TEMPORALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND DECAY IN THE WHITSUNDAYS (QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA)

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The Whitsundays comprises an archipelago of 74 islands and an adjacent coastal strip located in the north-east corner of the Australian state of Queensland. The region has been occupied for (at least) 9000 years, initially (for 98.5% of that duration) by Indigenous Australians. In the early 1900s European settlers arrived and rapidly depleted, dispossessed and displaced the local population and introduced tourism as a major local industry. These developments occurred in synchrony with (and contributed to the ascension of) the Anthropocene. Any overview of human inhabitation of the region, and of related senses of history and temporality, thereby has to acknowledge two distinct moments, one of a major duration and the other, the briefest contemporary flicker. This article attempts to explore patterns of contrast and similarity across these two very different time scales and the populations involved and to consider how the contemporary epoch reflects humans' role in shaping the (rapidly changing) environment. Temporality is thereby a key concern, and the article explores various notions of time and of cyclicity, including those concerning patterns of climatic development and of human responses to these. The research informing the paper also has a temporal dimension, having occurred over a thirty-year period during which many changes have occurred in the region and its weather patterns. The speeds of development and decay observed in some areas and the relative stasis of others provide key motifs for the discussions that follow.

Keywords: speed, temporality, development, decay, tourism, Whitsundays

INTRODUCTION

Chris Marker's 1983 film *Sans Soleil* (known in English as *Sunless*) is a richly complex exploration of what the narrator contends is the "great question" of the 20th century, namely

"the coexistence of different concepts of time" and how we can make sense of these. Marker's film attempts to explore this question through an impressionist collage of scenes from around the planet that attempt to show how time is perceived differently in locales as diverse as the Cape Verde Islands of the North Atlantic, urban Japan and – in a sumptuous, sun-drenched image that opens the film – Iceland. Marker was "ahead of the curve" in his contention about concepts of time and a pronounced temporal "turn" in Humanities research did not manifest itself until the 2010s. My own sustained consideration of this topic commenced in the mid-1990s and uncurled in synchrony with the development of the "turn." In my research I have been concerned to explore temporal issues with regard to human mobility and social experience in particular terrestrial-aquatic assemblages and, hence, to explore the characteristics and dynamics of such places. One of my enduring study sites, which I have returned to at various times over the last thirty years, has been the Whitsundays, an area off the north-eastern tip of the Australian state of Queensland comprising 74 islands and a coastal strip around the town of Airlie Beach which serves as a shore base for tourists visiting the islands[1] (Figure 1). The area is spectacularly beautiful, with densely wooded bays, peninsulas and islands scattered across typically azure waters (Figure 2). While some islands – such as Daydream, Hamilton and Hayman – have been extensively developed, the majority are relatively pristine components of the Whitsunday Islands National Park, an entity that has expanded in size to encompass over 96% of the archipelago since the state protection of individual islands commenced in the late 1930s (Queensland Government [n.d.]). The traditional owners of the region are the Ngaro people, and archaeological evidence shows that Indigenous people have inhabited the area for over (and possibly well over) 9,000 years (Barker 2004).[2] While the original Ngaro name for the area is unknown, it is of more than passing significance for this article that its European name is a calendar designation. Like many areas along Australia's eastern coast, the Whitsundays were named by the English mariner Captain James Cook during an exploratory voyage undertaken in 1770. The designation was bestowed when he sailed between the islands and shore on what he believed to be Whit Sunday (the seventh Sunday after the Christian Easter festival, held to be the day on which the holy spirit descended upon Christ's followers following his crucifixion). Illustrating the complexities of transferring European calendar dates – and/or religious associations – to the other side of the planet, he actually arrived there a day later (according to European chronological standards) (Blackwood 1997: 223–224), on Whit Monday, a less celebrated but still notable date in the Christian calendar, but one that was equally of zero relevance to the indigenous inhabitants of the region.

[1] Airlie Beach has more in common with the resort islands than nearby towns such as Proserpine or Bowen, which still rely on declining primary industries.

[2] We cannot say with any degree of certainty that the Ngaro people have inhabited the locale for 9,000 years, as some tourist literature implies, since archaeological records cannot confirm that the Indigenous population of the region at the time of European incursion are direct descendants of earlier Indigenous occupants.

Figure 1. Map of the Whitsunday archipelago and adjacent coast (Google Maps, 2022).

Figure 2. The Whitsunday coast and adjacent islands viewed from Honeyeater Lookout, above Airlie Beach (author's photo, July 2021).

I opened this essay with reference to *Sans Soleil* since its collage-based approach to exploring notions of time across a broad set of locations resembled my own – far more modest – address to a specific locale. In observing, documenting and reflecting on a range of places, institutions and incidents across the Whitsundays I was also inspired by the grand project that James Clifford launched from a visit to an old Russian settlement on the coast of California in his conceptual tour-de-force "Fort Ross Meditation" (1998: 299–348). Considering the fate of the site since it was abandoned by its Russian founders, Clifford *pulls-back* (to use a cinematic term), to speculate on ever-wider vistas of temporal – and even trans-species' – experience in the area. His reflections consider the profound ecological changes that have occurred in an era that had not become commonly referred to as the Anthropocene when he wrote the text. In one memorable passage Clifford (1998: 332–335) speculates on what perceptions Californian sea otters may have of environmental change in the region. While there are no otters in the warm Whitsunday waters, I received a jolt that set me on a similar conceptual path while swimming early one morning in Catseye Bay, on Hamilton Island. Wading into the shallows and starting to swim, I saw that what I had thought were rocks were, in fact, thin cartilaginous fish known as rays resting on the white sands. I immediately turned and swam as gently as possible to shore, fascinated by their presence but worried as to the danger of their barbs if I brushed against them. The close encounter stayed with me as a motif of the co-existence of the old, "untamed" Whitsundays in close proximity to one of the most developed sites in the region. I sensed vividly that the rays basked as they had for aeons while the moment of the resort's construction and inhabitation was the briefest temporal flicker in a longer perspective.

In glimpsing and embracing this "big picture" view of local history (then and now), I am – like Clifford – trying to gain a deep perspective on what can otherwise appear as an *over-compelling* and *overly deterministic* "short past." Here I converge with others who have returned to Braudel's concept of the *longue* durée in a manner that stresses intersectionality and the heterarchical nature of components involved (see, for example, various contributors to Ray and Fernández-Götz 2019). Presenting papers on the Whitsundays in the 1990s, I experienced a sense of irritation and insistent "nowism" from peers similar to the scenario that Guldi and Armitage (2014: 82) colourfully described whereby:

> As the Short Past came to dictate conversations about history, longue-durée understanding began to look, by contrast, like an antique mode of story-telling, something performed only by patriarchs or amateurs, unsuited to a modern student adept at using evidence or argument. This led to the charge that social history had abandoned all interest in politics, power, and ideology, leading its practitioners instead to "sit somewhere in the stratosphere, unrooted in reality"... Increasingly, the Short Past was defined as not only one way to look at history, but the only way to look at history.

Engagement with – rather than simple obeisance to – *longue durée* perspectives allows us to engage with broad vistas of socio-political and biocultural stability and change, the multiple "horizontal" factors that determine these and the complex and multiple chronologies involved. This is particularly important for considering the short term against the long since, as Sawyer has contended, the scope of the Anthropocene actively requires us to attend to:

> what our new human geological age means for the interaction of the multiple temporalities of the short, medium and the longue durée, or precisely how political and economic events and decisions interact with the climate and nature to generate a new kind of historical narrative. From this perspective what is needed is not simply a reconsideration of the role of man [sic] in climate change and the relationship between the natural and cultural, but a somewhat mind-bending reorientation of the temporal scales that makes up a sophisticated historical method. (Sawyer 2015: 8)

I attempt to pursue these points in what follows and also to acknowledge that the Anthropocene is not just a now, it is also a past (and a heritage) and a future, even though the fine details and extended trajectories of the latter are – necessarily – fluid.

THE WHITSUNDAYS' *LONGUE DURÉE*

The pre-Anthropocene history of the Whitsundays is premised on extended cycles of retreat and advance between sea and shore as polar areas variously accumulate water in their ice caps and release it back into the planet's interconnected oceans. As a result, the area saw both periods of relative stasis and significant changes that created modern land- and sea-scapes and patterns of human inhabitation of them. The most major changes occurred during the prolonged thaw that followed what is known as the last Glacial Maximum of the Pleistocene Era, around 20,000 years ago, with de-glaciation and related sea-level rise continuing until sea levels stabilised at close to their current position around 6,000 years ago. But despite the protracted time period of the deglaciation event it is unlikely that the Indigenous population of the Whitsunday region would have experienced it as a gradual, almost imperceptible process that transformed a landscape of valleys and high hills into one of islands and peninsulas. Recent archaeological and geological research has, by contrast, indicated that "inundation would have happened in fits and starts, with periods of rapid flooding as thresholds were crossed and tipping points reached" (Leary 2015: 39). The fragmentation of polar ice sheets[3] resulted in a sudden periods of "catastrophic global sea-level rise" accelerated by "meltwater pulse events" that rapidly raised sea levels and prompted sudden climatic shifts (Leary 2015: 39).

It is impossible to know what consciousness the Indigenous inhabitants of the region had of this transition – and/or whether popular memory or ancestral stories retained impressions of the changes that had occurred – but the serial immersion of lowlands would, at least, have created the sense of an extended dynamic event with its own periodic "milestones" as particular isthmuses became firstly covered at low-tide and then permanently covered, islanding landscape features and creating an archipelago. Considering the impact such changes may have had on the human inhabitants of "Northsealand" (an

[3] The ice-covered areas in question extended considerably at peak Glacial Maximum than their current extent.

area in what is now the North Sea between Britain and Northern Europe) that occurred in a similar period, Jim Leary has contended that:

> To those engaging with the coastal environment, change and dynamism are part and parcel of what it is. By actively engaging with the environment people were also immersed in the changes that took place; indeed the changes were an intimate part of their day-to-day lives, and people's relationship with the world was a dynamic one. (Leary 2015: 110)

However rapidly changes in sea-levels occurred, the effects were the same. In the Whitsundays, seasonal migration paths and local foraging routes that were once pedestrian trails would require first wading through shallows and, progressively, recourse to canoes to cross increasingly wide stretches of water to reach areas where particular fruits or nuts grew and/or where important resources such as ochre deposits could be found (Barker 2004).

Things stabilised around 6,000 years ago. The serial changes in terrain, areas of seafloor and means of accessing them gave way to stability, and it appears that the Indigenous community inhabited (what was by then) an archipelago in a pattern of seasonal migration from islands to shore. During this period, their intensive exploitation of marine resources created an *aquapelago* in the area: a socially constructed assemblage of marine and terrestrial elements for livelihood purposes (Hayward 2012; Suwa 2012). This – in all likelihood – modified individuals' and community senses of what it was to inhabit this area. After what appears to have been a prolonged period of fruitful existence within this assemblage (Barker 2004), a new disruption manifested itself in the form of the European colonists who first entered the region in the 1800s. The new arrivals arbitrarily claimed and seized common lands and massively depleted the Indigenous Ngaro population through violence, dispossession and transmission of diseases that the local population had no resistance to. While the flora and fauna of many of the islands remained essentially the same in the colonial period, it was a time of alienation and exile for the Indigenous community. Indeed, the settlers' moment of arrival started the clock of what one local informant once described to me as the "*White*sundays."

The rupture of dispossession was vividly brought home to me when I visited Nara Inlet, on Hook Island, in Winter 2011 with a group of Ngaro women and a party of Island Studies researchers who were in Airlie Beach for a conference that I had organised.[4] The inlet is an important Ngaro heritage site as the rock walls at the far end of the inlet feature paintings that substantially pre-date European colonial seizure of the region. For the Ngaro women it was a rare and emotional experience as transport from the mainland to Hook Island is costly and somewhat difficult to arrange for those without their own boats or comfortable finances. It was, thereby, a privilege to be with them but also a sharp reminder of their dispossession and of the whiteness of the area, with expensive yachts bobbing in the inlet and with human inhabitation of the island now prohibited by its national park designation.

[4] The annual conference of SICRI (the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative) was held in Airlie Beach in June 2021.

The past was almost tangible in this context, a sense that we were floating on the other side of a misty but nonetheless impenetrable historical veil between two periods.

Considerations of the commencement of one period and sensibility within a *longue durée* of the type that I sketch above involves a particular concept of discontinuity – a rupture from what is referred to in some Pacific cultures as the *taim bipo*[5] (i.e. a "time before" colonisation) that implicitly suggests the present as a "time after". This notion of rupture is one that has been questioned by various theorists of history and temporality. Reflecting on what she refers to as the "shape of history," for instance, Penelope Corfield (2007) contended that history is "braided" and identified three interleaved dimensions of it: continuity, gradual change and turbulent transition. There is much in this but – to extend the allusion – braids have multiple filaments and some can be sheared without the collapse of overall historical "ropes". There is also the question of temporal heterogeneities, discontinuities and "misfits", to return to Marker's aforementioned contention about "the coexistence of different concepts of time" – aspects played out in his film and in my research experience in the region in terms of residues and traces.

As previously sketched, the temporal turn in Humanities research suggests that singular, linear histories based on assumptions of simple causalities are increasingly inadequate to characterise particular phenomena. This sits somewhat awkwardly with the predominantly spatial and often ahistorical orientation of interdisciplinary Island Studies[6] and, more broadly with geographical studies of islands, in which their distinct spatiality (and characterisations, assumptions and contentions about this) has been fundamental. Such a focus notably contrasts to a key aspect of the concept of the aquapelago, a particular type of integrated terrestrial and aquatic assemblage generated by human livelihood activities. Rather than being fixed, as an archetypal island is, these can be considered to "come into being and wax and wane as climate patterns alter and as human socio-economic organisations, technologies, and/or the resources and trade systems they rely on, change and develop in these contexts" (Hayward 2012: 7). We can also extend the characterisation of the waxing and waning of aquapelagic assemblages to tourism activities that form part of some of them. The most obvious point of reference here is to Butler's 1980 tourism lifecycle model (expanded and deployed by various contributors to Butler 2006), which posits a generally predictable pattern of growth, stagnation and decline in tourism destinations. As he contends, tourism attractions (of various kinds) "are not infinite and timeless but should be viewed and treated as finite and possibly non-renewable resources" (Butler 1980: 11). A further point of reference is the emerging interest in infrastructural time, i.e. "the tangle of contested futures and memories attached to infrastructural projects" and the "implications of different temporalities of infrastructure – promised, abandoned, unfinished" (Bachmann et al. 2022: 3). While much work on

[5] A Papua New Guinean pidgin term used in various contexts.

[6] Represented by organisations such as ISISA – The International Small Island Studies Association and SICRI – the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative and elaborated in publications such as *Island Studies Journal*, the *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, the *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies* and *Shima*.

this topic has addressed state-funded projects in parts of the Global South, and their patterns of development, decline and (sometimes) renewal over short periods, the focus is equally pertinent for tourism infrastructure developed by commercial operations. If we superimpose Butler's tourism lifecycle model over the patterns of cyclic development and decay intrinsic to studies of infrastructural time, decay *always* looms on the horizon, providing a temporal "reality check" to the free-floating realm of endless, idyllic vacation time central to tourism marketing.

While it has not been at the forefront of debate, one concept particularly relevant to histories of mobility, tourism and related transitions in island and archipelagic locales is speed. In this context, it is worth considering the etymology of the word. While speed may nowadays be simply understood as velocity, the term (as embodied in the traditional salutation to a departing person, "Godspeed") has more complex elements, including a sense of speed being a luxury. The term derives from the Old English word *spēd*, meaning prosperity and good fortune.[7] At a time when travel over protracted distances was arduous and potentially dangerous, speedy transit was highly desirable. But speed is a very particular experience. Increased speediness of transit necessarily results in shorter durations of experience of terrestrial, marine or aerial spaces in between departure and end points. Similarly, as speed increases, there is a pronounced blurring of visual perception and of distortion of and/or disengagement from of olfactory, tactile or taste impressions of places passed through. As such, speed may be enjoyable, in terms of the aesthetic experience of rapid movement through scapes, but it sets the traveller apart from them. In air travel, in particular, the velocities achieved over extended distances distort our diurnal rhythms and senses of space-time – most obviously manifested in jetlag but also by the cognitive jarring that can result from moving between a metropolis and a quiet, remote island (for instance) in a fraction of a day. For example, I can have lunch in Sydney and dinner on Daydream Island on the same day, traversing the 1550 kilometres between in under 5 hours by jet and fast ferry. This, of course, can be a source of satisfaction for time-poor travellers. The luxury of speed is also connected with cocooning during such transit. High-speed travel is costed at a premium and premium passengers also require comfort. Slow travel – at present, at least, in a speed-orientated world – is more often associated with discomfort, such as infrequent and/or arbitrary refreshment stops, uncomfortable seats and/or sleepless overnight transits.

The terms "slow travel" and "slow tourism" have entered the lexicon of tourism journalism and academic study in recent years. Although somewhat ambiguous (Guiver and McGrath 2016), slow travel refers to a practice in which the distance between home and destination is not simply a hindrance to be overcome as rapidly as possible, while slow tourism refers to a type of tourism that is more concerned with sustained engagement with places rather than relentless transit through an itinerary of experiences to be "ticked off". It is worth emphasising that the two are not necessarily complementary. Many tourists who enjoy

[7] See, for instance, the detailed etymological discussion online at: https://www.etymonline.com/word/speed (accessed 11 June 2022).

slow, engaged experiences in destinations like to get to them as quickly and seamlessly as possible, seeing the maximum period of time at the destination as a priority. Others such as (but not limited to) road trip motorists, train enthusiasts, hikers and sailors, may enjoy the experience of the route, the exercise of various competencies involved and surprises encountered as keys aspects of the vacation. While there is a *Cittaslow* movement dedicated to the fine grain of distinct local urban experiences (Radstrom 2011), slow travel/tourism is often more closely associated with rural and/or regional destinations. Complicating matters, "3S" orientated tourism (sand, sea, sun) and its variant "4S" (with sex added) is often slow paced and focussed on limited locations (the hotel, the beach, the bar, the club)[8] but usually involves transporting visitors to such destinations as quickly as possible. Unlike "slow tourism", 3/4S tourism largely occupies a generic sub-/tropical space where local difference is incidental colouration rather than the essence of visitor experience.

In the next section I engage with temporality to produce an overview of the activity that has occurred in the Whitsundays over the last century and the different speeds and trajectories and senses of time that have determined and currently reflect patterns of development and decay within it. I profile this *busyness* and the various velocities of tourism delivery mechanisms that serve it as a snapshot of the Anthropocene present that presages and actively utters in an Anthropocene future that is likely to be as dramatic as the thaw that followed the last Glacial Maximum around 20,000 years ago and delivered the present-day landscape of the region.

THE CONTEMPORARY WHITSUNDAYS

At the beginning of the 20th century the islands and adjacent shore of the Whitsunday region were sparsely populated, with no towns and with minimal modern amenities. The area was an exotic, sub-tropical frontier for those inhabitants of Australia's major urban centres (Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane) who had any sense of its existence. Tourism commenced in the Whitsundays in the late 1920s with the development of small, proto-resort facilities with dormitory rooms and outside amenities on Lindeman and Saint Bees islands and with the staging of wildlife exploration camps in the summers of 1928/29 and 1930/31. In its early days, travel to and tourist experiences on the islands were slow and often *ad hoc* activities. The early summer camps, in particular, attracted patrons from Sydney and other parts of New South Wales, many of who travelled north on extended journeys by train, bus and boat that could take 3-4 days. This occurred at a time when the islands were also, notably, an interzone between different cultural spheres. While the indigenous Ngaro community had been almost totally removed from their islands by the mid-20th century, the Whitsundays were regularly visited by Torres Strait Islanders crewing on luggers, often captained by Japanese, who were harvesting trochus shells and

[8] See Lencek and Bosker (1998) for an overview of this type of tourism.

trepang (sea cucumber). There are several accounts of contacts between these crews and tourists in which they entertained each other with songs and dances from their respective cultures (Hayward 2001: 30–41). For the crews concerned, such interactions provided (no doubt welcome) interruptions to intensive work experiences on small vessels. For visitors, the overall experiences on the islands were "time out" from busy metropolitan life in which normal daily schedules were irrelevant and where late night revelry (or romance) could be easily accommodated in an exotic context (Hayward 2001: 16–17, 20–21).

Leisure sailing began to develop in the Whitsundays from the mid-late 1930s on, with the multiple islands and inlets and bays of the coast offering shelter and attractive moorings for vacationers wishing to idle through the archipelago. After an interruption during the Pacific phase of World War Two (1941–45), sailing grew steadily in the region, in line with a post-War economic boom that brought it into the range of middle as well as upper class holidaymakers. While the Australian economy faltered in the 1980s, sailing continued to flourish in the Whitsundays in the 1980s-1990s and became a cultural marker of the region. One sphere this was apparent in was popular song and, in particular, a cross-association of Whitsunday waterborn vacations and the representation of Caribbean recreational sailing most manifest in the work of US singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett. Buffett's 1977 album *Changes in Attitudes, Changes in Latitudes* remains an iconic expression of what might be termed "yachtie hedonism" and includes Buffett's best-known song "Margaritaville", a paean to the tequila-based cocktail, boozy hedonism and lazy summers on the water. The song's overall theme is crystallised in the lines "don't know the reason/stayed here all season" and its affectionate recognition that the vocal protagonist is "wasting away" in the fictional location of "Margaritaville." The song, and these lyrics in particular, highlight the luxury of idleness, of lazy pleasure as goal in itself, as a state of mind where a (summer) season can be allowed to pleasantly unfold without purpose. The song was highly popular in the Whitsunday bar scene and in outside concert contexts in the 1980s and 1990s (Hayward 2001: 111–112) and its sentiments were echoed in the work of local Whitsunday songwriters such as Norm Clayton and John Hickey. Hickey's contributions to the Shipmates' album *Warm Whitsunday Isle* (1984), for instance, combined the (generalistic) hedonism of Buffett's work with a careful address to Whitsunday locations and routes. Hickey's composition "Shadows in the Sand' exemplifies this, charting a route north from Brampton Island through locations such as Cumberland Reef and Solway Passage. The type of yachting and harbourside leisure celebrated in the aforementioned songs, the unhurried and elastic sense of time, the costs of the marine technology involved and the financial security that could allow a significant amount of time spent on them, all indicate the participants as economically privileged and as living easy (even if only for a short duration).

While the yacht-based tourism described above is a form of slow indulgent meandering, other developments in the Whitsundays in the post-War period were more concerned with speed and efficiency. In 1948, the Roylen company, based in Mackay (to the south of the Whitsunday coast), started running cruises through the Whitsundays and up to the southern fringes of the Great Barrier Reef on a converted ex-navy motor launch. The company

subsequently purchased Brampton Island resort and provided reliable and relative speedy transit for tourists on its vessels. But in terms of ease and comfort of travel, the local apex was set by the Royal Hayman Hotel. The resort was established on Hayman Island in 1950, funded by Reginald Ansett, an entrepreneur who made his fortune by developing road and air transport services. Designed as an upmarket resort, the island exploited the speed/comfort nexus by being initially served by flying boats that comfortably conveyed guests to the island where they were met at the jetty by a small train that would carry their luggage up to the resort. Travel time to and from the destination thereby became more predictable and the set meal times and evening entertainment slots at the resort were in marked contrast to the freewheeling camps of previous years.

In terms of ease of access, the Hamilton Island resort, which opened in phases in 1982–86, went one better by having its own airport. Prior to its opening, the only airport into the region was located near Proserpine, 40 km northwest of Airlie Beach. Arriving passengers would have to take a 45 minute bus trip to Airlie Beach and, if transiting to the islands, another 12km trip on to Shute Harbour, the mainland ferry terminal for trips to the islands. Hamilton Island airport was initially a landing strip constructed to service visitors staying on the island but quickly developed as a regional travel hub. Many passengers arrived to transit on to other island resorts, such as Daydream or South Molle islands, or through to Airlie Beach, with a dedicated ferry and cruise company – named Fantasea – being established to service them (and being succeeded by Cruise Whitsundays company in 2012). The advantages of the island-based facility over Proserpine airport[9] and the lengthy bus trip(s) involved in getting to the island ferry terminal from the latter, led to Hamilton Island airport catering for up to 500,000 passengers per year by the mid-2010s. The shifting of the mainland ferry operation to the islands from Shute Harbour to newly constructed facilities at Airlie Beach in 2014 allowed for quicker access between the latter and the islands but still left Hamilton Island airport in a dominant position.

The Whitsunday's "golden period" in terms of tourism numbers occurred in the 1980s-1990s but a series of factors served to undermine the popularity of the destination, including the increase of cheap travel options for Australians to other warm weather destinations, such as Bali, and a general decline in international tourists to Australia in the early 2000s. While the latter reversed in the 2010s, the region was not a marked beneficiary of the recovery, due, in substantial part, to the lack of an international airport in the area. As a result of declining numbers of patrons, owner/investor hesitancy in investing during such a market phase, and related factors, many island resorts, and particularly smaller island ones, were frequently perceived as "tired" and in need of refurbishment in the 2010s (even prior to the arrival of COVID and its multiple disruptions),[10] fitting the "stagnation" and "decline" phases of Butler's 1980 tourism lifecycle model.

[9] Also referred to as Whitsunday Coast airport.

[10] This is reflected in various Tripadvisor reviews of individual resorts in the period, anecdotal comments made to me by tourists and residents alike during my research in the region and my own experience of various island resorts.

In terms of the temporal phases and cycles explored in this essay, the stagnation/decline phase of regional tourism was reached fairly rapidly,[11] in 50-70 years. Indeed, in many cases, the decline rapidly transitioned to a phase not specified by Butler (but, nevertheless, implicit in his framework), namely decay. Decay has been an enduring companion to development in the Whitsundays since its earliest days in various forms. One is climatic. While generally warm and welcoming,[12] the commonly high humidity and the pronounced wet season in January-March means that vegetation grows rapidly and any property not maintained can be afflicted by damp and/or be rapidly "reclaimed" by local flora. Seasonal cyclones are also regular features. Australia is one of the most cyclone-prone areas of the planet, and north-eastern Queensland is the most cyclone prone area of Eastern Australia (Australian Bureau of Meteorology 2016). While earlier cyclones (such as Cyclone Yasi in 2011) caused some damage to resorts, the most significant weather event to impact island resorts and to rapidly accelerate decay was Cyclone Debbie in 2017. Here we confront the Anthropocene (and debates concerning the Anthropocene).

The Anthropocene is a recently recognised era often identified as commencing in the mid 20th century[13] when human impacts on the planetary environment, and particularly its atmosphere, temperature levels and climate became apparent. While climate change denialists dispute whether a number of recent changes in climate and global temperatures have been human-induced, there is little doubt that there have been several striking changes to global weather patterns in recent decades that accord with predictions offered by Anthropocene theorists. In Australia and internationally there have been a series of extreme events: record-breaking floods, heat spikes, massive fire seasons etc. Indeed, if these do not represent the Anthropocene at work, then the current period of pronounced climatic instability still merits identification as a notable phenomenon. Cyclone Debbie exemplifies this. While 17 cyclones passed directly through the Whitsundays between 1970 and 2014, two patterns have emerged in the region in the last decade. First, the frequency of cyclones has been declining and second, the intensity of those occurring is more extreme (CoastAdapt 2018). While no cyclones impacted the Whitsundays in 2015–2016, Cyclone Debbie, in 2017, exceeded all previous events in terms of its force and destructive impact. Classed as a Category 4 system (on a scale of 1-5), the cyclone's winds reached a peak of 215 km/h with gusts as high as 250 km/h, accompanied by torrential rain. Storm surge waters inundated low-lying coastal areas, severely damaging shore establishments such as Laguna Quays and the Shute Harbour Motel. In the archipelago, Brampton and South Molle Island resorts were so badly damaged that they remain closed. Other resort islands such as Daydream, Hamilton and Hayman sustained significant damage but have since been repaired.

[11] All things being relative – parts of China's Ocean Flower artificial island resort in Hainan being scheduled for demolition only a year after the resort complex opened (Yu et al. 2022).

[12] Air temperatures currently average around 29-30 ° C in Summer and 22-23 ° C in Winter and sea temperatures remain around 25 ° C all year round.

[13] Some accounts place it as far back as the agricultural revolution of c15,000 years ago when humans began to profoundly alter landscapes and vegetation patterns but much more recent dates, from the start of the Industrial Revolution to the start of atmospheric nuclear bomb testing in the 1950s are more widely accepted.

Out on the islands and around Airlie Beach, damaged and decaying leisure facilities are plainly evident (e.g. Figure 3)[14] and, indeed, have been the subject of a number of TV and print media news features (e.g. Taylor 2019; Smith, 2019). While none of the latter have characterised them in this manner, the abandoned amenities can be considered Anthropocene heritage artefacts. As I have argued elsewhere (Hayward 2021), heritage is more than the mere commemoration of valued objects and practices endorsed in mechanisms such as UNESCO's world heritage listings. Heritage can also alert us to human errors, catastrophes and systematically damaging processes. With reference to UNESCO's world heritage criteria, these cautionary aspects are also irreplaceable elements of the past and present that offer us significant lessons for the future (UNESCO). Ruins play a part here. As Macaulay (1953) has asserted, ruins and the process of decay that generate them are just as much a part of the meaningful existence of artefacts and institutions as their first, fresh forms. Heritage unfolds, sprawls, falters and (sometimes) revives rather than existing timelessly and monumentally – similarly its artefacts have material lives as well as transcendent values and meanings.

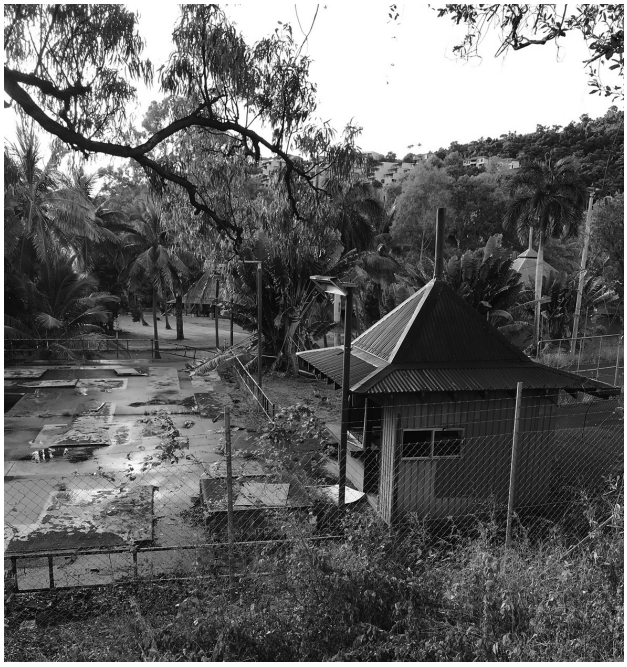

Figure 3. Decaying tourist amenities at Airlie Beach (author's photo, July 2021).

[14] There are a host of recently taken aerial photographs of crumbling and overgrown Whitsunday Island resorts available through Google Image searches, none of which I have succeeded in getting permission to reproduce without a hefty fee. A selection is however viewable by typing the words "Whitsunday resorts ruin" into Google Images search function.

CONCLUSION

While there was a fundamental change in the population of the Whitsundays in the 20th century linked to the rapid growth of new socio-economic practices, the original Indigenous population and the current European-descended settler population alike have had to deal with sudden changes in weather patterns and sea levels that reflect broader changes in the global climate and by the melting of glaciers and polar ice caps. Our temporal proximity to events such as Cyclone Debbie and the extensive audiovisual record of it available online give it a sense of immediacy and "eventfulness" that is not so easily grasped with regard to Indigenous inhabitation of the region over 6,000 years ago but it is likely that earlier inhabitants also had to cope with drastic changes and adjust their lifestyles and livelihood practices accordingly.

The most striking aspect of the recent history of the region has been the manner in which the local tourism industry and its related infrastructure have developed in tandem with a wave of dramatic climate and weather events that have so battered them that they have partially decayed within less than a century. While the speed of these events has been so rapid (within the *longue durée* sketched in this article) they have left greater material traces on the islands than preceding centuries of Indigenous inhabitation. The speeds of vessels and humans across the water have also been remarkable, in contrast to the *taim bipo*; indeed, they can be understood to have generated new ways of experiencing and perceiving the space, not in terms of greater depth of awareness and engagement (as in slow tourism) but rather in insulated trajectories in which the space is a scenic backdrop to movement between different built amenities. Along with this speed has come the absolute languor of resort tourism where, temporarily freed from the need to generate income, time can be idled away without fear of any lack arising from that inactivity. At the same time, the speed of cyclones has also increased and human experience of them – such as during Debbie – has heightened intensity. The leisure zone is also now a danger zone. Whereas the Indigenous inhabitants of the area during the pre-colonial *longue durée* had to react to sea level, weather and climate changes that were not directly triggered by their use of space and resources, the region's new inhabitants occupy a different moment. In the Anthropocene, industrial society humans – such as this author – are intrinsically implicated with the events they confront. We caused them. We contributed to the conditions that increasingly envelop us. In this manner we temporally extend past the present as creators of the planetary future. In the Whitsundays this role can be gleaned from both meta-factors such the increased power of weather events and also from the cycles of infrastructural/tourism development and decay that are evident throughout the region. In this regard, the Whitsundays of the early 2020s might be envisaged as an extensive eco-theme park highlighting the impact of the Anthropocene and the short life cycle of sub-tropical coastal tourist ventures in the area – a salutary reminder to us and to future generations of the ephemerality of human institutions and structures and of the folly of triggering major climatic change through the continuing use of fossil fuels.

For those of us with some degree of "Dark Green" sympathies (Curry 2011), the wreckage of the present and the regrowth of local flora and fauna in places recently frequented by high-carbon emitting enterprises may be pleasingly restorative but also serves to alert us to the need for greater agency in determining the future *if* we see human existence on an ecologically viable and varied planet as our goal. The Anthropocene is not – necessarily – the apocalyptic end of human history but it is undoubtedly a time of transition and crisis. The paradox of such crises is that they unfold in irregular manners and with irregular speeds amongst different actants. The spread of indigenous wonga vines (*Pandorea pandorana*) over decaying Whitsunday resort structures, for example, is simultaneously slow and rapid. The vine inches over obstacles, enfolding them, sprouting delicate white, bell-like blooms that go on to shed slender seeds and perpetuate the plant's reclamation of surfaces. It operates at vegetable speed. Its *durée* is both long and short; protracted and cyclic. Fancifully, we might ascribe a phronesic aspect to the vines' activity – a *timeliness*, in the sense of the vines' spread occurring at the opportune moment, but, realistically, it is more a simple case of vines doing what vines do. Equally, the Anthropocene results from late industrial capitalism doing what it does (in the present) and its disregard for its immediate and future consequences. Sawyer (2015: 8) argues that we need to acknowledge that history itself has pivoted in that while the long term of the past has determined the present, it is the short-term of the present that governs the future. Such an approach does not reduce the significance of the *longue durée* for understanding the origins of the now but seeks to position the short term – the immediate present – as the crucial focus for any intervention into planetary futures. However, the present (even an Anthropocene present) is not a homogenous phenomenon. The ruins of the present and the regrowth of flora and fauna marginalised by various industrial enterprises, from mining to tourism, in the decaying infrastructure of such operations in various parts of the planet are as much an Anthropocene phenomenon as the erasure of species from other areas. Chernobyl (post-meltdown and pre-Russian invasion, at least) exemplified the paradox of pollution and regeneration. As Flyn (2021) detailed, there is a host of such locales across the planet and a variety of regenerations underway. If a single historical lesson can be taken from both the *longue durée* and immediate past of the Whitsundays it is that slow cycles and adaptations can accommodate and outlast rapid movements (of people, technologies, capital etc.) and the traces they leave behind.

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TEMPORALNOST, RAZVOJ I PROPADANJE NA OTOČJU WHITSUNDAYS (QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIJA)

Otočje Whitsundays je arhipelag sastavljen od 74 otoka te obližnjeg obalnog pojasa na sjeveroistoku australske države Queensland. Područje je nastanjeno (barem) 9 000 godina, a isprva (prvih 98,5% tog vremena) nastanjivali su ga autohtoni Australci. Početkom 1900-ih stigli su europski doseljenici i ubrzo razvlastili i raselili lokalno stanovništvo te turizam uspostavili kao vodeću granu gospodarstva u tom području. To se dogodilo istodobno s dolaskom antropocena te je pridonijelo njegovu jačanju. Sve navedeno znači da se pri opisu ljudskog nastanjivanja na ovom području kao i osjećaja za povijest i za temporalnost moraju uzeti u obzir dva odvojena vremenska opsega: jedan izrazito dugog trajanja i drugi – najkraći mogući trenutak sadašnjosti. U ovom se članku istražuju sličnosti i razlike između ovih dviju posve različitih vremenskih skala i s njima povezanih populacija. Nadalje, ispituje se kako se u suvremenom razdoblju očituje uloga ljudi u oblikovanju okoliša (koji je podložan brzim promjenama). Stoga je temporalnost od ključnog značaja, a u članku se istražuju različita shvaćanja vremena i cikličnosti, primjerice u odnosu na klimatske obrasce i reakcije ljudi na njih. Istraživanje

koje je u podlozi rada ima i temporalnu dimenziju, jer se odvijalo u razdoblju od trideset godina, tijekom kojih su se u istraživanome području i njegovim klimatskim obrascima dogodile mnoge promjene. Brzina razvoja i propadanja zamjetna u nekim dijelovima nasuprot relativnoj stagnaciji u drugima ključni su elementi koji se ističu u raspravi.

Ključne riječi: brzina, temporalnost, razvoj, propadanje, turizam, otočje Whitsundays