

TOWARD 'SENSE OF PLACE':
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF ISLANDNESS

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ABSTRACT

This work combines ethnographic research with concepts drawn from island studies, and phenomenology of place, to investigate local constructions of island identity on North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah) Queensland, Australia. The research project explores embodied senses of place, lived experiences and perceptions of the environment, in the everyday lives and discourses of diverse island residents. Fieldwork was undertaken on North Stradbroke Island throughout 2014. The ethnographic material is analysed using approaches to islandness drawn from the evolving interdisciplinary field of island studies. Island studies seeks to explore the distinct features of island lives and cultures, studying islands ‘on their own terms’ (McCall 1994). The extreme diversity of physical islands, and the complex elaboration of island metaphors present conceptual obstacles to a coherent theorisation of islandness. Following Hay (2006) this thesis posits phenomenology of place as a productive approach to addressing the ‘radical particularity’ inherent in the vast diversity among islands. Drawing on concepts of place from philosophy, human geography and existential anthropology, sense of place opens up the everyday lived experience of embodied island existence, and identity. Phenomenology and the ‘lifeworld’ concept can address socially constructed intersubjective, and material physical dimensions of bodily entanglements in divergent local island landscapes.

Declaration

The written material in this thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

All sources have been acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sandra Lee Craig', written over a horizontal line.

Signed: _____

Candidate's name: _____ Sandra Lee Craig _____

Date: _____ November 7, 2014 _____

Ethics Committee Approval Obtained

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CHAPTER ONE: From Islandness To Sense of Place.

‘The difference-respecting and identity focused nature of phenomenology
of place is particularly apposite for island studies’
(Hay 2006:19)

This work draws together convergent lines of thought, and brings them into focus through the lens of a particular place. The place in turn, reveals important ways in which the two sets of ideas are linked and entwined within its everyday life. The two overarching concepts I refer to emerge from different intellectual traditions. The first is island studies, a relatively recent and evolving multidisciplinary field. Island studies addresses notions of islandness, and questions around the special qualities of islands and of lives lived on islands. The second paradigm is drawn from enduring scholarly discourse in philosophy, geography and anthropology, (among other disciplines) about space and place. From this extensive domain, I focus on the concept of ‘sense of place’, and complex questions around humans’ lived interaction with particular local landscapes. Aspects of these discourses, about islandness, and about sense of place, meet and intersect through research in the particular local places of North Stradbroke Island, in Queensland, Australia.

The research entailed fieldwork conducted on North Stradbroke Island, where I lived off and on, over several months in 2014. The research project was an exploration of embodied senses of place, of experience and perceptions of the environment, in the everyday lives and discourses of diverse island residents. Using participant observation, I considered local peoples’ haptic relations with the island’s landscapes, seascapes and environments, how island living shapes their everyday lives, and how they discursively reproduce the island itself. Living immersed in the immediate environment, and sharing in the everyday life of the local community, allowed me to gain some insight into social constructions of the landscape, and island residents’ attachments to, and identification with place. The ethnographic data and experiences I gathered are used to illuminate my analyses of contemporary spatially and socially situated constructions of place, and of their potential contribution to island studies.

Islands, their communities, cultures, landscapes and seascapes hold an extraordinary position in human, or at least Western, imagination. Islands have inspired a vast and compelling body of scholarship, literature and art throughout the ages. Citing references as diverse as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, and reality television shows such as *Castaway* and *Survivor*, Greenhough (2004:150) argues that islands are seen to reveal peoples' 'true' natures. Islands have also been profoundly important sites for many academic disciplines, especially biology but also including anthropology. Arguably modern anthropology was born on islands, and several early and very influential ethnographers chose islands for their field sites. Increasingly islands are the focus of many diverse research efforts. Recognising this, island studies emerged as a distinct field of scholarship in the 1980s and early 1990s, with a call to establish a holistic study of islands 'on their own terms' (McCall 1994).

At the core of island studies, is an acknowledgement, from a wide array of critical perspectives, that aspects of island life are distinctive and significant. Despite the extreme diversity among island types it has been argued that islanders share enough in common to justify systematic comparative study (Baldacchino 2005:247). Throughout its development however, the trans disciplinary field of island studies has struggled with divisive issues of definition and scope. Serious questions about the plausibility of defining generalisable island experience, along with other ongoing concerns, raise doubts around the possibility for a cohesive island centred scholarship (Fletcher 2011; Baldacchino 2008). Despite these perceived problems and *because* islands are the focus of such intense interest and affection, Hay (2006) has argued that they constitute 'special places, paradigmatic places, topographies of meaning in which the qualities that construct place are dramatically distilled' (Hay 2006:31). As special places then, imbued with meaning, both metaphorically, and geographically, the study of islands demands conceptually rich theories of 'place'.

Theories of space and place have a long history in intellectual discourse. Discussion of immediate local place, in contrast to general abstract space, can be traced to Archytas and Aristotle, (Casey 1996:16). Drawing also on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard and others, Casey asserts that place is prior to space, (despite a relative preoccupation with space in post enlightenment Western thought). Relph (1976:1) found the theorisation of place underdeveloped in geography and along with Tuan (1977) pioneered a much more thorough

consideration of the complex involvement of place in human experience. The late twentieth century saw theoretical approaches to place mature and flourish. See Hay (2006:32) for a survey of disciplinary angles. As Hay points out ‘place is an idea whose time has come’ (2006:31).

Exploring theorisations of place forms a key part this project. Since we are always already inescapably emplaced, the immediate material locality is inherently part of every experience. The perception of place is a complex interaction between body and locality and between the senses and the consciousness. That is to say, that place is always both sensed by the body and conceived by the mind; or rather that perception and conception are inextricably interwoven in places. Furthermore, social or cultural interpretations permeate perception (Casey 1996:18). Thus, Casey describes the ‘dialectic of perception with place (and of both with meaning)’ as intricate, profound and never ending (1996:19). This dialectic in turn signifies that humans are ‘not only in places but of places’. We are never without perception and therefore, never without emplaced experiences ‘human beings are ineluctably place-bound. More even than earthlings we are placelings’ (Casey 1996:19) .

In everyday lived experience, sensuously, bodily, reflectively and culturally, places inscribe human lives even as humans inscribe the places in which they live immersed (Ingold 2011). Furthermore, ethnographic engagements with people in place reveal the ways that people identify themselves with and through particular places. Indeed ‘attachments to geographical localities contribute fundamentally to the formation of personal and social identities’ (Basso 1996:53). With Casey (1996:16) I find that phenomenology provides the best access to understanding the lived, somatic and sensual character of place perception: the ‘sense-ing’ of place. Following Hay (2006), I contend that ‘sense of place’ is a paradigm well suited to exploring the notion of islandness. I don’t underestimate the vexed questions that arise to challenge the unity of island studies. However, using the experiences of people on Stradbroke Island, I seek out the special qualities of islandness, the enhanced island experience of place, through a phenomenological approach to the everyday lived experience of one particular island place.

The following chapters expand on these ideas. Chapter Two discusses the many meanings that attach to islands generally, and some specific information on North Stradbroke Island, as background to the study. Following that, Chapter Three presents ethnographic material in

connection with discussions of islandness concepts. Then Chapter Four looks at sense of place, and how it is lived and expressed locally on North Stradbroke Island. The concluding chapter examines how this material articulates with island studies, and its implications for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: What do islands mean? From Myth to Reality

In Western or European societies a profound historical and cultural significance informs our understanding of what islands are. Islands have aroused intense fascination throughout history and inspired art, literature and scholarship of many types. This enduring fixation with islands means that before we even approach an actual island, as a physical place, we bring along with us, consciously or not, a great many meaningful associations. From ancient Greece to medieval Ireland to renaissance mapmakers, and from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to television series like *Lost* and *Survivor*, islands are freighted with implied meanings. This chapter surveys some of the broad cultural and historical influences and associations which inflect our understanding of islands generally. It then sketches some background information on the one particular island, which is the site of this research: North Stradbroke Island.

2.1 Island Imaginaries in Western Minds

The literary fascination with islands can be traced from the earliest known ancient Greek authors (Van Duzer 2006:143). Homer's *Odyssey* recounted the voyage of Odysseus and his dramatic deeds on numerous exotic islands. Plato's Atlantis became one of the most famous islands ever chronicled, and many other Greek and Roman authors wrote about islands both real and mythical, for a fuller survey see Van Duzer (2006). Medieval Irish myths recounted the voyages of heroes to numerous mystical islands, such as Hy Brazil, in the uncharted Atlantic to the west of Europe. These fabulous voyages mingled with Christian immrama, detailing the miraculous voyages of saints, most notably Saint Brendan, which circulated through Europe, in manuscripts translated into many languages. In the fourteenth century, manuscripts relating Marco Polo's travels sparked European interest in Eastern islands, with their exotic descriptions of Ceilan (Sri Lanka), Chipangu (Japan) and Madagascar (Van Duzer 2006:147–8). Following European expansion and the age of discovery 'Isolario' began to appear. Illuminated books describing islands in lavish detail, and illustrated with maps,

proliferated throughout the renaissance (Van Duzer 2006:149–53) and the association of islands with exotic adventure flourished.

In 1704 a Scottish sailor, Alexander Sellkirk, spent over four years alone on Juan Fernandez Island, off the coast of Chile where he was marooned by his captain. Early published accounts of Sellkirk's story probably inspired one of the most enduring and influential island narratives of all time. Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York* was published in 1719. It set the tone for a genre of island writing, and a view of islands, that reflected its time, and still persists.

For Defoe, the challenges of surviving on an island were a milieu for demonstrating the power of a resourceful and educated individual to control his environment and to create from raw materials everything necessary for existence, to conquer the world through human labor and science (Van Duzer 2006:154)

Literary islands are rarely passive backdrop to the story. Islands may represent different things in different stories but their essential character, qua islands, bounded and discrete, is crucial to their literary function. Thomas More's Utopia, and Plato's Atlantis, for example, are fictional islands, portrayed as self contained autonomous polities, for the purpose of political allegory and social commentary. Each island in *The Odyssey*, those of Circe, or Calypso, is the domain of a different God, or holds a unique curse or challenge for Odysseus and his crew. Likewise the islands of Irish myth, or the immrama islands, of the dog-headed-men or of flaming seas, are each unique. They offer distinct quests or lessons to the story's hero. As in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the Robinsonade, islands are often the sites of contestation between man and nature, or the device through which humans are tested and their true natures revealed. Usually man, (and it's usually a man) triumphs over nature. William Golding's novel *The Lord of the Flies* is an exception where nature triumphs, reducing the humans to their baser, animal nature. It is the bounded, self-contained, separateness of each island that accounts for these literary possibilities: the island as a microcosm, as a prison, or as a laboratory.

The understanding of island as microcosm, as pristine laboratory or as social experiment is pervasive and powerful. In nineteenth century biology for example certain islands with isolated gene pools were seen as perfect laboratories for evolutionary specialisation, or for the study of closed ecosystems. This was dramatically demonstrated by the scientific insights

Charles Darwin drew from his observations in the Galapagos Islands, and Alfred Wallace from his journeys in the Malay Archipelago. Greenhough (2004) has argued that behind the idea of island as crucible lies an assumption that ‘encounters with islands may give clarity to human nature’ possibly because ‘being cut off from civilised society causes people to revert to some kind of natural type’ (Greenhough 2004:150). She suggests a further influence of these assumptions on the definition of ‘natural’ selection.

[u]nconsciously perhaps, Darwin and Wallace were echoing and reinforcing those fictional myths and stories about islands; islands as places where all kinds of individuals revert to their true forms. (Greenhough 2004:151)

For similar reasons that Darwin and Wallace viewed remote islands as self-contained systems in which to investigate the natural world, early anthropologists too were attracted to islands. Indeed islands were the birthplace of modern anthropology. Pioneering anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown in the Andaman Islands (1922), Malinowski amongst the Trobriand (Kiriwina) Islanders of Papua New Guinea (1922), Mead in Samoa and the Admiralty Islands (1928, 1934), and Firth in Tikopia (1936) developed the ethnographic methods that defined the discipline. In early anthropology islands were viewed as metaphors for closed and bounded *social* systems. Classical monographs described small-scale societies, usually presented in pristine isolation. If relations beyond the tribe or village were acknowledged at all, they were seen as extrasystemic, certainly not relevant or vital to the local social unit (Eriksen 1993:134).

Although the idea of the ‘cultural island’ had great appeal, it rapidly became clear that no society ever existed in total isolation from wider networks of exchange and communication. Even the oceans that separate islands are simultaneously the very means of their active social, ritual and trade connections to other islands and to mainlands. Acknowledging historical networks and increasing global interconnection, stable, bounded models of cultural identity, gave way to concepts of borderlands and hybridity and then in turn to processual and relational models. Much current anthropological theory recognises that ethnic identity for example, is situational and relational, and is constituted in and through social interactions (Eriksen 1993:134). Indeed the ‘universalising’ forces of globalisation may potentially emphasise ethnic and cultural identities. Long after it had been rigorously critiqued however,

the notion of discrete and bounded cultures, of self-sustaining social systems, remains influential in anthropology (Eriksen 1993:134).

In discussing historical productions of island isolation in anthropological theory, Eriksen (1993:133–4) draws attention to the relevance of both literal and metaphorical constructions of islands. He suggests that the notion of distinct cultural identity persists as an underlying theme in much contemporary anthropology but also highlights the role of self-conscious cultural identification, particularly in response to globalisation. Thus he writes about ‘[t]he self-conscious, reflexive production of cultural islands’ which ‘are mediated by the interfaces of markets, states and seamless, global systems of communication’ (Eriksen 1993:145).

The metaphor of the cultural island, retains currency in popular culture too, in the association of isolation with the exotic. Hence a recent *Gourmet Traveller* feature article that described the French Basque country as ‘[a] mysterious cultural island where peppers and pelota rule’ (Egan 2013). The dual use of island terminology, to mean both literal islands, and metaphorical islands, is a further example of the way island concepts infuse our language and thinking. Island can mean an island in the sea, or anything vaguely isolated: a traffic island, or an island bench. An oasis is an island of green in the desert, or a coffee shop is an island of calm in the city. A floating island is a French dessert.

As well as being loaded with socially constructed meanings, physical islands themselves are extremely diverse in size, climate, topography, biogeography and history, economy and politics. This variety is reflected in language. In English, islands may be called islands, islets, isles, atolls, cays, keys, rocks and reefs. In legal and political terms, the differences matter. In international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, (UNCLOS) the exact definition of ‘island’ remains unclear and contested. Explicit definitions, including size, height above sea level at high tide and human habitability, are crucial to numerous ongoing international disputes with major geopolitical ramifications. The precise status of many islands (or reefs and rocks) is central to political and military struggles for economic and strategic advantage.

Real islands comprise vast diversity, reductionist stereotypes mask their countless complexities, and ingrained cultural assumptions precede our engagements with them. We come to real islands bringing with us, conscious or unconscious preconceptions. The

language for islands extends to island-like things such as island benches, and traffic islands. Conceptually island characteristics are frequently extended to ‘island effects’ (Hay 2013:214) for representing isolated or surrounded sites such as urban ghettos or desert oases. Among the recurring conceptual problems in island studies then, is reaching a functional definition of what an island is for the purposes of study. Culturally ingrained images, which inflect perceptions and, arguably, infiltrate science about islands (Greenhough 2004), can be hard to disentangle from the hard reality of physical islands. Pervasive island tropes themselves constitute a ‘faultline’ in island studies (Fletcher 2011:19; Hay 2013:213), that has resulted in calls for the field to focus on real islands and exclude their metaphorical incarnations (Hay 2006; Hay 2013). The current project is sited on one real island. It considers the effects of historical and literary island metaphors, but in the context of a specific physical island and the embedded lifeways present there.

2.2 One Particular Island in Moreton Bay

Anyone who has ever flown into Brisbane Airport from the Southern states may well have seen North Stradbroke Island from the air. It lies off the coast of Southern Queensland, about thirty kilometres out from the mouth of the Brisbane River. ‘Straddie’ as it is often called, is one in the chain of large sand islands, which shelter Moreton Bay from the open swell of the Coral Sea. Roughly in the shape of a very long triangle, North Stradbroke Island stretches about forty kilometres from North to South and ten kilometres across its Northern end. It is the second largest sand island in the world, after Fraser Island. The large sand masses of the Southern Queensland coast were formed in the quaternary by sand eroded from northern NSW and deposited by ocean currents around remnant volcanic rock (including at Point Lookout).

From the long open ocean beaches to its East, to the sheltered mudflats on the Western, bay side, the island’s natural environment comprises a wide array of terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Coastal formations include rocky headlands, open beaches, frontal dunes, and high dune systems. Much of the island is typical wallum country, with teatree scrub and heathland, eucalypt and remnant rainforest, and sandy acidic wetlands. Sitting on extensive underground aquifers, North Stradbroke Island abounds in fresh water. Springs, creeks,

perched lakes and freshwater lagoons, meet the saltwater in fragile swamps and wetlands, tidal creeks, mudflats and mangroves. This varied mosaic of ecosystems provides habitat for a diverse range of native flora and fauna.

Among the local wildlife are bandicoots, possums and echidnas, koalas, grey kangaroos, and wallabies including the rare endemic golden swamp wallaby. A very wide variety of local and migratory bird species frequent the island. These include cormorants on the bay, black swans and pelicans around the mangroves, and wading birds such as curlews, herons and ibises. Coastal banksias and flowering eucalypts attract nectar-eating species including a number of honeyeaters and flocks of rainbow lorikeets. Several species of large raptors hunt over the beaches, and there are muttonbirds, gannets, kingfishers and kookaburras among many others. The numerous swamps and lagoons are feeding and resting grounds for many bird species. The island's Ramsar listed wetlands include Eighteen Mile Swamp, the largest coastal peat swamp in Eastern Australia, 'particularly remarkable for its extent and biodiversity' (Specht and Stubbs 2011:201). The many swamps are home to several rare species including a pygmy perch, a water mouse and the vulnerable Wallum Froglet, as well as the endangered yellow swamp orchid (*Phaius bernaysii*). The reptile population includes sixteen snake species, two large monitors and many small lizards.

The sandy shallows of Moreton Bay provide large beds of seagrass for grazing dugong populations and the island's beaches are regular nesting sites for Loggerhead and Green turtles. Many types of school fish, turtles, stingrays, pods of dolphins and migrating humpback whales are easily seen from the island's shores. The subtropical climate and rich natural environment easily provided the food shelter and transport needs of the island's local Aboriginal people, for many generations.

Also known as Minjerribah, North Stradbroke Island has had continuous Aboriginal occupation for many thousands of years (Durbidge and Covacevich 1981:58). Many Aboriginal sites including shelters and semi-permanent villages, middens, stone implements and scarred trees have been recorded since European contact. While many more have been disturbed or destroyed since settlement, some archaeological sites have been associated with Pleistocene dates (Carter, Durbidge, and Cooke-Bramley 1994:24).

Although Dutch and Portuguese ships probably explored the coastline much earlier, Captain James Cook mapped the outside of Moreton Bay in 1770. Cook named several prominent landmarks including Point Lookout, North Stradbroke Island's most easterly point. Matthew Flinders landed members of his crew near (what is now known as) Cylinder beach in 1803, to search for water. Local Aborigines guided them to a creek and helped them to replenish their supplies. In 1823 Nunukul people sheltered and fed three timbergetters, Pamphlett, Finnegan and Parsons at Pulan (Amity Point) for several weeks after they were shipwrecked off Moorgumpin (Moreton Island).

In the course of founding the Moreton Bay penal colony, a pilot station was established at Amity Point in 1825 and a military stores depot at Dunwich in 1827. Several skirmishes were reported between Aborigines and the Dunwich garrison in 1830-1832. No convicts were sent to Moreton Bay after 1839 and the territory was officially opened to free settlers in 1842. A short-lived Catholic Mission to the Aborigines operated at the former depot from 1844 to 1847. From 1850 Dunwich was declared the new colony's quarantine station. It was officially closed in 1864, and the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum was established to house the colony's aged and infirm. The benevolent Asylum opened in 1866 and continued in Dunwich for eighty years, when it was moved to the mainland in 1946. European settlers on the island established dugong fisheries, oyster farming, cattle, and fish canning over this period. Some Aboriginal people were employed in these endeavours.

The Quandamooka people were discouraged from traditional lifeways and resettled in a government reserve and school at Myora (Moongalba). Traditional social and economic practices were severely disrupted by European contact and engagement with the capitalist economy. However the local people retained in many cases some degree of access to language and to country (Whalley 1987:passim). Contemporary descendants of Nunukul, Ngughi and Goenpul Clans, of the Quandamooka (Moreton Bay) region retain strong connections to their traditional country. In July 2011 the Quandamooka people gained a consent determination in their long running Native Title Claim. After sixteen years of negotiations, the Federal Court recognised native title over most of the island and surrounding waters. This was the first native title determination in southeast Queensland. The Quandamooka are also party to Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs), which guide their role in sharing the management and care of their traditional country with local and state authorities. The native titleholders play an active role in the local community.

The permanent population on North Stradbroke Island is about two and a half thousand people, mainly residing in three small settlements: Dunwich (Goombi), on the bay side, Amity Point (Pulan) at the north western tip, and Point Lookout (Mooloomba), on the northeast. The three townships are geographically and demographically different, the product partly, of distinct histories. Amity was the site of the earliest passage into Moreton bay during colonial exploration and settlement, important to shipping and site of the first pilot station. It grew as a centre for fishing, and for many years, boat access to the island for visitors. Amity is now a quiet village, popular with retirees and anglers, as well as holiday campers. Dunwich was the island's institutional and administrative centre, first a military stores depot, then catholic mission, quarantine station and briefly, a lazaret, then benevolent asylum. Dunwich is now the island's transport hub, and the base of mining operations and other island businesses, as well as the local school. Point lookout was the location of a pioneering pastoral lease, used for cattle grazing. The site of a radar base during World War Two, it later developed as a holiday village for keen fishermen and adventurous daytrippers. Point Lookout became a popular surfing and tourist destination, recently promoted for land based whale watching. Despite massive tourist influxes at peak holiday times, the island community is small and close knit though exceptionally diverse. It encompasses local Aboriginal families, long-term residents and many itinerants. The island attracts retirees, anglers, surfers, travellers and those seeking alternative lifestyles, alongside professional fishermen, tourism operators, small business people and sand miners.

The sands of North Stradbroke Island are rich in the minerals rutile, ilmenite and zircon. Mineral sand mining first began on North Stradbroke Island in the late 1940's, initially as a small scale and labour intensive manual process. Visible veins of the black mineral, concentrated by wave action, were shovelled off the beach by hand, on to old trucks at low tide. The first shipment left the island in 1950 (Durbidge and Covacevich 1981). Now more than sixty years on, many parts of the island have been mined intensively, some areas more than once, as the efficiency of extraction methods improved. Sibelco Australia, hold extensive mining leases and currently operate at two large mine sites on the island. Privately owned by one of Belgium's wealthiest families, the Emsens, SCR Sibelco NV is one of the world's largest industrial mineral companies, with over 220 extraction and processing operations in 41 countries on five continents. This includes the 'Enterprise' and 'Yarraman'

mines on North Stradbroke Island. Sandmining is a major contributor to the local economy, as is tourism, but the mix is not always harmonious.

Both tourism and mining offer prosperity and development that support the local community. Both rely on the natural environment, but in dramatically different ways. Unrestrained, both pose threats to the distinctive character of the island, including to Aboriginal cultural heritage, aspects that constitute the island's appeal to locals and tourists alike. Thus the island's future has always been a sensitive subject. There have been long running tensions among the island's residents, about the direction of future development on North Stradbroke Island. Ongoing complex debates about mining, conservation, development, and native title are woven into everyday social relations. And like any small community there are many small and overlapping networks, as well as wider common bonds.

However tensions, which had often simmered in the past, erupted in unprecedented, bitterly divisive and acrimonious public battles in 2011 and 2012. Many locals rallied around polarised positions pitting sandmining against conservation in heated, highly visible, emotional and aggressive public campaigns. It got personal. Families and communities were divided. And the turmoil spilled beyond the shores of the island into the mass media, into state politics, and into the courts.

Shortly before the Native Title determination was formalised in July 2011, the former (Labor) Queensland state government announced, in April, several major decisions affecting North Stradbroke Island's future. The government announced new national parks, and the phasing out of sand mining when current leases expired in 2019. Legislation was passed in June, and discussions began of a process to plan the eight-year transition to a sustainable economy, based on ecotourism. Locals were affected differently by these changes, and reacted in a variety of ways. Mine closure was a threat to those who relied on the mining directly or indirectly for their livelihoods. It was welcomed by those who had campaigned many years for it, inspired by visions of a greener future. There was undoubtedly an economic dimension to this dynamic. Those who could afford to live on the island, without relying on the mines for work, were seen by some to have a selfish motivation, without regard for those could not. As it escalated, there was also ultimately a party political dimension to the rift. Many however, were simply thrown into deep uncertainty by divisive rhetoric about the future,

about the island communities' viability, and about the types of planning and development implied. It was unclear whose plans and whose voices would be heard.

Sibelco wanted leases extended to 2027, and lobbied the state government against the changes. A professional corporate communications firm was engaged to 'develop and implement a public affairs strategy to influence public opinion and political decision-making, to ensure the continuation of sand mining until at least 2027' (Rowland 2012:3). Identifying 'political uncertainty' in the lead-up to upcoming state elections as a factor, Rowland sought public endorsement by then Queensland opposition leader, Campbell Newman, for the continuation of mining until 2027 (2012:4). After Newman committed the Liberal National Party (LNP) to overturning the legislation, mining on North Stradbroke Island became a key issue in the state election.

At this point many island people became actively involved in hostile public political campaigns, both on the island and on the mainland. Some campaigned, on both sides, in campaigns in mainland electorates. Public rallies both for and against mining were held on the island, and duly reported in the news media, complete with T-shirts, placards and bumper stickers. All sides were active on social media platforms. There was discord within the local conservation movement, and division in the Aboriginal community.

The LNP won the state election in April 2012 and passed legislation to overturn the previous act in October 2013. In June 2014 the amendment act was the subject of a High Court challenge by the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC), and its relation to events in the election were referred to the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC).

Part of what was at stake in all this was islander authenticity: in the wider world who spoke for the island, who had the right to speak for the island. Their sense of place, emergent through everyday immersion in the landscape, informs the locals' perceptions. The intimate relationship in which they are engaged with their immediate environment sometimes produces the moral authority, or even a sense of obligation, to speak for the place itself. This plays into the complex relations in which the island community is enmeshed in wider global economic and political networks. The next chapters explore the production of island identities through conscious constructions, and through lived experiences in the island landscapes.

CHAPTER THREE: Searching For Islandness

'Being an island is the most special of Stradbroke's special qualities'
Mrs Durbidge said. (Anonymous 1984)

Between March and September of 2014, I spent time living on North Stradbroke Island myself. I stayed there four times, for periods of about three weeks each time. I timed my fieldwork to avoid school holidays, long weekends and peak tourist times, spending more time in the quieter winter months. I experienced immersion in the landscape firsthand, joined in community activities and met people through my neighbours and some old friends and acquaintances there, and through volunteer work. I kept a journal and recorded my observations as well as many casual conversations. I also made audio recordings of informal interviews with about a dozen people, from various backgrounds, about their experiences of island life. The quotes included in this ethnography are mostly taken from those interviews, and some are from other conversations.

This chapter takes information gathered during the time I spent on North Stradbroke Island and uses it to seek out the special qualities or unique characteristics that might be said to contribute to a sense of 'islandness'. What is it about islands that inspires such intense fascination, contradictory stereotypes and powerful allure? Island studies takes the importance of this concept as its basic premise, and initially enjoyed a 'growing and wide ranging recognition' (Baldacchino 2004a:270; Baldacchino 2006:3). Yet the field has struggled to articulate a coherent theory of what precisely constitutes 'islandness' (Fletcher 2011:17; Anonymous 2007:1) and intractable theoretical faultlines have emerged (Hay 2006:19; Hay 2013:10). Divisive conceptual debates still challenge clear definitions of islands and islandness.

Islandness is difficult to define, in part because islands themselves are extremely diverse (Gillis and Lowenthal 2007:iii) but also because physical islands are conflated with cultural preconceptions and metaphorical constructions.

Larger islands differ significantly from smaller islands. Islands dominated by a mountainous hinterland may have little in common with low-lying sand or coral islands. Tropical islands differ dramatically from temperate or cold-climate islands. And I do not only wish to establish these as intractable differences on the ground – the construction of island representations faithfully reflects this stubborn proliferation. (Hay 2013:209–10)

For these reasons much debate in island studies has surrounded the question of whether valid commonalities can ever be found across widely varied island lives (Hache 1998:35). There has been an argument against efforts to strictly classify islands, by size or geography, since their ‘myriad diversity’ is entailed in their richness for research (Baldacchino 2005:247). Many scholars insist still that island research offers important lessons for the wider world (Depraetere 2008:17; Baldacchino 2004b:280; Péron 2004; Terrell 2004).

[T]he enhanced impact of islands on the human imagination is not a passing fad: there is rather an essential contribution of, and by, small islands and their inhabitants to the urban and globalised civilisation of our time. (Péron 2004:326).

Thus, without lofty ambitions to posit universal answers, I examine three issues that seem problematic in island studies, through particular local expressions of islandness on North Stradbroke Island.

The first is the problem of powerful metaphorical constructions, prevailing cultural stereotypes about islands, and the tangled relations between real physical islands and the projected images. Although contradictory to the point of paradox, island stereotypes consistently reproduce images of islands as bounded and discrete, isolated, remote and peripheral. It can be argued that such depictions are essentially a mainland view that defines islands in *contrast* to mainlands. That is to say, they describe islands by what they are *not*: connected, contiguous and central, or by what they are seen to lack, often resources or progress. I compare this to ways that people on Stradbroke themselves create and maintain images of islandness.

It has also been suggested that islands often function as a sink for mainland fears and insecurities (Hay 2006:27) or as the butt of mainland jokes (Laurie Brinklow 2011:21). Part of what they lack, compared to mainlands, is modernity and sophistication. The second

section discusses this association of island remoteness and insularity with backwardness, and lack of progress. In this connection I suggest Stradbroke islanders' own constructions actively resist imposed mainland concepts of progress.

The last part of this chapter examines one effect of globalisation, the increasing movements, on and off islands, between islands and mainlands. Such movements are seen by some in island studies to weaken the social fabric and threaten vulnerable island identities (Hay 2006:25). I consider this question with the related issue of authentic islander voice, the 'insider/outsider' question in island studies. In the case of Stradbroke island (and other island places) movement is quite common. It does not appear to be either a new phenomenon, or a threat to island identity. It can be argued that the homogenising forces of globalisation also serve to reproduce difference (Eriksen 1993:145) and that travel can reinforce concepts of home. I raise some different ways of considering islander perspectives on movement, in relation to islandness.

3.1 Making Island Meanings

Physical islands may be surrounded by the ocean and yet not isolated from the world, hence many islands are not islands in the sense implied by the *metaphorical* use of the term island (Eriksen 1993:135; Baldacchino 2004b:273). Stradbroke Island is not a remote exotic or foreign location. It is quite close to a major city and fully embedded in media networks, the modern Australian state and the global political economy. And although they live on an island, contemporary Stradbroke Island residents are not immune to pervasive Western cultural stereotypes of island isolation, even as they are linked into wider networks. If the dominant island conceptions are mainland Western cultural constructions, what does that imply for *island* constructions of islandness, which are produced from *within* that cultural paradigm? How do the locals see islandness on North Stradbroke Island?

There are a handful of standard tropes among the cultural images of islands, which make for some general assumptions and associations. Islands are often represented as simple, with a slower pace of life, 'island time'. This is a double-edged projection: as a simple relaxed place, the perfect getaway-from-it-all holiday destination or romantic escape; but also as the

rustic unsophisticated, and primitive, undeveloped, left behind. Of course islands can also represent the ultimate opulence of the luxury resorts and private islands of the very wealthy. But whether relaxed and laid back, tropical paradise or challenging adventure, islands are never just the same as normal everyday mundane real life (on the mainland). They are generally defined in *contrast* to normal and everyday. Even local Stradbroke islanders, for whom island life *is* the everyday norm, do this.

When people on North Stradbroke Island speak about what it means to them that the island *is* an island, there are recurring themes, which often fit with common island stereotypes. ‘Oh, I guess we’re all just that much more relaxed over here, aren’t we?’ said Yvonne. ‘Everyone comes here to chill the f*ck out’ said Gary. Among the first things often mentioned, and it comes up in casual conversations frequently, is traffic. Traffic seems to be the peg on which island people choose to hang the contrast between island and mainland. I met some people, and heard about others, who are reluctant to go to the mainland at all, and often because they hate driving there. The roads, compared to the island are busier, more stressful (and there are traffic lights). I heard this many times, but this is one example from Leanne:

When I go - when I drive - when I go to the mainland I sit in that traffic and I look at people in the traffic. And I know that they do it every day, they sit in that traffic. I can’t believe it. I look at their faces, I study their faces, and I look at them and I think ‘are you serious? You do this every day?’ I find it really challenging just to do it for a Friday afternoon, for a couple of hours, sitting in the traffic. But I’m at peace, because I think, I don’t have to do this all the time. But, *what the hell* are they doing? They do this every day! I’m so grateful here that we don’t have any traffic lights. There’s no traffic.

Traffic is often mentioned, but it stands in for, or goes along with a range of mainland concerns, all absent on the island. Here is what Irene told me:

That’s the one difference that I’d have is that there are no big shops. There are no, not a lot of traffic, we haven’t got any streetlights we haven’t got any of the things that they’ve got over there in Australia. So, and when I – I hate going over!

And Renée said:

All you have to do is go to the city and look at the people catching the train to work everyday, and then you know, you catch a boat to go shopping! And it is special, you know, it is special, its beautiful, ... but it does become normal.

In another comment she added:

The thought of living in the city and working in an office block is enough to send the shivers through you.

I overheard Nadine, a mother, tell her teenaged daughter:

That's all the mainland kids have to do, is hanging round in shopping malls...

In these comments, and many like them, people describe island life in contrast to the mainland, by what it lacks in comparison. Unlike a mainland view, these deficits are rarely, if ever, seen to make the island worse off though. Rather they are generally seen as desirable, as benefits. The idea that island living implies a lack of resources, a limitation compared to more 'developed' places, was either dismissed or effectively welcomed. Rebecca said:

I don't think there are any disadvantages, ... I mean you know like maybe 2% disadvantage, 98% advantage

Irene told me how surprised she is that sometimes people move to the island and leave again

Oh yeah there's a lot, that do. They can't stand not having anywhere to go. Well you can't go out at night. You can't go to plays and movies and things like that. You know we *are* isolated to that extent. We are governed by the water taxis, and you're governed in time by them too. You've got to ... you try to tell the people they've got a water taxi to catch ... 'if you don't go now, you're gonna miss that'. You know? We are, and I always say that's the price we pay, for living in paradise.

Catching boats, relying on boats and their timetables is an inescapable fact of island life. And crossing the water is a powerful symbol of (relative) island isolation. Rebecca had explained:

The other thing about an island is ... I think, psychologically, it gives that feeling of security and a kind of inclusion, like a moat does around a castle, that we're here together, and all of that is over there away. So ... I think at a sort of primitive level there's also that sense of um,

well ... back when we first used to come, because there were fewer ferries and boats, once you were here, you couldn't get back, and they couldn't get to you, anyway. I mean ... you just had to *be here*, you know?

If crossing the water by boat is a defining feature of islands, then replacing boats with fixed links, like causeways bridges and tunnels, has the potential to bring the defining into sharper focus. Fixed links are always controversial, alternately seen to signify inevitable progress, or to annihilate island separation and distinct identity. The convenience of a bridge

irrevocably transforms otherwise whole islands into mere parts, fractions of mainlands. Thus, the island not only loses its geographically, historically and culturally defining islandness; it also becomes a small and insignificant appendage of, and therefore hostage to, a much larger whole, for which the island is but a nondescript peninsula or *cul-de-sac*. (Baldacchino 2007:324)

When the Queensland government proposed a bridge to North Stradbroke Island in the 1980s the plan included expanding the population from 2,000 to 50,000 (by 2006) in several new town centres. The proposal was very divisive. It generated vocal debates in which many people expressed a deep concern to protect the island's distinctiveness while others demanded the modern convenience a bridge would deliver. A well-known Point Lookout couple were photographed for a Brisbane newspaper, standing back to back with their arms folded, displaying their disagreement. The bridge debate offers valuable insights into how people perceived the island. Ron, a local resident was quoted in a newspaper article:

"Things are so primitive," said Ron. "We've got no repairmen, no high school, no public transport. It's only human nature to want to improve things – and that's what the bridge will do." (Bentley 1984).

The prospect of a bridge led others to articulate the island differences they valued, and to project them to a wider, mainland audience, in the mainstream media.

I built on the island because I enjoy island life, and happily accept all that this means. Had I wanted the facilities and conveniences of the Gold or Sunshine Coast holiday meccas, I would have built there instead. However I do not wish to live among the noise glare, glitter and hassle associated with that kind of suburbia.

I suggest, therefore, that those bridge proponents move to where they will receive all the benefits they feel they are entitled to, leaving behind those of us to whom island living is the ultimate ideal. (letters to the editor, The Courier-Mail, May 1984)

Many people protested the environmental impacts of rapid urban development. Still others questioned the planning process and political motives. Peter Chamberlain, a resident of a neighbouring island was quoted succinctly:

We came over here to get away from the mainland rat race. Now the government wants to bring the rat race to us. No thanks! (Ord 1984)

Arguably, the bridge controversy forced the issues of islandness, the island's essential and distinctive character, into consciousness, or into clearer focus. The Stradbroke Island management Organisation (SIMO) was formed in that period to research and protect the islands natural environment. In some ways the community was divided, but the island itself was what they shared, and the small community is part of what many people still value about island life. A third generation local, Neil, told me

Yeah the fact that an island is an island, means that you're meeting people and you're dealing with people who've come here because its an island, and they don't really appreciate a lot of the values of the city and um, living in a tight anonymous community. They might be loners, but they know everybody, and they're watching everybody and everybody's watching them, so it's a really great place for kids, it still is, because of the village nature of Point Lookout, Dunwich and Amity.

This comment highlights that island residents generally share not only the island space, but also the conscious choice to be there, and (often) a rejection of the contrasting mainland (usually expressed as 'city') lifestyle that that implies. This goes to the heart of one more metaphor about islands, the idea that they test or reveal true human nature. Glen, a surfer and lifelong visitor now 15 years resident, remarked:

A good old boy once said to me that people don't come here to find themselves – they already know who they are when they come...

Because they've made a conscious choice, and sometimes a great sacrifice to be on the island he explained:

there's already a sort of sensibility and it has nothing to do with education economics or anything like that, but it has something to do with life experience and an attitude to the world. It defines the sort of people that you find here and they will be different from the sort of people that you'll find going through ... suburbia round Australia

Talking to people on Straddie, the contrast against suburbia emerges as a deliberate conscious choice of the island alternative, and the active production of an island difference. Ironically perhaps, island communities, even though no longer technically isolated, may nevertheless mobilise island stereotypes. This is possible because of the *symbolic* significance that attaches to physical boundedness, the (idea of the) sea as a barrier. This may also contribute to another common image of islands: as backward and conservative, slow to progress. Think of Tasmania in Australian popular perception.

3.2 Insularity as Backwardness / Backwardness as Resistance.

When people spoke to me about island life almost everyone mentioned the sense of community. The small size and circumscribed nature of the townships throws people together. Renée said:

I still think it's the most beautiful place in the world to live, and to be, because, you keep thinking you want to go somewhere else, and there just is nowhere else. There is plenty of beautiful places, but, we've got a great community here. It's special.

According to Nadine, this is how the community works:

I love it. What I love about it is that you're a known entity and you know whether you're, and this is speaking about the community, whether you're an alcoholic, an unemployed person or a business person, we're all known entities and we all have our support networks

Others described the community in a similar way. This is Rebecca, a second generation resident:

I think there are all, lots of little pockets around, people coalesce around areas of common interest and sometimes those overlap, and then groups will, disparate groups will come together for say like a funeral, of a person, like happened last week ... you know, which a lot of us from here went to, and there were people from all over the island and very different groupings, so you wouldn't normally see that group of people collected together.

Isabel also drew attention to the intra-island differences:

We're not a homogenous population, on the island, as you'd be well aware. The three townships are demographically extremely different. And although we come together as islanders and we have that sense of identity, mutual identity, there are problems and issues that relate to the way that people think about the way that the island might be developed.

I even noticed some local parochialism, discussing development on the island – there is already too much high rise – Irene told me:

No, in fact Amity suits me, I wouldn't want to go and live at Point Lookout. Number one is anywhere in Amity you can walk, if you haven't got a car. And its just like a sleepy little fishing village where, in fact, my grandchildren used to say to me when I was driving the car, and I was waving, 'you know everyone, don't you Granma?' and I'd say 'well, not quite', but its sort of, at Amity, you've got a fair idea.

Some people, even at Point Lookout are attached to their own part of it, and wouldn't want to live in another street. A number of people described the dynamic between island identity and local differences. Several mentioned that a death, or a funeral brings people together. Rebecca again:

I think if there were a major threat, like some terrible illness, on the mainland and we had to kind of, now I'm just thinking extreme – and we had to all work together as a community and help each other out, we would, but I think in the meantime while there isn't such a threat, that we do tend a bit to kind of on various issues splinter apart. And there's not as much unity and harmony and cohesion, generally, as might be lovely to have, but I don't know, I think that's kind of true anywhere

Reflecting on his fieldwork on Mauritius, Eriksen points out the importance of context in identity construction. He notes that in everyday life on those islands, people are more likely to identify through their ethnic communities than as 'Mauritian'. However:

Isolation is always relative. Thus, Mauritians from different communities, when they meet in France or England, tend to relate to each other as Mauritians - not as Hindus, Creoles or Muslims. As a general rule, island identities depend on a contrast with some perception of the 'mainland'. What is to be conceptualised as the mainland and what is to be regarded as the island, varies with the social context. In the domestic context, the 'mainland' is frequently perceived as the whole of Mauritian society. When one is abroad, the mainland would rather be seen as France, England or the whole world - and in these situations, Mauritius as such may be an insular focal point of identification.

I suspect that people from Straddie might be more likely to say they are from Straddie when on the mainland, but from Dunwich when on the island. More research is required to confirm this. However intra island differences may not be clear from the mainland viewpoint, as Isabel pointed out:

In some of the environmental groups there has been a tension, because mainland environmental groups want to impose their views on island based groups, and there's often – there can be a problem, because the mainlanders aren't aware of the subtle, social and interpersonal relations and tensions that exist between people that live in the different townships and among the townships.

Is the island a place for loners? Some people noted a self-conscious awareness, or even construction of personal isolation. Several made comments to the same effect as this one from Glen:

Well I've always felt like *I* was an island! An outsider, you know? So this was a natural place to gravitate to. But I think that many people here might have a very similar consciousness, a sense of their own isolation.

And from Rebecca:

Well, we get on fine with people, and enjoy people and love living in a community, but we're both closet hermits.

And Neil:

Um, I've always been a bit of a loner, so, sort of the social, I haven't really been a social, in any real social cliques here,

The combination of relative isolation, small community and slower pace of development produces something else. I'll call it the village effect. Glen described it this way:

Well the sense of isolation that kids experience over here is not that much different from the sense of isolation that I felt in suburbia in Brisbane 60 years ago. We still looked then at the thought of going to town as a major excursion, the same as kids going from here, over to town, would be a major excursion. It required planning and I think that's quite interesting in the sort of independent thinking, the way of thinking it gives to young people. And the other thing of course was that we made our own fun, you know, we had nothing, so we made log rafts and paddled around the Brisbane River. You would never do it today ...

[Me: So, in some ways the isolation of the island is kind of like?] Its a time warp.

Other people made similar associations. One compared island life to living in a rural Italian village 'they never walked more than ten miles from their home'. When I asked about the social constraints of island life, Renée said:

Well it definitely narrows your perspective on the world, and you know politics, absolutely, you can speak to some people that say 'why would you go to the mainland?' you know, that've lived here for 50 years and there's nothing over there for them. But I guess its like a hundred years ago. People didn't move out of the village. There are some people that are really, like village life is for them, you know? That's their thing: they're content. I think if you're content, why ... you know, some people aren't looking for anything bigger, they're not looking for, and they can find it all here, you know they fish and if you're being provided for, there's no need to seek, and like I mean, its not for me (laughs)

Several others made similar comments, to the effect that the island meets all their needs. Although many people move freely on and off the island, there are some who never want to, and many people who avoid trips to the mainland if they can. Its common to see people

returning on the water taxi, weighed down with shopping and parcels of all description. I'm aware that many people try to minimise their trips to the mainland, and make them as efficient as possible. Rebecca told me:

... and as you would recognise too, when we go to the mainland, when we go overseas there, we always do multiple things. We try to be efficient you know, we go to Bunnings, we go to Woolies, we see friends, we stock up on this and that and we get you know... [Me: as much done as you can?] ... Correct!

So for some people the island is a nurturing environment. It meets their needs and they consciously choose to be there, and stay there. They avoid or minimise their necessary engagements with the mainland. And they embrace things as they are. For Irene the absence of a mail delivery service is part of social life:

The whole island I think - we don't have any mail delivery. You have to go to the post office to get your mail? We had a survey come round - years ago it was - 'did we want to have mail delivery?' And everybody said 'no'. That's part of it, you know, there's a lot older people here, and they go there and meet somebody, and they sit and have a talk and ...

There have also been ongoing clashes with the local (mainland) council over the appropriateness of the services they provide to the island, street lighting, traffic signs and roads. Isabel explained:

[C]ouncil has a mainland sense of place, which says that 'we've got to bring you all of the goodies and the benefits of 21st century life in the city', and if they could put a traffic light here, I'm sure they would, but they can't because there's no call for it but they bring us everything else, and we just want to say 'take it away, you're in fact desecrating our island sense of place'.

Early in the development of interdisciplinary island scholarship, it was noted that two main strands had emerged (Anonymous 2007:1). In one, the main aim of study was on contributing to the economic, social and cultural progress of islands and their sustainable development. The other

[N]ow commonly referred to as 'Island Studies' has developed in an attempt to understand and account for the nature, dynamics and diversities of islands and islanders (and their relation to non-island entities) (Anonymous 2007:1)

One prominent aspect of the relations between islands and 'non-island entities' is the powerful urge to assist islands to develop and progress. On North Stradbroke Island the Queensland government's former plan to build a bridge to North Stradbroke and urbanise the island, and the Redland City Council's development plans, might be seen as examples. The bridge protests, and more recent controversies, did not reveal a united local community, far from it. But they did demonstrate a strong desire for island voices to be heard, rather than mainland plans imposed. In resisting imposed changes, which might be presented as 'inevitable progress' from a mainland perspective, the island community is seeking to express and maintain the distinctive island character of the community itself, as well as preserve the environment. Though perhaps they do so in divergent ways.

3.3 Comings and Goings

FULL DISCLOSURE: I have been coming to (and going from) North Stradbroke Island most of my life. I'm the third generation of my family to do so, and my children and all their cousins are the fourth. That's a short time in the life of an island, but I have some personal history with the place. My grandparents, both keen fisherpeople, began coming over in the 1930s, when the trip was much more arduous than it is now. They stayed in various of the early shacks, until they built their own after World War Two was over, duly bringing my mother and her siblings for every holiday thereafter. My family lived in that house for a few years when I was child, and we in turn came back for all our holidays too. Now we bring our families back for holidays, and family gatherings, children's parties, cousins' weddings, 80th birthdays. The house my grandparents built is on lighthouse hill at Point Lookout, and this is where I stayed during my fieldwork visits. It's a rough, steep, crooked road, reaching a dead end at the lighthouse on top of the hill. It's high, and quiet (except in a southeaster) and surrounded by bush. Some of the houses have views right down the island and out to sea, over main beach, some see over the point itself and out to the island's north. Some peek through trees at both. Most of the houses are empty, most of the time. This is true in many

parts of the island. The small local population swells tenfold, (so I'm told) in peak holiday season. People are always coming and going. I am one of them.

My history on (and off) the island both informed my physical experiences of the local place and gave me shared connections with many of the informants I spoke to and interviewed. Like I, and others in my family had, some of the locals I spoke to had holidayed on the island for many years, before committing to move there permanently. Anna, a local business owner explained that she had grown up in the bay area, on the mainland, and her family spent every school holiday camping on the island. She said she had always wanted to live on the island, since she was a child, and always knew 'deep in her heart' that one day she would. She introduced her own partner and children to the island and brought them over camping as she had done, until a job redundancy allowed her to invest in an island business and the family relocated.

Others told similar stories: long associations with the island, coming and going, before settling down there. Two of my neighbours on the hill had also spent all their school holidays on the island, as children growing up in Brisbane. Rebecca's family had a house on the hill, (her grandparents knew mine) and after many travels, eventually found an opportunity to settle there. My nearest neighbour, Leanne, spent school holidays, then all her university breaks, then school holidays after she began teaching in the outback, coming back to the island. She explained that she loved the outback, but the contrast intensified her affection for the island. It took a couple of tries, but she engineered a transfer to the island school and has taught there nearly twenty years now.

Renée described how she had also been brought to the island on family holidays as a child, then her father built a holiday house there. After high school she enrolled in TAFE, but dropped out and moved to the island instead. Although she went back for university, she said, she had tried living in the city and knew it wasn't for her. Irene, an older resident laughingly told how she came to move to the island. She had so loved spending time in her holiday house, she eventually persuaded her employer in Brisbane, that she should work only Tuesday Wednesday, Thursday, so she could have four days a week on the island. But then:

I thought 'What am I doing over there when I could be here?' I could be bowling, I could be riding my bike on the beach and picking up shells, making mobiles, doing all those things,

picking up driftwood and this is where I wanted to be. And I finished up, I left, and then I came over here.

That was 37 years ago and she still swims in the ocean every morning at dawn (sometimes 'with the sharks' depending on the tide) then comes home, for a cold shower in her backyard.

There are also families who have lived on the island for generations, but sometimes they come and go as well. Some people, whose families were from the island, who had grown up there, left as young adults, but then returned. Neil, for example, left for teachers training college when he finished school, then travelled around teaching in various parts of Queensland, for several years, before returning to teach at the island school, and settle permanently. He raised his children there, they left, then returned. A young mother, Erin, told me she grew up on the island but left to find work, moved to the gold Coast and didn't expect to move back. When she met her husband there however, the first time she brought him to the island he asked her 'would you ever think about moving back?' So they did, and she's now raising her young children on the island. Several mothers spoke freely about their island children's prospects. Nadine said she fully expects her teenaged children will leave, but she hopes they'll come back when they're ready. More than one said that they thought it was necessary and important for young island people to explore the world, off island, and many do. I'm aware of several families who have left the island to travel around Australia for a year with their children, or around Southeast Asia for half a year. In several conversations it came up, that island-raised children are accustomed to travelling, because after primary school for example, they commute to the mainland every day for high school. Also though, they have to pack a bag and travel by boat and bus or train, for their mainland friends' parties and sleepovers, or to see concerts and movies, even to shop. They become used to it, and there is a general perception that they grow up adventurous and independent.

As well as those who come and go, then come to stay, and those who stay then leave and come back, there are some who live on the island part time. One woman I had just met, told me casually she was 'ah, semi-local'. At least three other people told me they had part time neighbours. Eve has a next door neighbour who works overseas several months at a time and returns between jobs. Lana, a local musician and sometimes scientist, explained that she occasionally takes consulting contracts on the mainland for a few weeks at a time, to help support her island life. Nadine's neighbour mentioned that she often spends a few weeks at

her daughter's (mainland) home, when the surf's not good. I also met a couple, originally from the bay area of Brisbane, who holidayed on the island for many years (and had their honeymoon there). They eventually bought an island place of their own, instead of renting. They live in New Zealand now, except for every winter when they spend a few months on the island. And some of the long term, part time islanders, or multi generational holiday people, have been island regulars longer than some of the permanent residents.

Of course many permanent residents have family connections that go back hundreds of generations, and they sometimes travel or live off island as well. Early colonial records suggest that local Aboriginal people in the Quandamooka region *belonged* to particular places on the islands, but travelled widely, interacting with mainland clans, and hosted substantial groups of visiting kin and social relations on the islands as well.

Some permanent residents are apt to travel off island and often. Leanne for example went trekking in Nepal last year, and is currently planning a trip to Malaysia, with help from another friend who's recently returned from there (and Leanne's daughter, a student, was in Europe at the time). At dinner in the café with a large group one night, everyone at the table compared notes about their (separate and multiple) trips to various parts of Indonesia. While not all island residents travel, in fact many have no wish to leave, it seems that many do. Another day Renée remarked '[We] *are* travellers you know? "Island girls will travel", that's what we say'. She'd recently returned from a trip to Japan with several island friends, and told me she tries to travel overseas at least every second year. Rather than a fixed demarcation between 'local' and 'tourist', insider and outsider, then, there seems to be something more like a continuum. I encountered a range of varying degrees of localness, and a steady flow of movements on and off the island, with little sense that movement diminished island connection or identity.

Island studies set out from the start to subvert the dominance of mainland perspectives, outsider views of islandness, in favour of insiders' voices, calling for the study of islands 'on their own terms' (McCall 1994; McCall 1994). This drew criticism for appearing to support islander views, while remaining a vehicle for mainland scholars, 'though presumably more well-meaning ones' (Baldacchino 2008:38). The critique goes some way to acknowledging the blurry outlines of island location, if not identity.

[S]tudying islands ‘on their own terms’, in spite of its predilection for “authenticity”, is fraught with epistemological and methodological difficulties. The insider/outsider distinction does not work all that well when it comes to islands, where hybridity is the norm. (Baldacchino 2008:37)

The insider/outsider dichotomy in island studies is closely related to the critique that continental interests define island ‘specialness’, that it’s a product of outsider values. However the insider/outsider split itself is an oversimplification, and problematic in several ways. Olwig (2007) and citing the work of Manners (1965) discusses the circulation of Caribbean migrants and remittances. She draws attention to the ways that widespread migration between and beyond Caribbean islands requires ‘conceptualizing Caribbean sociocultural systems in terms of translocal and transgenerational communities identified with different islands’ (Olwig 2007:261) rather than as bounded ‘island’ communities.

In the Pacific, Epli Hau’Ofa (1995) goes further, overturning depictions both of islands as small and circumscribed, and of migration and remittance as signifying dependency. Hao’Ofa argues emphatically that both are not only mainland views, but also oppressive colonial constructions that ‘belittle’ islanders and their worlds. Islands look small to the continental gaze because it sees only small and separate areas of land, and land is what it is used to seeing. Islanders however see not small islands scattered in the ocean, but a huge ocean of interconnected islands, a truly large world (as large as any continent). It is a world through which island people move and connect freely, notwithstanding the colonial imposition of artificial boundaries. Island diasporas and entrepreneurial remittance arrangements, argues Hau’Ofa, do not represent economic weakness and dependency. Rather they are only the latest version of creative traditional islander mobility and reciprocity. This powerful logic effectively exposes the ‘insider/outsider’ division itself as a product of the assumptions underpinning the continental view of islands as contained and bounded, separate and isolated.

In some small ways these large questions about divergent ways of defining island lives, which come to be asked through debates in island studies, can be related to North Stradbroke Island.

If a Caribbean person speaks of her island of origin as both a natural gateway to the world and as a place of belonging in this wider world, the island emerges as a versatile point of reference

for people whose lives are oriented to open horizons, not circumscribed by local boundaries.
(Olwig 2007:263)

Olwig's comment resonates with the flows I observed, of people readily moving on and off the island and traveling widely, of children leaving and returning, but still identifying with and through the place. It opens a way of understanding the apparent contradiction when people describe the small space and local community as 'freedom'. Many of the conversations I had were about the feelings people have when they leave and come back. Nadine, describing her return from an extended trip, told me:

...walking on the beach is my thing, and I did a lot of that in Southeast Asia as well, but there was a completely different feeling when I did that, and I just feel absolutely free, and I can't even think of any other words to describe it, its just a feeling of absolute and total freedom when I'm here.

Me: Even though, you know everyone, and everyone knows you, and you can't do anything without everyone knowing?

Yeah, that's right.

Me: That's somehow more free, or more comfortable than...

Than the big wide world, yeah.

A quote from Olwig's (2007:262) Jamaican informant offers a clue: 'Our house overlooked the sea, and I think that this set part of the pattern, because the sea was there, and we could just look across to the sea'. Despite the Caribbean being literally worlds away, this could easily be said on North Stradbroke Island. One of Renée's comments I recorded perhaps summed it up 'I love getting off the island, I love going to the city, I love travelling but I also love that this is my home'.

These insights help to unsettle the prevailing idea in island studies that a viewpoint is either 'insider' or 'outsider'. In anthropology there is a long history of engagement between anthropologists and small-scale societies (especially on islands). This is accompanied by an increasingly nuanced awareness of the positionalities of researcher and subject voices, but also by the practice of establishing long close relationships with informants. Olwig's work also provides one example of ways that anthropology opens multiple approaches to recognising, investigating and theorising complex movements, migrations and global flows.

In these ways, research on islands has continually engaged with continental thought, and is likely to continue to do so in the new millennium as debates move beyond tribal economics, kinship and salvage ethnography to studies of globalisation, post-colonialism and ‘movement’ in a new era caught between trade blocks and free trade agreements (Skinner 2002:205)

Islands come with a heavy load of culturally constructed meanings. They are, consciously or not, seen as isolated and, by extension, as limited and dependent, and sometimes, backward or primitive. These characteristics inform a colonial (and neo-colonial) view that islands need mainland or continental inputs, outside support and management, to progress and develop. The degree to which islands should be theorised as isolated is divisive in island studies. Early views of islands as isolated have been disputed as underestimating islander mobility and interconnection, and discredited as informing colonial constructions of islands as weak and dependent. There is a case to be made, as Hau’Ofa (1995) argues for the Pacific, that islanders are negatively affected by such mainland assumptions about isolation. Others argue that overemphasising mobility and interconnection risks masking the facts that historically, some islands were genuinely isolated, or purposely secluded (Broodbank 2008:72). Still others claim the island/mainland dichotomy is ‘overworked’ at the expense of the archipelagic view, that interconnections *between* islands are understudied (Stratford et al. 2011:114). At the same time, the negative impacts of contemporary interconnections, the homogenising force of global communications, mass migration and tourism, are seen to threaten island uniqueness and identity. It is also argued however that rapid globalisation has contributed to the conscious construction of islandness and island identity. In his own fieldwork sites in Mauritius, Eriksen argues that metaphorical islandness has more significance than diminishing physical isolation does (Eriksen 1993:140–1). This is not the same as the argument that the metaphorical abstraction of islandness is more relevant, that it ‘trumps’ real islands.

So powerful is the metaphorical idea of the island that it can be deployed in the absence of even the slightest reference to the reality of islands. Those who live real lives on islands are entitled to resent this. (Hay 2006:30)

Hay has called for the excision of metaphorical islandness from the purview of island studies yet makes the one exception,

There is one important manner in which metaphorical senses of islandness are the appropriate substance of island studies. This is when metaphoric transcriptions of islands rebound upon real islands and influence life there. (Hay 2006:30)

Among the locals on North Stradbroke Island there is a strong awareness of the differences between island and mainland. I encountered little suggestion that the differences are seen as a lack, or as a problem to be fixed. There is every indication that the time warp effect, village atmosphere, and slower progress, are highly valued and actively preserved, at least by some, and even mobilised politically. In this way the conscious deployment of island metaphors of isolation and even of backwardness, play a role in maintaining metaphorical boundaries, effectively creating the island. North Stradbroke Island is a physical island, surrounded by the sea. It is at the same time deeply embedded in the modern globalised world, and the people who live there take full advantage of the benefits of that (with some exceptions for mobile telephone coverage). However the island is effectively differentiated from the mainland by the contrasts raised and valued by residents. These differences are maintained by a conscious effort. When the island dwellers acknowledge that the things that make the island different from the mainland are also the things they value about island life, they actively and consciously construct those differences. Metaphor and reality are both at work on North Stradbroke Island, and I suggest that metaphor and reality are co-constitutive of the unique and special qualities of island life. The conscious acts of island construction are informed by and inextricably entwined with the physical daily reality of the island itself. That is to say, the lived bodily and sensual experiences of the particular landscapes are necessarily entailed in the cognitive realisation of the island.

CHAPTER FOUR: Finding Sense of Place

Island meanings ... emerge from a deeply visceral lived experience.
They are phenomenologically generated and articulated.
(Hay 2006:34)

This thesis was prompted partly in response to the suggestion by Hay that one potential route around some of the intractable problems in island studies might be through theories of place (Hay 2006). Island studies scholars often argue that the reason islands attract so much human attention and affection is the intensity and concentration of the engagement with place that results from a circumscribed and bounded landscape (Conkling 2007:199; Nicolson 2007:153). Visitors to islands might bring with them the cultural baggage of island associations, and island dwellers themselves, in cases like North Stradbroke Island are not immune to the metaphorical meanings. They may in fact deploy such metaphors themselves in their constructions of islandness, but in different ways than, or in defiance of, the ways they are used from the mainland.

What informs local perspectives, what island dwellers have that most mainlanders, and visitors, don't have, or not in the same way, is the daily existential experience of the island landscape. This chapter looks at how locals on North Stradbroke Island encounter the landscape and seascape, and experience the place itself, bodily and sensually in the course of everyday activities. How do they construct the conscious and unconscious local knowledge that derives from physical interaction with local place, and informs their representations of the island? I take an approach to understanding the personal entanglements of individuals in specific local places through concepts of place from phenomenology.

4.1 Intimate Local Knowledge

The people I spoke with on North Stradbroke Island engage with the immediate local landscape in many different ways in the course of their daily lives. Many spend time

regularly walking the beaches, or out in the bush, surfing or diving, or fishing from beaches or rocks, photographing the birds or weaving in the dunes. Bushcare volunteers work regularly in particular areas to remove invasive plants, and restore endemic species. Others care for injured wildlife. There are two informal bushwalking groups (that I know of) and two active environmentalist groups. Some people work outdoors, and many people walk or cycle wherever they need to go. Anna often walks to work along the beaches. She said ‘It takes longer but how could you not do that?’ But in many parts of the island, whatever you may be doing, the ocean, and sky, or the beaches or bushland or cliffs, and the wildlife, are just present, unavoidable.

In the house where I was staying, for example, I could always hear the surf. When I brushed my teeth, I could see a patch of ocean, through the window behind me, in the bathroom mirror. One morning I glanced up from the basin to see a humpback whale breaching, in the bathroom mirror. I could see the ocean, and often spot a whale, or several, from the kitchen as I washed up the dishes or made coffee. I often heard kangaroos passing by in the long grass outside the house at night, or woke up to the sound of them grazing nearby in the morning. It’s not unusual to encounter kangaroos and wallabies in the streets and walking tracks around Point Lookout. One sometimes has to stop the car to let a koala cross the road in Dunwich. Because these events are *not* unusual, they are simply part of the normal fabric of daily life for people who live there. When I asked people to talk about their daily lives they each told about different things. Lana for example said:

Well, I try to go walking most mornings, and get in the ocean as many times as I can in the day. Yeah, I spend a lot of time outside, at the beaches swimming – I’m not a surfer. But I also have a connection with the bush so, because I’m an environmental scientist, and botany is one of my main things, so ... I have a connection with the vegetation here as well. So yeah a bit of bushwalking. And I also actually have a – when I was working as an environmental consultant I did a lot of fauna and flora surveys over here. So I would go out in the bush and do like, frog surveys for example, in rehab areas, and in mines, and do the vegetation surveys as well. So yeah, I have a real connection to the natural environment.

And Neil:

I just enjoy going for walks along the beaches every day for an hour or so, and enjoy going fishing in my tinnie, and going spearfishing when the water’s clean and calm. That’s mainly

my saltwater activity. Ah, freshwater activity I just love going to the lakes, and the lagoons, and swamp, on the hot days in summer, having a few beers with my wife, lighting a fire and cooking something up that we've caught or gathered.

Renée said:

We wake up to the birds, you know, we wake up to the sound of the ocean. We're living in the environment here I think, you know I'm guessing, more than in the city. You know what the tide's doing, you know when the full moon is, you know we're very weather conscious here. We always know when the southerly change is coming. So our days are — I think we're outdoor people ... and even where I work here, you know, I feel like I'm living in the outdoors, because I'm looking at the ocean all day.

As for being weather conscious, Audrey, a quite senior resident said to me

You know where my place is, you've seen my front window? I just love living in the weather! I feel like I'm right in the middle of it all the time. I can see every change that comes, in watch it right across from the horizon, and its always changing, all the time. I *love* it.

People I spoke to were clearly conscious of their surroundings, and reflecting on their experiences, however mundane they might be for them. Nadine told me:

I'm in the outdoors a fair bit, and I also get to work from venues that have pretty spectacular views so I'm constantly in contact with that abundance of life and that feeling of being a millionaire because you're surrounded by beauty. And I think that just, island life, because it's more simple, I don't know, I think you end up appreciating quite simple things, and getting a buzz from them. And another thing that I find myself saying quite often is that even after 35 years of living on a small island swimming around in the same fishbowl, you'd think that that could get boring, or that you still wouldn't be stimulated by the amazing things that happen on a daily basis like a gorgeous sunset or an eagle floating on some sort of air current, and it still gives me the same stimulation that it always has.

Others made similar comments about long years of continuous engagement with small areas. Some made the link between deep connection with the landscape and the fact of being on an island:

I think a big part of the attraction of the island, for me and my family is that it is an island. And hard to get off, and at one stage it was even very, very difficult to travel from town to town, so you really got to know intimately the small area of land where you operated. My parents, they were very, very dedicated recreational fishers and they um, just fished 2 kilometres of Point Lookout virtually in their whole life, from before they were married til probably when my father turned about 79, 80.

Yeah, and different groups of people have intimate knowledge of different areas. There's an awful lot of retired scientists have lived here and live here now, and they fulfil whatever it was that they were studying while they were in the workforce. A lot of boardriders have come here as kids and found work, itinerant or full time, and still are comfortable exploring waves that they've been riding all their lives.

Intense engagements with the landscape, and intimate knowledge of small areas, are characteristics often ascribed to island dwelling people, and accounted as key aspects of 'islandness'. The boundedness of islands makes for an experience of the landscape in which 'qualities are heightened, their essence distilled, and their meanings sharpened' (Hay 2006:34) or 'deeply imprinted' (Conkling 2007:9) and a sense of place that is 'more self evident' (Malpas 2006:10)

Islandness is a metaphysical sensation that derives from the heightened experience that accompanies physical isolation. Islandness is reinforced by boundaries of often frightening and occasionally impassable bodies of water that amplify a sense of a place that is closer to the natural world because you are in closer proximity to your neighbors. (Conkling 2007)

Immersion in the local produces a rich local knowledge, and a shared local language. Local surfers for example communicate about conditions and locations in very specific ways. Glen mentioned that:

local rock fishermen talk to each other and they have a vocabulary that, you know, individual rocks are named and um, the type of swell that's coming, the sort of water, what the weather was like the night before, what the weather is like now. All these things will tell them exactly what the conditions are and they can talk to each other about it. So maybe that's because everything's slowed down, and you're more in tune with the environment, it helps you develop a more sophisticated type of communication

A Phenomenological approach to place accommodates this kind of complex interplay between physical interaction with landscape, inextricably combined with social relations, and cognitive understandings. Phenomenology is the study of experience ‘in its lived immediacy’ (Jackson 1996:2). We can’t know a place except by being in it, and being in a place is to be able to perceive it, so perception is not separate or prior to knowledge but knowledge is part of perceiving (Casey 1993:19). Likewise social and cultural givens are not separable from perception, rather ‘[t]he primacy of perception is ultimately a primacy of the lived body-a body that ... is a creature of habitual cultural and social processes’ (Casey 1996:19). And perception is intricately related to movement. As the perceiving body moves through places, perceptions change and the body acts on the place, as the place acts on the body. In this way bodies and places are mutually integrated (Casey 1996:22). ‘To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in (Casey 1996:18). This type of intimate place perception is enabled and enhanced by combinations of sensory involvements.

4.2 Sense-ing place

Several of the Straddie locals described ways they had become attuned to the seasons and the particular rhythms of the place through living there. I was not surprised because it’s very common to hear people discussing the weather, the swell, the change that’s coming, or how late the mackerel are, on the street or in the shop or post office. Here is what Glen told me:

The people here are - we know exactly - you know, we can smell and instantly know this is the first day of winter, or the first day of spring, and everyone is saying to each other this is the first day of winter, because the light changes, and you could live in any city and never notice it. Suddenly you find winter is on you. But here people are absolutely sensitised to it. And that's an existential experience, pure existential experience, its preconsciousness, it's there. You might seem to find that people talk about when the mullet season begins you know, when the tailor are running, what all that means, the type of mackerel skies we get at a certain time of winter.

I lie in bed and I know which way the wind is blowing, because I can hear the surf from this side or from that side, I know what sort of swell is running, I know whether there's a

sandbank building up down on main beach, I can hear it breaking on it, what sort of swell is breaking on it. I mean you can wake up briefly come to consciousness late at night and feel at ease with the world because you know where you are - from the sounds - you know where you are. The curlews are crying, oh, it must be about 3 o'clock you know?

On the island sensitisation to the local is not limited to the weather. Renée spoke of seasons in a different way:

Seasonally, we're watching the whales, we're you know, it's all – and also seasonally because of our holiday seasons too, you know? We've got busy Christmases ... the flow of people, yeah, which is, really affects me personally. Like, some people don't mind it. It's hard to get your head around it because, mostly its, you're not hearing traffic, you're not waking up to the sounds of neighbours. When there's a lot of people here, the whole energy of the place changes, and it does affect your day to day, sort of like mmm, you know? I mean I don't know how to put that in words – it does – I don't know – it affects me negatively, put it that way. And its really hard to, but, you know, it passes, and then we have the island back ...

And separately from Isabel:

Also just the way people from the mainland, men and women, come over here and want to dominate, want to drive on the beaches, want to drive fast through the village, because they can. They don't get the quiet and gentle rhythm, which is there, it's quietly beating, it's there all the time, and as soon as they go home – and this is what all the locals relish – everyone sighs with relief. Not because we don't like the visitors, but because that gentle rhythm reasserts itself. And we're in tune with it, because we have to be, we live here.

Phenomenology opens a way to explore and describe sensory and bodily engagements with place, with the seasons and the rhythms and energies of the local and particular.

Following Archytas and Aristotle, Heidegger and Bachelard, Casey finds place is prior, in human experience, to space. He notes that space, generally defined as abstract and infinite, has dominated in Western discourse for several centuries, but particular local place has been retrieved in recent decades through phenomenology (Casey 1996:16). Although French social theorists Lefebvre (1991) and de Certeau (2011) had begun to critique everyday life, including social space, sense of place remained poorly theorised in the 1970s. In geography

Relph (1976) drew attention to the paucity of geographical theories of place and influential new humanistic and phenomenological approaches emerged, lead by Tuan (1977) Buttimer (1976) and Seamon (1979; 1980). Anthropologist, Michael Jackson called for more ethnographic attention to the lived body, and bodily practices (Jackson 1983). It was noted soon after that the problem of the spatial dimension in writing up fieldwork had ‘not been thought about very much’ (Appadurai 1988:16). Otherwise notable ethnographer Fred Myers was critiqued for his treatment of place (Casey 1996:14–5; Ingold 2011:52–3). In the period since, a rich ethnography of place has begun to appear. Working with the Western Apache, Basso notes that ‘attachments to geographical localities contribute fundamentally to the formation of personal and social identities’ (Basso 1996:53) and describes the dynamic interplay between senses and place:

The experience of sensing places then, is thus both roundly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic...when places are actively sensed the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind (Basso 1996:55)

On Stradbroke memory is also a part of the experience of place. When people return to the same place over many years they bring back their memories of past times there, or stories from their parents or grandparents. And the landscape changes over time. Sand comes and goes, banks build up, lagoons form, creeks change course, trees grow up or get blown down. The relationship with place is a dynamic one.

4.3 Bodies: boats and breath

The relationship with place is a physical, bodily one, and arguably moreso on an island.

On the mainland we treat our bodies either as cars - the vehicle which our brains, our selves, use to get to and from the place of work - or as pets, to be pampered, exercised, spoiled, and fed. Our bodies, most of the time, are not us. But on an island that changes. Physical life becomes the life we have. We become engaged with the un-smoothed-out nature of the earth and the sea. We manhandle our existence in a way that the power-assisted mainland has largely forgotten. (Nicolson 2007:153)

I have observed one physical effect the island has on many people. Catching the boat is a basic part of island life. People don't think about it much, but I asked them to, and many had the same reaction. It was a physical bodily reaction they performed when they spoke about and remembered it. Rebecca related it this way:

so I always have related coming here with a journey, on the water. And I've done a lot of travelling on the ocean and on the water, and I always, I have two, impacts that has for me. One is of an adventure, and the other is of, ah, sort of a separating out, of what I've left behind, and a coming to be ready to be in the place I'm coming to, and even when that changed to the car ferry, it was the same, it was just a shorter journey. And you remember when you drive on the car ferry, its like "Haaaah" [*long sighing outbreath*] you know, there's that kind of like, that heaving that great sigh, and you know you kind of, all of that day to day, week-a-day worries and troubles, they're all left behind on the mainland and you get on the boat and then it's ...

When I was talking about the boat with Isabel, she said:

We all have, all of us ... we all have exactly the same perception when we get to Cleveland, get to Toondah Harbour, get on that barge or that water taxi. And I think if you took our blood pressures at that time you'd see ... they all sink and there would be other physical manifestations that we all shared ...

Renée just said:

There's nothing better than if you've been away somewhere, and you get on that water taxi, and you 'aahh' it's like you breathe a big breath, and, you just go [*heaves a long sigh*] you know?

And it's a It is a real body ... its just like, it's like, I've got the shivers now, thinking about it, cause it actually is a memory you go aahhh you know, back on the island. And it's really ... it's a physical thing, and I don't know whether – it's an emotional thing as well. It is, of course ...

Then reading the island studies literature, this, from Canada:

You have to make a conscious decision to get to an island. A water boundary provides a tangible separation, between what you're leaving behind and what you're heading towards.

When they built the thirteen-kilometre Confederation Bridge to Prince Edward Island, what many missed most was the ferry ride – that ‘in-betweenness’ when you were neither here nor there, *when you could catch your breath* and savour it as a gift of time to yourself, (L. Brinklow 2011:20) (emphasis added)

In an early call for island studies McCall (1996:101) wrote ‘Islanders ... have a sense of the sea as part of their lives, not an isolating barrier’. I suggest the sea may in fact be both.

Part of chapter three looked at how socially constructed ideas affect our cognitive understandings of the world around us as we experience it: the ‘social’ reproduction of place experience. This chapter digs a little deeper to examine the experience itself, the precognitive bodily and sense interaction with place. In the spirit of interdisciplinarity, island Studies offers an opportunity to take the most appropriate tools or methods from different fields and use what works. There may well be aspects of island life that emerge in comparative studies. The radical particularity of islands however, suggests a role for an approach with a matching capacity for attention to the small particular details of everyday life: a phenomenological approach to sense of place.

Place provides the fabric of our lives, of our experience, but it is also the very matrix within which life and experience are formed and articulated. Place takes us in, and in so doing it also opens up into a space for experience, for remembrance, and for imagination. Experience and memory are thus always inextricably embedded in its locale and situation, while imagination draws its own sustenance from the richness (Malpas 2006:9)

CHAPTER FIVE: Radically Particular

There's an intensity to island life – it's distilled, pared down to the essentials (Laurie Brinklow 2011:21)

This thesis has investigated some conceptual issues around islandness, that are contested in the evolving field of island studies, through the experience of local residents on North Stradbroke Island. Pervasive socially derived literary and historical portrayals of island isolation, both real and metaphorical, fold into local constructions of island identity. Island stereotypes are, often unconsciously, inextricably intertwined with everyday existential experiences of place, through the body and the senses. Island people engage with the landscape in myriad diverse ways, deploy metaphors of islandness in unpredictable ways, and identify through place, as islanders, both consciously and otherwise.

Chapter three looked at relations between pervasive, often contradictory island tropes and real physical islands, and the dynamic between literal isolation, and increasing global interconnectedness and mobility. Literary islands routinely evoke either pristine paradise, or brutal prison. Islands are often presented as a test site or laboratory. They can reveal scientific breakthroughs or true human nature. In contemporary times real islands can be the test sites for nuclear weapons, or economic development models. And they can still be prisons, as Christmas Island, Manus Island and Nauru are for Australia currently, or they can be luxury tourist resorts. Ironically many former prison islands have *become* popular tourist destinations. Robben Island in South Africa, Devil's Island in Guyana, and Alcatraz are all examples, as is Norfolk Island, (and Saint Helena Island in Moreton Bay). Robinson Crusoe's island was prison and paradise, as well as a proving ground for modern man over primitive nature. Chateau D'Ilf in *The Count of Monte Christo* was both darkest dungeon and the test that revealed the hero's true purpose and rewarded him with treasure. The layers of ingrained associations that spring from these island images can be hard to untangle from our perceptions of real places. At the same time, forces of rapid globalisation, modern transport and telecommunications networks dramatically reduce the physical isolation of most islands. But looming threats of global homogeneity can also spark defiant self-conscious resistance.

People I spoke with on North Stradbroke Island often invoked common island tropes, but they reject or invert some stereotypes: ‘people don’t come here to find themselves, they’re here because they already know who they are’. Some people expressed opinions such as ‘people come to the island to lay low’ or to ‘chill out’. This variety of ideas fits with the suggestion that locals are consciously constructing island identities for themselves, or at least for the island, but apparently not in any consistent or uniform way. In the process, some actively mobilise standard tropes, that the island is conservative, or old fashioned for example, in order to reproduce the desired island lifestyle. While notional isolation is cultivated, many take advantage of easy access to the mainland and travels beyond. Others do not and some don’t have the option. In highlighting moments that resonate with others in the literature, it is not intended to erase or deny the heterogeneous character of the island population and experience. I deem it realistic to acknowledge, as Hay (2006:34) does, that

there may not be a single integrated meaning of island place, and that there will be those for whom the experience of island living is displacement; a sense of entrapment and opportunity denied

Despite a growing body of interdisciplinary literature addressing complex questions around islands and island lives, a coherent theory of islandness remains elusive. The vast diversity of physical islands remains a daunting challenge. Yet many scholars remain convinced that studying islands ‘on their own terms’ has great value, not only for islands but for the wider world as well. Chapter four responds in part to the proposal by Hay (2006), that theories of place have a useful role to play in locating islandness, by exploring the existential experiences of place by locals on North Stradbroke Island. Because many island theorists hold that islands offer an intense experience of place, anthropology of the senses is highly appropriate, as is a phenomenological approach to sense of place. Furthermore, sense of place is closely associated with self-identification through place, and island identity, however diverse, may be fruitful to explore. And while it won’t deliver universal laws, phenomenology offers an insistently descriptive way to investigate radically particular lifeworlds.

Perhaps one of the most contested rifts in island studies is about whether islands through being circumscribed are prone to vulnerability, or resilience. There is a persistent view that islands are essentially dependent and threatened that coexists alongside a repeated call to learn from islands for the benefit of elsewhere. The insights of Hau’ofa draw attention to

ways of overturning the views of islandness that infiltrate English literature and culture, language and politics. The controversy over mining and conservation and the need for an island defined future might be seen in terms of the resilient/vulnerable tropes which are simultaneously mobilised on NSI. The idea of the island as economically vulnerable and dependent on outside, corporate and governmental economic and policy help to survive on one hand, vies against the will to retain island difference, and promote special uniqueness as a future path on the other hand, resisting imposed progress and ‘mainlandisation’. Studying the existential experience of the locals however, suggests that locals, regardless of their positions in this debate have in common both a deeply engaged experience of the place, and the wish to speak for the island’s future from an island perspective, as the authentic voice of the island, rather than see the future controlled by external, mainland perspectives. To the extent that cultural island tropes permeate all sides, they are mobilised to reinforce island identity, first and foremost, and they are informed by the bodily lived experiences of the island in daily mundane life.

Clearly many of the broader insights emerging in island studies fit better in some scenarios than others. North Stradbroke Island cannot be said to reflect the situation of remote small island nations in the Pacific or the Caribbean, (nor in Singapore or Hong Kong). And there is little comparison between middle class Australians travelling around Australia, or Asia, for leisure, and the remittance economies in Pacific island states for example, (or depopulation in fishing villages off the coast of Canada). This project is not intended to suggest there is a close analogy between vastly disparate island communities. The vast diversity among islands is indeed a key challenge facing island studies. It is an attempt to sift through the theoretical constructions, and metaphorical usages, in search of elusive commonalities. In the process I note that there is considerable diversity *within* the local population on North Stradbroke Island, as no doubt there is on many other islands. And the current research is limited to a small sample within that, hinting at still greater diversity, rather than any claims to representativeness. This only re-confirms the precarious nature of the search for common factors in island identity, and highlights the utility of ‘radical particularity’ as a warning against the temptation to generalise, even within islands.

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