

## Introduction

This paper seeks to expand the concept of “dark tourism” within the era of late capitalism. Such an era is characterised by the inequalities and injustices brought on by modern business and technological development underpinned by neoliberal ideology (Crary, 2013). Dark tourism is largely a concentration around documented accounts of physical violence that disrupts the normal state of things (Žižek, 2008). For example, in the form of walking tours, there are well-known attractions related to the crimes of Victorian-era serial murderer “Jack the Ripper” in London; the “murder castle” supposedly designed by the murderer H.H. Holmes in Chicago; and the more recent crimes of murderer and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer in Milwaukee, USA. There are also sites dedicated to the showcasing of bodily violence, including the Alcatraz East Crime Museum in Tennessee; the Museum of Death situated in Los Angeles; and the Museum of Death in New Orleans. Other examples include those sites created as memorials to historic events, including the Auschwitz concentration camps in Poland; the Choeung Ek killing field in Cambodia; and the Jeju 4:3 memorial in South Korea. Other familiar sites associated with this industry is that of prison tourism, with the Karosta prison hotel in Latvia and Dartmoor prison in Devon. Such discussions tend to define dark tourism as those sites ‘associated with death and tragedy around the world, where tourists visit with varying motivations’ (Bathory, 2018). Sharpley (2009) notes ‘that visitors have long been attracted to places or events associated in one way or another with death, disaster and suffering’ (pg. 5). Another key theme in the field of dark tourism is that such contexts were part of living memory and capable of generating increased levels of anxiety and doubt (Foley & Lennon, 1996). Sharpley (2009) states how, as general tourism has proliferated in over the past 50 years, dark tourism has also seen exponential growth in terms of both physical and digital contexts. This increased production of dark tourist attractions has been met with academic scrutiny. For instance, academic literature usually examines the self-evident issues pertaining to ethical issues (Lisle, 2004), marketing concerns (Seaton, 1996), interpretation problems (Cooper, 2006), and site management concerns including ensuring respect to victims (Blom, 2000).

This paper aims to add to this critique important perspectives from contemporary criminological enquiry in order to broaden the study of dark tourism as we move towards the apocalyptic zero-point characterised by increasing inequality and environmental devastation (Žižek, 2010). In order to do so, it will provide an examination into a form of tourism that has yet to be considered within the remit of dark tourism: Amazon’s virtual tours of warehouses. Amazon initially launched their warehouse tours in 2014, in which they stated that members of the public can now visit such facilities which the company deemed “safer than a department store” (Cook, 2014). The number of tours grew to approximately 21 locations in both the USA (for example Robbinsville in New Jersey and Tracy in California) and Canada (for example Brampton in Ontario), whilst in Europe there are 23 locations (for example Rugeley in England, Frankenthal in Germany, and Turin in Italy). In advertising these tours, Amazon states:

From our world class tour leaders to the FC Tour itself, we strive to create a fun experience, and we think you just might learn something in the process. So if you’ve ever wondered how that product in your online shopping cart gets from Amazon to you, now you can see for yourself (*Amazon Tours*, N.D).

Such a tour is designed to provide the consumer turned tourist an insight into the mechanisms behind how their orders arrive at their door. As Cook (2014) notes, the launch of such tours was likely a response to the rising levels of criticism the company was facing in relation to labour practices and environmental impact. West (2022) reaffirms such notions, suggesting that such tours are public relation efforts designed to quell concerns related to the company’s relationship with the climate and waste, as well as attempting to ensure that the consumer does not reflect on the labour and infrastructure required to deliver their items. In 2020 and at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Amazon’s in-person tours transitioned to online virtual tours due to lock-down restrictions. On Amazon’s website, they state that that “nothing is more important to us than the health and safety

of our staff and guests” (Amazon Fulfilment Centres, N.D). Alongside these virtual tours, a number of pre-recorded and edited videos have been uploaded to Amazon’s YouTube channel.

Despite the level of promotion pushed by Amazon upon the launch and advertising of these tours, the company’s track-record has repeatedly been under scrutiny (West, 2022). In particular, at the time of writing, it was reported that on the 27th of December 2022 a warehouse employee in Colorado, USA, died after experiencing a cardiac event moments after a shift change. It was revealed that the deceased’s body was cordoned off using makeshift cardboard bins, and the new shift workers were not notified as to what had happened and were told to get back to work as “usual” (Sainato, 2023). Alongside this tragic event, in the UK Amazon warehouses have also made mainstream news, with three facilities being notified of their closure, with a planned 1,200 jobs being cut (Winchester, 2023).

It is important to note here that Amazon’s warehouse tours have yet to be considered within a dark tourism perspective, despite its already apparent connections to ‘death and tragedy’ as noted by Bathory (2018). Here it is argued that traditional conceptualisations of dark tourism inadvertently undermine the ability to recognise harms of such forms of tourism that Amazon provides. However, Sharpley (2009) notes that the discipline is ripe for further conceptual analysis (pg. 12), and this paper seeks to provide such a development by drawing and expanding upon dark tourism’s association with violence, whilst also providing the theoretical means in which to locate the harms of such tours via the application of the emerging deviant leisure perspective. Deviant leisure has yet to also consider such forms of tourism, but its focus upon the harms of normalised and culturally embedded forms of commodified leisure (Raymen & Smith, 2019) provides the means in which to transcend beyond Amazon’s deliberately crafted public relations techniques.

This paper will first provide the necessary context with regard to the study of dark tourism, with specific attention towards the various conceptualisations and interpretations of the term. This particular section will also briefly discuss how the internet has been previously examined via the lens of dark tourism, given its central importance regarding the virtual nature of the Amazon fulfilment centre tour subsequently examined. Following on from this, attention will then shift towards previous theorisations of dark tourism, with specific focus upon the two dominant perspectives: namely the behavioural and interpretivist approaches. Critical approaches to violence and the deviant leisure framework will also be introduced in order to provide the necessary theoretical perspectives that will inform the latter discussion. The adopted methodology will also be outlined, detailing the approach to data collection and analysis before leading into a detailed overview of the tour process. The discussion is divided into three distinct yet connected sections, whereby the documented realities of workers is presented with a focus upon physical and mental harms; the significant environmental impact of the company’s activities; and finally how Amazon ultimately draw upon leisure and tourism practices in order to downplay and conceal the human and environmental realities of such a company indicative of late-stage capitalism.

### **Dark Tourism: A Conceptual Landscape**

The public’s fascination surrounding death has long been ingrained within our society before an ‘official’ definition for dark tourism was developed (Lennon & Foley, 1996). Early illustrations of death-related tourism included the roman colosseums and the turnout crowds for public executions in medieval central London (Stone, 2006), making this type of tourism a phenomenon that has become both widespread and diverse over the last century. Smith (1998) suggests sites or destinations associated with war constitute the ‘largest single category of tourist attractions in the world’ (pg. 205). From graveyard tours (Raine, 2013), the holocaust (Heřmanová & Abrhám, 2015), sites of devastation (Sharpley, 2005) and the macabre (Ibrahim, 2015), the dark tourism industry continues to thrive due to its ability to connect people to the past through objects, exhibits, and dramatic recreation (McDaniel, 2018). Therefore, there has been a growing recognition that it is important to consider the social, cultural, and geographical contexts in which people consume dark tourism and its theoretical underpinnings.

Studies into dark tourism is eclectic with terms such as ‘thanatourism’ (Seaton, 1996), ‘morbid tourism’ (Blom, 2000), and ‘black spot tourism’ (Rojek, 1993). Stone (2006) provides a succinct classification that synthesises these disparate terminologies into a coherent definition, which is the ‘act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre’ (cited in Sharpley, 2009: 10). Dann (1998) provides distinction to this broad definition, generating a series of categorisations including ‘Perilous Places’ (dangerous destinations), ‘Houses of Horror’ (dungeons of death), ‘Fields of Fatality’ (the holocaust), ‘tours of torment’ (locations where murder took place), and ‘Themed Thanatos’ (morbid museums). The wealth of categorisations demonstrates the continually evolving nature of dark tourism, its receptiveness to new theorisations, and ‘a powerful vehicle for exploring contemporary social life, practices, and institutions’ (Sharpley & Stone, 2009: 251).

The internet has been studied alongside dark tourism principally as a mode to improve or complement the dark tourist experience for physical sites, but there is scope to consider the internet’s role more broadly, ‘as a destination in and of itself’ (Denham, 2023 forthcoming). This article aims to not only add to existing understandings of what constitutes dark tourism, but also to further explore the importance of mediatisation with the context of the internet. The aim here is to draw attention to the potential study of dark tourism to, as noted previously by Sharpley and Stone (2009), critically explore contemporary ways of ‘social life, practices, and institutions’ (pg. 251) by examining the behaviours and motivations of the tourist and underpinned by cutting-edge criminological theory and critical notions of violence.

### **Theoretical Considerations: Critical Notions of Violence & Deviant Leisure**

Within the field of dark tourism a number of theoretical perspectives have been posited, including the interpretivist and behavioural positions. The former suggests that such sites call for a “passionate” interpretation of a war or conflict in order to better convey the “true” significance or meaning of a particular event (Uzzell, 1989). Further developments include discussions pertaining to stakeholders (Ashworth, 1996), debates concerning historical rigour (Muzaini *et al.*, 2007), and the distortion and displacement of the legacy of such locations (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996). The behavioural position examines tourist’s motivations rather than particular characteristics of any given location. There exists a “continuum of intensity” dependent on the motivations for visiting particular sites and whether they are general or person specific (Seaton, 1996). Within such a paradigm, a number of motivations have so far been determined including morbid curiosity (Lennon & Foley, 2000) and a collective sense of identity ‘in the face of violent disruptions of collective life routines’ (Rojek, 1997: 61). Seaton (1996) presents five categories of dark tourism activity including: travelling to witness public enactments of death; travelling to sites where single or mass deaths have been committed; travelling to memorial or internment sites; travel to symbolic representations of death and reconstructions of specific events; and travelling to witness re-enactments of death. Sharpley (2009) notes that such diverse theorisations have ‘enabled the deconstruction of many of the broad assumptions surrounding dark tourism’ and provides ‘a foundation for further conceptual analysis’ (pg. 12).

Robb (2009) denotes that dark tourism primarily consists of ‘visiting destinations at which violence is the main attraction’ (pg. 51). It is the centrality of violence that will now be critically explored. Specifically, it is not the intention of this paper to dismiss this importance, but to instead widen the understanding of the nature of violence within the lexicon and conceptual underpinning of dark tourism studies.

As Ray (2011: 6) notes, the social context for ‘both the performance and understanding of violence is of central importance’. Stanko’s (2001: 316) oft-cited definition of violence related to an individual that commits or threatens ‘physical, sexual, or psychological harm to others or themselves’ is often applied in academic discourse. Pertinently, it is apparent that such a conceptualisation of violence underpins most conventional forms of dark tourism.

Comprehensive conceptions of violence attempt to capture forms of harm that may be significant but

are not necessarily physical. Galtung's (1969) concept of 'structural violence' is notable here. In Galtung's conceptualisation, job insecurity and the removal of welfare entitlements can all be categorised as structural violence. Žižek (2008) develops the meaning of 'structural violence'. In his usual dialectic inversion, he draws our attention not to those forms of violence that disrupt what would otherwise be civilised normality, but to the actual constitution and reproduction of civilised normality as such. Such violence needs to take place so that we can continue on as consuming societies. Such forms of violence should thus be considered to provide a zero point against which we can judge other forms of violence (which, in Žižek's tripartite schema, are subjective violence and symbolic violence). Subjective violence is a form of direct violence committed by a clearly identifiable subject, whilst symbolic violence consists of symbols, signs, words, and narratives that signifies the implicit, unacknowledged violence of capitalist intersubjective domination. For Lacan, who Žižek draws heavily from, the Symbolic is a generally unconscious order of laws, regulations, internalised forms of oppression, and the immersion into language (Lacan, 1997)<sup>1</sup>. Žižek utilises Lacan's conception of the symbolic to illustrate an implicit order of power and oppression that is beyond subjective (direct) forms of violence. As noted by Recuero (2015), 'while objective violence is easily perceived against a background of "normality," it is precisely in this background that symbolic violence stands, sustaining, through language, the current status quo' (pg. 1). This Žižekian perspective has significant potential in both expanding what constitutes dark tourism along with tourist motivations for visiting such destinations.

Within the discipline of criminology, it is imperative to draw upon critical theoretical frameworks that captures such harms that exist beyond conventional notions of both crime and deviance. The term "deviance" often invokes behaviours that diverge from societal standards. Conversely, outside of these normative perspectives on deviance, the notion of "leisure", within a consumer capitalist society, has seen a shift from a 'moral good' to that of a 'moral right' (Raymen & Smith, 2019: 122). In participating in leisure, we exercise individual agency and internal desires on a cultural, economic, and political level (Rojek, 2010). A consequence of this emphasis on individual liberty and leisure pursuits, as noted by Rojek (ibid), is that 'one may hardly dare speak of leisure in anything other than celebratory or triumphalist tones' (pg. 1). This sentiment is also shared within previous criminological enquiry, in which leisure has taken 'centre stage only when leisure behaviours transgressed legal boundaries, or where scholars falsely identified proto-political resistance in leisure and consumerism' (Raymen & Smith, 2019: 115). However, such perspectives have begun to be challenged.

Deviant Leisure is a complex and sophisticated theoretical framework (Raymen & Smith, 2019; 2020; see also Smith, 2019). Whilst space precludes a discussion of all its core elements, this article principally draws upon its typology of subjective, environmental, socially corrosive, and embedded harms to frame a discussion of Amazon's virtual tours as a form of dark tourism. Incorporating ultra-realist theory alongside contemporary cultural criminological works and zemiology, Raymen and Smith (2019) present a theoretical framework which is able to travel beyond the confines of criminology. Smith (2016) states:

..."deviant leisure" began to orient itself toward a reconceptualisation of social deviance and an exploration of how individual, social, economic, and environmental harms are structurally and culturally embedded within many accepted and normalised forms of leisure, asserting that criminologists need to travel beyond [...] socio-legal constructions of crime and into the realm of harm (Smith, 2016: 6).

Continuing from the aforementioned quote by Smith, a more zemiological lens is necessary in order to recognise the proliferation of harms that have been embedded in the consumer capital system and supported by a constantly evolving legal framework. For instance, the devastating impact of the

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading regarding Lacan's triad framework please see:  
Hall, S. (2012). *Theorizing Crime & Deviance: A New Perspective*. London: Sage.  
Winlow, S. & Hall, S. (2013). *Rethinking Social Exclusion: The End of the Social?* London: Sage.

online gambling industry whereby a culture of indebtedness, ‘domestic instability and destructive behaviours of consumption’ have been documented (Raymen & Smith, 2020:1); the proliferation of substance use in the night-time economy (Ayes, 2019); and the harms of luxury tourism including environmental costs related to travel and tourist infrastructure development (Smith, 2019) have been explored via this perspective<sup>2</sup>. The deviant leisure perspective highlights the wider harms that other criminological perspectives related to leisure fail to recognise, along with existing conceptualisations and theorisations related to dark tourism.

The deviant leisure framework utilises four main categories of harm: subjective harms; environmental harms; socially corrosive harms; and embedded harms. Subjective forms ‘involve an identifiable perpetrator visiting harm upon an identifiable victim in action related to a defined leisure activity’ (Smith, 2016: 7). An example of such harm, as noted by Smith, would be within the context of the night-time economy whereby members of the public, taxi drivers, take away employees, and ambulance and emergency room staff are subjected to threats and instances of interpersonal violence (ibid). Environmental harms consist of those ecological damages caused in the pursuit of leisure activities including, for instance the rising levels of waste on beaches, the destruction of delicate ecosystems, waste disposal issues and a scarcity of fresh water (Smith, 2019). Socially corrosive harms dissolve notions of community and promote exclusion as a demarcation of the “haves” and “have nots”. An example of this, according to Smith (2016), is ‘embodied within Donald Trump’s grab for an enormous stretch of the Aberdeenshire coastline for the creation of a ‘world-best’ \$1.5 billion luxury golf-course, club, and hotel’ (pg. 9). Lastly there are embedded harms, which are embedded within legitimate consumer markets. An example of such harm can be gleaned via an examination of fast fashion, which is predicated on the principles of consumerism and ‘the creation of malleable identities based on the notion of cool’ (ibid). Such an industry, based on clever advertising and, in some instances, affordability, conceals a myriad of harms often related to supply chains. To summarise, deviant leisure provides a contemporary framework in which “new frontiers” of identifying harm in culturally accepted forms of leisure, including forms of tourism, can be explored.

### **Notes on Methods**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic virtual tours have been utilised to sustain the economic survival of tourism (Novalita *et al.*, 2021). The majority of existing research on virtual tours already utilises content analysis (Stone, 2006) as an analytical framework, and more recently has used virtual sources such as Putra *et al.’s* (2018) content analysis of West Java Tourism Websites. However, much of this literature fails to analyse virtual tours in other formats. Studies need to consider that virtual tours could be used to downplay the negative impacts of virtual and real-world tourism. Higgins-debioles (2020) argues that the consequences of tourism from the COVID-19 pandemic have led to an approach that favours fast economic recovery at the expense of undermining efforts to promote ethical and sustainable tourism. It is critical to consider these agendas in the methodological approach of this study. In this regard it is important to acknowledge that the function of in-person tours is limited. That is, virtual and in-person tours are pre-organised and manufactured for promotional purposes to ensure that the visitor only sees the most interesting elements of the tour (Goodall & Ashworth, 1988). It is imperative to regard the importance of editing in visual media, such as turning off the comments function in virtual tours (as shown in video 2) and time-restrictions. Given the high volume of emerging studies regarding impacts of virtual tourism (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019) in the face of the pandemic (Talwar *et al.*, 2022), it is important to collate secondary sources to evaluate the validity of approaches utilised in in-person and virtual tours. This study will enable critiques to be considered and tourism to be analysed within virtual environments.

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<sup>2</sup> For further reading with illustrative examples related to the deviant leisure perspective please see:

Kelly, C., Lynes, A. & Hoffin, K. (2020). *Video Games Crime and Next-Gen Deviance*. Bingley: Emerald Publishers Ltd.

Hayward, K. & Turner, T. (2019). ‘Be More VIP’: Deviant Leisure and Hedonistic Excess in Ibiza’s ‘Disneyized’ Party Spaces’, in T. Raymen and O. Smith (Eds.) *Deviant Leisure: Criminological Perspectives on Leisure and Harm*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, pp 105–134.

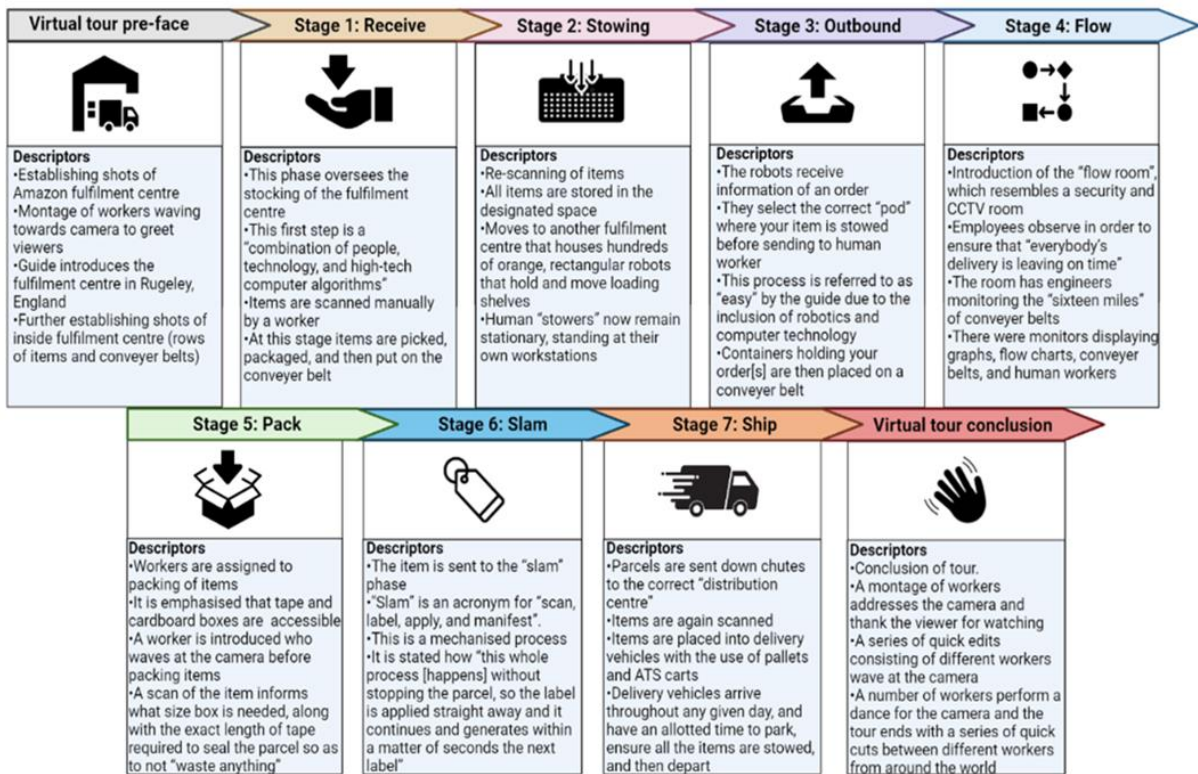
Utilising a hybrid of visual and virtual research methods, two recorded Amazon warehouse virtual tours were analysed. The first was a pre-recorded video of several Amazon warehouses showing its production process in different fulfilment centres (video 1). This particular video had 1.9 million views since it was uploaded on the 10th of April 2021, and the user comments are visible. Video 2 was a tour of Amazon warehouses across different fulfilment centres and was orchestrated on Zoom between managers and employees who interacted with one another and answered questions from the public. This video had been live streamed on the official Amazon YouTube channel on 25th July 2021 and has since gained 69,753 views, and user comments have been turned off by the channel. Visual methods, it must be noted, has the potential limitation of being susceptible to researcher subjectivity. It was deemed appropriate, given the qualitative nature of this research, to focus on inter-coder consistency (Thomas & Harden, 2008). As noted by O'Connor and Joffe (2020), 'many qualitative research teams include an element of comparison between individual team members' impressions of the data but may refrain from quantifying the degree of consensus' (pg. 2). This research followed the process of Thomas and Harden (2008), who state that thematic synthesis can be achieved between independent researchers in which identification of themes could be followed by group discussion of overlaps and divergences.

In order to compare what was presented in the tour with the realities of working within such environments, the inclusion of supplementary secondary sources was adopted. This data was subsequently put through a process of triangulation so that the researcher[s] can be confident that the truth is being 'conveyed as truthfully as possible' (Merriam, 1995:54). A sample of secondary sources were gathered including journals, books, and newspapers. However, Surette (2007) notes the media acts as a "filter", whereby less important, or contradictory information is omitted. This is a potentially important limitation with regard to reliability and validity of data, and therefore it was decided that prosumer media, such as online forums, recordings, and podcasts should also be included due to increased authentic user content (Giurgiu & Barsan, 2008: 55).

### **The Amazon Virtual Tour: Overview of the Tour Process**

To help understand the tour process, diagram 1 shows the stages of production which are discussed in both videos. For this diagram we incorporated both videos to provide a comparison of how these stages of production are presented to the viewer. In the discussion the findings have been integrated to analyse how these stages contribute to the reproduction of embedded harms to the consumer, and how these harms can be reproduced in the remit of dark tourism.

#### **Diagram 1: Overview of the Tour**



## Labour Market Conditions and the [in]Visibility of Subjective Harms

It is important to contrast what was displayed on this virtual tour in relation to the document realities of working within such workplace environments. The tour (in both videos) presented the various phases your order goes through in order to be delivered in an unproblematic manner. With the move to online shopping, there is the false perception that the lack of immateriality on the side of the consumer is similar for the seller – thus creating a “consumer capitalist utopia” of seamless transactions. Here we need to gleam through the symbolic violence that ‘naturalises the discourse about things and legitimates the domination system’ (Recuero, 2015: 1).

The visibility of subjective harms can be difficult to establish within the tours as it would not be in their interests to expose the realities of working there, but this does not necessarily mean that the actions of identifiable agents – such as supervisors – does not lead to harm. Pemberton (2015) can be utilised to portray the harms experienced by workers that go beyond examples of physical violence. Studies have shown that Amazon employees often perceive their job as physically demanding and alienating, imposed by strict management and surveillance (Alimahomed-Wilson & Reese, 2021). This was found to be the case in investigative podcast, Megacorp (2022), where numerous people were interviewed including an undercover journalist and an ex-prisoner who compared the working environment to being worse than the prison that he served his sentence in. The journalist revealed that workers could be given “idle points” each time they took too long to go to the bathroom. If an individual accumulated idle points they could receive a “disciplinary point”, and too many of these would result in termination. To put this into context, the two 15-minute breaks that Amazon workers were entitled to could be taken up by a trip to the toilet through the vast expanse of such warehouses. Such distances needing to be covered to reach a toilet were observed in the abridged video (video 1) in one of the many establishing shots of the warehouse. Yet in video 2, when Amazon managers were asked by the public how long it took to leave the building, none of the managers could actually confirm or provide an answer. During his time working as an undercover journalist in a warehouse in Essex, it was also revealed that he received a disciplinary for taking one day off sick (Bloodworth, 2019).

The rising targets and expectations have also significantly impacted workers' mental health, with 55% of employees reporting that they have suffered depression since working at Amazon in the UK (McCarthy, 2018). Such demands have also resulted in 'backaches, knee pain, and other symptoms of constant strain [that] are common enough for Amazon to install painkiller vending machines' (Newton, 2020). Deaths have also been reported, with the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health's report (2019) citing six US Amazon worker deaths between 2018 and 2019 (pg. 12). In one incident where a man died after suffering a heart attack, workers were "forced to go back to work. No time to decompress. Basically watch a man pass away and then get told to go back to work" (Sainato, 2019).

An investigation conducted by O'Connor (2013) utilising employees accounts likened working in the warehouse in Rugeley, UK, to "a slave camp". Another employee revealed that he advised workers "to smear their bare feet with Vaseline" to reduce blisters and sores from the work boots Amazon provides. Irrespective of incentives to boost the local economy, many employees were laid off after a Christmas period without any warning or explanation (ibid). These realities are indicative of objective violence in that they refer to the systemic nature of normalised and thus embedded harms in the political economy with limited regulation and scrutiny (Žižek, 2008). This reshaping of the economy is part of what Alimahomed-Wilson and Reese (2020:29) termed "Amazon capitalism". This same centre was shown in video 1 though the full extent of these conditions were not, unsurprisingly, shown in the video. A worker at the Coventry warehouse, UK, articulates such issues centred on working conditions, stating that the robots in the warehouse "are treated better than us" (Jordan & Conway, 2023).

### **Amazon's Environmental Impact and Socially Corrosive Harms**

Smith (2016) utilises low-lying destinations such as the Maldives as a direct example of the tourist destinations that endure environmental harms around 'destruction of delicate ecosystems, waste disposal and a scarcity of freshwater' (pg.8). Such industries may create jobs but often at the expense of disenfranchising local communities from obtaining economically and environmentally sustainable employment (ibid). In this regard it is important to consider that past literature has focused on the relationship between nature tourism and the environmental harms that are produced from preservation of conservation areas. While Amazon is keen to let the public know of their move to recyclable energy sources in the tour, it reinforces these aforementioned environmental harms across the supply chains from the machinery used in warehouses, to the materials used in products and the energy used in the consumption of fuel for the delivery of goods. Undercover filming from inside Amazon's Dunfermline warehouse in the UK exposed the sheer scale of the waste with 'Smart TVs, laptops, drones, hairdryers, top of the range headphones, computer drives, books galore, thousands of sealed face masks – all sorted into boxes marked "destroy"' (Pallot, 2021). In 2019 Amazon released a report detailing the company's impact on the environment, detailing that in 2018 it emitted '44.4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents into the atmosphere – roughly equal to the annual emissions of Norway' (Reynolds, 2020).

Amazon is seen as a trailblazer in the implementation of AI technology, but despite this it has done little to prevent it from being one of the world's largest consumers of energy (Caraway, 2020). In actuality, AI is accelerating natural resource extraction and the distancing of waste that harms 'marginalised communities, fragile ecosystems, and future generations' (Dauvergne, 2020: 696). AI as a force of sustainability reinforces a narrative of corporate responsibility that obscures the need for state regulation, and empowering transnational corporations as 'global governors' (ibid). The erosion of corporate responsibility to maximise efficiency and logistics does not reduce emissions effectively but increases productivity at the expense of already underpaid potential employees (Briken & Taylor, 2018). Conflicting interests over corporate social responsibility (Lee *et al.*, 2018) may mean that the transparency of environmental sustainability pledges (Amazon, 2020) may be questionable. Much of the environmental damage corporations like Amazon are largely contributing to often comes at the expense of workplace safety. The absence of state regulation means that Amazon has no legal obligation to implement alternative approaches to support consistent training for flexible job



transitions that utilise green technologies. Adopting a deviant leisure perspective to forms of industry tourism, within a similar structure to dark tourism (i.e., guided tours and not just holidays which are open to the consumer to do as they please) is useful in conveying how the impacts of environmental damage can be downplayed to consumers and potential visitors, alongside possible job losses accumulated from automation (Willcocks, 2020). These implications change how tourism is viewed and experienced by the consumer as technology advances (Deschacht, 2021).

The distribution of Amazon warehouse centres globally has disproportionately targeted disenfranchised marginalised communities. Waddell and Singh (2021) found that, in the USA, 69% of Amazon warehouses are built in neighbourhoods where ‘people of colour live within a one-mile radius’ and ‘57% of warehouses’ are built-in working-class areas. Video 1 exercises the appearance of a clean rural warehouse when these warehouses are actually located in economically deprived regions. The warehouse in Dunstable, UK, is in the top 20% of Central Berkshire’s most deprived areas (Census Data, 2011). The environmental impacts derived from infrastructure are experienced more by these communities. The measure of air pollution is difficult to obtain in the UK and other nations based on the absence of legal obligations to monitor pollution. Fairburn *et al*’s (2019) Review of air pollution in the WHO European Region shows that social inequalities are directly related to air pollution exposure. Data from the American Lung Association (2021) shows that the air quality is often lower in working class states in the US. These locations are often characterised as de-industrialised locales in which previously secure forms of employment were hollowed out and outsourced – often abroad - to cheaper labour sources (Telford, 2021). As such, individuals living within such localities face limited employment and career prospects, generating a demand for localised yet potentially precarious forms of employment which companies such as Amazon capitalise on.

In video 2 when employees and managers were asked about their favourite element about working at Amazon, all the respondents referred to elements of culture and collaboration of working there. This seems ironic considering that in the tours shown in video 1, there was little social interaction between managers and employees. It is worth observing that none of the tours showed employees on their breaks. The culture of working at Amazon represented in the tours contrasts with the vast majority of previously presented employee accounts. Alimahomed-Wilson and Reese (2021) supports this notion, arguing that Amazon marginalises women and ethnic minorities who make up most of the employee demographic. Employee accounts from interviews across Amazon warehouses in southern California, USA, show that workers faced difficulties in unionising facing retaliation, disciplinarys and hire and rehire in the pandemic. The researchers acknowledge that young workers and white workers were still overrepresented in their own research samples indicating that racial minorities are often underrepresented from anxieties over further marginalisation. Other research reveals that Amazon has been exposed for union busting by attempting to prevent activism in the workplace (Rae, 2021).

### **“Smile for the Camera”: Staged Authenticity and Emotional Labour**

The promotion of Amazon Warehouse tours conceals the harsh realities of working in Amazon without scrutiny. When the demand for online shopping increased during COVID-19 (Delfanti, 2021), the consumer has become complicit in enabling Amazon employees to endure physically demanding working conditions. Post-pandemic saw the closures of small businesses and the decline of the tourist industry (Sigala, 2020) as a result of lockdown measures. For instance, in the UK, the number of business closures between July to September 2021 was 100,835 - 50% higher than the same period during the previous year (Williams, 2021). With regard to the tourist industry, between March and June 2020, employment in accommodation for visitors fell by 21.5% compared with the same three months of 2019 (Roberts, 2021). Ethical consumption becomes difficult to ascertain when informed choices concerning consumption become limited (Prothmann, 2019). This tour is thus designed to soothe any discontent or concerns the consumer may have, and as you leave the tour you no longer have to consider the harms faced by Amazon workers or the documented ecological devastation caused by your spending habits. The authenticity of conventional forms of dark tourism has been a prevailing theme within academic studies, with many sites having been extensively

reconstructed. This ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell, 1973) of life as an Amazon worker can be witnessed in such tours, but ultimately implies an authenticity that is not there, often presenting a sanitised and unrealistic representation far removed from actual working conditions. Here we must dig beneath these outward performances of happiness and consider the importance of the “aesthetic” being displayed to the viewer. As noted by Lloyd (2019), the significance of the aesthetic is supplemented by the use of expressive and sentimental labour within the workplace. Lloyd draws upon the work of Hochschild (2003), who describes how ‘employees must draw on their personality, communicative skills and emotion to put the customer at ease and induce them into parting with their money’ (pg. 70). With increasing mainstream attention towards unethical business practices and Amazon in particular, such forms of tourism need to shift attention away from the growing concerns of the post COVID-19 “ethical consumer” (Latham 2021). Such consumers are characterised by their concern regarding sustainability, along with an increased priority towards climate change when in comparison to before the pandemic (ibid). With this in mind, such forms of tourism need to satiate such perceived growing concerns and ensure that the cultural injunction to enjoy (Žižek, 2002) is maintained and not inhibited.

Not only are the emotional forms of labour displayed in the tour designed to manage the feelings and expressions of the workforce, but also a tool in order to suppress the actualities of such conditions – further removing autonomy and freedom of expression from such people. Such displays of emotion permit the consumer turned tourist to continue to live in a continued state of denial regarding how their purchasing decisions facilitate the myriad of harms previously outlined. This process of denial refers to what Žižek calls the “fetishistic disavowal”, which he summarises as, ‘I know, but I don’t want to know that I know, so I don’t know’ (2010). This, in essence, is a process of denial, the denial of one’s position in the world relative to others. He argues that life, and in particular capitalist systems, functions on the basis of such denials. Alongside this, the consumer’s disavowal – now reinforced by such tours - further enables the company’s sense of entitlement as we continue to give them permission and the inclination to do what is needed in order ‘to simply get things done [so that] that the competitive logic of business can be served’ (Hall, 2015: 129). Online tours not only enable Amazon to manufacture an ethical facade but also enable the consumer to feel better (i.e., they are not physically there, or other retailers are not affordable). The consumer is sought with a conflict between convenience and affordability or investing in ethical products that are not affordable, available, or delivered as quickly or conveniently. Paradoxically, the same can be said for the future of the tourism industry. Post-pandemic many consumers are sought between a conflict of ‘eco guilt’ and ‘post-pandemic anxiety’ (Talwar *et al.*, 2022:1). Virtual forms of tourism appeal to these consumers for these reasons (ibid) but still reproduce embedded harms in different forms.

### **The Future of Virtual Tourism and Closing Comments**

Verma *et al.*’s (2022) review of the past, present and future of virtual tourism concedes that smartphones, augmented reality, virtual reality, big data, and AI/ML all play a role in reconceptualising the tourism experience. Such technologies could impact the operation of future tours. Scholarly attention has already been given to the role of virtual reality and artificial intelligence in tourism (Samala *et al.*, 2020). This research has been useful in assessing how tourism has evolved but it is not in the remit of this research to assess how notions of critical violence undermine sustainable tourism in ways consumers and the industry cannot fully perceive. Researching Amazon video tours has shown how technology is already transforming the industry of tourism in the form of AI technology, further perpetuating the harmful impacts of tourism embedded in the deviant leisure perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced nations to develop technologically based solutions at a much faster pace than generations previously (He *et al.*, 2021). In touching upon the relationship between technology and late-stage capitalism, this paper has only just begun to conceptualise the implications that this has had in studying dark tourism. This could be crucial in analysing the power that corporations already possess in using new technology and virtual tours to downplay the negative impacts of tourism and in further minimising corporate transparency in the form of automation. Incorporating prosumer forms of media to support analysis has enabled these ideals to be better evaluated to consider in future research more broadly.

Utilising the deviant leisure perspective, site management interpretivist theory can be applied in showing how tourism profits from the removal of subjective violence instead of its exposure. It is still critical to acknowledge that the historical development of dark tourism classifications has demonstrated how tourism has evolved and thus enabled tourism to be interpreted in modern contexts. Simply put, as the nature of violence evolved the purpose of tourism evolved to refit this narrative. In this regard behaviourism can be useful in analysing consumers' motivations in tourism's technologically evolving landscape. Tourism scholars are recognising that technology plays an instrumental role in the reconceptualisation of the tourism experience. Jung *et al* (2017) notes that augmented reality (AR) can be implemented in the digital restoration of artefacts and in the recreation of historical events. In analysing dark tourist experiences, the management of dark sites, ethical issues in profit making, and the involvement of indigenous peoples in site management, Biran and Hyde (2013) propose future directions for research. One of these proposals is to analyse the psychological impacts of dark tourism consumption more closely using Buda and McIntosh's (2013) adaption of Freud and Lacan's theories of voyeurism, understood as the 'drive to look at something forbidden', as a starting point (pg. 214). They also acknowledge that tourism is a leisure activity, suggesting that future research could explore the internal conflicts faced by tourists in experiencing or suppressing sites of tragedy and leisure experiences. They also suggest that 'ethical and moral issues around profiting from the commoditization of death and suffering' should be explored (pg.196). Notions of critical violence and the criterion of the deviant leisure perspective best acknowledges the critiques put forward by Biran and Hyde (2013), by analysing the complexity of consumption (and of violence itself) in dark tourism as a leisure experience, and its often-overlooked societal impacts experienced by tourists. To acknowledge this, the complexity of violence needs to be analysed to grasp the implications this has had on tourism development and dark tourism theorisations. In integrating the deviant leisure perspective with site management interpretivist theory, the complexity and evolution of dark tourism can be understood in-depth beyond behaviourism and thanatourism, as well as in more contemporary settings.

It was outlined how one of the prevailing themes with dark tourist destinations was that of generating increased levels of anxiety and doubt (Lennon & Foley, 1996). This account of a virtual Amazon warehouse tour was presented to put forward the argument that the opposite can also be true. By utilising what Recuero (2015) refers to as "superpowers" to symbolic violence, such virtual forms of tourism further enable the viewer's complicity towards the proliferation and normalisation of both the subjective and objective violence encountered by such workers. Within such forms of tourism, the symbolic violence witnessed here is devastating because it helps the naturalisation and further embedding of these approaches to labour typically taken by such corporations within the era of late capitalism, whilst also actively encouraging the socially corrosive and environmentally damaging impact of commodification and consumption. Taking this into consideration, the harms associated with such a form of tourism still evokes Stone's (2006) classification of an 'act of travel to sites associated with death [and] suffering' (cited in Sharples, 2009: 10), but gleamed via the application of critical strands of violence. Scholars have also begun to scrutinise the changing landscape of work and leisure, with Winlow (2019) stating that:

...corporations often utilise the tropes of leisure and freedom to advance their control of occupational cultures and work practices. Work increasingly bleeds into leisure and leisure into work (Winlow, 2019: 63).

This concept paper has sought to scrutinise these orthodox dichotomies of work and leisure. In particular, the discussion presented begins to incorporate and add further nuance to the principles of deviant leisure in order to reveal the increasingly blurred boundaries between these seemingly separate activities within the neo-liberal epoch. Thus, this concept paper begins to identify how corporations are indeed drawing upon the tropes of leisure, and thus tourism, in order to conceal the actualities of working conditions and environmental impact. Alongside this, within the context of capitalism realism as outlined by Fisher (2009) in which no alternative to the current economic system can be envisaged, leisure practices have become a tool to ensure the continual disavowal of labour

practices and ensure business continues as usual. The deviant leisure perspective is not only effective in evaluating the impact of consumer choices on the sustainability of the tourist industry, but it is useful in conveying how any efforts made by the consumer are undermined by the embedded harms reproduced by corporate entities on a mass scale in the operation of virtual and in-person tours. In the age of increasing pressure for corporations to not simply seek profit but operate with the public interest in mind (Hsieh *et al.*, 2018), facets of tourism and leisure have been co-opted in order to entice the post-pandemic consumer with the promise of transparency but ultimately, as demonstrated via the examination into Amazon's virtual tour, this is a façade.

Returning to the notion of "Amazon capitalism", it suggests that such an economic model is systemic within the global capitalist system and is characterised by a concentration of corporate power that wields tremendous influence over the world's economy (Alimahomed-Wilson & Reese, 2020). As such, we can witness how Amazon has influenced the retail sector such as Sports Direct (Goodley, 2020); Shein (Jones, 2021); Boohoo (Tingle, 2022); JD Sports and Asos (Chapman, 2019), which have all been scrutinised for working conditions in warehouses as they transition into online e-commerce. Alongside this, such companies have also begun to emulate Amazon's approach to adopting similar forms of tourism with companies such as Boohoo launching in-person and virtual tours in 2021 (Rodgers, 2021) and Shein using pre-recorded videos of warehouses on TikTok (Shein\_Official, 2022). At its crux, tourism has evolved and been harnessed by corporations in order to obfuscate the realities of their business practices. How we conceptualise dark tourism needs to be broadened to include the more systemic forms of violence that proliferate the neo-liberal epoch, along with deviant leisure's considerations towards the harms of normalised leisure activities. With this in mind, this concept paper has sought to instigate fresh theorisations and perspectives within the domain of dark tourism yet we readily admit the need for much more in-depth and rigorous empirical research designs in order to interrogate, and add to, such conceptualisations put forward in this paper.

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