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Keywords

Conservation, Nature, Aquarium, Affect, Keyword Approach

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Meanings of 'Conservation': Effects of Flexible Definitions at the Oceanside Aquarium Marine Science Centre

Sarah Smith

"Conservation is everywhere at this aquarium"

Upon meeting individuals associated with the Oceanside Aquarium and Marine Science Centre (OAMSC)¹, the most pressing question on my mind was, 'where is there evidence of conservation at this aquarium?' To this, I received comments similar to the statement made by one volunteer and participant, "conservation is everywhere at this aquarium" (Fieldnotes November 2010). At the beginning of my research, this sentiment seemed consistent with the fact that the word 'conservation' is visibly and audibly apparent in pamphlets, exhibits, gift stores, cafés, animal shows, and staff and volunteer discourse. The word conservation followed me home when I accessed the OAMSC website, and when I brought up the institution when talking with Oceanside residents and OAMSC patrons. After hearing the word used countless times in countless contexts I realized the question I needed to ask was not 'where is there conservation?', but 'what does conservation mean and to whom'?

These questions seemed simple at first. I had begun a project aimed at defining a word for an institution. However, as I began researching the literature on conservation, I became aware that the word itself is not neutral or even positive outside the OAMSC and rather highly debated and critiqued (Lazaruk 2000; Thomas 2008; Willie 2003). After further research, I realized that the space of the OAMSC was actually a site of meaning-making and of contested and flexible definitions. During personal visits to various aquariums and

zoos, my visceral reactions often focused on animal rights or the monetary value of nature in institutions. Although I still find these questions relevant and interesting, I can no longer ignore the importance of this particular word, especially at this particular institution, and its overall flexibility and broad social and environmental implications.

Conservation: a keyword approach

Conservation is demonstrated to be a keyword at the OAMSC as it is consistently referred to, raised, and discussed in both verbal and visual discourse; however, it is important to keep in mind that my goal here was not to search the spaces at the aquarium for an objective or 'truthful' definition. According to Raymond Williams (1985), keywords are the words used consistently in general discussion and everyday practice which are inextricably linked to broader problems, ideas, and concepts. They are not defined by their origins but are built and rebuilt through relationships with other words and thoughts in everyday discursive practice. Therefore the study of keywords is "an inquiry into a vocabulary: a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions" (Williams 1985: 15), rather than a search for accuracy or objective truth in definition. Moreover, Williams suggests that keywords can be sites of social and historical movement because word meanings and uses fluctuate, causing and reflecting large-scale and dynamic change. Thus change does not always have to be mapped onto language but words themselves can be the site of change or movement. This approach has been taken by Andrew Kipnis (2006), where, like Williams, the keyword is not defined. Instead Kipnis takes an interest in the discrepancy in a definition, using that observation as a gateway into broader historical and socio-political analyses.

How can a word be the locus of social or environmental change? It would seem that at the very least a definition must be operationalized or narrowed to a point of widespread understanding to have such broad impact. Through a brief historical analysis in this paper, I argue that the opposite is in fact true. Conservation movements are not based on a single simple or consistent idea of nature, and the word itself, 'conservation' is derived from "ideas of nature" that are as fluid as they are diverse (Williams 1980). However, there are consequences of flexibly defined keywords, which I will briefly explore in relation to historical conservation movements to provide a more in-depth analysis in regards to the OAMSC. The historical and flexible definitions of 'nature' and 'conservation' are where the story of conservation at OAMSC begins.

Ideas of nature

Mary Douglas once proposed that every understanding of nature or non-human world is "a mask and support for a certain kind of society" (Douglas as cited by Evernden 1993: 187). In other words, a study of the meanings of nature is also a study of culture and society. Theories of this sort have been widely critiqued in contemporary nature-culture studies, predominantly because the very distinction of nature-culture is debated or rejected outright (Haraway 2003, 2008; Kohn 2007; Latour 2004; Mullin 1999, 2002). Douglas did, however, understand that there are no singular definitions of nature. They change, and they reflect cultural values. It is the former that this paper focuses on: the changing meanings of 'nature' in relation to conservation. Prior to this discussion, two disclaimers are needed. First, I have focused on ideas of nature that are well known to contemporary Euro-North American audiences. This is due to the location and

history of my case study (Canada) and is in no way meant to suggest that these are the only, or 'correct', ideas of nature. Second, the ideas that follow are not in a concise timeline. After trying to historically map meanings of nature, I quickly realized that ideas are not easily divided by time because they interconnect, influence one another, and exist over long periods of time stretching into the present. I have thus followed Neil Evernden's (1993) approach which attempts to theorize meanings of nature from past to present but privileges the connections of ideas over time periods.

There are two reasons for an historical analysis of ideas of 'nature'. First, if conservation movements are based on nature, it is important to ask: conservation of what nature? Second, I draw a parallel between the flexibly defined 'nature' and the flexibly defined 'conservation', which shows the broader cultural and environ-mental effects as well as the effects on the process of individual meaning-making at the OAMSC.

Raymond Williams (1980) begins the history of ideas of nature with religious interpretation: "nature gods" versus nature as God. The idea of nature gods is commonly labelled as pagan by Christian interpretation, and it refers to the omnipresence of nature and spirits. Nature as God is, according to Williams, a reaction to monotheism. The story begins here as it is considered the first time the individual is abstracted from nature, which is then personified as a single, essential character (Williams 1980:71). At this point, nature is removed from the everyday and the everywhere and situated as a distinct 'other'. One result of this has been an increased desire to know and understand the 'other', so nature is reduced to laws and theories (Williams 1980).

Nature-as-object (Evernden 1993) is another idea of nature resulting from the

abstraction of the individual, and it is also the idea that dominates scientific and political discourse. This idea of nature "facilitates exploitation and the resourcist rhetoric that legitimizes and facilitates it" (Evernden 1993: 192). If nature is an object, it must be understood, controlled, and used. Interestingly, although nature is defined as object in this understanding, it may also be defined as a vulnerable object, in which case individuals may seek to save it. The problem, according to Evernden (1993), is that as long as nature is objectified, the questions proposed by individuals in relation to nature will always revolve around the assumption of human superiority, asking 'what's in it for me?'.

Nature-as-self is conceptualized by Evernden (1993) as the opposite to natureas-object. This view is often attributed to nature-lovers, who speak about nature emotionally and sometimes anthropomorphically (Evernden 1993). It is with these perspectives that such individuals form relationships to nature; morality and obligation, rather than human needs, are used as a method of defence on behalf of nature. The difference between this and the 'nature gods' view is that nature comes to be understood as outside oneself rather than a part of oneself (Williams 1980). However, that is not to say that this idea of nature did not exist prior to monotheism and the dominance of nature-as-object. Regardless, followers of nature-as-object tend to see nature-as-self as potentially dangerous since society depends on the use and exploitation of nature. If nature is attributed subjectivity, this process becomes a difficult and contentious relationship.

'Deep ecology' is an extension of Evernden's nature-as-self idea. As Milton (2002) describes, it proposes nature as an extension of self, so that damage to nature translates to loss of self. Deep ecology is akin to a philosophy wherein non-human life has the same right to exist as human life and nature is recognized for more than just utility (Milton 2002). Eco-phenomenology, a convergence of phenomenology and contemporary environmental concerns, is a similar approach which proposes the simple notion that nature has implicit value (Brown & Toadvine 2003). The individual is less abstracted in this view because meanings of nature result from one's own experiences and interactions (Milton 2002).

A related idea to deep ecology and eco-phenomenology is the conceptualization of nature as aesthetic or miracle. Nature, in this idea, is not questioned or understood in epistemological terms; rather, nature is miraculous. awesome. and beautiful (Evernden 1993). This understanding can only be achieved when the common 'laws of nature' are rejected or ignored. Whitehead (1925), for example, rejects the laws of nature, arguing that this view is "a dull soundless, scentless, affair. colourless: merely the hurrying of material, endlessly meaningless" (54). As Embree (2003) notes, such an aesthetic appreciation of nature often means a valuation of nature for its own sake. Individuals with this meaning of nature may even be classified as biocentric - an ethic or politic where non-human life is given special value (Embree 2003: 47).

Nature may also mean *natural*, as in lonely, unspoilt, wild, and untouched (Cronon 2007). As Cronon explains, this idea of nature is completely fictional, based on idealistic notions of authenticity. However, that does not mean it is not exercised and invoked purposefully and strategically, often disguising the role of human impact or labour. Cronon (2007) argues that this idea of nature is often used in conservation movements because it is based on human morality and obligations that do not dismantle or challenge the human-nature distinction. He believes that most individuals feel more comfortable in their

abstraction from nature but do necessarily disregard environmental issues, so that an understanding of nature as natural creates an appealing middle ground (2007).

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the idea of nature as an active agent, in comparison to being seen as only passively influenced by humans. Carolyn Merchant's work The Death of Nature (1990) helps situate the origins of seeing nature as passive or dead in the European scientific, industrial, and historic revolutions of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She argues for a shift in under-standing to one where nature is active and should not be dominated or controlled². These interesting and important aspects consider, but for the purpose of this paper, the term passive signifies a nature that does not have an implicit ability to act and is only acted upon.

What conservation? Conservation of what?

Conservation movements in the twentieth century have been wide-spread and important in encouraging positive change in public conceptions of the environment and degradation of natural habitats (Adams 2004). They have also been self-reflexive; responding to criticism and adjusting plans to suit the needs of the particular cause (Adams 2004), though also having gone forth without an operationalised definition that is finite in all cases. They rely on ideas of 'nature' and, as we can see, there is not only one stable and consistent idea of nature. In this section, I briefly provide examples of conservation movements to explore the various ways nature is invoked, the multiple ways conservation is under-stood, and the consequences incurred by each.

An early stage in the conservation movement was the advocacy of parks and nature reserves, usually heralded as the "last bastion of nature" (Adams 2004: 208; Curry-Lindahl 1964). In this movement, there is a

reliance on the idea of nature as *natural*; something to be isolated as much as possible and protected. Conservation projects based on this idea of nature rarely work. One major flaw in this view is the systematic disregard of local communities - often indigenous (Adams 2004) - which then leads to the impossibility of isolation and the gradual shift to tourism, resource exploitation or sustenance agriculture (2004). Nature cannot stay natural if natural means isolated or wild because there is always change and a separation between human and nature is not only impractical but it is impossible.

In 1980, the World Conservation Strategy was published by the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in with the United Nations conjunction Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). This document has impacted conservation movements worldwide, but for the scope of this paper, my analysis focuses on Western contexts. The definition of conservation in this document is as follows:

the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations. Thus conservation is positive, embracing preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilization, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment. (IUDZG et al. 1980: 1)

This passage seems to rely on multiple conceptualizations of nature. It is an object because its resources are being managed; it is aesthetic and thus has a particular value; it is passive, as it is spoken about and controlled; it is abstracted from man, natural; and it is in need of preservation, divisible by sentience and in danger. One definition of conservation could not apply to

all of these meanings, but generally it seems to be defined as a principle, a general ethic or morality. However, the definition of "direct-action" by humans also includes words like 'sustainable utilization' and 'restoration' (IUDZG et al. 1980). The breadth of this definition has left it open to criticism and has not inspired conservation movements with the same goals or results (Aronsson 2000).

Eco-tourism and national parks became common in the 1980s-1990s after the World Conservation Strategy, the stated goal of which was to unite humans with nature while maintaining minimal negative environmental and social impacts (Adams 2004: 209; Boo 1990; Honey and Stewart 2002; Stronza 2001). In order for this type of conservation to work, nature had to be conceptualized as passive so that humans could be positioned as active champions of conservation. We know now that when nature is seen solely in these terms as helpless, conservation movements often privilege human needs over the needs of the environment. Consequently, eco-tourism has been critiqued due to habitat degradation, human impact, animal endangerment and extinction (Bushell 2003; Crouch & McCabe 2003; Honey and Stewart 2002; Walsh 2004), as well as social inequality (Aronsson 2000; Boo 1990; Buckley and Pickering 2003).

Currently, conservation movements are often based on the management of wildlife (various species) as a resource (Adams 2004). This conception derives from one of two basic understandings of nature. The first is the idea of nature as passive object, a utilitarian understanding suggesting that other species are to be used for human benefit, even if that benefit is the hope that future generations will be able to experience a particular ecosystem or species (Adams 2004). The second is a romanticized version of William's (1980) nature as *natural*, one

that is humans' responsibility to preserve wild, untouched nature. Both ideas of nature still reflect an anthropocentric bias wherein nature is not preserved or valued for its own sake but rather for human values and interests (Adams 2004: 214). It is from these definitions and history of conservation movements that aquarium conservation is founded.

Conservation in aquariums: a history

Aquariums are part of a long historical tradition of collecting animals for recreation and entertainment (Kisling 2001). In the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries these collections were called menageries, but since the twentieth century have been referred to as zoological gardens and more currently, zoos (Kisling 2001). These terms are widely debated but the shift to zoological gardens does encompass an increased emphasis on education and 'natural' categorization (Kisling 2001). In the 1850s, the word aquarium was developed to distinguish the collection of oceanic organisms as a particular type of zoological garden (Kisling 2001).

As mentioned previously, there is a trend towards conservation and awareness of environmental crisis in Western nations (Adams 2004). Aquariums have become growing participants of this trend. increasingly foregrounding conservationist mission statements (Lazaruk 2000). Howthe motivations for aquariums' ever inclusion of conservation policies and statements are debateable, especially considering the history of recreation and entertainment in aquariums and zoological gardens (Kisling 2001). It may be in an attempt to capitalize on public fears and a growing awareness of environmental crises. reaction a competition or pressures from other institutions, or an attempt at direct-action environmental change (Lazaruk 2000: Various Adams 2004: Davis 1997).

conservation strategies are also being increasingly integrated into aquariums, potentially effecting both the environment and the institutional image itself.

conservation is founded multiple ideas of nature and consequently has multiple meanings, who decides how conservation should be framed at aquariums? Aquariums depend on visitor values and perceptions in order to develop and meet their mission statements (Woodroffe 1981), so the incorporation of conservation may be a reflection of guest perceptions of nature. However, since the institutional identity is vague - all we know from the OAMSC website is that it is a not-for-profit organization with little other information guests should be critical of whose idea of conservation and nature is being portrayed. For example, is the institution a collective unit? Is there defined community or opportunity for guest input? Is it a multi-national group or is it local?

Since the inclusion of conservation agendas into aquariums and zoos, there has been a steady debate in the public and academic realms surrounding the motivations and efficacy of institutional conservation projects. For example, arguments for the inclusion of a conservation mandate in zoos state that they provide: benefits to wild population, opportunities for research that could not be done in the wild, maintenance of genetic material, and contributions to the public positive attitudes regarding the environment, education of animals, and awareness of human-nature bonds (Atkinson-GrosJean 1992). argument against the inclusion of conservation mandates cite reasons including: the removal of species from the wild disrupts their social organizations, animals physically suffer, the moral objections to confinement, the money spent on institutions should instead be spent on natural habitat preservation, and the overall inaccuracy of education material (Atkinson-GrosJean 1992). Although these arguments specifically regard conservation in a zoo, the same general debates and reasons arose in my interactions with aquarium staff and volunteers.

What follows is a case study of the OAMSC in relation to these issues of conservation. The scope of this project is potentially vast since conservation in tourist organizations is a large and contentious issue (Davis 1997; Lazaruk 2000; Desmond 2001). I have thus approached the issue with narrow questions: What are the various meanings of conservation at the individual and institutional level? And what are the effects of flexibly-defined keywords at the OAMSC?

Research design and data collection methods

In order to engage with individuals and the institution, qualitative methodology and analyses were used. Conceptually, I designed the project with the idea that conservation would be an important word. This influenced my interviews and observation, though I did remain aware of other concepts and themes both in the field and in the literature. This is apparent in my results, which include other important concepts like research and education.

Between September and December 2010. I visited the OAMSC numerous times. engaging in participant observation, conducting interviews, and mapping the facility. Due to institutional regulations, I was not permitted to interview any guests; however, I was able to interact at the facility as a guest. This means I gathered data by taking notes of guest reactions at animal shows or in the facility in general, and also by engaging in casual conversation when approached. I did not ask formal questions but was able to gain information on general impressions. I conducted six formal

structured interviews, coordinated by the OAMSC volunteer program and one followup unstructured interview. The interviews were split evenly between staff and volunteers. In my capacity as a guest, I also approached numerous 'on-duty' volunteers and staff members, asking questions that were relevant within their job description to answer. Staff included paid employees at various levels of the institution. Volunteers are defined as individuals who volunteer a few hours a week and engage in different activities such as: providing information to guests in the galleries and exhibits, teaching youth programs, or giving tours of the facility. They range in personal history, including university students, fully trained marine biologists, students of biology, professionals. tourism business professionals.

As I was guided by a keyword approach, I made sure to note instances of how the term "conservation" was used throughout the facility, both visually and in discussion/discourse. I also conducted a visual analysis of media in the aquarium and found the posters and short films on display in the galleries useful, but had trouble finding television commercials or promotional videos online. I did find one promotional video on birds of prey, but it had no mention of conservation.

I also conducted a content analysis of the OAMSC website after my interview data had been analyzed. For reasons of anonymity, the website has not been sourced. I noted occurrences of the word "conservation" first and then noted the themes of conservation which emerged through analysis of the interview and observational data.

A visual record facilitated the analysis of emerging conservation themes. I took photos through the duration of fieldwork, mostly of signage and visual media but also of the physical space. With my

visual record, I was able to return to the space and recall visual insistences of themes that I had not previously located in the literature.

An analysis of multiplicity

After analyzing each use of the word "conservation" and its variants conserve, conservationist) in my collected data, patterned themes emerged that were attached to other words and phrases. In accordance with these findings, I conducted a second round of more focused coding, guided by the literature on conservation and ideas of nature. I subsequently grouped the meanings of conservation into five main themes: conservation as environmental policy, education, personal lifestyle, knowledge about animals, and preservation. These emerged primarily definitions from interview data. After being prompted with the question "what is your definition of conservation?", participants commonly defined conservation and then offered a variation or contradictory definition, often touching on two or three of the above themes. Due to inconsistency in interviews, and a lack of clear definition in the institution itself, I stopped trying to define conservation; that is, I stopped looking for a penultimate "truth". I started to look instead for evidence of multiplicity in the definition of such an important keyword. With this critical finding, I turned to the OAMSC website to look for institutional usages of "conservation" and there found a much clearer definition. However, this definition was inconsistent with the representations of conservation within OAMSC physical spaces and thus did not clarify the overall meaning.

Once clear that there were multiple definitions of "conservation", I began analyzing the effects that a flexibly-defined keyword can have on guests, staff, and volunteers. For the following section I draw

on the theoretical work of Massumi (2002) and the previously mentioned Williams (1985), as well as interview data and field observations. In this way I thus first analyze an overview of the flexibly-defined term "conservation" as discussed among participants, seen in the physical space, and represented by the institution itself online.

Five key themes: multiplicity of meaning

It is important to note that the five themes I have attempted to distinguish are not bounded. In fact, the main point is that they are flexible definitions which are inextricably influenced by each other, and thus related and interconnected without firm boundaries. Also, since I am focused on the individual interpretation of conservation, I structured the themes first around participant definition and the literature. I then included institutional definitions, gathered through visual media, brochures, and the website, to compare themes. I approach each in turn, beginning with the individual themes of conservation. To recap, the five themes are conservation as: environmental policy, education, personal lifestyle, knowledge about animals, and preservation.

The first theme, conservation as environmental policy, had a common description describing the steps taken/ needed to impact environmental change Almost all of my participants directly. mentioned the same statistic, "it's almost a no-waste institution, 82% of the wastes are compostable...so it has a lot of different types conservation" (Fieldnotes November 2010). Other participants stressed the importance of institutional and corporate policies regarding environmental crisis, stating "if guests see the waste system [the recycling and compost at OAMSC] it will change thinking" their (Fieldnotes November 2010).

This theme also encompassed the term "sustainable development", which by

definition refers to the need to control development and plan to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet the needs of the future (Aronsson 2000). One volunteer related conservation to development policy, saying, "in developed countries, I don't know, maybe because economics is better, conservation is better" (Fieldnotes November 2010). In a subsequent comment about South America, the same volunteer said such countries cannot address environmental issues because they have other problems that come first. Another employee, when asked to define conservation, said, "it's about balance, a sustainable approach to conservation" (Fieldnotes November 2010). Later he explained, "if I want to fish salmon it's ok, I'll fish salmon - do we have enough salmon, no, so let's not fish salmon if we don't have enough. To have that balance, a sustainable approach to conservation" (Fieldnotes November 2010). This theme relies on the idea that development inevitably involves the environment. Nature is conceptualized as passive, important only in relation to the needs of humans. Conservation in this theme seems to be a choice that must be actively enforced and reflected in policy.

The second theme, education, was often mentioned in relation to the other four themes but was sometimes separated out and used as a synonym for conservation. One volunteer saw education as a means toward conservation "because if you don't have education, you don't know how conservate [sic]" (Fieldnotes November 2010). Similarly, education was discussed in relation to children and the exposure to an environmentally conscious lifestyle. This volunteer emphasized the importance of teaching children and youth about practical environmental changes: "reducing plastic bags is a big step in changing the minds of kids and spreading the message of conservation" (Fieldnotes November 2010). She also emphasized the importance of educating her own children, "I think that the most important role that I have is to educate my kids...it's to create a human being with that style of life" (Fieldnotes November 2010).

Education was also discussed as its own form of conservation, in addition to being its own action. A few participants explained that conservation is awareness, "to be a conservationist is to spread the message to others, to educate (Fieldnotes November them" 2010). Morriss and Cramer (2009) have related environmentalism to religion, arguing that there are messages of salvation and conversion which are meant to become a way of life rather than an action. Many of my participants did reference the importance of their role as an agent of awareness, as if to be a conservationist is to be an educator of environmental issues. This may be based on an idea of nature as valuable or on Williams' (1980) notion of nature as God. However, it could also result from a very personal connection with nature as in nature-as-self or eco-phenomenology.

Conservation as a personal lifestyle, the third theme, was the most common one I encountered. A volunteer at one point defined conservation concisely as, "what you can change in your life to help" (Fieldnotes November 2010). She went on to explain the process of conservation as "not using a lot of plastic bags, having your own bag that you can keep for all the places that you go, try to take showers in less time, don't stay a long time in the shower, things like this you know – washing your clothes only one time or two times a week - don't wash a little of your clothes every day those kinds of things." Conservation under this definition becomes an individual decision, an everyday activity. A volunteer echoed this common understanding of the process of conservation during an interview at the OAMSC:

Participant So first, buy local, because rainforests are now – they are clearing the trees so they can't plant things to sell, so if we don't buy them, it will – if we buy local we aren't doing that. Try to buy organic too, so people that cut down trees to just plant drugs are not a factor because they are clearing trees to plant pot – to plant drugs like weed and all kinds of drugs (laughs)

Researcher (laughs) So no drugs.

P (laughs) No drugs. If you consume drugs you are killing the rainforest.

R (laughs)

P Umm, another kind of conservation, paper of course – recycle paper, and normally we say like, rethink, reduce, reuse, recycle.

She later continued, "you need to try and be conscious of everything," and again "my showers are short, normally when I take a bath I wash my dog with that water or my husband uses that bath, because of course I like baths like everybody else but I try to do a little more with that water, yeah, I recycle paper" (Fieldnotes November 2010). These are just a few examples I encountered throughout the interview process. Interestingly this is also the theme that came up in guest conversations. In the Arctic Exhibit, which largely focuses on climate change, I overheard one guest saying, "Now I feel bad", as if her lack of an environmentally conscious lifestyle caused climate change. Conservation as a personal lifestyle revolves around a separation of the individual from nature but also a concern for loss of nature or environmental degradation. Again, this could be because of personal attachment,

concern for human survival, or any other number of previously mentioned motivations.

Fourth is the theme of conservation as knowledge about animals, specifically in this case marine species. After a discussion with a volunteer about animals and conservation I asked "oh, so how human and animals interact?" she answered "yeah, yeah...and how the things that we do can interact with them for bad or for good". She continued:

Nowadays I can see a lot of good interaction but in the past only bad interaction because now it is fashionable, everybody is talking about ecology, about conservation, but in the past it wasn't like this, so in the past only degredate, degredate, degredate, and now we need to stop and start thinking what you need to do to recall all the wrong things that we did in the environment.

For many of the volunteers, especially those involved with animal education, the use of animals was seen as a convenient way of creating an accessible definition of conservation; change in animals, usually rates of extinction or endangerment, was a tangible way of seeing conservation at work. It was also a step towards conservation because species cannot be helped if there is no knowledge of them. Another volunteer also saw animals and conservation as closely linked goals, "I'm a gallery educator. So I directly interact with the public, discuss about both the animals and conservation". Later she mentioned the tension between these two goals in the institution, "the idea is to not just talk about the animals. It can be hard depending on your audience, but we try as much as possible to bring some kind of conservational message" (Fieldnotes November 2010). Nature, in this definition influenced verv passive and seems

immensely by human beings. Conservation with this understanding of nature requires research regarding non-human animals.

Knowledge about animals was also discussed as a step towards encouraging conservationists. An employee of the OAMSC stated that the role of animal knowledge was to "teach kids about the oceans and marine animals and conservation ...conservation through exposure, exposing kids to the variety of marine life, we're hoping to encourage a conservation movement and attitude, future stewards of the environment". This idea of conservation seems to invoke the aesthetic or emotional value of nature, the idea of nature-as-self, and of a moral obligation. Interestingly, it was a less common theme I witnessed among participants.

Finally, and least frequently, was the theme of preservation and isolation, quite closely related to Williams' (1980) natural nature. One volunteer was practical in her meaning of preservation as conservation, "it's just generally, I guess, the idea of preservation of ecosystems and animals. I guess I would consider conservation more keeping the natural habitat as undisturbed as possible, so yeah, the preservation of it includes a lot of things like the elimination of invasive species and minimizing their impact on the environment" (Fieldnotes December 2010). This participant, OAMSC employee, also combined the idea of protection and preservation with human involvement, rather than isolation or restricted access. "It's humans, working towards how we can better protect our environment and from the aquarium's perspective, the animals in it" (Fieldnotes December 2010). Some employees and volunteers more vehemently advocated the removal of human involvement, often with the phrase "zero-impact". Preservationist models of conservation may result from moral or ethical obligations, they may result from the romanticized *natural* nature, or they may be an appreciation of nature's aesthetic and implicit values.

Conservation on the floor: words and media

The definitions of conservation I encountered were as flexible within a single individual's statement as between statement with other individuals. There also seemed to be consistent variations between the personal conservation definition of and institutional definition. I asked participants where I could find the institutional definition and they suggested the gift store and three exhibits informally classified by animal (i.e., Beluga, Dolphins, and Jellies) rather than their official names (respectively, "Canada's Arctic", "Wild Coast", and "Exploration Gallery"). What follows are brief descriptions of the multiple conservational messages found in the visuals of the gift store and exhibits. Visuals include the words on posters and displays, as well as in short videos and static photography.

In the gift store, messages on posters and walls state, "Your purchase supports the Aquarium's conservation, research and education programs" (Fieldnotes November 2010) (example: see Figure 1). Also within the gift store, there are predominately located items of entertainment (e.g., stuffed animals, games), education (e.g., puzzles and books) and clothing. The gift store explicitly mentions conservation, education and research; however, the merchandise does not directly reflect these projects. When asked what programs the gift store revenue goes towards, a staff member explained that the money goes towards the institution overall, which is always involved in various initiatives. In other words, gift store revenue funds the OAMSC and its various projects. Although conservation is mentioned, it is not defined specifically. However, it is interesting to note the relationship between conservation, research, and education, a topic to which I will return.

In the "Wild Coast" underwater viewing area, there were many informational posters. On the wall by the seating area read the words "Conservation Partners: The Oceanside Aquarium and you". Much like in the gift store, the message here seems to be that conservation is both an individual choice and an institutional initiative. Again, the exact initiatives of conservation are not mentioned. Moreover, as one walks through the exhibit, more information is provided about research initiatives than conservation initiatives specifically (example: see Figure 2). This is clear by the amount of visual representation of research, in posters, and newspaper clippings.

In the "Arctic Canada" exhibit, the term "climate change" appears frequently on the walls and on posters. The visuals in the room are of Arctic animals, like polar bears, and of Indigenous people, who are often referred to as "people of the North". The climate change wall has information on polar caps and fishing populations but does not use the word conservation (example: Figure 3). There are other concepts present (e.g., climate change, global warming, ice caps) but they are not explicitly connected with the conservation initiative. One wall of the exhibit is glass, inside of which are the Beluga Whales (example: Figure 4). There were many guests sitting on benches watching them, with common remarks such as, "his head's so funny" and "they're so fat". During my observation, visitors consistently spent more time at the glass tank than at the climate change wall.

The exploration gallery is easily recognizable by large tanks of jellyfish, which is what I assume earned it the nickname "Jellies Gallery" by my participants. The entire exhibit is very modern, including a dramatically lit tank, interesting animals



Figure 1.
Photo taken by author in November, 2010 at the Aquarium Gift Shop, modified to ensure confidentiality.

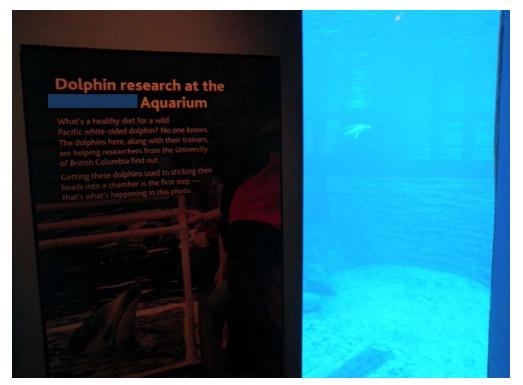


Figure 2.
Photo taken by author in November, 2010 at the "Wild Coast" underwater viewing area, showing display board, modified to ensure confidentiality.

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Figure 3. Photo taken by author in November, 2010 at the "Arctic Canada" exhibit.

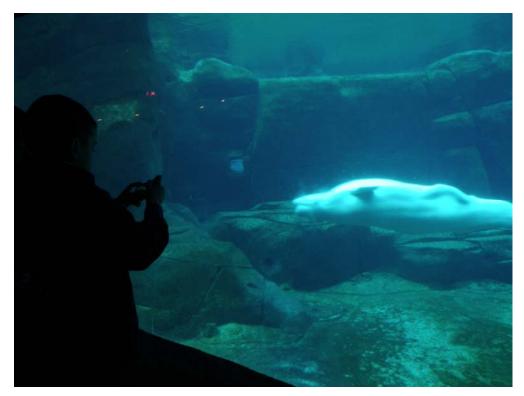


Figure 4. Photo taken by author in November, 2010 at the Beluga Whales exhibit.

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(including jellyfish, eels, and water snakes), and information regarding habitat and behaviour. The gallery is set up almost like a laboratory – it is noticeably different from the rest of the OAMSC and seems to be about examination than entertainment. In this exhibit, there was a film playing that contained various research project footage. Beside the screen, was a plaque with the following statement:

The aquarium provides a safe, controlled setting to research aspects of the animals' lives that can't be studied in the wild. This information is combined with field research, where animals are studied in their natural setting, to round out the picture. This knowledge is a critical tool in the efforts to conserve wild populations. (Fieldnotes December 2010)

After reading this passage, the visual set-up of the exhibit made sense. The animals are in a laboratory setting because of the research goals aimed towards the conservation of a species. Here, the word conservation is used with a very particular meaning, the intention of conserving or preserving wild species.

Conservation online: the take home/at home message

During my research, I observed other exhibits but did not find any overt uses of the word conservation. In order to get a clearer definition of conservation at the OAMSC, I researched content on their website and promotional brochures. It is important to remind the reader to think critically about whose idea of conservation is being represented in these spaces. I also wish to remind the reader that the major aim of this discussion on "conservation" is to demonstrate the multiple and conflicting ways and means in which the keyword is used. In one brochure, conservation is

mentioned in the following: "A donation to the Oceanside Aquarium supports: conservation initiatives that inspire people to take action to save threatened or endangered environments" (Fieldnotes aguatic December 2010) Donations also support (according to this brochure) "education programs that engage children and youth; creating the next generation of environmental stewards" and "ground-breaking research aimed at addressing some of the aquatic world's most pressing problems" (Fieldnotes December 2010). When relating these statements back to the data collected from interviews, it seems that the five themes of conservation at the individual level have merged conservation, research and education, whereas the institution has separated them, both in brochures and the website pages. For example, from the OAMSC home page, one can access different webpages for each word, one for conservation, education, and research.

The conservation website begins with the following statement: "making a difference can take one person or an entire neighbourhood. These Aquarium programs allow everyone to lend a hand. Anyone in any part of Canada can make a difference by choosing sustainable seafood, cleaning up a beach or reporting a wildlife sighting. Get involved today" (Fieldnotes December 2010). Following that, there are twelve programs listed and explained. They vary from research projects, "conservation in action", to animal preservation, "report a wildlife sighting" (Fieldnotes December 2010). The programs touch on all of the participant conservation themes.

Most importantly, it was on this section of the webpage where conservation is explained in relation to research and education, in the mission statement:

The mission of the Oceanside Aquarium Marine Science Centre is to conserve aquatic life through display and interpretation, education, research and direct action. Aquarium staff and volunteers have been involved in the creation of Canada's first no-take marine protected area, beach clean-ups, wetlands restorations, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, and population surveys of marine mammals and intertidal fishes. (Fieldnotes December 2010)

In the participant themes, conservation is defined as research or education, whereas this statement defines conservation as intention and research, education, and directaction as the methods of imple-mentation. On the home page this config-uration is apparent; the main statement on the page is "Welcome to Canada's largest aquarium. As a non-profit organization we continually dedicate our efforts to the conservation of aquatic life" (Fieldnotes December 2010). How? "Through edu-cation, research and direct action" (Field-notes December 2010). As mentioned, both education and research have separate webpages which provide statements to explain how they are methods of conser-vation. A statement for education describes "hands-on programs that are curriculum-based with a focus conservation" (Field-notes December 2010). The statement for research explains that Ocean-side 1956, Aquarium researchers have been conducting original studies of habitats and animals (fish. invertebrates and mammals) in the wild and on-site in order to advance knowledge and provide information necessary to enhance environmental conser-vation" (Fieldnotes December 2010).

I noted that the institutional material continually used conservation in the phrase, "conservation of aquatic life" and this was qualified by an explanation of how this is accomplished "through display and interpretation, education, research and direct

action" (Fieldnotes December 2010). It seems, at the institutional level, conservation is defined as a broad concept which is achieved through other means but is in itself more of an intention or an ethic. Nature could be understood in many ways under this definition because how one conserves depends on the methods chosen: education, research, etc.

In conclusion, relatively clear definitions of conservation do exist. However, they vary between spaces, in physical versus online places, and between individuals. I will now turn to the varied effects that a keyword has when it has multiple meanings.

The effect/affect of flexible definition keywords

In accordance with William's keyword approach (Williams 1985; Kipnis 2006), it is not my intention to provide a concise definition of conservation, nor to insist that one exists. Instead I will examine the broader issues, in this case, what are the effects of a flexible definition of "conservation" within the OAMSC based on an individual process of meaning making? Also, are there broader environmental or cultural implications? I will address the former question first.

Within the OAMSC, staff volunteers mentioned tensions that were forming between individuals and institution based on ambiguities in the represented (or misrepresented) definition of conservation. Although I was not able to talk with guests directly, the variation of definition among volunteers and staff suggests that guests may have a similar experience. For example, one participant stated: "our programs are better for the ocean, not good for the ocean" (Fieldnotes December 2010). A few staff, volunteers and guests had concerns about the animal shows being advertised as conservation since they could also be seen as entertainment. Some

participants also stated that "conservation is zero-impact, an institution can't be zero-impact" (Fieldnotes November 2010). The point here is not that one definition is more correct, it is that a flexibly-defined keyword can affect the relationship between an institution and individuals.

It seemed that tensions did not stem just from a difference of opinion but rather a critique of flexibility, and importantly, critiques differed based on individual meanings. I found that the individuals who critiqued the conservational message were those with a clearer personal definition of the word. In other words, those with a stable and more concrete meaning expressed pessimism and "disenchantment" with conservation goals at the OAMSC. In line with this discovery was the realization that the participants and guests I interacted with who expressed a personally flexible definition of conservation tended to feel more confident in the term and its use at the OAMSC. This phenomenon, I believe, is a result of affective space. I will describe affect at the OAMSC first and then discuss how flexibility in the keyword inspires scepticism in some and confidence in others.

To be affective, a space must first create emotional power, and second, be meaningful to each individual regardless of personal experiences (Massumi 2002). The OAMSC successfully creates this affective space through the use of a flexible keyword. First, "conservation" is an emotionally powerful keyword that does not rely on a stable or concise definition. One example of this process comes from a few studies that have researched celebrity and conservation (Brockington 2008; Meyer & Gamson 1995). They have concluded that conservation is a powerful message, especially considering current environmental crises (Adams 2004), and can thus be based on less concrete information (for example little to no environmental science) (Brockington 2008). Also, there is emotional power in "conservation" due to the awareness of environmental crisis in this society and in the OAMSC (Adams 2004). As discussed previously, conservation efforts (specifically in institutions like aquariums) have become more common since the publishing of official environmental documents by worldwide organizations (Lazaruk 2000) indicating a socially-patterned emotional concern involving conservation (Adams 2004).

Second, "conservation" as a keyword is affective when individuals can create meaning based on their own personal experiences. Brian Massumi (2002) explains this phenomenon with the mime effect, a concept he developed in relation to the speeches of Ronald Reagan. The crux of his argument is that constant interruptions (like stuttering) and potential movements (jerky physical gestures) create a space for individuals to qualify the meaning in their own terms, with their own definitions and experiences (Massumi 2002). There have been many critiques to Massumi's theory, such as a lack of agency accorded to the autonomous nature of affect (Sedgwick 2003), and the difficulties this theory poses for ethnographic researchers (Hemmings 2005); however, this theory can be applied successfully to the OAMSC. The empirical examples preceding this section demonstrated that conservation is displayed throughout the physical and online space, sometimes being defined, sometimes connecting to other concepts and sometimes without definition entirely. This allows each individual to form their own definition based on personal experience. The flexibility of the keyword therefore creates an affective space which allows individuals to make their own meaning of conservation.

Why then did some participants react positively and others negatively to the flexible keyword? I believe that if one's

definition of conservation is flexible, the flexible definitions and resulting emotional power (the affect) will be constantly actualized into one's understanding in accordance with one's personal experiences, creating positive meanings of conservation. If, however, one has a strong definition of conservation prior to entering the OAMSC, the multiplicity of its definition would not interrupt one's personal meanings and would not draw on one's emotionally powerful personal experiences of conser-vation. These individuals will be less affected and find "conservation" at the OAMSC overly vague and flexible.

Affect as a process is difficult to study but how it affects the individual is much more straightforward. In this case, it is clear that there are multiple definitions and that some individuals feel confident in one definition and find the flexibility in the OAMSC to be a weakness while others do not conceptualize multiplicity in its meaning negatively at all. By incorporating a study of affect, one can see how the specific culture of the OAMSC creates a space for multiple definitions to have multiple effects.

The broader cultural and environmental effects of this phenomenon are difficult to predict, and due to a lack of guest data, it is impossible to know how the majority of OAMSC patrons react to the flexible keyword. If guests do escape the affective space because of concrete personal definitions of conservation, there may be severe negative consequences. For example if guests are not affected, they may be reluctant to support the OAMSC's conserveation goals, which, if we assume are beneficial to the environment, would be a negative consequence. Another consequence to this phenomenon is agency. If affective spaces allow for individuals to support conservation movements without their own concrete definition, are they likely to support other conservation movements outside the OAMSC? Again, I do not have enough data to answer this question, but I think these issues should definitely continue to be examined in light of current environ-mental crises and corresponding public attitudes. A positive consequence of a flexible definition is the ability of the OAMSC to gather support from a majority of its guests, creating opportunity to engage in direct action conservation projects without having to clearly define a definition of conservation.

Conclusions

Although, many participants did not object to the flexible definition at the OAMSC and supported conservation regardless, I understand the most daunting consequence of a flexible definition keyword to be the resistance from environmental activists and others with more firm personal definitions of conservation and nature. It seems that if the OAMSC's mission is to conserve aquatic life, it is especially those individuals' involvement that would potentially benefit the institution. However, if public funding and general support can help the OAMSC achieve their conservation goals, a flexible definition can, as we have seen, be very effective. Also, if the OAMSC chooses to reduce the flexibility in their definition, they would be potentially reducing the overall affective power or even alienating those with differing definitions. However, if the OAMSC keeps conservation as a flexible keyword and the majority of people feel positive about conservation without a concrete personal definition, it is in a vaguely defined 'person' (the institution) that we trust to engage in the actual conservation projects. The power of the keyword "conservation" is not in its definition, but in its broad appeal and flexibility. This, depending on the institution, could be greatly beneficial or severely detrimental to the environment. In other words, although the keyword does not have to be defined to

garner support from individuals, I would urge each person – regardless of concrete or flexible personal definition – to critically question the direct actions of conservation projects, including outside of their support or opposition to conservation within OAMSC spaces.

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Notes

¹I have decided to use a pseudonym for this project. Although the identity of all participants is anonymous, I felt that the obvious nature of the interview process (discussed in the research design section), an additional level of anonymity was needed. The reader will note that although this discussion is particular to one aquarium, the theoretical foundations are broadly applicable to the history of Aquariums as well as the contemporary trends in conservation.

²This meaning of nature is also strongly linked to the theory of ecofeminism which likens the struggles of the environment to women's oppression and domination (Merchant, 1998). This movement, although influential, is discussed at great lengths more in feminist theory than environmental theory and thus will not be explored in this paper.

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