

On the Nervous Edge of an Impossible Tropics

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Abstract

There is not a day that goes by that someone in Placencia, a beach front village in Belize that has “gone crazy” for tourism, doesn’t say something about how life is becoming impossible. Impossibly smooth and beautiful, impossibly cruel and corrupt, impossibly laid-back and seductive, impossibly transformed socially and ecologically, impossibly out of control and violent, impossible to live. This paper tracks the impacts and intensities of “life becoming impossible” and the burdens of paradise that are conjured out of the unnerving appearance on the beach of a tourist named “Peter Pete.” No one knows where he came from, only that he appeared from “wherever” to spend a few weeks compulsively raking the beach. Why he rakes Pete wouldn’t say, and that generated a distressful shiver of dread and panic that ran through the nervous system of a village that no longer seems able to keep up or on track with everything going on these days. Pete’s presence coincided with a new rash of violent physical attacks on resident expats. No one blames Pete for the attacks, but his sudden appearance served to focus everyone’s attention on tourist encounters in this “seaside paradise by the Carib Sea.” These encounters bred an excessive exchange of stories about drug dealers, brutal violence, strange tourist, crazy locals, the end of the world, the rapture, infidelities, theft, property problems, and corruption, flows and lines of narrative force that rub against each other producing a friction that generates a contingent and nervous dread that seriously roughed up life in Placencia.

This paper is meant to open onto the affective intensities of life becoming impossible as a scene of immanent forces folding into an assemblage of public feelings. I track the

troubling state of suspense and suspension that haunts the place and its people and that lingers as a jumpy impulse trying to “make sense” of things that come into view as habit, shock, resonance, or impact. Lives in this contact zone throw themselves together as event and as sensation, something inhabitable but exhausting, a tropical dream world escape and an odd and haunting ordinary. Examining moments of encounter and lingering in the impacts of new signs of life becoming impossible means tracking sensations as emergent and potential emotional forces coming into play in this new state of emergency that is taking shape as neo-liberal exception, on the edge of global empire, in Belize.

Impossibly Beautiful

There is a particular quality of light, sound, and touch as you approach the beach in Placencia, a rapidly growing seaside fishing village in southern Belize that has “gone crazy” for tourism. It lends itself to a feel for the place, the impact of which, as Jim and Cindy said the first moment they laid eyes on it, “takes your breath away.” It’s some combination of sun, sea, sand and sky that intensifies an array of sensations as it dampens others. Much of this intensification and dampening is already encoded as advertising cliché, a carefully calculated indexing of pleasure in paradise “to die for.” In such cases these sensations stabilize momentarily into the commercial and cultural tropes of escape, paradise, and natural beauty that Belize has progressively activated commercially over the past ten years.

[2] And yet the place still conjures a sensory impact that is almost more than a body can take. Your body builds its substance out of layers of sensory

impacts drifting in the beach side surf, skin impossibly wet, warm and salty, eyes trained on the light clouds and the passing coconut tree tops or on watching colourful tropical fish dart about the live corals, ears submerged in the gentle pulse of wave action that surrounds, buoys, and carries you gently drifting along. On the beach your body surges with the rush and flow, the push and pull of sensations, gets with the picture, takes a tour to the ruins, goes diving, celebrates, gets side tracked, falls down, crawls on hand and knees, hits the wall, reorganizes, spends a day on the beach laying in a hammock, gets sunburned and then does it all again. It knows itself as states of vitality, exhaustion, and renewal.

[3] It's like your body can't help itself. This deserves to be mentioned because it shapes so much of the immediate tourist sensations of this tropical place as "impossibly beautiful." Tourists are quick to pick up on these sensations and go with their flows. It's all more than something seen or revealed, and much more than a representation can offer. Rather, it is something felt as almost overwhelming and it has an impact: it packs a punch. When you feel it, your skin dimples and tingles and your body is filled with an excitement you can't quite put into words, yet you sense it all the same in that breathtaking moment: a virtual to real move, an incorporeal folding into the corporeal, the body in movement, coincident yet disjunct (Massumi 2002).

[4] The beach sand feels warm, powder soft, the water crystal clear, and the sky is a profoundly deep blue seduction. These feelings are never separate or exacting points of excitation. Each is fuzzy at the edges, open-ended intensifications, incipencies, affects unlocking sensations' potentials as mischievous interactions, radiance spreading uncontained. The beauty and power of this paradise dream world is felt in the play of sensations intensifying into something, as feelings suffuse each other and into the slow drift that builds these breathtaking moments into intensifying impacts: a body event as viral contagion, you pass it along with each excited touch, look, intake of breath, or smile. These are feelings in a state of emergence, feelings on the verge of their naming, still unfolding, fugitive, chaotic, and shifting. The body's give and take in relaxation, its impulses, its waves of giddy sensation and tension, are like the waves lapping the Placencia beach, each the same but different in their making and breaking, and in this movement, in the suffusion, there is immanent possibility, a potential, a force gathering itself to a point of impact to instantiate something. It's a sensation scampering the edges of a feeling suggesting where a feeling might lead if it is left unchecked (Stewart 2003).

[5] This is the body as disjunctive encompassment, a kind of continuity but unlike one that follows a narrative line exhausting its signifying

possibilities in meanings or as a type or illustration of some socio-political process. Here, the body becomes a continuous displacement of the subject, the object, and their general relation, creating and created through a folding and an unfolding of sensations freed of the terms that name them (Massumi 2002:51). On a beach in Belize, they are actual sensations, felt forces gathering to become something impossible to describe. These tropical sensations are the forces of feeling that add to what one brochure helpfully calls “the impossible beauty of a Caribbean paradise” (Destinations Belize, brochure, nd). That’s the tourist Placencia. It generates a “body without image,” an additive movement from the incorporeal to the corporeal that registers as an included disjunction, or what Massumi calls incorporeal materialism (2002:60). It’s like recognizing some feeling in your body that you have no name for yet or recognizing the feeling that grows in you when you have some name on the tip of your tongue but you can’t quite get it out: wonderment and frustration, tension, movement, change.

A Case of Topical Nerves

I begin with impacts and the intensification of sensations in the space of a beach-front tourist paradise but only to disrupt the vibe with the burdens of that same paradise, conjured out of the unnerving re-appearance on Placencia Bay Beach of a tourist locally named “Peter Pete.” Re-appearance because a few locals with long memories remember when he

first appeared in Placencia to perform a crazy, daily raking ritual and when he mysteriously disappeared, not to be seen again, leaving only a nervous tension in the air, an agitated buzz throughout the village. That was in 2001, a few months before Hurricane Iris, and that was when Harry lost his money and made friends with a tree, and that's when a couple of big drug dealers seemed to make Placencia their new headquarters, and that was when rumours of the Rapture seemed to take a forceful grip on local sociality. It was like one impossibly crazy thing followed by another but with no connecting logic, just a pile up of confusing and confused random crazy events that conjured a serious edginess that spun life out of control: life becoming impossible for almost everyone living in Placencia at the time.



“Peter Pete”

Photo by Kenneth Little 2009

[7] Peter Pete simply re-appeared on the beach one day in March of 2009 and then a couple of weeks later he did his disappearing act again. Peter Pete, the redundancy of his name seems to mimic the sounds and rhythm of soft waves gently licking the shore-line against the relaxed, repetitive scratching of Peter Pete's red plastic rake. Because that is what Peter Pete did: he raked the beach daily, through the morning and over long, hot, breezy afternoons. No one really knew where he came from, only that he appeared from the "who knows where" to spend his time compulsively raking the same few square meters of beach front sand before he disappeared as quietly and mysteriously as he had appeared. Why he raked, Peter Pete wouldn't say, for he hardly ever said anything to anyone, and that, along with the public performance of his odd and empty ritual, once again generated a nervous intensification of dread mixed with humour that conjured a discordant shiver that ran through the nervous system of a village that no longer seems able to keep up or on track with "everything" going on these days.

[8] This time Peter Pete's presence coincided with a new rash of violent physical attacks on resident expats and tourists. No one that I talked to blamed Peter Pete for the attacks, but his sudden re-appearance and then disappearance and his odd behaviour served to focus everyone's attention on tourist encounters in this "paradise by the Carib Sea." These encounters

bred an excessive exchange of stories about drug dealers, brutal local violence, other strange tourists, pirates, crazy locals, infidelities, theft, mysterious land deals, government corruption, tropical environmental collapse, and strange weather: flows and lines of narrative force that rubbed up against each other and the arresting tourist image of paradise producing a friction that generated a menacing and nervous alarm that has seriously “roughed up” life in Placencia.

[9] Peter Pete seemed benign, but no one could walk past him and his incessant almost manic raking without a comment or without taking the opportunity to watch his mute performance and to speculate, to look for signs of some crazy move or encounter. Everyone on the beach had something to say about him. It made Miss Gloria worry. “He da make wi crazy,” she muttered one day. “Watch out for he. Da man no right.” If Peter Pete stopped his manic raking at all it was to talk to local marginals: the crack heads, a prostitute that seemed to be charmed by him, and a couple of strange expats whose everyday eccentric behavior (as ersatz pirates, drunken prophets, nervous loafers, for example) could be compared closely with Peter Pete’s. Witness to all of this, Miss Gloria worries about her kids and her property and she is not alone. If only Peter Pete would say something, give up his intentions, explain the crazy raking, hour after sweaty hour, day after day, but he proffers nothing. So villagers watch him

and watch for him while tourists usually give him a wide birth. "Just another crazy tourist Ken." Mr. Harry says to me one day. "Do you know him?" Harry's question comes with a tense laugh that belies his family's disturbing worries about everyday life these days with a village so full of strangers, projects, deals and "odd stuff just happening" that they hardly recognize it anymore.

[10] Few could figure out where Peter Pete slept or where he ate when he wasn't raking. Miss Gloria and several of her neighbours reported him to the police, but the police said that they had more important things to do than deal with a crazy tourist raking the beach. So most locals simply felt uneasy and puzzled by the performer and the performance. This meant that everyone kept an eye out for him, just in case. Someone said that he was this rich guy from California who lives in Honduras now, but likes to make side trips to Belize when he gets bored. But why Placencia? And that's when concerned locals tried to put two and two together as they started scanning the village for signs of bigger trouble: the drugs, the money, odd looking strangers, strange looking land deals, the new stores, the big boats suddenly at anchor in the bay, the new cars, the new foreign clothes, locals disappearing without explanation.

[11] Meanwhile, Peter Pete sang to himself to the tunes on his iPod, smiled at passers by, raked and then seemed to dissolve into the beach along with the sun late in the afternoon, only to show up in the morning at the same spot and at the same time the hotel and resort workers started their daily jobs of raking the garbage and sea grass off the beach. Peter Pete copies their moves: rakes, takes a break, rakes some more, places the garbage in piled up heavy-duty black plastic bags ready for daily beach garbage pick up. Peter Pete even used his own garbage bags, filled them and neatly piled them up. It all means more work for Rick and Vernon, the village beach garbage guys, and they don't like it. "We got lots to do. Enough! No Man, we no pick up after dis tourist," Vernon said in a gruff tone that belied a feeling he has about the place, the tourists, and a disquieting everyday life that seems all the more unmanageable as it becomes less recognizable: as it becomes impossible.

[12] Peter Pete is like one big pressure point conjuring a bundle of ambiguous images, stories, and "rogue vitalities" (Stewart 2003: 2), a strange and crazy tourist creating make work projects for locals (not a happy predicament), but doing a pretty good job, in the opinions of others, of keeping the place clean and setting a nice example, but putting still other locals, who aren't as conscientious about their own garbage details, to shame and so making them angry and jumpy. But Peter Pete made

everyone jumpy, and that jumpiness added to the twitchy intensity of the jumpiness locals now feel around the place anyway. And that's just one line of flight, one potential in the act of unfolding, territorializing onto some plateau of jumpy nervous public feelings that rubs up harshly against tourist-induced images of the place as a pleasure world.

[13] As such, Peter Pete is a mixed force of affective excess, mysterious as he is nonsensical. As such he is an example, "... a singularity, a disjunctive self-inclusion, a belonging to itself that is simultaneously an extendibility to everything else with which [he] might be connected" (Massumi 2002:17-18). This assemblage of mystery and nonsense, dread and giddiness fashioned out of an ambiguous and odd assortment of practices, tools, and feelings, shocks locals into nervously taking positions, re-thinking priorities, and more generally making decisions about tourists and other things for which there is no motivation or reason to do so more than an urgent, edgy network of demanding and troubling feelings that are making life impossible.

[14] Locals like Miss Gloria and Mr. Harry and their neighbours in Placencia made sense of Peter Pete through their stories, not by constructing an explanation for his appearance and disappearance or his odd behavior, but by offering accounts of his mysterious traces and effects and the nervous impacts conjured out of contact with him. And as the stories piled up like

shipwrecks on a reef, rocked by waves of telling and re-telling, the talk formed a tidal rush of dramatic and excessive images and forces that overwhelmed the merely referential and meaningful. Peter Pete as a body without an image flashed up uncontained by meaning onto the Placencia shoreline. Story subjects, objects, and events became performers in a spectacle that exceeded linear reason and the discipline of cause and effect, truth and lie. As such Peter Pete is what Sian Ngai calls a “bad example” (Stewart 2003:2). He doesn’t stand or work as a solid representation of some ideology or structure at work in Belize; rather, he becomes a site of tendencies, where forces gather to a point of impact to instantiate something. A bad example is a singularity: first, an affective intensity, a force that suggests where a trajectory might lead if left unchecked, which then becomes an event that literally “makes sense” of that force at the point of its affective and material emergence (Stewart 2003). The power of the story telling that focused on a strange man on the beach was that it drew listeners and watchers into a space of tense and lingering forces, some seen, others unseen, an affecting presence, a cultural poetics in the act of making something of itself. Peter Pete became an act of creative contagion (Massumi 2005:19), a troubling state of suspense and suspension that haunted the place and its people, pulling them up short, and that lingered as a troubled impulse struggling to “make sense” and make something of things more generally.

[15] It was the impulse to make something sensible of circumstances and events by fashioning stories about Peter Pete that turned the sight of him and his sudden disappearance one day into a tactile force. Placencia is a place of impacts, rapidly transforming into a spectacle of some homogenized, global, dream world, adventure pirate paradise, as if by some horrid and seductive mimetic Disney magic, before everyone's very eyes, connecting locals up with the spasmodic effects and currents of global flows of capital, information, people, and culture. This arresting presence of Peter Pete entered local senses, lodging there, growing as an intensity, forming into a state of nervous suspense filled with resonance. His presence and disappearance figures the immanent intensity or force of what Gilles Deleuze calls affect, the double sidedness of things where, as Brian Massumi explains, the virtual meets the actual, and where what "matters," as a materialization of local life in the making, is the permeable edge of potentiality itself (2002:12-18; c.f., Zournazi:1-3, 11-12).

[16] Looking for something positive, some sign or some thing meaningful about everyday life in Placencia with Peter Pete in it, locals start to realize that the only thing that might be possible is some lingering, awful disclosure that acts as some anxious, unspeakable incomposability, an undecidable, crazy force of becoming, an emergent vitality that quite literally charges up

the place by the sheer presence of Peter Pete, making life impossible. Far from anything forming as named “feelings” or “emotions” fashioned out of some representational discourse or some known subject position, such emergent vitalities take shape in the surge of intensity itself as an emotion before it is actually named as such and thus placed as part of an established discourse, a moral narrative, or an ideology. Vitalities intensify at random in fleeting gestures of affect, if only for a moment, before they become folded into a normative system. The point is to evoke the vitality of things in their movement, at the moment of their becoming. More compelling than a linear narrative and more restive, multiple, edgy and unpredictable than a representation, these fractious vitalities are constitutive events or acts that animate and literally compose cultural forces at the point of their affective and material emergence (Stewart 2007: 2-3).ⁱ

Rapture and the Raelians

And if Peter Pete were not enough to conjure a state of nervous disjunction, an unregistered difference in the act of emergence, a charged up flow that makes Placencia feel jumpy, aggressive, and unsteady, as if life were becoming impossible, there are other tourist impacts that have equally taken the place by surprise, caught it up short, stressed it out, and made it edgy. Public culture, and the incipient structure of feelings out of which it is being fashioned in Placencia, ricochets from one crazy moment of impact to

another as if time were a network of punctuated moments of rupture that hold a charge in the act of articulating something. But what?

[18] Take Bob, a retired evangelical minister from a small coal camp in West Virginia, who, along with his wife Diane, owned and operated The Beachfront Inn and Chapel until it went broke early in 2008 and they sold out to “some big developer.” Just who, he wouldn’t say. Bob and Diane are gone now, while their resort sits rotting. It’s a haunting ruin that most people stay clear of. “It gives everyone the creeps,” Mr. Harry says. He heard that some tourist was murdered there late last year, while squatting on the land. But while others have heard the same story no one is really sure and there is no public record of a body or official news of the event. Such an obvious absence conjures another anxious presence that grows alarming as it touches onto Bob’s intimate history with the place.

[19] Bob and Diane moved to Maya Beach in 1998. Bob felt commanded by powerful spiritual signs that came to him in the form of the Lord’s voice after a series of intense “prayer appeals” that hit him hard. But there were other signs too like the time he saw the face of Jesus in the clouds gathering above Maya Beach while swimming there during a holiday. That was a sign to buy the property. That’s when he knew he was “taking the Lord’s path.” He successfully sold “rapture tourism” for several years and made a “small

fortune," enough to think about expanding. But while he weathered Iris, the hurricane that hit the peninsula with such a devastating force in 2001 that it left nothing but heart ache and ruins behind, his resort didn't, and he spent much of his nest egg on repairs. But the guests returned, "praise the Lord," to spend a week or two with Bob and Diane praying and scanning.

[20] Bob's guests spent their time watching for special wave patterns and scanning Fox News 24/7 and praying. There is an art to all of this that Bob shares with his guests. He got the idea about wave patterns while reading from the Book of Revelations. Bob said Revelations is really the blueprint, the book of signs that in 1998 he could no longer afford to ignore. Bob figures that the signal for the Rapture will be found in strange weather that will be preceded by unique wave patterns, as the sea prepares itself. The rapture, he calculates, is very close at hand, so it is important to be vigilant. It's a matter of logic. Fox News stories, he figured out on his own with no help from the Bible, would cluster into a pattern of signs too. News and the waves were parallel signal systems that he and his guests turned into a "detection machinery."

[21] These tourists were not distracted by the beautiful surroundings. They came to scan and pray. The locals and the nay-saying "hard drinking" expat "philistines" that lived around them started to compare Bob and his visitors

to that other crazy tropical experiment in Caribbean evangelical work and worship in Jonestown, Guyana. The Jimmy Jones cult effect, the commanding voice of the Lord, the dreams of a final paradise, a return to Eden, martyrdom, Cool-aid and the glorious ending of the world in the rapture: all a Belizian tourist made line of flight pushing up against and pulling away from a growing yet diffused structure of village feelings, a tension so palpable that it also served to make life increasingly impossible: public sensibilities in chaos, a place and its people and guests growing oddly amused, aggressive, unstable and strange. That's when Harry asked one day: "Why do we get all the crazies?"

[22] And before any one could give Harry a good answer, an answer of sorts presented itself. The Raelians are serious about establishing an embassy in Belize, a welcome centre for human beings from another planet, the uber-tourists, the ones who created life on Earth in the first place, and who now wish to return to visit and take a tour of their experiment in cloning. What better place than Belize? "It now can live up to its name. Belize is an ancient and sacred place." Bernard Lamarche explains on Channel 7 TV news, on April Fools Day no less, while standing next to nervous looking government officials. The Raelians want to give Belize tourism a whole new look and purpose, and spin it way into another dimension. "To boldly go where no one has gone before?" Harry asks. And

the suggestion takes him up short, and sadly he begins to wonder what's happening to the little nation he loves so much. The Raelian offer morphs the state of a collapsing sovereign Empire under chaotic contemporary conditions as international capital mysteriously disappears and reappears from the centre of power through the efforts of schemers and dreamers whose ruthless cunning has shaken Belize's economy into panic mode so that a solution like the Raelian offer begins to sound like its own salvation. It's how a mysterious, cloning culture of Raelian enterprise suddenly appears on the margins of Empire and of the possible, to "save the day" in Belize. It's a new take and tale on the Imperial magic trick that conjures as much giddiness as it does uneasy, impossible expectation.

[23] They say that the money to be generated from the multi-million dollar Raelian embassy/tourist centre would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars and attract over fifty thousand tourists a year. "That's better than the cruise ships to which Belize has attached itself ball and chain," the Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, and Culture says on the *Love FM Morning Show*, his voice a strange mixture of authority, confusion, excitement and hopelessness. With that kind of foreign currency in the assets column of its national development plan and Belize may stand to win big time. But Belizians have heard it all before: the impossible

Raelians want an embassy in Belize

Canadian says the purpose of the embassy is "to welcome the human beings from another planet who created life on earth and who were wrongly mistaken for gods by our ancestors."

Structure would cost \$100 million, but would attract 50,000 tourists a year

by Adele Ruman

BELIZE CITY, Fri. Mar. 27, 2009

Aliens from "another planet" want to build an embassy in Belize. Sounds like an early All Fool's Day joke, but Canadian Bernard Lamarche says he is dead serious about the proposal.

After a first submission by the Raelians in 2007, under the



Bernard Lamarche

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From the Belize Newspaper Amandela: April 2, 2009

promises, the unfulfilled expectations. "Who knows, a welcome centre for aliens might catch on. It can't hurt. We'll have spacemen for you to study Ken," Harry quips. "We'll call it super-natural Belize."

[24] Empire eclipsed by the Universe, tourism in the grandest of styles conjuring another odd and nervous tourist moment in paradise. Here the

productive forces of global capital are at work on a new presence, a new now, a fore-history of tourism construction sites for outer space guests along with whole new tourism infrastructures of resorts, casinos, spas, golf-courses, and eco-tourism technologies, all sovereign enterprises that rub up against the ruins of the rapture, a new after-history of future decay and world destruction. And in the gap, in the present, in the now, the impossible job of keeping fore-history and after-history from collapsing in on each other.

Money Grows on Trees

Take another bad example, a late afternoon in paradise that no one will ever forget, when Placencia was showered with US dollars. "Lord, the money was blown' in like manna from heaven," Miss Julia exclaimed. This was another mysterious arrival, unrivaled in its impact as an arresting force, at once vastly familiar and seductive and entirely uncharted, even shocking. Familiar and seductive, because this has always been the promise of the state and the tourism entrepreneurs, that money would flow "like the air we breath" with more tourism and everyone would benefit; uncharted and shocking, because, among other things, no one expected money to flow quite in this way. More mystery and intrigue. More giddiness mixed with dread.

[26] This is really the story about Mr. Harry who, while fishing one day in early January, 2001, is said to have found a bale of cocaine floating in the water off of Little Water Caye. It was said to be tied to a stash of hundreds of thousands of dollars. It was said that Harry pulled it from the water and, once back on shore, hid the treasure up a tree. His nephew Bobby recounted the story of which many locals now have versions, even if they won't go out of the way to tell them:

"Harry finds this serious fuckin' stuff. He hides it, like pirate treasure. Soon he looks like he won the lottery. He's not fishin' or workin' tourists. I know what he's doin. He's into the money and the coke. So life is a party. He starts hanging out with tourists all day, buying drinks all over the place. Relaxin' and talkin'; maybe too much. He buys a new boat and motor, top o' the line shit. He's lookin' good and wants to start a tourist dive shop business with me. Now everyone starts askin' how he can do that. Maybe the big drug dealers get suspicious. Harry doesn't care. He's gettin' high all the time. He's not payin' attention. So one afternoon it's really windy. Harry is drunk but he seriously needs some cash so he heads for his secret bank in the tree, 'cause for Harry, money grows on trees. That's what he tellin' everybody. So that's got everybody lookin' in the trees for his money. People followin' him around all the time but no one

finds his money tree. Harry, he's too smart. But he fucks up. He left the bag of money open or something and the strong wind... All of a sudden all this money, hundred dollar bills, fiftys, twentys, tens, it start blowin' all over the place, down the street, onto the beach, in the water, in the air, on the road. It's rainin' money and it's landin' everywhere. No one can believe it, but they're pickin' up bills. Harry figures its gotta be his money. Not happy. By the time he gets back to his bank in the tree, almost nothin' left, all blown away."

[27] It was just after Harry's money blew into town that locals like Bobby remember their first-ever sighting of Peter Pete. Bobby guessed he was the drug dealer who must have heard about the money and came after it and the coke. That's when Harry "got lost" for a couple of months leaving villagers and who knows who else wildly searching Placencia for any connections between otherwise disparate and unusual things, scanning for signs of wealth and euphoria, of criminal threat, and suspicious behaviour in an increasingly unsocial, uncertain, and chaotic world and a life turned impossible that started to get on everyone's nerves. It is impossible to tell the drug dealers from the tourists, or either from the international resort/condo speculators whose side deal scams have created a state of emergency as they buy up what's left of the titled land in Placencia for a

song and a dance. They sell spectacles of local culture in the image of an escape to a pristine paradise with laid-back, friendly natives who have been, as Ellis once said, “pretty much voted off the island.” Peter Pete as a troubling local presence, was just one impulse-machine pumping a contact sensuousity into the Placencia nervous system seducing and shocking locals and expat-tourists alike.

[28] Today, Harry has cultivated another relationship with trees. A couple of years ago he named a tree “The Tree of Wisdom” and put a sign on it. Everyone thinks it was the tree he used to hide the money he found, but Harry isn’t saying anything much about the tree. That means everyone has a theory and it keeps local interests up and everyone in the loop. Harry does say that he uses the tree for “teaching purposes.” That means he sits under the Tree of Wisdom and gets drunk with unsuspecting tourists who are seduced by his antics and wicked sense of humour. They buy the beer while Harry tells the stories. They end up very drunk and short on cash. But that’s how tourists find “local wisdom,” Harry says. The tourists wake up feeling “enlightened” and a lot worse for wear wondering what happened and feel a sense of anxiety mixed with relief that they are still in one piece but happy that they got to share an intimate moment with the locals. Shared wisdom all around, that’s the way Harry likes it. It’s a world of shared banalities masking as local flavor that can be a basis of sociality or an exhausting

enervation, or simply just something else to do. Little moments of contact are felt as pleasures and warning signs, as exotic intoxications and repetitious daily routine. It's an odd ordinary that throws itself together out of seductions, intoxicating encounters, local need for distractions, shape-shifting solutions of a sort that help shake the drudgery of the everyday with something, anything, else in a place that is transforming into a monstrous tourist pleasure space unlike anything any local could ever have imagined. It's a Placencia where disparate events and sensations come together to form an odd ordinary, the repetition of which leaves a residue like a habit — a living cliché and another moment in which life becomes impossible.

Apocalyptic Dreamworlds

Here we have a set of intersecting moments that collectively fold and unfold into a sense of strange goings on in Placencia and that make life there seem impossible. The uncanny sensation of half-understood invisible apocalyptic or unexpected and contingent forces, specters and spectacles, powerfully populate the place and possess it with strange new spirits. Private lives and public worlds getting their wires crossed and snagged up on each other. Dreamworld and catastrophe, success and failure, prosperity and collapse, the Universe and the local, exist alongside of each other, inextricably tied as immanent to each other's details and making. Here, an incipient structure of public feelings begins to form along the lines of

apocalyptic discourses that take the shape of the rapture and the Raelians or in the form of mysterious flows of money; it throws itself together as affective forces, energetic incitements as much as material signifiers. This set of forces of public feelings is life becoming impossible. It is an affective becoming that resonates as an included disjunction, vibrating with tension that lodges in the body, histories executed through the body in lines of tension and relaxation as happenings, as things happening. Whether these affects are feared, seductive, romanticized, subdued or unleashed, they always point to a generative immanence lodged in things as they take shape in the surge of intensifications as moments of vital impact.

The Rub

There is not a day that goes by that someone in Placencia, doesn't say something about how life is becoming impossible. Impossibly cruel and corrupt, impossibly strange, impossibly transformed socially and ecologically, impossibly out of control and violent: impossible to live. I am trying to track impacts and vitalities, the formations of bodily sensations that open onto the affective intensities of life becoming impossible, as a scene of immanent forces folding into an assemblage of public feelings, public culture in the act of its becoming (after Agamben 1993). I am trying to track the troubling state of suspense and suspension that haunts the place and its people and that lingers like a jumpy, chaotic and creepy impulse trying to "make sense"

of things that come into view as habit, shock, intensity, resonance, or resistance (after Stewart 2007:1-7). Lives in the gaps, or the interstices of this contact zone throw themselves together as event (movement) and as sensation (affect), something becoming, some incorporeal materialism, a disjunctive encompassment, dreamily inhabitable but exhausting, a tropical dream world and an uncanny ordinary. Examining moments of encounter and lingering in the impacts of life becoming impossible means tracking sensations – free-floating affective agitations and sites of collective feelings – as the movement of emergent and potential emotional forces coming into play in this new state of emergency taking shape as neo-liberal exception, on the nervous edge of an impossible tropics in Belize.

[31] But it is here on this uneven terrain between what can be imagined as possible and what may be beyond the scope of the possible altogether, the impossible, that forces of sensation begin to instantiate. Impossibility, or the potential of rupture between the chaos of a world of the possible and what acts beyond it, a moment without end, an unspeakable, unrealizable, that which escapes the grid of intelligibility, has no horizon, it's a passage not a presence, a becoming, a becoming impossible, that which I cannot conceive yet nevertheless reach toward (Manning 2007), an expressive fragility in the making of some condition, good or bad on a beach in Belize.

ⁱ I am addressing questions concerning the historical specificities of affects and their possible relationship to specific tropical contexts and conditions, like the regional contemporary Caribbean political economy in which Belize operates as a weakly defined nation/narco state on the edge of global empire, but I do so not in a didactic manner or through an explanatory framework (see Massumi 2002). Mine is the story of a Belize caught in the grips of social, political and economic forces, the potentials of which are always unpredictable, shifting, unsteady, and immanent. I am trying to track ordinary life in the clutches of this unpredictability as that life seems to become more and more impossible to live. This is the equivalent, however, of capturing air with your hands. Certainly, some assemblage of power and money flows, bodily impacts and states, institutions, ways of experiencing space and time, dreamworld and catastrophe technologies begin to assemble and disassemble through and out of what gets called the postmodern capitalism of neo-liberalism. Working within definitions and distinguishing features of specific historical, economic and political processes does not get at this unfolding, nor does it allow us to track forces felt but still unrecognized and ungathered by concepts: the active generativity of forces in a state of emergence (Stewart 2003), This guides my use of affect as an emergent force of sensation's move into bodily matter and not primarily as a structure of feeling. Affect, as an emergent force is an act of making a history, not describing one or one about getting it right: history, power, society, economy without an object.

To know more about the debates concerning how affect is used as a concept see Clough (2008), Hemmings (2005), Puar (2008) and Thrift (2004).

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