

## Belize Blues

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### Article abstract

This is the story of how blue becomes an emergent, world making force of life in Walliceville, Belize. It is a story of attachments to scenes and objects of desire that sustain life in that village, about how blue takes material and imaginative form in the way it pulls some consistency of forces, sensibilities, and materialities into alignment to become the generative textures and rhythms of life in a place going crazy for tourists. My story tracks an eventfulness that erupts out of connections expressing qualities of blue that actualize worlds through a relay of encounters and are sensed through a sustained engagement with the seductive and recalcitrant materiality of that color. It also asks how ethnographic writing may be construed as an act of attuning that wavers from its trajectories to follow stories of blue encounters while attending to things that add to even if they never add up.

# Belize Blues

Kenneth Little

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“Find your blue”. (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Ocean Portal : <http://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life-ecosystems>)

“... writing tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but also to invite it. Take joy in your digressions because that is where the unexpected arises...” (Massumi 2002 : 18).

## Atmospheric Blues<sup>1</sup>

Belize, how blue it feels. It is not just one blue but blue hues and vibrant tones that press in on life, shivers of forces alluring enough to excite the skin and enliven the senses. These blues pull the social into focus in Belize and register in ways that animate life beyond itself in spatially and temporally dissonant conjunctions, refrains, and scenes. Belize blues constitute an affective atmosphere (see Anderson 2009; Stewart 2010a), an actualization of high and low pressures, the dispersed in-fill of distances that is the light that gets lost in that space between here and there.

Atmosphere : *Atmos*, something in the air, vapour, molecules, building, intensifying and releasing, brightening and dampening, breathing and exhaling into *spheira*. “Spheres”, or bodies, enter into relational, gravitational flows of feeling that mingle in ways that are never finished or fixed in position, nothing captured, but are the push and pull, the flows and frictions of tactile acclimations.

In another register, Rebecca Solnit adds to the way blue materializes as an atmosphere, as lost light and distance :

The world is blue at its edges and in its depths. This blue is the light that got lost. Light at the blue end of the spectrum does not travel the whole distance from the sun to us. It disperses among the molecules of the air, it scatters in the water. Water is colorless, shallow water appears to be the color of whatever lies underneath it, but deep water is full of this scattered light, the purer the water the deeper the blue. The sky is blue for the same reason, but the blue of the horizon, the blue of the land that seems to be dissolving into the sky, is a deeper, dreamier, melancholy blue, the blue at the furthest reaches of the places where you see for miles, the blue of the distance. This light that does not touch us, does not travel the whole distance, the light that gets lost, gives us... the color blue (2005 : 29).

As lost light, blue scatters, excites and activates things in the space between here and there. In a distance that you can never make up, blue is always “the color of where you are not. And the color of where you can never go” (*ibid.*); it instantiates things in an actual-virtual circuit that is never closed and is always indefinite. Blue activates and organizes incommensurate things, touching them, scattering them through a molecularization that changes them, and they are virtually infinite in their fragmented hues.

Blue is an activating quality of atmosphere itself, already there, the dispersed and mixed yet potentializing force of the haptic that presses in on the organization of sensations of distance, duration, interval, vitality, rhythm, and desire, as we attend, attune and attach to things as unfolding compositions “in social and cultural poesis” (Stewart 2008 : 71). Emergent and enlivening atmospherics are the generative milieu of blue forces. These are unfolding moments of potentiality and are qualities felt as unpredictable, rogue or opportunistic somethings in an act of connecting that is what the surge towards an actualization feels like. What gets connected, or knotted into figures (Haraway 2008 : 4, 88, 106) in moments of intersectional material-semiotic composition, provisionally actualize as objects, publics, and impacts.

Tracking such acts of composition means dropping the insistence on evaluative binaries like subject and object, the material and the representational, true and false critique (see Massumi 2002 : 12-13) and taking up a practice of sensing and evoking the colourful capacities of a milieu – a field of incommensurate forces that somehow hangs together for a moment as a consistency, a complicated intimacy of things that matter because they are thrown together as things happening : little moments, big scenes, nervous encounters, crazy intensities, odd vitalities, or uncanny hunches. So it is not the representational politics of blue taken up in different cultural or economic contexts that I want to dwell on here; instead, it is a matter of attending to the charged-up tendencies and vitalities of abjection, seduction, happiness, and confusion that are fashioned out of moments of blue contact that compose themselves as a dense entanglement of affect, attention, and matter – slowing down “the indeterminate chaos of sensations enough to extract something from them that is not so much meaningful as intensifying [as] affective

dynamized forces” (Gross 2008 : 3) – rather than a system of signifying images within a context.

For Deleuze (1997 : 61) a milieu is more than just a contact zone (see Haraway 2008 : 4, 83-88) : it is the different edges of an interface. A milieu is an autonomous zone of virtual-actual circuits, at once material and social, it is a network of affectively infused intensities and trajectories that in their folding and unfolding enact new infrastructures of difference. They enact new modes of relatedness that affirm, augment and keep open spaces of charged-up potentialities that index contact and, here, further the multiple occasions of blue’s collective “presence” (see Massumi 2002 : 6).

By this I also mean that my writing is lured by a force field of seductive blue hues and tones that assemble into a milieu of transiting social, material, psychic strata : a transitional immediacy of real relations of desire, opportunity, and challenge. This milieu composes and consists, assembles and reassembles, in ways that are incommensurate with the telos of imperial prerogatives of globalized tourist capitalism as those are enacted in the wild zone of power on the frayed and fractured edge of empire in Belize, as it churns out the promise of good-life plans, Caribbean-style.

For me it’s a matter of attending and attuning to such a milieu of blue sensations. It is a matter of taking “a step sideways into what normally gets stepped over” (Stewart 2010 : 448) in the social analysis of tourism. It’s a matter of being right where you are, only more intensely, in the eventfulness of various performative expressions of blue contacts – in Walliceville, Belize, in the trade wind heat of the Caribbean, in a bustling tourist destination that is dappled in blues – and lingering on what matters in singular moments of blue contact. It’s a matter of attuning to the alerted sense that something is happening, and then sensing it out (whatever *it* is) as an act of composing, worlding refrains, as an oscillation of strange forces resonating between something dreamy and disastrous (see Little 2013; Stewart 2010b).

In Belize, blue atmospheres encourage exciting and stunning Caribbean hide-away holidays that keep you buoyant while you ride a beach-front high. These are scenes of dazed and dazzled tourists wrapped in their loud, happy voices, smelling of sunscreen and sunburns deep in the seductions of a good-life bubble. This is the blue of tropical paradise that seduces tourists with a desire for contact, with what seductively attracts as a “tropicalization” (see Thompson 2006). This is the happy, performative, industry blue of Caribbean tourism. You know this blue, you’ve felt this blue, if only in scanning the travel section of your local newspaper. It takes your breath away and makes your skin dimple with the pleasures of holiday sun, sea and sand adventures. It is the global paradise blue of the Great Blue Hole of Lighthouse reef – that ubiquitous sign of “supernatural” Belize – both awe-inspiring and mysterious in its

instant changes of color : from the turquoise blue of the reef that defines the hole to the deeper than deep blue of an unfathomable seafloor sink hole, a “stunning jewel set in a coral ring” (Destination Belize 2003 : 6).

Jacques Cousteau, the popular Ur-tourist-adventurer, was the first to explore the Great Blue Hole for us on TV, to reveal its mysteries and secret dangers, to map the “tranquil abyss” from his famous boat Calypso and so connect us up to the spasmodic forces of international eco-tourism ([http://www.belizeaudubon.org/protected\\_areas/blue-hole-natural-monument.html](http://www.belizeaudubon.org/protected_areas/blue-hole-natural-monument.html)). And since then, avid visitors of all sorts tour “The Hole” and its mysterious underwater channels and passages. But stories are legion about its dangerous depths and the alarming number of careless unfortunate bodies lost and found years later suspended breathless in some underwater dead-end passageway or tunnel. And all of this rubs up against Captain Morgan’s Resort and Casino, whose very beach, they say, was the inspiration and original film set for Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean. The Curse of the Black Pearl*. And together the two create conditions tailor-made for true adventure, get-away holiday memories “that will last a lifetime” (Destination Belize 2003 : 2).

Blue atmospheres also seize things up to become a local Creole tour guide’s confusion and a local bar tender’s moment of endurance as they get caught up in circuits of active and reactive forces of official tourist training scripts that perform a perplexing difference between service and servitude. There is longing here in the way local life in this “little fishing village” has become unanchored and unstuck from its own common practices and modes of sociality. And so it floats in the super-charged tourist industry pressures – another tangle of associations, accrued strata of impacts, impulses, and reactions that enacts a deep ambivalence, ricocheting wildly between a build-up of deep sadness of loss and disappointment and the exciting possibilities of new dreams and schemes of “recovery”, fed by the new world order magnetism of global tourism.

But this is the same alluring blue that indexes an ex-pat couple’s sad disappointment when their seniors’ adventure in tropical living, once the temptation of a happy paradise retirement plan, turned into a long-term attachment to a bad situation and they started crying some post-happiness blues (see Ahmed 2010). No one said anything about the downside of a life in paradise or about the failed promise of a dream world, good-life retirement. No one said anything about that unfathomable distance of Caribbean beachfront tropicalization across which longing travels but finally lodges in the senses like a hideaway nightmare as sad and slumped as the fading rush of a burdened blue light being pulled into nighttime darkness.

“Longing, because desire is full of endless distances”, Solnit (2005 : 30) writes, quoting the poet Robert Hass. If blue is the colour of longing, it is because longing for the distances you can never make up is that

activating quality of blue atmospherics. Blue, like longing, gets caught, dispersed in air and scattered in sky and water, and so never travels the full distance between here and there. Longing is always the space of desire for an object that is forever present in its absence and so it agitates in that endless distance where “things [...] don’t quite add up even as they add to” (Ivy 1995 : 20).

And in that space between here and there, light shifts, things happen and move, something is lost and dragged down into its molecular connections or is found but remains ephemeral and haunted. Nevertheless, something emerges momentarily as *something*, some everyday contingent sensibility. But something else escapes connection and goes rogue, becoming vitality in the reach that animates while drifting as an emergent line of resonant force in everyday sensibilities with the power to instantiate other things. Lost light may be ephemeral but it always captivates us as it suggestively lingers on the wild edges of things. That is the blue of distance. “[I]t is the distance between us and the object of desire that fills the space in between with the blue of longing” (Solnit 2005 : 30).

Each scene of blue contact mobilizes into what Kathleen Stewart (2010b : 339) calls “worlding refrains”, something she calls “a scoring over a world’s repetitions. A scratching on the surface of rhythms, sensory habits, gathering materialities, intervals, and durations”. Refrains are an ever-changing movement of interludes and fade-ins, gaps, extensions and fade-outs, reveries, vitalities, tangles of associations, accrued layers of impacts and reactions : all attunements that conjure stories generated through the inchoate impulse, feeling, tones, and affecting hues that bear an influence in Belize as waves of atmospheric pressures. And, like the endless repetitions of waves washing up on the Walliceville beach that keep the form of the beach in constant flux, refrains are repetitions, agitations that gather as habits, accretions of intensities, sudden or sagging nascent forms, forces of chaos that become a rhythm without a regularity, a generative unfolding. Refrains create the feeling of what’s around, the surrounding influences, the forces of various intensities, “affecting and being affected” – lived strains of action and reaction condensing as capacities not yet bearing their own form, but “in-formation”. In short, these Belize blue refrains are atmospheric compositions : worldings.

Such blue refrains, scenes, and intensities, generated as circulating atmospheric forces, become the backdrop of living in and through a shifting beachfront pressure system of highs and lows. These circulating forces are perpetually forming and deforming Belize bodies as qualities not in their own right but as intensifying mal-adaptations that swirl, build and subside, that are strong enough to pull bodies into awkward, fussy alignments with other bodies, worlds, histories, horizons, rhythms and ways of being in the climate of an eventful, crazy, alluring, and

enduring postcolonial, late liberal, beachside saturation of the senses for better and for worse. Belize blues distinctively reveal stunning Caribbean tropicalizations in which official international tourist seductions, national, local and ex-pat cultural expressions necessarily participate as bright vitalisms that ride the cusp of the incommensurate, enabling lives to become otherwise.

But here, blue matters beyond its power as cliché, beyond the capture of life potentials, and so it is always so much more than any representation of blue could ever offer. Blue matters in its movements, tones, and blends, in the unregulated rhythms of its shifting vibrant hues. Tropical blue is a relational force that produces sensations, affects, intensities that forever exceed whatever blue's actualized determinations attempt to fix : blue becoming "all too blue" (*e.g.*, Massumi 2002 : 208-256). And it all becomes much more than the wager on which a dream world paradise could ever promise to pay out or what a local future, as an inflection of a national economic assurance, or the bliss of a retirement rapture, could ever deliver. Imagine blue as a transitional force forming as a milieu that catches things up in the contact zone between here and there, that urges attention to its resonant disjunctive dynamism, to its creative potentiality, its uncanny, interstitial and emergent liveliness, its excess. This is also how blue emerges as an event in that non-linear space between here and there : sensations, a series of connections, an unfurling moment when something begins to actualize and then something begins to instantiate itself as part of a scene, as a colour of a social composition.

Tourist blues, local blues, blue ex-pats [...] My writing attends to these interlinked registers of blue contacts and emergence, selected out of countless, potentially possible moments, situations and scenes when a sense of something happening begins to surge up. How do blue atmospheric pressures spawn multiple micro-worlds, animate attachments, entanglements and unravellings, and act as the intricate situation-scripts for how forces become lodged in bodies as vectors of social possibility, the back-form of potential's unfolding and circulation? How do forces of blue propel and compel, attract and detract, convoke and provoke things in the making on a sunny Belize shoreline?

Here I evoke something of the qualities of blue intersections while tracking its emergent, world-making force through everyday life in Wallisville, Belize.<sup>2</sup> So, it's to the daily rhythms and attachments to scenes and objects of desire that sustain life there that I turn. It is to how blue takes material and imaginative form in the way it pulls an assortment of forces, events, sensibilities, and materialities into alignment to become nervously generative of the textures and rhythms of social life in a place that has gone crazy for tourist development – for better and for worse (see Little 2010; 2012; 2014). What are the emergent political imaginaries and affects of blue compositions that might become think-



able and sensed through a sustained engagement with the beguiling and recalcitrant materiality of that good-life feeling tone and hue : blue?

### Paradise Blue

That blue happiness : picture yourself somewhere on the Belize coast, on the barrier reef, among the teaming corals of the cayes of the Caribbean Sea. Imagine the bluest of azure blue waters, a powdery white beach, a smooth fast boat trip to Lighthouse Caye and diving at the Great Blue Hole, or an infinity pool, a hammock, and the rustling rhythms of tall leaning palm trees swaying in a gentle breeze. Feel the warm water touch your skin, caressing waves lapping your body. A vibrant blue sea matched only by the bluest of blue skies. It is an amazing blue that saturates you, connecting with a solar radiance and a sticky humidity that hangs on you; it dampens some things as it enlivens others. You feel immersed in something pressing in on you. You breathe it, in big drafts that taste a bit salty, gritty, a bit burnt or fragrant; it's all a bit mysterious. A collection of sensations alerts you to something mixing and to something emergent in the mix that charges you up; it changes you. It stirs your imagination and you smile : it's that blue, conjuring good-life attachments to paradise, with fresh hibiscus blossoms in your hair, an exotic rum drink in your hand, and soft Bob Marley tunes your blissed-out sound track. The point of your trip is to stay in that seductive, dream world, paradise bubble and the affects it encloses. The natives are "super friendly". The village is safe and the good-life rolls out without a hitch. Now this promise of happiness is on its way to being realized, actualized against Sara Ahmed's (2010) better instruction, at least for the moment, and your smile broadens and deepens while you too begin to unfurl and unwind.

You may never have been to Walliceville but if you have seen any of the extraordinary pictures used to sell Caribbean tourism you have a tempting and seductive image of the place. You already know it, like it and want it even before you think about it as your sight lines meet the "infinity" pool's smooth projection into the sea and to the horizon. No interruption, just endless extension. Beautiful bright sandy beaches, the blue warm water, the brilliant blue sky and sunshine, you can feel the soft warm trade winds blowing across your body. It's relaxing and dreamy. You can swim, sail, scuba, snorkel, or spend your "downtime" in a hammock under the shade of a palm tree sipping beach drinks and taking in the splendour of nature and local culture.

The Belize Tourism Board advertising brochure says that Walliceville was once a "sleepy fishing village" that is now also "an exciting tourist destination, where change has taken place without losing the original Belizean culture [...] A sidewalk meanders through the village along which you will find a variety of gift shops, beachside bars and restaurants specializing in everything from local Belizean dishes to more exotic



Caribbean cuisine [...] Once you have rested you can enjoy the casual nightlife the village has to offer' (Belize Tourism Industry Association/ Belize Tourism Board, Creative Marketing tourist brochure 2003). There you have it : a warm, sun-drenched day and glorious evening in paradise. It's smooth and mellow and intoxicating, it's what you have always wanted in get-away pleasure, in a pirate hideaway cove advertised across the globe as "mother nature's best kept secret".

But it's all more than that too. Walliceville is a place that tourists have been getting high on for a long time. The stories of hippies discovering the place in the 1960s are legion, but its discovery also has a longer history that takes us back in time to the 18th century era of pirates and privateers and later to the blue indigo extractions of the 19th century logwood trade. All of these stories of discovery act like sediments of romantic discourse that stimulate cultural images that act as fossils do, preserving a radioactive quality of original contact to be tapped into in the contemporary tourist moment of wish image encounter (see Benjamin 1999).

Walliceville is awash in blue tropicalizations. It's a place where a body can't help itself as it mixes bliss with just a bit of dread about how good it all feels and just how long such bliss can last (see Little, 2010). It has a reputation for good stories, food, ganja, cocaine, Rasta sex, friendly natives and booze all tied to a beach party ethos, but in a relaxed, sunny, and laid back mode. It's a place to detach, which is the tourist's prime directive. It's a beachfront in vitalizing blue where the body surges, guard down, drifts and dreams, gets sidetracked, indulges, falls down, crawls, gets up slurring, indulges some more, laughs it off then hits the wall, regroupes to do it all again, or beats a retreat and gets out. This is a place where the tourist body knows itself in states of intensity and vitality, exhaustion and renewal.

But the buoyant wonder of this blue is almost always too good, and the good-life paradise it conjures is a delicate balancing act of advertised paradise vacation elation that rubs up against a local duty to service paradise and to some over-the-top, urgent need to meet the demands of the long- and short-term tourists by reproducing advertised tropical happy objects. And so the tourists come, the cruise ships come, and so does the big-time crime, the drugs, the land-steals, the corruption, the violence, and too many mysterious changes to village life to count, including the new demands on the local such as the new good-life rules about pets, garbage, language, dress, comportment made to accommodate tourists and leave them with a lasting impression of how wonderful paradise is. The collective sensibility of living up to the advertised blue hues of the Caribbean tropicalization, now in hot circulation globally, drives every local more than a bit crazy. Locals see it all happen before their very eyes, this blue liveliness coming into play in new scenes, habits, and in moments when things throw themselves together into

something that feels like a situation and the object of ordinary attention (see Little 2013).

These instances of blue are placeholders that magnetize heterogeneous investments and fantasies of an adventure in paradise. These blue sky and azure blue sea tourist industry worlds are sites of collective excitations that organize as moments of tourist engagement, blockage, and desire – states of emergence as lines of force immanent in that activated infinite reach of light dissolving into that atmosphere constituted in that space between here and there. What emerges in this milieu is not just the promise of a good-life or a commodity mystification, but an excess of all those moments of tourist vitality, potentializing forces, singularities not representations, weak, unstable significance. What emerges is not so much signs that carry meaning, but co-constituting textures, impulses and densities that pick things up as they move episodically through bodies in touching moments of aching topical beauty that lodge in moments of crazy beachfront fascination settling into some life of the senses.

### Local Life in Indigo

For Creole locals the blues of Caribbean tropicalizations feel like the ambivalent, fraught, and dissipating feeling tones and hues of tourist service and a deep and abiding sense of historical servitude mixed with a new hustle and laughter. These are blues that fill Belize coastal villages with the dynamic sensations of possible fortune and futurity, and that back-talk local hardship and despair, local circumstances and traditions, into something that begins to recalibrate the social, the local, and the sovereign. That's one way local blues blend in with that ubiquitous blue of a globalized Caribbean imaginary (see Little 2014).

Take Ron, one of Walliceville's blue ribbon tour guides. He shows me the ribbons and medals and plaques to prove it. He wins National Geographic and Belize Audubon Society awards for his knowledge of local nature and culture, for his hospitality and for the professionalism of his adventure wildlife tours. He has worked with the Smithsonian Institution too, helping adventure eco-tourists to "find their blue". He knows his way around Belize and can guarantee an experience of a lifetime for tourists and adventure naturalists. His reputation is worldwide as the reliable Creole exegete. And he knows Belize nature. He and his wife made enough to build their own modest tourist cabana operation several years ago; their business is barely making it now that the big resort tourists are replacing the day-tripper backpackers, if anyone visits their place at all these days.

Ron is at his wit's end with all of that, but it is still "a living" he understands. And it is hard work dealing with "the industry" and the tourists with short attention spans, mostly looking for their next meal, beer and bathroom break. When he is not leading a tour he trains tour

guides through the National Tour Guide Training Program of Belize. He has worked doubly hard to help the younger villagers become effective guides, but he is close to scrapping the whole project, a dedicated professional lifetime of work swirling down the drain. These days Ron mostly gets “rass” from the trainees. He says that they won’t buy his lecture on “service not servitude”. “Work hard for the tourists means working hard for the nation and that means working hard for you”, Ron says. “Guiding is a good life”, he says. “Tourism makes things happen in Walliceville”, he says. And his training sessions are performances that open onto the shifting grounds of a crazy future for postcolonial circumstances in Belize that he has no choice now but to tap into and ramp up. Ron’s greatest success is his example. He considers himself to be a “winner not a loser” and if he can win the kids can too. But his trainees laugh bitterly, and their laughter unsettles the official happiness tour guide scripts that Ron passionately protects as the keys to success. “They don’t get it and they are not buying it”, Ron complains.

For Ron, there are two ways of squaring this new tourist world disorder. It’s about knowing the difference between service and servitude when for those he is desperately trying to train it’s all servitude. “Excuses”, Ron says. “They’re lazy”, he complains. “Too much TV, no ambition, no sense of commitment. They get it from their parents. No one works anymore, not really. They want everything given to them. They’re all a bunch of ‘*lampas*’”, he continues. Ron knows that Stretch “hangs” on the beach with the tourists and hopes for easy money selling ganja, taking in the tourist parties that he may be invited to. Maybe there’ll be a free trip to Europe if he attracts a “sugar momma” or a fancy job on a yacht or at one of the big resorts. Wait on family money from NYC, Chicago, Miami or LA, ‘gangsta’ clothing, and bling. “Gotta look good”, Stretch laughs. “Man, Ron just kills the vibe”, he grumbles. And Stretch may have a point, his friends say. Everyone respects Ron, his dedication and ambition, but the real models for getting ahead are the politicians making secret land and drug deals with who knows whom, from who knows where, and getting rich doing it. And when they roll into town their success rolls with them in their new SUVs, with their new big boats, new fashions, new friends. “Get in, get out, have some fun” Stretch insists with a smile.

Ron’s life of service is Stretch’s servitude. “Skip it”, Stretch says. “Like da song go, man, ‘Don’t worry. Be happy’”, he laughs. Ron’s true blue work ethic no longer attracts those who see another world of paradise happiness emerging while performing versions of themselves as tropicalized happy objects, “fo wi di real Creole cultcha”, Stretch insists. And the “once in a blue moon” success stories, the lucky ones who have hooked up and into this erratic and discontinuous new world “whatever”, have become the new impulse examples for local kids like Stretch. “Find a beach wife. Be like a tourist, that’s where the easy money is”.

Or take Sweets, one of Stretch's best friends and someone he often tries to emulate. Locals have been shocked and seduced into this new world of chronic capitalist blur, fueled by Belizian tourism, and touched by the threat and promise of the tourist spectacle of a good-life paradise. Sweets used to mix drinks at the "Sunset Bar and Grill", once a lagoon-side bar built several years ago by two middle aged English women after falling in love with Walliceville and with Sweets, and after that they "shared their Sweets" between the two of them. "We get our Sweets every day", Bev chuckled while watching him eagerly mix up drinks and witty conversation with a great big smile for a group of tourists at the bar. Bev calls Sweets her "love toy". Sweets takes an awful ribbing about his lifestyle from many of the local men who would like nothing better than to replace him, or find their own "sweet mommas", even as they recoil in horror from the image of the happy-go-lucky native that goes along with the performance.

Sweets knows to stay in frame. "Life is 'Sweets' that way", he chuckles. And he knows that locals out of costume, out of image, and out of frame are a threat : another arresting image (Stewart 2003a) of local impact. It's as if locals are literally touched by the scene and make themselves its convulsive possession. More than most of the locals I spent time with, Sweets desperately wanted to work on a big yacht that sailed into the bay one day. He saw it as an international pleasure boat, a sign of a magical pleasure world beyond Belize. If he could only get onto the boat he could show everybody how to party "Belizian style" and how sweet life could be with "a spoonful of sweet tenderness" (see Little 2012).

There is material, bodily abjection in this image, but at the same time there is also a vital move to take on this force of abjection with intensity, enough to capture it in the senses as a matter of doing something with it. This is a "dialectics of intoxication". Ann Chvetkovich (2003) calls such a dialectic "traumatic realism" where, on the one hand, a traumatic impact of abject tourist images of locals fails to represent the inflicting force of tourist capitalism as an object in the symbolic order – so locals like Sweets feel compelled to repeat those images over and over. Yet, on the other hand, there is the confidence of locals so constituted, like Sweets, to take on such force as a subject rushing to bear an affect toward some affirmative actualization, to make something out of circumstances. In this sense, Sweets' lack of fullness as a subject, his extreme vulnerability (all those unwarranted hopes and dreams that were conjured by the local success stories) comes not from a disconnection with reality, or from false consciousness, but from the promise of vital connection as he goes with the nervous flow of intoxicated moments of impact. Impacts as intensities like these make the social, whether good or bad. In that zone of tourist encounters, between here and there, Sweets gets high on pleasure with an intoxicated confidence that ricochets wildly between a hard life and a reckless daydream (Little 2010 : 7).

But this all makes Ron gloomy blue as he worries deeply about the transformation of his cherished little village that has gone crazy for an unfolding, episodic, moment of vital impacts that inarticulately skirts the margins of global control society – no clear plans in sight, only the willingness to go with the flow, despite the disappointments, the insults, the rip-offs or the humiliations. And now it's the cruise ships. I caught up to Ron one evening after he had stomped out of another community meeting with the representatives of a leading European cruise ship line. They now have big plans for a beautiful little caye located just down the coast from Wallaceville. They are going to turn the caye into a private investment, an international cruise ship terminal and tourist village : marina, resort hotel, condos, you name it. Ron was more than angry. He was almost in tears and shaking as we walked, feeling deeply "disrespected" because of "the man's 'rass'". The cruise ship rep had just laid into him during the community meeting of nearly 300 people, as he and other locals who were adamant in their opposition to this development project when they were given the chance to lay out their concerns :

"You just don't get it do you!" the Man spit, smiling hard at Ron. He said things like : "You have to separate your emotions from the facts, Ron". "Read the EIA. We have the facts so calm down". "We addressed all your questions". "Once you look at it rationally and understand the improvements in tourist industry investment we will be making you will see 'the long term benefits to the community. That's when I'll say 'welcome aboard Ron'". "Just because you are offended doesn't mean you are right". "Next question please" (see note 2).

But Ron is a nationally trusted naturalist with impressive international credentials and is usually a respected voice of local authority and reason especially when it comes to the world of tourism. He knows what's up and so do the eco-tourist NGOs and some of the other local business people he talks to. He has seen it all before, with the cruise ship Tourism Village fiasco in Belize City.

"I don't know anymore", Ron says grudgingly. "Maybe Stretch and Sweets got it right, Man. Maybe it's all servitude", he sadly admits. "What am I teaching them for? Who we working for? My guess is that these guys will make some kind of public relations gesture to appease the community, maybe some contribution to help with the waste disposal issue in the village, build some schools or hire more local people, pay off the rest. The deal's done, land's been bought, politicians' been paid off, corporate wheels are turning. You can't undo all that, not now, too much everything involved. This meeting was a useless thing. It's their game now", he laughed harshly. We walked up the village sidewalk in silence with the sound of the sea on a warm soft breeze the sun setting, the darker blue of the encroaching nighttime touched Ron's blue mood and he turned bluer than blue.

Wallaceville comes together for Ron through a relay of discontinuous and odd moments like this. In a flash he can trace a litany of such mo-

ments of confusing ambivalence when his trust in a service ethos and practice rubs up against an ever-expanding atmosphere of out-of-control servitude. That's when things either successfully come together for him or things just fall apart, accrued layers of substance building, ebbing or flowing like the waves on the shoreline as Ron struggles to find his blue. Ron is ready to admit that the choices are stark, – service or servitude – but while the two nervous edges touch to form a circuit and a determinate context for the big story that actualizes as the good and bad sides of local political power and tourism capital, a low pressure zone of intensity that forms as a milieu, they are only two edges of an enfolding interface. Ron's stories of service and servitude grow palpable, conjuring rogue trajectories of potentiality, the unqualified possibilities of excess that are those infrastructures of difference forming the contingent space between here and there. This might be the something blue in what fails to work, or gets lost in things, or that might be waiting for a chance to occur; something nascent in the atmosphere that acts as a pressure, as image touching matter and colour touching us, that keeps open spaces of charged-up potentialities and furthers the multiple occasions of blue's actualizing as a presence. But it's that feeling of a new servitude that rubs Ron the wrong way and puts him in contact with the stories about his own family history when 19th century Creole wood cutters were forced into collecting logwood for the British dye industry to make indigo blue : a colour that now indexes the sad and sordid way things feel today for him.

Still there is some odd voluptuous pleasure in Ron's blues, because it is in moments just like these that Ron "gets lost". That's when he disappears out onto his family caye. He never feels better than when he beats a retreat and "escapes". All those boat rides, his social life either before or after him, racing across the shifting blues of the sparkling sea under a brilliant blue sky suspended in the beautiful solitude of a shifting distance. It is here too that Ron finds his blue : in the introspection that provokes his memories of growing up on this water, fishing with his grandfather, the weeks out on the reef working, fixing up the family caye that is now his. The feelings that this transitioning from land to caye conjures is something like an "aching joy", Ron says, when the blue is deepest on the horizon and the clouds are "doing their wispy fleeting thing"; it's one of those things "easier to sense than to explain". That's when Ron can breathe again, the breath of something brooding, to be sure, but also of something inexplicable, beautiful. It's a place where desire floats free.

### Blue, a Sagging Loss

But Ron isn't the only person with some ambivalent blues, although for Doug and Gaile things didn't start out feeling that way at all. It was all vibrant happy holiday blue that seduced them to Belize. But it can become such a heartbreaking intensity. Their tropical early retirement



good life now sags with disappointment and acts as an incitement for their unhappiness and regret as the hues of this seductive daydream blue began to blend into the monotonous hues and tones of their daily life in a disconcerting way – conjuring a dream gone bad and attachments that now feel frayed, a dream world optimism turned dirty blue, mean and nasty –, yet they still have some irresistible cruel attachments to the things that will probably kill them. This seducing scene rubs their senses raw and beckons toward a wretched fade into some contingent combination of sensations that make them both feel blue. It indexes an ex-pat “situation tragedy”, a post-happy moment of sad disappointments (see Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011).

Doug and Gaile really felt like they were into that something wonderful that Belize blue promised. They came from Alberta, out of the oil patch, left it all behind, packed their hopes and dreams for paradise and blew in on a wisp of a warm Caribbean breeze, light and fresh, like a high pressure system. They were looking to find their blue and thought that they had. But it has all become a “bad trip”. Dripping exhaustion in the heavy humidity, mostly they feel a drooping frustration mixed with sadness, shock and incredulity. Their talk these days is always about some local tragedy or about someone recalling a tragedy that recently unfolded and it all conjures local hopes abandoned and dreams once glimpsed now lost.

Like the day that their local Creole neighbors just to the south of them warned Doug and Gaile not to let their building developer destroy their handsome stand of shoreline mangroves. But they needed a dock for their big new boat to go with their big new “beach palace”. Besides, who knew better about local seaside ecology, the locals or the experts? Everything would be just fine, their developer said. But now that their third boat and motor are gone, stolen yet again, they don’t need the dock. They don’t even like to look at the dock. Iguanas, attracted by an old unpruned cashew tree, peacefully occupy it as if moving to the rhythms of a less fractious and sunnier time. Their mess fouls and agitates the once handsome structure that now, ignored, rots away and stinks of green. “A sore spot”, says Doug sadly. “A sour spot”, Gaile laughs bitterly. The mangroves were cut down to put in their dock and the docks of several of their neighbours to the north of them so now their once clear lagoon water has turned into a murky, reeking mess of sulfur smell and floating garbage heaps.

This bolt from the blue is almost more than they both can endure when they look out at the smelly overgrown chaos that almost parallels their lives in paradise. Their lives have become a tropical low pressure zone and the best Doug can offer is a bitter note in a growing ex-pat refrain, “You know”, he says so sadly, “We’re into somethin’ now we really can’t get out of”. Trapped. Growing paranoia and fear, substance fatigue and worn out nerves, a troubled otherside of paradise they didn’t



see coming (Little 2010). They desperately want to sell and get out, but since the 2008 market crash no one's buying and besides, where in the world would they go? They can't leave, even for a break. Leaving the house empty, even with a guard around, means a break in and who could they trust with all of their stuff anyway, a tourist? It's all a profound disorientation. A slumping nightmare, paradise is all about enduring now as some emergent structure of feeling that they can't shake at all. This is the poesis of an on-going present and longing for that dream world bubble that has now popped – and so things become part of that unfolding moment, a state of emergence that makes things aggressive, unsteady and fugitive, the potentializing state of emergency that goes for the everyday for Doug and Gaile and so many others just like them.

So now Doug and Gaile suffer daily through their tropical depression. Who knew their dream world retirement investment would fall apart so easily and so quickly? They have tried their level best to fit into some village ordinary that worked on them originally as the promise of a generic Caribbean cultural seduction, but it turned out to be anything but. They can see it all now as part of their sad refrain, a scene that shocks the growing and nervous exhilaration of local consumer tourist culture in Belize. Along the main road for as far as you can see new ex-pat neighbours are building happy-life gated beach mansions or time-share condo communities, fitted out with golf carts, in internationally financed mega-projects so that there is little public space or comportment left. Cozy holiday and retirement cocooning is where forms of paradise living have become tactile, and the bubble of fantasy life born of commoditized "local Caribbean culture" grows sensuously vibrant in the circulating impacts of a tropical dream world haven and settle in as another arresting image.

But, as Doug and Gaile know now, it all places heavy demands on an image. The holiday retirement house in paradise was meant to guard against the "outside world" with its wild scenes of global crime, chaos, violence, terror, disease, and decay. Doug and Gaile thought that the time was right to escape to this hideaway haven, to revitalize and find renewal and a new purpose in life. Life's little pleasures hooked up to the big picture of a local paradise that settled into a dreamy connection with things, a resurgent image-affect of tourist pleasure mixed with a retirement master plan.

Vitality and happiness unfold as if naturally and effortlessly, but, as they finally figured out, anxiety, fear and the shoreline ebb and flow of bitter disappointments are the grounds over which happiness flows, breaks and flounders when the big-picture dream world implodes under the weight of its own embodiment and plays itself out to the point of nervous exhaustion. A dream world beyond the pale becomes a nightmare (Stewart 2003a). That's when the dream is confronted with its own contradictory and excessive strivings for pleasure and that's when Doug

and Gaile began to ask themselves why they were trying so hard to relax. That's when the panic began to settle in over the fear, and disappointment felt like a growth industry, like the way Massumi describes good food as being the foretaste of heart disease (1993 : 9).

Their beachside, hideaway in paradise first led to a regime of healthier life style choices and a chorus of new therapeutic routines that were supposed to set the controls for beach front happiness. They decided that it was best to keep busy, so they put more effort into stabilizing the dream. They tried to get involved in the community, to help build a cleaner village and proposed plans to deal with vermin, stray dogs, and the garbage. They hooked up with a local NGO eco-tourist, save-the-reefs group too, which Gaile says they poured a fortune into. But it folded up and vanished some time ago along with their investment even though they still get a year-end financial statement and a "thanks for your support" from their main offices in Copenhagen. And, besides, the locals never really got involved in any of these community plans anyway, other than the kids from the local school who showed up on class projects sponsored by the village council to help out in one way or another. But they built their beach dream home and finally, after their second boat and motor vanished, they installed some sophisticated surveillance technology, this time guaranteed to keep the local thieves out. But it didn't. They used to share information about break-ins, protection, cell numbers, who to trust and not to with other ex-pats at their yoga classes or at the soft touch Thai Massage Spa. And they used to play horseshoes with the locals on Saturday afternoons when the Sunset Bar and Grill was still around, making connections with them and feeling good about the positive contact; but even that was a niggling reminder that they were surrounded by a nervous otherness that is never quite assimilated or domesticated, no matter how strong the dream world image of friendly locals was.

But their involvement meant that they were never able to escape the cruel world of local corruption and fear just outside their beautiful beach house and that felt like a betrayal. They know now that you can't buy land or build without some Belizian ripping you off or stealing you blind. No local honours a commitment; contracts are useless. Don't go to the police, things just get worse when you do. Finally, all sorts of fears – of drugs, thieves, corruption, chaos, and unseen dangers – swelled and flexed their muscles. And there they are now, Doug and Gaile, right back where they started, nervously weighing their lives, as the future grows tense and tactile with anxiety and while their abused bodies index sad and sagging lives that have become a "cruel optimism [...] [that] exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing [...] when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (Berlant 2011 : 1). This is the moment when their paradise slipped them into a blue funk.

That's when Doug and Gaile started to "lay low" and that's when they started hanging out more often at the local bars with the other ex-pats just like them, forsaking the therapies and the community investment projects. Now when they think about their place in paradise it's like riding the ups and downs of dread mixed with pleasure, like the pelicans riding the air currents across the water : life reduced to atmospheric pressures. So stick to conversations about the weather. Don't get involved. Make the necessary master plan adjustments. "Don't panic". "That's life". "Take a deep breath". Have another snooze, another drink, another toke. But the spectres of paradise keep reappearing to haunt the dream, like something seen out of the corner of your eye, some blot, unassimilated, and not quite exhausted by what Lacan (1977) calls the Symbolic, or the thing Lyotard (1991) calls the "inhuman" : something monstrous, an abject surge that points to a troubling vulnerability haunting the deep blues of a paradise depression. It's excessive and virtual, nothing you can put your hands on or completely figure out, and it makes both Doug and Gaile sad, nervous, angry, and fearful, but not all at the same time. It's all mixed up with the daily highs of afternoon gossip get-togethers, shopping, and then on to the daily happy hour evenings ducking for cover with friends just like them. They are all oddly located in the ongoing nightmares of paradise, feeling their blues (see Little 2010).

But what now? It's in generative moments of ducking for cover when things get caught in active and reactive circuits, when the sad and sagging trajectories that once held so much promise begin to shift in feeling tone and Doug and Gaile begin to sense the dissolve of a bright blue tone into another much darker one. "That's life", Doug said one afternoon when he was recounting how it was that things always seem to add to other things but never conveniently add up to anything anymore. "It is always something about getting yourself *into* something or getting yourself *out of* something you've gotten yourself into and then onto the next thing (if you are lucky)" (Stewart 2008 : 72). These are the moments, Stewart says, when "something that feels like something throws itself together" (*ibid.*); when Walliceville composes itself for Doug and Gaile as an uncertain and fretful unbecoming.

Still, the rumors about tourist development proliferate at a panic rate locally. Now the rumour is of cruise ships coming into port and flooding the village with thousands of tourists at a time, with no infrastructure in place to accommodate them. "We will be knee-deep in shit", the village council Chair says to me one afternoon after a long troubling council meeting in which he and the other members rehearsed their own survival strategies while considering the imponderables and contingencies of local life heading out of control – yet another register of nervous agitation fed by conspiracy theories about those they know who are "connected" and those who stand to win or lose on future land deals, political influence, and the new tourism village that someone said was going to go in down

at the point, an agreement made by “who knows who from who knows where”. And all of a sudden the image of paradise becomes completely indistinguishable from the commercial globalized world of the tourism industry mixed in with sordid forms of local corruption.

The point is how the virtual and the real have collapsed in on each other, their difference no longer relevant in the state of emergency that is rapidly forming as a generalized condition of paradise capitalism on the margins of empire, teasing and encouraging these new forms of life transformed unmercifully into strategies of survival. But what needs attention is not the ‘big system’ explanatory critiques of commodity mystification, cultural politics of class and race, or the global inequality of advance tourism capitalism overtaking the state of emergency that Belize is becoming.

Life became a series of ill tempered, badly timed moments of social collision and stale, unhealthy routines that have kept Doug and Gaile feeling off balance, worn down, and out-of-synch lately. These days Doug and Gaile feel more than a bit blue. It feels now like the village holds secrets that will never be revealed to ex-pats like them. It’s all about local life going on without them and beyond their control. And all they were trying to do was fit in and help out. But here they sit sipping two-for-one happy hour rum drinks at a local ex-pat beach bar, Gaile softly slurring the lyrics to an Eagles’ song as if the words figured her life now. She is squinting past me, at her bar-side familiars, blurry kindred spirits just like them, and with a sardonic smile she sings along with the others to their new theme song, “*They call it paradise, I don’t know why. You call someplace paradise, Kiss it goodbye*”. Gaile looked at me and finished what she knew of the song as if it really meant something to her, like a forecast she wishes now that she and Doug had been able to read better than they did. “*Some rich men came and raped the land. Nobody caught ’em. Put up a bunch of ugly boxes, and Jesus, people bought ’em. And they called it paradise. The place to be*”. And the title of the song, *The Last Resort*, doesn’t help matters much. It seemed to reach into the assembled ex-pat nervous system of the bar as a crazy kind of sickening impulse that they all feel intensely if not all at the same time or exactly in the same way. They are all deliriously riffing on some vibe of last resorts. They each have their ups and downs and that means that there are some who can laugh at the lyrical ironies. But this time Doug and Gaile just look at each other, drinking and drowning from the inside (here) out (there). Gossip and rum stabilize the grief.

They feel local eyes scanning them daily and sense the crazy changes that are transforming the image of paradise they “bought into” for some fitful, cartel-driven, corrupt and out-of-control chaos. “They’re all thieves and drug addicts”, Gaile rasps, talking about the politicians, as she lights up another Colonial, struggling to keep herself perched on her bar stool while trying to finish up her early evening drinks, before she and

Doug stumble home feeling flush-faced and soggy damp, worn out and tanked again, preparing themselves for yet another bumpy night to the echoes of street laughter that they are sure is mockery directed at them : it's all the background sound that indexes popping bubbles and that encourages another hit of cheap rum, what the locals call "blue ruin", until breathless with gloom they both fall into a broken slumber. It's a sad joke, and they feel like they are wearing it. And they are not alone.

It is the atmospheric pressure of that space between here and there, created of that interstitial distance, that milieu of those affective intensities; it's the blue skin and the blue lips of a nervousness jumping from feeling crazy to sensing fear that feeds Doug and Gaile with an aching sadness becoming their dominant mode of attention. The blues happen when you forget how to breathe. Here in the generative modality of a discontinuous assemblage of incommensurate yet potentializing sensations something like blue feelings and impulses throw themselves together, composing a kind of rhythm to a desperate journey of connections that move for Doug and Gaile from blue dusk to a nightmare darkness of despair, from those happy blues and early days in paradise to the cruelty of sad and sagging attachments – and that's when some *whatever* jumps into form to feel like something, for better or for worse.

### The Light That Gets Lost at Its Distant Edges

Scenes of blue throw themselves together as potentializing forces creating moments when assemblages of incommensurate things, exchanges, linkages, sensations, and publics compose themselves as atmospheric pressures, as a co-constitution of things blue that begin to feel like something good or bad or odd or rogue, or eerie or completely off the scale. Each blue scene is an attunement, a "worlding refrain" (Stewart 2010b). Here Walliceville is a space of unfolding where some active generativity of things takes hold and forms as a state of emergence in a state of emergency that hits the senses and makes bodies jumpy, unstable – makes them shift, just as they may begin to feel adaptable, resourceful, ideal, useful or not. Each scene feels like something bodies get themselves into, comfortably or not, for a short time or for what feels like an eternal hell. It's full-on enthusiastic immersion or a nervous twitching that skitters along the edges of things, composing as impact scenes. And then it's something else, like a dream or a kind of bailing on a dream : that feeling of being abandoned by the world or seduced by those who become the "trust investments" or examples worth emulating. Things all depend on the lively entanglements of affect and attention, matter and flesh : a virtual to actual move that always leaks.

This writing is my augmented refrain, a materialist semiotics attuning itself as a practice that drifts from its trajectories in order to track moments of encounter, or as it morphs while attending to things that add to yet never actually add up. Rather than develop a repre-

sentationalist understanding of the significance of blue in its various contexts and as a container of hidden systemic political and economic operations, I press in on moments of blue contact, impact and intensities that form as emergent atmospheric pressures. I turn to the eventfulness that erupts out of connections and couplings of singular, virtual, potentializing qualities of blue actualizing worlds through a relay of sensations tracked as generative modalities of seductions, vitalities, attachments, wishes, nightmares, encounters, successes and failures, for better and for worse.

It's not so much about signifying as it is about tracking a moment of intensifying, a worlding augmentation of its own. What is significant about blue in Belize is less vital than carefully attending to the ways in which blue materializes, emerges, attunes and attaches as innumerable linkages and flows of proliferating, everyday village life compositions or expressions of things actualizing. I press in on provocations of blue forces, arbitrary scenes of living that conjure compositions of life in hues and feeling tones of blue intensity, which enable atmospheric pressures that are the sensing modes of living as they come into being : obstinate, struggling, restless, promissory, across real and imaginary social fields, shifting lifestyles, weird circumstances, and states of immersion. Such provocations are posed by forces of material indeterminacy with forces of living bodies by efforts of networks, assemblages, territories, and temporalities that impede indeterminacy enough to extract from it something intensifying, a performative organization of blue hues and feeling tones, a generative coherence of forces that seduces and enables life and next steps.

## Notes

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2. All place and personal names have been changed. This is done as a sign of respect for the local friends who have asked for anonymity and for the coastal village council with whom I was in close consultation during the fieldwork and writing portions of my long-term research in Belize. It is their wish to remain anonymous, personally and as a village. Some events are composites and all personal and place names have been changed, but all direct quotes are actual speech acts.

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## Abstract

This is the story of how blue becomes an emergent, world making force of life in Walliceville, Belize. It is a story of attachments to scenes and objects of desire that sustain life in that village, about how blue takes material and imaginative form in the way it pulls some consistency of forces, sensibilities, and materialities into alignment to become the generative textures and rhythms of life in a place going crazy for tourists. My story tracks an eventfulness that erupts out of connections expressing qualities of blue that actualize worlds through a relay of encounters and are sensed through a sustained engagement with the seductive and recalcitrant materiality of that color. It also asks how ethnographic writing may be construed as an act of attuning that wavers from its trajectories to follow stories of blue encounters while attending to things that add to even if they never add up.

## Résumé

Voici une histoire du bleu qui raconte comment cette couleur devient une force de vie émergente et créative du monde à Walliceville, Belize. C'est une histoire d'attachement aux scènes et aux objets de désir qui nourrissent la vie dans ce village et concerne la façon dont le bleu prend des formes matérielles et imaginatives, tirant une certaine cohérence des forces, des sensibilités et des matérialités de la vie, en s'enlignant sur ses textures génératives et ses rythmes, dans un lieu qui raffole des touristes. Nous suivons ainsi de nombreux événements découlant de connexions diverses qui expriment les qualités du bleu et qui actualisent des mondes à travers un relais de rencontres vécues grâce à un engagement soutenu avec la matérialité récalcitrante et séductrice de cette couleur. Mon récit questionne également l'écriture ethnographique en examinant comment elle peut devenir un acte d'harmonisation du sens où, via diverses trajectoires narratives reliées à une expérience du bleu, il devient possible de suivre des histoires multiples qui ajoutent à notre compréhension bien qu'elles ne s'additionnent jamais dans un tout aux frontières déjà délimitées.

KENNETH LITTLE is Associate Professor of Anthropology at York University. His current research focuses on the analysis of society as spectacle, visual cultures, and popular cultural performance in both Euro-American and postcolonial societies. He has an abiding interest in European circus and is now conducting research on the rise of the tourist state in Belize focussing on the way tourism has become an important modality through which everyday life in neoliberal Belize's is organized. This research shows how local touristic encounters open imaginative spaces which stimulate new modes of fixation and harmony, putting in evidence new aspects of social relations and interactions, assuring actively new "fantasies of becoming" in this country.