getting off that cornice and going on double black diamond on their first day. Whereas the tourists are here for the lessons and the "*après*" and the skiing on the nice groomed slopes.

Youth travellers, then, are searching for the “true” Whistler while tourists are satisfied with its outer trappings. Laura’s juxtapositions of “out of body experience” with “*après*” and “double black diamond” with “nice groomed slopes” are also further examples of the dichotomization that is indicative of disidentification.²⁰ By characterizing themselves as athletes pushing the envelope of experience and tourists as clumsy skiers more interested in “bar hopping” and hot tubs, youth travellers disidentify themselves with tourists and forge a boundary between themselves as insiders and tourists as outsiders.

Conclusion

Youth travellers use the process of disidentification to establish a separate identity from tourists. An examination of traditional travel typologies reveals that youth travellers are ambiguously situated in the scholarly literature. The experience of youth travellers in Whistler eludes categorization and seems to fall somewhere between institutionalized and non-institutionalized tourism. This indeterminacy is reflected in youth travellers’ inability to satisfactorily articulate the difference between themselves and tourists. Youth travellers’ hazy sense of identity is compensated for in the dichotomous nature of their stories, in which youth travellers invariably represent knowledge and experience while tourists are characterized by ignorance and inexperience. Although youth travellers acknowledge the important financial contributions made by tourists to Whistler,

²⁰ The difficulty level of a ski trail is indicated by symbols on a sign at the head of the trail. Double black diamonds indicate the highest possible degree of difficulty.

they resent them nevertheless. Youth travellers view tourists as mundane comfort seekers who only skim the surface of the Whistler experience. By contrast, youth travellers see themselves as intrepid adventurers constantly striving for authenticity. Youth travellers' ambivalence toward tourists seems partly to stem from the ambiguous nature of youth travel in Whistler, which prompts youth travellers to defend their borders against the conceptually threatening presence of tourists.

Chapter Four

Youth Travellers Perceptions of Themselves: “The Lifestyle of One Year”

Introduction

In this chapter I establish the link between ritual, youth travel and identity in Whistler. To this end I consider the attributes of the liminal phase of ritual, drawing parallels between liminality and the behaviour of youth travellers. Once I have established the liminoid aspects of youth travel in Whistler I investigate the uneven distribution of this liminality within the youth traveller population, returning to my focus on insiders and outsiders. Similarities between *rites de passage* and youth travel are also be addressed. At this point I turn to an examination of *communitas*, one of the key expressions of liminality in ritual. It is my contention that spontaneous, normative, and ideological *communitas* are all present among youth travellers in Whistler, although the distribution of the forms of *communitas* is once again not consistent across the youth traveller population. Returning to the concept of play discussed in Chapter Two, I also look at the connections between *communitas* and play. Finally, I examine the role of liminality in the ritualistic inversions of behaviour that characterize most youth travellers in Whistler. It is my goal to examine the ways in which youth travellers' attitudes toward the ritualistic elements of youth travel reflect their need to erect boundaries between themselves and others.

Youth Travellers and Liminality

Youth travellers in Whistler tend to characterize both themselves and other youth travellers in ways that resonate strongly with the anthropological literature on liminality. Anthropological conceptualizations of liminality date to the turn of the twentieth century when folklorist Arnold van Gennep noted that most rituals, particularly *rites de passage*, could be divided into three phases: separation, limen, and reincorporation (Turner 1974:196). In the separation phase of a *rite de passage* the ritual participant is separated either physically or symbolically from non-participants. In the liminal phase the participant is stripped of his or her former status or role in society but is not yet accorded a new position. Finally, the individual is reincorporated back into society bearing the marks of the new status conferred on him or her through participation in the *rite de passage*.

Interest in van Gennep's tripartite analysis of ritual was rekindled in the 1960s, primarily through the work of Victor Turner (1969). Turner (1969:94) emphasized the ambiguity of the liminal stage in rituals, noting that ritual participants during this phase are "betwixt and between" their past and coming states, effectively belonging to neither. The liminal ritual actor has therefore temporarily stepped outside the ordinary structure of society and is consequently beyond the reach of many of the cultural rules by which he or she is normally bound (Lett 1983:53). Turner was not slow to realize that this ritual framework could be applied to other cultural phenomena as well, coining the phrase

“liminoid” to describe practices that are not part of a *rite de passage* that nevertheless display liminal characteristics (Lett 1983:45).

Descriptions of youth travel provided by both newcomers and established youth travellers in Whistler indicate that youth travel, at least in Whistler, has clearly liminoid aspects. First, like the liminal state in a ritual, youth travel is understood to be a transitory phenomenon in the lives of most of those who practice it. While experiencing this temporary state in Whistler, youth travellers, especially newcomers, seem to be without any pressing responsibilities. Most have completed school, or are taking some time off from it, and have yet to start on any serious career path, so while in Whistler they are free to do as they please. This seeming lack of obligations is akin to the suspension of social roles experienced by the ritual actor in the liminal phase of a ritual. However, the apparent aimlessness of the average youth traveller in Whistler may actually conceal something more complicated. Youth travellers travel to Whistler, as they say, to clear their minds prior to taking up the greater responsibilities of careers or higher education. Without ties or responsibilities, youth travellers in Whistler, particularly newcomer youth travellers, are suspended between childhood and adulthood in much the same way as individuals who are undergoing an initiation rite.

One of the most important characteristics of the individual in the liminal state is that he or she “has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state,” (Turner 1969:94). The fact that liminality is bracketed by both a past and a

future state indicates that, above all, liminality is *temporary*. Youth travel in Whistler is also surrounded by an aura of impermanence. Will, an established youth traveller who has lived in Whistler now for seven years, believes that most youth travellers come to Whistler simply to take a short break from school or work. Of course, most youth travellers do not stay nearly as long as Will, indeed Will initially intended to stay for only six months. Drawing from his own experience, Will thinks that almost no one ever goes to Whistler planning to make a life there, asserting: "I don't know any of my own *personal* friends that came here *expecting* to stay." Most people do not expect to stay in Whistler for very long, and the majority of Whistler's residents have definite plans for *leaving*. Jon, whose perceptions of Whistler were discussed in the previous chapter, states that many of the people that he has met since moving to Whistler have fixed departure plans. This observation was confirmed by my own experience, as most of the newcomers that I talked to in Whistler could tell me fairly accurately when they were planning to leave. While it is probable that some of these people will, like Will, end up staying; most of them will be gone after a season or two, only to be replaced by others.

In the same fashion as ritual actors in the liminal stage are suspended "betwixt and between" their old and new societal roles, newcomer youth travellers in Whistler perceive themselves to be experiencing a time in their lives that has little to do with either their previous or projected ways of existing. Most of the people who come to Whistler have recently completed high school, college,

or university or are taking a year off from their studies. Stuart, a young local who works for Intrawest, speculates that most youth travellers go to Whistler simply to take a year or two off: “They’ve gone to school straight after high school, or gone to university, and now they’re very – had enough, take a break.” And many youth travellers know that when they return home it will be time to settle down and start a career. Laura, an established youth traveller who came to Whistler from England, comments on this aspect of youth travel in Whistler:

... I do also think I *am* [a youth traveller] just because of my age, and why I came here, and my original intentions when I got here. It was more to just go out and try something new, and then to [go] back and get it out of the system and, you know, start the career thing and all that – rubbish.

So for most youth travellers, time spent in Whistler is time that is somehow spent in between.

Whistler bridges the gap between school and career, but it does not do so by providing a kind of intermediary step that has elements of both, in the way that high school is something like elementary school and something like college or university. Youth travellers claim that living in Whistler for a season or two is something like being a first year university student because, like “frosh,” newcomer youth travellers are engaged in a great amount of irresponsible drinking and partying and are housed in university style residences. However, this comparison fails to take into account the fundamental differences between life as a youth traveller and life as a student. The student’s primary responsibility is to his or her studies whereas the youth traveller’s greatest obligation is to his or her employer. The employment of youth travellers in Whistler is nevertheless not

like the employment that most of them will seek upon leaving Whistler. Youth travellers in Whistler may have jobs, but these are not careers. Jobs in Whistler are mostly seasonal; they are easily obtained and just as easily lost. Whistler mediates school and career by being in stark contrast to both of them, just as the liminal phase in a ritual marks the passage from one stage in life to the next, all the while displaying no characteristics of either the ritual participant's old or new status.²¹

The transient nature of most youth travel leads many people in Whistler, chiefly established youth travellers who have become locals, to conclude that newcomer youth travellers are frivolous and lack purpose. Kelly, the only person I met in Whistler who moved there *intending* to stay, frequently contrasted herself with other youth travellers for this very reason. Differentiating herself from other youth travellers by saying that when *she* moved to Whistler she had a purpose, Kelly implies that other youth travellers do not really have a good reason for being there. This view is echoed by Erin, a recent graduate from the University of British Columbia and the roommate of Jon and Jason, who comments that youth travellers come to Whistler "because they just don't have anything else to do." In a strange way, this popular perception of youth travellers in Whistler as aimless drifters is yet another sign of the liminality of the average youth traveller. Stripped of the goals that defined them prior to arriving in Whistler, and having

²¹ A study of the career trajectories of former youth travelers is beyond the scope of this study. However, while in Whistler, most youth travelers distinguish between their planned career path and the casual labour that they undertake in Whistler.

yet to acquire the goals that will characterize them upon their return home, youth travellers, unless they decide to remain in Whistler, seem on the surface to be merely wasting their time.

In the case of most youth travellers, the appearance of frivolity is actually a mask for something more serious. When asked to speculate on the motivations behind youth travel, many youth travellers arrive at more sophisticated analysis than the one given above. Dana, an established youth traveller with an unusually positive attitude toward newcomers, believes that there is a lot hidden behind the typical newcomer's façade of purposelessness: "I mean, you learn a lot here and you decide. You get stuff dealt with here, mentally and emotionally..." She believes that people come to Whistler to clear their heads, which, paradoxically, is achieved by "messing up their heads." The partying, drinking, and snowboarding conceal the mental process that most newcomer youth travellers are going through, a process that, like an initiation rite, is often preparatory to making major life changes. Neil verbalizes this view explicitly when he discusses the difference between tourists and youth travellers:

I think the youth traveller; they're more [travelling] to suspend any major decisions or choices that they have to make. You know, they're just pretty much content on living life day to day, which, personally, I don't really have a problem with. Often things – some people tend to worry too much about the future. But, I don't know, it's all an escape, I think.

This temporary suspension of responsibility prior to going home and starting a career is akin to the lack of roles governing the ritual participant in the liminal phase of a *rite de passage*. Caught between two distinct periods of life, the

transient youth traveller experiences the obligations of neither precisely because he or she is liminoid.

The link between ritual and youth travel is not, I think, entirely an academic construct, as youth travellers of an analytic bent occasionally also articulate this connection. Musing on the difference between tourists and youth travellers, Dana expresses her conception of youth travel as pilgrimage in a quote that has already been seen in Chapter Three:

But [youth travellers] – it’s like they’re on a *journey*. Whereas the tourists have already made it from A to B... I think travellers are *on* their way to A and B. But the traveller’s on a different journey altogether. I don’t know, more of a spiritual journey or a pilgrim of something. That’s why they’re travelling.

Dana’s allusion to pilgrimage echoes the work of Victor Turner (1974; Turner and Turner 1978), who coined the word “liminoid” to account for the phenomenon of pilgrimage. Dana’s reference to pilgrimage, then, serves only to only give concrete expression to the liminoid aspects of youth travel that most of the youth travellers with whom I spoke seem to recognize.

Not all youth travellers experience liminality equally. Expression of liminoid characteristics varies from individual to individual, but there are also broad variations across the two different populations of youth travellers. Newcomers to Whistler seem, as a group, to experience a higher degree of liminality than do established youth travellers. One possible reason for this difference is that it seems to be relatively difficult to remain liminal indefinitely (Turner 1974:169). Newcomers are enabled to behave in a liminoid fashion

precisely because they believe themselves to be in Whistler only temporarily. They have come to take a season or two off from the routinized activity in which they were engaged prior to their arrival in Whistler, and most expect that they will ultimately leave Whistler and move on. After a certain point, though, if a youth traveller does *not* leave Whistler it is because he or she has formed the intent to remain in Whistler on a more long-term basis. At this juncture the youth traveller can no longer properly be said to be “betwixt and between,” and most such travellers will begin to distance themselves from the liminoid aspects of their former behaviour. Established youth travellers want to be seen as qualitatively different from newcomers. Although established youth travellers undoubtedly felt themselves to be locals when they were newcomers, they now deny newcomers’ claims to local status and erect boundaries between themselves and newcomers.

Stuart, a 26-year-old who has lived in Whistler since he was in high school, comments that every year there are fewer similarities between himself and the average youth traveller. He sums it up as follows: “I can’t drink as much as I used to; I can’t party as much as I used to; I can’t stand night clubs; I don’t like making friends with really transient types.” He also notes that he no longer skis with the same degree of reckless abandon. While the shift in Stuart’s behaviour could simply be attributed to the fact that he is getting older, I think it goes beyond this explanations. He does not cite his own increasing maturity as one of the reasons why he now avoids newcomers. Rather, he focuses on the difference between their approach to living in Whistler and his own: “I’m here to like the

town; I'm not here to kill myself in one year." The liminal behaviour of most newcomers, something that Stuart refers to disparagingly as "the lifestyle of one year," is interpreted by Stuart as excessive, a way of life that takes away from the enjoyment of the town as *home*. And liminoid behaviour tends to be something that is best indulged in away from home (cf. Lett 1983).

One could object that Stuart's attitude stems from the fact that he is a local, having lived in Whistler since he was a boy; however, it is important to note that most established youth travellers also consider themselves to be locals. And like most established youth travellers, Stuart has only recently come to think of Whistler as his adult home. Previously, he was something of a transient himself, leaving home to attend university and travelling extensively to other parts of the world. Now that he has settled in Whistler, Stuart distances himself not only from his previously liminal behaviour, but also from those who behave in a similarly liminal fashion. He admits that he generally does not associate with anyone in Whistler who has lived there for less than two years, and further observes that most established youth travellers "won't give the transient type the time of day." Stuart, along with many other locals and established youth travellers, operates on the one year principle: "But if you're here for, like, a year plus, hit that magic second season, then you start getting a bit more of a welcome then." At this point newcomers start to tire of their liminal behaviour and established youth travellers judge them to be acceptable companions. It is clear that, in the minds of established youth travellers at least, the line between insider and outsider among

Whistler's youth travellers is a temporal one, lying at the bounds of "that magic second season."

In *Self-Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, Anthony P. Cohen (1994:127) notes that, despite their structural similarities, physical boundaries and *rites de passage* are not often linked in scholarly literature. He remedies this oversight with the following observation:

We have the evocative notion of liminality to describe the blurriness of transformation and the acute consciousness of status on either side of it. This seems not unlike the exaggerated concern with social identity which is commonly found in geopolitical borderlands (Cohen 1994:127).

Whistler is not a "geopolitical borderland" but Cohen's remarks on liminality offer some insight into established youth travellers' heightened consciousness of the boundary between themselves and newcomers. Having recently passed through the liminal phase characteristic of newcomers, established youth travellers are intensely aware of their status and anxious to prove that they are no longer newcomers. They therefore disidentify with newcomers by projecting onto them all the characteristics they no longer find acceptable among themselves.

Youth Travel and *Rites de Passage*

The connection between tourism, of which youth travel is a branch, and ritual is one that has been frequently made in the literature on both tourism and ritual (cf. MacCannell 1976; Graburn 1977; Turner and Turner 1978; Graburn 1983; Allcock 1988). Tourism has, in fact, been characterized as the "modern ritual" because, in a society that is otherwise lacking in ritual, it involves a

conscious departure from the every day and is characterized by the familiar tripartite structure – leaving home, going somewhere else, and then coming back (MacCannell 1976:13). In “The Anthropology of Tourism,” Nelson Graburn (1983:12) states that there are two different kinds of tourism. These two categories of tourism correspond with two different kinds of ritual. Modal tourism consists largely of family vacationers on annual holidays and it is analogous to rites of intensification that are held to mark seasonal transitions, or the passage of time (Graburn 1983:12). Rite of passage tourism signals important transitions in the life of the tourist, just as *rites de passage* indicate status changes in the life of the ritual participant. Graburn (1983:13) claims that “such tourism often consists of prolonged absences, often arduous, which are a kind of self-testing wherein individuals prove to *themselves* that they can make the life changes.” Rite of passage tourism thereby functions in much the same way as ordeals or spirit quests in more traditional societies, possibly because “modern societies may not impose enough satisfactory rites of passage for people to mark the progress and vicissitudes of their lives,” (Graburn 1983:13).

Although they do not speak of it in such terms, the stories and comments of my research participants indicate that they would tend to place youth travel in the category of rite of passage tourism. First, youth travel seems to mark the onset of adulthood, as it occurs immediately prior to the serious responsibilities of higher education or starting a career. Second, youth travel is a prolonged absence from home, often lasting for a season or more. Youth travel is also frequently quite

arduous. Kelly, an established youth traveller, notes that “the typical youth traveller is just, you know, completely and totally drained – partied out; sported out; exhausted -- by the time they leave town, if they’re the true youth traveller.” Finally, youth travel seems to be a time of self-testing for many youth travellers. Will, who works in Employee Experience at Intrawest, and Dana, who works at Intrawest’s Staff Housing, both comment that many youth travellers have never been away from home before. Time spent in Whistler by youth travellers is time spent proving that they can cook dinner, wash clothes, and pay rent. And again, Whistler is the place where youth travellers go to “deal with their issues, to clear their heads.” They must prove that they are ready to take up more serious responsibility. Furthermore, the conception of youth travel as a spiritual journey, expressed by Dana above, echoes Graburn’s link between rite of passage tourism and the spirit quests and ordeals of other cultures.

Youth Travellers and Communitas

The parallels between Graburn’s rite of passage tourism and youth travel provide an explanation for the apparent liminality of youth travellers in Whistler. One of the primary expressions of this liminality is *communitas*. *Communitas*, as defined by Victor Turner, occurs during the liminal phase of a ritual. It is characterized by feelings of intense comradeship with fellow ritual participants, and by a general sense of oneness with all humanity (Turner 1969:95). Turner (1974:169) further breaks *communitas* down into three different subtypes: spontaneous, normative, and ideological. Spontaneous *communitas* is immediate

and intense. It “tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind [sic] as a homogeneous, unstructured and free community,” (Turner 1974:169). Normative *communitas* develops when spontaneous *communitas* becomes organized into a social system. The structures of normative *communitas* channel and express the sentiments of *communitas* more effectively. Finally, ideological *communitas* is what obtains in utopian model communities, such as *kibbutzim*, which are designed to foster *communitas* among their members.

The element of *communitas* that characterizes Whistler, particularly among newcomers, is readily apparent in the stories that youth travellers tell about themselves and others in Whistler. This point is best exemplified in the following narrative, which was recounted to me by Susan, whose story about the magic mushrooms was related in Chapter Two. Susan is an engaging young woman from Australia who is neither newcomer nor established youth traveller. Although she has lived in Whistler for three years, much longer than a newcomer, her work visa is only extended from year to year, and as a result she never knows exactly when she will have to leave. With much humour and warmth, she narrated the following story near the end of a fairly lengthy interview in her office at Intrawest.

Susan: ... And I have another one, and I was involved in this one. And I was actually talking – it was – see that guy sitting on the chair (pointing to a photograph) –

Me: Uh huh.

Susan: He’s a good friend of mine that I met here. And he’s from Barrie actually, so he’s back in Barrie now. But I’m glad that there are no names

associated with this thesis, because he and I were in our Director's truck. Like, all the Directors for Whistler/Blackcomb get trucks. And we were in, you know, regular gear but we had our nametags on, and we were coming from Creekside back to the Village. We were doing some errands. And he pulls over, there's this Asian male, youngish, male hitchhiking. He picks this dude up and – well, stops the car, and the kid gets in the back seat. And then Steve, you know, he turns around and says: "Everything ok?" And then stomps on the accelerator and starts screaming about how he's sick of life and I'm completely shocked at this stage because I had no idea this was going to happen. And I look at the guy behind me. I just quickly whipped around, and his face was just about *white*.

Me: (Laughter)

Susan: And Steve's sort of reaching across from me, going for the glove compartment, saying: "Get my pills, Sue, get my pills; I need my pills!"

Me: (Laughter)

Susan: And by this stage we'd gotten to, maybe the turnoff to Nordic. And I just smacked him and said: "You've got to stop it." Right? So he stops the car and he turns around to the guy and he goes, "I'm so sorry. You know, that wasn't funny at all." Anyway, he looks out the window, and there's a couple of hitchhikers standing there, so he gets out of the truck and he's, "Come on guys! Come on! I'll give you a lift!" In the end –

Me: (Laughter)

Susan: - going along the road, we had eleven people in our Director's truck, because he stopped and picked up –

Me: Did he do the same thing to all? (Laughter)

Susan: No, no, no. No. No.

Me: (Laughter) Oh, ok.

Susan: No, just the first guy. But on the way into the Village we had eleven strangers in our Director's truck, and Steve had them singing nursery rhymes and stuff like that.

Me: (Laughter)

Susan: And I *laughed* my *ass* off because it was just the funniest thing I'd ever been a part of.

Me: (Laughter)

Susan: It was so (she snaps) on the spur of the moment and he was just the funniest guy. And it's just something that you wouldn't really do if you had a truck identified as your company, as well as wearing your nametags...

The highway around Whistler is littered with hitchhikers every day – almost all of which are youth travellers on their way to and from work. Susan's story about the mercurial Steve and his truck full of hitchhikers is therefore essentially a story about youth travellers interacting with each other. And as Susan's narrative makes amply clear, interaction between youth travellers can at times be infused with spontaneous *communitas*. Of course, the other element to Susan's story is that of the practical joke on the first hitchhiker, a prank that is *not* indicative of *communitas*. Nevertheless, I feel that the dominant theme of Susan's narrative, and certainly the note that it ends on, is one of *communitas*. This is readily apparent in the impulsiveness of Steve's game of picking up as many hitchhikers as he can. It is also demonstrated by his desire to bond, however briefly, with this transitory community in the back of his truck, even if only by singing nursery rhymes with them. That the hitchhikers, including, apparently, the first one, are equally willing to be moulded into a temporarily cohesive unit is another sign of spontaneous *communitas* at work. Finally, spontaneous *communitas* is evident in Susan's gleeful retelling of the event. Susan recalls with obvious fondness the day that she was united in silliness and song with a truck full of strangers, revelling in the memory of her intense, if

short-lived, camaraderie with a group of people that she will probably never see again.

It is July 10th, and after months of rain the sun is finally shining on Whistler. My roommate Kelly decides that I simply have to see the view from the paraglider launch just outside of Pemberton. Ordinarily she would ride her bike, but in appreciation of the fact that I have been having trouble with my back she says that she will drive me there. She invites her friends Aaron and Jennifer and the four of us pack an impressive picnic lunch of fresh bread from the market, trail mix, strawberries just coming into season after the miserable weather, and cherries as big as small plums. Kelly and I laugh as we explain to them that in exchange for taking them on such an exquisite picnic they will have to grant me interviews at the top of the mountain. After winding our way up the treacherous mountain road, we finally arrive. Spreading our blanket out on the launch, we chat and laugh as we eat, gazing across at the peaks on the other side of the valley. When lunch has been devoured and everyone has stretched out in the sun, lazily spitting cherry pits down the side of the mountain, I turn on my tape recorder and make my customary demand for stories. After a slow beginning, they start to respond to my prompts, vying with one another to produce the most outrageous anecdotes. At this moment we hear the unmistakable sound of bells and a cyclist rides into view. The sound that warns us of his approach emanates from the bells that he has sensibly strapped to his bicycle in order to frighten away sharp-eared black bears. The young man lies down in the grass some ten

metres away, resting after his arduous climb. We all wave and go on with our stories until Kelly decides that we should ask him to join in. Calling him over, she explains my research (with no help from me) and asks him if he can contribute. After I record his comments the others turn to him and proceed to find out everything about him. We offer him food and congratulate him on his English as, with a thick German accent, he tells us that he has come from Switzerland to learn how to glide. Comparing notes, Kelly, Aaron and Jennifer try to figure out if they know his Pemberton gliding instructor. The cyclist eventually leaves and we are again left to ourselves, but we have become tired. We pack everything up and get back into the car. As we bounce back down the mountain, it occurs to me that we never asked him his name.

While incidents of this sort occur according to the nature of spontaneous *communitas*, that is, they occur within the moment and cannot be accurately predicted, they are facilitated by the normative system that has grown up around spontaneous *communitas* in Whistler. Of course, spontaneous *communitas* can occur anywhere, not just in Whistler, but it tends to be more concentrated in Whistler than in many other locations because Whistler has acquired a reputation for being the kind of place in which demonstrations of this sort happen on a regular basis. Whatever Whistler was like when the resort was first established, it is now a well-known playground and gathering place. People travelling to Whistler expect that it will live up to its reputation of liminality, and they do their best to ensure that it does by creating an atmosphere in which the possibilities for

communitas are maximized. In many ways, communitas is the norm in Whistler. For example, everyone who regularly travels the Sea to Sky Highway, which is the only route to Whistler, knows that every day it is lined with young hitchhikers on their way to work at the resort. Youth travellers on their way to work who are lucky enough to possess cars will pick up those who are not so fortunate, whether they know them or not. Michael, an established youth traveller whom I observed hitchhiking to Whistler several times a week, had worked out a fairly accurate system of commuting to work. Depending on when his shift started, he knew exactly what time he had to be out on the road in order to arrive in the Village on time for his shift. It never occurred to Michael that he would not be picked up, because helping out fellow youth travellers is expected behaviour in Whistler.

The stories told me by many of my research participants emphasized this point. For example, Tom recalls arriving in Whistler with a scant \$127 – an amount that does not go very far in a resort town – and no idea of how to manage until he found a job. Not knowing what else to do or where to go, he threw his bags into the bushes, planning to spend his first night in Whistler sleeping on the ground beside them. His actions had been observed by a passer-by, who, divining Tom's purpose accosted him and offered him a place to stay. The result was that Tom ended up staying on his benefactor's floor for three weeks until he landed his first steady job. While events like this one are fairly commonplace in Whistler, they are not typical of much of the rest of urban Canada. People in Vancouver or Toronto – where many of the youth travellers in Whistler originate – do not

usually approach strangers disappearing into the bushes at night and invite them into their homes.

These incidents, among many others, are part of the system of normative *communitas* that operates in Whistler. Youth travellers feel a common bond with one another in much the same way as Turner (1969) claims that ritual participants experience sensations of unity and connection when they are in the liminal state. However, in Whistler this sensation has become organized into a social system. Liminality is expected in Whistler and *communitas* has become normative in order to meet that expectation. *Communitas* is also actively promoted by employers within the area, specifically Intrawest. Appearing in this guise, *communitas* is no longer normative, it is ideological. Although an expensive resort may seem like an odd place for the proliferation of ideological *communitas*, Graburn (1983:14) notes that ideological *communitas* is frequently found among staff members of holiday camps, which, while not exactly identical to resorts, are similar in orientation.

In a “hip” looking glossy information brochure aimed primarily at the area’s youth travellers, David Brownlie, Senior Vice President of Whistler/Blackcomb, notes:

The success of Whistler/Blackcomb, to a great extent, is built around the personal connections we establish with the people we do business with. After all, we aren’t selling widgets here. We’re selling dreams and experiences. Whether guest, supplier or employee, we want the people who interact with us to feel like they are part of our team. Part of our dream.

This unified team atmosphere is emphasized repeatedly in Whistler/Blackcomb's Employee Handbook, in which team play is listed as one of Intrawest's most important values. Noting its connections to sports, games, music and theatre, Intrawest states that "play" is "an appropriate metaphor for the way we do business," and goes on to say that "at Intrawest... every member of the team is a player, and every player's contribution to the team is sought and valued." In a sense, team play is also an apt metaphor for *communitas*, as team members are united by a sense of common purpose that strips their external differences. Additionally, the focus on play, an undeniably appropriate one for this self-defined mountain playground, heightens the potential for *communitas* by bringing to the fore the liminal aspects of playing. This point will be clarified in a more detailed discussion of play that appears further on in this chapter.

At Whistler/Blackcomb, staff members are told that their mission is "to create memories for our Guests and Staff as the best mountain recreation experience... again and again." The atmosphere of *communitas* is the key to the attainment of this goal because it is *communitas* that enables staff to project a constant sense of spontaneity, inclusiveness and fun for the benefit of tourists. Intrawest refers to this aspect of its policy of memory creation as "animation." Animation is a widely known and used term among Intrawest staff as it is one of their employee slogans. It is defined as follows in the Employee Handbook:

Animation. We take every opportunity to create 'larger than life' experiences for our Guests and Staff. This is accomplished through planned programming of events, festivals and dazzling attractions or spontaneously through humour and playfulness by each and every one of us.

Staff are encouraged to enact Intrawest's ideology of *communitas* on a continual basis and, perhaps because of their own personal sensation of liminality, they do so with enthusiasm and verve.

As a part time employee of Whistler/Blackcomb during my fieldwork in Whistler, I witnessed numerous examples of ideological *communitas*. Additionally, many of my research participants recounted stories in which either they, or people that they knew, had striven to create an atmosphere of *communitas* for the tourists that they encountered in Whistler. Perhaps the best example of this process comes from a story told to me by Nicki, one of my supervisors at Intrawest.

Like if you're a liftie and you decide – we had one guy one year, it was crappy weather and people were waiting in the line-up and it was right before Christmas and the lift shut down. And for a half an hour, he had the whole crowd singing Christmas carols. Like, he was doing rounds; he was getting people doing rounds and standing up on a big box and getting everyone singing. And when the lift started, people started booing it because they didn't want to get on the lift; they were having *so* much fun.

Since the narrator of this story works for Intrawest, it is entirely possible that this is an idealized fictional account. Nevertheless, the fact that such a story exists and is told by staff members is a sign of the pervasiveness of ideological *communitas* in Whistler/Blackcomb. In any case, judging from my own experience with youth travellers in Whistler, I believe that the events recounted in Nicki's story, or something very like them, did actually occur.

While all three forms of *communitas* – spontaneous, normative and ideological – appear to be present among youth travellers in Whistler, these

sentiments are not evenly distributed among the population of youth travellers. In fact, most of the examples of *communitas* given so far have involved newcomers rather than established youth travellers. For example, in Susan's story about her friend Steve and his truck full of hitchhikers it is likely that, with the exception of Susan, all of the participants in the sing-along were newcomers. Similarly, Tom's story of being helped out by a fellow youth traveller refers to Tom's arrival in Whistler. Finally, the lift operator in Nicky's story is probably also a newcomer as lift operator is an entry-level position with the Mountain. While *communitas* is present among established youth travellers as well, it only appears under certain conditions. For example, most established youth travellers are trying to cultivate the identity of "local" and therefore avoid such overtly liminal behaviour as spontaneous *communitas*. Established youth travellers do not want to be mistaken for newcomers, so they behave in a way that reinforces the boundary between newcomers and themselves. The only time I witnessed spontaneous *communitas* among established youth travellers was when they were involved in some kind of athletic activity. While cycling or hiking the normal aversion to spontaneous *communitas* did not seem to apply and established youth travellers were willing to include freely anyone encountered on the trail in their expressions of camaraderie. Again, however, I suspect that this reaction may have more to do with the dynamics of play than with anything intrinsically liminal in the position or character of established youth travellers.

However, despite their stance on spontaneous *communitas*, established youth travellers seem to have no problem facilitating the institutions of normative and ideological *communitas* in Whistler. Picking up hitchhikers on their way to work and offering newcomers places to stay until they find their own apartments, established youth travellers are the backbone of normative *communitas* in Whistler. This aspect of the relationship between newcomers and established youth travellers is consistent with the anthropological literature on liminoid behaviour, in which Victor Turner (1974:169-170) notes that the chief bond between pilgrims (representatives of liminality) and those who help them on their way is one of normative *communitas*. This bond is analogous to the one that exists between newcomers and established youth travellers in Whistler. It is a state of affairs that creates a certain amount of ambivalence in the relationship between the two youth traveller populations. Established youth travellers will help newcomers out – after all, established youth travellers were once newcomers in need of help themselves – but they avoid identifying with them.²² Stuart, while vociferously objecting to befriending *anyone* with less than two years experience in Whistler, nevertheless let newcomers live in his car one winter when they had nowhere else to stay. And I, newcomer though I was, received no lack of help from established youth travellers.²³ By taking upon themselves the task of

²² As mentioned in Chapter Three, established youth travellers only identify themselves with newcomers in the presence of tourists.

²³ Although it could be objected that the assistance of established youth travellers was given in consideration for my status as an anthropologist, I do not believe this to have been the case. Most of the people I met in Whistler dismissed my research as a “scam” that enabled me to get

orienting newcomers to life in Whistler, established youth travellers assert their seniority.

Established youth travellers are also supporters of the system of ideological *communitas* in Whistler. Their participation in this system largely results from their work in the tourist industry. By virtue of their employment, then, established youth travellers are constrained to uphold the values of ideological *communitas*. However, most established youth travellers do not experience these values as a constraint, indeed, it was my experience that they actively embraced the necessity for *communitas* in the work place. Many of the established youth travellers I interviewed had very positive things to say about the teamwork promoted in Whistler by Intrawest and other employers. Additionally, I witnessed numerous examples of established youth travellers going out of their way to make tourists feel at home. Of course, in Whistler as in any other place, there are good days and bad days. Youth travellers, established and otherwise, admitted to me that there were days when their co-workers irritated them and they wished never to see another tourist again. Nevertheless, for the most part established youth travellers seem just as willing as newcomers to engage in the ideological *communitas* that prevails in Whistler.

academic credit for spending my summer in Whistler. Therefore it seems likely that youth travellers in Whistler responded to me more as a newcomer than a researcher.

Communitas, Play and Youth Travel

Insight into the pervasive camaraderie of youth travellers in Whistler can also be gained through a further analysis of the concept of play. This concept was used in Chapter Two to illuminate Whistler's status as a playground. One of the key aspects of play is that it encourages sociality by promoting "the feeling of being apart together in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms," (Huizinga 1955:12). In his article "Ludic and Liminoid Aspects of Charter Yacht Tourism in the Caribbean," James W. Lett Jr. (1983) applies the framework of play to the behaviour of charter yacht tourists in the British Virgin Islands. He notes that the knowledge of being at play together creates an atmosphere of almost aggressive conviviality among fellow yachters, all of whom "share a common interest, sailing, and...speak a common dialect, one that is liberally sprinkled with nautical terms," (Lett 1983:44). The situation described by Lett is not very far removed from that experienced by youth travellers in Whistler. In many ways, youth travellers, both newcomers and established youth travellers, are also at play. Certainly they share common interests and speak a common dialect. Most youth travellers in Whistler, regardless of whether they are a newcomer or an established youth traveller, are interested in a number of sports and they may, with no danger of being misunderstood: argue the benefits of "duelies" versus "hard tails," complain that the trails have been "shralped," or rejoice in the fresh "hero snow" that blankets the Mountain. And, like the charter

yacht tourists described in Lett's article, youth travellers in Whistler are particularly gregarious. I think that this aspect of play may explain why established youth travellers only seem to break into spontaneous *communitas* when they are involved in athletic activities. At these moments they are at play, and may therefore freely include all others who are similarly engaged, in their *esprit de corps*.

That the *communitas* of ritual and the camaraderie of play should share so many similarities is not surprising, as both are liminal activities. Both of them stand 'quite consciously outside "ordinary" life' (Huizinga 1955:13). The player always knows that he or she is "only" playing and the ritual actor is fully aware that the ritual will not last forever. In *Homo Ludens*, J. Huizinga (1955:12) notes that in play "the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count," and he cites several examples, according rites of passage and rites of intensification prominent positions in his list. The analytical link between ritual and play has also been made by Graburn (1983:11), who places these two activities together with tourism in the "set of non-ordinary behaviors" comprised by "[tourism], ritual, play, ceremony, communion, altered states of consciousness, meditation, worship, pilgrimage, and so on."

Youth Travel and Ritual Reversals

In ritual, as in play, the norms that govern everyday life no longer apply. The liminal period of a ritual is, in fact, often characterized by *reversals* of what would normally be considered appropriate behaviour (Turner 1969). Graburn

(1983:21) adapts this idea to tourism, pointing out that ritual inversions are inherent within the concept of tourism. Tourists are motivated to leave home and travel somewhere else in order to reverse those aspects of their home life that they are otherwise unable to change (Graburn 1983:22-23). For example, those who are hemmed in by schedule and responsibility often choose unstructured vacations that allow them to dispose of their time as they see fit. Tourists struggling through harsh northern winters frequently opt to spend their holidays relaxing on sunny southern shores. City dwellers typically vacation in country cottages rather than in other urban environments.

Reversals of a similar nature appear to be in effect in the lives of youth travellers in Whistler. Most youth travellers in Whistler come from lands of horizons: Ontario, Quebec, England and Australia. These places may not be completely flat in a topographical sense – they have afforded the potential youth traveller a taste of mountain biking, skiing or snowboarding – but neither are they mountainous in the sense that Whistler is mountainous. There is also an East/West reversal in effect as most Canadian youth travellers in Whistler come from Eastern Canada. Many youth travellers also have backgrounds of relative affluence. Skiing, snowboarding and mountain biking are, after all, middle and upper class pursuits as the financial outlay required to become involved in these sports is quite high. Nevertheless, while in Whistler most youth travellers live in poverty, often working several minimum wage jobs at a time in order to pay the rent. Youth travellers are also typically from urban environments: Toronto,

Montréal, Sydney, Canberra, Tokyo, and Liverpool. Whistler may be very cosmopolitan but it has a population of only 10,000 and is surrounded by wilderness. Additionally, youth travellers are often moving from a restricted setting into one of license. Free from adult supervision for the first time in their lives, they are loosed upon the town of Whistler to drink, ski and party. These behavioural reversals have clear ritualistic elements and are a further example of the liminoid status of youth travellers in Whistler.

Conclusion

Youth travellers in Whistler exhibit numerous ritualistic qualities. First, their position in the town of Whistler displays many characteristics of the ritual phase of liminality. The state of being a youth traveller is, like liminality, a transitory one.²⁴ And, like ritual actors during the liminal state of a ritual, youth travellers can be considered “betwixt and between” two different stages in their lives. Youth travellers also demonstrate the characteristic liminal suspension of ordinary social roles. Finally, youth travel, like an initiation rite, is preparatory to the assumption of greater responsibility. These liminal traits are not evenly distributed among youth travellers. Liminality is widespread among newcomers to Whistler, and for this reason established youth travellers generally avoid displays of liminal behaviour. This avoidance extends at least partially to *communitas*, which is one of the primary aspects of the liminal phase in a ritual.

²⁴ Youth travellers that decide to make their home in Whistler, whether they are newcomers or established youth travellers, become locals.

While established youth travellers are at the heart of normative *communitas* in Whistler and seem just as willing as newcomers to participate in the ideological *communitas* promoted by the town's major employers, they avoid displays of spontaneous *communitas* except when they are at play. In Whistler, spontaneous *communitas* is associated almost exclusively with newcomers; hence established youth travellers avoid it. The relation between spontaneous *communitas* and play in the behaviour of youth travellers in Whistler can be explained by the close theoretical link between the two concepts. *Communitas* and play are both liminal phenomena. Liminality also accounts for the ritualistic inversions that are inherent in youth travel. There are numerous links between the traits and behaviour of youth travellers in Whistler and the literature on ritual. The extent of these links is, I think, significant. I suggest that most youth travellers perceive travel to Whistler as kind of *rite de passage*. Established youth travellers, who have already undergone the rite, are acutely conscious of the status that has thereby been conferred upon them and seek to disidentify themselves with newcomers as a result.

Chapter Five

Youth Travellers' Perceptions of the Extreme: "Tough but Good"

Introduction

In this chapter I establish the connection between authenticity and the extreme in the discourse of youth travellers in Whistler. I first examine the role of authenticity in the tourist literature and then focus on the specific connections between authenticity and youth travel. In Whistler, the authenticity sought by youth travellers manifests itself in the extreme. I use the word "extreme" not as an adjective indicating "excessive" or "immoderate" but as a catchphrase indicating an attitude toward life that stresses the personal and spiritual rewards to be gained by maximizing risk. In other words, as youth travellers say, "go hard or go home." Disciples of extreme sports, youth travellers in Whistler also seek to project the glamour of the extreme over other aspects of their lives, striving at one and the same time to achieve a lifestyle balance of hedonism and asceticism. Youth travellers imagine themselves to be pushing the envelope of experience, and use their pursuit of the extreme as a means of distinguishing themselves from tourists. They feel that their extreme lifestyle is more authentic than the mundane experience of tourists, and contrast the materialism of tourists with their own allegedly more spiritual – and therefore more authentic – point of view. However, some youth travellers feel they are more authentic than others.

Established youth travellers speak derisively of newcomers' inexperience and are critical of the heedlessness of their approach to the extreme, mentally linking them with inauthentic tourists. My objective in this chapter is to consider youth travellers' manipulation of the concept of the "extreme" as a means of reinforcing the boundaries between insider and outsider in Whistler.

Tourism and Authenticity

The idea of authenticity has a prominent place in the tourist literature. Harkin (1995:653) notes that the "quest for authenticity is essential, if not to all tourism, at least to its more prestigious forms," and this idea is explored in the works of numerous other scholars of tourism (cf. Cohen 1988; Gable and Handler 1996; Harkin 1995; MacCannell 1976). Before the significance of authenticity to tourism studies can be analysed it will be necessary to take a closer look at the concept of authenticity itself. Despite its prominence, use of the term "authenticity" in the tourist literature is problematic. As Erik Cohen (1988:374) points out in his article "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism," "authenticity" is a philosophical term whose meaning is negotiable and its philosophical and historical roots need to be carefully examined before it is introduced into tourism studies. While a full examination of the meaning of the word "authenticity" is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would briefly like to explore a few of its theoretical underpinnings.

In his examination of the concept of authenticity, Erik Cohen (1988:273) states: "Authenticity is an inherently modern value, whose emergence is closely

related to the impact of modernity upon the unity of social existence.” Cohen (1988:374) claims that unity is lacking in modern society because the connection between the self and social institutions, which once afforded a sense of reality to social existence, no longer exists. As Lionel Trilling (cited in Handler 1986:3) points out in his influential work *Sincerity and Authenticity*, with the rise of the concept of the “individual” it is suddenly possible to be insincere. As identity is divorced from social position it becomes difficult to know who a person *really* is; one can be deceived, and one can deceive others. Related to the newfound concern that *people* are not who they profess to be, is a concern that *experience* is not what it seems to be. This fear is related to the process of industrialization that swept through Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. In an increasingly mechanized society people become wary of the mechanical principle that has insinuated itself into all aspects of life, “imposing habits and modes of thought which make it ever less possible to assume that man is man,” (Trilling 1971:126). The authenticity of the human condition is suddenly called into doubt, with the result that “we moderns are characteristically anxious about being, about ‘reality’, or, more particularly, about our lack of reality, about our lives which seem, as the popular term has it, ‘unreal,’” (Handler 1986:3).

While suggesting that the quest for authenticity is not quite as pervasive as it is held by many theorists to be, Gable and Handler (1996:568) nevertheless note:

An enduring image of modernist anxiety is that the world we inhabit is no longer authentic – that it has become fake, plastic, a kitschy imitation. Anxiety, so the common wisdom has it, goes hand in hand with desire. We

may have lost authenticity, but we want to find it again, and will pay what it costs (within reason) to get it.

Tourism is one means through which anxious moderns seek reality. An early connection between authenticity anxiety and the rise of modern tourism appears in Dean MacCannell's (1976) landmark study of tourism, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. MacCannell (1976:13) characterizes tourism as "a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience." In their quest for authenticity, tourists therefore seek "the pristine, the primitive, the natural" as it is felt that such locations will not be tainted by modernity's influence (Cohen 1988:374).

Whistler, then, would seem to be an odd travel destination for an alienated tourist. It is neither *pristine*, nor *primitive*, nor *natural* and it is certainly not untouched by modernity.²⁵ It is, in fact, the ultimate postmodern location, reminiscent of Baudrillard's (1981: 114) *hypermarchés*: "No relief, perspective, line of escape where the gaze would risk losing itself, but an encompassing screen where billboards, and the products themselves, in their uninterrupted display, play like equivalent and successive signs."²⁶ Whistler may not be natural – may, in fact, be *unnatural* – but it is not without a certain authenticity of its own. It looks more like a European alpine village than an actual European alpine village. The resort has been carefully engineered to be even "better" than the "real" thing,

²⁵ The scenery around Whistler may represent "the pristine, the primitive" and "the natural," but tourist encounters with nature are usually mediated by the resort.

²⁶ Translation mine

because tucked away in all Whistler's quaint little chalets are expensive hotels and restaurants. Whistler is an "authentic copy," a "genuine fake," a "postmodern quotation" of the original ski resort – and it is this that the tourists have come to experience (cf. Byatt 1990:211).

Whistler exists solely to "create memories for our Guests and Staff as the best mountain recreation experience," (Whistler/Blackcomb 1998:1), and its Marketing Department leaves nothing to chance, subscribing to the widely-held belief that "rather than being naturally given, authenticity in tourism is held to have been produced by a variety of entrepreneurs, marketing agents, interpretive guides, institutional mediators, and the like" (Hughes 1995:781). Itself a copy, Whistler is subject to infinite replication.

Erin and Jon, youth travellers who have each lived in Whistler for approximately one year, are aware, as perhaps the average tourist is not, of the degree of urban planning involved in the Whistler image:

Erin: It just shows you, like, how Intrawest can just replicate Whistler. I can't remember the other mountain that everyone says is like a mini-Whistler. And it's, sort of the design –

Jon: Probably Mont Tremblant.

Me: Yeah, I've heard that.

Erin: I haven't been there but I've heard it's exactly the same as Whistler. The fact that Intrawest, which also owns Mont Tremblant, can reproduce the external aspects of Whistler/Blackcomb at any or all of its other resorts is repugnant to Erin and Jon, although they hasten to assure me that such trappings

are not the “real” Whistler, and that the true spirit of Whistler cannot be exported. Youth travellers scorn Whistler’s highly produced exterior and they deride tourists for their enthusiastic acceptance of mere surface display. For the youth traveller, Whistler has less accessible, and therefore more prestigious, sources of authenticity.

Authenticity and Youth Travellers

While many forms of tourism are characterized by the search for authenticity on one level or another, youth travellers are particularly noted for their single-minded pursuit of this ideal. Luke Desforges (1998:176-177), in his article “‘Checking Out the Planet:’ Global Representations/Local Identities and Youth Travel,” comments that youth travellers “collect” exotic places as a form of cultural capital:

Through intellectualising travel into the collection of knowledge and experiences rather than, for example, sitting on a beach or going to Disneyland, young travellers define themselves as middle class, gaining entry to the privileges of work, housing and lifestyle that go with that class status.

The success of the individual youth traveller’s endeavour to acquire cultural capital is directly related to the degree of perceived authenticity in his or her travel experience. If travel is to confer prestige it must be done properly. The place travelled to must be “really” new, “really” different, or allow the youth traveller to “really” “get behind the scenes,” (Desforges 1998:180).

For youth travellers, authenticity rests on the distinction between themselves and other tourists. In order to have the right (most authentic) kind of travel

experience, the traveller must be as independent of the tourist industry as possible, avoiding the places and practices commonly associated with tourism (Desforges 1998:182-183). In Whistler, the separation of youth travellers and tourists is more conceptual than actual, but exists nevertheless. As discussed in Chapter Three, youth travellers in Whistler compensate for their reliance on the tourist industry by disparaging tourists as much as possible and asserting a separate identity, although not always with unqualified success. While youth travellers in Whistler may not be as atouristic as they hold themselves to be, they certainly *believe* that they are.

Correspondingly, youth travellers think youth travel is a more authentic form of travel than tourism. In a critique of popular tourist destinations such as Whistler, Daniel Boorstin (cited in MacCannell 1976:103) notes: “These [tourist] ‘attractions’ offer an elaborately contrived indirect experience, an artificial product to be consumed in the very places where the real thing is as free as air.” Youth travellers in Whistler would concur with Boorstin’s appraisal, using it as another brick in the foundation of their disdain for tourists. Tourists, they say, are content with the “artificial product” that Whistler/Blackcomb offers for their consumption and are willing to pay a lot of money for the privilege. Youth travellers contrast this approach to travel with their own experience of Whistler. The Whistler they know, the “real” Whistler, cannot be bought.²⁷ By associating tourists with the external aspects of Whistler and themselves with Whistler’s core,

²⁷ The cost of the dual-suspension Cove “G-Spot” mountain bikes and Head Monster snowboards that most youth travellers seem to feel that they need is not considered relevant.

youth travellers conceptually elevate themselves to the category of insiders and relegate tourists to that of outsiders, a process that will be discussed in greater detail below.

Authenticity and the Extreme

In *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell (1976:10) observes that tourists do not like other tourists, and that their dislike “is based on a desire to go beyond the other ‘mere’ tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture.” Youth travellers’ desire to go “above and beyond” manifests itself in Whistler in the discourse of the “extreme.”²⁸ Laura, dismissing tourists as superficial and lauding youth travellers’ extreme behaviour as more authentic, comments: “The tourist is here to have skiing lessons and improve themselves whereas the traveller is here to seek out that extra thrill of jumping off the...85 foot cliff.” Time and time again youth travellers comment that tourists are “only” in Whistler for expensive restaurants, ski lessons, or the “*après*” scene, whereas youth travellers are after “something more.” As Susan explains in Chapter Three, youth travellers come to Whistler for the “experience,” which is, or should be, as extreme as possible. Laura elaborates: “That’s it! It’s...being the first one up the lift at 7:00 in the morning and going off, you know, the peak and hitting the bowls and hitting the knee-deep powder and going into the backcountry...”

²⁸ “Above and Beyond” is a Whistler/Blackcomb slogan of employee excellence.

Unlike tourists, youth travellers come to Whistler to experience the extreme. The Marketing Department of Whistler/Blackcomb shrewdly capitalizes on this difference between its tourist and youth traveller clients. Tourist brochures offer a tasteful array of tangible benefits: groomed slopes, gourmet restaurants and luxury hotels. Advertisements aimed at the restless youth drifting in and out of Whistler offer something far more nebulous: authenticity. In the youth traveller brochure, "Ski Area Culture," the Whistler/Blackcomb Marketing Department waxes philosophical:

Whistler is about stepping out and redefining boundaries. It is about stretching one's limits (emotionally and physically). Getting active. Taking chances. That's why Whistler has become the crossroads of the universe for the snow riders of the world. Those pushing the boundaries, redefining the art of the improbable, (Whistler/Blackcomb Marketing Department 1997:5).

Intrawest promises the extreme, offering youth travellers the opportunity to "take chances," "push the boundaries" and, even more extravagantly, "redefine the art of the improbable." While youth travellers cast a jaded eye on Whistler/Blackcomb's marketing techniques – feeling that, as insiders, they know what's behind "the hype" – the fact that they have chosen to come to Whistler demonstrates the effectiveness of the resort's advertising campaign. Youth travellers agree with the sentiments expressed by Intrawest's brochures even while mocking them.

To be extreme is to be authentic, at least among the youth travellers of Whistler. Laura, a young woman working in the Employee Experience

Department, comments on the ideas about authenticity found in my research proposal:²⁹

I like the “perceived authenticity.” The idea of – you know, that there has to be a *real* experience... It was the ideas of “the pristine, the primitive, the natural, and – the untouched.” And that’s...what it has to be to be an authentic experience. And I was thinking about that and wondering whether it’s also – things like – “danger” is the wrong word, but – the thrill. A lot of people really go for the whole adrenaline thing.

In Whistler, the “adrenaline thing” is manifested in extreme sports.

At the end of every interview I asked my research participants to relate their most extreme experiences in Whistler, something which few had difficulty doing.

When asked for his most extreme experience, Neil, without hesitation, launched into the following story:

Neil: Well, this – it would have to be this January ’99 – the first time I seriously came close to living to the end of my life, I think. It was bad visibility conditions... and I was riding at the top of a cliff. I was making my way to one of the bowls that we like to ride...I went pretty high on the sign line and I just wanted to make a turn to go a bit further down hill, and the snow just gave way. I don’t know if I decided to turn on a wind lip or what, but it just came away and my board just slid and I was on my back and started spinning. And I went over this cliff on my back, head first, and my feet must have – my board, I guess because it was kind of heavy must have swung, like, rotated and swung over my head, so as I fell I was now facing the cliff. Somehow I managed to, like, do, like, a spider man manoeuvre, absolutely, like, glue myself to the cliff face. And I looked up. I was, probably fell about 15-17 feet, and it’s a good thing.

Me: Did you look down? (Laughter)

Neil: Yes, I did look down, and that’s why it was a good thing I only fell that far, because there was probably another 70-80 feet to go.

²⁹ Laura asked to read my research proposal prior to being interviewed as she felt that she would thereby better be able to address my ideas and offer greater insight.

While Neil does not begin each day with the resolution of coming as close to death as possible, he gets a lot closer to it than the average tourist because he takes more chances. Unlike the tourist, Neil is thoroughly familiar with the area. He knows exactly where he is going and therefore feels justified in deviating from the usual route. Flirting with the edge of an official “out of bounds” zone, Neil rides high on the sign line despite the poor visibility conditions. Of course, he does not mean to fall off a cliff but this is a natural consequence of his actions. Neil’s behaviour affords the potential for extreme experiences regardless of whether or not he is *trying* to be extreme at any given moment.

Youth travellers’ proximity to the extreme is not unintentional, although the specific results of this proximity may be unplanned. Sometimes, as with Neil, the extreme is entirely serendipitous but more often it is actively sought out. Youth travellers tell many stories of their daring and courage, but perhaps the most hair-raising is Kelly’s epic tale of a bike ride gone wrong, told to an audience of three others including myself:

Kelly: ... Ally, Dave – no – God, it was Ally, Sean and I. We did the Cheakamus Lake ride and then we cross over the bridge, like, the cable car, which is now a bridge. And our plan was just to go back towards Function, like, take the road that ended up near the Black Tusk road. The Black Tusk road, right? And Ally says: “Well this is what *sounds* like a good idea. What do you guys think, should we do this?” And, you know, Sean says: “Well how far do you think it is?” “Oh about a kilometre or so. How far can it be?”

Me: Oh!

Kelly: “It’s a slog through the bushes for a kilometre. Big deal.” So we decide to go and do it. It ends up being a hike-a-bike for about an *hour*. And then we end up at this one section, it’s all eroded and it’s just earth,

river, like, God knows how many feet below you, and then rockslide up here. So we're trying to make our way across this, and Ally's foot falls through the earth, and you can see the river through the hole that her foot has left.

(General laughter)

Kelly: Meanwhile we have our bikes attached to us, right? So that was part one. Then we carry on and we come to, like, just a straight rock slide part, and we scramble our way across there. And then we think: "Ok, it's, like 4:00 in the afternoon. How bad can this be? I mean, we're *almost* there. We must be." Then we come across (dramatic pause) The Creek.

Aaron: Yeah.

Kelly: Well (laughter), at this point the creek is not really a creek; it's kind of like a raging river. (Laughter)

Jennifer: (Laughter)

Kelly: It's probably about, I guess, 30 feet across and –

Jennifer: Oh God.

Kelly: Going fairly fast. And we, in our infinite wisdom figure that, well, going across it just by foot would be, you know, *too* difficult because it's rushing quite fast, right? ...So we decide: "Ok, there's a big *log*. We'll try –" I don't know what we were thinking, we were so stupid, "We'll try and push this log across the creek and then we can use the log to walk across." So we try to lift this log, and in the meantime the log *falls* and crushes the tip of my finger. (Laughter) And you know it hurts because you've got to put your finger *in* the river to cool it off in this numbing cold, ice cold water, and you can *still* feel it, because it's totally shattered on the end. (Laughter) So we finally make it across the stupid river and we get back to where we want to be.

Jennifer: On the log?

Kelly: And then, as we're going along – no, we forgo the log, and then we just sort of used each other's *arms* to get across.

Jennifer: Oh.

Kelly: And we see this sign saying: “Warning: Helm Creek Trail May Be Closed Due to Rock Slide.” But the trail, like the sign, is on the far end. There’s no sign between all the stuff we just went through and the Creek, right? (Laughter)

Kelly is proud of her experience and she relishes each obstacle that she and her companions successfully overcome to get to the trailhead. As experienced mountain bikers they must have known that trails are usually closed when blocked by rockslides and swollen creeks. They continue past the point of reason, risking their lives to cross a swift moving mountain stream swollen with melt-water for the sake of completing what they set out to do.³⁰ The more difficult and dangerous the experience, the more authentic it is for Kelly and the more prestige she gains in the telling of it.

It is early June and I have been in Whistler for several weeks. I have a shiny new mountain bike that I am dying to try out and my roommate offers to take me out for a spin. By this time I have heard many stories of the crazy rides that she and her friends like to go on, and I am slightly apprehensive, but she promises that she will go easy on me. My new bicycle has clipless pedals that lock into my equally new bicycle shoes. I have never ridden with clipless pedals before and am somewhat alarmed by the idea that I can't just slide my feet out of my pedals whenever I want to. Kelly insists that I practice the characteristic downward twisting motion of the ankle that gets the foot successfully out of the pedal, and I ride around the gravel parking lot clipping in and out of my pedals

³⁰ Kelly does not specifically state that the fording of the creek put the lives of herself and her companions at risk, but all of those present at the interview had seen enough mountain rivers to form an idea of the kind of danger that she was talking about.

with satisfying, audible clicks. Off we go on a short preliminary loop. I am happy to note that the trail is well within my modest abilities as a mountain biker and I sail back into the parking lot and clip out with ease. Kelly insists that we ride the same loop in reverse before tackling the main trail. All goes well until we are back out in the parking lot again, whereupon I come to a beautiful modulated stop only to discover that I can't get my feet out of my pedals. With no momentum to hold me on my bike there is nowhere to go but down.

I have fallen off my bike many times before and it has always hurt much less than I thought it would, so I am not unduly alarmed. A moment later, after crashing to the gravel surface of the parking lot, I make a very valuable discovery: sometimes falling off a bike hurts more than I think it will – a lot more. As I disentangle myself from my bike and stand up, blood is freely pouring from a large cut on my knee and the hand that I used to break my fall is numb. To my disgust, tears of pain start in my eyes and I can only hope that Kelly doesn't notice. She grins at me and pronounces our readiness for the "real" trail. Although my nerve is completely shattered (along with my knee), I know that to refuse would be contemptible.

The next half an hour takes the form of a sustained inner prayer: "Please don't let me fall off my bike again. Please don't let me fall off my bike again. Please don't let me fall off my bike again." I don't know if Kelly knows it, but a few shreds of will power are all that is keeping me on that bike – I have long ago reached the limit of my skill on a trail that is much harder than the loop we

started out with – and it wouldn't take much for me to give up in defeat and walk back to the car.

The next day I am quite proud of the enormous, pussy scab that is forming on the side of my knee and it is a long time before I finally scrub the bloodstains off my bike.

Youth travellers court the extreme in all aspects of their lives and not just in their athletic activities. The lifestyle of the average youth traveller in Whistler is, in itself, an exercise in the extreme. As newcomer youth traveller Richard notes: “I think the whole place is an extreme experience in some ways.” Youth travellers, notably newcomers, take drugs, drink all night long, indulge in promiscuous behaviour and throw wild parties. Keen participants in extreme sports, they are also connoisseurs of extreme hedonism – which is perhaps why most youth travellers burn out after a year in Whistler and the remainder learn to take life at a slower pace. When I ask Dana for her most extreme experience, expecting the story of a great adventure on the slopes, she demurs: “Extreme could be – anywhere – part of an extreme lifestyle. Just being on drugs for, like, five days straight... You're taking your body to an extreme when you do that.” Richard's reply to my request for a story about youth travellers is also telling. As he tries in vain to remember a specific story about youth travellers, he laughs:

I mean, basically, there's one standard story that is the Whistler youth traveller story, which is: wake up in the morning hung over as hell; get up; go skiing all day; come back down the Mountain; get back into the drinks again; and keep drinking all night.

The ability to indulge in this kind of behaviour is one of the reasons why youth travellers are attracted to Whistler. As a somewhat jaded Neil states in Chapter Two everyone knows that Whistler is an “outrageous time.” Laura elaborates: “You’ll see the lifties who’ve been out drinking five nights in a row come in stinking of alcohol every morning. (Laughter) But, yeah, and that’s not something you can get away with so much, you know, back in your home culture type thing.” The truth of Laura’s statement is indicated by the fact that established youth travellers, who now *are* in their home culture, cease engaging in such overtly hedonistic behaviour, leaving newcomers to carry on the Whistler tradition of outrageousness on their own.

Youth travellers, even established ones, approach other aspects of life in Whistler with the same gleeful abandon and lack of moderation that characterizes their attitude toward sports. Discussing youth travellers’ antics, established youth traveller Mark shrugs and notes laconically: “Some years are just crazy. Like, everyone runs around naked on the patio, in the hot tubs and things like that, and no one really thinks anything different of it.” Well do I recall my experience with the “nudie dock” during my first visit to Whistler in 1997. After a long, hot day of hiking, I went with my brother and a number of his friends, including Kelly, to Lost Lake for a swim.³¹ As indicated by its name, nudity was unofficially acceptable at the “nudie dock.” Kelly’s established youth traveller boyfriend of

³¹ At this time the popularity of Lost Lake as a youth traveller swimming hole was already on the decline. Declaring that the location had become “too touristy,” most youth travellers would only swim from the less accessible “nudie dock.” By the end of the 1990s, the majority of youth travellers were swimming elsewhere.

the time stripped down with obvious delight – completely oblivious to the presence of Kelly’s mother, who was visiting from Québec – running up and down the dock in a not entirely artless display of his own liberal attitude toward accepted notions of decorum. Scampering over to where I was circumspectly dabbling my toes into the frigid water of the mountain lake, he quickly realized that I was wholly unconcerned by his lack of clothing and took himself off to bother my more prudish brother, another established youth traveller, who kept urging him to “put some clothes on.” My brother’s outraged sense of propriety is anomalous among youth travellers, most of whom are inured to unconventionality. This incident indicates that when they are at play established youth travellers can be every bit as outrageous as newcomer youth travellers, and, due to Whistler’s playground status, established youth travellers are frequently at play. The disregard for social norms displayed by skinny-dipping established youth travellers and newcomers that “run around naked on the patio” can also be linked to liminality, a state which is frequently characterized by a reversal of ordinary behaviour (Turner 1969). In Whistler the extreme is woven into the very patterns of daily existence.

One of the keys to life in Whistler is “getting out of your comfort zone,” and this goes beyond merely getting “big air” on your jumps and drinking as much alcohol as possible. Laura reflects on the essence of youth travel in Whistler:

Yes, push the envelope, “get out of your comfort zone,” which is actually one of the things that, as a company, it’s one of the philosophies, is: get everyone out of our comfort zone. And I think a lot of people who come here are doing that anyway.

Although Laura is speaking figuratively, “comfort” is a word that, in the case of youth travellers, should be taken literally. Comfort is sacrificed for the experience of living in Whistler and the sacrifice makes the experience all the more authentic.³² Middle class youth travellers glory in the comparative poverty of their existence in Whistler. Kelly notes wryly:

The big joke in Whistler is that everybody has at least three [part time] jobs...because every single one of those jobs pays, you know, seven to ten dollars an hour. I mean, the rents in Whistler are comparable with anywhere else in the country, except that now you’re sharing your living space with at least one other person. So you’re still paying the same amount of money to live, you have less space, and you have to hold more jobs to support yourself. So that’s very typical. And the only reason people do it is for the actual living experience in Whistler. It’s just far too much fun so you make the sacrifice.

The notion of the “sacrifice” is an important component of youth travellers’ belief in their superiority over tourists. Interestingly, the importance of sacrifice in the youth traveller discourse mirrors its prominence in pilgrim discourse. Some of the connections between these two forms of travel have already been examined in Chapter Four. Within the context of pilgrimage, pain and suffering are sanctified and redefined as “sacrifice,” (Dahlberg 1991:46). According to Nancy Louise Frey (1998:109) in *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*, “Pain may be interpreted [by the pilgrim] as a gift that brings greater insight.” Similarly, youth travellers in Whistler mentally link suffering with sacrifice and consider sacrifice to be a source of spiritual gain.

³² The Whistler/Blackcomb Marketing Department was undoubtedly aiming for a more glamorous interpretation of the slogan “Get out of your comfort zone.” although ironically the low standard of employee housing offered by the resort provides the foundation for this *double entendre*.

Kelly's statement about the sacrifices made by youth travellers indicates that a significant part of what is sacrificed by youth travellers is privacy. Richard, who lives in an independently owned house, comments: "I mean, the guy who had the [two bedroom] house that I'm staying in now, who had that throughout the winter, he said he was packing as many people as he could into it... He had about twelve or thirteen people in there sometimes." Those who opt for employee housing fare little better. Isabel, a co-op student working for the Whistler Housing Authority, feels that lack of privacy is one of the drawbacks of employee housing: "Yeah, but with, like, employee housing you have to essentially live three people to one bedroom, and they just *pile* them in." In the most extreme cases, youth travellers have no living quarters at all and, as noted in Chapter Four, they are reduced to "couch surfing," or, as a last resort, living in cars or tents.

Another essential part of the Whistler sacrifice is bad food, or none at all. Tom describes his early days in Whistler in spartan terms, looking back on the experience as one conducive to his growth as an individual:

It was tough but good. I was having hot chocolate for lunch until January because I didn't have any money. Yeah, I ate very little meat until January, again. I didn't have a McDonald's until February, my first year, after arriving in October. It was good. You know, it was great to – sort of ate way more healthily when you haven't got any money...because you're eating pasta and then you get really cheap vegetables.

"Tough but good" encapsulates the attitude that most youth travellers have toward their self-imposed "poverty," again highlighting the link between privation and spiritual gain in youth traveller discourse. Tom is clearly impressed by his ability to live without McDonald's and I could tell he enjoyed telling me that he

managed to subsist on a diet of hot chocolate for two months. Many other youth travellers report similar feats of self-denial. Richard humorously affirms his reliance on Kraft Dinner, and Laura proudly describes her capacity to live by cereal alone. Youth travellers scorn the Village's many fine restaurants and flaunt their inability to afford dining out.³³ Their "poverty" sets them apart from the rich tourists who are "only" in Whistler to enjoy the superficial luxuries offered by the resort town.

The Difference Between Tourists and Youth Travellers

In the eyes of Whistler's youth travellers, the difference between tourists and themselves is that youth travellers are more extreme. According to youth travellers, tourists do not even attempt to rise above mediocrity during their stay in Whistler, whereas youth travellers, as mentioned above, flock to Whistler "to seek out that extra thrill of jumping off the...85 foot cliff." Youth travellers also practice a more extreme lifestyle than tourists. Commenting on the propensity of tourists to drink to excess in the resort's many bars, Laura nevertheless smugly notes: "But I think a good Whistlerite, if they've been here for a couple of months, could probably out-drink every single one of them."³⁴ Finally, youth travellers are proud of their excessive poverty and frequently contrast it with the wealth of tourists.

³³ Youth travellers' ability to afford a night out at one of the Village's many bars is, of course, another matter altogether. Being seen drinking copious quantities of alcohol in a public place, night after night, is yet another manifestation of the extreme.

³⁴ It is possible that tourists, by drinking too much, are also in search of the extreme.

Youth travellers feel that their extreme behaviour gives them a certain claim to authenticity. Tourists, on the other hand, can never be authentic, at least, not according to youth travellers. Youth travellers conceive of tourists' experience of Whistler as commodified experience and they contrast it with their own experience, which is somehow more real. Susan's comment about the difference between tourists and youth travellers, already quoted in Chapter Three, nicely illustrates youth travellers' conceptions of tourist experience:

I think that the youth traveller perhaps feels a little bit more of a connection with this place, whereas the tourist is here staying in their nice motel and forking out however many dollars a day on food and drink and things like that, whereas the youth traveller is here for experience...

Youth travellers are "living" the Whistler experience whereas tourists are merely buying it. Can experience be bought? Youth travellers think not, and therefore they feel superior to the rich tourists (who are probably very similar to their parents) that come to the resort.

Youth travellers claim that tourists are not interested in what lies beneath the exterior of Whistler and characterize them as absorbed in a host of petty concerns. Usually these concerns have something to do with "getting their money's worth." Laura speaks derisively of the narrowness of tourists' expectations: "[tourists'] whole idea is they want the service. They want everything to go smoothly. You know, they don't want a line-up to get on the lift. They want exceptional service everywhere. That's what they expect." Laura is not the only youth traveller to focus on tourists' alleged service fixation. Erin comments: "It's service, you know, and that comes along with all the new money that's going into the tourism.

You know, people *want* someone who's going to clear away their tray in the cafeteria; they've paid for it." The tone of her voice leaves no doubt about the scorn she feels for the sort of person whose concept of Whistler is limited to the kind of *service* they get and whether or not it's worth what they *paid* for it.³⁵

Youth travellers speak of tourists in monetary terms, and they contrast the commodified experience of tourists with the youth traveller experience, which they frame, albeit unconsciously, as divine experience. Laura makes this distinction very clear with a comment that has already been heard in Chapter Two:

A tourist here will not, I don't think, go to the extremes that a youth traveller will. A youth traveller's looking for that out of body experience, that whole idea of authenticity that we were talking about before. The idea of finding the best powder and being the first one down the run and getting off that cornice and going on a double black diamond on their first day. Whereas the tourists are here for the lessons and the "*après*" and the skiing on the nice groomed slopes.

Laura's connection between spirituality, the extreme and authenticity is significant. According to Laura, youth travellers engaged in the extreme are looking for an "out of body experience," which will in turn confer a measure of authenticity. Tourists, on the other hand, want only to have a safe and pleasant vacation.

In a lengthy homily on the finer points of alpine sports, Neil muses:

And, I don't know, I find skiing and snowboarding is very spiritual, almost. You know, it's kind of you communing with the earth...*and* with the water

³⁵ It is possible that tourists are not as concerned with service as youth travellers say they are. As the main providers of service in Whistler, it is only natural that youth travellers would be extremely sensitive to this issue.

– well, the snow. Like, a lot of people say, you know, like, come down a track of fresh powder, you know, I’ve heard friends of mine say that it’s better than sex... You know, and I’ve had experiences where... I finish and I’m just in awe of what I just did. And – not that it was difficult or anything – just the feeling, the sensation, and, I don’t know, it’s very... It puts you in place with the whole planet, you know.

While Neil emphasizes the fact that the degree of difficulty is not related to the degree of spirituality, this should not be interpreted as a negation of the extreme. Neil would not be “in awe” of his accomplishments if they did not involve some degree of technical skill. It is when the extreme becomes effortless that it is the most gratifying.

Time and again, youth travellers tell of the sense of euphoria they feel upon “clearing” some particularly difficult section of trail on their mountain bike, or “landing” a particularly spectacular jump on their snowboard. Neil’s feeling of wonder is reproduced in a tale told by Michael of a memorable day on the slopes:

Michael: So my friend Fernando – I just learned how to snowboard this winter – my friend Fernando, I work with, were cruising around Blackcomb Mountain and I know the Mountain better than he does but he’s a much better snowboarder than I am. So, a lethal combination: me guiding, and him pushing me harder and harder. And we ended up at this one spot where we were at a cliff and two feet fresh powder. You know, it was about a ten, fifteen-foot drop one way, but an ugly landing, and a twenty-foot drop straight ahead, or a half-hour hike in waist deep powder to try and get out of where we were. So we just decided to jump off it. He went first and made it successfully, didn’t break anything or twist anything, and then it took me a couple of minutes to screw up my courage. Then I threw myself off the cliff-

Me: (Laughter)

Michael: - landed in a big poof ball at the bottom, and had a mini snowball fight and whooped and yelled for a minute.

...

Michael: And was so elated I just jumped off that. I remember looking back at the cliff and wishing I had a camera.

Like Neil, Michael is in awe of his own daring. Although Laura uses the term “out of body experience” somewhat facetiously when she discusses youth travellers’ need for authenticity, Michael’s description of his sensations upon hurling himself from a twenty-foot cliff resemble those experienced in an altered state.

Youth travellers enjoy the “high” they get from risking life and limb on a daily basis and believe that the extremity of their experiences gives them a kind of spiritual connection to Whistler that tourists, with their commodity-oriented focus, have no access to. Dana’s comments on the links between pilgrimage and youth travel, which have already appeared in Chapters Three and Four, provide perhaps the greatest insight into the distinction youth travellers make between themselves and tourists:

...it’s like [youth travellers] are on a journey. Whereas the tourists have already made it from A to B...I think travellers are *on* their way to A and B. But the traveller’s on a different journey altogether. I don’t know, more of a spiritual journey or a pilgrim of something.

The tourist voyage is entirely corporeal, but youth travellers are navigating the sacred. The mystical element of youth travel instils a sense of authenticity in youth travellers, convincing them of their superiority over “mere” tourists.

Youth travellers’ desire to dissociate themselves from tourists is evident in their dichotomous characterization of the difference between tourists and youth travellers. Youth travellers hold themselves to be extreme and describe their

connection to Whistler in spiritual terms, dismissing tourists as pedestrian and materialistic. This dichotomy is indicative of projective identification, a process referred to by Abram de Swaan (1997:106) as disidentification. Youth travellers project their own negative tendencies onto tourists, identifying with these denied qualities through tourists. The dichotomies employed by youth travellers to demarcate the boundary between tourists and themselves are also suggestive of Jacqueline Waldren's (1996) work on insiders and outsiders. Waldren (1996:139) defines the insider-outsider dichotomy as "a binary opposition which allows a group to define itself, establish an image, an identity, or community in contrast to another with whom it shares physical space." However little they like it, youth travellers must share Whistler with tourists, but they are not obliged to share their identity. In disidentifying themselves with tourists, youth travellers establish themselves as insiders and relegate tourists to outsider status.

The Difference Between Newcomers and Established Youth Travellers

Although youth travellers, as a group, feel they are more authentic than tourists, some youth travellers believe they are more authentic than others. Established youth travellers think that newcomers fail to see the "real" Whistler and speak derisively of their approach to life in the resort town. If, as Desforges (1998:180) says, the key to authentic travel experience is that it allows the traveller to really "get behind the scenes," then newcomers still have a long way to go. Long-time resident Jason shakes his head over the shallow behaviour of newcomers:

A good percentage of, say, younger people that come to Whistler, you know, they'll come and work for the Mountain for a season – being Intrawest – you know, party, and don't really take advantage of what else is really beyond the glamour and the hype of Whistler.

Established youth travellers, then, feel that the frivolous lifestyle of newcomers blunts their understanding of the true nature of Whistler.

Jason clearly feels that, as an established youth traveller, he has arrived at an understanding of what lies “beyond the glamour and hype of Whistler” and is fully qualified to talk about it. Whistler, he announces *with confidence*, has an “underground soul:”

Whatever soul, whatever backbone [Whistler] did have at one point I find is, you know, is definitely under the rug. It's still around, I think, but overall, you know, I don't think you really notice it just by coming in and out of town frequently, or spending a couple of months here.

Newcomers, like tourists, are here associated solely with the external characteristics of Whistler, whereas Jason links himself and other established youth travellers with the “backbone” of Whistler. Prior to being granted a sight “under the rug,” a youth traveller must first have served his or her apprenticeship in the town. Whistler's soul is not in the open for all to see, and if one wishes to find it one has first to be initiated into the secret of where to look for it. Jason's insight into the “backbone” of Whistler is a sign of his authenticity because it is a sign that he is one of the elect who have successfully completed the probationary period. The internal-external framework of Jason's remarks also demonstrates the insider-outsider opposition employed by established youth travellers to distinguish themselves from newcomers through its dichotomization of the two

youth traveller populations. It is a further indication of established youth travellers' disidentification with newcomers.

Jason's remarks also imply that the Whistler spirit is slowly dying, a common belief among established youth travellers, most of whom attribute this identity crisis to the increasing popularity of the resort. Erin, an established youth traveller speaking of the changes that have taken place since she first started coming to Whistler as a small child with her Vancouver-based parents, observes:

I think there's a lot of younger people...I've started seeing bring a lack of respect for the town – for other people. And I think that shows quite a bit...I think there's a big emphasis on equipment and, you know, clothes and just tangible things. I think that's probably what's made Whistler lose its soul a little bit.

According to established youth travellers, newcomers are not only incapable of appreciating the true essence of Whistler; they are actually responsible for Whistler's spiritual decline. Interestingly, Erin's remarks demonstrate the connection between tourists and newcomers that exists in the minds of most established youth travellers. Like tourists with their expensive hotels and concern for the quality of service they receive, newcomers with their parties and state-of-the-art equipment are focused solely on "tangible things." This is another form of the dichotomy employed by Jason above, one that echoes the dichotomy youth travellers use to distinguish themselves from tourists.

Insider-outsider dichotomies are the tool of disidentification, and established youth travellers' reliance on them signifies a lack of confidence in the strength of the boundary that separates them from newcomer youth travellers. Established

youth travellers would not seek to mark the boundary so clearly if they did not think it needed to be defended. Their hints that newcomers are responsible for a perceived loss of “soul” in Whistler are another sign of boundary blurring. In *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Anthony P. Cohen (1985:109) states that the encroachment of outsiders on an individual’s community threatens that individual’s identity, because his or her sense of self is necessarily bound up in his or her sense of community. When the community’s boundaries are already in a weakened state, outsiders are perceived as a threat:

Thus, one often finds in such communities the prospect of change being regarded ominously, as if change inevitably means loss. A frequent and glib description of what is feared may be lost is ‘way of life;’ part of what is meant is the sense of self (Cohen 1985:109).

In this light, established youth travellers’ attribution of Whistler’s loss of “soul” to the presence of too many newcomers is telling. Established youth travellers feel threatened by the presence of newcomers because the boundary between newcomers and themselves is already hazy, and therefore they accuse newcomers of destroying the Whistler way of life.

Established youth travellers feel that another problem with newcomers is that they too often think they are being extreme (and therefore cool) when they are really just being heedless. As long-time resident Stuart succinctly notes in a comment that has already been heard in Chapters Three and Four: “I’m here to like the town; I’m not here to kill myself in one year.” According to established youth travellers, there is an art to being extreme that newcomers have yet to master. Seduced by the “glamour and the hype” of the extreme, newcomers try

too hard with too little experience, a state of affairs which is dangerous to say the least. Mark, an established youth traveller with a lot of experience co-ordinating rescue operations on the Mountain, notes:

But – definitely a lot of extreme people out here... [T]here’s never a shortage of people that will go out and do things with you, so if you’re into jumping off big cliffs or whatever, the opportunity’s definitely there... Which is a good thing and a bad thing, I think. Like, a lot of people injure themselves that aren’t ready for that, and they’re just out here, and the calibre of skier or rider here is so different from what they’re used to.

Established youth travellers, then, see newcomers essentially as *poseurs*. With their trendy gear and their extreme-at-all-costs attitude, newcomers rush into things far beyond their level of skill for the sake of being seen to live “on the edge.”

Discussing the superficial motivations of newcomers, Neil philosophizes: “Yeah, I am pretty much over that. You know, it’s part of the maturing process. You know, to use a far over-used quote: The path of excess leads to the temple of wisdom.” Neil does not repudiate the extreme but he draws a distinction between what is extreme and what is merely excessive. He knows what it is like to be a newcomer because he was once a newcomer himself, but he now realizes that the behaviour of newcomers is foolish and irresponsible. Secure in his place within the “temple of wisdom,” Neil feels himself to have arrived at a degree of self-knowledge that newcomers – benighted travellers still toiling up the temple path – have yet to find. Erin puts the case more bluntly: “[Newcomers] just don’t know what they’re doing.” Neil and Erin’s statements about newcomers resonate with Anthony P. Cohen’s (1994) work on liminality and boundaries. Cohen

(1994:127) refers to liminality as an “evocative notion” that describes “the blurriness of transformation and the acute consciousness of status on either side of it.” The liminality of newcomers was discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Established youth travellers have already undergone the period of liminality characteristic of newcomers and they are now intensely aware of the gulf that separates the two groups.

Jon takes Neil and Erin’s uncharitable assessments of newcomers one step further by suggesting that newcomers are indirectly maligning the reputations of those youth travellers (such as himself) who really *are* extreme. According to Jon, the extreme takes preparation and skill, and newcomers, frequently injuring themselves attempting feats of skill beyond their level of expertise, are mistaken when they define their behaviour as extreme. They give the extreme a bad name.

Established youth travellers, then, feel that they are the only ones who have the experience necessary to distinguish between what is legitimately extreme and what is simply excessive. They express the difference between the two states in their discourse about the darker side of authenticity. Established youth travellers are the only youth travellers who spontaneously refer to the risk inherent in the extreme, and it seems to be a serious concern for many of them. Accidents happen frequently on the slopes, and the longer a youth traveller remains in Whistler, the greater his or her respect for the mountains. While established youth travellers occasionally engage in blatantly reckless behaviour, and relish tales of foolhardy exploits as much as any newcomer, underneath their bravado

lays an awareness of vulnerability. They have learned, often through painful experience, to take certain necessary precautions in their athletic activities and they decry newcomers' frequent lack of preparation and seeming belief in their own immortality. As a result, established youth travellers' narratives of the extreme are often shadowed with a hint of menace that is not present in the brash anecdotes of devil-may-care newcomers.

Established youth travellers tell stories of lost hikers and people buried in avalanches: those whose bodies resurface only with the spring. Michael calls to mind the fate of "a Whistler Mountain employee who hit his head...right at the start of a heavy snowfall and within two hours...he was buried by the snow and no one could see him." With grief, my brother recounts his participation in the search for one of his skiing students, a little girl eventually found by rescue dogs under an enormous pile of snow at the base of a tree. In a collision with the tree, she had dislodged the snow that ultimately pinned her in the tree well and suffocated her. Susan's roommate narrowly escaped a similar fate, falling head first into a tree-well while snowboarding. Susan vividly recalls her sensations on that day: "But that was super scary, yeah. It wasn't *as* scary at the time, because I thought, 'Ah, she's just gone ahead of me and she's out there *somewhere*.' But then when I *found* her and *heard* her story, that – how close she could have been and how – Perhaps we should have stuck together a little bit more."

The most poignant example of established youth travellers' recognition of the risk inherent in authenticity comes from Michael:

Michael: Yeah. I mean I know there's times where I've been in *sketchy* situations on the Mountain, and I *have* been on my own, and if something went wrong I would have been in a lot of trouble, but, I guess I was just lucky that nothing went wrong. Another one that happened this winter, actually, was – back in January; an old roommate of ours was killed in a climbing accident. And the next day I was up on the Mountain and, thinking a lot about Karen, and – she was only 21. It was a freak accident. She was one of the most careful people, and knowledgeable people about the outdoors that I've ever met. And I just got somewhere and I got completely freaked out. I'd been there before but it was really steep and it required about a ten-foot jump into a bowl, and I just couldn't do it. I just kept thinking of Karen, and if something happened. That was kind of a weird feeling for me because it was something that I *knew* I could do, but I couldn't do it because of the thoughts running through my head.

Me: So what did you do?

Michael: I took my snowboard off and crawled out of there. Which – and I had to crawl extremely carefully because I'd almost gone to the point of no return.

Michael's story is haunted by his sense of mortality and, without overt allusion, contains the key to established youth travellers' belief in their superiority over newcomer youth travellers. Michael is acutely aware of the hazards of the extreme, and he lets himself be guided by this awareness. In this consciousness of vulnerability, Michael displays what he would no doubt classify as maturity. He has the experience that newcomers lack and this difference is manifest as much in his *inaction* as in his action. Established youth travellers paradoxically locate their claims to authenticity in an awareness of their own frailty. They feel that their approach to the extreme is more nuanced, and therefore more profound, than that of newcomers. For established youth travellers, the extreme is all about death. To be extreme is to enter into a conscious relationship with death,

challenging it while simultaneously accepting it as a reality. Established youth travellers therefore believe that neither tourists nor newcomers can be accounted extreme because neither group meets the criteria. Tourists, whether or not they acknowledge the existence of death, choose not to confront it. Newcomers, on the other hand, defy death fairly regularly but do not respect it.

Established youth travellers attempt to negotiate an identity that separates them from newcomers as much as possible. The distinction they make between themselves and newcomers pivots on the notion of the extreme, which they feel they have mastered while newcomers are still raw recruits. Newcomers not only do not know what they are doing, they do not even properly know what the extreme *is*, and they devalue the concept of the extreme by misapplying it to their lunatic exploits. A bigger problem, in the eyes of established youth travellers, is that newcomers do not take the extreme *seriously* enough. In other words, they do not seem to appreciate the genuine risk involved in being extreme. In their narratives, established youth travellers dwell on this risk with a kind of morbid fascination that calls attention to their feelings of authenticity. They believe that only they have achieved insight into the weighty matter of what it means to be truly extreme, and they display their initiation into the secret of the extreme as a sign of authenticity.

Conclusion

Youth travellers in Whistler use the idea of the extreme as a means of asserting their authenticity, which in turn is linked with their identity as insiders.

Their enactment of the extreme takes many forms. First, and most obviously, youth travellers are practitioners of extreme sports. However, youth travellers also apply the philosophy of the extreme to other aspects of their lives, on the one hand pursuing a lifestyle of maximum self-gratification and on the other pushing themselves to feats of self-denial. They contrast their radical approach to life in Whistler with the approach taken by tourists, which youth travellers characterize as superficial and materialistic, and they feel that their own devotion to the extreme grants them a spiritual insight that tourists are denied. Literally and metaphorically “on the edge,” youth travellers maintain that their extreme lifestyle is a mark of authenticity. Nevertheless, some youth travellers believe themselves to be more authentic than others. Established youth travellers scorn the impetuous behaviour of newcomers and hold their recklessness to be a sign of their failure to understand the true nature of the extreme. Identifying with the extreme on multiple levels, youth travellers use this concept to authenticate their experience in Whistler and to assert their identity.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

In *Self-Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, Anthony P.

Cohen (1994:131) states:

There is a difference between being conscious of what is on either side of the border, and being preoccupied with the boundary as such... The latter seems to me more authentically boundary-conscious: liminal, aware that one is walking a risky line... If this sounds unduly cryptic, I would say that it is this kind of uncertainty which drives people to grasp for certainty, and which in turn motivates identity.

In this thesis I have examined some of the issues surrounding identity among youth travellers in Whistler. The boundaries separating different groups of people in Whistler are very fluid and are not always readily apparent – even to those existing on either side of them. This uncertainty drives youth travellers to assert their identity in opposition to others. In this thesis I explore some of the myriad ways in which youth travellers' need to reinforce the boundary between themselves and others is manifested in their perceptions of Whistler, tourists, the “extreme,” and themselves. I suggest that youth travellers are, in the words of Cohen (1994:131), “authentically boundary-conscious.”

According to Cohen (1985:12), “community” is a relational concept that at once implies similarity and difference. Belonging to a community not only requires that an individual associate with his or her fellow community members, but also that he or she dissociate him or herself from those who do not belong

(Cohen 1994:120). The very idea of community depends upon the existence of non-members. The mental category of “member” is defined by that of “non-member” and vice versa (Ilcan 1999:244). The boundary between one group and another is the site at which these oppositions are expressed (Barth, cited in Cohen 1994:10). In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Fredrik Barth (1996[1969]) investigates the boundary phenomenon as it relates to ethnic groups. Barth’s work is continued by Cohen (1985:44), who believes that community members attribute “meaning and significance which belies [their] appearance” to the boundaries of their community.

Boundaries, however, exist primarily “in the minds of their beholders,” (Cohen 1985:12). When boundaries are perceived by group members to be threatened or blurred, members of the group will attempt to strengthen the boundaries symbolically (Cohen 1985:44). Common identity as members of the same group is so important to group members that in times of perceived boundary blurring, they will draw together to protect their boundaries despite “intervening sectional interests,” (Cohen 1985:107). Community members attempt to symbolically reinforce their boundaries through identification and disidentification. Identification with one another is one way through which the goal of boundary strengthening can be achieved, but disidentification is equally important. Abram de Swaan (1997:106) describes the process of disidentification as one wherein individuals deny the negative tendencies of their own group and project them onto others. In the process, group members create “insiders” and

“outsiders,” categories they use to establish their identity in opposition to others (Waldren 1996:139).

These categories are not set in stone and neither are the boundaries between them. According to Cohen (1994:122), “boundary suggests contestability.” It is this contestability that makes the notion of the boundary so pivotal in establishing the identity of a community, and which causes youth travellers in Whistler to disidentify with others and manipulate insider-outsider dichotomies in order to symbolically strengthen their own boundaries.

Youth travellers’ need to erect boundaries between themselves and others is evident in their perceptions of Whistler. In “Wandering: Youth and Travel Behavior,” Jay Vogt (1978:33-34) describes gathering places as sites where youth travellers congregate and he outlines five reasons why youth travellers are attracted to them. The first of these is that gathering places have a liberal climate. Whistler’s youth travellers, who refer to the “outrageous time” and “excellent pot” that is to be had there, attest to Whistler’s liberality with stories of comrades operating gondolas while high or coming to work hung over after drinking all night. Established youth travellers, however, usually frown on such conduct. They dissociate themselves with newcomer youth travellers by indicating that they have outgrown the need to take advantage of Whistler’s permissive culture. The techniques established youth travellers use to distance themselves from newcomers are signs of their disidentification with newcomers.

Vogt (1978:33-34) second criterion of a gathering place is that it attracts youth travellers through the variety of recreational pursuits it has to offer. Of course, part of Whistler's appeal is the tolerant atmosphere described above, which also has a lot to do with the kind of activities that are available there. There are two streams of activity in Whistler: parties and sports. Youth travellers, especially newcomers, are enthusiastic about the "big party atmosphere" in Whistler and tell stories of its wild parties. Nevertheless, it is the opportunities for skiing, boarding and mountain biking that usually draw newcomers to Whistler, and that discourage established youth travellers from leaving. Established youth travellers, while they participate fully in Whistler's athletic scene, frequently disdain its party scene because partying is conceptually linked with newcomers. This disdain is another aspect of established youth travellers' disidentification with newcomers.

Vogt's third (1978:33-34) criterion is that a gathering place must be accessible. Whistler is a resort and is therefore not exactly off the beaten track. It is a two-hour drive from Vancouver on a major highway. Unfortunately, the fact that Whistler is a resort contradicts Vogt's (1978:33-34) fourth criterion, which is that a gathering place should be cheap. Whistler is very expensive. However, as a number of "good deals" are available for youth travellers it is not as expensive for them as for tourists. Any person who can prove that he or she either lives or works in Whistler gets a discount in most of the stores, and staff housing is available for those who work at Intrawest. The final criterion for a successful

gathering place is that it must already support a large population of youth travellers (Vogt 1978:33-34). This situation is clearly the case in Whistler. Youth travellers explain that the high concentration of young people in Whistler is a deciding factor in most youth travellers' decision to go to Whistler. There are so many youth travellers in Whistler that many established youth travellers come to resent Whistler's popularity, experiencing the overwhelming presence of newcomers as a threat to the boundary between the two groups.

Another perception that youth travellers share concerning Whistler is that it is a playground. In the classic *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, J. Huizinga (1955:12) discusses the six elements of play. The first of these is that play is a "free activity" (Huizinga 1955:12). Youth travel seems to fit this description as most youth travellers go to Whistler in order to postpone major life decisions for a season or two while they hit the slopes and participate in raucous parties. Established youth travellers complicate the discussion of play in Whistler because, at some point, the "free activity" of newcomer youth travellers turns into a settled routine that is tempered with responsibility. Established youth travellers seem to compromise by continuing to play on the mountains while reducing the amount of time they spend in the bars.

The second characteristic of play described by Huizinga (1955:12) is that it stands "quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life." Youth travel is generally short-lived and most youth travellers know that they will be returning to the "real" world after they leave Whistler. They distinguish what they are doing in Whistler

from their ordinary lives by referring to Whistler as a “playground.” Even established youth travellers consider Whistler to be a playground. Their dual understanding of Whistler as home and playground highlights the ambiguity of their position in Whistler and is one of the sources of the tension between established youth travellers and newcomers. Established youth travellers think newcomers’ relationship with Whistler is not as profound as their own because newcomers see Whistler *only* as a playground.

Another important feature of play is that it is not attached to any material benefits (Huizinga 1955:12). Youth travel is clearly not undertaken with any hope of financial gain because living in Whistler is fairly expensive and working in Whistler is not particularly remunerative. Moreover, job experience gained in Whistler is not usually transferable to the careers adopted by most youth travellers upon their return home, which are outside the tourist industry.

Play is also a disciplined phenomenon, bounded in both time and space (Huizinga 1955:12). Most youth travellers go to Whistler for the ski season and leave when it is over. The period between the first and last snowfall, therefore, is time that youth travellers dedicate to play. Established youth travellers, however, do not have the benefit of the deadline provided by a plane ticket home, and so they learn to combine play with living. The spatial boundaries of youth travel are, in this case, confined to Whistler. Youth travellers come to Whistler because they cannot “play” in the same manner at home. Of course, Whistler *is* a home to many established youth travellers, so their play becomes more moderate. Play is

also governed by certain laws (Huizinga 1955:12). Youth travellers must prove themselves socially and physically fit to be members of the Whistler youth community. The pressure to do so diminishes over time, however, which accounts for established youth travellers' scorn for newcomer youth travellers' excessive drinking and reckless behaviour on the slopes.

Finally, Huizinga (1955:12) notes that play entails the formation of social groups from which others are barred. Whistler's youth travellers, regardless of whether they are newcomers or established youth travellers, share the same play space. They understand one another because they play together and they develop camaraderie that excludes outsiders such as tourists. Play therefore partially explains youth travellers' dissociation from tourists. Play also provides an explanation for established youth travellers' attitudes toward newcomers, because established youth travellers play *and* live in Whistler.

Youth travellers in Whistler see it as both gathering place and playground, but in their attitude toward these perceptions, established youth travellers reinforce the boundaries between themselves and newcomers. Established youth travellers disidentify with newcomers through a critique of newcomers' play behaviour and disdain for the frivolity of newcomers' responses to the gathering place scene.

While established youth travellers disidentify with newcomers as much as possible, they nevertheless join forces with them against tourists. In "Towards a Sociology of International Tourism," Erik Cohen (1972) distinguishes between

four different types of tourists according to the degree of novelty they seek in their vacations: organized mass tourists, individual mass tourists, explorers and drifters. He classifies the former two as institutionalized and the latter two as non-institutionalized tourists. Jay Vogt (1978) develops a similar typology in which “tourists” and “travellers” are substituted for institutionalized and non-institutionalized tourists. In his typology Vogt (1978) also refers to “drifters” as “wanderers.” Whistler’s youth travellers seem to fit best in the drifter/wanderer category, but the match is far from exact as neither Cohen nor Vogt consider the possibility of youth travellers obtaining regular work as part of their travel experience.

With greater specificity, Pamela J. Riley (1988) investigates youth travellers in “Road Culture of International Long-Term Budget Travellers.” She offers a balanced view of the “push” and “pull” factors that motivate youth travel, describing youth travellers’ desire to postpone adult responsibility and their curiosity about other places. Even so, her description of youth travellers also falls short of encompassing youth travel in Whistler since she does not consider youth travellers’ practice of remaining stationary in order to work there. J. Hartmann (1991, cited in Loker-Murphy and Pearce) offers a more detailed look at youth travellers with his seven-part taxonomy of youth travel. Whistler’s youth travellers seem to belong equally to two categories. Most are simultaneously adventure travellers *and* party travellers.

Youth travellers' own confusion about their place in Whistler mirrors this theoretical ambiguity. Although youth travellers are clear that there is a great difference between themselves and tourists, they are unclear about the nature of this difference. When asked to distinguish themselves from tourists, youth travellers usually begin with a discussion of the physical and material disparity between the two populations, saying that tourists are generally older and wealthier than youth travellers. However, most youth travellers feel that difference between the two lies in their experience of Whistler. Youth travellers claim that youth travellers truly want to "experience" Whistler whereas tourists just want to have a "world class ski vacation." From my own perspective, it is frequently difficult to differentiate between the "experience" of youth travellers and the "world class ski vacation" of tourists. The most obvious dissimilarity is that youth travellers are working in Whistler while tourists are not, but youth travellers minimize the importance of work as part of their experience in Whistler. Regardless of any confusion experienced by visiting anthropologists, youth travellers themselves vehemently refute any suggestion that they are like tourists.

Youth travellers' attitudes toward tourists are ambivalent at best. Although youth travellers bluntly acknowledge that they are indirectly supported by tourists and describe them as the "bread and butter" of Whistler's economy, youth travellers do not appear to like tourists. Youth travellers are usually required by their jobs to serve tourists with a smile, or at least without overt rudeness, and they compensate for this enforced restraint by making fun of tourists as much as

possible when they are out of hearing. Established youth travellers, who usually avoid any identification with newcomers, join with them in mocking tourists. Youth travellers compete with one another to offer examples of the ignorant questions tourists ask and tell stories of the stupid things tourists do. In these stories the incompetent behaviour of tourists is usually contrasted with the competency of youth travellers, conceptually strengthening the boundary between the two groups. Youth travellers' use of dichotomies in this instance also suggests the unconscious manipulation of insider-outsider oppositions in youth travellers' discourse about tourists. Youth travellers perceive themselves to be insiders while tourists are outsiders.

In "Prestige-Worthy Tourism Behavior" Roger W. Riley (1995) notes that travel is considered prestigious to the degree that it displays spontaneity and adventurousness. For this reason, among others, youth travellers feel that their form of travel is more prestigious than that of tourists. Youth travellers boast of their "hard core" lifestyle and crazy adventures in the mountains while pointing out that most tourists settle for comfortable hotels, predictably safe ski runs and good service. Tourists are therefore characterized as shallow, while youth travellers congratulate themselves on their own authenticity.

Youth travellers seem unsure of their place in Whistler and compensate for their insecurity through the vehemence with which they deny any similarity to tourists. Youth travellers generally perceive tourists to be complacent and ignorant – the complete opposite of youth travellers – and therefore

fundamentally incapable of the “true” Whistler experience. Putting up a united front, established youth travellers and newcomers come together to mock tourists and nearly all youth travellers characterize tourists as unwelcome outsiders.

Established youth travellers may unite with newcomers to fortify the boundary between themselves and tourists, but they otherwise identify themselves with newcomers as infrequently as possible. The perceived differences between the two populations are evident in my investigation of the ritualistic aspects of youth travel. In his classic analysis of ritual structure, Arnold Van Gennep divides *rites de passage* into three phases: separation, limen and re-incorporation (Turner 1974:196). In the liminal state of a *rite de passage*, ritual actors are suspended “betwixt and between” two states of being, belonging to neither, and are therefore not bound by ordinary social rules (Turner 1969:94). Non-*rite de passage* situations that exhibit the same qualities are known as “liminoid” in the theoretical literature on ritual (Lett 1983:45).

Youth travel in Whistler has clearly liminoid aspects. Youth travellers are “betwixt and between” childhood and adulthood. Most have finished school but have yet to pursue a career. Some youth travellers say that they are in Whistler to “get stuff dealt with” prior to taking the major step of looking for long-term work. Youth travellers clear their heads by “messing up their heads:” drinking, partying and behaving in a reckless manner while out in the mountains. This conduct is a sign of youth travellers’ liminality because it indicates they are not bound by normal social rules. Going to Whistler is more than just an intermediary step

between school and work for youth travellers because it is nothing like either school or work; it is a liminoid phenomenon.

Established youth travellers, however, are not properly liminoid because they decide to stay in Whistler – for the present, anyway. They are no longer “betwixt and between” and therefore distance themselves from their former liminoid behaviour. Established youth travellers comment that they do not drink or party as much as they used to and that they no longer find it necessary to ski with their former sense of abandon. They attribute this shift in behaviour to the fact that they now think of Whistler as home. The state of liminality is difficult to achieve at home because liminality assumes separation from the everyday structures of social interaction.

Connections between tourism and ritual are often made in the scholarly literature on tourism (cf. MacCannell 1976; Graburn 1977; Turner and Turner 1978; Graburn 1983; Allcock 1988). As MacCannell points out in *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, the tripartite structure of tourism – leaving home, travelling somewhere else and then returning – mirrors that of *rites de passage*. Nelson H. H. Graburn (1983:13) makes this connection clearer in his analysis of rite of passage tourism, which he describes as a potentially arduous time of self-testing. Youth travel is usually an arduous experience and youth travellers report leaving Whistler feeling absolutely “drained.” Moreover, many youth travellers have never been away from home before and are trying to prove that they can manage on their own. Some youth travellers make the connection

between *rites de passage* and youth travel explicit through references to youth travel as a “spiritual journey.” Established youth travellers, however, feel that they have already proven themselves and often express a sense of exasperation with those evidently still on the path of self-discovery. Established youth travellers’ acute awareness of the boundary between newcomers and themselves is characteristic of those who have recently passed through the liminal stage themselves and who are consequently anxious to demonstrate newly acquired status (Cohen 1994:127).

Among the signs of liminality in Whistler is *communitas*, a concept developed by Victor Turner (1969), who describes it as those powerful feelings of fellowship and community felt by ritual actors during the liminal phase of ritual. In *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Turner (1974:169) identifies three types of *communitas*: spontaneous, normative and ideological *communitas*. Youth travellers tell many stories of the intense yet fleeting relationships that are indicative of spontaneous *communitas*. Their stories also reflect the normative system that has arisen to foster spontaneous *communitas* in Whistler. Finally, ideological *communitas* is promoted by Intrawest through their employee-training programme. Interestingly, spontaneous *communitas* is associated mainly with newcomer youth travellers, and established youth travellers tend only to display it when they are engaged in sporting activities. Established youth travellers nevertheless provide the foundation for normative *communitas* in Whistler. They promote a strong sense of community

by going out of their way to help newcomers settle into life in Whistler. This assistance highlights the ambivalence of established youth travellers' feelings for newcomers. Established youth travellers help newcomers out but do not want to be identified with them. Both established youth travellers and newcomers are involved in ideological *communitas* because both populations work in the resort.

The fact that established youth travellers only display spontaneous *communitas* when at play is probably related to the fact that play is itself a liminoid phenomenon. Indeed, play and ritual have been theoretically linked in the work of both J. Huizinga (1955:12) and Nelson H. H. Graburn (1983:11). Other links between ritual and the activities of youth travellers in Whistler can be found in the ritual reversals of most youth travellers. Turner (1969) notes that the liminal period of *rites de passage* is typically characterized by reversals of behaviour relative to what would be considered "ordinary" by the ritual actor. Graburn (1983:22-23) points out that this phenomenon is also characteristic of tourism. Many examples of such reversals are evident in the behaviour of youth travellers. Most youth travellers arriving in the wilderness setting of Whistler have come from urban environments. Additionally, although most youth travellers come from relatively affluent, middle-class backgrounds, they live in comparative poverty while they are in Whistler.

The connections between ritual and youth travel are evident in the newcomers' liminoid conduct in Whistler. Established youth travellers place barriers between themselves and newcomers in their response to this conduct.

They scorn newcomers' apparent freedom from rules and avoid displays of liminality. Although established youth travellers are willing to help newcomers settle in to Whistler, they steer clear of behaviour that might identify them with newcomers. Established youth travellers thereby demonstrate their own comparative seniority in Whistler and indicate newcomers' inability to penetrate the inner circle of the Whistler community.

Boundary marking is also evident in youth travellers' apparent need to assert their authenticity in opposition to other groups. Tourism has frequently been described as journeying in search of authenticity (cf. Cohen 1988; Gable and Handler 1996; Harkin 1995; MacCannell 1976). The rise of concern for authenticity is connected to the fragmentation of modern society (Cohen 1988:374). In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling (1971) also explores the link between authenticity and the emergence of the concept of the individual. Members of modern society are anxious about authenticity in a way they could not have been before because the concept did not exist, and they are concerned by the degree of "unreality" in their lives (Handler 1986:3). Tourism is one way through which modern individuals seek the authenticity they perceive themselves to be lacking (MacCannell 1976). In particular, tourists seek to rise above perceived inauthenticity by seeking authenticity in places deemed uncontaminated by modernity (Cohen 1988:374). Whistler does not meet this final criterion, but for tourists it holds out the highly produced "authenticity" of postmodernity.

Youth travellers are less concerned about the authenticity of Whistler than about that of their own experience there, in which they profess an unshakable faith.

As a sub-category of tourists, youth travellers are particularly noted for their pursuit of authenticity. They “collect” places as a form of cultural capital (Desforges 1998:176-177). This practice, if it is to succeed, depends on establishing the authenticity of the travel experience, a factor which itself is related to independence from the tourist industry (Desforges 1998:182-183). In Whistler the separation between the tourist and youth traveller populations is more symbolic than literal, as youth travellers depend on tourists for their livelihood while asserting their moral superiority. It is clear that youth travellers believe youth travel to be a more authentic form of travel than tourism. They believe themselves to be at the heart of Whistler and accuse tourists of being satisfied with mere surface display – an interior-exterior dichotomy that is another expression of the familiar insider-outsider one.

In Whistler, authenticity manifests itself in the extreme. The extreme has many faces in Whistler but the first of these is extreme sports. Youth travellers’ deride tourists for their mundane, safety-conscious style of skiing, contrasting it with their own desire to “seek out that extra thrill of jumping off the...85 foot cliff.” Youth travellers’ involvement in extreme sports is apparent even to the casual observer and is moreover reflected in the stories they tell of hair-raising adventures on the slopes. Youth travellers also demonstrate the extreme in other ways. First, newcomer youth travellers are extremely hedonistic. Newcomers’

conduct in Whistler demonstrates a general lack of moderation and they are well known for drug and alcohol consumption. Established youth travellers, of course, scorn newcomers for these reasons. Second, youth travellers engage in what they would no doubt characterize as extreme asceticism. They dwell on the “sacrifice” they make in order to live in Whistler, making much of their unaccustomed poverty.

Youth travellers use the idea of the extreme to distinguish themselves from tourists. More extreme than tourists, youth travellers also believe themselves to be more authentic. They describe the tourist experience of Whistler as commodified and consider tourists to be preoccupied with money and service. On the other hand, youth travellers equate their own experience of Whistler with the divine. Looking for an “out of body experience” on the slopes, youth travellers’ connection to the extreme affords them a sense of awe that “puts [them] in place with the whole planet.” The opposition between materialistic tourists and spiritualistic youth travellers is another manifestation of the insider-outsider dichotomy used by youth travellers to construct a boundary between themselves and tourists.

Established youth travellers use the concept of the extreme to reinforce another boundary, the one that exists between themselves and newcomers. Seduced by the “glamour and the hype” of Whistler, newcomers are felt by established youth travellers to be concerned solely with the physical realm – a concern which places them on a par with tourists. Newcomers’ perceived

superficiality leads established youth travellers to conclude that newcomers are not capable of true insight into Whistler. Established youth travellers also attack newcomer youth travellers' approach to the extreme, making a fine distinction between extreme and excess. In the eyes of established youth travellers, newcomers are excessive rather than extreme, and furthermore they cheapen the idea of the extreme by using it to describe their foolish exploits. Established youth travellers demonstrate their own respect for the extreme through their awareness of risk – the dark side of authenticity. Telling poignant stories of those whose lives have been lost on the mountains, established youth travellers reveal the sense of vulnerability they feel is crucial to a proper understanding of the extreme. Newcomers do not display this understanding and are therefore not fully accepted by established youth travellers.

Established youth travellers use the idea of the extreme as a means of denying the authenticity of perceived outsiders to Whistler and asserting their own identity as insiders. Youth travellers believe they are granted spiritual insight into Whistler through their proximity to the extreme. They contrast the divine experience of youth travellers with the commodified experience of tourists. Additionally, established youth travellers maintain that only they have a proper understanding of the extreme in Whistler, and through their focus on the dark side of the extreme, undermine the extreme experiences of newcomers.

In Whistler, the boundaries between insider and outsider are shifting and unstable. Not only do tourists far outnumber residents, but also, as newcomer

youth travellers come and go the resident population itself is constantly on the move. Youth travellers' relationships with one another and with tourists demonstrate what Cohen (1994:131) refers to as "boundary-consciousness." They experience the boundary blurring that occurs in Whistler as a threat to their identity and respond symbolically through disidentification and manipulation of insider-outsider dichotomies. Youth travellers' perceptions of Whistler, tourists, the extreme and themselves reflect their need to protect their identity through a symbolic reinforcement of the boundaries that exist between themselves and others.

Social scientists have been engaged in the systematic study of tourism since the 1970s, nevertheless, tourism studies is still a relatively undeveloped field of inquiry within the social sciences. Youth travel, although consistently referred to as a major category of tourism in tourist typologies, is itself an almost entirely unexplored branch in this field. Until the recent work of Laurie Loker-Murphy and Phillip L. Pearce (1995), Luke Desforges (1998), and Kevin Hetherington (1998), the bulk of the literature on this subject consisted of a few articles written by Erik Cohen (1972; 1973; 1982), Jane Teas (1974) and Jay Vogt (1978) in the 1970s and early 1980s. Although there has been a recent renewal of interest in the subject, the phenomenon of youth travel is still noticeably under-researched. The present research addresses this imbalance in tourism studies by contributing to the literature on youth travel. Additionally, this study expands the generally accepted understanding of youth travel through the exploration of a youth travel

experience that is in many ways atypical. As far as I am aware, this thesis represents the first academic study of youth travellers in Whistler, or indeed in any other resort, and therefore offers valuable insight into some of the ways in which youth travellers working in resorts understand their experience.

In focusing on certain issues rather than others in the present research, I have necessarily excluded several potentially fruitful lines of inquiry. In his article “The Anthropology of Tourism,” Nelson H. H. Graburn (1983:28) calls for more “[d]evelopmental or biographical studies” of tourism “which...would expose the relationships between world view and touristic experiences within the individual’s socio-psychological life cycle.” This “biographical” gap within tourism studies has been largely ignored by scholars of tourism (including myself), owing to the difficulty of conducting longitudinal ethnographic research. In this light, it would be instructive to carry out a long-term survey of Whistler’s youth travellers both in Whistler and after the leave to re-join the “real” world. The overall impact of youth travel on the subsequent lives of youth travellers, as well as the connections between youth travel and *rites de passage*, could then be better understood.

It would also be helpful to compare the experiences of youth travellers in Whistler with those of youth travellers in other resorts. Such an investigation would yield insight into the extent to which the “Whistler experience” is a product of unique regional influences. Similarly, it would be interesting to compare youth travellers in Whistler to youth travellers who are *not* working in resorts in order to

discover if backpackers or Peace Corps volunteers, for example, construct their travel experiences differently. It would be particularly illuminating to study the relationship between tourists and youth travellers in these other contexts to gauge the applicability of the themes of identity and boundary maintenance raised in this thesis to youth travellers elsewhere.

I would like to draw my thesis to a close with the words of Jon, an established youth traveller who reflects on the phenomenon of youth travel as follows:

I think, these days, that there's people our age...coming out of school or deciding not to go to school even, and have nothing to do really. You know, like...no one knocking on their door. So I think at this particular time in our *century* there's, you know, more young people with time on their hands to go and try and have some fun than there ever was before.

Jon's comment highlights the necessity for studies such as this one. A better understanding of what young people "with time on their hands" do when they "go and try and have some fun," may help answer the question of why it is that so many young people feel they "have nothing to do" and that no one is "knocking on their door."

References

- Allcock, John B.
1988 Tourism as a Sacred Journey. *Loisir et Société* 11(1):33-48
- Barth, Fredrik
1996 "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries." IN Ethnicity, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 75-82. New York: Oxford University Press
- Baudrillard, Jean
1981 *Simulacres et Simulation*. Paris: Editions Galilée
- Bernard, H. Russell
1995 *Research Methods in Anthropology, Second Edition*. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press
- Bruner, Edward M.
1986 "Ethnography as Narrative." IN The Anthropology of Experience, edited by Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, 139-155. Chicago: University of Illinois Press
- Byatt, A. S.
1990 *Possession: A Romance*. London: Vintage
- Clifford, James
1986 "Introduction: Partial Truths." IN Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, 1-26. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Cohen, Anthony P.
1982 *Belonging: Identity and Social Organization in British Rural Cultures*. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Cohen, Anthony P.
1985 *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. New York: Tavistock Publications
- Cohen, Anthony P.
1994 *Self-Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*. New York: Routledge

Cohen, Erik

1972 Toward a Sociology of International Tourism. *Social Research* 30:164-182

Cohen, Erik

1973 Nomads From Affluence: Notes on the Phenomenon of Drifter Tourism. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 14(1-2):89-103

Cohen, Erik

1982 Marginal Paradises: Bungalow Tourism on the Island of Southern Thailand. *Annals of Tourism Research* 9:189-228.

Cohen, Erik

1988 Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 15:371-386

Dahlberg, Andrea

1991 "Body as a Principle of Holism: Three Pilgrimages to Lourdes." IN Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage, edited by John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, 30-48. New York: Routledge.

Desforges, Luke

1998 "'Checking Out the Planet': Global Representations/Local Identities and Youth Travel." IN Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures, edited by Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine, 175-192. New York: Routledge

Frey, Nancy Louise

1998 *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Gable, Eric and Richard Handler

1996 After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site. *American Anthropologist* 98(3):568-578

Graburn, Nelson H. H.

1977 "Tourism: The Sacred Journey." IN Hosts and Guests, edited by Valene L. Smith, 17-32. University of Pennsylvania Press

Graburn, Nelson H. H.

1983 The Anthropology of Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 10:9-33

Hamilton-Smith, Elery

1987 Four Kinds of Tourism? *Annals of Tourism Research* 14:332-344

Handler, Richard

1986 Authenticity. *Anthropology Today* 1(2):2-4

Harkin, Michael

1995 Modernist Anthropology and Tourism of the Authentic. *Annals of Tourism Research* 20(3):650-670

Hartmann, J.

1991 The Significance of Youth Tourism in a Post-Industrial Society: The Case of Sweden. Paper presented at the 1991 International Conference on Youth Tourism, New Delhi. Madrid: World Tourism Organization

Hetherington, Kevin

1998 Vanloads of Uproarious Humanity: New Age Travellers and the Utopics of the Countryside. IN Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures, edited by Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine, 328-342. London and New York: Routledge.

Hughes, George

1995 Authenticity in Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22(4):781-803

Huizinga, J.

1955 *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press

Ilan, Suzan

1999 Social Spaces and the Micropolitics of Differentiation: An Example From Northwestern Turkey. *Ethnology* 38(3):243-256

Lett, James W. Jr.

1983 Ludic and Liminoid Aspects of Charter Yacht Tourism in the Caribbean. *Annals of Tourism Research* 10:35-56

Loker-Murphy, Laurie and Philip L. Pearce

1995 Young Budget Travellers: Backpackers in Australia. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22(1):1-15

MacCannell, Dean

1974 *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books

Marcus, George E. and Michael M. J. Fischer

1986 *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Okely, Judith

1992 "Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge." IN *Anthropology and Autobiography*, edited by Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, 1-27. New York: Routledge

Pastor, J.

1992 *The Nature of Youth Tourism: Motivations, Characteristics and Requirements*. Paper presented at the 1991 International Conference on Youth Tourism, New Delhi. Madrid: World Tourism Organization

Riley, Pamela J.

1987 *Road Culture of International Long-Term Budget Travelers*. *Annals of Tourism Research* 15:313-328

Riley, Roger W.

1995 *Prestige-Worthy Tourism Behaviour*. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22(5):630-649

Rosaldo, Renato

1989 *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press

Stahl, Sandra Dolby

1986 *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press

de Swaan, Abram

1997 *Widening Circles of Disidentification: On the Psycho- and Sociogenesis of the Hatred of Distant Strangers – Reflections on Rwanda*. *Theory, Culture and Society* 14(3):105-122

Teas, Jane

- 1972 I Study Monkeys – What Do You Do? Youthful Travelers in Nepal.
Paper presented to the Symposium on Tourism and Culture Change at the
1974 Meeting of the American Anthropological Association.

Theuns, L.

- 1993 The Significance of Youth Tourism: Economic Dimensions. Paper
presented at the 1991 International Conference on Youth Tourism, New
Delhi. Madrid: World Tourism Organization

Theroux, Paul

- 1975 The Great Railway Bazaar. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Trilling, Lionel

- 1971 Sincerity and Authenticity. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Turner, Victor

- 1969 The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Ithaca: Cornell
University Press

Turner, Victor

- 1974 Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society.
Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Turner, Victor and Edith Turner

- 1978 Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Columbia University Press

Tyler, Stephen A.

- 1986 "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult
Document." IN Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of
Ethnography, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 122-140.
Berkeley: University of California Press

Vogt, Jay

- 1978 "Wandering: Youth and Travel Behaviour." IN Tourism and Behaviour,
edited by Mario D. Zamora, Vinson H. Sutlive and Nathan Altshuler, 19-
40. Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary: Studies
in Third World Societies, Publication Number Five

Waldren, Jacqueline

- 1996 Insiders and Outsiders: Paradise and Reality in Mallorca. Oxford:
Berghahn Books

Whistler/Blackcomb Marketing Department
1998 Ski Area Culture – Whistler/Blackcomb: A Vision for the 21st Century

Whistler/Blackcomb
1998 Employee Handbook 1998/99

Whistler.com Systems Inc.
2001 “Community” <<http://www.whistler.com/community/>>

Woods, Oona
1998 The Whistler Survival Guide. Whistler Mountain Community Health
Alternatives and the Whistler Survival Guide Committee