

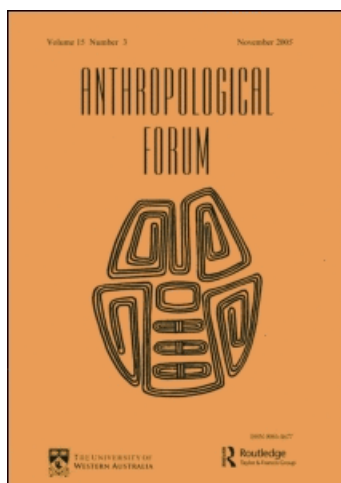
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Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 773444546]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Anthropological Forum

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713405137>

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Online publication date: 09 June 2010

To cite this Article Peace, Adrian(2001) 'Dingo discourse: Constructions of Nature and contradictions of capital in an Australian eco-tourist location', *Anthropological Forum*, 11: 2, 175 — 194

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/00664670123053

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00664670123053>

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Dingo discourse: Constructions of Nature and contradictions of capital in an Australian eco-tourist location

ADRIAN PEACE

During the 1990s, the symbol of the dingo was extensively used to market Fraser Island, located off the east coast of Australia, as a significant destination for eco-tourists from both inside the country and overseas. Situated some 190 kilometres north of Brisbane, capital city of Queensland, Fraser Island is geologically unique. The largest sand island in the world, it contains over 400 distinctive perched lakes, and distributed throughout its 124-kilometre length is a striking diversity of flora and fauna.¹ The dingo is amongst the largest of the island's fauna, and it is made to play a prominent part in the commercial advertising geared to selling the island and its major up-market resort, Kingfisher Bay, to visitors. It figures extensively in leaflets, guidebooks, magazine articles and maps, as well as on postcards, T-shirts, posters, videos and the many other commercial items commonplace in Australian tourist destinations. Yet in mid-1998, at the same time that the dingo's iconic potential was being commercially explored, rangers in charge of the island's many eco-tours were in a backroom of the Kingfisher Bay Resort drawing up a profile of dingoes selected for disposal. On an office wall chart, the distinctive markings and current misdemeanors of several dingoes were being carefully recorded, with a view to transporting them to the north of the island, or feeding them arsenic-laced food, or shooting them—though the word actually used by local rangers and regional politicians was 'culling'.

In this paper, I aim to unravel this paradox in order to explore the contradictions underpinning eco-tourist practices on Fraser Island. My initial focus is on the discursive strategies used to constitute the island as the embodiment of Nature and to construct its flora and fauna as the natural constituents of that space. All tourist venues are sold on the strength of their environmental distinctiveness. Eco-tourism, however, especially privileges the environment and the experiences that visitors might variously derive from contact with it.² This being so, the social practices involved in constituting the environment and its parts must be of analytic interest to an anthropologist.³ This means examining the words, phrases, metaphors, images and other linguistic resources that go into constructing Fraser Island as the embodiment of Nature.⁴

Within the marked degree of unanimity among those who commodify Fraser Island as the ultimate encounter with Nature, one finds the discursive practices that constitute the objects of which they speak. What is most striking about this

eco-tourist construction of Nature is its exceptionally ordered and patterned character. Everything has its place in a wider scheme of things: all fauna and flora occupy and remain in a designated and known space. This is central to the appeal of Fraser Island as an upper-echelon tourist location. When travelling substantial distances from overseas, and when paying handsomely for accommodation and services on the island, tourists want to be assured that they will see what they have come for, and for the most part this has been the case. The problem with the island's dingo population is that in recent times some have moved out of their prescribed space in the tourist-directed cartography of Fraser Island, and for some the price of transgression has been high. They have become victims of the island's intense commodification and the exchange value that this process has accorded their symbolic form, rather than continuing to bathe in the limelight as one of its more prominent icons.

Fraser Island: The context and the practice of 'wilderness adventure'

Fraser Island (Figure 1) is composed of sand washed into the South Pacific Ocean by the rivers of the Great Divide, driven northwards by powerful ocean currents and finally built up just a few kilometres off shore by strong winds. The island's width varies between 5 and 25 kilometres, and its highest point is 250 metres above sea level. However, the powerful ecological forces which created it ensure that the island is constantly changing. A number of its lakes are being lost to the invasion of sand dunes driven by the prevailing wind system.

Because of the quality of the sand, Fraser Island became a target for national and transnational mining corporations in the late 1960s. This was so trenchantly opposed by the Fraser Island Defense Organisation (Sinclair & Corris 1994) and subsequently the broader Australian environmental movement (Bonyhady 1993: ch. 1) that the island became a major focus of environmental struggle during the 1970s. However, prior to this, the island's ecology had been transformed by extensive cattle grazing and the timber industry that logged the area for well over a century (Dargavel 1995:178–179).

All such development was brought to an end in 1992 when the area was declared a World Heritage site, following the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry (Queensland Government 1991). At this point, not only did the sand-mining companies abandon their interest in the island but so, too, did the more aggressive wings of the country's environmental movement; this left the field open to the eco-tourist industry, whose political discourse is currently pervasive.⁵ The 300,000 visitors who cross from the mainland each year mostly encounter the distinctive discourse of the eco-tourist companies, which situates the dingo within the broader construction of Nature that is integral to the island's commodification as a distinct physical place and unique symbolic space.⁶ This commo-

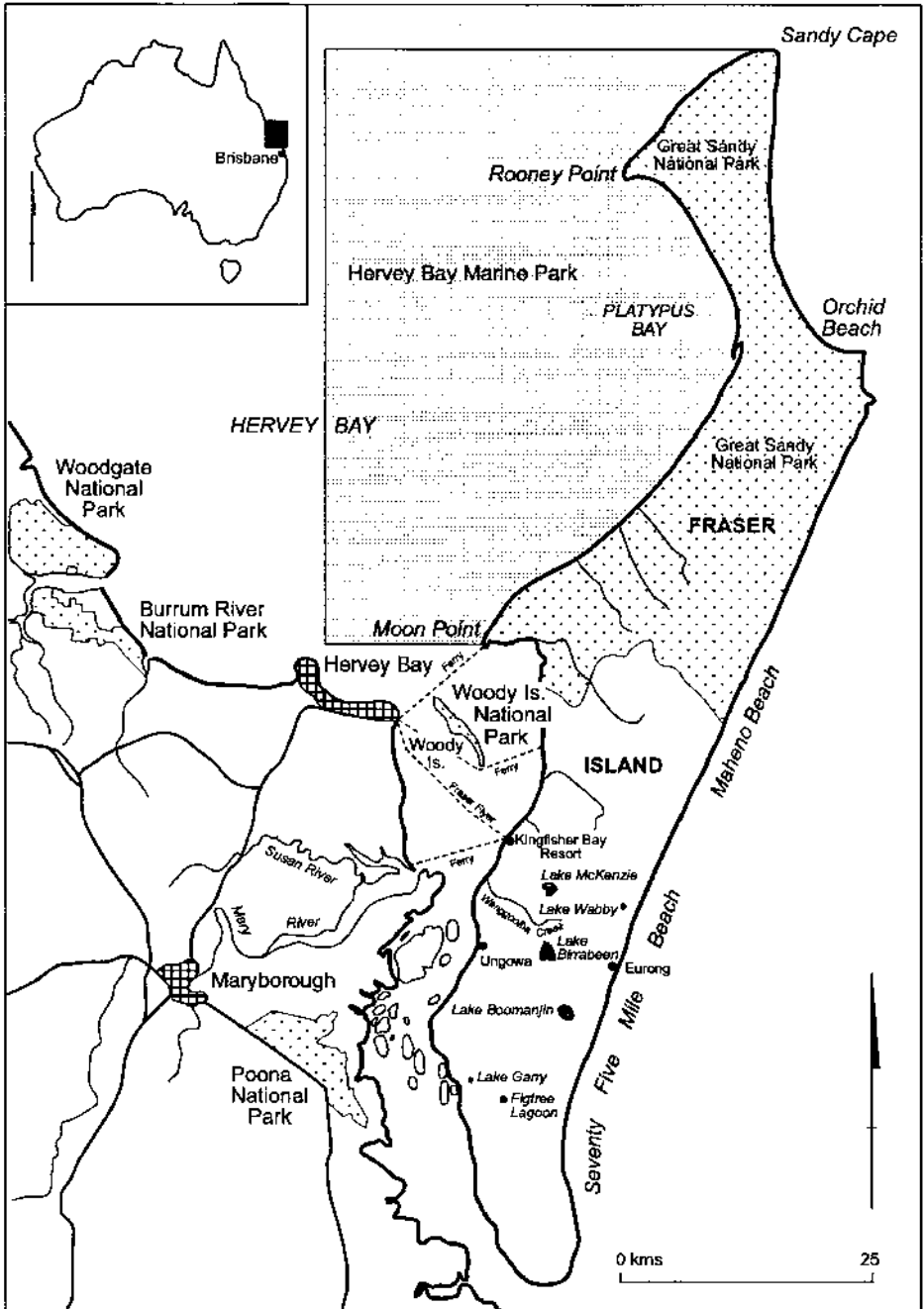


Figure 1. The Fraser Coast, Queensland.

fication involves the repeated cataloguing of select and substantial physical resources of the island, and its portrayal as pristine, untamed, ancient and untouched.

Inasmuch as modern industry has transformed the ecology, and since some of that industry is itself now commodified as tourist attraction, the equating of Fraser Island with natural wilderness has to be engineered with the deployment of carefully selected metaphors. The image of Mother Nature is recurrent: the emphasis throughout is on this space as a welcoming, comforting, and captivating environment in which it is possible to feel secure and at ease. On occasion, an alternative metaphor is that of a young, seductive woman, as befits the designation of leisure space in an uncompromisingly hedonistic society:

Fraser Island—Sculptured by Nature

Spanning 124 kilometres and covering an area of 16,300 hectares Fraser Island has developed over a period of 800,000 years, and it's still being perfected. It may be possible to explore every inch of its beauty, yet just a taste can leave you charmed and captivated. Sand is the key to how the island was formed but it is the abundance of fresh water in its many lakes and crystal clear creeks and streams that has made it so special. Pristine clear mirror lakes and the peat-coloured perch lakes are some of the largest in the world. Each of the lakes has its own particular character. Mysterious, moody and beautiful ... (Fraser Coast, Fraser Coast Travel Centre)

Anthropomorphism of this order is rife in writings about Fraser Island. In this quite unexceptional passage, Nature is a 'sculptor' that strives towards perfection and 'charms' and 'captivates' by virtue of being 'mysterious', 'moody', and so on. Nature can even be recruited to ensure an outstanding vacation. One leaflet describes the island as a place 'where nature works all the year round to give you a great holiday' (Kingfisher Bay, Ranger-guided walks), another claims that 'Fraser Island is an adventure with nature—wild, beautiful, ancient'. In that tourists are encouraged to move through the island's different ecological niches by bus, four-wheel drive or on foot, as well as viewing it from the air, the idea that Nature is putting on a constant exhibition for this population-in-motion is a recurrent theme. During a day-long bus tour, visitors will learn of 'the epic migration of whales and wading birds, of thousand year old trees and wildflowers that bloom for just a day, of the fragile complexity of this ever-changing, living museum' (Fraser Island, Ranger-guided tours).

On this island, then, Nature is neither hostile nor threatening nor unpredictable. Instead—and this is the force of the museum metaphor—Nature is arranged, patterned, ordered, instructive; everything has its part to play and each element maintains its place in terms of space and time. The successfully anticipated arrival of whales along the coast, or migrant flocks in the mangroves and estuaries, testifies to a degree of certainty, even coordination, in Nature that

belies more unstable and unknown qualities which might be vaunted elsewhere.⁷ The tourist literature contains many exhortations to explore and discover: visitors are encouraged to take 'an adventure with nature' or experience 'wilderness adventure'; they are exhorted to embark on 'an encounter with nature', 'to explore Paradise', and so on. Yet the mammoth facticity of maps alone subverts the idea that a tourist is likely to 'discover' anything novel about this comprehensively worked-over terrain. This is by no means a negative consideration. It ensures that one's few days on the island will be turned to best advantage; the guarantee is that one will see what one has come to see before returning to the time-consuming uncertainties of city life.

The fold-out 'Sunmap Tourist Map of Fraser Island' not only provides numerous signposts to what one will encounter in a particular locale but also determines the meanings to be derived from it. The signpost that directs the visitor to follow one major creek from the coast to Central Station reads: 'Wanggoolba Creek—Cool freshwater creek running through the heart of the island's rainforest. Central Station provides the best area from which to view the creek's lush tropical plants including some very rare ferns'. Overleaf, the visitor is literally told 'What to See', and this builds on the claim—under the heading of 'Fauna'—that:

The island's transition forest is the most interesting feature of the flora. These develop as tall stands of satinay and brushbox and mass together with picca bean palms and kauri pine to harbour a lush understorey. Satinays, the most magnificent trees on the island, are easily recognised with their rough bark, dark fleshy leaves and straight trunks reaching some 70 metres or more towards the sky. They are almost exclusively found in the centre of the island with the more impressive areas being at Pike Valley, between Central Station and Lake McKenzie.

Maps such as this not only give metaphorical significance to Nature's constituent elements (trees that 'mass together', 'harbour', and 'reach for the sky'); phrases like 'the best area', 'what to see', 'very rare', and 'the more impressive' also impose a definitive cartography of meaning that might well discourage visitors from working out such matters for themselves. The temporal sequencing of an eco-tour also reflects these authoritative, professional judgments. The bus will stop for an hour at Central Station because, as the map pronounces, 'Here, you can become part of nature ... [and] ... Central Station is the best area for viewing Wanggoolba Creek's rare ferns'. Yet there is no stopping in the forest on the way because, as the driver explains, 'There's not much of interest round here. The loggers took out most of the biggest and best trees that were available back then.' Evidently, it is not possible to 'become part of nature' where the impact of commercial exploitation has manifestly compromised an earlier (albeit indeterminate) integrity of place.

The important point remains that according to this rhetoric it is still possible to encounter Nature in its authentic, pristine, sublime form. This is made discursively possible because of—rather than despite—the presence of resorts on the island, for each resort has become a resource with which to mark the boundary between culture and Nature. At the ‘Kingfisher Bay resort and village [*sic*] complex’, emphasis is placed on the way architects and builders were sensitive to environmental considerations. Brochures claim that the resort complex was ‘inspired by the miracle of Nature ... [so that] ... the resort is in perfect harmony with its natural surroundings’ (Kingfisher Bay Resort publicity booklet). Yet insofar as Kingfisher Bay aims to capture the upper end of both the Australian and the international tourist markets, its eco-tourist credentials are in no way allowed to compromise the quality of its consumer comforts.

A firm line is drawn between the high consumer culture of the resort and the rich resources of Nature that lie beyond the built space of the hotel: ‘This is truly nature at its most miraculous—yet easily accessible to you from the relaxed comfort of Kingfisher Bay Resort and Village’ (Kingfisher Bay Resort publicity booklet). Brochures are frequently drawn up with one page describing the beauties of Nature, and the next the exceptional quality of accommodation and entertainment. Eco-tours always begin in the comfort of the hotel’s foyer, from which each party ventures out into Nature and begins to learn of ‘her mysteries’. Swallows nesting in the high metal eaves immediately outside the foyer are described by guides as ‘intruders’ or ‘invaders’. They are considered completely out of place in this setting where the spaces of culture and Nature are presented as complementary and harmonious, but also separate and distinct.

The dingo in Nature

Both people and animals are deployed to flesh out this construction of an ordered and benign Nature, but in each instance the exercise proves highly selective.⁸ Amongst the former, only Aboriginal people and their ‘traditional culture’ are situated in Nature’s domain, and this by virtue of allochronic representation. Sketches of the heads or upper bodies of ‘traditional Aborigines’ adorned with customary artifacts decorate publicity material, while magazines refer in the present tense to ‘Aboriginal ways of life’ as if still on-going somewhere ‘out there’. There is a racist dimension to these attempts to indelibly situate the Aboriginal population in Nature.⁹ In a series of ‘Nature Notes’ made available by the leading resort, and sandwiched between ‘Bats of Fraser Island’ and ‘Vegetation on Fraser Island’, are to be found the pages of ‘K’Gari Island of Paradise—A Cultural History of Fraser Island’, which sketches ‘Butchella legends’, ‘totems’, ‘initiation ceremonies’, and the like.¹⁰

Island fauna count for most in amplifying the specifics of Nature as an orderly and ordered domain. Advertisements frequently shift from the general

properties of the Fraser wilderness to select animals, as in the brochure, 'Fraser Island. The Natural Experience': 'Fraser Island is famous for its natural beauty and untamed wilderness. Discover for yourself the many freshwater lakes, lush forests, wild dingoes and brumbies while traversing the main inland tracks and surf beaches.' Here, then, the tourist who moves through the spaces of Nature intersects with large animals doing likewise, but it is only '*wild* dingoes' that are properly congruent with the specific space of 'untamed wilderness'. Alternatively, there is the 'Fraser Exclusive Tour—Discover the World's Largest Sand Island in Personalised Style':

Swim in the pristine waters of Lake Allom and Eli Creek . . . The Exclusive Tour is unique by being the only day tour that visits Lake Allom, home to fresh water turtles that surface regularly. You have also the chance to spot goannas and dingos [*sic*] on your day out.

This advertisement neatly captures how the predictable presence of key animals—the 'regularly surfacing' turtle—is matched to the exigencies of time compression endured by elite tourists.

Of all animals on Fraser Island, though, the dingo is singled out most frequently for special mention and iconic embellishment, for at least two main reasons. The first is that, of all Australia's charismatic megafauna, only the dingo is found on the island.¹¹ None of the other animals that are of substantial size and capable of symbolically representing the distinctiveness of this part of the continent (kangaroos or koalas, for instance) inhabits this space.¹² The field is left open, as it were, for the dingo to be endowed with charismatic properties, a prospect realised with alacrity by trading on the second consideration, which is that the Fraser Island dingo is considered 'purebred' by comparison with those throughout the mainland. How this purebred status is arrived at scientifically is not readily apprehended (see Newsome & Corbett 1982, 1985; Woodall *et al.* 1993, 1996). Yet it is consistently claimed by professional sources that, by virtue of its restricted surroundings, the Fraser Island dingo has had less opportunity to breed with domestic dogs, thus maintaining its purebred strain (see, in particular, Corbett 1996:ch. 10).

Considering that over time many domestic dogs must have been brought to the island by different migratory populations—the Butchella, farmers, fishermen, timber workers, residents and tourists—some degree of scepticism might seem warranted, but this is neither here nor there. What is important is that the claim adds greatly to the iconicity of the dingo; it accords an aura of raw Nature that resonates strongly with the claim that the island itself is true wilderness. Moreover, since the purebred population is only 150–200 strong, it is widely asserted in the tourist literature and rangers' tour commentaries that dingo numbers must be carefully conserved. As with the island's pristine terrain, the strain has to be properly nurtured, and this means taking special measures like

prohibiting domestic dogs from coming onto the island and neutering those already there. Unlike brumbies, which are recognised as having gone wild, the dingoes are presented as having never been anything but wild.¹³

For these reasons, the dingo is the object of relentless representation. Iconically, it is constituted by, and is constitutive of, Nature on the island. The imagery of the one feeds on the imagery of the other, and in the process the dingo as symbol has acquired increasing exchange value in the wider commercial marketplace.¹⁴ For example, the leaflet 'Fraser Island Guided Tours at Kingfisher Bay' explains in characteristically romantic rhetoric that the island is World Heritage listed because of 'its lush and towering rainforests; its ancient, shifting dunes and endless shimmering beaches; its rainbow-washed sand cliffs and clear, pure lakes, bright as jewels'. Above the text, there is a photograph of lush, green, swampy rainforest, while below it a fawn-coloured dingo pads slowly in the midday sun from sea to shoreline across a deserted beach. The publicity flyer for a 'Fraser Island 2 Day Safari: the Overnight Experience' displays to the left side a map of the island and to the right some text. In between, a mid brown stationary dingo is photographed on the sand at the end of the day with breakers rolling in on the beach some distance away.

This is how the dingo takes its place in the 'natural order' of things: representations of its purebred, wild identity resonate with claims about its untouched natural habitat. There are, however, three particular features that need emphasis, the first being that the animal is characteristically represented on the beach, further highlighting the claim that this is a special breed. Most images of dingoes in Australia are, of course, set in desert or scrub settings. To represent the animal in a beach context links the purity of the sand to its purebred identity. Second, the dingo is never photographed in a pack. The animal is consistently alone; it appears isolated, vulnerable, a threat to no one—and so all the more a candidate for conservation. Third, the animal is always pictured standing still or padding along. It is not photographed in aggressive or hostile mood, it is consistently docile and passive, and always at a distance from the camera.

In other words, just as Nature is sublime, so too are the animals within it, and none more so than the dingo.¹⁵ Nature here is accommodating, accessible, free from hazard, non-threatening. More particularly, this is a natural setting devoid of conflict and antagonism. One might never imagine the dingo kills to stay alive, because the presence of small vermin on the island is not mentioned; mice, rats, and the like simply do not register on lists of significant fauna put out by the publicists or rangers. This selectivity is a critical component of Fraser Island's portrayal as an eco-tourist destination. In addition to there being a clear yet complementary divide between Nature and culture, the animals occupy their distinct space in Nature, and in it their behaviour is orderly, harmonious and predictable.

Dingoes out of place

The trouble of late with some dingoes, however, is that physically and socially they have moved out of their designated space. In doing so, they have threatened to subvert the carefully crafted and commercially successful fabrication of an ordered and non-threatening Nature. In short, some dingoes have transgressed and, as the experience of transgressors in the world of humans well shows (Foucault 1972), the result has been their progressive demonisation. A further parallel is that this can only be done by those authorised to speak about and explain transgressive activities, and it is on this count that the absence of a more radical environmental discourse becomes significant. We have seen that the animal is represented as isolated and vulnerable in Nature. Now forces are at work to make it isolated and vulnerable in culture as well.

The important period on this count was early 1998, when reports of incidents involving dingoes and tourists began to circulate on the island before being taken up by the regional and national media. From this point onwards, a quite different dingo took shape on the landscape. The dingo, no longer iconic because of its symmetrical association with Nature, became instead the subject of a narrative of un-naturalness—a threat to, rather than an attraction for, the tourist trade. The incidents compiled into this new narrative unleashed an avalanche of anthropomorphism in which the passive animal became an active beast, and the hitherto celebrated wild nature of the dingo became the subject of sustained opprobrium.

For example, on 7 April 1998, *The Advertiser* (South Australia's leading newspaper) bore the headline, 'Father tells: The night a dingo took our baby'. In the main photograph, a young and attractive mother holds in her arms a small child with a dummy in its mouth. The child's shoulder is directed towards the camera to expose bite marks, and the caption reads: 'LUCKY LITTLE GIRL: Mrs Sharon Rowles with daughter Kasey last night, showing the wounds from her ordeal, and (below) one of the Fraser Island dingoes.' This second, close-up photograph, an inset to the first, depicts a snarling, ferocious animal—an image that will be extensively reprinted over the next few days. This is how the article begins:

The father of a baby girl snatched by a dingo told last night how the screaming child was dragged into the surrounding bush. Alan Rowles said he heard a crunching sound as the wild dog bit into the shoulder of 14-month-old Kasey. Mr Rowles and his wife Sharyn said they were just 2m away from Kasey when the animal stalked the child near their tent on Southern Queensland's Fraser Island. 'Sharyn yelled out and a matter of seconds later I saw this dog two metres away. I heard a crunch as he grabbed Kasey's shoulder. It was a funny sort of noise like the muscles were going to crunch. Then he shook her. All this happened in seconds. I could see the dingo with his mouth on Kasey's shoulder and going into the darkness.' Mrs Knowles, 31, got to Kasey first. 'I saw the dog dragging

her away and I ran straight for her,' she said. 'The dog must have realised I was coming (and) dropped Kasey ... I rushed to her and her lip was bleeding and I stripped her clothes off and could see the wounds.'

This source warrants quoting at length because distilled within it are several features characteristic of subsequent coverage. First, the young family is cast as innocent victim. In addition to the evident innocence of the small child who is the predator's focus, the whole family is youthful, they are on annual vacation, the child is close by (so no fault can be attached to the parents), and its 'natural hierarchy' is revealed as the father provides the account of what happened, despite the mother being the one who 'saved' the child. Second, the sequence and pace of events are set by the dingo. The people are essentially passive, or they react to the animal as the active agent that raids and assaults. This agent is effective by virtue of, third, the multiple human qualities with which the dingo is endowed by the Rowles family and the journalist. The dingo 'takes', 'drags', 'snatches', 'stalks', 'realises', and 'drops'—a striking array of abilities to display within a matter of seconds, but it is in the combining of them that the dingo dominates the situation. Fourth, this is alternately a 'dog' or a 'wild dog' and hence has quite different qualities from the natural animal represented in the tourist literature. Although 'dingo' is used at the outset, it gives way to 'dog/wild dog' as the action unfolds: 'wild dog' is especially graphic because that creature has necessarily 'gone wild'; it has learned exceptional survival qualities in an alien environment, which ensure it is aggressive and ruthless. This is an arch, clever, malevolent and treacherous beast, a predator every bit the equal of its victims. Under cover of darkness, it chooses its target carefully, it times its attack as the parents' guard is down, and only when faced with a show of greater force does it retreat. Finally, it is assumed as a matter of course that this dingo is male.

Incidents such as this can be revisited, and over the next few days dramatic flourishes were added by imaginative journalists. Just 4 days later in *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane's leading newspaper, 11 April 1998), one account of the same incident began: 'A baby girl plays in the sand near a still-warm barbecue plate, surrounded by the smell of cooked meat.' Having dwelled on the darkness and its shadows, the author describes—still in the present tense—another 'shadow' as the dingo 'sidles up silently'; and, once the demonic attack on the 'toddler' has been foiled, 'the dog ... retreats into the shadows'. The real significance of subsequent reports, however, is to draw together information on incidents that had not been thought worthy of coverage hitherto, but which could now be assembled to establish a pattern of 'Dingo Danger', as one headline had it. The symbol-replete character of the attack on little Kasey Rowles could serve as a peg upon which to hang earlier incidents that lacked the same iconic potential but could now be brought together into a coherent narrative.

Thus the same *Courier-Mail* article went on to describe how, in recent times

across the island, 'incidents were reported—a nip here and a bite there'—but such had been their irregular, minor nature that they were not accorded much significance. With the benefit of hindsight, however, a distinct pattern had been unfolding: a local resident 'had been stalked by a pack of four', a boy of five had been 'savaged on his arms and legs', an English backpacker was subject to 'the most savage attack ... bitten 14 times on the upper legs', whilst two small children were 'assaulted' within half an hour of each other.

Still photographs of the dingo were especially important at this time, none more so than the one accompanying this article, which was reprinted in the powerful stable of newspapers and magazines belonging to News Limited. Under the headline, 'Getting too close for comfort', a colour photograph in *The Courier-Mail* (11 April 1998) depicts a pack of three dingoes in shallow water between the beach and half a dozen bathers further out to sea. The animals are pointing and fully alert with their ears tipped forward, while young and old bathers appear trapped out at sea, unable to return to the safety of the beach. Like the 'toddler' Kasey, the bathers' vulnerability—for at no time are we more vulnerable than in our swimwear and in water—is being fully exploited by this pack of predators. When reprinted in *The Advertiser* (11 April 1998), the photograph is sandwiched between two headlines: below it, 'Dingo Beachcombers', which anthropomorphises the animals in yet another way; above it, 'Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water ...', which intimates that the dingoes are land-based sharks.

Clearly, some of these dingoes no longer exhibit the qualities amplified in eco-tourist publications. The solitary, aloof animal anxious to maintain safe distance from human presence has been displaced by an aggressive pack creature more than ready to intrude on the most emblematic of tourist spaces: pristine beaches and barbecue areas. The pattern warrants explanation, and at least superficially it is not difficult to find. These novel developments result from the annual flood of visitors 'bringing (onto the island) four-wheel drives full of food, laden picnic tables, meaty barbecues and loads of scraps'; in other words, a range of fast foods which any sentient animal would compare favourably with 'their natural harder-to-catch prey' (*The Courier-Mail*, 11 April 1998).

What this cannot explain is why the dingo preys on, attacks and wounds people in the selective fashion now detailed in the media. Authoritative assessment is called for, and scientific expertise is considered most suited to the task. The key idea introduced at this stage comes from a member of the Department of Veterinary Science at the University of Queensland although, as the opening sentence to the following quotation makes clear, his opinion is shared by the scientific community:

Caught in the Middle

There is broad agreement that the major problem on the island is that the dingoes' natural fear of humans has been broken down because people

continue to feed them despite many warnings not to. 'Dingoes have lost some of their fear and have started to associate humans with a soft food supply,' Woodall said. (*The Courier-Mail*, 13 April 1998)

One merit of this explanation is that it is easily taken on board. In the same article, the journalist records a similar argument from Queensland's Environment Minister (whose involvement is itself a measure of the seriousness of this situation), and then summarises what is by now received opinion:

(They) will naturally eat smaller animals and birds but prefer food that comes more easily, from people and around campsites. The problem is that when dingoes are fed or scavenge rubbish, they change their hunting skills and start to depend on scraps and handouts. They lose their natural fear of humans and expect food from everyone ... Pups do not learn to hunt naturally and grow without being wary of people.

In this scientific judgment, therefore, the idea of natural behaviour as being deeply ingrained, habitual conduct that is profoundly difficult to modify carries little weight; after all, the mass tourist industry, which has generated this atrophy of 'hunting skills', is a recent development on Fraser Island. It is nevertheless a view expressed by other highly qualified scientists. In an extended piece in *The Age* (Melbourne's leading newspaper, 8 April 1998), bearing the title 'Now it's the dingo on trial' (to which I shall return), no less a figure than the Australian mammals curator at Melbourne's Taronga Zoo gives the same argument a distinctive twist:

... some of the attacks have occurred because dingoes, having lost their fear of people, regard them as objects for games. 'The way some people are bitten is similar to the way they nip each other in dominance games,' Langdale said. 'People have become so integrated with them that they are regarded as part of the animals' group.'

Later in the article, it is claimed that nowadays 'a substantial proportion of the island's population is ingrained with bad habits'. Elsewhere, yet another scientific authority takes this claim further: 'Dingo expert Dr Laurie Corbett yesterday warned that dingoes were being trained to cohabit [*sic*] with people on Fraser Island by the activities of unaware tourists' (*The Courier-Mail*, 8 April 1998).¹⁶

When juxtaposed like this, these scientific opinions clearly lacked consistency, and yet in practice such reports were consumed separately, so that for the most part their scientific credentials could remain intact. The significant upshot is that the emphasis on dingoes as having 'lost fear' emerged as unanimous judgment. This being so, the same experts collectively predicted that 'the dingo problem', as it would be unequivocally labelled henceforth, could only become more pronounced, unless preventive measures were set in motion.

Several newspaper articles suggested it was young males on heat that were especially prone to attack people. One headline read 'No Fear ... dingoes don't hesitate to swim near tourists in the shallows off Fraser Island' (*The Courier-Mail*, 11 April 1998). 'No Fear' is a prominent Australian advertising slogan for young peoples' clothing. It conjures up an image of reckless, dare-devil behaviour by young males with little respect for the limits of permissible conduct. To this idea was added the argument that, since the current adult generation of dingoes was failing to socialise the next in proper hunting skills, marauding and scavenging animals would shortly constitute a major threat to the multi-million dollar tourist industry.

By early 1999, an increasingly dire scenario was predicted by the same, or similar, authorities who had spoken out the previous year. In February, a ranger employed by Queensland's National Parks and Wildlife Service pointed out that, while the dingo breeding season was well under way, the 'natural culling' process was not. Weaker pups were not being killed by either mature animals or their stronger siblings and so would ultimately become especially reliant on easy-to-access scraps from the tourist table. An even more ominous and indefinable process was at work. The ranger said, 'something's different', in the sense that Nature was not taking its customary course—as evidenced by highly unusual, even inexplicable, developments. Under the headline, 'Animal behaviour experts fear a fatal dingo attack on Fraser Island is imminent', it is now reported that:

Inland rangers and residents are worried that the latest attack by two dingoes on an elderly sunbaking German woman broke new ground by introducing the 'pack factor' into attacks on humans ... Senior Ranger Max Haste said that while dingo attacks on tourists were not unusual, the latest incident sounded warning bells because the woman had simply been lying on the beach. (*The Courier-Mail*, 20 February 1999)

To some extent this was predictable, the most likely culmination to a rising crescendo of opinion that the dingoes were becoming increasingly dangerous. Well before this, however, arguably the most telling source on this ultimate danger had been marshalled into the debate. In 1998, following the attack on Kasey Rowles, the electronic and print media turned to Michael Chamberlain and Lindy Creighton-Chamberlain, who were renowned throughout Australia and beyond for their long-running conflict with the judicial authorities over the loss of their child, Azaria. Although she claimed that her 9-week-old infant had been taken by a dingo as the family camped in the shadow of Ayers Rock (as Uluru was then generally referred to), Lindy Chamberlain was imprisoned for 3 years after being convicted of Azaria's murder. Following her early release in 1988, she and her husband received a compensation payment of \$1.3 million from the Northern Territory Government.

Although she had remarried and taken up permanent residence in the USA,

the parallels between the attack on Azaria Chamberlain and that on Kasey Rowles were too obvious and indeed uncanny to ignore. Lindy Creighton-Chamberlain's response was brief but emphatic: 'It gives me a shock. I've got to admit ... Dingoes are such wild animals and need to be treated as such. I am saddened when anyone gets hurt in an attack' (*The Australian*, 7 April 1998). It was left to her husband, still resident in Australia, to speak at greater length to the media about the enduring and immutable 'wildness' of the dingo:

'The dingo is the number one predator in Australia and fundamentally it can't tell the difference between humans and animals as prey.' Chamberlain said he hoped the attack on Kasey would sway the minds of some of the 'significant percentage' of Australians who think dingoes 'are sweet little things' incapable of hurting a child.

The Chamberlains thus had no truck with explanation along the lines that the dingoes had 'lost fear', still less that their behaviour was some variant of 'dingo play'. Instead, they found confirmation of the dingo's innate propensity to aggressive behaviour. Whereas the commentators on Fraser Island traced the pattern back over the previous few years, the Chamberlains clearly had a much longer trajectory in mind. This difference notwithstanding, their input added to the growing insistence that something be done before the tourist industry was extensively damaged through bad publicity. Shooting some of the offenders was increasingly becoming the favoured option amongst the authorities (although it was at this point that the word 'culling' became widely deployed):

Anti-vermin laws prevent relocation, employed for America's nuisance bears. Zoos have plenty of dingoes, so that an option similar to that planned by the State Government to rid North Queensland tourist destinations of saltwater crocodiles—dispatching them to farms—is not available. Littleproud (the State Environment Minister) said he would be reluctant to sanction culling, but there may be little choice. 'We would not be thinking of a complete cull because dingoes are part of the fauna of Fraser Island but we need to take into account human safety' ... Nonetheless, National Parks and Wildlife Service sources said culling was inevitable ... 'We are not in the position now of not acting quickly to decisively fix this problem,' one ranger said. (*The Age*, 8 April 1998)

All of this emphatically bore out the claim made in the sub-heading to this newspaper item: 'A series of attacks in Queensland adds strength to the case that the dingo is a mortal danger to humans.'

Demonising dingoes

The contribution of the Azaria Chamberlain case was undoubtedly more substantial than the few words reported from Azaria's parents. Since the mother's

conviction for murder at a time when the full weight of public opinion was against her (see Bryson 1985; Marcus 1989), the pendulum had swung the other way: the possibility that a dingo did take the child was widely countenanced. For this reason, accounts of Fraser Island dingoes attacking small children assumed pronounced significance in 1998 and 1999, as signalled by (amongst much else) the headlines, 'Now it's the dingo on trial' (*The Age*, 8 April 1998) and 'Dingo back in the dock' (*The Advertiser*, 8 April 1998).

Whatever the specific significance of that contribution, it assuredly added to the process of demonising the island's dingoes to a point where the prospect of shooting them was openly countenanced. Inasmuch as the population was widely held to be purebred, endangered, and enumerated at a mere 150–200 animals, it stands as testament to the weight of the authorities' combined judgment that the prospect of 'culling' had become their clear option.

It was, of course, a prospect that was contemplated with misgivings: many regrets were expressed by contributors to this seemingly compelling discourse. The senior ranger on the island lamented: 'To remove the dingo is abhorrent to us as rangers. Having to destroy animals like this is terrible, it really hurts us' (*The Australian*, 15 February 1999). It was also emphasised that culling (now further euphemised into a 'management strategy') would be done according to best scientific practice. The State Environment Minister proclaimed: 'As a matter of high priority the best available dingo expert will be engaged to review the dingo management strategy and related issues on the island and to produce recommendations to address the problem.' Lastly, it was understood that the strategy would be even-handed. In the words of the senior ranger, the problem facing the authorities was that of 'finding a balance between protecting the dingoes and protecting the tourists', though quite how shooting the former and fining the latter \$50 for feeding the dingoes constituted 'a balance' was not spelled out.

The point is that this exceptional response to a wholly contradictory set of circumstances could not have been contemplated, still less publicly debated, without being preceded by the constitution of a discourse and the elaboration of an imagery that effectively demonised the dingo population.¹⁷ These animals finally bore little resemblance to the aesthetically constructed purebred dingoes that had hitherto dominated the symbolic landscape of Fraser Island. Far from being the embodiment of Nature, these creatures had become polluted by their contact with culture. Far from being firmly and irrevocably situated in Nature, these animals had become liminal to it, intruding on and increasingly inhabiting an uncertain and hazardous space between their natural terrain and the artificially ordered tourist one. Finally, far from possessing a significant iconic utility in the presentation of the entire island as authentic wilderness, these deviant dingoes had lost their symbolic value. By virtue of their transgression, of turning their backs on Nature and abandoning the wilderness in favour of easy pickings from tourists, these dingoes had become symbolically redundant.

In other words, inasmuch as these animals had purportedly abandoned the space in Nature that privileged and protected them as endangered, they were dispensable. Since they no longer matched up to the essential standards of authentic and original purebred behaviour—these were dingoes that could no longer even hunt to survive—they could not be allowed to threaten the multi-million-dollar tourist industry. No terminology proved more revealing on this count than the word ‘rogue’ as it was increasingly applied to the island’s dingoes. Whether applied to elephants in India, lions in East Africa, or crocodiles in Australia, the term has exactly the same negative connotation: a rogue animal has abandoned its customary and proper position in Nature. Having turned its back on its natural habitat, it inevitably behaves in an unpredictable, violent and destructive fashion. It becomes such a threat to people that it must be put down before it creates further havoc in the terrain into which it has forced itself. Ultimately, killing a rogue dingo is no great loss because it has abandoned precisely those qualities that have privileged it in the first place.

The argument is, then, that the eco-tourist discourse about Fraser Island and its component parts has constituted the purebred and endangered dingo population in a very particular way, having been calculated to wrest the maximum symbolic significance from the small fauna population. Not only has the fabrication constructed the dingo as a quintessentially natural and charismatic animal but it has been integral also to constituting the island itself as wilderness. As Fraser Island has been increasingly commoditised, so the dingo as symbol has taken on a substantial exchange value (prior to the island’s full-scale commercialisation it had been stuck in mere use value). However, once the dingo departs, as it were, from the script fashioned by this commercially driven discourse, its worth is greatly diminished. The distinct aura enjoyed by the dingo for some time cannot survive its transgression of the boundary between Nature and culture, a boundary whose maintenance is indispensable to the success of resorts like Kingfisher Bay.

This is the fundamental contradiction created by the enormous amounts of capital increasingly invested in the eco-tourist industries of countries like Australia. The contradiction is not so much that the massing of Western tourists will, by their sheer volume, destroy the natural resources which they have come to savour in the first place.¹⁸ Nor is the contradiction that the building of freeways, hotels, restaurants and swimming pools will replace the wilderness that was previously there. The central issue is, rather, that the eco-tourist industry marshals all of the capital-intensive resources of media production in order to construct *arbitrary and idealised accounts* of Nature and wilderness *which are no more than that*. Such accounts therefore prove acutely suspect and fragile in the face of developments not congruent with the proliferation of narratives and images holding these provisional constructs together.¹⁹ What these arbitrary and fragile cultural ensembles can never cope with is the ‘rogue’ element—and

that is why, in different places and at different times, rogue bears (Higgs 1999), rogue crocodiles (Roberts 1999), rogue kangaroos (Haran 1998) and increasingly rogue people, have to be removed from the view and the space of eco-tourists, and corralled into zoos, enclosures, and reserves.²⁰ At least the rogue dingoes of Fraser Island have so far been spared such an ignominious end.

NOTES

Acknowledgements: The research for this paper was supported by two small research grants from the University of Adelaide to Peter Mühlhäusler (Professor of Linguistics at the University) and to me. I am greatly indebted to my colleague for many discussions on the language of eco-tourism and related linguistic matters. I am also obliged to Professor Gísli Pálsson and his colleagues at the Institute of Anthropology, University of Iceland, who commented on a draft of this paper in a seminar in Reykjavík in the summer of 2000.

1. Perched lakes arise where the wind establishes hollows in the sand, into which is swept plant debris that cements with sand grains to form sandstone basins capable of holding water. The considerable number of books (*e.g.*, Burger & Knowles 1976) and exceptional range of geographic articles (*e.g.*, Carruthers *et al.* 1986) about Fraser Island make a great deal of its perched lakes.

2. Thus Ceballos-Lascuráin (1991), writing from inside the industry, says that eco-tourism involves 'travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the objective of admiring, studying and enjoying scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any cultural features found there'. Figgis (1993) writes from a conservationist position (the Australian Conservation Foundation) that eco-tourism is 'travel to remote or natural areas which aims to enhance understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and cultural heritage, while avoiding damage or deterioration of the environment and the experience of others'. What is common is the assumption that Nature has an objective existence quite independent of how social agents might variously construe it.

3. Cohen (1979) makes a useful, early attempt at disaggregating the category of tourist into a more manageable typology, whilst the possible contributions from anthropologists to the study of tourism in general have been spelled out by Crick (1989). Cohen (1978) has also considered the adverse impacts of tourism on select environments, a concern addressed in the final section of this paper.

4. For the range of analytic possibilities that this approach creates, see Harré *et al.* (1999).

5. The Fraser Island Defense Organisation (FIDO) continues to function and to put out a regular newsletter, but it is difficult to estimate to what extent its message reaches the ordinary tourist. One suspects it may not be much more widely than those eco-tours run by FIDO's founder and Chief Executive Officer. This is an appropriate point to acknowledge that the content of eco-tours on Fraser Island varies. Reference in this paper is made only to those emanating from the leading resort at Kingfisher Bay.

6. These distinctions are explored in detail in the Introduction and several contributions to Feld and Basso (1996).

7. Notably in the currently popular 'extreme adventure' tourist experiences where, at the very least, the body is subject to intense pressure.

8. The social constructivist approach to Nature, the history of which is detailed by Bird (1987), is assessed in Milton (1996) and in the introduction to Proctor and Pincel's

analysis (1996) of the spotted owl controversy in the Pacific Northwest and southern California. It is put to effective use by Dizard (1993) and Higgs (1999).

9. There is little that is distinctive to the literature on Fraser Island in this respect. For comparable material, see various contributions to Cowlshaw and Morris (1997).

10. This Aboriginal group is variously referred to in the literature as Butchella, Batchella, Batjala and Bajala.

11. I borrow this term from a salutary editorial in *The Guardian Weekly* (4 April 1999): 'Charismatic megafauna—whales, tigers, white rhinos and penguins—are the only way to grab people's attention. What has to filter into our closed minds is that every living thing is interdependent in thousands of unknown ways in the functioning of the planet. We are destroying 27,000 species a year according to the scientist Edward Wilson; most of them are less than three millimetres big, and were perhaps never discovered before they were wiped out. What we really have to worry about is not the extinction of lovable penguins, but that of the creepy crawlies on which they, and we, ultimately depend.'

12. Swamp wallabies are found on the island but are rarely seen, in contrast to the readily visible dingo.

13. Horses were extensively used in the timber industry and then set free as it fell into steep decline.

14. One of the more ingenious, yet elementary, representations of this symbiotic relationship was to be found in a series of advertisements for the Kingfisher Bay resort in the quality newspapers. Bearing the same heading, 'The adventure side of Fraser Island', outlines of island animals had set within them a picture of a ranger pointing out features of the rainforest to a young couple. One of the outlines was that of the dingo.

15. The social constructedness of Nature is by now an established theme in the historical and anthropological literature, the various contributions to Cronon (1993) having played a key part in its elaboration. See also Evernden (1992).

16. Corbett is the author of one of the more definitive volumes on the dingo (1996) as well as a number of significant articles.

17. A first-rate analysis of the linguistic struggle over Canadian seals is provided in Lee (1988).

18. These ideas are, nevertheless, revealingly explored in a special edition of *The Australian Financial Review* (11–12 July 1998). See also Monbiot (1999).

19. See, here, the line of argument developed by Macnaghten and Urry (1998). Substantially, my paper follows the direction established in their opening remarks: 'there is no singular "nature" as such, only a diversity of contested natures; and ... each such nature is constituted through a variety of socio-cultural processes from which such natures cannot be plausibly separated' (p. 1).

20. *The Guardian Weekly* (29 June 1997), for example, reports that: 'Lawrence Ngabarino and 3,500 other Ugandans from the Kibale forest region had not heard of the 1992 Earth Summit when they were forcibly evicted by police and soldiers clearing the area for a European-funded project to protect the forest and encourage tourism ... In Ethiopia, the EU, which has led the way on many green issues, wants to force 7,000 people out of three national parks for conservation and tourism projects.'

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