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THE BATTLE OF THE BAY

Nelly Bay, Magnetic Island



Plate 13: Marina Breakwall, Nelly Bay, Magnetic Island



THE BATTLE OF THE BAY Nelly Bay, Magnetic Island

Community construction and place making as expressed in the previous chapter suggest that excessive urban development of the island, with the potential to impose multiple impacts, can threaten the place and landscape values of island residents. Many islanders clearly and emotionally assert a sense of place and identify special places within the island, inseparable from their experiences and ways of being, from representations of the past and anticipations for the future. The desire to 'leave things as they are' is, however, not naïve. Tourists and visitors are welcome – indeed the livelihood of many islanders relies on tourism – and an attraction of the island is its modern infrastructure and the proximity to a major urban settlement. The concerns expressed are not indicative of a 'plot' to prevent others from enjoying the island, or to hamper economic opportunity – they are more closely implicated in attempts to balance the protection of the environment with development proposals that will impact both tangible and intangible aspects of the islanders' lived experience.

This chapter explores the Nelly Bay Harbour development⁹¹ (plate 14) and the protracted public and private protests that have unfolded in its wake. It is a contentious project, and will result in the most extensive environmental and demographic impact in the island's European history.⁹² The project has been subject to setbacks and conflicts that represent a developer's worst nightmare. However, the implications for the community over the almost 20 years since its inception resonate with the hegemonic privileging of particular discourses, and a limited understanding of attachment, identity and the social construction of the natural environment.

⁹¹ The development has been through a number of name changes since its inception, including 'Magnetic Quays' and 'Magnetic Keys'. Its current incarnation is 'Magnetic Harbour'. In order to avoid confusion I have opted for the more general nomenclature of the 'Nelly Bay Harbour development'.

⁹² The greatest impact on the island's population and environment followed the European settlement of Cleveland Bay in the 1860s and the ultimate displacement of the island's Aboriginal population.

The community reaction can be described as a social drama that triggered more extensive social debate. It highlights that attachment and meaning can emerge from the nexus between practice and place, and that this is often articulated through a complexity of mechanisms involving public protest and political representation. The main public arenas for action were the legal system, formal submissions in response to the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) findings, assertions of pro- and anti-development sentiment published in the local newspapers, and various community gatherings to vocalise specific concerns. Less public articulations involved a network of islanders and Townsville residents who restricted their protests to privately expressed concerns and the provision of 'moral support' to the more vocal protagonists.

The following discussion is an exploration of discourse creation and assertion. It not so much investigates the nature and extent of the cleavage in community social alignments (many islanders being supportive of the project) as it reveals how the voicing of opinions in a prolonged struggle over place was regulated by prevailing discourses and discursive fields. The result was that voice was given to scientific, economic and political arguments about environmental conservation that were effectively ancillary to more specific but less articulatable concerns to do with place and identity. Inherent in the Nelly Bay Harbour development debate and in discourse formation was the separation of nature and the environment from cultural matters, the assumption that 'cultural heritage' investigation was primarily a review of archaeological issues, and the conflation of community values and attachments with socio-economic matters. More significantly, heritage and nature were both created as scientific artefacts, and rhetoric was formalised through a discussion of 'scientific facts' and a positivist debate reliant on the findings of various environmental, social and archaeological studies. The discourse of science and 'the environment' became the one to which authority – and hence power – was most closely attributed. A further power relationship was disposed through state bureaucratic processes, which formalised and funnelled the voice of protest through either the legal system or the EIA process. The result was a muting of expressions of the conceptual dimension of the Magnetic Island community, and of the affinity for people and place that is

grounded in social relations and practices, and inseparable from the experience of the natural environment.

Background

I do not propose to review the entire history of the development as such a task would be mammoth.⁹³ I have appended a summary of the relevant matters arising through the EIA process (Appendix 3). Neither do I intend to provide a comprehensive critique of the merits of the development project. To do so would require a much more comprehensive review of the available archival material, and a more quantitative approach to the fieldwork. The aim of the fieldwork and interviews with community members is to engage with feelings about place and identity – not to assess whether the development is or is not morally, legally, politically or environmentally ‘correct’. There are multiple sources available that provide a range of viewpoints, including governmental (for example, Whitehouse 1992; Department of the Premier, Economic and Trade Development and Sinclair, Knight Merz 1995; Department of State Development and Sinclair, Knight, Merz 1998; Environment Australia and the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency 1999), the current developer (Magnetic Harbour 2003), and opponents to the project (in particular, see Walkden 2003). Various opinions have been publicly circulated through the pages of the two Magnetic Island local newspapers: *Magnetic Community News* (edited by a ‘pro-development’ advocate) and *Magnetic Times* (the editors of which oppose the development), and the more widely distributed *Townsville Bulletin*.

Administratively and judicially the project was complicated from its inception, involving a combination of freehold land, Queensland Crown Land, Queensland Marine Park (State) and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Commonwealth); consequently, various State and Commonwealth bodies and legislative mechanisms came into play (see Whitehouse 1992). This was compounded by the involvement of the Townsville City Council in matters relating to the island’s town-planning concerns.

⁹³ The James Cook University Library has compiled an archive of documents relevant to the development: it includes a reference list in excess of 200 pages.

Nelly Bay is the second largest settled bay on the island, nestled in the island's south-east corner (see Figure 2). The developer's proposal, as first presented in 1983, was to construct a resort hotel and apartments, a sports centre, a new beach, a commercial centre, a tavern (pub), residential units, a holiday village and a marina, as well as a new passenger ferry terminal which would replace the Picnic Bay jetty. The new terminal by definition is not a jetty, but rather a pontoon. As discussed in the previous chapter, issues surrounding the jetty have created an emotive response. In terms of impacting the marine park, the works involved the excavation of a marina basin, the construction of the marina breakwalls (plate 13), and the excavation of an access channel to the new marina. On land, the work planned the reclamation of foreshore areas, the repositioning of the entrance of a local creek (Gustav Creek), together with the removal of vegetation and substantial amounts of earth for the proposed constructions. Although there was a catalogue of concerns associated with the proposal, the most vocalised included (and still include) potential damage to the bay's ecosystem, the visual impact (including the quarrying of Bright Point – the headland at the north end of Nelly Bay: plate 15), the viability of relocating the ferry terminal (closely associated with arguments as to whether or not Nelly Bay was a safer harbour), the appropriation of public (community) land for private purposes, the impact on the community's recreational activities (such as decreased public beach areas) and the socio-economic impact on the community, including the effect of an influx of visitors and residents.

As the works progressed, a small number of concerned islanders lodged formal appeals with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, primarily in challenge to government permit and approval validity, on the basis of which the works had been allowed to commence. None were successful. The first was a challenge to the grounds on which GBRMPA granted a permit for works that would impact the bay's waters and coral reefs. In 1990 the then developer was placed in receivership, but not before substantial preliminary works relating to the harbour infrastructure, notably the construction of a breakwater and the extensive quarrying of Bright Point for rock. The latter in particular has come to symbolise the destructive and negative aspects of the development, having scarified and partly destroyed a significant visual landscape feature of the bay (plate 15). In addition, it was charged that by this stage 'the most

beautiful section of Nelly Bay's fringing reef had been destroyed in the dredging of the access channel' (Walkden 2003). Queensland State Government support for the completion of the development led to the selection of a new 'preferred' developer in 1994, and the initiation of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, as required by the Commonwealth Environmental Protection Agency (see Appendix 3).

Because the development triggered multiple impacts under the relevant EIA legislation, a series of environmental reports were prepared. Although there was potential under the EIA process to address cultural heritage issues that could be defined as contemporary community attachments, or 'social value', there was a consistent failure to explore community sentiments that are concerned with attachment to place, or the relationship between community, place, identity and practice. Following the critiques outlined in chapters 2 and 6, I suggest that a failure to address such matters in the Nelly Bay Harbour development EIS should not be construed as an isolated error: unfortunate as it may seem, it reflects a common omission in such studies.

The Final EIS was released in 1999 and on the basis of this authority the necessary permits were obtained from both GBRMPA and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. After a decade of sitting in limbo, works recommenced on the Nelly Bay Harbour Development in August 2000. The decision to continue with the Nelly Bay works included a major consideration of the impact of *not* proceeding in consideration of the effect of the substantial works already undertaken (the breakwater, for example). One objection included in submissions by islanders challenged the necessity to finish something simply because it had started. It was argued (unsuccessfully) that it would be less expensive and more environmentally advantageous for Nelly Bay to expend allocated State Government money on improving the ferry terminal facilities at Picnic Bay and to rehabilitate the impacts of the first stage of works at Nelly Bay.

The development as currently proposed has undergone modification on the 1983 proposal. It has been scaled down in size and excludes the area of Bright Point – this land is separately owned and is under consideration for development as a residential

precinct. Among other changes, the land area under development has been reduced, as has the population influx of new residents and tourists. Open-space and public access has increased, and two public beaches included (Walkden 2003). The intent remains to build a high-density canal estate, a ferry and car-barge terminal, a medivac facility, car parking area and a commercial complex. Promotional material for the development summarises the proposal as:

Located within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, Magnetic Harbour will feature 200 homes (single-dwellings, units and townhouses), private marina berths, yacht club, harbourside village, specialty shops, restaurants, tavern, tourist accommodation and public boat ramp. (Magnetic Harbour 2003)⁹⁴

For a small community, many of whom value the island for its lack of development and its lifestyle removed from modern influences and upmarket tourism activities, the nature and extent of the Nelly Bay Harbour development can be seen to be dissonant with the sentiments of place and belonging expressed in the previous chapter. The following discussion further explores these attachments and understanding of place, landscape and community through various responses to the Nelly Bay Harbour development.

Reading Between the Lines: What the Community Said

Formal Submissions in Response to the EIA

A comprehensive submission in response to the EIA process by Wendy Tubman, a local resident, identified a failure to address (among a number of previously raised issues) the 'social impact of the proposal'. Of interest are her assertions that 150 pro-forma respondents had stated that 'The development is contrary to World Heritage convention obligations' and her refutation of the contention made in the 1998 Supplementary Environmental Impact Study (SEIS) that the majority of islanders support the Nelly Bay Harbour development proposal, with no survey of islander's

⁹⁴ It is difficult on one level to write about a project that is under construction. The physical landscape is constantly changing, as will the reaction of the community as it engages with the process and the final product. For the purposes of avoiding a moving goal post, I have 'closed-off' my discussion at the time of my last visit to the island in July 2003. At this time the ferry terminal facility was near completion, and the looming question was the date of it becoming operational. No other structures had been completed, although residential lots (including berth locations) had been surveyed and land sales had commenced. The general impression of the landscape was of a giant building site.

views on the subjects existing to support this. Another submission, by a Nelly Bay resident Julia Walkden, made reference to World Heritage values as follows:

The SEIS states that filling that corner of Nelly Bay with canal estate/tourist accommodation will clean up the mess in Nelly Bay and enhance its World Heritage values. This is utter rubbish. The World Heritage values of the area would be better enhanced by an alternative development that restored the World Heritage property as much as possible, while complying with the object of the zoning and fulfilling the needs of the community. (Walkden 1998)

The North Queensland Conservation Council submitted a lengthy comment and critique on the final EIS, which the Council considered to be flawed and incomplete. Of interest are two references to community demographics (Tager 1999):

[The] Claim that this is a low key development. A development that proposes to increase the population of Nelly Bay by 100% in a 13ha area is not low key. A proposal that proposes a dramatic increase in tourism and retail space is not low key. A canal estate is not in keeping with any current element of Island life.

And

Total occupation of the proposed development could result in an increase of population of over 600 people (tourism zoning in the Plan of Development does not preclude residential use). It may be higher because of the high level of 'flexibility' in the current Plan. No equivalent population figures are provided in the SEIS or FEIS. A 600+ person increase (derived from claims in FOI documents) represents a 100% increase in the population of Nelly Bay and approximately a 25%–30% increase for the entire Island. Not a minor increase by any standard.

This submission provides further evidence that the extent of opposition to the project was more widespread than 'just a few vocal locals':

Those who have opposed this project are now subject to open denigration by so-called independent consultants. Those who oppose the project and condemn the EIS include hundreds of people who did not participate in any of the court actions. They include new residents, residents who once believed that such a development would be good for the Island and now know better, business people and non-residents.

A review of the material submitted in opposition to the development reveals that a significant objection to the development was based on the potential damage to the environment, with emphasis on the erroneous sanctioning of such damage in the

context of associated World Heritage values, all of which are natural heritage values. In this instance, World Heritage is being enlisted as an instrument of protest. The preceding chapter has shown that the concerns felt by the community were and are more extensive than impacts on the natural environment; however, the mechanisms through which challenges could be formally and most effectively expressed were either the judicial appeal system or the EIA process. In the former, legal challenges were made to the validity of granting permits for the development to proceed, where the approval for those permits was predicated on the impact on the natural environment (with the exception of permits granted under town planning matters).

The EIA process was clearly restrained in its attempts to deal with community values that related more closely to contemporary attachment to place and community identity. Heritage and its associated 'values' were restrictively defined, and 'social' value and community issues were considered under the umbrella of socio-economic values, including discussions of demographics, and the provision of infrastructure to support an increased population (see Greer et al. 2000 for a discussion of the conflation between community values and socio-economic considerations in such studies).

The investigation of community sentiment in many equivalent assessment processes is often confined to tick-box surveys that commonly use the word 'satisfaction' in conjunction with perceived attributes of 'living in a place'. As Hummon has noted, local 'satisfaction' and local 'attachment' remain relatively distinct dimensions of community sentiment, with only a modest relationship in empirical work. While some individuals may be quite 'satisfied' with their community and not have developed any deep emotional ties to that particular locale, others may indicate an attachment to a place that they find less than satisfactory. Community attachments can only be understood in relation to processes more inclusive than those of the 'broad ecological structuring of settlements in modern, urban society'. The suggestion is that community 'satisfaction' is more broadly linked to macro-social dynamics of social class and urbanisation, while community identity and attachment are intertwined with personal experience, social interaction and local culture (Hummon 1992: 257–261).

The Voice of Protest

Nelly Bay is described in current editions of the *Magnetic Island Guide* as ‘a great place to go for that early morning run or a leisurely walk. Good too for swimming, wind surfing, sailing a catamaran, or snorkelling on the fringing coral reef’. While this may have been the case in years gone by, anyone visiting the bay today would find little resemblance between this picture and a physical environment that has yet to chrysalise into the promised commercial and residential paradise. Faced with the daily reality of what many consider a ‘blot on the landscape’, various islanders express an imagery of the bay that is evocative and imaginative in its reminiscences, with recurring themes of the beach and the water, and of the bay as a community meeting place and a place of beauty that should never have been disturbed:

Should never have been touched ... it was so attractive, but once done there was no way to turn it back ... you can't turn back time, so something has to be done ... it was a very beautiful place, I remember collecting crabs there as a kid at low tide ... and when the tide was up it was great as well. (Townsville resident with holiday house on island)

The same person acknowledges that there are unavoidable issues to do with balancing commercial interests and unemployment with the overcommercialisation of the island – and the existing attraction of the island as a *family* place that is financially accessible, particularly to north Queensland people. But the idea of Nelly Bay becoming a resort area and hosting large influxes of people is not a good one. He agrees that he stayed out of the debate, noting that most people were concerned with being seen to be aligned either way (pro-development or ‘green’), but that now some of them are regretting that they had not fought a bit harder.

We were always in boats a youngsters ... would stay in the hut in Nelly Bay and go fishing and dragging nets ... It should never have started in the first place ... it should have been left the way it was when I was a kid ... but once the first lot of work was done it had to be finished. (retired Townsville resident with house on the island)

It is a betrayal of people's appreciation and interaction with the natural environment ... should never have been built in such a sensitive and beautiful area – the beaches and mangroves have been destroyed ... the opportunity to appreciate the intrinsic values of the island has been decreased ... it will change the island. (island resident)

I lived there for 17 years ... the kids grew up there ... I just really loved the place ... I was surprised that the oldtimers were for it, but not all of them ... it was a real mixture though of old and new ... but it is an intangible thing really ... I always had a lot to do with the sea, so with the kids we were always there, fishing or something. It was a meeting place for the locals ... there were Aboriginal sites too ... an absolutely beautiful spot with a vista to Bright Point and across the sea to Cleveland Bay, a beautiful fringing reef. Nelly Bay was really representative of all of Magnetic Island, with hoop pines and all of us did the same things ... there were gatherings and eat ups ... the school always went down there ... it was sad to see it go ... life things weren't there in the guidelines [for objection to the development] so no-one would listen unless it was economic ... complaining was seen as being selfish as it wasn't a place for yourself, but this is not right because it is never yours. (former island resident)

Every cultural feature in Nelly Bay has been systematically erased without record – hoop pines with scars, stone artefacts, geomorphology, existence of burials ... any vestige of spiritual or cultural life would be gone ... everything about Nelly Bay and values was lawyer talk to satisfy an obligation that couldn't otherwise be got around ... they did a 'community survey' relating to health, access to facilities and so on ... these were looked at in terms of community interest so they weren't interested in anything else of 'community value'. (island resident, works on the island)

If you knew Nelly Bay in its past beauty, when there was a beach, and it was for everyone, with an amazing reef a short snorkel away, and compare that with the plans for private dwellings with private mooring sites, and a ferry harbour that neither you nor any family can swim and view the coral in, you'd know why people keep on about it. (Rebecca Smith, island resident – marine biologist; Letter to the Editor, *Magnetic Times*, 25/1/01)

Another long-term island resident indicates his support for the development, but stresses that the attraction of the island is the lack of suburban characteristics and glitz, its sense of family and community and as being somewhere from another time: 'Most of us care about the environment, and don't want the island to become an enclave for the rich ... at least not living here ... they can come for visits.' His point is that not all development is bad, just that which is more extensive. The problem is trying to resolve at what stage something becomes 'too big'. Even his statement is paradoxical in its support for the development at Nelly Bay and desire to keep the rich in a visitor role, as the cost of buying into the residential component is likely to be beyond those of average income.

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Plate 14: Nelly Bay Harbour development, June 2003 (photograph: GBRMPA)



Plate 15: Bright Point (after quarrying), Nelly Bay

A Townsville resident with a house on the island (and plans to move there permanently) comments that she thinks many people are very closely attached to the island and value many of its places, but that this argument is given no room in government decisions to do with the island. She believes that such attachments are extremely important and that there are many people on the island who have no wish to change their lifestyles, but there has been no avenue for these sorts of community values to be expressed. And she certainly does not think an avenue to do so was adequately provided for Nelly Bay.

A comment about the rights of the community at large comes from a woman who lives on the mainland and has a history of environmental activism: 'GBRMPA should be mindful of the views and wishes of people who never visit these places ... future options and values are also important. The Nelly Bay development has cut off these future options. I think it is immoral that these people can fiddle the law and reclaim and create artificial islands and ruin the flow of the beach and the future of the place'. Similar expressions of objection to the land reclamation are strongly critical that the developers (aided by the state) could take possession of land that belonged to the public, and threaten 'the rights of the commons'. Although the criticisms are explicitly critical of political and economic decisions, they suggest the conceptual ownership issues discussed in the previous chapter, acknowledging that people do not own such places but believes they should be able to rightfully engage in a relationship of non-intrusive use and experience.

'United We Stand'

A major social impact of the Nelly Bay Harbour development is the schism in community opinion. One of the recurring themes in islander rhetoric revolves around a perceived threat to the community's sense of itself as a nourishing and inclusive entity, and reassertions that harmony has been restored. An island resident who runs a business on the island thinks the extreme factionalism was purely incident based, arising around the Nelly Bay Harbour development, but was nowhere near as strong as made out in the press. Similar attempts to trivialise, or somehow mythologise, the purported community rift are not uncommon. A former resident who still regularly visits the island notes that this divide between 'greenies' and those who are 'pro-

development' became prominent in the early Nelly Bay protests but that this is no longer so obvious. Another resident is of the opinion that a small number of dissidents on the island made their voice louder by 'importing outsiders' to support their cause, and none of these were 'true locals' anyway. This attempt to define 'true locals' and their right to an 'authentic' voice is similar to assertions of who has the right to speak with authenticity at Avebury. There is a similar jostling for the 'high ground' of opinion that is somehow more legitimate.

The evidence (both on public record and as expressed in conversation) suggests that there was and still is a polarity of opinion about the development, but that the publicly visible protagonists on either side are limited to a small number of people, albeit supported in either practice or principle by a broader section of the island and Townsville community. It is also evident that the right to opposing views is respected for the most part, although at various times these views have resulted in the formation of opposing community factions. However, these must also be considered in the context of various other mutable social and community affiliations. Competing with these various internal divisions are the processes through which belonging and identity are given substance to act to reinforce a 'community consciousness of distinctiveness' (Moore 1994: 25) that can conceptualise a community and its locality as a discrete entity, grounded in the concrete nature of social relationships. Community conflict and divisions such as those founded in the Nelly Bay debate can serve to reinforce the relationship between identity and community, revealed in assertions of unity and communality. Attempts to assert and sustain cohesiveness are social strategies, signalling that the 'sense of belonging' acts in a fundamental way to create a sense of both community and place. As a consequence locality, or place, can at times appear to be subsumed within the idea of belonging itself. Belonging 'acts to provide a sense of community, collective identity and cultural commensality, recognising that conflict and differentiation can be integral parts of the same process' (Lovell 1998: 4). The process, however, is one in which varying conceptualisations of 'the community' can co-exist.

One dilemma, as described by an island resident, is that there is an imperative to 'not create waves' through protestations that may inflame community divisions: but in

refraining from protest, the course of change is given inevitability. In her own words, it is as 'a sort of damned-if you-do damned-if-you-don't thing': unless there is an outpouring of objection to change, the islanders will lose the 'harmonious' and 'unified' community in which they ground their identity and sense of belonging. J. Kapferer (1996: 7) points out, 'the very individualism and egalitarianism which produce the struggle for community and solidarity can also produce further fissions, so that the attempt to treat all groups and individuals with scrupulous fairness has the potential to generate new definitions of identity and difference, which in their turn negate the dream of community'. The islanders, however, express a determination to keep their particular dream of community alive.

An attribute that the island community values is its small size and the enhanced degree of interaction and knowledge of the community this allows (although the perception and the reality of this interaction may be at odds). Consequently a strident objection to the development at Nelly Bay is directed against the influx of new residents and tourists. Concerns have been compounded by a marketing program aimed at a social demographic more commonly associated with 'upmarket', expensive resorts. In this sense it has come to symbolise the threat of the ultimate 'touristification'⁹⁵ or commodification of the island and a consequential loss of both power and identity by the locals – as one Nelly Bay resident comments 'it is a living place and not a fun parlour'. Another, who is actively involved with island promotional issues, suggests that 'the big worry now is what is it actually going to look like when it's finished, and what is going to be the impact of an additional 1000 people in that space ... what about the road and other infrastructure issues ... the concerns are 100% to do with lifestyle issues'. Noting the lack of a to-scale model of the site, she thinks that if the community could have visualised the impact and final scene in advance they would have all said 'no way!'.

⁹⁵ One islander referred to it as 'Noosification', Noosa being an exemplar of a small beachside resort north of the State's capital, Brisbane, that has undergone extensive development to become an escape from one type of urbanism to another.

... a Word from the Sponsors

The irony is that a consistent theme in the development rhetoric is one that echoes values the islanders express as intrinsic to their sense of being in place: the 'laid back' and 'community' lifestyle – the very values that are threatened by excessive development. Attention is directed to the escapism of the island life-style and 'sea-change' opportunities, although arguably with greater luxury and trappings than the ideal of island living experienced and valued by many of the locals.

The ultimate tropical island lifestyle ... modern, stylish living with all the conveniences and services in dreamy harbourside homes, with your own private marina berth outside your front door ... and the Great Barrier Reef as your playground.

Magnetic Island has its own special magic. It is blessed with a record East Coast average of 320 sunny days a year. But it's not just the climate luring lifestylers here. *Magnetic Island abounds with natural beauty and is a relaxed, safe, friendly island* with easy access to full city services, such as major shopping centres, hospitals and airport – a luxury most islands can't offer.

Magnetic Harbour will offer a kind of lifestyle the region has not seen before ... it will have everything people have become used to when visiting the world's style centres.

When it comes to livability, Magnetic Island takes some beating. The island enjoys a high quality of life and supports a diverse population of just 2000 people with good education and professional skills. *It has a strong community spirit.* It has a rich Indigenous heritage and a vibrant arts community. Magnetic Island supports a well-run school. *The island is still regarded as a safe place to live, work and play.*

(Magnetic Harbour 2003, italics added)

The inevitability of becoming an 'in-place to work and play' and the exemplar of a 'world style centre' does not sit easily with many Magnetic Islanders. Such characteristics are antithetical to the conceptualisation of place, meaning and value within which most of the locals live their daily lives. There is a palpable threat to the web of meaning that informs and layers information within the lifeworld experienced by the islanders. Strang (1997: 173) notes that such experiences form the core or everyday world of meaning that is shared with others, and encompass more specialised and finite realities, pulling people into a particular kind of interaction with their material world in which the individual and the wider natural and social

environment mutually construct each other. The imposition of change can render the familiar unfamiliar and displace the meanings enmeshed in a habitual understanding of the material world. Changes to both the physical and social environment are likely to disrupt the reality of place and community reinforced through customary interactions and practices.

The narratives of the islanders weave social, sentimental, aesthetic and spiritual elements in often emotional expressions of attachment. Values arise from a combination of conceptual cognitive structures and subjective emotional responses, and result in judgements that are both subjective and objective. Emotions are ways in which an individual can evaluate and make intelligible his or her circumstances and behaviour. The relationships constituted through emotions gain meaning and value through the social processes in which they are embedded, where social processes are mutually constituted in an engagement with the broader environment (Strang 1997: 176).

Because feelings for and attachment to place are verbally expressed using words and terms that evoke emotionalism, there is a risk that they will be branded as anti-rational and hence lacking in authority. As one commentator of reef issues has written, recalling a discussion with a long term resident on one of the Great Barrier Reef islands

The feeling with which he recalled the experience [of first viewing small reef marine organisms] reminded me again that he was, in a way, the embodiment of all that the anti-conservationists deplored, of that emotion that they were always warning against. The future of the reef, they urged, should be discussed without emotion, and in this they set an example. (Clare 1971: 68)

The remainder of this chapter looks at how the emotional and 'qualitative' attribution of meaning and significance has been displaced by a positivist debate that sanctions the scientific 'facts' that emerged in the various environmental, social and archaeological studies undertaken as part of the Nelly Bay Harbour development.

Rhetoric and Discourse Creation

A local archaeologist who undertook research as part of the first stage of the development reaffirms her personal frustration at the constraints of the EIA process when she explains her own Magnetic Island 'sense of place' as both a professional and as a life-long resident of Townsville: 'We didn't have the words we now have in terms of cultural heritage values that we now use'. The frustration is born out of the experience of her PhD research, in which, she comments, 'I reoriented my own thought processes [as an archaeologist] to understand contemporary attachment'. During the work she undertook with colleagues in the late 1980s, she notes that she repeatedly urged for a rigorous anthropological study to more closely investigate the relationship between the *living* Aboriginal community and the bay (and indeed the island more holistically). These recommendations were ignored. A similar recommendation was included in the 1995 EIA guidelines that led to another three environmental reports; however, no such study has been undertaken. However, if it had been, it would have followed the precedents of Australian heritage practice of acknowledging the significance of Aboriginal attachments to land, but is unlikely to have included an exploration of the attachments of the non-Aboriginal community.

The 1995 draft EIS section on cultural heritage restricted its discussion to archaeological reports that dealt with Aboriginal artefact material and to a short reference to the shipwreck of the *Presto*. However, the Cultural Heritage Assessment (Hatte 1995) included as an appendix to the draft EIS did provide a discussion of social and heritage issues that were of concern to the Wulgurukaba, the Traditional Owners. In its response to the supplementary EIS document, Environment Australia (the Commonwealth agency with responsibility for both natural and cultural heritage) endorsed that 'Nelly Bay is an area of high significance to the local Aboriginal community ... the Aboriginal heritage of Nelly Bay is considered extremely important by the local Aboriginal community as one of their few remaining links with Magnetic Island following their removal from the island earlier this century'. Yet Environment Australia's follow-up recommendations made no mention of the lack of an anthropological report, rather re-asserting the archaeological value of the bay. The Environment Australia response provided a more general comment on heritage issues

that, as quoted below, is indicative of how 'heritage' was narrowly defined through all stages of the Nelly Bay Harbour development:

The Nelly Bay proposed development occurs entirely within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Property Area. It is also listed in the Register of the National Estate as a unique and diverse biological system, which demonstrates past and continuing geological and ecological processes, and provides habitats for endangered species. Further, the island is important as a scientific research area and contains important historical and Aboriginal sites. (Environment Australia 1998)

In summary, the heritage values of the bay were defined as the scientific (biological) values of the natural environment, World Heritage (that is, the Great Barrier Reef), and historical and Aboriginal archaeological 'sites'. Given the limited attention to historical sites, I suggest that heritage came to be even more restrictively identified with Aboriginal artefacts and sites and the natural environment. The result was a division of values and knowledge systems into a nature–culture dichotomy, reflecting similar divisions in legislative and heritage management processes. It also subsumed debate about values into a scientific discourse that addressed and assessed biology on one hand, and indigenous archaeology on the other. The subsumption of cultural heritage values into the confined ideological spaces of archaeology, and the relegation of natural environmental values to scientifically determined conservation significance, funnelled debate into a narrow arena of interests and concerns. As a consequence, protecting archaeological sites (Aboriginal sites in particular) and biological values (including World Heritage values) became the focus of community protest and assertions of the heritage significance of the bay. Any other 'heritage' values were effectively sidelined.

One of the Traditional Owners has commented elsewhere in respect of Nelly Bay: 'If all the archaeological and environmental evidence was seriously considered at the beginning (YES before they blew up the Point) by the State, then this development should never have been given the green light. It is important to realise that as Indigenous people the environment and culture are one and the same, they co-exist and are not separate' (George 2001). Another member of the Wulgurkaba to whom I spoke, a young man who lives in Townsville but was working on the island at the time, reinforces that he and other members of the Aboriginal community 'were

concerned about how the development impacted on anything cultural', a statement that must be understood in the context that cultural interests are inseparable from the impact on the broader environment. Grounded in a separation of natural and cultural values, the EIA process mitigated against any such attempt at a holistic understanding of the environment, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests.

Among the islanders to whom I spoke are two Nelly Bay residents (one has left the island) who are publicly identifiable as representative of the more active and vocal objectors to the Nelly Bay Harbour development. Both based their advocacy on the platform that significant cultural (Aboriginal) and natural (scientific) values of the bay would be destroyed in the harbour development. This may reflect a background familiarity with working within a positivistic, scientific milieu. On the other hand, both advocates acknowledge that they saw no apparent advantage in expanding the protest to argue that personal and community attachments to Nelly Bay and the island as a whole were important components of the 'value' of the bay. Not only was there no avenue through which such expressions could be made, neither individual at the time perceived this to be extraordinary. This reinforces my argument that despite the inclusion of 'social value' as a key component of heritage assessments in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, this has not translated into significant on-the-ground consideration in heritage practice and assessments at the public level of engagement.

Both islanders have personal and emotional narratives of the island, quotes from which are included above and in the preceding chapter, grounded in notions of identity, belonging and of a special and emotional relationship with the places of the island and with the community. Neither, when discussing why the island is important to them, identify its archaeological sites or biological values as significant contributors. For one, they are woven into his dialogue as mnemonics or story-markers, the story and the memories they allude to gaining significance in the broader landscape narratives of Nelly Bay and the island. For the other, a woman who lost her home and was declared bankrupt as a result of legal costs fighting the development through the courts, their significance was that 'challenging the science' was the only avenue available. However, her motives for the extreme level of her protest are simple: 'because I love this place'.

The frustrations of islanders who are pro-development have been and continue to be equally vocal: 'It is a major flaw in our legal system that a minority group can, by manipulating the law, frustrate a developer until they go broke' (Geoff Orpin in Dickie 2003). However, the retort from one of the legal appellants is 'the law is all we've got' (Walkden in Dickie 2003). 'The law' played a significant role as a vehicle of protest and as a means for community concerns about the environment to be addressed through formal challenges. The formal expressions of objection fought in the courts have been punctuated by various public expressions of protest. Much is contained within the tournament of words played out in the pages of the local island newspapers: the vitriol now circumscribed by threats of libel. One woman who is resident on the island tells of visiting a local hotel (pub), to be confronted with her name on a publicly displayed list of those deemed to be enemies of the island's interests through their objection to the Nelly Bay Harbour development.

One of the more overtly aggressive and emotional protests arose in the late 1980s in response to archaeological investigations in the bay. The consultants' findings failed to provide significant 'scientific' grounds to prevent the development going ahead, and refuted assertions by some non-Aboriginal local residents that the bay was replete with significant Aboriginal archaeological sites, including scarred trees. Challenging the validity and veracity of 'scientific knowledge' had been established as a 'protest of precedence' in appeals to the AAT. The full force of this was brought to bear in a challenge to the professional competency of the archaeologists involved, culminating in a group of protestors surrounding an archaeologist at work, bearing placards and chanting slogans that reflected the sentiment printed on their T-shirts: 'Archaeologists are prostitutes'.

A Townsville resident I interviewed was one of the main archaeological 'figures' under attack in the above protest. Aside from the obvious unpleasantness of being the centre of such negative attention, her reaction is more emotional as having been associated with the island all her life her own attachments are profound: 'I loved the place and didn't want it to be destroyed'.

One object of analytical interest is the expenditure of energy and emotion that went into attempts to attach cultural heritage significance to the Aboriginal archaeology of the bay. This was arguably out of proportion, but made meaningful in a context where such sites had become the sole focus of cultural heritage interest. I suggest that these sites symbolised the much broader values arising from the web of social meanings that is attached to the bay, and as a result they became the focus for a sentiment and emotion that had no other voice or means of expression. Consequently they enshrined a much more significant level of cultural significance than accrued through their scientific (archaeological) values alone (and see Henry 1998: 151). Sullivan (2003) discusses a similar situation, where the community was forced to identify certain aspects with 'heritage value' and to rely on a certification by heritage experts: 'The local community does not need this assessment to validate their sense of place but modern heritage conservation practice demands it. There is really no other acceptable way for them to express their inherent love for the ordinary landscape in which their lives are led'. The conundrum will remain as long as heritage experts do not themselves have the methodological and theoretical 'toolbox' to incorporate community attachments as a component of heritage assessments.

Public episodes of tensional disruption have been labelled by Turner as 'social dramas ... [that] constitute isolable and minutely describable units of social process' (1974: 33). Henry (1998: 143, 1999: 294) refers to similar social tensions as 'articulatory practices' that operate to produce identities in situational contexts that involve the contestation and negotiation of categories, 'a type of situated social practice'. Ultimately, faced with the hegemony of a scientific and legal paradigm, the protesters against the construction of the Nelly Bay Harbour development were forced to legitimate their arguments through 'the language game of science' in which a statement's truth-value is the criterion that will determine its validity, and the conditions of truth (or proof) – the rules of the game of science – are established within a debate that is already scientific in nature (Lyotard 1989: 25, 29; and see Henry 1998: 149). This is not to presuppose that some of individuals involved in the protest were not themselves familiar with the parameters of such scientific debates. Rather, the point I make is that 'the game' itself was predefined and the rules immutable. Language can be used as a battlefield, becoming powerful when used in

particular ways or by particular groups. In some circumstances it is adopted without reflection by those on whom it is imposed as it is seen as the only course of action. Bourdieu (1994) describes this as a form of symbolic violence. As Jacobs notes about similar community protests, the politics involved are

... rarely only about how space is to look and function, about competing architectural aesthetics or urban planning ideologies, although such concerns may well provide the dominant discursive form of these struggles. These place-based struggles are also *arenas in which various coalitions express their sense of self and their desires for the spaces which constitute 'home'* – be it the local neighbourhood or the nation home, an indigenous home or one recently adopted. (Jacobs 1996: 2; italics added)

Such discursive and representational practices are inseparable from, and indeed mutually constituted by, political and economic forces. Together they operate to create landscapes, in both their material and imagined forms (Jacobs 1996: 9). Said (1995: 332) reaffirms that identity, far from being static, is a 'much worked over historical, social, intellectual and political process', where such processes take the form of 'urgent social contests involving a range of concrete political issues ... the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society, and is therefore anything but mere academic wool gathering'.

A second 'sub-plot' to the story is the multi-level engagement of a number of interested professionals whose personal relationship with the island was also one of special attachment. The archaeologist discussed above is one such individual. As a centre for marine studies, Townsville hosts organisations such as GBRMPA, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Co-operative Research Centre for the Reef, and James Cook University. In addition there are regional offices for a number of government agencies involved in park and heritage management, and the office of the North Queensland Conservation Council. Along with independent consultants in various disciplines, Magnetic Island is the home or a place of regular recreational visits for various employees of all these organisations. The potential in the Nelly Bay proposal for a merging of professional and emotional interests is evident. A separate study (Jakku 1998) has investigated the role of scientists in the Nelly Bay Harbour dispute, with particular attention to the maintenance of professional and private boundaries, and the tensions this brings in the adoption of an advocacy role (whether

for or against the development). Jakku (1998: 40–41) provides a piquant overview of the social construction of the science/politics nexus in the attribution of partisanship to the various participants in the debate:⁹⁶

In contrast to how the ‘insider’ scientists portrayed their role, Ben (pro-Magnetic Keys) saw the scientists as manipulated by the conservationists. Similarly, but in the opposite direction, the conservationists and some of the ‘outsider’ scientists saw the scientists as merely saying what the developers wanted them to. The managers seemed to see themselves as being in the middle of all this and having to juggle, among other things, what the scientists had to say with how other groups perceived the issues and the roles of the scientists. These different views highlight the way that ‘the recognition of technical expertise ... is fraught with political significance’.

The different views become more politically fraught when they are entangled with opposing opinions as to the representation and use of scientific ‘truths’. It is of no surprise that there is a lack of support for various scientific findings in the ‘non-scientific’ sector, when even marine scientists came to different conclusions as to the likely impacts of the development on the fringing coral reefs (see Jakku 1998: 50–51). A similar contradiction of findings evolved in connection with attempts by archaeologists and other professionals to provenance the scarring on the trees in Nelly Bay. This was one of the debates involved in the archaeological dispute discussed above. Of interest to my argument is Jakku’s discussion of attempts by scientists involved in the dispute to separate personal and professional opinions – as one person described it, the dichotomy of ‘me as scientist, me as a person’:

... ‘if it’s not a scientific issue, and is patently a social issue, then I would not be interested. I would as a person, but not as a scientist’. In the case of the [Nelly Bay] development [he] pointed out that there were ‘a whole lot of social issues which should’ve been addressed earlier on’. However, while he was ‘upset as a person’, as a scientist he had to ‘make sure that OK, let’s get the science right’, and in his scientific opinion ‘there was no scientific reason’ why the development shouldn’t go ahead. (Jakku 1998: 55–56)

⁹⁶ Jakku uses the denominatives ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ to separate those who had a formal professional role in the environmental assessment work from scientists who were involved outside of the formal framework, including residents and conservationists.

Another scientist explains

... with all these things I have a personal view point and then I have a view point based on the science. And often they're different, so that I'm very careful ... because it's easy to just say 'aaagh, bloody thing. I don't think it should happen' ... [but] you have to make it clear you've swapped hats. I'm standing here with a placard, as a private citizen because I feel strongly about something. I don't care whether the science says its good or bad, my feeling is that I don't want it to go ahead. (Jakku 1998: 56, 58)

Jakku (1998: 69) concludes that the existence of such 'boundary' disputes at the individual level can be used strategically by various interested parties to affirm or challenge the authority of scientific expertise. The flexibility of border construction can also blur the demarcation of science from non-science and challenge accepted images of the rationality and independence of scientific knowledge. By implication, the borders are socially constructed and contested, although the contestants are differentially empowered. The discourses through which the Nelly Bay Harbour development has been attacked and defended effectively engage with attempts to realign borders to compensate different social constructions of the meanings and values of nature and culture (see Laclau & Mouffe 1990 for a discussion of the transformation of social fields arising from struggles between groups and individuals). The conflict so engendered is used as a form of cultural politics. However, attempts to move away from positivist approaches have been constrained ideologically – by a debate limited to specific, scientifically conscribed values – and hegemonically, by the prevailing discourses of science and heritage. A result is that archaeology and biology become discourses rather than disciplines, as defined in the Foucauldian sense of discourse as the formation of language, thought and practices that yield a certain form of knowledge and truth.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ As discussed by Foucault (1994) in *The Order of Things*; see discussion in Byrne (1995). Smith (1994: 5) cautions that an overemphasis on the analysis of discourse and interpretation, while valuable in recognising a range of concerns and interests, can obscure the equally important and 'real' political issues that underlie conflict between varying groups. That is, it is not sufficient to allow that there *are* other voices, without considering how the dominant discourse is used outside the Academy. Otherwise other interests are once again marginalised – the point being that archaeological discourse can be used by the State or any other parties in debates relating to identity – with or without the agreement of the archaeological community.

The privileging of scientific 'knowledge' authenticates those who have recognisable authority within that system (or cultural field in Bourdieu's terminology), that is, professionals with relevant university degrees. In certain contexts, including those that apply bureaucratic structures and processes of assessment, the effect can be to authorise the commentary of a university graduate as authentic, and disallow the veracity of information provided by a 'lay' person, however well informed and experienced the latter may be.⁹⁸ This is compounded by what Ellen (1996: 28) has identified as a failure by many practitioners of science to understand 'the problematic and contingent – the fundamentally anti-monosemic – character of our constructions of nature', where such an understanding cannot but challenge the scientist's own mode of analysis. The matter becomes more crucial when science and policy are intermeshed, and there is an interface between scientific concepts and political pressures. 'We need to examine the extent to which official definitions of nature simply legitimate those of the morally and politically powerful and the degree to which they combine the definitions of different constituencies' (Ellen 1996: 28). The consequence is that although any number of discourses can flow through the landscape, some are deemed to be 'more equal' than others. In struggles of power and politics certain discourses can also be more 'useful' in terms of legitimising the practices of those people or institutions who do have hegemonic sway.⁹⁹

The Environment: Multiple Ordering of Realities

Ellen asks, 'can person and environment ever be anything but implicated in each other?':

Is the 'environment' the same as the environment? To what degree can we anyway cope at a practical level with the multiple ordering of realities, or do we need the re-assuringly straightforward certainties of Cartesian dualism? A relativist discourse of nature and culture is much easier to handle for those who treat all their data as texts, who deny or have no interest in explicit comparison or pan-human generalisation. It is much more difficult if we wish to translate the import of such ideas into terms that are understood and productive in the work

⁹⁸ See, for example, Clare (1971: 97, 102); Peace (1996) is also interesting for a discussion of a similar conflict between loggers and 'greenies'.

⁹⁹ I remain conscious that the Nelly Bay Harbour Development has not proceeded in a political vacuum. From the time of its implementation various Queensland State governments have retained a powerful interest in the development, and sanctioned processes and practices that have attracted strong criticisms.

of 'natural' scientists and those in the applied professions who use their insights and models of the world, or if we seek to explain how it is that humans seem to share a particular experience of the world sufficiently to be able to find the things they talk about recognisable. (Ellen 1996: 2)

In this section I am interested in exploring the social processes through which the scientific discourse became instrumental in setting the rules of the Nelly Bay Harbour debate. From an analytical perspective the concern is most simply to try to understand how a particular body of knowledge is socially constituted as definitive and authoritative, how it is accorded a 'truth-value' through its embeddedness in social relations. The difference becomes one of privileging 'proper knowledge and real understanding' from a mere 'opinion' (Peace 1996: 96–97). This has relevance in the broader interests of this thesis. It recognises that the heritage discourse arises from the same globalising, scientific, Western knowledge-systems or paradigms as does biological/environmental discourse. It also shows us that a dialectical engagement with the cultural construction of the environment challenges the 'truth-value' of such systems, reducing their relevancy not only in non-Western cultures but also in Western communities.

A recent study about the range of meanings in public understandings of nature and 'naturalness' proposes that the process of environmental decision making is a 'tournament of value' that involves competition over definitions of nature and environment. It is a competition that will only allow effective participation if those involved 'command the rhetorical resources to define these key concepts' (Hull et al. 2001: 325; see also Knowles 1997). This was evidently the case with the Nelly Bay Harbour development, where there was a need for some community 'players' to resort to an often unfamiliar or inappropriate rhetoric.

'The various pathways by which Nature is self-consciously met in the modern world – conservation, sustainability, ecotourism, environmentalism – are [underpinned by] a "dialectic of love and money"' (Jacobs 1996: 135-136). Processes whereby nature is dominated through modern appropriations – such as ecotourism, where the pursuits range from a fantasy of the primordial, to nature untouched by culture, to nature 'properly touched by culture' – represent an adaptation of cultural/capitalistic

appropriations and mediations of nature.¹⁰⁰ Nature as conceptualised through the conservation movement has seen a shifting to a more scientific approach that Strang (2001: 81) describes as a movement from 'tree hugging to tree counting'. She attributes this in part to an establishment take-over that has led to environmental issues, previously associated with extreme political movements, becoming mainstream. A consequence at the international level has been a shift towards a 'corporatist', scientific engagement with environmental issues that acknowledges the inevitability of political and economic concerns. While this has many positives, Ellen (1996: 28) argues the need for international organisations – such as the UN Environmental Programme and WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) – to develop a shared working language through which concepts of nature can be discussed and disseminated: this has practical consequences for the kinds of knowledge generated and for the lives of ordinary people.

Although it could be argued that the community concerns evidenced in the Nelly Bay Harbour development indicate a polarity of support for environmentalism versus development, I suggest it is too simplistic, and indeed erroneous, to label those who are against the development as 'environmentalists' – or 'greenies' – as has been attempted in the progression of the debate.¹⁰¹ Such a categorisation runs the risk of attributing imperatives that while significant to certain individuals and groups (ecological concerns, for example) are not universally prioritised by all who express a concern for the environment. As Ellen (1996: 29) argues: 'The philosophical language of ecology in which nature is dissolved is remote and not easy to grasp for many people, and we can see our inherent cognitive tendencies at work in the way in which 'ecology' has become the same as environment'. Environmentalism as, for example, formalised through nature conservation organisations is based on a universalistic view of the world, and a greater concern for ecological and biological issues (see Henry

¹⁰⁰ See Frawley (1992) for an overview of the evolution of environmentalism in the Australian context. See also J. Kapferer (1996: 76) for a discussion of the role of 'politically correct' tourism, such as ecotourism, in the commoditisation of symbolic goods and the discourses of identity.

¹⁰¹ Although, as B. Kapferer (1995b: 75) notes: 'identity categories and stereotypes become vital in the generation of social relations within relatively unstructured situations ... a phenomenon of such categories in the anonymous settings of mass-urban societies is that they become integral in the forming of social and political situations'. See Henry (1999: 299) and Hull et al. (2001:328) which discuss similar categorisations; see Amit & Rapport (2002) for a more general discussion of the attribution and invocation of categories of identity.

1999: 313–314). This approach to the natural environment is removed from an understanding of the cultural construction of community and place grounded in the environment, unless for example this engages with the nexus between conservation and the interests of minority indigenous groups (as discussed in Chapter 2).

However, in the context of the Nelly Bay protest, 'environmentalist' discourse provides a legitimate voice through which notions of attachment to place can be filtered. Or, in the words of one Nelly Bay resident: 'I think that the place is seen as something special, but that environmental issues have been used as a "compartment" for protest'. Although there is certainly an alignment with environmental (conservation) interests, the concerns of the disaffected islanders represent a more comprehensive suite of cultural rights, social attachments and constructions of both individual and community identity. However, lacking a familiarity with the prescribed discourse they face an immense capacity for their meanings to be misunderstood, misinterpreted or misrecognised, even though they are speaking the 'same' language. J. Kapferer (1996: 229) suggests that while language can mediate a range of experiences that go beyond the immediate lives and interests of the speaker, it cannot be assumed that this leads to a habitation of the same symbolic world. She identifies an alternative symbolic world of language 'which achieves its power outside and beyond language ... it is a code of social and symbolic power and as such constitutes both the currency of what Bourdieu calls cultural capital and the means whereby symbolic violence is perpetrated upon those who have no access to that capital'. By being forced to play by the rules of the language game of science, community expressions are doubly disempowered: first by the creation of a restricted field of dialogue, and second by a lack of familiarity with the dialogue to which they are restricted.

I suggest that J. Kapferer's (1996: 33) discussion of the hegemony of sub-cultures, reinforced through 'the mythologisers, who mine the cultural seams of everyday life and refine the raw materials of everyday meaning making' can equally apply to the propounders of scientific discourse involved in the Nelly Bay Harbour development. Kapferer suggests that 'the finite meaning provinces of specialist, private subcultures – their taken-for-grantedness and common sense – are rarely open to the scrutiny or

critique of outsiders except in so far as they are thought to be fair and impartial, their critique demonstrably 'constructive' and well within the parameters already set by the subcultural gatekeepers and their publicists/guardians'. What is interesting in the Nelly Bay Harbour protests, therefore, is the attempt (however unsuccessful) by members of the community to redefine the parameters and broaden the meaning provinces with which they are forced to engage. However, faced with the more powerful webs of meaning of the stronger social group (or sub-culture), it is inevitable that matters of scientific significance tend to 'masquerade as the paramount reality of everyday life'.

Davidson (1984: 183) allows us to recognise that the assumption that discourses are *not* exclusive is inherently flawed. In his discussion of multiple fields of conception, he proposes that the 'truth of a sentence is relative to (among other things) the language to which it belongs':

What matters is this: if all we know is what sentences a speaker holds true, and we cannot assume that his [sic] language is our own, then we cannot take even a first step towards interpretation without knowing or assuming a great deal about the speaker's beliefs ... the method is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible ... Charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters ... we improve the clarity and bite of declarations of difference, whether of scheme or opinion, by enlarging the basis of shared (translatable) language or of shared opinion. (ibid: 196–197)

The relativity of truths has become one of the main field markers in debates surrounding the Nelly Bay Harbour development. Davidson asserts that it is only through acknowledging a lack of common ground that meaningful disagreement can be possible. In the absence of this, emphasis is placed on condensing the debate – and disagreement – into one set of meanings, with no understandings of how these are enmeshed in more complex webs that lack a common language of connection. With respect to the debates surrounding the development of Nelly Bay, charity has never entered the game.

Conclusion

There is an obvious correlation between the above social struggles and what Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 5) describe as 'the eternally incomplete nature of hegemony, with its implication of the cultural as a contested, contingent political field, the battlefield in an ongoing 'war of position''. Integral to the Nelly Bay Harbour protest is the struggle to shift the socially constructed boundary between science and non-science. One outcome has been that protestors have had little choice but to align themselves with debates reflecting a contemporary ethos of eco-political interests; in so doing they have adopted a strategy that funnels opposition into specific biological and archaeological concerns. It would be erroneous, however, to suppose that these concerns are not authentic as a result. But their authenticity does not negate their paucity, implicated as they are in a greater suite of emotions and values that represent the reality and depth of community attachments. Discourse regarding the natural world cannot be separated from cultural constructions of reality (Frawley 1992: 216) in which 'the environment' as a whole is constructed as a cultural artefact. Although the protest incorporates more universalistic philosophies, such as those expressed through environmentalism, and is directed at threats that symbolise structures of global power, it is essentially locally expressed and redolent with local concerns. Indeed, it was in attempts to protect the local that recourse was made to World Heritage 'ammunition', with assertions that impacts on the coral of the bay were in direct contravention of their World Heritage values. I suggest, however, that the contribution of the corals to the heritage of the world is not their primary significance to the protestors. In this case, World Heritage is being used as a tool to protect values that are more specifically local.

Through social practices the natural environment is made culturally meaningful, and redolent with stories, memories and experiences. However, the islanders' stories reinforce that an important aspect of the experience of the 'naturalness' of the environment is solitude: being able to engage in recreational activities without encountering large numbers cannot be readily dismissed (see Hull et al. 2001: 332). Included in the project impacts is the recognition of threats to the communality of places – the appropriation of the commons for private and commercial use, more

particularly for the use of 'outsiders', particularly tourists. The bay will be lost to the community – it is no longer theirs, in the sense that the reinforcing practices and traditions of community making will be displaced.

Ultimately, community resistance to the Nelly Bay Harbour development is an expression of the perceived threat to the very 'sense of place' that is identified as important in cultural heritage discourse. Integral to place is the capacity to define both self and community; a threat to one is a threat to the other. So while the arguments revolve around the 'facts' of science, the debate is underpinned by assertions of identity and the experience of place, of a particular way of being in the world. The protest (re)constructs a symbolic landscape that is grounded in a universe of meanings that acts to enmesh places and sites, the natural and built environment, and the community into a complex expression of belonging and being. In so doing, it reaffirms that the heritage of the island is a complex interaction of physical and intangible attributes that cannot be understood in its complexity without recourse to community narrative and voice.

