Going by the Book:
Backpacker Travellers in
Aboriginal Australia and the
Negotiation of Text and Experience

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

Tamara Young: ______________________________
Acknowledgements

Just over ten years ago I wrote my first undergraduate essay on tourism and Aboriginal Australia. In the pages that follow is an extended exploration of this topic, an area that has long been central to my academic research interests. Despite what some may think, my experience as a researcher of travel and tourism has not been a holiday! But it has been a journey. A journey which, from the beginning to the present, has been fulfilling and rewarding, both intellectually and personally. There have been many people who have made this journey possible and enjoyable, and I wish to acknowledge those whose support and friendship have guided me and sustained me along the way.

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my Grandma
Elizabeth Newman (1914 – 2005)
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Synopsis

Long-term independent travel is regarded by many commentators as an active quest for discovery, and has long been proclaimed by individuals and organisations, both within and outside the tourism industry, as having a social, cultural and educative role. As independent travel becomes an increasingly popular and important sector of the travel market, the guidebook as cultural text becomes a significant and powerful mediator of experience. Guidebooks have a prevailing capacity to define and represent places, peoples and cultures and, at the same time, present descriptive and prescriptive information that simultaneously constructs the traveller and shapes their perspectives and experiences. Independent travellers such as backpackers, in their quest for the ‘authentic’, often seek out experiences with other cultures and demonstrate a desire to learn about, and interact with, indigenous people and their cultures. This thesis is concerned with the complex process of the dialectic construction of the backpacker (the traveller) as a particular gazing and experiencing subject, and of places, peoples and cultures (the travelled) as objects of the gaze. Central to the thesis is a consideration of the role of the guidebook as an interpretative lens through which the constructed and mediated nature of both the traveller and the travelled can be examined and understood.

Drawing on theoretical and methodological insights from the interdisciplinary fields of tourism studies and cultural studies, the thesis seeks to understand relationships between text, audience and culture in tourism. The interpretative method of textual analysis is married with qualitative interviews with a sample of backpackers to Australia to examine the interplay between travellers, guidebooks and experiences. An analysis of guidebooks published by Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and Let’s Go reveals that representations of Aboriginal people and their cultures are central to constructing an ‘authentic’ experience for independent travellers to Australia. These representations are, however, not without contradiction, as traveller discourses of authenticity, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and responsible travel are mobilised concurrently with popular tourism imagery and stereotypes of Aboriginal Australia. For the backpackers interviewed, the discrepancies between discourses provided in guidebooks means that their engagement with texts is dynamic, and their experiences with, and understandings
of, Aboriginal Australia are continuously negotiated and renegotiated throughout their travel experiences. I argue in this thesis that backpackers actively engage with narratives and representations of culture contained within guidebooks, and negotiate these textual contradictions to construct a particular type of experience and traveller-self to make sense of their travels in Aboriginal Australia. The findings of this thesis raise important questions about the role that the text plays as mediator between the traveller and the travelled culture, and the tensions, contradictions and negotiations between text and lived experience.
Chapter 1

Background to the Study:
The Construction of the Travel Experience

Rock Your World … Backpack the Real Outback! Adventure. Explore. Experience. Australia’s Outback Northern Territory … This place is for travellers who think differently. It’s for travellers who enjoy their freedom, who welcome choice, have a sense of adventure and who appreciate and respect one of the oldest cultures on earth … Like any journey you need a beginning, so start here. (Northern Territory Tourist Commission 2004)

Introduction: A Journey to the Centre

My first glimpse of Uluru was from the air, as the plane banked left approaching the airport. ¹ The flight had taken me over spectacular rock formations and, up to this point, the Australian desert scenery had been pretty much as I had been led to expect. A ‘sunburnt country’ of wide-open spaces – a distant and endless horizon, the reddest soil I had ever seen, and hectares of arid terrain spotted with bush and scrub, somehow enduring under relentlessly sunny skies. The view of Uluru from above, however, was nothing as I expected. This enormous red rock was in three dimensions! The Uluru I was familiar with was a silhouette cut against the horizon in varying shades of colour (Figure 1.1). The Uluru I thought I knew was no rock at all, but an image, a perspective, a mere imagining. Susan Storm (2000: 207) was right when she said ‘no matter how prepared you think you are, the first sight of Uluru will jar each of your jaded senses’. I had not yet even set foot on red soil and already my preconceptions of this place were being challenged.

¹ Uluru was known only as Ayers Rock to non-Aboriginal people until 1985. Further details regarding this site and a brief history of the transference of ownership from the Australian Government to the Pitjantjatjara-Yankuntjatjara Aboriginal peoples of Central Australia (collectively known as Anangu), is provided in Chapter 6.

There is no denying the lure of the Red Centre. In confirmation of this fact, I remember thinking as I disembarked that the only reason this airport exists, and indeed the entire township of Yulara, is to service tourism at The Rock – to ferry the endless hordes of modern day pilgrims and snap-happy sightseers direct through the gateway of Australia’s most famous cultural and natural attraction in Central Australia, the Northern Territory (Figure 1.2). They each have their own reasons for making the journey, and I, of course, had mine. My journey to the Centre was, ultimately, as a researcher but, at the same time, I was a traveller making my first visit to the Australian Outback. I was travelling with a backpack, a guidebook, and great expectations for my impending experiences – both cultural and educational. I was hoping to embrace cultural experiences; I was there to learn, to explore and appreciate the place, to understand it. I considered myself a knowledgeable and responsible traveller; in my Northern Territory adventures I would respect Aboriginal Australians – the owners of this land. From the outset, climbing Uluru was not an option. In this regard, my decision was made based on clear ideals concerning culturally appropriate, sensitive and respectful behaviour towards Aboriginal people their cultural and spiritual beliefs. As a

non-indigenous Australian, and having spent a number of years researching Aboriginal tourism, there was, for me, no dilemma in deciding whether to climb or not to climb. Even so, when actually immersed in the tourist machine and mentality enveloping Uluru, it was particularly difficult to deny the pervading impulse to ‘conquer’ the Rock. As I have argued elsewhere (Young 2005), and will discuss in this thesis, backpackers to Uluru are ‘between a rock and a hard place’ and the conflicting discourses regarding the climb create significant dilemmas for these travellers and their experiences at this popular destination.

Figure 1.2
Map of the Northern Territory highlighting the location of Uluru in Central Australia (Department of the Environment and Heritage 2005)
Independent travellers, such as backpackers, are often described and portrayed as those people who ‘appreciate’ and ‘respect’ indigenous cultures (as evident in the passage from the Northern Territory Tourist Commission that commenced this chapter). Indeed, I wished to ensure that my tourist dollar would go to local Aboriginal communities rather than to those non-indigenous people who would package their arts, crafts and beliefs to sell them off a little piece at a time. I planned to experience and learn about Uluru on an Aboriginal cultural tour and to spend time in the Aboriginal cultural centre. All these ideals seemed simply the ‘right’ way to go about things. I had come, like many others who come to Uluru, as an independent traveller – as a backpacker with my Lonely Planet guidebook. There was comfort in this fact; within its pages were many tips, ideas, details and promises, and all of them appealed to, and reinforced, my way of thinking. I too desired to get off the beaten track, to learn about another culture and way of life, and perhaps in the process somehow find out more about myself as well.

My stay at the backpacker hostel at the Uluru resort town of Yulara was a rude awakening to the tourist machine operating there. Travellers came and went very quickly, the faces constantly changing. They would arrive at the hostel in the early evening, many having been on a tour to Uluru and the surrounding areas; they would revel in the nightlife of ‘The Outback Pub’, get drunk, have fun, then climb into bed needing to sleep before an early rise to rejoin their tour group for the renowned sunrise viewing over the Rock. Numerous alarms sounded at 4:30am and the backpackers would depart, their Uluru experience complete. Early on my first morning I undertook the nine-kilometre walk around the base of Uluru. The ochre red rock juxtaposed with cobalt blue sky was just as I anticipated (Figure 1.3); yet the size and shape of the rock, its many caves, crevices and boulders was far different from what I had imagined. The walk was both challenging and satisfying and as I sat at the base of Uluru soaking up the atmosphere (and resting my legs) I remember thinking two clear thoughts. The first was that those embarking on the climb were crazy as far as I was concerned. The base walk offered an opportunity to see and appreciate so much more of Uluru and the surrounding landscape – a way to really experience the place and feel its energy, rather than merely a view of the surrounding desert landscape from the top. My second thought was that Uluru really did have a mystical feel about it. I felt very happy and remember thinking: it is understandable that this is a sacred place.
By 9:45am, the large car park at the base of Uluru was practically full. As tourist coaches arrived, one after the other, the majority of people appeared to be heading directly to the climb (Figure 1.4). People congregated at the base taking photographs of their companions ascending, descending and upon completion – the conquering moment captured on film and preserved forever. The ‘Rock Climb Viewing Area’ was overflowing with people cheering their mates (or applauding themselves) when they reached the bottom. I found this a fascinating and yet troubling ritual. I was keen to know whether they were aware of the cultural significance of Uluru to Anangu, the local Aboriginal people, and if any of them had visited the Aboriginal cultural centre or

read the information pamphlet provided upon entering the National Park. Information regarding the climb quotes the traditional owners saying such things as: ‘That’s a really important sacred thing that you are climbing … You shouldn’t climb. It’s not the proper thing’.

At the base of the climb there were also signs with this request that anyone embarking on the climb must walk past. And yet, from my observations, it appeared that many visitors to Uluru still chose to climb. The Aboriginal request not to climb is also printed

Figure 1.4
Visitors embarking on the Uluru climb
on all of the interpretative material distributed upon entering the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park. Further, a quick glance at the Uluru section of my *Lonely Planet* guidebook revealed a text box clearly stating that Anangu would prefer visitors not to climb as it goes against Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. Many of the aspects of travel that I considered of great importance quite possibly never even crossed the minds of others visiting the same place. Jim Butcher (2003: 41) may well have been right when he said tourists and travellers are very different animals.

I took a guided tour from the Cultural Centre to Uluru led by an Aboriginal guide who introduced the group to traditional Aboriginal activities. My excitement at this opportunity to learn about Aboriginal culture from the source was short-lived and I found several things that took place around me somewhat disturbing. The Aboriginal guide’s re-enactment of traditional cultural activities seemed almost like watching a performer running through a routine of tricks. He did not appear to be at all interested in the tour participants and seemed to be doing a series of rehearsed movements without enthusiasm. It was as impossible to imagine that what was being revealed was some deep and ancient cultural practice, as was it to imagine that anyone observing could take away something of personal significance. When we were told ‘you can now take photos of [our tour guide] Andrew’ everyone pulled out their cameras and began clicking away, a chance to get a photograph of a ‘real’ Aboriginal person, despite the fact we had been told Anangu prefer not to have their picture taken. A deep-seated dislike of what the tourism industry was doing to indigenous cultures arose in me, and I took fleeting refuge in the idea that at least I was not one of those tourists. Except of course I, too, was there, sharing the same space.

As I look back now, and read over my field diary entries, I realise that many of the phenomena I observed and experienced were far more complex than I had imagined at the time. The ideals which I had when I arrived at Uluru led me to make certain choices and in making them those ideals were confirmed as mine. In my travels (both in Australia and overseas) I defined myself as a traveller rather than a tourist, I preferred to think of myself as culturally aware and responsible, and I interpreted the sites and people I encountered accordingly. Yet, all I could do to demonstrate who I was and what I believed to be important was to sit idly by and watch on as others climbed the
Rock, literally trampling on the wishes of the Aboriginal people. My experiences at Uluru had certainly not turned out as I had expected – they were far more real – and as Alain de Botton (2002) implies, that is perhaps the very essence of travel. I left Uluru with many lingering questions and, certainly, the seed that grew into this thesis was first planted in that red soil.

The Art of Travel: Conceptualising Travel and Tourism Experiences

According to Judith Adler (1989: 11; 1998) in her writings on the Origins of Sightseeing, travel in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ‘was first widely proclaimed as an art’ playing a social, cultural and educative role. For those who pursued travel at that time – the elite scholars and European aristocrats – the ‘art of travel’ was about experiencing the world, it was about gaining knowledge ‘as an exercise in universalising discourse’ (Adler 1989: 11). In one of the first social critiques of mass tourism written some 40 years ago, Daniel Boorstin (1964; 1987) discussed ‘the lost art of travel’. He argued that, in contrast to travel, contemporary tourism has become nothing more than a superficial and trivial activity. Boorstin lamented the disappearance, or replacement, of certain key aspects of travel with the superficial and fabricated simulacra of tourism, arguing that the nature of the experience had been altered profoundly. He described the origins of travel in ‘travail’ – a practice that entailed (mis)adventure, hardship and the struggle against the unexpected. Through exposure to the unfamiliar, travel presented a series of situations that encouraged the traveller to ‘discover’ or to ‘become’ more of himself or herself. Indeed, the cliché that travel broadens the mind is evident in this particular view. Early travels were undertaken by:

European men of culture … [and] to travel was to become a man of the world. Unless one was a man of the world he might not seem cultivated in his own country … The travel experience was an adventure, too, simply because so few could afford or would dare its hardships. (Boorstin 1987: 82-84)
In contrast to this audacious [male] traveller, Boorstin sketches a picture of the modern tourist who, rather than seeking out adventure, expects it to be presented and packaged in a sanitised and easily digestible manner. The rise of the mass tourist occurred alongside the simultaneous amelioration of risk and danger where the experience is predetermined and insured, and occurs through a series of insulated and insulating mechanisms that provide a thoroughly comforting familiarity. Accordingly, Boorstin believed that tourists are no more than pleasure-seeking hedonists unable to experience reality directly, thriving on and finding pleasure only in the inauthentic and, therefore, taking pleasure in contrived experiences, attractions and ‘pseudo-events’. Boorstin claimed that this inability to experience reality was central to the human condition, and he thus holds a similar view to arguments raised by culture theorists, such as Roland Barthes’ (1973) work on ‘myth’, Jean Baudrillard’s (1981; 1988) accounts of simulation and simulacra, and Umberto Eco’s (1986) discussions on the production of, and travels in, ‘hyper-reality’. According to Graham Dann (1996a: 7), Boorstin viewed the tourist as a passive onlooker, as a ‘superficial nitwit and cultural dope, someone who was taken in by the fabrications of reality’. Boorstin argued that the fundamental shift from travel to tourism was the transference of the onus of responsibility away from the one doing the travelling to the one providing the travel service and, hence, the journey became the holiday – the ‘getting there’ replaced by the ‘being there’. Boorstin (1987: 85) claims that:

The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes ‘sight-seeing’ … He expects everything to be done to him and for him … Thus foreign travel ceased to be an activity – an experience, an undertaking – and instead became a commodity.

More recently, Alain de Botton (2002) reflects philosophically on the ‘art of travel’ in writings of his personal experiences as a tourist and an analysis of the motivations that underpin the desire to travel. In essence, de Botton suggests that modern tourism is anything but simple and trivial. Rather, tourism is exemplary of the contemporary human condition that is dominated by a search for happiness as part of its essential development and, as such, is deserving of a more considered and critical reflection. In his words:
If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest – in all its ardour and paradoxes – than our travels. They express, however inarticulately, an understanding of what life may be about, outside of the constraints of work and the struggle for survival. (de Botton 2002: 9)

de Botton speaks of travel in relation to themes including the anticipation of travel prior to departure, the actual experience of travelling, and the motives for travel that relate to a search for the exotic and the curious. According to de Botton, the ‘art of travel’ – the experience of travelling – occurs in a state of discrepancy between the packaged and promoted holiday image and the reality of the day-to-day experiences of actually being in another place and another culture. Rarely do experiences unfold as effortlessly and predictably as they do in brochures and constructed itineraries and, even more pointedly, rarely does the traveller encounter an experience of self that even remotely reflects preconceived imaginings and expectations. Indeed, he notes that ‘we are familiar with the notion that the reality of travel is not what we anticipate’ (de Botton 2002: 11). Despite the best attempts of the tourism industry to present an accessible and eminently satisfying experience through the idealised imagery of the exotic – preplanned and perfect – the reality of everyday life, and the travel experience, is a far messier affair. Notwithstanding the advent of commodified mass tourism, the art of travel, according to de Botton, still has the potential to enlighten both the nature of desire and of the self.

From the ‘lost art of travel’ to the ‘art of travel’; these critiques and reflections highlight some of the central and essential ideological aspects of the often contentious relationships between discourses of travel and discourses of tourism. Within popular consciousness and much academic literature, the travel-tourism debate is located within a dichotomous and binary framework. Conceptualised in this way, travel is associated with education and enlightenment and a ‘quest for knowledge, culture and cross-cultural intermingling’ (Craik 1997: 119), while tourism is associated with commodified, mediated and conflicting experiences with, and of, culture (Williams 1998). Of particular significance to this thesis is the construction of the traveller as someone who...
seeks out a different kind of experience – an experience that is supposedly more ‘authentic’ and more ‘meaningful’ – than that sought and achieved by the mass tourist.

Whether discussing travel or tourism, it is clear that academic reflections on these topics have, over the past forty or so years, become increasingly critical and sophisticated. The scholarly study and subsequent theorising of tourism (studied within disciplines including sociology, anthropology, geography and, more recently, across disciplines in the case of cultural studies) is a relatively recent phenomenon that has corresponded with the growth and rapid expansion of international travel in modern industrial society (Cohen 1984; 2004a; Williams 1998). Tourism, as a major mass phenomenon, increased significantly in the latter half of the twentieth century as a result of the various economic, technological, social and political changes following the Second World War (Lanfant 1995). According to Malcolm Crick (1989: 310) tourism represents ‘the largest movement of human populations outside wartime’. Indeed, there was a constant and spectacular growth in international tourism in the post-war period, and particularly in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century. Jim Butcher (2003: 5) acknowledges that:

Over the last century and a half the achievement of the [tourism] industry has been nothing less than the democratisation of travel, from the few deemed worthy, and wealthy enough to partake, to an everyday activity for the majority in developed societies.

Certainly, travel and tourism now are considered phenomena of social and cultural significance – particularly in writings on modernity and associated understandings of late and postmodernity (Wang 2000) – as ‘quintessential features of mass consumer culture and modern life’ (Britton 1991: 451). Because tourism is a frequently undertaken activity and socially accepted practice within Western consumer society, much sociological theorising of the phenomenon has sought to understand why people travel. In this regard, the pursuit of authenticity as a primary motivation of travellers and tourists has informed many theoretical discussions since the earlier critiques by Boorstin, and the notion that tourism is a search for authenticity is one of the most well-known and well-established theoretical debates in the study of tourism (Dann 1996a; Young, T. (2005) Going by the Book: Backpacker Travellers in Aboriginal Australia and the Negotiation of Text and Experience, PhD Thesis, The University of Newcastle, Australia.

The most well known examination of authenticity and tourism is the early work of Dean MacCannell (1973; 1989) whose writings on authenticity pervade the literature on the sociology of tourism (Dann 1996a). MacCannell considered tourism to be a search for an authenticity that no longer could be found or experienced within an alienated modern world. He viewed the tourist as a contemporary secular pilgrim motivated to travel by a desire to encounter authenticity in other places and other cultures. Yet according to MacCannell (1973), this quest is ultimately doomed – it is hindered by locals and by the tourism industry. As a result, tourists are only usually able to access the spaces of ‘staged authenticity’. So, although tourists wish to experience the ‘real’ lives of others in authentic ‘back regions’ they are usually unable to penetrate and move beyond the ‘front’ regions.

Tourism, however, cannot be explained in terms of only one type of motivation. Rather, it consists of a range of contemporary travel practices and various types of tourists (Adler 1989). Erik Cohen (1979) argued that the discussions of authenticity by both Boorstin and MacCannell were limited since both had assumed a homogenous view of the tourist. Consequently, they had suggested that all tourists behaved in a similar manner and had similar motivations for travel. Cohen (1979) pointed out that he believed there to be a range of tourist types, each holding different worldviews predicated on their relationship towards the ‘centre’ of their own societies and the centre of ‘other’ societies. Hence, Cohen argued that it was no longer theoretically legitimate to talk of a single type of tourism or tourist but a continuum of tourist types seeking varying degrees of authenticity in their travels. Although attempts to understand authenticity are, therefore, not new, they are important to this thesis on a number of levels, particularly as they apply to understanding the active construction of so-called boundaries between ‘independent travellers’ and ‘mass tourists’.

As the study of tourism has become more established within the social sciences and there has been greater recognition of its broader social and cultural significance,
academic debates about tourism and authenticity have been reformulated (Dann 2000; Cohen 2004a; Wang 2000). Ning Wang (1999; 2000) has recently outlined the theoretical formulation and shifting interpretations of the authenticity perspective within tourism analyses. He contends that explanations of authenticity within tourism have often been oversimplified but that theorisations can be differentiated into two separate overarching interests – the authenticity of tourist (and traveller) experiences and the authenticity of toured (and travelled) objects (Wang 2000: 48). He claims that three dominant and different approaches to understanding authenticity can be identified – ‘objective’, ‘constructed’ and ‘existential’ – the first two of which he claims are ‘object-related’ and the third is ‘activity related’ (Wang 1999; 2000).

Using MacCannell’s ‘staged authenticity’ thesis as a point of departure, Wang explores the concept of ‘objective’ authenticity, which refers to the authenticity of toured objects as being ‘original’ and, therefore, genuine and authentic. In this light, authenticity is thought to be measurable and definable. This externalised view of the concept leads to the second approach of authenticity as ‘constructed’ whereby the focus is on tourist perceptions of authenticity and refers to the authenticity that is projected onto toured objects. In other words, authenticity is the product of social construction. Tourists are seeking ‘signs of authenticity or symbolic authenticity’ (Wang 2000: 49) at the same time as objects are constructed to appear authentic through images, stereotypes, expectations and power. In contrast to these object-related forms of authenticities, Wang also speaks of ‘existential authenticity’ which is grounded in the tourism or travel experience. In this sense, authenticity comprises ‘personal or intersubjective feelings that are activated by the liminal process of tourist behaviors’ (Wang 2000: 49). In other words, the nature of toured objects is comparatively less relevant; instead, authenticity is a subjectively interpreted and ‘existential state of Being’ that describes a particular kind of relationship with the self, and is potentially activated and achieved through travel activities (Wang 2000: 49).

Understood in this framework, the concept of authenticity is ‘a subjective attribution’ (Smith 2003: 20) the meaning of which is arbitrary and negotiable (Cohen 1988). Moreover, it is a relative concept, and ‘one person’s absolute fake is another’s meaningful experience’ (Moore 2002: 55). Whilst authenticity may have limited
usefulness and applicability in understanding much tourism phenomena it is still very relevant to discussions on cultural tourism and the representation of cultures in tourism (Wang 1999) both of which are central to this thesis. Tourism has become increasingly fragmented and there are various alternatives to the much criticised mass tourism; for instance, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, and indigenous tourism (to name but a few) with each of these seemingly offering more authentic experiences than those provided by contemporary mass tourism. Cultural tourism, for instance, is a specific form of alternative tourism that has cultural sites, events and experiences as its primary focus. Jennifer Craik (1997: 113) notes that the ‘cultural component of tourism experiences’ emerged and became increasingly significant since the mid-1980s. She suggests that a broad comparison can be made between the Grand Tour – that is, the view of travel as educational and enlightening – and modern cultural tourism (Craik 1997: 119). In this light, Craik notes:

By returning to the quest for educational, authentic, experiential and communicative aspects of tourist encounters, advocates and the industry are positioning culture as a central part of the phenomenon. In one sense, this is a return to the primary motivations of the Grand Tour … it taps into the desire for alternative, special interest and off-the-beaten-track kinds of travel experiences. (Craik 2001: 104)

Indeed, certain tourist types – particularly independent travellers – are considered to be avid seekers of authenticity, and a search for authenticity is seen as underpinning their motivations, expectations and experiences. Indeed, Luke Desforges (1998: 182) contends that ‘young independent travellers are not only concerned that the places they visit are authentic, but that their experiences of them are as well’. According to Chris Rojek and John Urry (1997: 1), travel involves the ‘migration’ of ‘peoples, cultures and objects [and] it is now clear that people tour cultures; and that cultures and objects themselves travel’.
Touring Cultures: Travelling Subjects, Travelled Objects

Contemporaneously, hundreds of thousands of young people travel the world for extended periods of time (from three months up to a number of years), temporarily foregoing employment or further formal education. This type of travel, best known in Australia as backpacking, is considered more as a rite of passage to a worldly identity than as merely a form of diversionary leisure and recreation. In this sense, long-term independent travel is viewed as a pursuit of self-enhancement through the accumulation of experience (Desforges 2000). As backpackers undertake lengthy journeys, they can incorporate a range of activities into their travel experiences, and have a variety of motivations for travel. For many, in addition to seeking elements of pleasure, the opportunity to meet local people and to engage with the culture of destinations – through experiencing local lifestyle and cultural difference – is considered just as paramount.

Lengthy periods abroad with independent and flexible itineraries seemingly provide backpackers with greater opportunities to experience and to immerse themselves in destination cultures. They reportedly are less interested in sightseeing than they are in experiencing, participating and learning (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). A central aspect of backpacking is a search for cultural knowledge and ‘contact with the authentic Other’ (Phipps 1999: 84). According to Ian Munt (1994), the tertiary educated ‘new middle class’ of international independent travellers – for instance, backpackers – is less inclined to participate in holidays aimed towards the mass. Travellers are, arguably, in search of authentic experiences that are culturally responsible and environmentally sensitive, signalling ‘a social and cultural reaction of the new middle classes to the crassness which they perceive as tourism’ (Munt 1994: 119). For backpackers, the authenticity of the travel experience is often marked by the relative absence of the tourism industry and, thus, ‘by as little commodification of the relationship between traveller and the Other as possible’ (Desforges 1998: 183).

Backpacker travel to Australia has burgeoned in recent years. Backpackers have become an economically and culturally significant segment of the independent traveller market, and are considered as especially lucrative because they:

Tend to spend more, travel further and stay longer than other tourists … [consuming] a diverse range of experiences and services across a wide spectrum of places and settings, from cities to outback, from the coast to the desert. (Allon 2004:50-51)

Around 438,000 international backpackers visited Australia in 2003, comprising approximately 11 per cent of all international visitors to Australia (Tourism Australia 2004a). This figure indicates a considerable increase from the 230,000 backpackers who visited Australia in 1996 (Buchanan and Rossetto 1997). Indeed, the Office of National Tourism (1999) predicts that the number of international backpackers visiting Australia will continue to grow in both volume and significance. International backpackers stay in Australia for an average of 64 nights (Tourism Australia 2004a), and many travel for much longer periods of time and incorporate work or study into their long-term travel experiences. In 2002/2003, 89,000 ‘Working Holiday Maker’ visas were granted to international travellers to Australia (Tourism Australia 2004b). Backpackers come from a range of generating regions (most notably the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States and Canada) and contribute approximately $2.3 billion annually to the Australian economy (Tourism Australia 2004a; 2004b).

The popularity of Australia as an international tourist destination increased in the 1980s (Hollinshead 1988; Morris 1995) corresponding with increased promotion to international markets (Craik 2001). According to Meaghan Morris (1995), the marketing of Australia to international and national tourists focuses on and emphasises the uniqueness both of the landscape and the perceived character of Australian people. Specifically, Aboriginal culture is viewed as a ‘major point of uniqueness’ (Hutchinson 1997: 183). Increasingly, Australia is positioned and promoted as a distinctive tourist destination through the mobilisation of images of indigenous people, particularly in an effort to attract tourists and travellers, such as backpackers, who wish to have contact with local people and experience authentic culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Smith

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2 The Australian Bureau of Tourism Research defines backpackers very simply, for statistical purposes, as international visitors to Australia who spend at least one night during their stay in backpacker (or youth hostel) accommodation (Bolin 2001: 1).

2003). For Western tourists to Australia, the unique and exotic Other are indigenous Australians – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures.³

Morris (1995: 188) highlights that Aboriginal culture is an ‘object of tourism’ and, more often than not, Aboriginal culture is the toured rather than Aboriginal people being the touring subjects. The representation and promotion of Aboriginal Australians is apparent in international and national advertising campaigns. For instance, The Australian Tourist Commission (now known as Tourism Australia), a federal government body, incorporates particular signifiers of Aboriginal culture into their campaigns (see, for example, Simondson 1995; Waitt 1997; 1999; Zeppel 1998a). Thus, within the discourses of Australian tourism promotion, particular elements of Aboriginal culture are marked as being of touristic significance and visitors are invited (predominantly by non-Aboriginal people) to learn about and experience Aboriginal Australia as a component of their travels. As a result, particular aspects of culture are transformed into commodities which, ultimately, can be sold to, and consumed by, tourists. The implications of being an object of the tourist gaze has been the topic of some research (see, for example, MacDonald 1997; Morris 1995). An increasing interest in tourism imagery has focused on how the object of the gaze is constructed and represented in tourism. The mythology of the Other is fundamental to much tourism and particularly relevant to indigenous cultural tourism and subsequent representations of indigeneity. In relation to tourist (and traveller) desire to experience other cultures, Wang (2000: 218) notes that:

Tourism involves interaction and an antithesis between the touring (subject) and the toured (object). The touring, or the tourist, as an agent of modernized society comes to be a subject. In contrast the toured, often in the form of the exotic, difference, or novelty, becomes an object of curiosity at which the tourists gaze.

³ Throughout this thesis, I use the term Aboriginal Australia in reference to Aboriginal people and their cultures. The terms ‘indigenous people’, ‘Aboriginal people’ or ‘Aboriginal Australians’ are used in preference to ‘Aborigines’ which has been described as ‘problematic’, its meaning associated with the widespread dispossession of Aboriginal people throughout the settlement of Australia (Meadows 2001: 22). Dewdney (1994) notes that ‘Aboriginal Australians’ is the term preferred by Aboriginal people; however, generally they do not refer to themselves as Aboriginal at all. Instead, they use terms, such as Koori (Goori or Koorie) in New South Wales and Victoria, Murri in Queensland, Nunga in South Australia, Palawa in Tasmania, and Nyoongah (Noongar) in Western Australia (Dewdney 1994; Heiss 2001). In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal people generally define themselves by their language group, for example, Jawoyn around Katherine and Warumungu around Tennant Creek (Heiss 2001).
The complex process of constructing the traveller as a particular gazing subject, and of people and cultures as objects of the traveller’s gaze, is a central concern of this thesis. Of primary interest are the general traits and qualities that characterise the culture of travellers, in particular, backpackers, and the centrality of indigenous culture to their travel experiences and expectations. As mentioned above, a search for authentic encounters with other cultures supposedly is fundamental to their experiences and to their identity as travellers. As a result, one would expect them to seek out educational experiences in order to learn about other cultures, as well as to demonstrate a desire for personal interactions with indigenous people. In travel and tourism, however, the relationship between the subject and object is a mediated one; indeed, as has been noted, ‘tourism is a mediated activity’ (Chambers 1997a: 4). Backpackers travelling in foreign destinations usually carry little more than their clothes and a guidebook in their backpacks. Therefore, the role that guidebooks play in the backpacker travel experience, mediating their relationships with destinations and their peoples and cultures is potentially significant. But in spite of this significance the role of the guidebook as a mediator of backpacker travel is little understood. The overarching aim of this thesis, therefore, is to explore these relationships through a study that examines the interaction between text and audience in the specific context of independent (backpacker) travel. In particular, the central question guiding this research study is to investigate how the traveller, and the travelled, are constructed, mediated and shaped through guidebooks.

**Framing the Study: A Cultural Approach**

The importance of culture to this thesis is two-fold as I explore the interplay between the culture of backpackers (the traveller subjects) including their texts (guidebooks), and the culture of the people being toured (the travelled objects) and their representation in these texts. In other words, the focus of this study is on cultures and cultural texts; therefore, it is necessary to take into account the complexity of the concept of culture, which is one of the most widely used concepts in the social sciences and humanities (Edles 2002). The idea of culture is widely contested and is subjected to various interpretations and emphases within popular usage, which once led Raymond Williams (1976: 76) to proclaim that ‘culture is one of the most complex terms in the English
language … it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct systems of thought’. Following Williams, Laura Edles (2002: 1-8) explains that the most common uses and definitions of culture are: aesthetic (as humanistic and elitist), ethnographic (as a way of life) and symbolic (as systems of shared meanings). Indeed, the role of culture in tourism is multi-faceted, it ‘is simultaneously a resource, a product, an experience and an outcome’ (Craik 1997: 113).

This thesis is concerned with travel and tourism as cultural and social phenomena and, in this sense, travel is viewed as a complex set of social and cultural practices that are considered central to a modern Western self (Rojek and Urry 1997). The study adopts a multidisciplinary social science approach drawing primarily on the theoretical perspectives of tourism studies, sociology and cultural studies. Cohen (2004a: 2) notes that the sociological concern with tourism throughout the late 1980s and 1990s developed along with an increasing interest in consumption and popular culture as ‘critical constituents of late modern society’. To study tourism is to study a cultural process, and the academic field of cultural studies seeks to study particular aspects of the social world and cultural processes (Gray 2003: 1). Cultural studies is an interpretative ‘field of inquiry’ (Gray 2003: 11) that represents the ‘cultural turn’ or ‘linguistic turn’ in the humanities and social sciences since the 1970s (Alasuutari 1995; Barker 2002; Barker and Galasiński 2001; Fuery and Mansfield 2000; Tudor 1999). The development of cultural studies lies at the interface between the social sciences (notably sociology and communication and media studies) and the humanities (including literature and modern languages).

A central concern of cultural studies is the role of cultural texts in the structuring and experience of everyday life. Chris Barker (2002: 7) asserts that such an approach to understanding social phenomena takes into account aspects of culture ‘as constituted by the meanings and representations generated by human signifying practices, and the relations of power and its consequences that are inherent in such representations’. Cultural studies thus treats culture and systems of meaning within broader questions of politics and power (Alasuutari 1995; Turner 1996). Further, according to Ann Gray (2003: 1), one of the central characteristics of cultural studies is ‘that of understanding
culture as constitutive of and constituted by ‘the lived’, that is the material, social and symbolic practices of everyday life’.

Cultural studies is now well known for the analytical perspective employed in the spectrum of interpretative and qualitative methodologies (Alasuutari 1995; Turner 1996). Employing and operationalising a cultural studies approach to understanding the complex cultural practice of tourism is not without some dilemma because both fields of inquiry have often been criticised for lacking distinctive theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. It has been argued, for example, that tourism research lacks theoretical foundations that contribute to understanding the social and cultural activities involved (see, for example, Crick 1991; Franklin and Crang 2001). The cultural theorist Pertti Alasuutari (1995: 2) points out that ‘the real gist of cultural studies is to make use of all useful theories and methods in order to gain insights about the phenomena one studies’. Likewise, Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg (1992: 2) state that no specific methodology can be privileged and a range of methodological approaches can provide important insights and knowledge. Somewhat similarly, in relation to tourism studies, the sociologists Graham Dann and Erik Cohen (1991) state that tourism, as a multifaceted phenomenon, is best studied from an eclectic viewpoint. They argue that the combination of insights from a variety of disciplines and the application of various social science theoretical and methodological approaches will lead to a deeper understanding of a ‘pluralistic sociological interpretation of touristic reality’ (Dann and Cohen 1991: 167).

Whilst no dominant specific disciplinary theories or methods can be discerned from either tourism studies or cultural studies, there is an evident nexus between these two fields of inquiry, both of which have developed from traditional disciplines and have become prominent fields of academic inquiry in their own right over the past few decades. Turner (1992: 640) argues that early developments in cultural studies saw a reluctance for it to become a discipline and cultural studies projects were ‘motivated, at least in part, by a critique of the disciplines’. Thus, as an interdisciplinary, ‘multi-disciplinary’ or ‘post-disciplinary’ approach (Barker 2002: 3), some primary areas of critique in cultural studies are race and ethnicity, discourse and textuality, popular culture and its audiences, nationhood, national identity, colonialism and postcolonialism.
Increasingly, these prevailing areas of concern are also being addressed in tourism research, particularly in relation to the images and representations of indigenous peoples (Frow and Morris 2000).

Cultural studies is concerned with the artefacts of popular culture and the cultures of everyday life (Gray 2003: 12), with a focus on ‘how our everyday lives are constructed, how culture forms its subjects … the aim is to locate the social and political effects of these formations’ (Turner 1996: 3). The attention of much research is thus on ‘texts’ (including written texts such as literature and the media, as well as visual texts such as film, photography and advertising), with textual analyses aimed towards finding inherent meanings, and the construction of multiple meanings, within cultural texts. In his detailed work on cultural representation, Stuart Hall (1997: 16) puts forth a basic definition of representation as ‘the production of meaning through language’. Indeed, it is through language that meanings are constructed, meanings from which people ‘make sense of the world of people, objects and events’ (Hall 1997: 16). With regard to the significance of cultural texts to tourism, John Urry (1994: 238) argues that sites and experiences are:  

[C]onstructed through multiple texts which combine to produce a particular tourist text, albeit one whose meanings are shifting, unstable and contested. At the same time it is important to recognise that texts themselves are part of a larger framework of signification, of narratives, concepts, ideologies, metaphors, practices.

Recent developments in cultural studies, however, have not solely privileged the text with research going beyond the analysis of the text itself to take into account social and lived experience (Morris 1997). Indeed, the ‘cultural turn’ in sociology is known for the repositioning of texts within academic analyses, and rethinking the importance of texts in understanding and researching culture (McGregor 2000: 28). As a result, a greater focus has been placed on the production and consumption of texts, with discourses and structures of power that operate to construct texts becoming the objects of study. Furthermore, Gray (2003: 14) notes that the consumption of popular culture forms has been studied to examine the way that cultural texts construct identities and ‘a sense of

self and relationship to others’ (see, for example, Ang 1985; Radway 1984). The study of the audience has thus been a significant contribution of cultural studies research to the understanding of society, with cultural studies being influential in providing ways of ‘understanding popular culture and issues of representation, alongside examination of the role and position of the audience, and wider contextual studies’ (O'Shaughnessy 1999: 15).

Current developments in tourism studies have seen an increased interest in the methods and theories derived from interdisciplinary cultural studies. Interpretative methods of textual analysis increasingly are being used to gain an understanding of the meanings produced and encoded in tourism texts. Much of this research, however, has focused on the researcher’s interpretation of texts and little attention has been paid to the way tourists interpret and shape their knowledge of place and culture in dialogue with their reading of tourism texts. Thus, what the receivers of tourism texts do with the texts, how they decode and interpret them, and the different ways knowledge can be constructed and shaped through texts has received little attention in tourism research. This thesis aims to bridge this gap by incorporating interpretative methods of textual analysis, combined with a qualitative study of the audience of the texts. The result will be an in-depth understanding of the interplay between text, audience and context in tourism.

In order to examine the interplay between text and audience I pursued two broad areas of investigation. First, I analysed the ways by which the traveller and particular aspects of the travel experience are represented within texts – in the case selected guidebooks. Second, I examined how travellers engage with these texts to negotiate their experiences. Through the study of these two axes, and the mediation between them, the thesis seeks to make an original contribution to the contemporary and growing body of critical literature on the social and cultural study of tourism, and the place of texts and travel discourse within this study. Of specific interest is the construction of the traveller (as subject) and Aboriginal Australia (as object) through text and experience. The study seeks to contribute to academic analyses of travel and tourism from a framework that incorporates the theoretical perspectives of tourism studies and cultural studies. Indeed, as argued above, these areas of study overlap, therefore, the interrelationship of these perspectives enables a comprehensive and original framework of inquiry. The
Methodological Appendix (Appendix A) provides detailed information pertaining to the research process and the strategies and issues of data collection involved in this study, but it is necessary to outline and reflect briefly here on the methodological approach.

**Researching Text and Experience: Methodological Perspective**

Tourism research generally has often been criticised for its lack of theoretical awareness and methodological sophistication (Dann, Nash and Pearce 1988) and, in particular, for a deficiency of theoretically informed empirical studies (Cohen 1984). This criticism has also been extended specifically to studies of tourism imagery with Cohen (1993) arguing that few researchers have attempted to position their studies within theoretically refined or methodologically systematic approaches. In his theoretical and methodological study of tourism imagery and representations of (what he terms) ‘native people’, Cohen (1993) outlines two directions that should frame research regarding images in tourism. His outline for analysis applies equally well to analyses of texts, such as guidebooks. The first of these he terms an ‘intrinsic direction’ which is those studies that focus on revealing the messages and meanings encoded in images through the methods of textual, semiotic and content analysis. Second, he identifies an ‘extrinsic direction’ that moves away from focusing only on the text itself to explore the relationship between representations and reality, and the discrepancies, contradictions and tensions that may arise from representations. Cohen argues for a combination of these directions so as to position tourism images within the context of their production and use with reference to socio-historical circumstances and socio-political relationships. Moreover, he recommends coupling tourism image research with a sociological study of the tourists who are the audience for the images and representations. A study of tourism imagery alone can be seen to create a ‘stereotype of a stereotype’; however, combining image research with a study incorporating the perspectives of the tourists themselves can eliminate the emergence of a ‘sole, ubiquitous image of native people’ (Cohen 1993: 42). The methodological approach adopted in this thesis is subsequently informed by Cohen’s (1993: 42) contention that:
[T]o bring the study of images into a closer relationship with prevalent theoretical approaches in the study of tourism, content analysis has to be coupled with or supplemented by interpretative methods. Indeed, one of the tasks of a research programme for the study of touristic images is to synchronize the study with the sociological study of the tourists themselves.

Despite Cohen’s suggestion for the need to couple the study of tourism imagery with a study of the tourists encountering the images, it is still rare for tourism researchers to combine studies of representation and interpretation. Certainly, representations in tourism should not be studied in isolation, as Dean MacCannell (2001: 31) asserts:

I could summarize the central finding of all the research I have done on tourists as follows: the act of sightseeing is itself organized around a kernel of resistance to the limitations of the tourist gaze. The strongest indication of this resistance is the desire to get beyond touristic representation. This is a desire which almost all tourists will express if given an opportunity.

A common criticism of ‘one-sided’ representation studies is summed up by Squire (1994: 8) who says that ‘the researcher retains the position of power, telling readers what tourism means and how such meanings are constructed, communicated and interpreted’. Moreover, there is a lack of nuanced understandings of the ways in which tourists experience and learn about indigenous cultures and peoples, including Aboriginal Australians. It has been argued that tourists themselves are infrequently the objects of consideration in tourism research (see, for example, Cohen 1979; Crick 1989; 1991; Morgan and Pritchard 1998; Pearce 1982; 1988; Ryan and Huyton 2002). Therefore, there is still a lack of research that adequately incorporates the voice of the tourist, or of studies that are ‘grounded in experience’ (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 12).

To this end, the empirical study undertaken for this thesis seeks to bridge this gap by incorporating a textual analysis of a selection of guidebooks with a study of a group of independent travellers who comprise one of the primary audiences for the guidebooks. The methodological approach adopted was qualitative and framed by an interpretative paradigm. Qualitative research is:

A qualitative approach thus aims to address questions of understanding and meaning through an investigation of social phenomena in contrast to positivist and quantitative paradigms that traditionally have dominated much tourism research (Riley and Love 2000). Qualitative research, generally, can be described with reference to the concept of bricolage which means that, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study, the choice of research practices and methods should be, to some extent, ‘pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive’ (Alasuutari 1995: 2; Nelson et al 1992: 2). Furthermore, John Fiske (2001: 247) recommends that when a cultural studies project seeks to explore issues of power and power relations, a combination of textual analysis and ethnography should be employed. These two methods are useful for the analysis of representation and interpretation in tourism and, in particular, for exploring the intersection between representation and interpretation as played out in cultural texts such as guidebooks.

According to Duncan and Duncan (1992: 27), Roland Barthes (1973) advocated a broad definition of cultural texts which he considers to be:

[Spaces] in which there is a weaving together of symbols to create an irreducible plurality of meaning. It is a signifying practice that abolishes the distinction between writing and reading, production and consumption. A text does not occupy space as does a work on the library shelf, but is a field within which there is an activity of production, or signification.

Indeed, Barthes (1973) states that any cultural artefact can be regarded as text and, therefore, can be subjected to textual analysis. The interpretative method of textual analysis is a methodological strategy derived from semiotics and structuralism that seeks to examine the social production of meanings within a sign system and to provide insights into the symbolic meanings embedded in texts and artefacts:
Textual analysis involves a close reading of the signifiers of the text – that is, its physical presence – but recognises that the signifieds exist not in the text itself, but extratextually, in the myths, countermyths, and ideology of their culture. It recognises that the distribution of power in society is paralleled by the distribution of meanings in texts, and that struggles for social power are paralleled by semiotic struggles for meanings. Every text and every reading has a social and therefore a political dimension, which is to be found partly in the structure of the text itself and partly in the social relations of the reader and the way they are brought to bear upon the text. (Fiske 2001: 247-248)

As stated above, however, studies of representation have often presented a unilateral view giving only the researcher the power to define meanings; therefore, the use of textual analysis as a sole method can be viewed as a relatively narrow ‘top-down’ approach (Tudor 1999). Where textual analysis and semiotic analysis are concerned with studying texts and their meanings, audience studies research is concerned with engagement between the reader and the text (Fuery and Mansfield 2000). Textual analysis coupled with audience research has come to comprise an important approach in cultural studies research (Radway 1984: 236). Several shortcomings in textual analysis have contributed to audience studies research, primarily the claim that semiotic practices, social forms and ideological frames operate within broader and specific cultural contexts and can configure human subjectivity. This conceptualisation has led to analyses of the ‘way the media have constructed the subjectivities of readers, viewers and listeners’ (Machor and Goldstein 2001: 203). Certainly, the ways by which guidebooks construct particular traveller subjects is a fundamental question that guided my study. As a form of cultural analysis, audience studies is one of the major interpretative and theoretical perspectives structuring contemporary qualitative cultural studies research (Denzin and Lincoln 1998), and can be broadly defined as the study of the way in which audiences behave when they engage with media texts. Traditionally, audience research has focused on mass media texts and, in particular, television and television audiences (for example Ang 1985; Fiske 1987; 1989; 1998; Morley 1986; 1989; 1992), although audience research has also been conducted with readers of other popular media forms, for example, romance novels (Radway 1984) and *National Geographic* magazines (Lutz and Collins 1993).

The empirical study undertaken for this thesis employs textual, content and audience research analyses specifically to examine the relationships between texts (guidebooks), travellers (backpackers) and travelled culture (Aboriginal Australia). Central to this study is an examination of the role that the text plays as a mediator between the traveller and the travelled culture, and of the tensions, contradictions and negotiations that emerge between text and lived experience. The empirical study which examined the relationships between travellers, traveller texts and Aboriginal Australia comprised two interrelated foci. The first of these was an examination of representations of the traveller and the travelled in selected guidebooks. The second was an exploration of the relationship between these texts and their audience through a study of backpackers in Australia. This combination of methods was chosen to gain a theoretically and methodologically informed understanding of the relationship between the text and the traveller, and the ways by which traveller experiences of Aboriginal Australia are mediated and constructed.

Specifically, I analysed three guidebooks to Australia aimed at independent travellers that were being used by the backpackers I interviewed. These were *Australia: Up Front, Outback, Down Under* (O’Byrne et al 2000), *Let’s Go: Australia 2000* (Sheppard et al 2000), and *Australia: The Rough Guide* (Daly et al 1999). A textual analysis of the guidebooks was conducted in order to gain insights into the meanings embedded in these texts. Specific sections of the guidebooks were selected for analysis through a process of theoretical sampling. These sections of the guidebook texts were the preliminary pages, the brief introduction chapter, and the Northern Territory chapter. The preliminary pages included aims and mission statements and author biographies and were studied in order to ascertain the guidebook messages and target audiences. A thematic analysis of the words in the introduction and Northern Territory sections was undertaken to establish the dominant images, meanings and representations that comprise the construction of Australia generally, and Aboriginal Australia specifically. In addition, a content analysis of all the guidebook photographs was undertaken.

The guidebook analysis was coupled with a period of fieldwork in the Northern Territory and Northern Queensland from August to December 2000 during which time I engaged in participant observation and conducted interviews with 28 international
backpackers. The backpackers were interviewed whilst they were travelling in selected destinations in the Northern Territory and Northern Queensland. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used in order to provide an opportunity for the backpackers to impart detailed views and perceptions about their travel experiences including their use, and reading, of guidebooks. This method provided me with a traveller perspective on Aboriginal culture which, rather surprisingly, remains a key omission in academic analyses of the topic of Aboriginal tourism in Australia (Ryan and Huyton 2002: 635). Although there is an increasing body of literature exploring the experiences of tourists with Aboriginal Australia, these studies have involved quantitative surveys (for example, Moscardo and Pearce 1999; Ryan and Huyton 2000a; 2000b; 2002) rather than qualitative research that allows the tourist voice to be heard:

Despite the quantity of writing on tourism, tourists themselves remain ‘shadowy’ figures in the existing literature and their voices are rarely heard. Tourists are typically treated as objects to be analysed rather than subjects with feelings, experiences of a host community, memories and stories to tell. (Wickens 2000: 455)

In-depth interviews offered interviewees ‘the opportunity for story telling in a relatively informal and unstructured way’ (Desforges 2000: 933) whereby the traveller is considered ‘as a narrator, and the journey as a narrative’ (Elsrud 2001: 598). I also undertook ethnographic fieldwork that, in addition to the interviews, included observations, informal discussions, participation on some tours, visits to cultural centres and key cultural sites, such as Uluru. By immersing myself in the backpacker culture, this ethnography enabled me to ‘engage’ with the extra-discursive elements of travel and also a ‘shared knowledge’ of the travel experience in Northern Australia in general (Desforges 2000: 933). Due to the qualitative nature of the research and my concern with understanding experiences from the point of view of a relatively small sample of backpackers, I do not make claims to generality and my findings are not based on statistical representativeness. The research is positioned in the time and space within which the study was conducted and represents the responses of the backpackers at one point during their travels. Nevertheless, the findings of the study are instructive, providing insights into the negotiation of text and experience, and making an original
contribution to understandings of long-term independent travel experiences, in particular the intersection between backpackers and Aboriginal Australia.

**Overview and Structure of the Thesis**

Some of the issues outlined in this introductory chapter concern the culture of the traveller (the touring subject) as they are positioned within the established theoretical understandings of travel and tourism and an interest in an ‘authentic’ other (the toured object). These overarching axes of the research are further explored and analysed in the following chapters. In Chapter 2, the theoretical approaches that have shaped contemporary understandings of travel and tourism within the social sciences are explored more deeply. In particular, I discuss developments of critical tourism theory, and identify the emerging theoretical perspectives of ‘tourism as conflict’ and ‘tourism as interaction’ as the conceptual framework for the critical analysis of relationships between travelling and travelled cultures undertaken in this study. I further examine the theoretical approaches that have shaped contemporary understandings of a dualistic relationship between travel and tourism, as outlined in this introductory chapter. Thereafter, the chapter examines the chronological development of academic research regarding independent travel and other alternative forms of tourism that have emerged largely as a product of the dualistic conception. To this end, the chapter focuses on the social and cultural attributes of backpacking as independent travel, and explores the qualities and features that differentiate backpacking from other types of tourism. I argue that backpackers, as long-term independent travellers, seek authentic and alternative cultural experiences. I suggest that theorisations of alternative tourism, particularly indigenous cultural tourism, provide a framework within which to situate the study of backpackers in Australia and their experiences with Aboriginal people and cultures.

Due to the central role that indigenous cultural tourism plays in facilitating these desired authentic experiences, representations of indigenous people and cultures – focusing on the exotic, the unique, the primitive, the Other – are constructed to create tourist and traveller desire and interest in particular destinations. Chapter 3 focuses on the issues of representation and interpretation of cultures in the context of tourism. In this chapter, I
examine more comprehensively the perspectives of conflict and interaction as they relate to tourism discourse and power. I conceptualise tourism as a series of power relationships and acknowledge the role of tourism texts in shaping, framing and constructing travel experiences. I explore these processes in relation to the representation and interpretation of Aboriginal Australia, and I argue that the imposition and perpetuation of stereotypes so common in tourism imagery cannot be separated from relations of power and the appropriation, commodification and exploitation of culture. Significantly, this chapter outlines the role of travel guidebooks as powerful mediators between the independent traveller and the places and cultures they visit. Guidebooks are political texts that play an undeniably significant role in the experience of backpackers and other independent travellers.

In Chapter 4, I present the analysis of the three selected guidebooks – *Lonely Planet*, *Rough Guide* and *Let’s Go*. Specifically, I focus on the variety of ways in which these texts frame, shape and construct the traveller, the travel experience and the travelled culture. I examine the ways in which Aboriginal people and aspects of their cultures are represented and interpreted in textual narratives. An analysis of the Introductory and Northern Territory chapters of each guidebook illustrates a two-way process of construction involving the mobilisation of discourses of ‘authenticity’ that promote and construct both the ‘authentic traveller’ and the ‘authentic Other’. In relation to the ‘authentic traveller’, I examine how readers of the guidebooks are constructed as a certain type of gazing (and experiencing) subject through representations of the travelling and travelled cultures. The analysis focuses on the discursive and narrative techniques through which the guidebooks structure the field of possible experiences, and prioritise and emphasise specific locations and activities over others. I explore how the subject is constructed as someone who not only pursues certain cultural and educational experiences, but has learnt to define and understand them in a particular (authentic) way. In relation to the ‘authentic Other’, I investigate how representations of Aboriginal Australia in guidebooks are often in opposition to the dominant popular tourism stereotypes reproduced in mainstream tourism media. At the same time, however, the stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ is perpetuated as ‘authentic’. I explore the resultant contradictions that emerge from the reliance of these texts on the popular
stereotypes of tourism concurrently with the construction and deployment of counter narratives and images.

Chapter 5 moves beyond the analysis of guidebooks to examine the tensions that exist in backpacker negotiations of text and experience. The objective of the chapter is to explore the influence of texts on experiences with, and interpretations of, Aboriginal Australia. This relationship is investigated in the lived experiences of backpackers, and the ways by which discourses are reproduced and challenged through cultural interactions. I suggest that traveller discourse and traveller texts exert influence upon the ways in which backpackers define themselves as authentic travellers and, in so doing, actively mobilise certain components of the discourse – seeking ‘authentic’ experiences through the quest for educational and cultural interaction. In this sense, the chapter demonstrates how the backpackers reproduce and enact certain behaviours presented in the guidebooks as characterising the ‘appropriate’ activities and sensibilities of an educated, culturally sensitive and responsible traveller subject. I examine backpacker expectations of authenticity in relation to themselves and their desired interactions with Aboriginal people and cultures, and I explore how traveller discourse provides a diverse array of self-narratives and subject positions. These various backpacker positions can be situated on a spectrum from the institutionalised backpacker to the anti-backpacker. I demonstrate that there is a range of possible negotiations of guidebook texts, and I explore the ways through which backpackers use these texts to position themselves as travellers and validate their experiences of Aboriginal Australia as ‘authentic’.

Central to construction of the ‘authentic’ Aboriginal cultural experience in traveller texts and in the travel narratives of the backpackers themselves (and, indeed, in tourism discourses more generally) is the notion that the Australian Outback is the destination that will provide profound and meaningful opportunities for an engagement with Aboriginal culture – the Outback is coded as simultaneously authentic and indigenous. Chapter 6 presents a site-specific case study of the contestations that exist between traveller and tourist discourses embodied in conflictual representations and interpretations at Uluru (formerly Ayers Rock) in Central Australia. Uluru is a symbolic tourist and traveller site and the quintessential icon of Outback Australia, as well as
being an area of cultural and spiritual significance to Anangu, the local Aboriginal people. Key arguments and themes raised in Chapters 4 and 5 pertaining to the negotiation of text and experience coalesce in Chapter 6, and a critique of the representation and interpretation of cultural experiences at Uluru through traveller texts and traveller experiences and expectations is presented. Central to the discussion is an examination of backpacker views on whether or not to participate in the popular tourist activity of climbing Uluru, an activity that, as explained above, goes against the wishes of Anangu, the Aboriginal owners of the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park. This singular choice-action scenario reveals much about the competing discourses of travel and tourism that this thesis explores.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I pull together the themes and arguments of the thesis, discuss its findings, and reflect upon its research question and aims. I argue that modern independent travel, in the form of backpacking, is a constructed and commodified experience that is underpinned by complex relationships between text, audience and culture. I also argue that guidebooks are powerful mediators playing an essential role in constructing and affirming backpacker traveller identity, and their travel experiences with, and of, Aboriginal Australia. I consider how the thesis contributes to broader debates in the social and cultural study of tourism and, specifically, to understandings of backpacker travel. In particular, I contend that the study raises important questions about the role that the text plays as mediator between the traveller and the travelled culture, and the tensions, contradictions and negotiations that exist between text and lived experience.
Chapter 2

Travelling Cultures: 
Tourism, Travel and the Backpacker Phenomenon

They’re not scrounges, penniless layabouts, permanently high or rip-off merchants. If I had to define my belief in travel it’s that if you’ve been some place and stayed in the local Hilton you’ve not been there … Tourists stay in Hiltons, travellers don’t. The traveller wants to see the country at ground level, to breathe it, experience it – live it. (Tony Wheeler, founder of Lonely Planet Publications, 1982: 22)

So the traveller has generally been presented as a very different animal to the tourist. (Butcher 2003: 41)

Introduction

This chapter examines the backpacker phenomenon in the context of broader theoretical debates about travel and tourism. Although there has been a significant increase in the number of studies regarding this particular popular type of independent traveller, Cohen (2004b: 59) has recently noted that comprehensive social and cultural research into backpacking is still in the early stages of development. To this end, the chapter focuses on the social and cultural attributes of backpackers, and explores the qualities and features that differentiate backpacking from other types of travel and tourism. I commence the chapter with an exploration of the ways in which travel and tourism have been theorised within the social sciences. In so doing, I outline various theoretical approaches that have shaped contemporary understandings towards a dualistic relationship between travel and tourism. This apparent dichotomy, evident in the quotes presented at the commencement of this chapter (and outlined in Chapter 1), is prevalent in popular conceptions of tourism and also in some branches of social science research. I argue, however, that the dichotomy can be viewed as problematic in the context of modern experiences of travel and tourism and, in particular, of backpacking.

In order to develop an understanding of the origins of this dualistic conception of independent travel and mass tourism, I explore macro-conceptualisations of tourism and trace the historical development of tourism theory to establish the contemporary research agenda. In particular, the theoretical perspectives of tourism as conflict and as interaction are considered to provide a conceptual framework for the critical analysis of relationships between travelling and travelled cultures. Thereafter, the chapter examines the chronological development of academic research regarding independent travel and other alternative forms of tourism that have emerged largely as a product of the dualistic conception. I then relate these perspectives to understandings of contemporary backpacker travel. I suggest that theorisations of alternative tourism, particularly indigenous cultural tourism, provide a framework within which to situate the study of backpackers in Australia and their mediated experiences with Aboriginal people and cultures.

Development of a Critical Perspective on Tourism

Economically speaking, tourism has, over the past 50 years, become one of the largest industries in the world. In many developed and developing countries, tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy and a major source of employment and investment (Buhalis 2001; Butcher 2003; Johnson and Thomas 1992). Corresponding with the growth of mass tourism and the tourism industry there has been an increase in the study of tourism, and this topic has become an important and growing area of academic enquiry. Within this research, the possible positive and negative impacts of tourism have been explored, particularly in relation to economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. According to Johnson and Thomas (1992: 14) ‘tourism is regarded as a subject of study concerned with the motives, expectations and experiences of the tourist and with the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in host countries’. In response to this burgeoning academic interest in tourism, Franklin and Crang (2001: 5) recently asked what has grown more rapidly: the tourism industry or research regarding the tourism phenomenon.
As suggested in Chapter 1, however, research regarding tourism within the social sciences is relatively recent, and long overdue, especially considering its social and cultural – as opposed to economic – significances (see, for example, Cohen 2004a; Dann 2000; Wang 2000). As Wang (2000: 1) states:

[F]or a long period of intellectual history, travel and movement have not been seen as an essential feature of the human condition … in the Western sociological tradition, travel, tourism and mobility have long been treated only as derisive characteristics of human beings and society, and usually as economic indicators … Even today the sociology of tourism is a marginal branch of sociology, and its relevance is doubted by quite a number of mainstream sociologists.

Cohen (2004a: 1) notes that the critical and systematic study of tourism within the social sciences (particularly sociology and anthropology) did not really commence until the 1970s and, further, did not begin to receive substantial recognition until the 1980s. Dann (2000: 367-368) suggests a number of reasons for the slow initial development of the sociology of tourism including some uncertainty as to what realm of mainstream sociology the study of tourism belonged. He also acknowledges the multifaceted nature of tourism and the resulting multidisciplinary perspectives, as well as the failure of many sociologists to adopt an eclectic stance and, finally, the tendency for ‘ideological posturing’ rather than theoretical advancement (Dann 2000: 368).

The academic study of tourism has drawn from a number of traditional disciplines with two broad disciplinary categories being identified. First, there is research regarding the business of tourism as well as the development of tourism management, marketing and policy. These perspectives generally acknowledge and promote the economic importance of tourism. According to Mowforth and Munt (1998: 3), a key focus of research concerned with the business of tourism includes ‘auditing, categorising, listing and grouping the outputs or consequences of tourism’ and, in this sense, tourism is viewed as an industry: as a business or enterprise that is of positive economic importance and has positive outcomes.
Second, there is research within the social sciences which emanates from disciplines including sociology, anthropology, geography, cultural studies, psychology and history. These perspectives seek to overcome the limitations of analyses of tourism as business underpinned by an emphasis on economic implications and statistical measurement. Rojek and Urry (1997) point out that an approach that considers tourism only as a set of economic activities fails to recognise that tourism is a significant social and cultural practice. Whilst economic analyses provide ‘crucial information for understanding the phenomenon’, this knowledge is somewhat limited in that it ‘tells us very little about the diverse qualities of tourist experience’ (Rojek and Urry 1997: 2). Thus, a social science approach to studying tourism is concerned with providing a broader and more critical understanding. In so doing, a social approach to research is more concerned with ‘conceptualising the forces which impact on tourism and, through an analysis of these forces, providing a broader context for understanding tourism’ (Mowforth and Munt 1998: 3).

Due to the varying perspectives that have shaped the study of tourism, there are many definitions of the phenomenon and there is still some contention and debate over the meaning of the term tourism itself. Indeed, that there is no single definition of tourism indicates that tourism, as a field of study, is constantly developing and undergoing change. Rojek and Urry (1997) note that definitions of tourism range from the operational to the social. An operational definition of tourism tends to be pragmatic and is most often employed by the tourism industry to provide statistical data. Therefore, definitions are developed that allow tourism to be measured and quantified. A widely used operational definition of tourism is that of the World Tourism Organisation that defines tourism as including all travel away from home for a stay of at least one night but less than one year. Conversely, a social definition of tourism takes into account its complexity as a practice, whereby ‘tourism as a cultural practice and set of objects is highly significant or emblematic within contemporary ‘Western’ societies organised around mass mobility’ (Rojek and Urry 1997: 5). Mowforth and Munt (1998: 3) note that one of the most significant differences in the latter approach to understanding tourism is that:
Tourism is seen as a focal lens through which broader considerations can be taken into account, and it confirms the multidisciplinary foundation upon which tourism research is built as the only way in which tourism can be comprehended.

The evolution of tourism studies from diverse disciplines has resulted in complex theoretical and methodological issues and, consequently, what has been referred to as the ‘disciplinary dilemma of tourism studies’ (Echtner and Jamal 1997: 868-881). The theorisation of tourism from two dominant, yet disparate, perspectives – each with a different focus and projecting into tourism research a different emphasis – has led to the central concepts of tourism being somewhat amorphous with shifting boundaries and considerable slippage between conceptual categories. The range of often contradictory definitions can be recognised as an outcome of this dilemma and, as I argue below, so can the somewhat reductionist establishment of differential practices coalesced under the positioning of tourism and travel as oppositional. Thus, there is considerable need for a more critical engagement with the central concepts and relationships of tourism research:

Tourism is a term waiting to be deconstructed … it is a chaotic conception, including within it too wide a range of disparate phenomena ... It embraces so many different notions that it is hardly useful as a term of social science, although this is paradoxical since tourism studies is currently being rapidly institutionalised within much of the academy. (Rojek and Urry 1997: 1)

The recognition of the need for increasingly sophisticated tools of analysis has seen significant advancement in the conceptual apparatus of tourism research. According to Jafar Jafari (1989), four ‘tourism platforms’ dominated the study of tourism in the early stages of its development. He argued that a concern with each platform – labelled ‘advocacy’, ‘cautionary’, ‘adaptancy’ and ‘knowledge-based’ – has exerted considerable influence over the contemporary tourism research agenda in various conflicting and intersecting ways. The first stage of tourism research (the ‘advocacy platform’) was evident in earlier studies that viewed tourism as an inherently and, overwhelmingly, positive phenomenon. This positive outlook was adopted and promoted by economists and national governments, in particular. However, researchers
increasingly, and perhaps inevitably (Dann 2000), gradually began to acknowledge and stress the various negative environmental impacts and sociocultural consequences of tourism (the ‘cautionary platform’). Subsequently, there was the development of more critical tourism studies that explored the negative impacts associated with mass tourism, resulting in the promotion of alternative forms of tourism (‘adaptancy platform’). Critical debates within these three stages of tourism research resulted in the ‘knowledge-based platform’ which emerged ‘to fill the intellectual void left by the previous three platforms’ (Dann 2000: 368). This platform is generally considered essential for coherent and sophisticated theoretical and critical debate.

Various theoretical advances on the study of tourism have emerged from ‘knowledge-based’ analyses (Dann 2000). Graham Dann (1996a: 6-29) identifies these (not necessarily mutually exclusive) theoretical perspectives as ‘authenticity’, ‘strangerhood’, ‘play’ and ‘conflict’. He noted that whilst the first three perspectives are relatively well-established and accepted frameworks within the field of tourism research, the notion of ‘tourism as conflict’ has been a more recent theoretical development. Despite the significance of the conflict perspective to understandings of power as central to the analysis of tourism, Dann notes that it has often lacked strong critical or empirical grounding. The ‘cultural turn’ that has swept social science research generally (as discussed in Chapter 1) is certainly reflected in more recent analyses of tourism, as evident in discussions of text and discourse. Such analyses are situated in the conflict perspective, therefore, this particular perspective frames the discussion of tourism texts and discourses in Chapter 3.

In addition to the four perspectives discussed by Dann (1996a), Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard (1998: 12) recognise another theoretical perspective that they term ‘tourism as interaction’. Like Dann (1996a), Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 12) identify the first three perspectives as part of a well-established body of knowledge within tourism research, yet they criticise these theoretical frames for not being ‘grounded in experience’. Drawing on the work of Wearing and Wearing (1996) they argue for the study of ‘tourism as interaction’ to take into account the actual experiences of tourists in order to gain a deeper understanding of the tourism phenomenon. They suggest that the more established theoretical perspectives of tourism fail to examine the actual
experience of the tourist and, thus, do not ‘explain the tourist’s reality … [undervaluing] the actual experience of the tourist’ (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 12). In other words, much tourism research has been conducted without developing an understanding of the perspectives and lived experiences of the tourists. Viewing tourism as interaction is an emerging area of sociological thought that:

[T]ries to move away from the dominant characteristics of tourism, arguing that we need to look anew at the subject and at the relationships between those who visit and those who are visited. (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 12)

In this context, tourism is viewed as an ‘arena of interaction’ which impacts upon the tourist as well as impacting upon the host community. As Stephen Wearing and Betsy Wearing (2001: 151) state:

The theorization of tourism, like that of leisure, needs not only to recognise the interrelation of the site and the activities provided at the tourist destination, but requires a fundamental focus on the subjective experience itself. While not being divorced from its sociological contextualisation, the involving experience allows for the elaboration upon the role of individual tourists themselves in the active construction of the tourist experience.

Acknowledging the centrality of interaction to understanding tourism invites parallels to be with the ‘tourism as conflict’ perspective – much interaction can be usefully theorised as relations of power and, therefore, there is considerable overlap between these two points of view. Thus, a combined perspective that views tourism as conflict and interaction is a central dimension of the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis and my examination of the construction of both the traveller and the travelled – the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ – through the lived interactions and textual negotiations that comprise traveller experiences. Significantly, authenticity permeates both these perspectives and is a useful linking concept for understanding and unravelling the complex experiences and relationships between those who visit and those who are visited.
The development towards a critical perspective on tourism has promoted increasing recognition of the individualisation and subjective nature of the tourist experience. In Chapter 1, I outlined how the concept of authenticity is often used to distinguish between different traveller and tourist types. Over the last few decades, a ‘profusion of tourist experiences’ have been identified for the purposes of theorising, analysing and marketing tourism (Wearing and Wearing 1996: 143). Many authors have proposed different tourist typologies based on their characteristics, motivations and travel behaviour (see, for example, Cohen 1972; 1973; 1979; Crompton 1979; Dann 1977; Hamilton-Smith 1987; Krippendorf 1987; Pearce 1982; Plog 1987; Sharpley 1994; Smith 1977; 1989). Therefore, a concern with theorising tourists and the essence of the travel experience, particularly with respect to independent travel, warrants further consideration as it provides a framework for the contextualisation of backpacking as independent travel within broader debates on tourism and tourist experiences.

Theorising the Traveller: From Drifter to Backpacker

Independent travel has been the focus of a growing corpus of academic literature, with the conceptual origins of the study of backpacking commencing with Cohen’s (1972; 1973; 1974) ideas about tourist typologies which he based on distinctions between institutionalised and non-institutionalised travellers (Ateljevic and Doorne 2004; Uriely, Yonay and Simchai 2002). Long-term travellers have been defined in a number of different ways, and labelled a variety of terms, including drifters (Cohen 1972; 1973), nomads (Cohen 1973), youthful travellers (Teas 1976), wanderers (Vogt 1976), tramping youth (Adler 1985), long-term budget travellers (Riley 1988), independent travellers (Desforges 1998), and non-package Western tourists (Edensor 1998). Over the past decade, however, academic studies increasingly have discussed long-term independent travellers under the one label – ‘backpackers’. The term backpacker was coined to describe people who travel with their material resources in a backpack, for an extended, budget-oriented and, often working, holiday. The term is explicitly employed

4 For example, Allon (2004); Elsrud (1998; 2001); Hampton (1998); Jenkins (2003); Loker (1993); Loker-Murphy (1996); Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995); Murphy (1998; 1999; 2001; 2005); Noy (2004); Pearce (1990); Richards and Wilson (2004a); Ross (1993); Scheyvens (2002); Sørenson (2003); Spreitzhofer (1998); Uriely et al (2002); Wearing et al (2002); West (2005b); Westerhausen (2002); Young (2005).

by the Australian tourism industry, as well as being a common description of these travellers in Asia and New Zealand (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995) and, increasingly, by the travelling community themselves (Murphy 2001). In the following discussion, I explore some significant developments in the theorisation of independent travel, chronologically, in order to establish the influences (albeit historically contingent) on contemporary academic discourses of independent travel. Through this discussion the backpacker as the contemporary exemplar of the long-term independent traveller is contextualised.

Historically, long-term travellers ‘have sojourned into unknown lands seeking ‘undiscovered’ people and sights, travelling for the sake of travel’ (Riley 1988: 314). Certainly, long-term travel has a notable and influential history. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, long-term travel predominantly took the form of pilgrimages that were, at the time, a widespread phenomenon (Urry 1990a). According to Urry (1990a: 4) early pilgrims visited holy places and the purpose of their travel was based on a fusion of ‘religious devotion and culture and pleasure’. In addition to the influence of pilgrimages on the history of modern long-term travel, contemporary independent travel can also be viewed as sharing certain similarities to the Grand Tour, which was well established by the end of the seventeenth century (Adler 1985; Cohen 1972; Urry 1990a). The Grand Tour was popular amongst young, well-educated European men from the aristocratic classes. These young travellers embarked on extended trips of continental Europe primarily for the purpose of cultural education, with the travel experience offering sightseeing, education and adventure (Adler 1985; Towner 1985; 1996). Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995: 820) note that involvement in the Grand Tour was viewed as an educational ‘finishing school’ that was designed to contribute to one’s ‘sophistication, worldliness and social awareness’. Interestingly, the travel routes pursued and the destinations visited in the days of the Grand Tour became the focus of youth counter-cultural travel in the 1960s – a parallel described by Alderson (1971) as the ‘New’ Grand Tour. Indeed, the origins and practices of backpacking can, to some extent, be traced back to the Grand Tour (Loker-Murphy and Peace 1995). A significant difference, of course, is that recreational travel is now a possibility for large numbers of people rather than a wealthy elite.
As mentioned above, Cohen’s (1972; 1973; 1979) seminal works on developing a social theory of tourists have played an important role in contemporary understandings of independent travellers and, correspondingly, of backpackers. In his early writings on the topic, Cohen (1972) differentiated the experiences of travellers and tourists primarily by the extent of their containment within the ‘tourist bubble’. The primary distinction he made was that mass tourists are content to enjoy the comforts of ‘environmental bubbles’ while travellers wished to immerse themselves in host cultures. Cohen (1972) argued that tourism is a manifestation of people’s desire to visit other places in order to experience the cultural, social and environmental differences that exist in the world. Where some tourists desire the experience of difference or strangeness this desire is not consistent for all types of tourists, with some desiring and seeking the familiar. Cohen, therefore, suggested four tourist types – the organised mass tourist, the individualised mass tourist, the explorer and the drifter – the main differentiation between them being between institutionalised and non-institutionalised tourists. Institutionalised tourism is associated with conventional mass tourism as being for those people for whom ‘familiarity is at a maximum and novelty at a minimum’, with the individual mass tourist being someone for whom ‘familiarity is still dominant … [but] the experience of novelty is somewhat greater’ (Cohen 1972: 167). These tourists were said to desire (to varying extents) fixed itineraries and homely comforts achieved through taking package tours conducted in the comfort of an air-conditioned bus (Cohen 1972: 167).

In contrast, Cohen wrote that non-institutionalised forms of tourism were ‘at best only very loosely attached to the tourist establishment’ (Cohen 1972: 169), and represented by the less institutionalised tourists that he defined as the ‘explorer’ and the ‘drifter’. He viewed both these tourist types as having a desire to avoid the ‘environmental bubble’ and get ‘off the beaten track’, evoking a phrase that has since been entrenched in the travel literature as a central value and desire. The key difference between these latter two tourist types, according to Cohen, was that drifters would fully immerse themselves in unfamiliar host cultures shunning any association with the tourist establishment, whereas explorers still sought some comforts in the form of accommodation and transport. In contrast to institutionalised tourists, explorers and drifters were not viewed as being linked to the mass industry of tourism (Cohen 1972: 169). These early theorisations of independent travel can be seen as examples of a general trend towards
defining travellers and tourists as oppositional on the basis of apparently different qualities in relation to their motivations and expectations. The significant impact of Cohen’s work upon subsequent tourism research may be an influencing factor in the traveller/tourist dichotomy that pervades much academic literature.

Recognising the theoretical limitations inherent in an overly simplified typology of travellers, Cohen sought to further refine his categorical definitions. In a 1973 paper, Cohen developed his definition of the drifter to distinguish between ‘outward-oriented’ and ‘inward-oriented’ drifters and these distinctions are also integral to understanding and conceptualising the contemporary backpacker traveller. According to Cohen (1973), drifters were predominantly young middle-to-upper class travellers of the ‘counter culture’ who travelled cheaply for long periods of time, ostensibly drifting from place to place with no set itinerary. Essentially, Cohen explored how the individualistic phenomenon of drifting became increasingly institutionalised and, in this respect, he suggested a typology of drifters. The primary distinction between drifter types was based on those who seek faraway and unfamiliar destinations to live with the locals, and those who seek the enclaves of other drifters. The latter was labelled the ‘new mass drifter’ and identified as having certain correlations to the institutionalised mass tourist, particularly evident through the ‘specialisation of drifter-oriented facilities, meeting and lodging places, as well as the emergence of whole drifter communities’ (Cohen 1973: 97).

Cohen argued that non-institutionalised forms of travel were becoming increasingly less distinct from mass tourism. This significant insight – that tourist ‘types’ do not simply fall into one of several clearly defined and conceptually discrete categories but, rather, take up a position along a continuum dependent on their actual lived experiences which are themselves a product of the interaction of their desires with the possibilities of the destination – is a precursor to later theorisation of the relationships between tourism and travel. Thus, a more sophisticated utilisation of Cohen’s tourist ‘types’ identifies characteristics of practices and experiences, rather than qualities attributed to individuals. Furthermore, this perspective on tourist types acknowledges that individuals are capable of shifting position along this continuum, and also shifting are
the points of recognisable differentiation – under continual pressure from capitalist commodification – that mark various ‘types’ of tourist experiences.

In addition to theorisations of independent travel, the exploration of youth travel offers insights into contemporary backpacking practices and experiences. For instance, Vogt’s (1976) exploration of youth travel (which he called ‘wandering’ in preference to drifter) places youth travellers in a similar position to drifters particularly in relation to their motivations for travel and their class composition. Vogt viewed complexity, novelty and diversity as the key motivating factors for travel, yet, like Cohen, he argued that many such experiences have become standardised and normalised by the tourism establishment.

Adler (1985) explores more historical forms of travel to conceptualise contemporary tourism including youth travel. She points out that whilst contemporary tourism is often conventionally linked to the Grand Tour, modern low-budget long-term travel can also be associated with ‘tramping’, a form of travel that actually ‘originated as a well-institutionalized travel pattern of working class youth’ (Adler 1985: 335). Thus, where travel is often viewed as being associated with the middle and upper classes (or the aristocracy of the Grand Tour), tramping recognises the long-term religious and labour-related travel of the lower classes in Europe that served as the ‘working man’s Grand Tour’ (Adler 1985: 335). In addition to travelling from village to village to find employment in trades or crafts, tramping provided opportunities for sightseeing, adventure and education. So, although this travel practice was generally associated with work, it also offered opportunities for personal development. In comparing tramping to modern youth travel, Adler concludes that ‘the major historical change has been the transformation of a labour-related youth practice into a leisure pursuit’ (Adler 1985: 352). The various themes of recreation, adventure, personal development and exposure to new places, peoples and cultures (that at various times have provided the motivation for travel) certainly remain integral to the travel experience today (Pearce 1988).

Riley (1988) draws on empirical research to explore the ‘road culture’ of what, she terms, ‘long-term budget travellers’. Like Vogt (1976), Riley rejects the term drifter, arguing that it has negative connotations associated with deviant behaviour. In so doing,
she explains that ‘today’s typical youth traveller is not accurately described as a ‘hippie’, a ‘bum’, or an adherent to the ‘counter culture’. Western society has undergone some major changes and the contemporary long-term traveller reflects them’ (Riley 1988: 326). She points out that the labelling of these travellers as ‘budget’ does not suggest that they are from a particular socio-economic background or that they have limited financial resources. Rather, budget travel refers to a choice of travel mode necessary for an extended travel experience. Accordingly, Riley (1988: 313) defines the ‘average’ long-term budget traveller as someone who:

[P]refers to travel alone, is educated, European, middle class, single, obsessively concerned with budgeting his/her money, and at a juncture in life. Many are recent college graduates, delaying the transition into the responsibilities associated with adulthood in western society, or taking a leave between jobs. Their status is achieved on the road by experiencing hardship and nontouristic experiences, and by ‘getting the best value’.

The above conceptualisation of long-term youth travel provides some vital insights into the motivations of young travellers. Long-term travel is seen as being a transitional period – as an interval from everyday routine and from decisions regarding new or different roles and responsibilities (such as careers and marriage). These travellers are understood as being predominantly middle class and well educated, and have been described by Munt (1994) and Mowforth and Munt (1998) as the ‘new middle classes’. A commonly held view is that youth travellers are at a life juncture when they embark on their journeys (Cohen 1973; Graburn 1983; Riley 1988; Vogt 1976) and, in this sense, travel could be said to function as a rite of passage (Turner 1973; Turner and Turner 1978). Travel presents young people with opportunities for personal growth and development, ways of demonstrating independence, and helps to construct them as more knowledgeable and ‘worldly’. Significantly, the status of the long-term youth traveller is heightened by the rejection of mass tourism – of the tourism industry – and of the commodified experiences associated with short-term tourists. A traveller-self can, therefore, be viewed as oppositional to a tourist-self. Indeed, these themes are summarised by Stephen Wearing (2002: 244) in his statement that:

Sociologies of tourism have developed two major themes concerning the self of the traveller. First, there has been an emphasis on tourism as a means of escape from everyday life, even if such escape is temporary. Secondly, travel has been constructed as a means of self-development, a way to broaden the mind, experience the new and different and return in some way enriched.

In a significant contribution to the theorising of young independent travellers, Philip Pearce introduced the term backpacker to the academic literature in his 1990 book *The Backpacker Phenomenon*. Pearce, a social psychologist, was concerned with the motivational aspects of long-term travellers, particularly in relation to extending one’s education through travel. One of Pearce’s central arguments was that backpacking should be viewed as an approach to travelling, rather than as a categorisation based on age or expenditure. In order to provide a social definition of the backpacker, Pearce determined five fundamental criteria for distinguishing backpackers from other traveller types. These criteria were: a preference for budget accommodation; an emphasis on meeting other travellers; an independently organised and flexible travel schedule; longer rather than very brief holidays; and an emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities (Pearce 1990).

Loker (1993) and Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) further explored the motivations and behaviour of backpackers, characterising them as predominantly young, budget-conscious travellers whose holidays are considerably lengthy and often involve (or, indeed necessitate) working at the destination. Backpackers tend to travel alone or in small groups, essentially with independently organised and flexible itineraries. An emphasis is placed on meeting people (including locals and other travellers) and the pursuit of informal and participatory activities. Although backpackers prefer to spend less money on accommodation than other travellers and tourists they tend to spend more on experiences combining a variety of destinations and activities within their travels (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995).

The ‘backpacker phenomenon’ (Loker 1993; Pearce 1990) in Australia certainly gained considerable academic attention throughout the 1990s (for example, Jenkins et al 1998; Loker-Murphy 1996; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Murphy 1998; 1999; Ross 1993).
It is worth noting here that the conceptualisations of backpackers within the academic literature were also, at this time, adopted by industry-related literature and backpacking was appropriated as a distinct market segment viewed as playing a significant role in Australian tourism, particularly economically. As a result, there have been various federal and state government initiatives to promote and attract this lucrative market.

Hampton (1998: 641) notes that whilst ‘government development planners and international agencies’ had largely ignored the importance of the backpacker market, the Australian government recognised the importance of this segment of inbound tourists and subsequently implemented various initiatives to foster it. Hence, from the mid-1990s, a number of government reports have focused on backpackers in Australia, with the Australian Tourist Commission (1995) identifying the importance of the independent travel market in their report *Backpacking it’s a State of Mind: Opportunities in the Australian Independent Travel Market*. In the same year, the Commonwealth Department of Tourism (1995) published the *National Backpacker Tourism Strategy*. Also, during the 1990s, the Australian Bureau of Tourism Research published a number of research reports and conference proceedings relating specifically to backpacking (see, for example, Buchanan 1998; Buchanan and Rossetto 1997; Haigh 1995), and individual state agencies, such as the Western Australian Tourism Commission (1993, 1999) published reports identifying the increasing importance of this market to state tourism. Richards and Wilson (2004b: 10) recently noted that ‘the backpacking phenomenon has developed considerably over the past 30 years, progressing from a marginal activity of a handful of drifters to a major global industry’.

The increased recognition of the significance of backpacker travellers, and the increase in the number of people backpacking, have resulted in an intensification of academic empirical research into this type of travel as a social practice. Indeed, from the mid-1990s to the present, there has been a proliferation in the academic literature evident in numerous journal articles (see Footnote 3, page 40) as well as several edited book collections (for example, Richards and Wilson 2004a; West 2005a). This academic literature focuses on diverse aspects of the backpacker phenomenon that reflect its economic, social and cultural significance and, furthermore, its status as evidence of extensive structural shifts supposedly characteristic of the transition to late (or post-) modernity. In this context, Ateljevic and Doorne (2004: 60) note that:

The backpacker phenomenon as a metaphor of mobility has in the contemporary context become representative of a travel lifestyle and an expression of identity, as well as a coherent industrial complex in its own right.

The relationship between backpacking as a travel lifestyle and as an expression of identity has been examined empirically by authors such as Desforges (1998; 2000), Elsrud (2001), Noy (2004) and Welk (2004). Central to such research is the view that backpackers often see their travels ‘as a form of self development, in which they learn about themselves, their own society and other cultures’ (Richards and Wilson 2004b: 6).

Desforges (1998) suggests that travel for ‘white middle-class youth’ is a means of constructing individual and collective identities. In particular, he emphasises travel as a means of developing experiential knowledge – the ‘opportunity of gaining knowledge which contrasts with the difficulties of formal education’ (Desforges 1998: 178). The educational experiences that comprise this form of knowledge are based around the seeking of difference, of situations and experiences that are of a substantially different quality to that which young people are used to. According to Desforges (1998), travel provides substantial opportunities for ‘collecting’ places and for accumulating these desired experiences of difference. Moreover, experiences of difference provide a greater range and diversity of ‘building blocks’ that can serve as component elements in processes of identity formation. Consequently, the authenticity of places and people is prominent and is understood by backpackers through recourse to familiar distinctions between commodified mass tourism and alternative modes of tourism. For young independent travellers, the quality of experiences with other cultures is deemed more ‘authentic’ if they are not (or perceived not to be) commodified (Desforges 1998). The ‘authentic’ encounter with the Other forms the basis for the development of experiential knowledge that has been described by Munt (1994), following Bourdieu (1984), as ‘cultural capital’ which is accumulated towards the articulation of self-identity.

In a further exploration of traveller identity, Desforges (2000) turns to a more individualised understanding of selfhood. In considering the increasingly subjective nature of formative experiences, attention is directed towards the ways in which travellers actually experience social reality where this experience actively is produced
rather than merely obtained. The role of long-term travel in providing ‘authentic’
experiences of the Other and of the Self consist of a series of opportunities for escaping
the restrictions of previous identities and providing experiential material for the
reconstruction of self-identity. Travel experiences are thus drawn upon to re-imagine
and re-define the self. The transitional nature of youth, from adolescence to adulthood,
is commonly associated with the redefinition of self-identity, which for young people is
often constituted by experiences of anxiety and possibility for change, or ‘fateful
moments’ (Giddens 1991). Desforges (2000: 936) argues that many young people
consider travel as a rite of passage that ‘provides answers to questions that are raised
about self-identity at fateful moments’. Therefore, backpacking is simultaneously
considered as educational and character building and ‘is imagined as providing for the
accumulation of experience, which is used to renarrate and represent self-identity’
(Desforges 2000: 942).

Similarly, Elsrud (2001: 598) describes the travel experience as a process of narrating
self-identity. Drawing on Giddens’ (1991) conceptualisation of identity as a ‘self-
reflexive project’ she regards ‘the traveller as narrator and the journey as narrative’.
Elsrud highlights the role of adventure in backpacker travel as constituting a challenging
and spontaneous experience of difference. She suggests, in a similar fashion to
Desforges (1998), that such experiences are primarily based on difference and
Otherness:

The more different a culture is experienced as being, the more is felt to be at stake
in each situation of interaction … novelty is not enough to turn a journey into an
adventure. It requires difference as well … a comparable ‘Other’, an ‘other’
quality, an ‘other’ being, an ‘other’ state of mind, upon which the adventure
narrative must build its foundation. (Elsrud 2001: 606)

Elsrud (2001: 597) states that independent travelling, such as long-term global
backpacking, is often presented as an adventurous lifestyle, and independent travellers
are accredited with increased knowledge, a stronger sense of identity and social status.
Furthermore, because experiences of otherness are defined through difference they are
most often located in the myths of the ‘primitive’ that provide the counterpoint to

Young, T. (2005) Going by the Book: Backpacker Travellers in Aboriginal Australia and the Negotiation of Text and Experience,
modern Western societies (Elsrud 2001: 613). Tales of adventure, narrated as components of self-identity, allow the narrator to position themselves within ‘a hierarchical value system’ which mobilises encounters with Otherness as markers of cultural capital (Desforges 1998; Munt 1994).

These recent investigations into backpacking as independent travel provide insights into the motivations of the young people who pursue such experiences. However, like earlier (mis)conceptions of a single tourist type discussed above, there has often been a tendency within the academic literature to discuss backpackers as a homogenous group. In focusing on the distinctions between non-institutionalised travellers as compared to institutionalised mass tourists the diversity and plurality of experiences and motivations within backpacking has somewhat been overlooked. In response to this trend, a recent study by Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002) examines the heterogenous nature of backpacking and, following Cohen (1979), these authors explore how individual backpackers embark on their journeys for a diverse range of reasons attaching various meanings to their experiences. Indeed, Cohen (1979) argued that tourist experiences range along a fluid continuum from a desire for mere pleasure at one end of the spectrum and a search for meaningful experiences at the other. He defined these tourist categories as recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential, and argued that each holds different worldviews predicated on their relationship towards the ‘centre’ of their own societies and the centre of ‘other’ societies (Cohen 1979).

Drawing on Cohen’s (1979) definitions, Uriely et al (2002: 521) distinguish between the ‘type-related’ and ‘form-related’ attributes of backpacking. They state that ‘form’ refers to the ‘visible institutional arrangements and practices by which tourists organize their journey’ (for instance, length of holiday, flexible itineraries, destination choices, transportation and accommodation types), and ‘type’ refers to ‘less tangible psychological attributes’ such as motivations for travel, attitudes towards society and the meanings assigned to experiences. Like Cohen, Uriely et al explain that backpackers can be positioned according to the different types of experiences that they are seeking, which can be placed along a continuum from recreational to existential. They found that backpackers seek out many different types of experiences during their travels and that their motivation for certain types of experiences can transform in a single trip (for

example, for part of the trip recreation may be at the forefront, whilst at other times a search for knowledge may be prominent). Uriely et al argue that backpacker self-identity is most commonly associated with form-related attributes. In other words, backpackers most often differentiate themselves from institutionalised tourists based on the practices they organise their travels around rather than their motivations for particular experiences.

Richards and Wilson (2004c) suggest that another important contributor to backpacker identity is the label they actually apply to themselves. They found that of the backpackers they surveyed, the majority identified themselves as ‘travellers’, followed by ‘backpackers’, with only a small percentage defining themselves as ‘tourists’. That backpacker experiences are deemed (by backpackers) to be more ‘authentic’ than those of conventional tourists is a common assumption highlighted in the literature (for example, Cohen 1989; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). Indeed, most backpackers would like to believe that their way of travelling is the antithesis of conventional tourism even though backpacking itself has become in recent years a more conventional, mainstream and institutionalised form of travel (Butcher 2003; Sørenson 2003; Spreitzhofer 1998). Sørenson (2003) suggests various reasons for the institutionalisation of ‘backpacker culture’, that include the rise in short term backpacking, and the proliferation of guidebooks and the internet. Similarly, Butcher (2003: 45) discusses guidebooks, and in particular Lonely Planet, as icons of independent travel that are evidence of how travel has ‘merged’ into mass tourism:

Lonely Planet, once associated with independence, freedom and adventure, is in the frame for spawning generations of ‘mass backpackers’. For the critics, these backpackers are really Mass Tourists by another name. (Butcher 2003: 45)

Consequently, the institutionalisation of backpacking and the commercialisation of travel has resulted in the emergence of the ‘anti-backpacker’ (Welk 2004: 88) and some long-term travellers are avoiding any kind of labelling or categorisation, seeing their travels, instead, as a way of life. Welk (2004: 78) explains that being an ‘anti-tourist’ is a fundamental element of backpacker identity, with backpackers constructing their disassociation from conventional institutionalised tourists along oppositional symbolic
and ideological lines. He states that backpackers share a similar set of ideals which include travelling on a low budget; meeting different people; being (or feeling) free, independent and open-minded; organising an individual and independent journey; and travelling for as extended a period as possible. Welk (2004: 80) postulates that:

These ideals can be read as the basic symbols with which backpackers construct traveller identities and a sense of community – collectively as well as individually; inward-oriented as well as outward-oriented. They serve to distinguish the backpacker from the (stereo)typical conventional tourist, to pursue a ‘better’ approach to travelling in general and in particular, to have more ‘non-tourist’ (i.e. authentic) experiences.

Yet, as Cohen (2004b: 43) contends:

There is an irony inherent in the backpacker’s quest for freedom: while each might seek to do ‘his or her own thing’, most do very similar things; like the conventional tourists, from whom they desire to distinguish themselves … most backpackers pursue highly conventional lifestyles, characteristic of their subculture; following similar itineraries, staying in the same currently-popular enclaves, and participating in similar sightseeing, vacationing and partying activities …

What has emerged from this review of literature on independent travel is that discourses of travel are very often positioned against discourses of tourism. In reality, however, there is considerable slippage between the concepts and activities of travel and tourism. Thus, even though different discourses can be recognised, they are not actually mutually exclusive, nor are they entirely dissimilar. As Butcher (2003: 45) suggests ‘travel is perhaps mass tourism – travellers are just fooling themselves’. While the simplistic binary relationship between travel and tourism has received some academic attention in recent years (through recognition of the plurality and diversity of traveller and tourist experiences and motivations), the positioning of independent travel and mass tourism as dichotomous has entered the popular consciousness and the travel literature often without being problematised. In this dichotomy, mass tourism is seen as negative,
undesirable and to be avoided, while independent travel is presented as desirable, positive and to be pursued. Travel is thus perceived to be a set of practices based around an ideological opposition to tourism and, therefore, seen as providing an alternative set of meanings and practices to those aspects of mass tourism considered by travellers as undesirable. In this regard, Wang (2000: 181) notes:

[T]he discourse of the dichotomy between travel and tourism has been echoed by the discourse of ‘alternative tourism’. Although the meaning of alternative tourism is ambiguous and it means different things to different writers, it is clear that alternative tourism is quite different from mass and package tourism, and that it is regarded as relating to high taste.

Conceptualisations of alternative tourism have developed to counteract the actual and perceived negative implications of mass tourism and to reflect the diversity of tourist motivations. For independent travellers seeking more authentic and seemingly less commodified experiences, the range of activities and experiences coalesced under the alternative tourism umbrella (such as cultural tourism, ecotourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism) provide descriptive categories reflecting the traveller desire to avoid mass tourism. Certainly, as noted above, the distinction between the traveller and the tourist has become a recurring theme in the academic literature (Dann 1999). The embedded tensions that characterise the traveller-tourist debate require further exploration particularly as they relate to the construction of the traveller as being ‘morally superior’ (Butcher 2003: 1) to the mass tourist.

**Travel versus Tourism: Key Debates**

The ‘traveller versus tourist’ debate represents an axis around which many critiques of tourism have been discussed (Butcher 2003: 40). This debate was briefly outlined in Chapter 1 with reference to the writings of Boorstin (1987) who denigrated contemporary tourism at the same time as exalting earlier travel (Cohen 2004a: 2). From this standpoint, tourism is viewed as the ‘deviant offspring’ of travel (Butcher 2003: 40). Indeed, the tourist-traveller dichotomy has been the focus of much attention in the
literature (see, for example, Butcher 2003; Buzard 1993; Crawshaw and Urry 1997; Dann 1999; Galani-Moutafi 2000; Risse 1998; Wang 2000). According to Wang (2000: 178), the ‘discourse of the traveller versus that of the tourist is one of the most typical tourism discourses on taste in the West’.

The distinction between traveller and tourist raises questions about the nature of the tourist quest, and of relationships with people at the destination – ‘the presumed object of the quest’ (Dann 1999: 159; Crick 1994; van den Berghe 1994). As Cohen (1989: 31) notes, the most common way to distinguish between travellers and tourists is by ‘their quest for authenticity [which for travellers] is on the whole more serious and demanding than that of the ordinary mass tourist’. Further, as discussed in the previous section, the dichotomy also raises questions relating to identity (Dann 1999). The ways by which the independent traveller is constructed in opposition to the mass tourist, and the impact of this construction on backpacker identity is important to this thesis and, therefore, the following discussion seeks to uncover the reasons why tourism has become viewed as a negative phenomenon.

Certainly, the growth of modern mass tourism and the subsequent development of the tourism industry as a major economic enterprise is emblematic of the various economic, technological, social and political changes that occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century. Since the Second World War, the growth of tourism in the West has been dramatic, and corresponds with major social changes including increases in leisure time and higher disposable incomes. The rapid growth of the tourism industry, and an increased recognition of its sociocultural and environmental impacts, ensures that tourism has faced much controversy and debate, manifested primarily in the view that mass tourism brings about ‘social, cultural, economic and environmental havoc in its wake’ (Poon 1993: 3).

The development of, and interest in, alternative forms of tourism aims to ameliorate many of the negative aspects of mass tourism. According to Butcher (2000: 45), alternative tourism is ‘counter-posed to a conception of mass tourism as problematic, destructive of the environment and insensitive to cultural differences’. As a result, people who are averse to conventional mass tourism are now seeking a plethora of...
‘alternative’ and ‘new’ travel experiences (see, for example, Butcher 2000; 2003; Butler 1990; 1992; Cohen 1987; 1989; Douglas et al 2001; Dowling 2001; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Poon 1989a; 1989b; 1993; Smith and Eadington 1992; Wearing 2001; Williams 2004). These changes have resulted in the increasing fragmentation of the tourism industry and the development of niche and specialised markets, in particular small-scale ventures that contrast with the mass, large-scale enterprises of established tourism. Some examples of the terms assigned to these alternative or new forms of tourism include: adventure, cultural, ethnic, nature, wildlife, volunteer, sustainable and responsible.

Alternative forms of tourism have developed seemingly in ideological opposition to mass tourism. Cohen (1987: 13) states that the ‘idea of alternative tourism has its source in two contemporary ideological preoccupations: one is the countercultural rejection of modern mass consumerism, and the other the concern for the impact of the modern industrial world on Third World societies’. Similarly, Eadington and Smith (1992: 3) state that:

Disillusionment with ‘mass’ tourism and the many problems it has triggered has led many observers and researchers to criticize vociferously the past methods and directions of tourism development and to offer instead the hope of ‘alternative tourism’, broadly defined as forms of tourism that are consistent with natural, social, and community values and which allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experience.

The changing desires of tourists, and the emergence of tourism forms that are the antithesis of commercial, mainstream mass tourism, are often theoretically positioned within discussions of postmodernism or globalisation (Buhalis 2001). The emergence of specialised markets in tourism is described by Munt (1994: 119) as a consumer reaction against being part of a mass – a ‘craving for social and spatial distinction from the golden hordes’. Furthermore, Mowforth and Munt (1998: 103) state that new forms of tourism reflect the desires of the ‘new middle classes’ for exclusivity in their holidays and tours. They go on to highlight a number of key characteristics of postmodernism and its relevance to (specifically Third World) tourism including:

The emergence of specialist agents and tour operators (and its adjunct, more individually centred and flexible holidays); the de-differentiation of tourism as it becomes associated with other activities; and the growth of interest in other cultures, environments and their association with the emergence of new social movements. (Mowforth and Munt 1998: 126, original emphasis)

Even Krippendorf, writing in the early 1980s, stated that for the tourist seeking an alternative tourism experience the guiding principle is ‘to put as much distance as possible between themselves and mass tourism. They try to avoid the beaten track, they want to go places where nobody has set foot before them’ (Krippendorf 1987: 37). Alternative tourists are said to be in pursuit of the primitive and the remote; they are searching for ‘authentic and unspoilt areas beyond the boundaries of the established touristic circuits’ (Cohen 1989: 31), and thus the quest for the ‘authentic’ experience is central to much alternative tourism (Cohen 1989).

Moreover, in the alternative tourists’ search for authentic experiences there is an increased interest in seeking cultural contact. Whilst ‘new’ and ‘alternative’ tourists are seemingly more aware of their capacity as tourists to impact upon indigenous cultures, according to Butcher (2000: 46) they are certainly ‘not satisfied with staged aspects of the host’s culture’ and seek to go ‘beyond that, potentially into the backstage world of the host society’. He argues that the ‘new tourist’ is:

[A] tourist who seeks selfhood through experiencing other cultures … The new tourist is often seen as intent on gaining an understanding of the host society’s culture, and through this, discovering something about themselves. (Butcher 2000: 45)

There certainly appear to be many similarities in the theorisations of alternative tourists and independent travellers, particularly in terms of their ideological positioning relative to mass tourists. Theoretically, the search for alternative and more authentic experiences is central to the motivation of those tourists who consider themselves travellers. These forms of new and alternative tourism are popular among backpackers who seek to differentiate themselves from mass tourists and their experiences from mass tourism.
Butcher (2003). Although the quest for alternative tourism experiences is not solely related to backpackers, Cohen (1987) pointed out that it is often youth tourists who wish to escape from the mass tourism establishment and, therefore, pursue alternative forms of tourism:

Many youth tourists, spurning conventional tourism, consider their style of travel as ‘alternative tourism’ … In their opposition to the contemporary world, the travelling youths even reject the label ‘tourist’ and see themselves as ‘travellers’ or ‘globetrotters’ while others labelled them as backpackers, drifters or ‘hippies’ … They claim to be travelling in a quest of ‘authentic’ experiences, as against the contrived ones of the mass tourist; hence they seek to avoid the itineraries, amenities and sites offered by the tourist establishment, and to travel spontaneously off the beaten tracks, where they believe they can establish unhindered personal contact with the local population. (Cohen 1987: 13-14)

The supposedly commodified and mundane world of the modern Western tourist is eschewed, and frequently ‘meaningful’ experiences of indigenous cultures are sought. As backpackers search for experiences of, and contact with (what they consider to be) an authentic Other, there is growing interest in, and appreciation of, indigenous cultures and traditions, with independent travel providing opportunities for learning experiences. Munt (1994: 104) argues that an increasing respect for the natural environment and for indigenous cultures as a ‘critique of mainstream culture’, means that a dominant characteristic of contemporary alternative and independent travel is the involvement of Otherness. Whilst backpackers to countries, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, are travelling to relatively familiar Western countries there are opportunities to pursue cultural experiences considerably different to those that can be found elsewhere. As discussed in Chapter 1, in Australia these experiences are promoted as being found in Aboriginal cultures. In the section, below, I examine some of the central elements of indigenous tourism in the Australian context, and argue that cultural tourism, as an alternative tourism experience, offers backpackers the promise to be able to pursue and satisfy their desire for having these authentic encounters with other cultures.
In Search of the Other: Travel and Indigenous Culture

An interest in life-long educational pursuits as an increasingly powerful motivator for travel experiences has inevitably resulted in an increased interest in, and provision of, educational tourism experiences including ecotourism, cultural tourism and heritage tourism (Ballantyne 1998). Robinson (1999: 4) suggests that cultural interactions are more likely to occur in the travels of long-term independent travellers rather than those of the mass tourist. Backpackers are, therefore, often identified as a key market for cultural tourism experiences (Boniface 1995). Certainly, several Australian government reports investigating tourist interest in Aboriginal culture have indicated that international backpackers are one of the key tourism segments displaying a high level of interest in indigenous cultural experiences (for example, Department of Industry Science and Resources Sport and Tourism Division 2000; South Australian Tourism Commission 1998). This view is supported in the research conducted by Ryan and Huyton (2000a; 2000b; 2002) who found that younger tourists are those who express a greater interest in Aboriginal cultural experiences.

Cultural tourism has been an identifiable sector of the international tourism industry since the 1970s (Stevenson 2000) and particularly central to Australian tourism since the 1980s (Craik 1997; 1998; 2001). Craik (1998: 125) defines cultural tourism as ‘tourist experiences that promote contact between visitors and locals through experiencing local customs and ways of life’. Further, Craik points out that the broad term cultural tourism refers to two very different, though sometimes related, types of tourism. These are ‘arts’ tourism and ‘cross-cultural’ tourism, with the latter having indigenous cultures as the central focus of the experience (Craik 1998) but which is also referred to as ‘ethnic’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘tribal’ tourism. These alternative forms of tourism can be differentiated from mass tourism by being based on ‘activities in which the distinction of a people becomes a part of the appeal of a tour’ (Chambers 1997a: 9). Much of cultural tourism is about difference with visitors seeking ‘a quality of “otherness”, of difference from that which constitutes his [sic] daily life’ (Boniface 1995: 69).
Smith (2003: 29) argues that cultural tourism itself can no longer be considered a niche or special interest form of tourism but, rather, is better understood as an ‘umbrella term for a range of tourism typologies and diverse activities which have a cultural focus’. There are also various levels of touristic interest in cultural tourism products (see, for example, Bywater 1993; Craik 1997; McKercher and du Cros 2002; Smith 2003). Bywater (1993), for instance, in her study of cultural tourism in Europe, distinguishes between ‘culturally motivated’, ‘culturally inspired’ and ‘culturally attracted’ tourists. The ‘culturally motivated’ tourist is the cultural tourist whose holiday and destination choice is based solely on cultural opportunities. The ‘culturally inspired’ tourist is attracted to internationally renowned cultural and heritage sites deemed worthy of a ‘once in a lifetime’ visit, while the ‘culturally attracted’ tourist is one whose cultural experiences such as visiting cultural sites and events are incidental to their holiday experience and destination choice.

Another attempt to characterise the cultural tourist is provided by Smith (2003) who describes cultural tourists as predominantly situated within the ‘travel mindset’ and, accordingly, they eschew highly commodified and mass produced experiences and tourist products. Cultural tourists actively seek personal and authentic experiences in destinations and their interactions with travelled cultures. Smith notes that because a key focus of cultural tourism is on authenticities – primarily ‘objective’ and ‘existential’ (Wang 1999; 2000; see Chapter 1) – there is a potential for cultural tourists to hold idealised expectations of everyday cultures. Further, a desire for ‘meaningful’ and ‘real’ experiences can draw attention away from the often constructed nature of the ‘authentic’. Nonetheless, these characteristics frame and shape a type of experience that is fundamentally different from mass tourist pursuits, and encourage particular forms of engagement and interaction with local cultures that would seem anathema to the mass tourist:

Many cultural tourists (especially backpackers) will often take great delight in being sandwiched between locals and their sacks of rice or grain, or their entourage of goats or chickens. Most cultural tourists are likely to be on some kind of quest for authenticity, either in terms of self-improvement or in terms of the sites, communities and activities that they engage with or in. (Smith 2003: 35)
Smith’s (2003) positioning of backpackers as cultural tourists is especially pertinent to my study because this situation provides an understanding of the characteristics that can be considered representative of backpackers who seek to engage with indigenous peoples and cultures. The activities and desires exhibited by backpackers in relation to seeking difference and cultural interaction indicates that the travel experience, like cultural tourism, is about more than merely sightseeing – it is about participating, experiencing and learning. As Deborah Stevenson (2000: 130) notes:

Most commentators agree that cultural tourism is not just about looking; rather, it is about participation and experience … this means coming into contact with what is perceived (or packaged) as ‘authentic’ in order to learn about a culture or a particular set of cultural practices or productions through the encounter.

Furthermore, cultural tourists are ‘becoming increasingly interested in the culture, traditions and lifestyles of indigenous peoples, tribal and ethnic groups’ (Smith 2003: 117). Indigenous cultural tourism in Australia has focused on the cultures, values and traditions of indigenous Australians, and since the 1980s Aboriginal people in northern Australia have been ‘experiencing increasing pressures from government and business interests to participate in the tourism industry’ (Altman 1989: 456). Tourism is seen as an avenue for the achievement of positive outcomes for Aboriginal people, such as improving their economic status and political power; as well as minimising the social and cultural impacts of tourism upon Aboriginal communities (Altman 1989). Hollinshead (1988: 183) claims that until the late 1980s ‘the sites and scenes of Aboriginal Australia largely remained latent and unharnessed’.

Heather Zeppel (1998a: 24) states that the growing visitor demand for indigenous cultures has resulted in some cultural experiences increasingly being provided by Aboriginal communities. Tourism products that are owned and operated by Aboriginal people include cultural tours, cultural centres and art galleries. Aboriginal tourism attractions feature ‘Aboriginal people; Aboriginal spirituality or the dreaming; Aboriginal bushcraft skills; Aboriginal cultural practices; and Aboriginal artefacts’ (Zeppel 1998a: 23-25). The development of Aboriginal tourism in Australia has been supported by federal and state government tourism policies primarily as a ‘means of
achieving economic independence for Aboriginal communities’ (Zeppel 1998a: 26). For example, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Industry Strategy (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 1997) identifies opportunities for the development of indigenous tourism products (Parkin 2001; Zeppel 1999). Furthermore, Aboriginal owned tourism ventures have developed and increased since the 1990s, with Aboriginal people often presenting their cultures as a tourist attraction (Zeppel 2001). Aboriginal cultures are promoted as unique to Australia with tourists routinely being ‘invited’ to ‘discover’ Aboriginal cultures within their travel experiences (Zeppel 1998a: 23).

Some research has been conducted that explores the degree to which tourists have an interest in Aboriginal culture (for example, Moscardo and Pearce 1999; Ryan and Huyton 2000a; 2000b; 2002). Importantly, these studies suggest that particular types of tourists are more interested in pursuing cultural learning and interaction – especially younger people. Although this desire may be incidental to, or an extension of, a desire for fun and novelty, younger travellers still often demonstrate a keen interest in Aboriginal cultural tourism. For example, Moscardo and Pearce (1999), in a case study of ‘ethnic’ tourists at the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (situated in Cairns in Far North Queensland), found that visitors wanted to have contact with indigenous people in order to learn about Aboriginal history and traditional and contemporary cultures, as well as a desire to participate in ‘traditional’ activities. They suggest that there are varying levels of interest shown by tourists in relation to indigenous cultural experiences, arguing that some visitors had a keen interest in indigenous tourism displaying a strong desire to have contact with indigenous people and to learn about different aspects of their culture. Others though were more passive in their engagement with indigenous people, displaying some interest in learning about aspects of their culture but being less interested in having direct contact with indigenous people. There were also some people who were interested in participating in traditional activities but less interested in learning about indigenous culture or interacting with indigenous people. Finally, there were those tourists who displayed little interest in learning about or and having contact with indigenous people and cultures. The array of modes of interaction with indigenous cultures identified by Moscardo and Pearce supports the
argument that cultural tourists have a plurality of desires – and, hence, experiences – which can be plotted along a continuum of travel and tourism practices.

Ryan and Huyton (2002) found that although only a small proportion of their respondents had a significant interest in Aboriginal tourism experiences – such as attending dance performances, going on Aboriginal guided tours, or purchasing authentic Aboriginal souvenirs – this interest in Aboriginal culture was greatest among ‘younger, female, better educated tourists from North America, the United Kingdom and Germany than among others’ (Ryan and Huyton 2002: 640). The attributes of these tourists imply that they may be backpackers. Other research by Ryan and Huyton (2000a; 2000b) examining tourists’ interest in Aboriginal tourism in the Northern Territory found that these ‘younger people’ from Northern Europe and North America can be identified as ‘active information seekers’. These tourists, whilst greatly interested in pursuing cultural experiences, are also active in seeking out other types of experiences, with the Aboriginal component ‘but one component of all the other things that defined or represented this part [the Northern Territory] of Australia’ (Ryan and Huyton 2000a: 19-20).

Images of Aboriginal people and aspects of Aboriginal culture are prominent in contemporary Australian tourism promotion. Advertising campaigns, particularly since the 1990s, increasingly have focused on Aboriginal culture as a unique attraction (Waitt 1997; 1999; Zeppel 1998a; 1998b; 1998c). This increase corresponds with a growing touristic interest in, and awareness of, Australia’s indigenous heritage (Waitt 1999: 146), as well as of indigenous cultures worldwide (Haynes 1998). As noted in Chapter 1, The Australian Tourist Commission routinely incorporated particular signifiers of Aboriginal culture into their campaigns. For instance, campaigns such as Brand Australia include images of Aboriginal people as exotic and tribal – as the ‘noble savage’, the primitive Other – to represent Australia as a destination that provides unique cultural experiences.5 Aboriginal Australia is represented through visual and

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5 Brand Australia is a marketing initiative of the Australian Tourist Commission (now known as Tourism Australia). Brand Australia was originally launched in 1995 (see, Brown et al 2002; Craik 2001; Morgan et al 2002, Waitt 1997; 1999) and was aimed at promoting Australia to international markets (specifically New Zealand, North America, Europe, Asia and Japan). In 2004, a ‘re-branding’ saw the campaign launched in the United Kingdom, Italy and Singapore and, for the first time, in Australia (Tourism Australia 2005).
textual images of the people, and aspects and artefacts of their cultures, including traditional dance performances and corroborees, indigenous arts and crafts, Aboriginal cultural tours and cultural centres, and art and rock art sites (Zeppel 1998a; 2001). However, much of the promotion of Aboriginal Australia is confined to a very narrow base of products, and the promotion of the Aboriginal cultural experience is mostly limited to Queensland and the Northern Territory (Moscardo and Pearce 1999). Stevenson (2000: 131) notes that significant inequalities resulting from power relationships are especially pertinent ‘with regard to the promotion (and often appropriation) of the arts, rituals and lifestyles of Indigenous Australians’. Issues of promotion and power and the tourism image of indigenous people form the central focus of Chapter 3, below.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, backpackers have become a very significant and important market segment of independent travellers and, increasingly, are the focus of much academic interest and industry research. Rather than focusing on the potential economic benefits of independent travellers, this chapter has examined the literature on the backpacker phenomenon in the context of broader theoretical debates on travel and tourism. In so doing, the chapter has developed a conceptual framework within which the study of backpackers can be situated. To this end, the chapter focused on the social and cultural attributes of backpacking as independent travel and explored the various features that differentiate backpacking from other types of tourism. Some important aspects of traveller discourse have been identified, including a search for authenticity and the seeking out of educational and cultural experiences. As outlined in Chapter 1, authenticity as a conceptual category serves to define peoples, places, objects and experiences as ostensibly more ‘real’ and, therefore, more meaningful. As a result, a concern with authenticity was woven throughout this chapter (and, indeed, the thesis) particularly as authenticity relates to differentiating between independent travel and mass tourism. I also explored in the chapter how the ideological opposition to mass tourism has led to the development of new and alternative forms of tourism that promise travel experiences that are supposedly more authentic than other types of tourism. In

particular, indigenous cultural tourism would appear to play a central role in the independent traveller’s desires for an authentic cultural experience.

Significantly, a central theme that emerged in this chapter was the difference between the independent traveller and the mass tourist. I argued that the opposition between the two has its origins in early academic literature on tourism. While the ‘traveller versus tourist’ debate has largely been superseded by more critically sophisticated conceptualisations that acknowledge the multiplicity of tourist and traveller desires and practices that comprise a less rigidly defined continuum of lived experiences, the ideological dichotomy nevertheless remains prevalent in popular travel literature and forms of alternative tourism. Backpacking, as a social practice, can be understood relative to this dichotomy, particularly in regard to the lived experiences of backpackers and their interactions with indigenous cultures. Importantly, the oppositional basis that defines the independent traveller against the mass tourist constitutes a framework for the analysis of traveller texts and traveller experiences that underpins the discussion of subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Independent travellers are popularly viewed as avid seekers of genuine and authentic experiences, who have a desire for contact with, and to gain knowledge of, local peoples and cultures. In Australia, images of Aboriginal people and cultures are frequently mobilised to attract visitors who are interested in indigenous cultural experiences. In this respect, it is important to develop a conceptual framework that encompasses the discursive production and representation of indigenous cultures in traveller texts, such as guidebooks. The representation and interpretation of indigenous cultures in the context of tourism is a process deeply influenced by relations of subordination and inequality and, therefore, ultimately are political in purpose and effect. In order to further develop an understanding of tourism as conflict and interaction, as described in this chapter, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of issues and concerns relating to representation and interpretation of travelled cultures, and these issues are the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Mediating Cultures:
Representation and Interpretation in Tourism

Tourism is not just an aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs. (MacCannell 1992: 1)

In contrast to what is commonly assumed, the cultural experiences offered by tourism are consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies and mythologies generated in the tourist’s origin culture rather than by the cultural offerings of that destination. (Craik 1997: 118)

Introduction

In Chapter 2 it was argued that, in order to comprehend fully the complex relationships that exist between the traveller and the travelled culture, a broader understanding of tourism as conflict, and as interaction, is necessary. In this chapter, I more comprehensively outline these perspectives as they relate to tourism discourse and power, particularly in relation to representations of culture. As this thesis seeks to analyse how the traveller and the travelled culture are constructed, it is necessary also to examine mediation and cultural interpretation in the context of tourism. Much of the more recent research into tourism, from both the conflict and interaction perspectives, focuses on tourism discourse and tourism imagery. These progressively more sophisticated developments in tourism research conceptualise tourism as a series of power relationships and acknowledge the role of tourism discourse in shaping, framing and constructing travel experiences. In this chapter, I explore these processes in relation to the representation and interpretation of Aboriginal Australia, and argue that the imposition and perpetuation of stereotypes so common in tourism images and travel texts, such as guidebooks, cannot be separated from relations of power and the appropriation, commodification and exploitation of culture.
Further, this chapter outlines the significant role of the guidebook as a powerful mediator of the relationships between the independent traveller and the places and cultures they visit. As noted in Chapter 2, backpackers are often understood as long-term independent travellers who, amongst other things, seek what they consider to be authentic and alternative cultural experiences and interactions. As such, backpackers are understood within the conceptually oppositional relationship between independent travel and mass tourism. I suggested, however, that these categorisations are largely grounded in a series of typologies prevalent in the social science literature on tourism. Arguably, the social reality is far more complex and consists of a more fluid continuum of lived experiences and actual practices. The role of the guidebook in shaping and framing these experiences is also investigated in this chapter. Guidebooks as texts play an undeniably significant role in the experiences of backpackers and other independent travellers. However, as articulated in Chapter 2, the guidebook can also be considered as an example of the commodification of independent travel. The tensions that arise from this relationship with mass tourism are substantially concealed by its positioning within, and reproduction of, traveller discourses.

Tourism and Power: Discourse and Knowledge

Tourism has increasingly been recognised as a powerful phenomenon that reflects and reinforces global power structures and particular relationships in societies (Dann 1996a; Morgan and Pritchard 1998; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Selwyn 1996). As Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 3) assert in their study of tourism promotion, these relationships are ‘grounded in relations of power, dominance and subordination which characterise the global system’. Research in this context recognises that power relationships, particularly in relation to colonialism and imperialism are exemplified through tourism discourses. Yet the study of the power context of tourism has, for some time, remained largely peripheral within tourism studies (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 4), and although issues of power have often been suggested or acknowledged, tourism research has tended to downplay or, indeed, ignore the significance of power relationships (Mowforth and Munt 1998). Furthermore, much of the research that examines power is discussed as
Recent developments in research regarding power and tourism have inspired questions in relation to the impacts that tourism, as a global industry, can have on various societies and cultures. Whereas tourism has long been positioned as an industry which can alleviate the economic problems of nations, regions and cities (Craik 1991; 2001; Robinson 1999), an increasing body of research now acknowledges that tourism is a complex phenomenon that can result in a tapestry of social and cultural problems for its host societies and cultures (Craik 1991). The transition in both theoretical and empirical focus towards examining the complex and diverse social and cultural impacts of tourism on travelled cultures is evident in the ‘knowledge-based platform’ that developed from the ‘advocacy platform’ of tourism studies (Jafari 1989, see Chapter 2). Dann’s (1996a) identification of the ‘conflict perspective’ explicitly acknowledges the systemic inequalities, and relationships of domination and subordination, existing between the travelling and travelled cultures as perpetuated by the tourism industry. Some of the dominant ways in which power operates within contemporary tourism include: the dominance of the ‘first’ world over the ‘third’ world and the perpetuation of uneven and unequal relationships (see, for example, Mowforth and Munt 1998); the view that tourism is an extension of earlier imperialistic and colonial ambitions of Western nations (see, for example, Chambers 1997a; Nash 1989; Palmer 1994); and, significantly, in the representation of indigenous people (see, for example, Morgan and Pritchard 1998).

The majority of tourists are from Western industrialised countries travelling to destinations in both Western and non-Western nations (Mowforth and Munt 1998). As a result:

Few large industries evoke such close, face-to-face contact between people of different means, class, ethnicity, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Few human activities have such a great potential for exposing on a personal level the considerable inequalities that do exist between people, particularly between people of different countries and different color. (Chambers 1997a: 1)
The direct and personal contact between people of different socio-economic positions and cultural backgrounds that the tourism industry produces is a defining element of Morgan and Pritchard’s (1998) description of the ‘interaction perspective’. The capacity of such interactions to expose relationships of inequality, grounded in race, culture and class, is important in unveiling the often concealed power relationships that privilege individuals from the Western industrialised – touring – nations. It is equally important to recognise that the discursive production of the Other, through both language and image based representation, conceals these power relationships and elicits tourist desire precisely through the notion of difference. In saying this, it is clear that the capacity of tourist based interaction to expose relationships of power and inequality is, in fact, predicated on the reproduction of those inequalities. It is, in this way, that Mowforth and Munt (1998: 49) suggest that tourism can be viewed as a ‘conduit for power relationships’, and Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 7) claim that:

Tourism processes manifest power as they mirror and reinforce the distribution of power in society, operating as mechanisms whereby inequalities are articulated and validated.

In many ways, the shift from the advocacy platform – grounded in an understanding of the economic benefits and associated empowerment of the disadvantaged communities comprising the travelled cultures that are the objects of tourism – to the conflict and interaction perspectives reflects Foucault’s (1980) conceptual reconfiguration of the modernist axiom: knowledge is power. In recognising that power operates as knowledge, the capacity of tourism discourse to shape the discursive representation of travelled cultures through language and control of the image is revealed. Processes of representation and objectification are central elements in the conflict of interests and power relationships entrenched in the interactions between travelling and travelled cultures.

Since the 1970s, there has been much debate concerning the impacts of tourism on host societies and indigenous cultures in particular, and the subsequent conflicts that can arise between visitors and locals (for example, the essays in Smith’s 1977 and 1989 edited collection *Hosts and Guests*, and in Robinson and Boniface’s 1999 collection *Going by the Book: Backpacker Travellers in Aboriginal Australia and the Negotiation of Text and Experience*, PhD Thesis, The University of Newcastle, Australia.)
entitled *Tourism and Cultural Conflicts*). However, theorising such tourism conflicts within broader understandings of power and theories of power and discourse has only begun within the tourism literature in the past decade (although well established in other areas of social and cultural research). Indeed, in 1996, Dann noted that exploring the cultural and symbolic power of tourism imagery and tourism discourses was still an emerging area of enquiry in tourism studies (Dann 1996a).

Of significance to this thesis is the literature that explains the ways in which tourism discourses structure tourism experiences. In this process, people and places are appropriated and, as objects, subjected to the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990a). Wang (2000: 172) argues that:

> [T]he influence of discourses upon potential tourists is undeniable. People choose to travel somewhere partly because they are, consciously or unconsciously, persuaded or lured by a certain discourse to which they have been exposed for some time. What travellers see is what they expect to see, for the discourse has already informed them where to go and what to see.

It is in this respect that an analysis of the role of guidebooks as influential mediators of knowledge is pertinent to the examination of the capacity of tourism discourses – of which traveller discourse is but one of many – to inform and shape experiences of travel. The powerful nature of tourism discourses is that they are informed and constructed by a number of competing discourses (Dann 1996a; Morgan and Pritchard 1998) and so, for example, tourism discourse may comprise and, therefore, mobilise any number of other discourses (for instance, national, cultural, colonial and indigenous). Discourse is an important dimension of social power, and not merely a way of describing the world (Foucault 1984).

Within cultural studies, issues of discourse and power often draw upon the work of Michel Foucault (mostly written throughout the 1960s and 1970s) who saw an intimate relationship between discourse, power and knowledge (Hall 1992; 1997; McHoaul and Grace 1993; Smith 2001). Whilst Foucault’s works in this regard have long been used and critiqued within a range of traditional academic disciplines, his thoughts and...
theories on discourse and power have only relatively recently been applied to the study of tourism and tourism imagery (see, for example, Cheong and Miller 2000; Hollinshead 1999; Simondson 1995). Although predominantly understood as consisting primarily of language, discourse concerns the wider relationships between practice, language, images and power.

A central element in Foucault’s thinking is the conceptualisation of discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge (McHoaul and Grace 1993). Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is the relationship between power and knowledge and the means by which the social reality is constructed and determined through the practice of language (Foucault 1972; 1974; 1980). It is through the power of language to identify and define, that objects are made articulable as the object of knowledge. Foucault contends that power is inextricably linked to knowledge, and that the ‘exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power’ and, therefore, one cannot be considered without the other (Foucault 1980: 52). Discourse can be seen as ordering an incomplete and dynamic field of meanings. Through the production of specific representations and understandings particular meanings are attached to socialised functions and certain ways of behaving are imposed – producing, simultaneously, social ‘reality’ and subject positions within that reality.

Discourse functions as a domain of statements, a structured arrangement of meanings serving to delineate, define and/or justify certain possibilities over others by determining what can be said and thought and, through this relationship of knowledge and power, ‘effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false’ (Foucault 1984: 60). Based on Foucault’s (1980) claims that power operates primarily through knowledge, and that different discourses construct their own ‘truths’, Stuart Hall (1992: 295) states that discourses ‘always operate in relation to power – they are part of the way power circulates and is contested’. As Foucault (1980: 27) argued:

We should admit that power produces knowledge … That power and knowledge directly imply one another: that there is no power relation without the correlative
constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute … power relations.

Hall (1992) employs Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse and applies it to broader understandings of culture and cultural representations. He explains that discourse is a group of statements that provide a language for talking about, or representing, a particular kind of knowledge about a subject or topic. In this sense, discourse can be seen as the production of meaningful knowledge about a subject or topic through language. The statements that are made about a topic within a particular discourse make it possible for a topic to be constructed in a certain way, whilst at the same time limiting, and thus constraining, the ways in which the topic is constructed (Hall 1992: 291-295). In other words, a discourse is a way of describing, defining and classifying people, places and objects. Hall (1992) further states that the knowledge produced in discourse influences and enters into all practices of social life, and that discourses are never free of power relations. The practice of producing meaning in discourse is known as ‘discursive practice’, and the statements that work together to form a discourse were termed by Foucault as ‘discursive formations’ (Hall 1992; 1997). Those who produce and control the discourse have the power to make it appear true and, hence, to enforce its validity (Hall 1992). Fairclough (1992: 64) states that:

Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning … discourse contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief.

A pertinent example of this circulation of power/knowledge as discourse can be made in relation to the conceptual and ideological dichotomy between tourism and travel as discussed, above, in Chapters 1 and 2. Foucault’s (1980; 1982) work on power/knowledge as discourse was essentially grounded in, and remains extremely relevant to, the social sciences and their ability (drawing on the legitimacy of scientific discourse) to define and order social experience. In order to understand tourism it had first to brought within the domain of discourse – that is, differentiated, categorised and defined, in order to become an object of knowledge, to become articulable. In seeking to order and exert control over a fluid experiential phenomenon, early research into
tourism was grounded in the binary opposition between conceptual categories of travel and tourism.

Whilst academic research has since articulated tourism in a more sophisticated sense of discursive relationships that are more able to grasp a complex and fluid continuum of tourist practices and experiences, powerful discourses of travel and tourism remain as an undercurrent within social science analyses. More significantly, these discourses, defined in opposition, have entered popular literature (see, for example, Dann 1999; Risse 1998) and thus serve to frame experiences and produce subject positions for individuals who take up that discourse to express their identity and have meaningful knowledge of their experiences. Thus, the power of the social sciences to produce knowledge on tourism has produced discourses as ways of perceiving and acting that have entered popular discourses of travel. Individuals defining themselves as travellers, grounded in an aversion to an ideologically opposite set of practices articulated by discourses of mass tourism, reproduce the traveller discourse through actions and language. Simultaneously consolidating the ‘truth effects’ of this discourse by living it, and providing further empirical material for social scientists to verify or disprove in light of those discourses – continuing the circulation of power and knowledge.

Edward Said’s (1978) influential work *Orientalism* is widely recognised as having made a seminal contribution to understandings of tourism discourse. Based on the writings of Foucault, and also acknowledging the frequently binary nature of knowledge produced in discourse examined by Derrida in his studies of dualistic tendencies in the construction of language, Said argued that discourse is essentially about power. In an examination of the ways in which ‘the Orient’ was constructed by European nations, Said argued that the centuries-long representation of the Orient has come to embody what the West is not (Dann 1996a). He sees the relationship between ‘east’ and ‘west’ as one of power, domination and subordination, as opposed to being mutually supporting and sustaining. Following Said, Dann (1996a: 25) states that tourism discourse ‘comprises not so much representations as misrepresentations, not formation but deformation, not what the world of the Other is, but what the writer wishes it to be’. Tourism can thus be considered as being constructed and constructing, with the ability to shape and mould a society’s ideologies (Dann 1996a), as well as reflecting and
reinforcing these (Crawshaw and Urry 1997; Morgan and Pritchard 1998; Urry 1990a). With reference to Hall’s (1997) circuit of culture, Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 18) assert that tourism discourse is a key element in the circularity of knowledge and power:

[L]anguage, representation and meaning do not exist as isolated concepts but are inexorably intertwined in a continuous circle whereby language utilises representation to construct meanings … The tourism image, therefore, emerges as one sphere into which we can look in order to understand the dialogues between, and amongst, the creators, the consumers and the consumed. (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 18)

The circuitous nature of discourse operating to produce cultural representations and meanings through language – exerting power through knowledge – highlights the need for examination of the role of texts that convey and embody tourist and traveller discourses. The image of both the travelling and travelled cultures constructed and carried by guidebooks as mediators of knowledge is key to understanding the role of traveller discourse in shaping the way in which backpackers actively consume and negotiate text and experience.

In applying an understanding of power and knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of tourism as discourse, Dann (1996a) suggests that tourism can be viewed as a language. The ‘language of tourism’ represents particular knowledges about particular subjects or topics. In this instance, the objects become subject to the tourist gaze and tourist consumption (Urry 1990a; 1990b; 1995). Tourism, as a social institution operates as a system, or apparatus, of power (Kress 1985: 28). It can be argued that tourism, as an entity of power, exerts control and constrains tourists and their experiences. Dann (1996a: 68) describes tourism discourse as a ‘language of social control’. In this sense, tourism discourse exerts control through determining attractions which are deemed appropriate for the tourist gaze through the selection and marking out of places, peoples, cultures, events and experiences. Indeed, Dann (1996a: 2) argues that ‘tourism has a discourse of its own’ that:  

Via static and moving pictures, written texts and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients. By addressing them in terms of their own culturally predicated needs and motivations, it hopes to push them out of the armchair and on to the plane – to turn them into tourists … Thus, since much of this rhetoric is both logically and temporally prior to any travel or sightseeing, one can legitimately argue that tourism is grounded in discourse.

Tourism, as a set of ideas and practices, is constituted through, and draws on, a wide range of discourses, and these discourses organise and give meaning to the many different types of tourist encounters (Bruner 1991). Tourism also mobilises different discourses for different markets and audiences. Discourse implies that there is no one set of objective truths or facts but, rather, a range of ideas, stories, beliefs and languages that can be mobilised depending on the context of the power relationship. In this sense, it is possible to expand on Dann’s comment above that ‘tourism has a discourse of its own’ to recognise that, in fact, tourism has many different discourses of its own, that are mobilised in relation to different markets and audiences, and that produce a range of often competing subject positions. One such example being traveller discourse which, while sharing many structural and functional qualities with tourism discourse, mobilises a different set of meanings, representations, ideas and values, and thus produces a substantially different subject position – the traveller. Therefore, any conceptual dualism or oppositional relationship present in either the academic or popular travel literature, is not with tourism discourse per se but, rather, with a varied subject position produced by an alternative discursive formation – that of the mass tourist.

In addition to the images and texts constructed by the tourism industry that feed into these tourism discourses, tourists themselves also construct their own images and systems of expectations from information supplied to them by the tourism industry and other independent sources (Dann 1996a; Wang 2000) This is an important point as it implies that meanings within discourses are not fixed and that individual discourses are not constructed within a vacuum – they are not ‘closed systems’ (Hall 1992: 292). Rather, a network of meanings is constructed as other discourses and knowledges are
drawn upon. The images and representations reproduced in tourism or travel discourse, for instance, are formed and influenced by many other kinds of images derived from a variety of competing discourses, such as cultural, colonial, political and religious (Cohen 1993; Dann 1996a; Mowforth and Munt 1998). Crawshaw and Urry (1997: 176) note:

Different gazes are ‘authorised’ by different discourses. Examples include the discourse of education which conditioned the experience of the European Grand Tour, that of health which defines a type of tourism whose aim is to restore the individual to a state of physical well-being, and the discourse of play which surrounds what can be called ‘liminal’ tourism.

Indeed, the ‘traveller gaze’ is conditioned and ‘authorised’ by traveller discourses of authenticity, cultural interaction and responsible travel, and differs considerably in both ideological content and impact from those discourses informing mass tourism. Although it is true that tourists’ experiences and interactions are informed by the dominant ideological constructions and meanings reproduced in tourism discourse (Morgan and Pritchard 1998), it cannot be assumed that each individual experience of destinations will be alike (Wearing and Wearing 1996). Viewing tourism in this way suggests that although tourism discourse can be seen as reinforcing dominant social meanings and power divisions, these may either be accepted and confirmed by tourists’ own value systems and beliefs, or may be challenged through interaction and experience. Such negotiations are central to this thesis particularly in relation to the negotiation of the guidebook text (as a product of traveller discourse) with actual travel experiences. Indeed, in his analysis of guidebooks Lew (1991: 124) contends:

People come to know about places in a variety of ways, among which the most important and highly valued is direct experience. The direct experience of a place seldom occurs in a vacuum. Instead, it is filtered through preconceived images and expectations. Such images may or may not be congruent with actual experiences.
Thus, a combination of experiences, texts and media can contribute to learning, knowledge and understanding during travel, leading to the possibility for dominant representations to be questioned, challenged and negotiated.

As mentioned above, tourists can, and do, feed back into tourism discourse and the expectations they have of people and places – the images that individuals have constructed – stem from information provided to them by the tourism media and popular culture. In this regard, Dann (1996a: 4) explains that the discourse of tourism ‘is not just about what is represented and communicated, it is also about what is practiced’. As a result of travel experiences, tourists can also contribute to tourism discourses by passing on information. Certainly, for independent travellers, such as backpackers, information provided through word-of-mouth is considered to be one of the dominant forms of knowledge creation (Murphy 2001; 2005). This form of communication often challenges dominant tourism discourses or leads to the creation of new discourses (Wang 2000) and ‘counter-narratives’ which are defined by Edensor (1998: 100) as ‘those interpretations which challenge the norms and assumptions of the dominant accounts’. Whilst specific discourses are reproduced and mobilised by the tourism establishment and reproduced in texts with the aim of mediating knowledge and constructing meanings of peoples and places, the industry has little to no control over the information that is passed on and obtained by travellers through word-of-mouth. These ‘experiential sources’ of information (Dann 1996a: 151-2) include verbal communications at destinations between ‘guests’ and ‘hosts’ and between tourists themselves.

The suggestion that dominant discourses and narratives are challenged through travel experience is not, however, without some criticism. For instance, Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 13) point out that there are often limited opportunities for interactions with other cultures, and often these meetings are ‘brief and highly structured … [and] informed by stereotypical representations’. The authors suggest that research conducted in this area (for example, Evans-Pritchard’s 1989 and Laxson’s 1991 studies of the interactions between tourists and native Americans) has generally found that rather than stereotypes being challenged through tourism experiences they are, in fact, frequently confirmed and reinforced (Morgan and Pritchard 1998). Uzzell and Ballantyne (1998: 170) also
endorse this claim in their statement that one of the problems of heritage and cultural interpretation is that it can ‘indoctrinate ideas, reinforce stereotypes, incite and encourage fear’. The stereotypical representation of indigenous people reproduced in tourism promotion is a political process, as Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 175) point out, stereotyping ‘is all about power, the power of one to label or define another and thus to represent peoples and places in particular ways’. Images reproduced in tourism advertising draw on a wealth of stereotypes and, in the following section, I explore the tourism image as it relates to indigenous representation with particular reference to the representation of Aboriginal Australians.

The Tourism Image: Cultural Representations of Indigeneity

Whittaker (1999: 37) argues that tourism can be viewed as a ‘knowledge industry’ in which the production of goods – as tourist commodities – is secondary to the production of meanings and representations. Within tourism promotion and marketing, a great deal of value is placed on imagery and the production and reproduction of visual materials. Images are possibly the most dominant mode of communication in modern society (Edwards 1996), and images reproduced within tourism media play a significant role in influencing perceptions, beliefs and attitudes and in constructing ‘realities’. As Susan Sontag (1977: 153) contends, ‘reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images’. Certainly, within tourism, often ‘the first contact a sightseer has with a sight is not the sight itself but with some representation thereof’ (MacCannell 1989: 110).

The tourism image has become the focus of a significant body of academic literature and various tourism texts have been analysed. These include tourism brochures (for example, Dann 1993; 1996b; Dilley 1986; Selwyn 1993; Simondson 1995; Uzzell 1984); postcards (for example, Albers and James 1983; 1987; 1988; 1990; Edwards 1996; Mellinger 1992; 1994; Whittaker 2000); printed advertisements (for example, Cohen 1989; O’Barr 1994); television advertisements (for example, Waitt 1997; 1999); travelogues and travel articles (for example, Dann 1992; Santos 2004; Simmons 2001; Zeppel 2000). Of pertinence to this study are analyses of guidebook texts. The role of

guidebooks in the construction of places, peoples and cultures has received some, although somewhat limited, empirical attention. Studies of guidebooks include the analyses of place representations, and social and cultural construction of: Singapore (Lew 1991); India (Bhattacharyya 1997); Asia and Africa (Carter 1998); Tana Toraja in Indonesia (McGregor 2000); Vietnam (Laderman 2002); and Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japanese language guidebooks (Siegenthaler 2002).

Selwyn (1996), focusing on the tourist image and the creation of myths and myth-making in tourism, argues that the tourism industry actively mythologises places and cultures. He, therefore, contends that tourists can be understood as those who ‘chase myths’. Tourists travel into spaces that are constituted by images and signs, they are the ‘unsung armies of semioticians’ (Culler 1981) endeavouring to make sense of a multitude of cultural signs, symbols and codes, and seeking markers of authenticity. Yet as Crick (1991: 12) notes:

It is impossible to separate touristic relations and spaces from representation; for, in a sense, international tourists do not go anywhere ‘real’. Their destinations are so constituted by the advertising of the tourism industry, that the space of the Other is a fiction; it is a space in which the mundane is mystified, the exotic amplified, the strange routinised, the misery minimised and the disquietude rationalised. Images are created largely in the tourist-generating countries about tropical paradises with friendly people, and tourists go to consume such images. Clearly such images have only the most partial of correspondences to real places and people.

Whilst photographic images are ubiquitous within tourism media in advertising, brochures, picture postcards and tourist souvenirs, images are also created through words within texts, such as guidebooks. According to Urry (1990a: 3), images reproduced in tourism texts allow the tourist gaze to be ‘endlessly reproduced and recaptured’ and, thus, the gaze becomes a form of consumption. Representations recreated within tourism imagery ‘not only construct, but also reinforce ideas, values and meaning systems at the expense of alternative ways of seeing the world’ (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 5). Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 5) further argue that the

construction and creation of images in tourism need to be acknowledged as they ‘reveal much about the dynamics of relationships between people, cultures, genders and states – constructions which dominate the currency of culture and ideology’.

Images reproduced in tourism discourses have not been created within a social or cultural vacuum (Cohen 1993; Sontag 1977) and do not represent totally new concepts or knowledge. The images and representations in tourism texts, such as guidebooks, brochures, postcards and advertisements, are formed and influenced by many other kinds of images derived from a variety of discourses. Moreover, the images reproduced in tourism exist side by side with images reproduced in a variety of popular cultural forms including film, television and literature. As Kevin Markwell (2001: 41) notes in relation to the representation and mediation of nature in tourism:

"Myths pervade tourism promotional material and help to confirm existing beliefs about places, culture and nature … The mediation of nature begins with its portrayal and representation in various forms of popular culture which themselves reflect these broader cultural mythologies. These cultural understandings provide the context in which tourism promotional discourse is located, and which constructs and represents nature in ways which conform to the already established meanings evident in popular culture."

Similarly, the representation of cultures conforms to well-established meanings operating within broader discourses, and the ubiquity of images of indigenous people in all forms of the mass media play a role in the promulgation of racial stereotypes, and in the social and cultural construction of racial and ethnic identities (Lutz and Collins 1993: 4). The representation of indigenous cultures and ethnic minorities in the media is located within particular historical relationships that relate to European domination, including colonialism and imperialism. The imposition and perpetuation of stereotypes cannot, therefore, be separated from relations of power and the appropriation, commodification and exploitation of culture. Wayne Mellinger (1994: 776) argues:

"One needs to situate tourism representations politically, examine what they include and exclude, and expose whose interests they serve. A critical analysis of"
tourism representations must recognize the political linkages between tourism discourses and technologies of power to uncover the ideologies and practices that structure touristic relations.

The tourism industry’s dependence on the production and consumption of images means that ‘ethnographic imagery’ is often used in an effort to differentiate and sell ‘the product’ (Edwards 1996: 197). Ethnographic imagery focuses on the exotic, the unique, the authentic and the primitive – the Other. The representation of indigenous people and their cultures in tourism imagery is most often overwhelmingly superficial and stereotypical, and ‘limited to those cultural distinctions and elements of ‘local color’ that are compatible with the tourists’ home grown expectations’ (Chambers 1997a: 5). Binary representations between ‘them’ (indigenous peoples) and ‘us’ (non-indigenous Westerners) in tourism rely on oppositional categorisations. Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 177), for instance, highlight key differences that include black/white, savage/civilised, simple/complex, primitive/advanced. These oppositions often serve to construct indigenous people as ‘noble savages’. Whilst the ‘noble savage’ is central to much tourism marketing and tourist desire, this construct is merely a figment of Western imagination (Bruner 1991: 241).

The stereotypical ways in which indigenous people are represented in the visual images of tourism led Cohen (1993: 37) to comment:

[T]here is a wide consensus among researchers and commentators on the nature of this [touristic] image. Natives are said to be presented, for touristic purposes, anachronistically or ‘allochronically’ … ahistorically or atemporally, as idealized and exotic, isolated and authentically living others, torn out of the wider contemporary and socio-economic and socio-historical context.

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, the promotion of Aboriginal people and their cultures has played a significant role in the marketing of Australia to tourists particularly since the 1990s (see, for example, Craik 2001; Moscardo and Pearce 1999; Waitt 1999; Zeppel 1998a). The images of indigenous Australians reproduced within much tourism media conform to a dominant stereotype that represents Aboriginal Australians in
traditional cultural contexts and deny the realities of contemporary Aboriginal life and culture. Tourism imagery presents a romanticised and exoticised view of Aboriginal Australians that has long been central to the Western imagination of native people:

Most images in the West of Australian Aborigines are of a ‘primitive’, ‘tribal’ people – the uncivilised ‘dying race’ of the anthropologist, *National Geographic* and documentary films; the dark-skinned savages of cultural evolutionist texts; the scary nature-people of ‘Crocodile Dundee; the ‘stone age artists’ of Australian travel brochures. The images are of naked primitives with their boomerangs, stone axes and spears, their ancestral sites and secret rituals, their traditional songs, dances and Dreamtime stories, their bark paintings and body decorations – living in harmony with nature, blending into the flora and fauna. (Jordan and Weedon 1995: 489-490)

Certainly, these stereotypical images are in stark contrast to the realities of much Aboriginal life in Australia and only serve to suggest a false picture of contemporary Aboriginal societies. Yet, such imagery has remained central to the presentation of Aboriginal Australia in tourism advertisements. Waitt (1997; 1999) for instance, analysed images produced by the Australian Tourist Commission for the *Brand Australia* campaigns and found indigenous people presented as ‘exotic primitives’ and ‘noble savages’ inseparable from the Outback landscape. Such images serve to sell Australia ‘as an escape from civilisation to a primordial timeless world … [where Aboriginal people] live in perfect harmony with their environment’ (Waitt 1997: 50).

The dominant stereotype of indigenous Australians constructed in contemporary tourism imagery is of a primitive and timeless pan-Aboriginal culture, represented by black-bodied men living in the Outback, connected to the land both spiritually and physically, with a focus on the traditional and tribal aspects of Aboriginal life. This stereotype serves to construct Aboriginal Australians as the exotic and ‘authentic Other’, and denies spatial and temporal differences as well as the cultural diversity and complexity of Aboriginal society. The stereotype also perpetuates the myth that ‘real’ Aboriginal people live in the outback, in the desert regions of Australia, and not in contemporary urban society (Simondson 1995; Zeppel 1998a; 1998b; 1998c).
According to indigenous academic Tony Birch (1993: 14), the creation and celebration of this ‘real and ‘authentic’ Aboriginal Australian is ‘exploited for economic gain’; it is a ‘marketable product [that] has no relationship to the actual cultures of Aboriginal people beyond appropriation and exploitation’.

But of course the overwhelming majority of Aboriginal Australians are not these exotic natives of the white Western imagination (Jordan and Weedon 1995). An atrocious and somewhat recent colonial history has involved violent and brutal attempts to assimilate and integrate Aboriginal Australians into European Australian society, resulting in genocide and the denial of civil rights and basic human rights. Government policies over the past hundred years have seen indigenous Australians forcibly removed from their land, children forcibly removed from their families, and the suppression of identity and language. The reality is that large numbers of Aboriginal people have been uprooted, oppressed and demoralised, many live in shanty towns and remote reserves, and face the difficulties associated with poverty, alcoholism and health (Jordan and Weedon 1995). Birch (1993: 13) argues that the stereotypes of Aboriginal people as an inferior native race, and the categorising of Aboriginal people into racial types (such as ‘real’ and ‘half-caste’) is a creation of Australian colonial society perpetuated in an effort to ‘justify its destructive policies and brutal practices’.

According to indigenous academic and anthropologist Marcia Langton, what has emerged in media representations of Aboriginality is the development and promulgation of two dominant stereotypes of Aboriginal people both of which are inherently racist in nature. These stereotypes are the ‘real Aborigine’ of the Outback and the fringe dwelling ‘drunken Aborigine’ (Langton 1993a; 1993b; Oxenham 1999). Langton (1993b) has noted that the ‘drunken Aborigine’ is also one of the most enduring stereotypes – a colonial construction that neutralises the reality of alcohol as an ‘agent of seduction’. Aboriginal people, therefore, are narrowly represented in various media as either the ‘noble savage’ or the ‘ignoble savage’ (Meadows 2001: 38). In either context, Aboriginal people are grouped together as homogenous, their cultural diversity not recognised or represented, and they are treated as an undifferentiated Other. It is the stereotype of the ‘real Aborigine’ of the desert – the Outback – that permeates tourism imagery and other popular cultural forms, such as film (Langton 1993a).
Representations of Aboriginal culture in tourism mobilise the discourse of primitivism (Deutschlander and Miller 2003; Simondson 1995; Waitt 1997), also known as ‘the anti-modernist discourse’ (Smith 2000). In their study of Aboriginal cultural tourism in Canada, Deutschlander and Miller (2003) highlight two major elements central to this discourse – spirituality, and respect for nature and animals – both of which can be applied to tourism representations of Aboriginal culture in Australia. For instance, Aboriginal spirituality, commonly referred to as the Dreamtime or the Dreaming, is a fundamental aspect of indigenous tourism promotion in Australia (Zeppel 1998a), with the ‘mythology of the Aboriginal ‘dreamtime’ stories and legends [offering] the kind of new or authentic experience so increasingly sought after by travellers today’ (Hollinshead 1988: 187). In recent years, Aboriginal Dreamtime stories have also been popularised in other media forms, for example, in the popular books Songlines (Chatwin 1987) and Mutant Message from Down Under (Morgan 1991). The representations of Aboriginal culture in these ways, however, are confined to certain parts of Australia, particularly the desert areas of the Northern Territory (Zeppel 2000).

Western attempts to understand the Australian desert – The Outback, The Red Centre – draw upon Aboriginal discourses of spirituality and traditional culture. Representations of desert landscapes as the ‘antithesis of materialism’ (Haynes 1998: 6) have resulted in clichéd interpretations (which are recycled endlessly by the tourism industry) of the Outback as ‘an eternal timeless land, unchanged since antiquity’ (Haynes 1998: 260). Alongside the presentation of the land as unchanging and timeless, is the presentation of its indigenous inhabitants as also unchanging and timeless (Lowenthal 1978). So, whilst Australia’s desert landscape has achieved iconographic status as an image of Australia, so too have Australian Aboriginal people and their cultures, who seemingly offer ways of understanding its mysticism. For instance, the ‘timeless frame of the Dreaming’ conveys to tourists:

[T]hat the ‘authentic’ Australia exists at the Centre because that is where the ‘real’ Australian is to be found – a stereotypical Aboriginal figure, culturally identical with his or her pre-contact ancestors. (Haynes 1998: 264)
Certainly, the Outback has always been a prominent feature of the tourism promotion of Australia, and as awareness of the Outback has increased, so too has the number of tourists who include an Outback component in their Australian travels (Craik 2001). Modern day tourist ‘pilgrimages’ to the Outback are undertaken by travellers who are searching not only for experiences with the desert wilderness, but also with Aboriginal people and their cultures in traditional tribal contexts. The linkage between the Australian Outback and Aboriginal culture is a ‘key relationship within tourist perceptions’ of this part of Australia (Ryan and Huyton 2002: 632).

McGrath (1991: 122), in writing of the Outback myth, argues that it provides Australians with a ‘distant past’ that is related to the uniqueness of the desert landscape and its authenticity as an ancient Aboriginal land. It is also this uniqueness, or strangeness, that contributes to the significance of particular sites such as Uluru (formerly Ayers Rock) as an international tourist attraction. McGrath (1991: 123) explains:

In their imaginations, the outback is where white Australians negotiated their present. As a highly flexible mythological site and signifier, it easily incorporates new historical traditions … By going there and ‘seeing it’, by witnessing living Aborigines in their own country, by breathing in the unpolluted air of the outback, such travellers enact rituals of colonial sanctification.

As the quintessential image of the Outback, the ‘symbolic centre of the Australian nation’, Uluru is incorporated into the national identity of ‘settler’ Australia, exemplifying the ‘myth of the outback’ (McGrath 1991: 115). Fiske, Hodge and Turner (1987: 123) argue that the power of this symbolism is illustrated by the metaphoric terms used to describe Uluru, such as the ‘Red Centre’ or ‘Heart’ of Australia. Uluru is seen as ‘sacred’ to ‘white’ Australia (Hamilton 1984: 377), it is the ‘sacred centre’ of ‘settler cosmology’ (Marcus 1997: 30). It has been argued that the appropriation of Uluru into national consciousness as a spiritual centre results in a transformation of meaning for Aboriginal people who are left with no unique cultural focus (Haynes 1998), including the loss of ‘identification of themselves with their country’ (Marcus 1997: 29). Additionally, while ‘settler’ Australians legitimate their claim to Aboriginal
land, and rely on the Outback to provide a distant past, tourism and travel media, including guidebooks, promote Uluru as magical, mystical, sacred and spiritual in a way that depends on connotations of a timeless Aboriginal culture (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987: 125).

Uluru is a renowned international tourist destination – a symbolic tourist site. Due to inextricable links to Aboriginal culture in the representation of Uluru, there are bound to be issues of contestation in relation to representations of the place. Edensor (1998) uncovers the dominant ways in which symbolic tourist sites are represented and regulated in his study of tourists to the Taj Mahal in India. For instance, he identifies various discourses of the Taj Mahal which are underpinned by colonial, nationalist and religious narratives. Edensor argues that symbolic tourist sites should be viewed within diverse spatial and representational networks in a globalised economy. The ‘symbolic spatial framework’ comprises three ‘imagined geographies’ of tourist spaces: the colonial, the sacred and the national (Edensor 1998: 8), and these spatial frameworks emerge out of particular times and places and are incorporated into larger symbolic geographies and popular narratives. Moreover, he contends that tourist spaces are produced through representation and the operation of power plays a dominant role in the construction of symbolic tourist sites (Edensor 1998).

Hamilton (1984) suggests that the construction and representation of Aboriginal experiences as central to the Outback experience is a dominant contradiction with regard to tourism in Central Australia. She cites a study conducted by the Northern Territory Tourist Commission which found that one of the main expectations of tourists to Uluru was to have contact with Aboriginal people, and that a large proportion of visitors, both international and domestic, expressed disappointment that they, in fact, did not have experiences with Aboriginal people and cultures. She argues that it is difficult to envisage how tourists will satisfy their expectations of contact with Aboriginal culture in the Northern Territory given that:

Only a handful of Aboriginal people [live there, and] most of them wish to lead a normal, quiet life just like anybody else. To the tourist, the Aboriginal is an object
of his or her vacation gaze, something to be photographed and taken away as a souvenir of ‘the real thing’ in the Great Outback. (Hamilton 1984: 377)

Although Hamilton made this observation twenty years ago it is still very relevant today, as Aboriginal people are still represented as an integral element of the Outback landscape (Simondson 1995; Ryan and Huyton 2002; Waitt 1999; 1997; Zeppel 1998a). An issue that emerges here relates to the contradictions between what is represented in tourism imagery and, consequently, how tourism and travel experiences are interpreted and negotiated. In order to understand the fundamental tensions that exist in such representations it is necessary to undertake a more detailed discussion of the politics of representation and interpretation.

Tourism as a Mediated Activity: The Politics of Interpretation

The construction and reproduction of meanings in tourism, and the major ways in which different travellers and tourists make sense of people, places and objects occurs through mediation. In his edited collection on tourism and culture, Erve Chambers (1997a) asserts that tourism is a mediated activity:

This mediation intervenes between and helps shape the relationships of the parties we usually think of as tourism’s hosts and guests. Recognition of tourism as a mediated activity, subject to a wide variety of interventions and an equally diverse array of interpretations as to the meaning of those interventions, encourages us to pay more systematic attention to those actors and institutions that stand outside of the host/guest relationship but that so greatly influence the consequences of tourism. (Chambers 1997a: 3-4)

In viewing and understanding tourism as a mediated activity, it becomes clear that discourses, representations, and images continue to construct the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990a). The experiences of tourists are mediated through various ‘gatekeepers’ of information-providing intermediaries situated between the traveller and their travelled destination, such as commercial travel agents, local tour guides and travel guidebooks.
Integral to the arguments developed in this thesis is that these intermediaries control the knowledge that is imparted to potential tourists and travellers and wield a considerable amount of power over the representation and interpretation of a destination and the subsequent travel experience. MacCannell (1989), in his discussion on the nature of tourist attractions, highlights the important role of ‘markers’ in the mediation process. He argues that tourist attractions comprise a sight, a tourist and a marker – the marker is the element of an attraction which legitimises its inclusion within tourism. In other words, markers signify an attraction as worthy of the tourist gaze. He states that some interpretation is necessary – some signifying information – that informs the viewer of the significance of particular attributes of the attraction. Markers are not just signs, but also guides (including tour guides and texts, such as guidebooks) that act as interpreters by imparting information and relaying messages about sites and sights. These markers provide ‘a piece of information about a sight’ and, by their presence, contribute to ‘sight sacralization’ (MacCannell 1989: 41). Markers, therefore, play the role of interpreter, and, in cultural tourism, methods of interpretation are incorporated into the visitor experience with the primary goal being to educate tourists.

A commonly cited definition of interpretation comes from Freeman Tilden (1977: 8) who defined interpretation (particularly in relation to heritage interpretation) as:

An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, through illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.

Black and Weiler (2003: xiii) point out that empirical evidence suggests that quality interpretation (and tour guiding) are ‘vital components of a satisfying visitor experience’. Interpretation of places, peoples and cultures is viewed as necessary in tourism experiences with culture and heritage because meanings are not always self-evident (Uzzell 1998: 17). Cultural (and heritage) interpretation occurs at a number of levels and, according to Uzzell (1998), there are a range of issues that need to be considered in the discussion of interpretation. For example, one level of interpretation is that presented to visitors at museums or cultural centres, and to tourists by tour guides.
and guidebooks. On another level are the people who do the interpreting, that is, the people who construct exhibits and displays, the educators of tour guides, and the writers of guidebooks. It is at this level that many contradictions can occur and power relations and power structures may be articulated due to (predominantly covert) communication of political, social and cultural ideologies and discourses. As Ballantyne (1998: 2) argues, those who play the role of interpreters in tourism need to consider ‘the decisions they make concerning choice of themes, stories and messages and their likely impact upon visitor knowledge, attitudes and behaviour’. Often, however, they are working within guidelines set by others and within a complex, yet often unacknowledged, set of social and cultural beliefs and power relations.

Another aspect of interpretation that should be considered is the way by which audiences respond to the dominant interpretations prescribed by others. Although it could be argued that ‘tourists rely on information that is passed down to them by faceless experts’ (Dann 1996a: 76), Uzzell (1998: 18) points out two main theoretical differences between dominant conceptions of the audience – the audience can be viewed as either ‘meaning-takers’ or ‘meaning-makers’. In other words, one assumption is that the audience is a passive consumer and in this sense ‘interpretation becomes a form of manipulation’ (Uzzell 1998: 17). However, the opposing view sees the audience as actively making sense and meanings out of the dominant (packaged) interpretations and relating these to their own experiences, expectations and views of the world (Uzzell 1998: 18). The audience can thus be treated as actively reading and interpreting texts within a framework of social and cultural attitudes, values and beliefs. Indeed, ‘truth’ is contestable, and interpretation presents ‘perspectives on the world which encourage visitors to question and explore different understandings, values and viewpoints’ (Uzzell and Ballantyne 1998: 170). The politics of interpretation thus becomes evident as ‘places, processes and events are invariably subject to multiple or competing interpretations’, and that ‘subjective interpretations of the world are presented as if they were objectively true’ (Uzzell 1998: 15). It is the competing and contradicting interpretations of people and cultures that have become the subjects of academic attention, particularly in relation to the interpretation of indigenous cultures (see, for example, Brown 1993; Dahles 2001; Fine 1988).
Craik (1998) explores in detail what she terms the ‘interpretative mismatch’ in cultural tourism. She challenges the view of many tourism advocates who suggest that cultural tourism enables cross-cultural understanding to take place and notes that there is limited evidence to suggest that cultural tourism brings people and cultures together. Essentially she argues that because the ‘process of intercultural communication is mediated in multiple ways … the ideals of tourism are often very discrepant from the realities of tourist transactions’ (Craik 1998: 115-6). There are, therefore, various tensions and inconsistencies, and tourism can reinforce existing prejudices and stereotypes and can actually promote conflict. In this sense, tourism ‘generates tensions, unease, downsides, impacts, misunderstandings, and cultural conflict through a range of unintended consequences’ (Craik 1998: 116). In relation to interpretation, Craik (1998: 116) further states that ‘there are discrete and contradictory interpretative practices (intentions, discourses and texts, interpretations, rhetoric) embedded in the three key agents of the tourist transactions’. She argues that tourism is ‘underpinned by a fundamental interpretative mismatch between the key agents and agencies involved in tourism’ (Craik 1998: 117).

Cultural interpretation as a process of mediation can take on various forms and, as mentioned above, there are two dominant avenues within which tourists encounter cultural interpretation, that is, at interpretative sites and through interpreters on-site. Particularly in relation to indigenous cultural interpretation, interpretative techniques used at sites such as museums and cultural centres are described as ‘hot’ (Uzzell and Ballantyne 1998) and ‘living’ (Craik 1998) interpretation. Uzzell and Ballantyne (1998: 169) define ‘hot interpretation’ as interpretation that has an affective impact and, as such, provides a ‘powerful, evocative and emotional experience’ and the information provided is seen as being value-laden. Craik (1998: 120) states that the purpose of hot interpretation is to provoke visitors:

[T]o take charge of making sense of the tourist phenomena by applying their own frames of meaning and relating attractions to their own experiences. Tourism, here, is about the manufacture of meanings about ourselves through the medium of tourist otherness.

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Uzzell and Ballantyne (1998: 168) further argue that ‘hot’ issues include the interpretation of Aboriginal cultural heritage and, as such, the approach of ‘hot’ interpretation would focus on the ‘positive role played by Aborigines in Australian society, the nature of cultural beliefs and practices today, land rights, massacre sites, life on mission stations and the stolen generation’. These ‘hot’ issues are addressed in a variety of tourism interpretative sites such as at cultural centres, through on-site interpreters such as tour guides on guided tours, and, significantly, within interpretative texts, such as guidebooks.

In addition to the interpretation provided at cultural sites, cultural interpretation is also presented to those people who take part in organised guided tours. In such contexts, tour guides, guidebooks, and other printed interpretative media, mediate understanding. In his analysis of tourism as a language of social control, Dann (1996a) speaks of the control mechanisms that are in place at destinations particularly when tourists partake in organised tours. With reference to MacCannell’s (1989) stages of sight sacralization (naming, framing and elevation, enshrinement, mechanical and social construction), Dann (1996a: 94) argues that these stages ‘combine to control attitudes and behaviour in the beholder’. Sites are named and marked out as ‘attractions’ and the guide:

[S]eeks to persuade the tourist that it is indeed a ‘must see’, when it is framed and elevated there is the tacit command not to damage the exhibits either physically or verbally, and when it is enshrined the visitors surrender their identities to the venerated objects of their gaze. Thereafter, sightseers are encouraged to persuade others to undertake the tour, to become, as it were, guides themselves as part of a cyclical process. (Dann 1996a: 94)

Dann (1996a) discusses three types of tours and the differences and variations in levels of social control between them. First, he looks at the ‘organised coach tour’ which is when the entire holiday is based around a tour. These tours are primarily associated with the ‘organised mass tourist’ who travels within an ‘environmental bubble’ (Cohen 1979) and is characterised by ‘encapsulation’ (Dann 1996a: 95) because tourists are isolated within the comfort and safety of the tour bus. Once the tour is over they are further ‘encapsulated’ in luxury hotels. Such tourists remain outsiders to the sights and people.
of the destination and do not become ‘part of the experience’. Second, Dann looks at ‘adventure tours’ which he argues are often just as restricting as the organised coach tours as tourists are still controlled or manipulated by tour guides, even though adventure tours are promoted as being the opposite to mass organised tours. Third, Dann discusses ‘walking tours’ where the levels of social control differ due to the various degrees of tour organisation. That is, walking tours can be guided, or organised groups, through to independent walking tours. Dann argues that independent tours can be just as constraining as those that are guided by people because of the nature of the interpretative media (for example, guidebooks) that are used.

A significant amount of literature relating to academic debates on cultural interpretation in tourism examines the role of the tour guide and the politics of interpretation in guiding, with tour guides being viewed as key mediators of knowledge within the tourism experience. Certainly, the dominant roles and dimensions of the tour guide can also, to some extent, be applied to guidebooks which function as a ‘surrogate tour guide’ when used by tourists at a destination (Bhattacharyya 1997: 373). Dahles (2001: 131) points out that tourism based on cultural heritage in particular ‘demands a specific body of knowledge and a high standard of tour guiding’. However, this area is still relatively under-researched, and there is a lack of critical empirical research regarding the influence of guides on the knowledge gained by the audience within the tourism experience. The literature focuses on a number of issues including: the role of the tour guide (for example, Almagor 1985; Cohen 1985; Fine and Speer 1985; Holloway 1981; Katz 1985); the interactions and social encounters of tour guides (for example, Pearce 1984); guides as interpreters of culture, heritage and the environment (for example, Howard 1997; Ryan and Dewar 1995); the role of the guide in youth tourism (Cohen, Ifergan and Cohen 2002); and the politics of tour guiding, particularly in relation to competing discourses (for example, Bowman 1992; Brown 1993; Dahles 2001).

According to Dahles (2001: 131), academic interest in tour guiding has become increasingly prevalent because ‘tour guiding constitutes a strategic factor in the representation of a tourist destination area and in influencing the quality of the tourist experience’. Cohen (1985) identifies two principal roles of the tour guide – as ‘leader’ and as ‘mediator’. His description of these two types of guide is based on his historical
analysis of guiding whereby two original roles were distinguished, the ‘pathfinder’ and the ‘mentor’. He describes these as antecedents of the modern tourist guide, or professional guide. The role of the guide as ‘leader’ includes both the instrumental and social components of the tour. The responsibility of the guide is to ensure the smooth running of the tour by giving accurate directions, ensuring access to attractions and effectively controlling the group. Instrumental leadership refers to those activities of the guide which ‘relate to his [sic] responsibility for the smooth accomplishment of the tour as an ongoing enterprise’ (Cohen 1985: 11). The social component of the tour leaders role relates to the ‘responsibility for the cohesion and morale of the touring party’ (Cohen 1985: 12). Cohen, however, argues that the role of the modern tour guide has shifted away from being primarily logistical to focusing on the facilitation and mediation of the experience. In other words, the role of the guide has moved away from merely leading tours to becoming ‘mediators’ of the tourist experience, where communication is considered to be the principal component of the tour guide’s role. As mediators, tour guides arbitrate between the hosts and guests, between the tour operators and the tourists, and between the tour leader and the tourist scene (Dahles 2001: 134). Therefore, the guide as mediator would include the instrumental components of leadership, but there is also a stronger focus on the components of interactional mediation and communicative mediation.

The communicative component of the tour guide’s role incorporates selection, information, interpretation and fabrication (Cohen 1985: 14-16). First, ‘selection’ refers to the role of the guide in pointing out ‘objects of interest’ that are selected and deemed worthy of the attention of tourists. Cohen argues that in this sense the tourist experience is manipulated in that objects of interest are selected and tourists are shown what the guide wants them to see but ‘more importantly they will not see what he [sic] does not want them to see’ (Cohen 1985: 14). Second, guides are information providers, they are the disseminators of information and knowledge. Cohen points out, however, that the information imparted is rarely neutral; rather, ‘it frequently reflects the information policy of the tourist establishment or of the official tourist authorities’ (Cohen 1985: 15). As such, the information provided may engender wider social, cultural or political issues that may influence tourists’ impressions and attitudes. Third, interpretation is one of the key areas whereby guides mediate encounters between cultures – that is, between
the travelling culture and the travelled culture – and, in this sense, the guide acts as ‘culture-broker’ (Cohen 1985: 16). Cohen points out that such interpretation is generally the ‘translation of the strangeness of a foreign culture into a cultural idiom familiar to the visitors’ (Cohen 1985: 15). Finally, fabrication refers to ‘outright invention or deception’ whereby the representation or interpretation provided by the guide is false and fabricated. Indeed, Fine and Speer (1985: 82) describe tour guide performances ‘as an elaboration of narratives and anecdotes’.

Dahles (2001: 134) acknowledges that the dominant role of the modern tour guide is still as a mediator of the tourist experience. However, she states that this view is not unproblematic and that it often provides an idealised view of guiding. By this she means that mediation implies a harmonious relationship between all parties involved (for example the between hosts and guests, the tour guides and the hosts) but in reality these relationships are not as innocent or unproblematic as such a perspective would imply. Guides are often controlled by rules and regulations which expect them to deliver pre-fabricated narratives and stories. In this sense, guides ‘sell images, knowledge, contacts, souvenirs, access, authenticity, ideology, and sometimes even themselves’ (Dahles 2001: 134, original emphasis). The ability of the guide to sell, and to make profits for themselves and for their enterprises, adds another dimension to the role of the tour guide: guides as entrepreneurs (Dahles 2001: 134).

Within the experiences of independent travellers, it is commonly assumed that there will be fewer intermediaries than there will be in the experiences of mass tourists. Indeed, McKercher and du Cros (2002: 163) state that many independent travellers have ‘no need for gatekeepers associated with the commercial tourism trade’ although they might selectively use some promotional literature such as internet sites. The evidence shows, however, that independent travellers are the primary users of independently published tourism media as opposed to media produced by tourism marketing organisations (McKercher and du Cros 2002), such as travel guidebooks published by companies such as Lonely Planet. As Williams and Shaw (1995: 18) have noted, individual traveller decisions in relation to the travel experience are ‘increasingly dependent on the opinions of travel writers’. Guidebooks play an integral role in the tourism experience, particularly those of backpackers. They are the markers that construct a place or
attraction, they describe and define what the place represents, and they mediate the traveller’s relationship with the travelled destination. Accordingly, guidebooks create expectations and influence the ways in which people see and understand places and cultures. A more detailed understanding of guidebooks in this context is presented below.

**Travel Guidebooks: Structuring Gazes and Framing Experiences**

Guidebooks must be understood as cultural texts within the broader understandings of representation and interpretation in tourism, discussed above. Guidebooks are a form of travel literature primarily used for on-the-road factual information and advice, and are most often purchased once the decision to travel to a particular destination has been made (Simmons 2001). Thus, guidebooks are unlike other types of tourism media, such as the advertisements, brochures and internet sites produced by destination marketing organisations. These media are promotional in nature and intended to sell destinations and are most often encountered by tourists before they undertake a travel experience. Although guidebooks may be used at all three stages (that is pre-trip, on-trip, and post-trip) of the travel experience (Dann 1996a), they are predominantly read whilst travelling and, therefore, have a more direct, immediate and situational impact on their readers. This impact can be considered as quite a dynamic relationship (McGregor 2000) as guidebooks not only shape expectations but, perhaps more significantly, they frame experiences. Further, Lew (1991: 126) notes that ‘possibly more important than the factual information they contain, guidebooks provide a framework for experiencing a place and relaying that experience to others upon returning home’.

McKercher and du Cros (2002: 166) note that guidebooks ‘have greater scope to present a more balanced and detailed overview of the destination’ than other forms of tourism media. In so doing, guidebooks present some background information on, for example, the cultural values of the people of a particular destination, as well as suggestions for culturally appropriate behaviour (McKercher and du Cros 2002: 166). Tourism brochures, on the other hand, tend to use colourful imagery and language to describe

people and places in an exaggerated style (Bhattacharyya 1997). However, like all tourism media, guidebooks do have limited space in which to convey messages about the places, peoples and cultures ‘which means that the message must be condensed to its core features’ (McKercher and du Cros 2002: 166). In his discussion of guidebooks, Lew (1991: 124) states that the message reflects the viewpoints and interests of the authors and/or editors as well as the market for which the guidebook is written. In relation to the market for which guidebooks are written, Bhattacharyya (1997: 371) notes that they are primarily aimed at audiences of independent travellers and, although they are ‘deliberately planned to satisfy diverse budgets’, they still ‘tend to be more appealing to the low-budget, independent traveller’. Until recently, users of most ‘alternative guidebooks’ were almost exclusively backpackers and independent travellers; however, there has been a significant increase in the range of users, titles and publications (Sørensen 2003).

In his categorisation of tourism promotional materials, Dann (1996a: 156) positions guidebooks as ‘written and visual/sensory media’ which, in advance and during the journey, advise and direct travellers to ‘what they must see’ at particular destinations. In other words, they ‘mark’ (MacCannell 1989) what aspects of a place are worthy of the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990a). Furthermore, when used at the destination, the guidebook is a ‘surrogate tour guide’ playing a significant role in mediating the travel experience and the traveller’s relationships with the travelled – the destination and the host population (Bhattacharyya 1997: 373). Guidebooks not only mediate knowledge, but they also construct it, playing a communicative role in ‘tutoring’ (McGregor 2000) and educating readers through the provision of detailed but selected information. The educational role of guidebooks is reflected in the statement by Desforges (1998: 178) that ‘discourses of education point towards a ‘framing’ of the world in which knowledge and experiences can be gathered or ‘collected’ through travel’. Guidebooks can, therefore, be considered as powerful political documents. As cultural texts, guidebooks have the power to shape, frame and define a place and its people, and, in turn, play a significant role in influencing the experiences, opinions and perceptions of their readers.

Guidebooks also have the power to control the travel experience by informing readers how to behave when they are at a destination and how to interact with the locals;
thereby constructing the traveller as a particular type of gazing and experiencing subject. In this sense, Dann (1996a: 84) argues that guidebooks can be considered an excellent example of the ‘language of tourism’ as a form of ‘social control’ – guidebooks have the ‘ability to control both receivers and referents of their discourse’. This particular argument is further summed up by McGregor (2000: 46) who says that guidebook texts cannot simply be considered as markers of culture, they ‘are also dynamic objects which have a massive amount of power over how an individual, or whole culture, comes to see the world’ and, indeed, themselves in relation to the travel experience. Guidebooks are certainly an important generative source of ‘systems of knowledge and belief’ among Western tourists (Laderman 2002: 87). Despite the integral role that guidebooks play in travel experiences, they have infrequently been the objects of systematic academic study, although their role has been identified and discussed in some very significant works.

Barthes (1973), in his seminal collection Mythologies, presents a semiotic exploration of the travel guidebook Blue Guide, which he positions as a cultural text that provides a socially and culturally constructed lens through which travellers come to see and understand landscapes. The beautiful, extraordinary, natural scenery of landscapes is exalted and ‘elevated by the Blue Guide to aesthetic existence’, whilst ‘the human life of the country disappears to the exclusive benefit of its monuments’ (Barthes 1973: 81-82). Certain sites are selected, suppressing ‘the reality of the land and that of its people’, the gaze becomes standardised, and ‘the Guide becomes … the very opposite of what it advertises, an agent of blindness’ (Barthes 1973: 83). Dann (2003) cites the works of other French commentators who, like Barthes, have examined guidebooks. Gritti (1967: 29), for instance, also discusses the Blue Guide and the ‘closed circuit of obligatory stops at places sacralized by guidebooks’, and Burgelin (1967: 72-73) speaks of the manipulation of tourists by guidebooks; they are the ‘prisoners of Baedeker’ and ‘chained to capitalism’ (cited in Dann 2003: 469).

Boorstin (1987) too discussed the power exerted by the guidebook over the tourist when he argued that modern guidebooks not only create and raise tourist expectations, but they provide ‘the natives … with a detailed and itemized list of what is expected of them and when’ (Boorstin 1987: 104). In other words, Boorstin is identifying the role of
the guidebook in constructing the toured as well as the touring culture. He discussed the *Baedeker* guidebook’s (first published in German in 1829) meticulous descriptions that not only informed tourists of what they should expect at destinations (and thus saving his readers from unnecessary encounters) but, also, instructed tourists as to how they should behave. Tourists were informed about how to dress and how to act – how to be ‘a decent, respectable, tolerable member of his own country, so as not to disappoint or shock the native spectators in the country he was visiting’ (Boorstin 1987: 105).

Moreover, Boorstin (1987: 105) suggests that the ‘star system’ was ‘*Baedeker’s* most powerful invention’. This system ranked attractions with two stars for the extraordinary, one star for the merely noteworthy, and no stars for places not worth a visit (but, ironically still worth a mention). *Baedeker* guidebooks are part of Boorstin’s broader critique of tourism and, as such, they are positioned as dictators of tourist expectations. Thus, according to Boorstin, guidebooks become pseudo and inauthentic tools of manipulation – of the tourist by the tourism industry.

Many travellers and tourists rely on advice from guidebooks to construct their itineraries. Having been previously exposed to visual images of destinations, guidebooks confirm for travellers what they should gaze upon and what sights are worthy of seeing. In this sense, the tourist gaze is systematically structured and directed. As Dann (1996a: 83) comments:

> Thanks to the previous exposure to glossy photographs of these sights, tourists know what they must see – the norms of the trip are already implanted in their minds. In the guidebook these norms become normalized through stars, asterisks and boxing off procedures. The sights and attractions are decontextualized, detached from culture, museumized and embellished for visitation. They become a *spectacle* – an absolute must. Tourists are thereby reduced to being ‘chasers of images’ … confirming tautologically by experience what they have been told to see.

What has emerged as tourism has expanded, is a diverse range of guidebooks, some of which are aimed at mainstream mass tourists while at the other end of the spectrum are those that are aimed at alternative (youth) tourists (Lew 1991). In relation to the latter,
Cohen (1973) argued that the institutionalisation of drifting in the 1960s and 1970s was a result of the introduction of facilities and services for the youth tourist market (for example cheap air, bus and train fares), and the establishment of travel patterns and itineraries (see Chapter 2). He also argued that an example of the institutionalisation and specialisation of this form of independent youth travel is the guidebook:

The drifter of earlier days would presumably reject it as spoiling the spontaneity of his [sic] experiences … [guidebooks] are a neat example of the way in which the tourist-establishment capitalises on the counter-cultural consumer demands. (Cohen 1973: 96)

Today, there are numerous popular guidebooks, for instance, *Lonely Planet, Let’s Go, Rough Guide, Fodor* and *National Geographic Traveller* (to name but a few), each of which is aimed at somewhat different markets of travellers and tourists. When *Lonely Planet* was first published in the 1970s it was not a mainstream publication; however, today *Lonely Planet* is a major international enterprise making millions of dollars in annual sales and producing over 250 publications (Butcher 2003). *Lonely Planet* has been criticised, in both academic and popular literature (for example, in Alex Garland’s 1997 popular novel, and subsequent feature film, *The Beach*), for commercialising and capitalising on the demands of independent travellers and their quest for experiences that are not part of the mass. Indeed, Butcher (2003: 45) suggests that *Lonely Planet* was ‘once associated with independence, freedom and adventure’ but is now ‘in the frame of spawning generations of mass backpackers’. *Lonely Planet* has, nevertheless, come to symbolise ‘backpackers, their activities, norms and values’ (Sørensen 2003: 860). Mowforth and Munt (1998) suggest that the publication of guidebooks is motivated by the tourist desire for real and authentic experiences. Guidebooks supposedly allow travellers to move away from the mass tourism industry – to get ‘off the beaten track’ – to find more real, natural and authentic experiences. Using a guidebook is also a marker of one’s independence as a traveller – of one’s status as not being part of the mass tourism phenomenon.

In Lew’s (1991) analysis of four guidebooks for Singapore, he examined the ‘portrayal of place’ through a content analysis of tourist attractions. In choosing four different
guidebooks he aimed to identify how different perceptions of place were constructed for the different tourist types that he defined as ‘mainstream mass tourists’, ‘expatriate Americans living in Singapore’, and ‘alternative youth tourists’. The guidebooks analysed were *Papineau’s Guide to Singapore* (a conventional, mainstream publication), *The Singapore Travel Agents Guide* (published by the national tourism organisation), *Living in Singapore* (published by The American Association of Singapore) and the Singapore chapter of the *South East Asia Handbook* (published by Lonely Planet). He found that each of the guidebooks reflected the way in which the reader/audience was imagined. For instance, the guidebooks aimed at mainstream tourists had a heavy focus on shopping and leisure attractions. In contrast, those aimed at alternative youth tourists focused on low cost experiences and traditional culture. They spurned mainstream tourist attractions by promoting ‘out of the ordinary’ experiences. Importantly, therefore, Lew’s findings identify a clear difference in guidebooks aimed as mass tourists and those aimed at alternative youth tourists. These distinctions further suggest the coexistence of mass tourism discourses and traveller discourses. He concluded that each of the guidebooks provided a distinct perspective on Singapore based on its target audience, and that the ‘multifaceted nature of urban environments … allows several different tourist realities to exist within a small area. The content of these different realities are selectively chosen to be congruent with the cultural ideology of different tourist market segments’ (Lew 1991: 136).

Deborah Bhattacharyya (1997), in her study of the *Lonely Planet* guidebook to India, primarily used semiotics as the method of textual analysis to explore the representation of place as well as of indigenous Indians. She examined the narrative style of the book, the images and representations of India in general, and the portrayal of Indian people and their relationships with tourists. Basing her methodology on Cohen’s (1985) analysis of the role of the tour guide (discussed in the above section), Bhattacharyya demonstrates that three of the roles identified by Cohen are also dominant functions of the guidebook, that is: instrumental leadership; interactional mediation; and communicative mediation (eliminating the role of social leadership). She concludes that the primary function of the guidebook is to mediate tourists’ experiences in India ‘in ways that reinforce both certain images of India and certain relationships with Indigenous inhabitants’ (Bhattacharyya 1997: 371).
In order to come to such a conclusion she explored the narrative characteristics of the guidebook and identified two significant aspects of the narrative voice: the claim to authority and the ethical stance (Bhattacharyya 1997: 375). These characteristics are apparent through the use of particular linguistic styles. For example, the ways in which the guidebook exemplifies a claim to knowledge is demonstrated through the use of two distinct narrative strategies. First, the guidebook presents ‘interpretative material without argument’, and second, it presents ‘valuative material in a unitary voice’ (Bhattacharyya 1997: 375). As such, the evaluation made about India and Indians is presented as ‘incontrovertible’ or indisputable and thereby the guidebook constructs and communicates only one image of India. The guidebook is written and researched by a number of different authors, but there is no evidence in the language that differing views would have contributed to the unitary voice presented. Bhattacharyya also provides an analysis of the images of India in the guidebook by examining the sights that are selected and interpreted. She argues that certain sights are selected and marked as ‘must see’ attractions and, in this sense, a guidebook ‘distinguishes the authentic from the inauthentic’ (Bhattacharyya 1997: 379). Through the use of selected photographic images the guidebook focuses only on some aspects of Indian social and cultural life, primarily those which differentiate and mark India as the Other – as spectacle – through imagery of exotic, traditional and colourful locals.

Indeed, the guidebook’s process of textually and visually representing selected aspects of a culture to be worthy of the tourist gaze is similar to the star rating process in Baedeker guidebooks. A question that remains is what is missing from guidebooks’ representations – what aspects are considered not to be worthy of touristic interest and significance. Bhattacharyya highlights three topics that are not included in Lonely Planet India: ordinary and routine everyday life; normative cultural patterns; and contemporary social and cultural developments. Overall, she argues that these omissions comprise an absence of the personal and unique qualities of contemporary Indian life (Bhattacharyya 1997: 388). Bhattacharyya (1997: 387) concludes that the homogenising of Indian culture as spectacle through representation and omission presents India ‘as a sign of western discourse and as such it communicates more about western discourse than about India’.

Another study of the construction of places through words and images within guidebooks was conducted by Carter (1998) who examined the representations of ‘risky’ destinations. He analysed the travel advice sections in selected Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and Lets Go publications because interviewees (defined by Carter as leisure and business travellers) had suggested that these three guidebooks aimed at independent and budget travellers were ‘more trustworthy’ than other sources of information and had reputations for ‘offering progressive advice’ (Carter 1998: 351). The construction of African and Asian destinations as risky and dangerous was textually represented through descriptions of health threats and differentiations based on Otherness. What occurred was the tendency to treat both Africa and Asia as undifferentiated Others yet, within these guidebooks, such Otherness was presented as a positive attribute. However, stereotypes and myths of place and people were perpetuated and reinforced in the guidebooks, and reiterated by the tourists he interviewed.

Whilst the studies discussed, above, have focused on the content of guidebook texts, McGregor (2000) sought to analyse the effects of guidebook texts upon individual travellers. In doing so, he proposed a model for understanding relationships between guidebooks, verbal communication, and tourists’ perceptions and experiences of their destination and, thus, the consequent mental constructions of place. He combined a quantitative content analysis of guidebooks with qualitative interviews with travellers at the destination of interest (Tana Toraja in Indonesia). McGregor (2000) contends that texts, such as guidebooks, need to be understood as ‘dynamic objects’:

[T]hey are not simply markers of a culture. They are also dynamic objects which have a massive amount of power over how an individual or whole culture, comes to see the world. (McGregor 2000: 46)

Acknowledgment of the ‘dynamic properties of texts’ promotes an approach to guidebook analysis that recognises the extent to which readers judge their contents in light of information coming to them from a wide variety of other sources. For instance, McGregor argues that word-of-mouth communication acts simultaneously with texts to influence how travellers come to see and understand the world. At the same time,
however, he found that travellers relied very heavily on texts which were influential in shaping the way they gazed upon features of the destination.

McGregor identifies various perceptual spheres that dominate the tourist gaze – the known, imagined, unknown and unseen – and argues that travellers gaze upon different sites in different ways, depending on the amount and type of prior information that they had been exposed to. First, the ‘known’ refers to those aspects of the destination that travellers have been visually exposed to through photographs supported by verbal or written communication (McGregor 2000: 40). Second, the ‘imagined’ are aspects to which they have not been visually exposed to but ‘are well aware of and anticipate through word-of-mouth or written text’ (McGregor 2000: 40). These are the counter-narratives to the dominant accounts and stereotypes of the ‘known’. Third, the ‘unknown’ refers to the ‘mundane aspects’ of the destination that people are exposed to during travel experiences not written about in guidebooks (McGregor 2000: 40); for instance, normative and routine cultural life (Bhattacharyya 1997). Finally, the ‘unseen’ are those aspects not mentioned in texts and not seen or experienced during travel. The unseen are thus those backstage aspects of the destination (and its people and culture) that are completely removed from the world of the tourist. In his concluding remarks, McGregor (2000: 46) contradicts the commonly held view that travellers have less structured experiences than do mass tourists:

Travelers are not the roaming, romantic free agents they are often portrayed as in academic literature, but a subgroup of tourists whose experience and gaze is heavily structured by a restricted number of non-stigmatized, traveler-friendly texts.

Certainly, the point that McGregor is making here is pertinent to my study. Whilst the literature positions travellers and tourists as being in a binary opposition (see Chapter 2), he argues that travellers are, in fact, a subgroup of tourists. Like the experiences of tourists, the experiences of travellers are structured and mediated; however, there is less of a stigma associated with this mediation as it occurs through guidebooks which are considered as ‘traveller-friendly texts’.

Lew (1991) argues that individual guidebooks have different audiences and, therefore, construct places differently based on the desires of their imagined audiences. Bhattacharyya (1997) provides a framework for the textual analysis of guidebooks, but leaves unanswered the question of the ‘reader response’, that is how travellers use, engage with and negotiate these texts. In this regard, she contends that any analysis of the impact of the guidebook on tourist or traveller behaviour must also take into account the extent to which readers accept or reject the images of a destination represented within the guidebook, and the extent to which their interaction with a destination’s locals are structured by the guidebook (Bhattacharyya 1997: 388). Interestingly, although McGregor makes no reference to Bhattacharyya’s work, he combines a study of guidebooks with traveller interviews to examine the influence of these texts on mental constructions of place. While partially addressing the absence of theoretical and empirical material on the role of guidebooks in constructing experiences of travellers, his study is limited by a lack of qualitative and interpretative analysis of the guidebooks. Furthermore, his focus is on individuals, although he suggests that further study into the relationships between text and cultures would be of value. In his words, the ‘way is open for cultural and tourism researchers to advance textual studies by examining their effects on cultures, rather than the effects of cultures on texts’ (McGregor 2000: 47). Furthermore, each of the guidebooks analysed in previous studies focus on guidebooks in which non-Western experiences remain central. As such, Otherness is not only inherent to the representations, but the spectacle of Otherness relates to the entire destination. There is a need for a study that examines the construction of Otherness in the context of travel texts for a Western industrialised nation, such as Australia, and the way in which they mediate experiences and expectations of international travellers.

**Conclusion**

Representation and interpretation in the context of tourism is ultimately political in purpose and effect. This chapter has demonstrated, through an examination of tourism discourse (of which traveller discourse is one of many), that processes of mediation cannot be separated from broader conceptualisations of power. I have argued that the combined theoretical perspectives of conflict and interaction provide a framework for
exploring these issues, and underpin the development of a critical framework for the analysis of the cultural construction in texts, such as guidebooks. The concept of discourse, operating at the intersection of power and knowledge, is central to understanding representation and interpretation through the perspectives of conflict and interaction. Discourse can be seen as ordering a dynamic field of meanings and offers up powerful ways of seeing and understanding the world. Further, discourse relates not only to language but, also, to practice and the imposition of certain ways of behaving. In this regard, discourse functions to produce, simultaneously, social ‘reality’ and subject positions within that reality.

The capacity of tourism discourse to shape the discursive representation of travelled culture through language and image was explored in the chapter. The representation of indigenous people and their cultures in tourism imagery is overwhelmingly superficial and stereotypical. For instance, I argued that the images of Aboriginal Australians reproduced within much tourism media conform to a romanticised and exoticised idea of Aboriginal people in traditional cultural contexts. Processes of representation and objectification were identified as central elements in the conflict of interests and power relationships entrenched in the interactions between travelling and travelled cultures. I suggested that representations of indigenous cultures used within tourism promotion to elicit tourist desire also function to conceal these power relationships. Further, the capacity of tourist based interaction to expose relationships of power and inequality is, in fact, predicated on the reproduction of those inequalities. Thus a combination of experiences, texts and media can contribute to learning, knowledge and understanding during travel, leading to the possibility for dominant representations to be questioned, challenged and negotiated. Significantly, guidebooks are influential mediators of knowledge and key points of contact with traveller discourse. As dominant sources of information in the travel experience, guidebooks have a prevailing capacity to define and represent places, peoples and cultures and, at the same time, present descriptive and prescriptive information that constructs the traveller and shapes their perspectives and experiences. I have argued in this chapter that academic studies of guidebooks rarely combine the analysis of these cultural texts with qualitative studies of their audiences.
In order to address this gap in the literature, I undertook a study which analysed the ways by which the backpacker to Australia and particular aspects of the travel experience are represented within guidebook texts, and how backpackers engage with texts to negotiate their experiences. The remaining chapters of this thesis draw on this empirical research, employing both textual analysis and audience research specifically to examine the relationships between texts, travellers and travelled cultures. Previous studies of guidebooks, discussed in this chapter, have focused on the ways by which places and cultures are constructed and while an examination of this aspect is a central focus of my study I am also concerned with how the traveller is constructed through words and images in guidebooks. In other words, I explore the role that guidebooks play in mediating ideas about places and cultures, as well as in constructing a particular type of gazing and experiencing traveller. In Chapter 4, below, I present the results of the guidebook analysis that deconstructs representations in guidebooks to examine the construction of the traveller and the travelled culture.
Chapter 4

Constructing Cultures: Deconstructing Representation in Guidebooks

The great namers of tourism were not the explorers, but the magicians of guidebooks … As guidebooks developed, they went on from telling people what to look at, and in what order, to telling them also how something was to be seen. This resulted in a kind of ‘framing’, in which whatever was looked at became isolated from the rest of the world. … Because they told people what to look at and what to see when they looked at it, guidebooks became the principal agency of spellbinding. (Horne 1992: 23-24, original emphasis)

Introduction

In this chapter I analyse three guidebooks aimed at independent travellers – Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and Let’s Go – and focus specifically on the ways in which these texts frame, shape and construct the traveller, the travel experience and the travelled culture. The chapter begins with a consideration of the aims and messages of each of the selected guidebooks. It then moves on to deal with the ways in which the guidebooks, as mediators of the travel experience, educate the reader through various representation and interpretation techniques. In the second section, I discuss the representation of Australia that is constructed in the guidebooks to produce an image that appeals to the independent traveller seeking a unique and authentic experience. In the third section, an analysis of the Northern Territory chapter of the guidebooks is presented, and I examine what the guidebooks say in relation to ‘where to go’ and ‘what to do’ in order to have ‘authentic’ experiences with, and of, Aboriginal people and their cultures. This discussion of the authenticity of places and experiences highlights contradictions that lead to a reframing of authenticity and, in the fourth section, I explore more deeply the construction of the authentic traveller experience with Aboriginal Australia. The fifth section explores the authentication of place and illustrates how particular Northern Territory landscapes are authenticated with reference to narratives of traditional
Aboriginal culture and spirituality. Finally, in section six, further representations of authenticity are explored through a discussion of the presentation of art and cultural objects within the guidebooks.

Framing Interpretations: The Guidebook as Mediator of Knowledge

The majority of the 28 international backpackers who I interviewed for this study were using a guidebook, with only three indicating that they were not. Thus, for the majority, guidebooks were important mediators of their experiences in Australia. Details of the guidebooks being used by each backpacker are presented in Table 4.1, below. The Lonely Planet dominated as the most popular guidebook, with 79% of the backpackers carrying Lonely Planet Australia: Up Front, Outback, Down Under (O’Byrne et al 2000). Only two other guidebooks were being used, with 14% carrying Australia: The Rough Guide (Daly et al 1999) and a further 11% carrying Let’s Go: Australia 2000 (Sheppard et al 2000). Four of the backpackers indicated that they were using more than one of these three guidebooks. Each of the guidebooks covers the destination of Australia as a whole. They are large books of around 1,000 pages divided into a chapter for each state and territory of Australia, and introductory or concluding chapters which provide factual and contextual information (see Appendix C for details on the origin and format of individual guidebooks). These guidebooks provide a wide variety of information from general transport and visa requirements to information about various destinations, sights and activities.

Hereafter, these guidebooks will be referred to as Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and Let’s Go. When quoting from the guidebooks, page number references will be cited as (p.) to maintain consistency and avoid repetition.
Table 4.1
Travel Guidebooks used by the Backpackers

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McGregor (2000: 35) notes that guidebooks such as these three have ‘managed to escape the stigma travelers associate with most tourist-oriented texts, clearly belonging to the ‘good’ traveler world, rather than the ‘bad’ tourist world’. This is interesting considering that each of these ‘alternative guidebooks’ (Sørensen 2003: 859) is now a mainstream publication that is readily available in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Indeed, the publishers of Lonely Planet claim that they are the ‘world’s leading independent travel publisher’ and that they ‘cover every corner of the planet’ (www.lonelyplanet.com). Certainly, for the backpackers of my study, the Lonely
Planet was the most popular choice of guidebook which seems to confirm Laderman’s (2002: 95) claim that the ‘Lonely Planet guidebook message reaches more people than those of other guidebooks’. There is a general consensus within the academic literature that the Lonely Planet publishes the most popular travel guidebooks (Butcher 2003; Laderman 2002; Sørensen 2003; Williams 1998), often being referred to as ‘The Book’ (Butcher 2003; Garland 1997) and ‘The Bible’ (Bhattacharyya 1997). The overwhelming popularity of Lonely Planet is further reflected in the academic literature whereby it is most often the focus of analysis and scholarly critique (for example, Bhattacharyya 1997; Lew 1991; McGregor 2000; see Chapter 3).

The three guidebooks analysed have fundamentally the same objectives in relation to their target audience in that they are all aimed primarily at independent travellers. The various audiences of independent travellers are identified as ‘adventurous travellers’ (Lonely Planet p.16), ‘budget-minded travellers’ (Let’s Go p.v) and ‘independent-minded travellers of all ages on all budgets’ (Rough Guide p.iv). In each case, the independent traveller is positioned as different to the mass tourist. For instance, the cover text of Let’s Go advises the reader to ‘be a traveller, not a tourist … avoid tourist traps, discover local secrets, and create your own adventure’. The traveller is thus constructed in opposition to the tourist from the outset. Furthermore, the reader is encouraged to ‘be a traveller’, not simply to partake in travel. The implication is that the traveller is a fundamentally different kind of being than the tourist, and in many ways is defined as its antithesis. These implicit criticisms of tourism draw on the popular conceptions of travel and tourism (as discussed in Chapter 2) in that independent travel is presented as desirable, positive and to be pursued, whereas mass tourism is negative, undesirable and to be avoided. The independent traveller ethos, therefore, is presented as being achievable through the use of guidebooks – they provide a means through which tourism can be avoided, and the status and experience that comes from travel pursued.

Lonely Planet says its ‘main aim is to help make it possible for adventurous travellers to get out there – to explore and better understand the world’ (p. 16, my emphasis). The publishers of Lonely Planet promote what they refer to as ‘responsible travel practices’ (p. 16). Thus, they position their guidebooks and travel advice within the ‘morally
superior’ (Butcher 2003: 1) alternative tourism framework by focusing on responsible and sustainable travel, as illustrated in the guidebook’s foreword:

At Lonely Planet we believe travellers can make a positive contribution to the countries they visit – if they respect their host communities and spend their money wisely. Since 1986 a percentage of the income from each book has been donated to aid projects and human rights campaigns. (Lonely Planet p.16)

This aim is further reinforced on the Lonely Planet website:

Lonely Planet is passionate about bringing people together, about understanding our world, and about people sharing experiences that enrich everyone’s lives. We aim to inspire people to explore, have fun, and travel often … Travel can be a powerful force for tolerance and understanding. As part of a worldwide community of travellers, we want to enable everyone to travel with awareness, respect and care. (www.lonelyplanet.com)

This clearly defined aim positions the traveller as responsible and aware, and travel as a force for peace and understanding. Indeed, simply by selecting and purchasing the guidebook, the reader has apparently already made a contribution to improving third-world living conditions and ensuring human rights via Lonely Planet’s donation of a percentage of their profit from the sale. By association, Lonely Planet has positioned itself as a ‘force for tolerance and understanding’, as ‘respectful of host communities’, and as making a ‘positive contribution’. The reader is invited to become part of a worldwide community of like-minded individuals who share these values of ‘awareness, respect and care’, and this invitation is facilitated or ‘enabled’ by the reader’s close attention to the information and advice contained within the Lonely Planet publication. From the above passage it can be seen that in constructing the backpacker Lonely Planet mobilises discourses of the adventurous, responsible, and culturally interested traveller. Moreover, they endorse travel as a way to ‘bring people together’ and respect for other cultures is promoted. Lonely Planet, therefore, is actively defining and reinforcing the meanings associated with being a traveller.
Let's Go also aims to appeal to the adventurous traveller; however, it targets the more budget-conscious traveller. This guidebook is described as being ‘researched, written and produced entirely by students who know how to see the world on the cheap’, and these ‘adventurous travellers’ are ‘hired for their rare combination of travel savvy, writing ability, stamina and courage’ (Let’s Go p.v). The publishers of Let’s Go contend that:

> We don’t think of budget travel as the last recourse of the destitute. We believe that it’s the only way to travel. Our books will ease your anxieties and answer your questions about the basics so you can get off the beaten track and explore. (www.letsgo.com)

Promoting the traveller myth of getting ‘off beaten track travel’ is central to the Let’s Go aim and mission, and can be interpreted as a reference to the supposedly ‘authentic’ experiences that exist beyond the well-worn circuits of popular tourism destinations. The publishers of Let’s Go advise their readers that they assist them in making travel happen as their guidebooks can be relied upon for ‘inside information’ on these ‘undiscovered’ sites and sights. Likewise, the ‘travelling on the cheap’ aspect of the Let’s Go message could almost be seen as a kind of insurance against the highly commodified and highly lucrative mass tourism industry. By promoting budget travel, Let’s Go is both encouraging and making it possible for their readers to immerse and interact with local cultures – to have an authentic travel experience.

Rough Guide, while less overt in its self-positioning as a traveller text, and lacking explicit reference to elements of the traveller narrative, such as adventure, responsible travel and authentic experience, still identifies its target market as ‘independent travellers of all ages, on all budgets’ (Rough Guide p.iv). The emphasis on the ‘independent’ traveller highlights the differentiation from the mass tourist common to all three guidebooks. ‘Independent’ potentially refers to both travelling individually (as opposed to mass tourists) and without a structured itinerary imposed by a tour organisation. Rough Guide claims to have been developed to fill a niche apparently ignored by other travel guidebooks concerning aspects of ‘contemporary life – its politics, its culture, its people, and how they lived’ (Rough Guide p.iv). The experience
of culture, therefore, is a central dimension of the *Rough Guide’s* message alongside ‘accounts of every sight, both famous and obscure’. The confluence of these themes can be seen to outline a familiar set of principles – the thoroughly independent traveller should be interested in the ‘obscure’ as much as the well known, and their travels should focus upon experiencing the living culture alongside visiting destinations more commonly associated with mass tourism.

As discussed in Chapter 3, guidebooks play an important role in mediating knowledge and tutoring their readers by providing information and cultural interpretations. In order to appeal to travellers who are known to have the desire to get beyond the contrived images prevalent in mass tourism and its associated promotional media, the guidebooks select and present information in particular ways. It is instructive to examine their presentation in order to understand how the guidebooks promote and define the ‘authentic’ travel experience in relation to people, cultures and landscapes and, also, how they construct the ‘authentic’ traveller.

Guidebooks as mediators are often ‘the only fixed structure with the ability to hold and transfer information and culture from one cohort to the next’ (Sørensen 2003: 859). Bhattacharyya (1997: 375-378) highlights two significant characteristics of the narrative voice that she identifies as the guidebook’s ‘claim to authority’ and ‘ethical stance’. She says that the claim to authority refers to the authoritative way that guidebooks represent places and people with the use of language presenting a particular representation as unified and seamless (Bhattacharyya 1997). The three guidebooks I studied have been written predominantly in an informal narrative voice that MacCannell (2001: 27) notes is characterised by a ‘contemporary style of hip detachment’. These guidebooks are written in the voice of an ‘implicit narrator’ and readers are often referred to by second person pronouns (Bhattacharyya 1997: 375). For example, *Lonely Planet* ‘talks’ to the reader in the statement ‘[t]he first thing you have to realise about Australia is that it’s big, and you’re not going to see very much of it on a two week holiday’ (p.19, my emphasis). Similarly, *Rough Guide* says ‘You could spend months driving around the Outback’ (p.xi, my emphasis).
The language used in these texts, therefore, can be considered somewhat analogous to a conversation between author and reader, where the reader is directly addressed. Ultimately this is a one-way conversation to which the reader cannot directly respond, and information given by the implicit narrator is thus somewhat incontestable. Dann (1996a: 79) points out in relation to conversational language, such as that used in guidebooks, ‘the speaker intends to exert control over the listener, just as an analogous process occurs in written communication between author and reader or advertiser and client’. The guidebooks, however, do invite and encourage readers to respond and contribute to dialogue by writing to the guidebooks, or visiting their websites which provide a link for reader feedback. Thus, the text’s ‘truths’ can be challenged and negotiated by readers through their own experiences and the information can be re-evaluated – the reader can ‘test’ how accurate or true a guidebook is by measuring it against their own direct experience.

As guidebooks reflect the views of their authors, editors and publishers (Lew 1991), it is interesting to consider who their writers are. Information provided in the preliminary pages of each guidebook presents brief bibliographic details about their contributors although, generally, there is little information about authors and editors. As far as could be ascertained, none of the contributors to the guidebooks was an Aboriginal writer.7 Lonely Planet has 11 authors, the majority of whom are Australian or who ‘call Australia home’. Let’s Go has 10 authors, all of whom are Harvard University students. Rough Guide has four authors, one was born (and presumably lives) in Australia, two now live in Australia and, for some reason, no such information is provided about the fourth writer.

Individual authors are ‘introduced’ to the reader and it is here that they are presented as experts with the cultural capital to claim authority and to provide information to other travellers. For instance, authors are described as ‘well educated’ and ‘well travelled’, and there are some references made to their university education and travel experiences, their experiences in research and writing, and their travel philosophies. For instance, consider these vignettes of two guidebook contributors:

7 Since I conducted the fieldwork for this study in 2000, the Lonely Planet has published a new guidebook titled Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait Islands: Guide to Indigenous Australia (Singh et al 2001) which is co-authored and includes contributions from 51 Aboriginal writers.
[B]orn in Sydney, where she studied Communications at the University of Technology; she has an MA in Writing from Sheffield Hallam University. She is the co-author of The Rough Guide to Australia and has contributed to Rough Guides to France, Paris, Thailand and Europe and More Women Travel. (Rough Guide p.v)

Writer and photographer, he was born with restless feet. He travelled extensively in his native Britain before hitting the around-the-world trail as a Thatcher refugee in 1985 … He prefers unusual areas of travel: he is one of the few who have visited North Korea and has ridden a motorcycle over the Himalaya. He lives with his partner … another ardent traveller. (Lonely Planet p.11)

Once introduced, however, these individual narrators disappear being subsumed into a single voice. In the presentation of information the narrative voice is unitary and the points of view of individual writers are neither acknowledged nor identified. Particular representations are presented as the only legitimate one and interpretative material is presented as incontrovertible (Bhattacharyya 1997: 375). Disagreements between authors and the process of editing, for example, are kept out of view of the reader.

The nature of the guidebook text is to offer advice to readers, and this is achieved through the process of interpretation. As Bhattacharyya (1997: 381) states, ‘a guidebook shapes the image of a destination through both selection of sights and providing information about them, [but] it is the process of interpretation that is perhaps the most crucial in this regard’. In other words, the ways in which the guidebook acts as the interpreter of the sights is important. Interpretation within the guidebooks I studied was a combination of contextualisation and evaluation in that two distinct narrative styles are identified that I distinguish as informative and evaluative.

Evaluative comments are characterised by positive indicators (such as, good, excellent, worthwhile, interesting, fascinating) and negative indicators that are either opposite terms (such as, poor, dull, boring) or negations of positives (such as, not very good, uninteresting). These evaluative interpretations of sites and experiences are done with reference to some previously developed and potentially arbitrary criteria of which the
reader is never informed (much like the *Baedeker* star system, see Chapter 3). For example:

Interesting though it is, it has to be said that the display is not particularly effective at communicating its message and, unless you have some previous understanding of Aboriginal culture you’ve forgotten much of what you’ve seen soon after leaving. (*Rough Guide* p.541)

Informative narration is predominantly characterised by the seemingly neutral selection of sites and presentation of information, where this neutrality refers to a lack of judgements and descriptions. Instead, there is a simple and unembellished laying out of detail without emotive and pre-emptive language. Of course, the selection of details to be described belies this apparent neutrality and, as such, cannot be considered strictly impartial. Nonetheless, certain interpretations presented through an informative narrative style appear less explicitly loaded than those presented through an evaluative narration. For instance:

[T]he centre houses a variety of creative, educational displays on the history of the wetlands. (*Let’s Go* p.257)

Each guidebook is not restricted to just one of these narrative styles. Rather, they often utilise a combination of both. In the following example, both informative and evaluative narration is contained within a single sentence. As well as detailing informative material concerning location and content, evaluative comments are made in relation to the type of interaction that the reader can expect with the content of the site. A judgement is also made on the quality and relevance of the material:

[A] modern visitors centre atop Beatrice Hill, by the Arnhem Hwy … The centre has some excellent ‘touchy-feely’ displays that give some great detail on the wetland ecosystem, as well as on the history of the local Aboriginal people and European pastoral activity. (*Lonely Planet* p.386)

The narrative style is relevant to the means with which the guidebooks are able to both select certain sites as ‘worthy’, and also to contribute to the construction of a particular way of experiencing and interpreting the cultural material found at these sites. The evaluative material, however, can serve to pre-empt perceptions (both positive and negative) and thus partially produce the experiences of the traveller in relation to aspects of Aboriginal culture. To a degree, this is to be expected as all the guidebooks readily admit to being an intermediary source of interpretative material concerning cultures.

The publishers of *Rough Guide*, for example, state that they aim ‘to combine a journalistic approach to description with a thoroughly practical approach to travellers’ needs … [and that their] wit and inquisitiveness [is ‘relished’] as much as their enthusiastic, critical approach’ ([www.roughguides.com](http://www.roughguides.com)). They endeavour to provide ‘practical information … while also giving hard-hitting accounts of every sight … and providing up-to-the-minute information of contemporary culture’. Thus, rather than merely listing sites and attractions, *Rough Guide* states that they aim to provide critical detail and entertaining information. By explicitly stating their intention to evaluate the significance of sites and experiences, and also to provide entertainment by describing curiosities, *Rough Guide* positions itself more overtly than the other two guidebooks as an intermediary and interpretative text. Nonetheless, the dual use of narrative styles and their intermingling could be seen as concealing processes that influence reader interpretation and constructs their experiences.

The organisation and presentation of information through these particular narrative strategies serve to legitimate the role of the guidebook as a mediator of knowledge. An ostensibly unified and authoritative perspective is presented. Sites are selected through a process and criterion that is hidden from the reader, and through a combination of informative and evaluative narration styles, descriptive information is presented that identifies sites as being of interest to the traveller. Amongst these descriptions is interwove prescriptive information that offers readers advice about how they should behave, for example, through the provision of information on culturally appropriate behaviour. The following passage is illustrative:
As in any country, politeness goes a long way when taking photographs; ask before taking pictures of people. Note that many Aboriginal people don’t like having their photo taken, even from a distance. (*Lonely Planet* p.88)

Through the presentation of interpretative information the guidebooks contribute to the shaping and framing of traveller interpretations of experience. Places of interest are identified and described through a process of evaluation grounded in the supposed ideals of the traveller. Information is provided about culturally appropriate behaviour that can be drawn upon by the reader in order to guide their interactions at their destinations. These ‘appropriate’ behaviours are grounded also in the central values of the idealised traveller as constructed and portrayed by the guidebooks. In so doing, the guidebooks contribute to the mobilisation of a particular form of ‘sight’ – a ‘second gaze’ (MacCannell 2001) or ‘traveller gaze’ (*cf.* Urry’s ‘tourist gaze’). The above quote illustrates aspects of this gaze – a level of respect for the travelled culture, and a concern for both the cultural values and emotional well-being of any potential indigenous subjects of traveller photography. The traveller is constructed as a subject who is not only interested in other cultures, but is culturally aware and responsible when interacting with them.

These dimensions of the traveller gaze are explored below in relation to the construction of Australia as a destination appealing to travellers. As discussed above (and in Chapter 2), backpackers, as independent travellers, are generally constructed through a conceptually oppositional discourse as having the desire for experiences that are marked as ‘authentic’. Such experiences attempt to go beyond the contrived and staged images prevalent in mainstream tourism media and the activities associated with commodified tourism. The ways by which the guidebooks attempt to move beyond popular tourism stereotypes and the structured tourist gaze to position themselves as texts of the traveller discourse are explored below.

Images of Australia: Representing a Unique Destination for the Traveller

In words and pictures the selected guidebooks ‘paint a portrait’ of Australia and represent a unique image of the country that is designed to appeal to the traveller. A content analysis of the photographs contained within the guidebooks, as well as the words used to describe the country in the brief introduction of each guidebook, is presented below. The analysis determines the image of Australia being constructed for the traveller. Central to the image of Australia as a destination that offers unique opportunities for authentic experiences and cultural interaction are references to Aboriginal people and their cultures – the travelled culture. In this way, Australia is ‘marked’ (Cohen 1993) as authentic and Indigenous.

Both *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide* have a number of photographic images interspersed throughout, while the budget-focused *Let’s Go* has a notable absence of photographic material. *Lonely Planet* has a total of 162 photographs and *Rough Guide* has 39. Those aspects of Australia represented in these photographs include landscapes (natural, urban and rural), buildings and memorials, people, flora and fauna, and Aboriginal art and cultural objects. Table 4.2, below, illustrates the results of the content analysis of these photographic images.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photograph</th>
<th><em>Lonely Planet</em> (n=162)</th>
<th><em>Rough Guide</em> (n=39)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Landscape</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Landscape</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Landscape</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buildings/Memorials</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora and Fauna</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Art/Cultural Objects</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, photographic images of natural landscapes were the most popular category in both the guidebooks that feature photographs, with 36% (58 photographs) in Lonely Planet and 53% (21 photographs) in Rough Guide dedicated to natural landscape scenery. The Australian landscape in its beauty and diversity is well suited to photographic representation, and in the construction of Australia as a unique destination for travellers the natural landscape is used as a noteworthy drawcard. Of additional interest, therefore, are the particular natural landscapes that are presented as distinctive, and a further breakdown of this category is presented, below, in Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Landscape</th>
<th>Lonely Planet (n=58)</th>
<th>Rough Guide (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outback</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowy Mountains</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from Table 4.3 that more than 50% of the total photographic images of natural landscape in both guidebooks are of the Outback (54.2% in Lonely Planet and 57.1% in Rough Guide). Typical features of these Outback photographs are red rocks and red sands, a dry and harsh environment of empty open spaces and vast horizons (Figure 4.1). Photographs of the Outback are mostly of landscapes within the Northern Territory, including Uluru (Ayers Rock), Kata Tjuta (The Olgas), Kakadu, The MacDonnell Ranges and The Devils Marbles.

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8 The high proportion of photographic images of ‘Flora and Fauna’ and ‘Aboriginal Art/Cultural Objects’ in Lonely Planet are all placed within two ‘full colour feature’ sections which are a special feature of this particular guidebook.
9 The Outback could also be considered a cultural landscape as Aboriginal people perceive and experience the natural landscape as heavily invested with cultural meaning. But the Outback is a constructed Australian space, existing only in the imaginations of non-Aboriginal people – for indigenous Australians there is no Outback (Muecke 1996: 407). While this may be the case, this study focuses on guidebook representations and backpacker perceptions and experiences and Aboriginal interpretations of ‘the Outback’ lie beyond the scope of the study. I use the Outback as a categorisation of natural landscape predominantly because this is the way it is represented in photographs in the guidebooks.

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The high proportion of Outback imagery is made more significant as the Australian desert, and thus the Northern Territory, is positioned and constructed as the primary place where Aboriginal people and culture is located. For instance, in the words of all the guidebooks’ introductions the Outback is associated with Aboriginal culture – as the
place where an ‘ancient’ and ‘timeless’ people has best been able to maintain ‘traditional’ cultural lifestyles. The first message given to readers in relation to Aboriginal Australia, therefore, is that the Outback is the best place to experience and interact with a supposedly ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture. The reader is informed:

If it’s space you’re looking for, look no further than the Outback … Here you’ll find wilderness areas like Kakadu National Park, Cape York, the Nullarbor Plain and the Simpson Desert. It’s also where Australia’s Aboriginal people have best been able to preserve their ancient culture and traditions. (*Lonely Planet* p.19-20)

This is an ancient land … one that has played host to the oldest surviving human culture for at least fifty thousand years … [T]here are opportunities – particularly in the Northern Territory – to gain some experience of Australia’s indigenous peoples and their culture … (*Rough Guide* p.xi)

The Outback … In the Top End of the Northern Territory, Kakadu National Park spends half the year in dry beauty – tourists can camp out and learn about the land and culture of the Aboriginal people. (*Let’s Go* pp.2-3)

It is clear from these statements that the guidebooks seek to present the view that experiencing aspects of Aboriginal Australia is an important and integral part of the traveller experience in Australia. Although the word authentic is not used *per se* in any of these introductions, the use of words such as ‘ancient’, ‘traditional’ and ‘spiritual’ strongly connote authenticity, and these themes are mobilised as narratives of traditional Aboriginal culture. Cohen (1989) refers to the process of using such words as cultural descriptors for indigenous or tribal people as the ‘communicative staging’ of authenticity. These themes serve to position the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory in traditional cultural contexts and reinforce the stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ so prevalent in tourism promotion (see Chapter 3). For instance, in mainstream tourism media the representations and images of Aboriginal people are most frequently of a traditional, timeless and spiritual Other situated only in remote areas of Australia and living separately from mainstream Australian society in the desert regions – the Outback – of Central and Northern Australia (Simondson 1995; Waitt 1999; 1997;
Zeppel 1998a). This previous research indicates that the visual images employed in tourism media (such as advertisements, brochures and postcards) overwhelmingly project the stereotypical image of the ‘noble savage’ – the primitive black bodied male with painted body and dressed in loin cloth performing traditional rituals with traditional cultural objects. The image of the Outback conjured by the guidebooks presents and reifies this mythological space as a remote and ancient landscape, as an escape from civilisation. Aboriginal people are represented as an integral element of the Outback landscape where they have, to some extent, been able to avoid the effects of modernity. As Fiske, Hodge and Turner (1987: 128) have noted, ‘[t]he Aborigine is a personification of the central Australian landscape: each is equally and similarly opposed to the urban lifestyle of the typical white Australian’. Indeed, Uluru in Central Australia is represented as being the quintessential icon of Outback Australia and a case study of this particular site is presented in Chapter 6.

The centrality of Aboriginal culture to the construction of a representational image of Australia is also evident in Lonely Planet’s section on Aboriginal Art (24 pages) that contains 20 photographs representing ancient art (rock carvings and paintings), bark paintings and more contemporary artworks including paintings and artefacts. This section consists of discussions of relationships between Aboriginal art and the Dreaming, the significance of rock art, as well as the development of modern Aboriginal art through key artists such as Albert Namatjira. However, what is most significant is that with the exception of one photograph originating in South Australia and one originating in Queensland, the entire body of images are of art sites in the Northern Territory or of art works produced by Northern Territory artists. Associations between Aboriginal culture and the Northern Territory, therefore, are confirmed and entrenched in the presentation of images of art and cultural objects in Lonely Planet.

A surprisingly small proportion of photographs are devoted to representing Australia’s diverse population and culture despite Australian culture being a theme of each guidebook’s introduction. For example, in the following passage the diversity of Australian cultural life is discussed. Significantly, ‘traditional’ Aboriginal culture is

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10 Albert Namatjira (1902-1959) is one of Australia’s most well known Aboriginal artists. He painted Central Australian landscapes and was a significant figure in the popularisation of Australian indigenous art (Hughes 1970).
positioned as being foremost in the list of contemporary Australian cultural events and activities:

"Even though Australia is often thought of as being rough and ready – there are many exciting events which illustrate a rich cultural diversity. These include timeless Aboriginal corroborees, the acclaimed Adelaide Festival of Arts and Sydney’s outrageous Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Numerous other festivals celebrate everything from wine and music to multiculturalism. (Lonely Planet p.20)"

The photographs of people that are presented in the guidebooks (see Table 4.2 – 3% in Lonely Planet, 5% in Rough Guide) tend to conform to a range of common and easily identifiable images that are emblematic of the cultural representation of Australia projected to the rest of the world. The small number of images of people include a photograph in both guidebooks of a surf life saver which is synonymous with Australia’s sun-loving beach lifestyle; an image in Lonely Planet of a reveller at Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, simultaneously representing the cosmopolitan, fun-loving and ‘outrageous’ (Lonely Planet p.20) cultural events, and also Australia’s apparent acceptance and tolerance of a diversity of lifestyles, cultures and people. There are also only three photographic images of Aboriginal people (one in Rough Guide and two in Lonely Planet) the significance of which warrants further discussion.

The photograph in Rough Guide is of three Aboriginal people walking along a beach (Figure 4.2). The caption states the location is Melville Island in the Northern Territory and the activity is described as ‘Going Hunting’. All three people in the picture are walking away from the camera and so their faces cannot be seen. They are not identified by name, either as individuals or tribal group, but are presented as generic and homogenous Aboriginal people. It is the combination of the caption (that defines their activity) and the visibility of their skin colour that confirms for the reader that they are Aboriginal people. Furthermore, they are presented (and identified) as participating in the traditional activity of hunting, primarily by a man carrying a long stick which is denoted as a spear through association with the activity. The two women follow him...
carrying plastic buckets and a water container. All three are dressed in modern (Western) attire and their physical location is the natural landscape.

Figure 4.2
Photograph of Aboriginal people in *Rough Guide*
The single image of Aboriginal people in *Rough Guide* (Figure 4.2) is positioned on a page with three other photographs, all of which present scenery of the Northern Territory, thus firmly placing Aboriginal life as an inextricable component of the Northern Territory and Outback – these areas are coded as ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘authentic’. These photographs are of red desert sand dunes, an Aboriginal rock painting, and Kakadu National Park in the wet season. Images of the Outback which conjure the familiar themes of wide-open space and endless horizons juxtaposed against the lush landscape of Kakadu image. Also significant is that the two photographs of Aboriginal culture (of the people and of the rock art) are presented as part of a montage with two images of nature. So these images, and their juxtaposition, reinforce the association between Aboriginal culture and the Outback, and Aboriginal culture and nature.

*Lonely Planet* has only two photographs of Aboriginal people, both of which are in black and white which lends them a certain historical and documentative perspective as does their location in the introductory section of the guidebook entitled ‘Facts About Australia’. The first photograph (Figure 4.3) is situated within a discussion of ‘History’, under a subheading ‘The Devastation of the Aborigines’ and is highly political in nature.

Image removed for reasons of cultural sensitivity

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**Figure 4.3**

*Photograph in Lonely Planet illustrating historical treatment of Aboriginal people*
The photograph is of six Aboriginal men dressed in loin cloths standing in a line and seemingly being posed for the camera. The men are chained together by a single chain that links each of their necks ending in the hand of a white policeman in uniform. Crouching in the foreground is a fully clothed Aboriginal man, he is unchained and is presented as ‘free’ because he is clothed in the attire of the ‘white man’. This man crouches at the feet of the policeman, while his fellow people stand with arms crossed and hands on hips; his body language is one of submission, theirs is one of defiance. This image represents a relationship between colonising Europeans and Aboriginal Australians which was characterised (and described in the caption) as being ‘the systematic slaughter and repression of its traditional owners. Aboriginal people suffered inhuman treatment with dignity, and often fought back’ (Lonely Planet p.27). In no uncertain terms, this photograph informs the reader of the nature of this history, and attempts to place the reader in a position to understand contemporary race relations in Australia which, in turn, is contributing to their ability to be a culturally aware traveller.

The second black and white photograph of Aboriginal people in Lonely Planet of ‘Injinoo Aborigines in traditional dress’ (Figure 4.4) (Lonely Planet p.53) is situated between the discussion of ‘Traditional Society’ and ‘Beliefs and Ceremonies’.
The photograph in Figure 4.4 conjures ideas of Aboriginal people as ‘noble savages’ – they are wearing loin cloths have their bodies painted and are holding spears. The photograph features a group of six children being addressed by two adult men, seemingly being instructed on the practice of throwing a spear. Alongside the two traditionally dressed men are another two Aboriginal men dressed in modern (Western) attire. The photograph seems to illustrate the passing on of the traditional activity of hunting to the younger generation. This photograph is in stark contrast to the other photograph in Lonely Planet because it represents the ongoing sharing of cultural practices and values rather than dispossession and devastation.

Whilst the analysis of the guidebook photographs demonstrates that traveller discourse shares some similarities to tourism discourse – particularly evident in the combined employment of natural landscapes and of traditional Aboriginal culture to produce and sell particular destinations – Lonely Planet also attempts to move beyond superficial representations and to more accurately present ‘reality’. The first Lonely Planet photograph discussed above (Figure 4.3) is an example of the pictorial presentation of ‘factual’ information relating to the historical reality of colonisation that is largely absent from mainstream tourism media. Furthermore, a lack of photographic images of Aboriginal people in all the guidebooks means that the representation of Aboriginal Australia is primarily achieved through words. In contrast to the photographic images projected in mainstream tourism media the relative absence of photographs seems to be a tactic that attempts to distance the guidebooks from mainstream tourism media.

Let’s Go does not have any photographs in the entire book. But the colourful, emotive and descriptive language used to describe natural landscapes and scenery offsets the absence of photographs. Let’s Go mobilises the same themes that were evident in the other two guidebooks and similarly conjures a close association between the Outback and Aboriginal people. The tone of the first paragraph of the introduction in its Northern Territory chapter, for instance, is descriptive and emotive, and a connection between the Northern Territory and Aboriginal people is set. For example:

A well-worn 4WD rumbles down an endless road towards the reflection of a fiery sunset bellowing pumpkin-colored dust behind its growling motor. The mudcaked
licence plate says ‘Northern Territory’. Against the backdrop of a pastel sky, silver eucalyptus trees contort their limbs into ghost-like curves … In the distance, the thick smoke of a bush fire bruises the horizon. If this is your image of the outback, and the outback is what you’re after, you’ve come to the right place. The Northern Territory stretches into the country’s most extreme regions … Aboriginal homelands … give droplets of human life to the vast outback. (Let’s Go p.242)

All the highly visual elements associated with the Outback imagery evident in the photographs of the other guidebooks are elicited in this passage – its colours and extreme environmental conditions, the sparseness of life, the wide-open space and vast horizons – its authenticity and indigeneity. Reference to Aboriginal homelands locates indigenous culture within the imagery, corroborating a discourse of primitivism that historically interweaves indigenous culture as being a part of nature (Deutschlander and Miller 2003).

The Outback is presented as the primary destination for experiencing Aboriginal culture and perhaps for meeting Aboriginal people in traditional cultural contexts. The associations of the Outback, the Northern Territory and Aboriginal people and cultures in the guidebooks conform to popular images of Australia perpetuated in tourism media. Therefore, the guidebooks disseminate a range of popular and accepted images of Australia generally, and of Aboriginal Australia specifically. However, Lonely Planet points out that popular images are not necessarily representative (again positioning guidebook texts as a counterpoint to the superficialities of mainstream tourism media):

When most people think of Australia a particular image comes to mind. It may be the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Ayers Rock, a laconic sun-burned character out of [the feature film] Crocodile Dundee, or a kangaroo hopping down a main street. Such imagery may not be particularly representative, but it does highlight the fact that in many ways Australia is different to anywhere you have been before. (Lonely Planet p.19)
At the same time as presenting popular imagery, guidebooks also can assist travellers to move beyond stereotypes. A mechanism by which dominant tourism stereotypes are negotiated within the guidebooks is through the provision of social, political and historical ‘realities’. Each of the guidebooks analysed provided significantly detailed information supposedly to educate their readers and construct the culturally aware traveller. In so doing, the guidebooks play an important role as a mediator of knowledge, offering information that is not readily available in the mainstream tourism media. This material serves to instruct and educate the reader in the contours of the political and cultural landscape of Australia and dominant themes presented include colonial history, political struggles, and current events. While attempting to address a range of historical and contemporary issues deemed to be of relevance to the culturally aware traveller, the guidebooks, necessitated by textual limitations of space, have been selective in what themes and issues they choose to expound. In making these choices, the guidebooks are constructing the traveller as someone who should be aware of the depth of cultural nuance that underlies the representations so frequently offered to the mass tourist.

Simultaneous to the presentation of certain popular representations, dominant stereotypes are, to an extent, also challenged and the ‘second gaze’ (MacCannell 2001) is constructed. The production of an alternative set of representations and meanings counterposed against the dominant stereotypes provides the reader an opportunity to question the veracity of information presented and to weigh the accuracy of cultural representations against their own experiences. Central to the production and presentation of the traveller as culturally aware and responsible is the development of the capacity for critical reflection upon both the travel experience and the travelling self. As MacCannell (2001: 36) states, this ability, or second gaze ‘turns back onto the gazing subject an ethical responsibility for the construction of its own existence. It refuses to leave this construction to the … apparatus of touristic representation’. As a

11 In Lonely Planet, for example, the first six chapters (about 170 pages) provide such information in chapters entitled ‘Facts about Australia’, ‘Flora and Fauna’, ‘Facts for the Visitor’, ‘Aboriginal Art’, ‘Getting There and Away’ and ‘Getting Around’. Similarly, Let’s Go commences with three information chapters (about 70 pages) entitled ‘Discover Australia’, ‘History and Culture’ and ‘Essentials’. A slightly different format is evident in Rough Guide with cultural and political information about Australia presented in the final chapter of the book in a seven-part section entitled ‘Contexts’ (about 45 pages). These sections serve the purpose of describing the types of experiences that can be had at the destinations discussed throughout the guidebook.
result of their positioning as texts of the traveller discourse, and in the interest of producing the potential for this subject position in their readers, the guidebooks present counter-narratives to the dominant stereotypes. For example, in the introduction to *Rough Guide*, readers are informed that:

Many Aboriginal people – especially in central Australia – have managed to maintain their traditional way of life … speaking their own languages and living according to their law … Conversely, most Aboriginal people you’ll come across in country towns and cities are victims of what is scathingly referred to as ‘welfare colonialism’ – a disempowering system in which, supported by dole cheques and other subsidies, they often fall prey to a destructive cycle of poverty, ill health and alcoholism. (*Rough Guide* p.xi)

Through the provision of information that tends to be silenced in mainstream tourism media the guidebook can be seen as attempting to give readers the necessary explanatory tools to be able to understand the systemic inequalities that shape contemporary Aboriginal life. As a result, however, the guidebooks reproduce and communicate what is identified in the academic literature as being a second dominant stereotype of Aboriginal people – of the ‘drunken’ and ‘dispossessed’ Aboriginal person of the city (for example, Birch 1993; 1997; Langton 1993a; 1993b; Oxenham 1999; see Chapter 3). Thus, another stereotype is constructed through words that challenges the stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ and yet simultaneously functions as a simplifying and reductionist representation. These two stereotypes operating in tandem are the dominant representations of Aboriginal Australia within the guidebooks. The second dominant stereotype is further disseminated within the Northern Territory chapter of the guidebooks. For instance, *Rough Guide* warns readers of the ‘depressing spectacle of the Aboriginal underclass staggering around’ (p.518) and *Lonely Planet* points out that ‘alcohol (grog) is a problem for some Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory’ (p.437). Through the presentation and discussion of past and contemporary issues, the guidebooks seemingly serve to address a ‘contemporary reality’ (Cohen 1993: 36) that is silenced in promotional and photographic tourism media.
Fusing the Outback and Aboriginal culture is obviously significant to the way guidebooks represent Australia as a unique destination for the traveller. In each of the guidebooks studied it is suggested to readers that if they pursue a journey to the Northern Territory they will encounter Aboriginal people and their ‘ancient’, ‘traditional’ and ‘spiritual’ culture. I now turn to an analysis of the Northern Territory chapter of each of the guidebooks to examine how and why readers are directed to the Northern Territory, and consider the places and experiences that are recommended and marked as ‘authentic’.

**Experiencing The Real: Imagining Authenticities**

The Northern Territory chapter of each guidebook commences with a general introduction, following which there is little difference between them in the presentation of information in terms of the specific destinations that are discussed. Each Northern Territory chapter is similarly structured, commencing with Darwin (the capital city) – ‘The Top End’ – and followed by a discussion of individual destinations and concluding with ‘The Red Centre’ (the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park in Central Australia). In the general introduction to the Northern Territory in *Lonely Planet* is a section titled ‘Aboriginal People’ and similarly *Rough Guide* has a section entitled ‘Aborigines of the Northern Territory’. These sections provide some historical and explanatory information regarding the Aboriginal people of this territory. In contrast, *Let’s Go* has no such subsection in its introduction to the chapter with general information relating to Aboriginal people dispersed throughout the chapter instead. The presentation of information regarding Aboriginal people is a common feature of *Lonely Planet* whereby the introductions to all states (except the Australian Capital Territory) contain a similar section. However, *Rough Guide* only features this information in their Northern Territory chapter which serves to accentuate the connection between this particular place and Aboriginal people and their cultures, which in turn, reinforces and perpetuates the popular stereotype that Aboriginal culture is confined to the Northern Territory.

Overwhelmingly, the guidebooks suggest that the Outback of the Northern Territory is where Aboriginal people have ‘best been able to preserve their ancient culture and
traditions’ (Lonely Planet p.19) and where they have ‘managed to maintain a traditional way of life’ (Rough Guide p.xi) and a ‘persistent spirituality with the land even today’ (Let’s Go p.3). The guidebooks present three reasons why this is the case. First, that a higher proportion of the population of the Northern Territory are Aboriginal people. According to Lonely Planet ‘around 38,000 of the Territory’s 190,000 people are Aboriginal’ (p.360), for Let’s Go ‘nearly 30% of the Territory’s population is indigenous’ (p.242), and for Rough Guide ‘nearly a quarter of the Territory’s inhabitants are Aborigines’ (p.518). Irrespective of the statistics, what each is promising is that the traveller is more likely to experience Aboriginal culture in the Northern Territory than anywhere else in Australia – even though more Aboriginal people actually live in the state of New South Wales (Zeppel 1998a). Underpinning this ‘promise’ is an assumption that readers want opportunities to experience ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture.

Second, the Northern Territory is described as having the most recent history of colonisation. The subtext here is that it is the least spoilt by modernity and thus the least affected by the encroachment of Western culture. This information conjures images of the Northern Territory as a locale for potential adventure, and a site of possible authentic cultural interaction. For example, Rough Guide states that ‘within the Territory’s boundaries there’s evidence of the most recent colonial presence set among the oldest-occupied sites in Australia’ (Rough Guide p.516). The third reason pointed out by the guidebooks is that the Northern Territory has the greatest proportion of Aboriginal land ownership compared to other Australian states, with Aboriginal people owning ‘around 50% of the Northern Territory’ (Lonely Planet p.362) and ‘over one-third of the Territory is Aboriginal Land’ (Rough Guide p.518). The reader is told that as a result of the Northern Territory land rights, and the ‘handing back’ of land to traditional owners, Aboriginal people ‘began to leave the settlements and return to a more traditional, nomadic lifestyle on their own land’ (Lonely Planet p.363).

In each guidebook, the Northern Territory chapter commences with a black and white map that highlights the areas that are Aboriginal Land (for example, Figure 4.5). Paradoxically, however, readers are also informed that travel on Aboriginal land is ‘generally restricted’ (Lonely Planet p.363), and ‘out of bounds to casual visitors’ (Rough Guide p.516), because visiting Aboriginal communities and travelling through
Aboriginal land without a permit or invitation is not an option. *Lonely Planet* also makes an effort to inform readers about the socio-political struggle for land ownership with information on the ‘troubled and violent’ process of white settlement in the Northern Territory. The discussion includes acknowledgement of the colonial appropriation of land throughout the early twentieth century and the resulting confinement of Aboriginal people to government reserves, Christian missions, or work as low-paid stockmen or servants on cattle stations. The reader is then told of the struggle to regain land which began as recently as the 1960s and resulted in the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the 1993 Native Title Act (*Lonely Planet* pp.962-3).

*Let’s Go* does not address the issue of Aboriginal land ownership within its Northern Territory chapter. While it does include a map highlighting areas of Aboriginal Land in the Northern Territory, there is no reference point to inform readers of the meaning of the highlighted areas. This lack of information must be viewed in the context of the relative lack of attention that this particular guidebook provides in relation to contemporary Aboriginal issues. *Let’s Go* generally is less political than the other two guidebooks and, as discussed below, tends to focus more heavily on Aboriginal spirituality.

In *Rough Guide*, the passage relating to Aboriginal land in the subsection of the introduction to the Northern Territory chapter is interesting on several accounts. *Rough Guide* present the words ‘Aboriginal Land’ within quotation marks (inverted commas) and in bold typeface. The bold type draws the reader’s attention to the existence of Aboriginal Land but its status is somewhat undermined by use of quotation marks. This ambiguity can be seen as implying that the land is Aboriginal in name only, which could be read as a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the importance of Aboriginal land ownership and the political struggles involved. This perception is supported by *Rough Guide’s* declaration that the land is ‘commercially unviable’, insinuating that only lands deemed without any economic value or potential for profit were handed over and that Aboriginal control is merely ‘nominal’ (p.518). Such Western-oriented attitudes towards what is considered of value in relation to Aboriginal Land claims are continued throughout *Rough Guide*. For example, a recent land claim in Central Australia is referred to ‘as an example of the ridiculous excess of some land claims following the
Mabo decision’ (p.575). It is doubtful that Aboriginal Australians consider their land claims ‘ridiculous’ or ‘excessive’.

Figure 4.5
Map of the Northern Territory in *Lonely Planet* highlighting areas of Aboriginal Land

Despite the higher proportion of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal owned land in the Northern Territory, readers of all three guidebooks are warned that their experiences with Aboriginal people and culture may be, to some extent, difficult. Within historical discussion about colonialism and associated issues of cultural ignorance, readers are told that ‘there are still yawning gulfs between cultures’ (Lonely Planet p.363), that ‘separatism [between cultures] is rampant’ (Let’s Go p.242), and that ‘the chasm between the two vastly different cultures is actually far greater than most visitors realize’ (Rough Guide p.518). Thus, for the traveller seeking authentic experiences with Aboriginal people and cultures, ‘meaningful contact’ is ‘hard’ or ‘unlikely’ (Lonely Planet p.363, Rough Guide p.518) and Aboriginal people ‘often prefer to be left to themselves’ (Lonely Planet p.363) in ‘self-imposed isolation’ (Rough Guide p.518). As a result, ‘most exchanges’ between Aboriginal people and the ‘short-term visitor’ (Lonely Planet p.363, Rough Guide p.518) can be ‘awkward and superficial’ (Rough Guide p.518). As this warning is directed at ‘short-term’ visitors, the implication is that travellers who spend an extended period of time in the Northern Territory may have more opportunities to have meaningful and, thus, authentic experiences and interactions with Aboriginal Australia. While the long-term visitor is positioned as having advantages in this regard, these statements could also be read as revealing the limitations of all types of recreational travel, including backpacking. The traveller’s ideal of spontaneous authentic cultural interaction evokes a more complicated, and difficult to achieve, set of values against which cultural experiences are measured and evaluated. By acknowledging the limited possibilities for travellers to achieve this ideal, the guidebooks, arguably, are contributing to a more realist and self-reflexive perspective as part of the traveller gaze.

The discussion of the area of Aboriginal Land as being places where Aboriginal people live traditionally and more ‘authentically’, introduces a significant contradiction in the representation of authentic places and traveller experiences in the Northern Territory. That is, Aboriginal land is difficult to access for casual visitors. This particular contradiction is exemplified in the discussion of Arnhem Land as a place constructed as being ‘authentic’ and where Aboriginal culture remains at its most traditional. Arnhem Land is identified as Aboriginal Land and a contemporary link is made between the land that was ‘never colonised’ (Rough Guide p.516) with Aboriginal culture supposedly

remaining in a traditional state. The authentication of this ‘spectacular, sparsely populated’ (*Lonely Planet* p.399) ‘Aboriginal homeland’ (*Let’s Go* p.267) is further enhanced as it is a ‘remote wilderness’ (*Lonely Planet* p.399) of ‘scattered communities’ (*Rough Guide* p.516). Further, the ‘three thousand Aborigines who live in this remote region’ have done so for ‘forty thousand years’ (*Rough Guide* p.542).

However, ‘venturing into Arnhem Land is a serious matter’ (*Let’s Go* p.267) and not only is it ‘out of bounds to casual visitors’ (*Rough Guide* p.516) it is ‘virtually closed to independent travellers’ (*Lonely Planet* p.399). The Aboriginal owners are said to ‘value’ their traditional lifestyle and seek to protect it and, through their refusal to welcome tourists, the ‘authenticity’ of Arnhem Land as a destination for travellers increases. It is necessary for visitors to obtain ‘expensive permits’ (*Rough Guide* p.542); however, even with a permit ‘travellers can only go to three places in Arnhem Land’ (*Let’s Go* p.268). These include Oenpelli which is described as a ‘fairly nondescript Aboriginal community town’ (*Lonely Planet* p.399), and Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsular which is ‘a mining town of no appeal to tourists’ (*Rough Guide* p.542). Thus, the representation of Arnhem Land as a place where Aboriginal culture is at its most ‘authentic’ is primarily due to the more mundane qualities of everyday life that are available to be experienced. A ‘nondescript community town’ and ‘mining town’ comprise the truly authentic contemporary reality that contrasts markedly with the tendency for spectacle that is generally central to tourist attractions. It is precisely these aspects that make Arnhem Land of ‘no appeal to tourists’ and, thus, inversely appealing to the traveller. While its attractiveness to the traveller as a destination is partially limited by guidebook perceptions of expense and difficulty of access, it also serves to construct Arnhem Land as an authentic traveller destination because of the difficulties that must be overcome in order to access this type of experience.

A notable contradiction, therefore, can be found in the presentation of authenticity in relation to Aboriginal cultural experiences in the Northern Territory. Although the Northern Territory is constructed as the primary destination for travellers seeking authentic experiences with Aboriginal people and their cultures, the guidebooks also explicitly state that large tracts of Aboriginal Land are largely inaccessible to all but the most dedicated and rugged traveller. Whilst travellers are directed to the Northern Territory as a destination where Aboriginal culture is at its most ‘authentic’, the practical challenges of accessing these experiences mean that they are primarily available to a limited audience of dedicated and rugged adventurers.
Territory for the ‘authentic’ cultural experience it is, in fact, difficult, or indeed unlikely, that the traveller will have any direct contact with Aboriginal people outside a structured and commercial context (in the form of tours, for example). This caveat is somewhat paradoxical considering that the guidebooks contribute to the construction of a traveller who seeks authentic experiences and cultural interaction, and yet is also informed of considerable spatial and cultural barriers to achieving these goals. This contradiction arises due to the interplay of certain characteristics of traveller discourse in which a search for ‘the real’ and getting beyond tourism are central themes.

Each guidebook indicates that person-to-person contact outside of a structured and commercial setting is quite unlikely and, moreover, that direct contact with Aboriginal people in traditional cultural contexts is virtually impossible. In so doing, they are dispelling the myth that Aboriginal culture is accessible to travellers in its traditional form. The guidebooks, therefore, seek to produce a new set of meanings and associations for what constitutes an ‘authentic’ experience. My analysis reveals that to deal with this contradiction the guidebooks reframe what can be expected of ‘authenticity’ with meaningful experiences being recast and redefined in terms of educational pursuits rather than direct contact with Aboriginal people. The ‘reality’ is that the traveller will be unlikely to have unstructured personal intercultural contact, but a more structured educational experience can offer a similarly ‘authentic’ cultural experience. In the reframing of authenticity, the guidebooks present three alternative avenues for the traveller to experience an authentic Aboriginal Australia – taking Aboriginal cultural tours and visiting Aboriginal cultural centres; visiting particular Aboriginal landscapes; and purchasing Aboriginal art and cultural objects. Each of these themes is explored in the remainder of this chapter beginning with a consideration of educational pursuits and the discussion of cultural tours and cultural centres.

Reframing Authenticity: Constructing the Cultural Experience

Certain destinations in the Northern Territory are identified as the places where aspects of Aboriginal culture are accessible and can be experienced. In this sense, the reader is told where to go (‘worthy’ sites) and what to do whilst there (‘worthwhile’ experiences).
As discussed above, the places described in the guidebooks for an authentic cultural experience are Aboriginal Land, Aboriginal owned National Parks, Aboriginal cultural tours, Aboriginal cultural centres and other interpretative centres (including museums and art galleries). Of interest is the selection of particular sites and experiences, and the ways in which they are interpreted by the guidebooks in ways that tell travellers what should be seen and experienced, and how (Horne 1992).

Organised tours are presented by all three guidebooks as the best option for gaining access to Aboriginal Land. These tours include Aboriginal cultural tours as well as backpacker adventure tours. Importantly, Aboriginal cultural tours are presented as an excellent way through which to learn about, and gain first hand knowledge of, Aboriginal cultures. Lonely Planet provides the most comprehensive information in relation to Aboriginal tours, which is not surprising considering this guidebook positions itself most explicitly within discourses of ‘responsible travel’, as evidenced by references to responsible travel practices in its mission statement.

Lonely Planet advises that taking tours is the best way to visit Aboriginal land and Aboriginal communities and, therefore, such tours provide the greatest opportunity for authentic experiences, even allowing some access to Arnhem Land ‘and other places that are normally off limits’ (p.364). Moreover, Lonely Planet presents its readers with reasons why taking an Aboriginal owned cultural tour is beneficial, not only in terms of education and providing access for the traveller, but also readers are informed that they can contribute to Aboriginal communities in two ways: ‘the more obvious is the financial gain; the other is that introducing Aboriginal culture and customs to non-Aboriginal people helps alleviate the problems caused by the ignorance and misunderstanding of the past’ (p.363). By emphasising this aspect of traveller discourse – an apparent concern for the well-being of toured cultures – Lonely Planet is defining a certain type of experience as worthwhile and culturally appropriate. Throughout the Northern Territory chapter, Lonely Planet’s presentation of information regarding Aboriginal owned and operated cultural tours precedes any discussion of other recommended organised tours. Thus, at every opportunity, Lonely Planet recommends Aboriginal cultural tours. Let’s Go and Rough Guide, in comparison, are more likely to list cultural tours within any general discussion of organised tours (except in the case of
the Tiwi Islands where the Aboriginal owned Tiwi Tours are the only way to visit the islands).

According to *Lonely Planet*, Aboriginal owned and operated cultural tours offer travellers the opportunity to ‘delve into’ Aboriginal culture (p.376, p.437). Aboriginal cultural tours are promoted as providing important opportunities for learning about culture through the leadership of an Aboriginal guide, as it is considered more appropriate and no doubt more authentic to be guided by Aboriginal interpreters rather than non-Aboriginal people. The presentation of descriptive information in the guidebooks regarding the aspects of Aboriginal culture likely to be experienced on tours tend, however, to conform to what is stereotypically expected within a relatively narrow view of Aboriginal culture, such as, being exposed to bush tucker, medicine, arts and crafts. For example:

There are excellent Aboriginal tours at Manyallaluk … [on] the eastern edge of the Nitmiluk National Park … [the land] is owned by Top End Aboriginal people, some of whom now organise and lead very highly regarded tours. The one day trip includes … lunch, billy tea and damper, and you learn about traditional bush tucker and medicine, spear throwing and playing the didgeridoo. The two day trip adds swimming and rock art sites. (*Lonely Planet*, p.404, 407)

Aboriginal owned and operated cultural centres are also highlighted as attractions that provide travellers with apparently authentic educational experiences as they offer contemporary Aboriginal interpretations of places which are not offered through non-Aboriginal visitor centres. For instance, all the guidebooks direct readers to the Aboriginal cultural centres in Kakadu and Uluṟu – Kata Tjuṯa National Parks. In comparison to Aboriginal owned cultural tours, which are often presented as ‘pricey’, access to cultural centres involves no admission cost except for access to the National Park. This lack of cost of admission is important in presenting cultural centres as ‘authentic’ cultural experiences, playing on the general theme running through traveller discourse that the commodified and the inauthentic go hand-in-hand. Ironically, that Aboriginal cultural tours are described in the guidebooks as expensive somewhat promotes this perception of inauthenticity associated with commodified tourism. The
ramifications of this perception as played out in the actual lived experiences of backpackers are explored in Chapter 5.

Cultural centres are also presented in the guidebook descriptions as offering travellers indirect access to Aboriginal culture. For example, the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Kakadu (Figure 4.6) is described by *Lonely Planet* as an attraction that provides ‘an excellent insight into the culture of the Park’s traditional owners’ (p.394). Similarly *Let’s Go* lists this centre as a ‘highlight’ within the National Park with ‘outstanding displays’ that show visitors an Aboriginal history of Kakadu (p.266). These two guidebooks also provide some detail regarding the significance of the architecture of the Cultural Centre building. *Lonely Planet* explains, for example, that its circular shape is not only ‘symbolic’ of an Aboriginal meeting place, but also of the pig nosed turtle (the *warradjan*) after which the Centre is named (p.394). Both guidebooks direct readers to this Centre and provide some general information about it.

![Figure 4.6](image_url)

*Figure 4.6
The Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Kakadu National Park*
Rough Guide also directs its readers to this Centre but its interpretation is considerably different. According to Rough Guide the Centre offers ‘unusually designed interpretative displays on the culture and lore of the local Aborigines’ and despite being ‘interesting’ it is described as being ‘not particularly effective at communicating its message’ and that without prior understanding of Aboriginal culture ‘you’ve forgotten much of what you’ve seen soon after leaving’ (p.540). Rough Guide goes on to describe a non-Aboriginal owned visitors centre (the Bowali Centre, also in Kakadu) as a ‘masterpiece of thoughtful and relevant landscaping and design [that] should not be missed’ (p.538). Ironically, though, it also says that it is Aboriginal Cultural Centres that allow some measure of ‘understanding Aboriginal culture’ (p.541). It is possible that visitor centres provide generalised and over-simplified interpretations with little real insight into Aboriginal cultures. While it may be the case that individualised evaluation of sites recognise the heterogeneity of content and standard thereby assisting in the construction of the traveller as a critically autonomous individual, at the same time, the process of evaluation is not unproblematic as it largely occurs relative to some set of standards that are kept hidden from the reader. Whether or not Rough Guide’s evaluation of the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre is accurate, the evaluative language used in this particular description could be read as pre-empting traveller visitations to the centre and potentially negatively shaping their own interpretations.

That the guidebooks select particular sights and experiences as worthy of the travellers’ attention ‘distinguishes between the authentic and the inauthentic’ (Bhattacharyya 1997: 379; Culler 1981). Frow (1991) describes this process of selection as authentication with reference to the ascription of authenticity to places and experiences. This is certainly evident from the guidebooks I analysed, particularly the way in which cultural education replaces direct interaction as the key element of authenticity. In the next section, I further examine the reframing of authenticity by exploring the ways in which particular sights of natural landscape in the Northern Territory (that are not educational in the sense of being recognised or sanctioned as sources of cultural information) are authenticated through a connection with the narratives of Aboriginal spirituality and traditional Aboriginal culture. Just as nature is socially and culturally constructed, landscape is a social construction that is shaped through discourse (Dunlop and Ascui 1995: 2). For the traveller, these cultural interpretations of landscape offer potential
opportunities for a seemingly unmediated interactive experience with Aboriginal Australia. The guidebooks recommend visits to particular sites and places that, in addition to their natural features, are authenticated for travellers through the identification of Aboriginal names, traditional tribal associations and Dreamtime stories. These strategies for producing ‘authentic’ cultural destinations out of geographical locations are highly significant and my analysis of the guidebooks has identified that they are the dominant means by which particular landscapes are authenticated by association with discourses of traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality.

**Dreamtime Landscapes: Narratives of Aboriginal Spirituality**

Spirituality is represented as a central element of authentic Aboriginal culture and relates to the search for authenticity constructed in traveller texts. There is certainly a narrative of Aboriginal spirituality present in the guidebooks and it is often presented in conjunction with representations of traditional Aboriginal culture. While the two are not identical they are closely related and are utilised by the guidebooks to achieve similar ends – to authenticate certain places and transform them into destinations for the traveller seeking authenticity. Due to the particular nature of Aboriginal spirituality, which has natural landscape features as central to its cosmology, the reference to Dreamtime stories and traditional Aboriginal culture is well placed to authenticate sites by association. By representing certain places as being associated with Dreamtime stories and Dreamtime characters, the guidebooks link the spiritual with the natural landscape. *Let’s Go*, for example, describes the Dreaming as ‘one of the most famous ideas associated with Australian Aboriginals’ (p.7) and in its introduction states:

[T]o the Aboriginal people … natural wonders [are] even more significant. Spirits carved the canyons and the rolling hills of the west – the MacDonnell Ranges were their handiwork – and the trees and wildlife of the eastern rainforest were spirits come to earth in disguise. The Aboriginals believe in ‘Dreaming’, a strong connection between the earth and its inhabitants. (*Let’s Go* p.1)
The guidebooks employ three main strategies for the textual authentication of landscapes by association with traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality. The first is the identification of Aboriginal place names for destinations. This strategy creates contemporary links between Aboriginal culture and particular sites and also recognises the legitimacy of such names. The second is the naming of the Aboriginal tribal groups that are indigenous to particular places, particularly in relation to the ownership of land. This strategy connects contemporary traveller destinations with traditional Aboriginal culture. The third strategy is the naming and description of Dreamtime stories and Dreamtime characters as they relate to particular places, further serving to create and strengthen connections between contemporary sites and landscapes and Aboriginal spirituality. Through the interchange of these three textual strategies, certain places are associated with the people, cultures and spiritual traditions of Aboriginal Australia. The guidebooks use these methods of authentication either singly or in combination. Arguably, the authentication of landscapes in relation to Aboriginal culture is most effective when all three of the strategies are combined, although this is, in fact, the least common.

The first two strategies – the identification of Aboriginal place names and traditional Aboriginal tribal names – are the most common and frequent ways by which destinations are ‘authenticated’. This process of ‘languaging’ (Dann 1992) is strongest when Aboriginal people are acknowledged as traditional landowners and, as Zeppel (2000) claims, this is more prevalent in the Northern Territory than in other states of Australia. Following Dann (1992), Zeppel (2000) argues that languaging is an important device used in the promotion of Aboriginal Australia and relates to the elevation of Aboriginal cultures in tourism. In this regard, traveller discourse is again shown to have similarities to tourism discourse. Thus, the differentiation between these two discourses as expounded by the guidebooks is somewhat problematic, existing primarily at the level of individually produced perceptions and experiences rather than in the underlying discursive formations and strategies. For this very reason, Marcus (1997) notes that while this process can be viewed as either a growing recognition of Aboriginal cultural groups and landscapes – certainly a characteristic of traveller discourse – it can also be seen as a further appropriation of Aboriginal culture for the promotion of particular destinations. Table 4.4, below, lists places in the Northern Territory that are

authenticated in the three guidebooks by their association with Aboriginal place names and Aboriginal tribal groups.

### Table 4.4
Representations of Traditional Aboriginal Culture and Spirituality

#### Authentication of sites by association with Aboriginal place names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Lonely Planet Authentication</th>
<th>Rough Guide Authentication</th>
<th>Let’s Go Authentication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nourlangie Rock</td>
<td>Naukulandja/Burrunggui</td>
<td>Tiwi Islands</td>
<td>Tiwi Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathurst and Melville Islands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine Gorge National Park</td>
<td>Nitmiluk</td>
<td>Nitmiluk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek</td>
<td>Jurnkurakurr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devil’s Marbles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>Mparntwe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs Water Hole</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tjanerilji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzac Hill</td>
<td>Untyeyetweleye</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie Meyer Hill</td>
<td>Tharrarltneme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untamed Ridge</td>
<td>Ntyarlkarle Tyaneme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gosses Bluff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tnorula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Gap</td>
<td>Anthwerke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree Rock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Antanangantana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambers Pillar</td>
<td>Itirkawara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uluru (Ayers Rock)</td>
<td>Uluru</td>
<td>Uluru</td>
<td>Uluru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kata Tjuţa (The Olgas)</td>
<td>Kata Tjuţa</td>
<td>Kata Tjuţa</td>
<td>Kata Tjuţa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Authentication of sites by association with Aboriginal tribal groups names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Larrakeyah/ Larrakia Authentication</th>
<th>Gagadju/Gagadju/Gagadju (language) Authentication</th>
<th>Tiwi/Tiwi/Tiwi Authentication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>Larrakeyah</td>
<td>Gagadju</td>
<td>Tiwi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakadu National Park</td>
<td>Gagadju</td>
<td>Gagadju</td>
<td>Gagadju (language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathurst and Melville Islands</td>
<td>Tiwi</td>
<td>Tiwi</td>
<td>Tiwi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daly River</td>
<td>Naniyu Nambiyu</td>
<td>Jawoyn</td>
<td>Jawoyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Jawoyn</td>
<td>Jawoyn</td>
<td>Jawoyn/Dagoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitmiluk National Park</td>
<td>Jawoyn</td>
<td>Warlpiri</td>
<td>Jawoyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanami Desert</td>
<td>Warlpiri</td>
<td>Jingili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliott</td>
<td>Jingili</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Edward Pellew Islands</td>
<td>Mara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek</td>
<td>Warumungu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warumungu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devil’s Marbles</td>
<td>Warumungu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti Tree</td>
<td>Anmatjera</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Standley Chasm</td>
<td>Iwupataka</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>Arrerrete</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aranda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anzac Hill</td>
<td>Arrerrete</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aranda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gosses Bluff</td>
<td>Arrerrete</td>
<td></td>
<td>Western Aranda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Gap</td>
<td>Arrerrete</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aranda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corroboree Rock</td>
<td>Arrerrete</td>
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<td>Chambers Pillar</td>
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<td>Aranda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uluru (Ayers Rock)</td>
<td>Anangu</td>
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<td>Kata Tjuţa (The Olgas)</td>
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Of the guidebooks, *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide* identify Aboriginal place and tribal names more frequently than does *Let’s Go*. Aboriginal place names are used either alongside the European name or they stand alone, serving the purpose of creating, or sustaining, links between the locations and traditional Aboriginal culture. For instance:

Kakadu National Park … derives its name from the Gagudju language group of Aborigines, who number among the area’s traditional custodians; the Gagadju Association now manages the park … (*Rough Guide* p.535)

The name Kakadu comes from the Gagadju, a local Aboriginal language, and much of Kakadu is Aboriginal land, leased to the government for use as a national park. (*Lonely Planet* p.390)

The identification of places with Aboriginal names and their connection to the traditional tribal names of Aboriginal groups convey historical-political information related to Aboriginal land ownership as highlighted above in relation to the Kakadu National Park. All instances of description of land as Aboriginal owned are fairly recent developments in Australia and are the product of an extensive and enduring political campaign for the recognition of Aboriginal Land Rights and Native Title. This process is understood and represented as ongoing by the guidebooks. For example:

Some of the southern areas [of Kakadu National Park] are subject to a land claim under the Native Title Act by the Jawoyn people of the Katherine region. (*Lonely Planet* p.390)

*Lonely Planet* prefers to name sites that are associated with Aboriginal place and tribal names only as a consequence of successful land claims. As such, it says definitively that the land *is* Aboriginal land and in so doing does not relegate Aboriginal culture only to the past. When *Lonely Planet* provides Aboriginal place and tribal group names they are usually combined and placed in a contemporary context. For example, ‘To the Warumungu people, Tennant Creek is Jurnkurakurr’ (p.410) and ‘[Anzac] Hill is known to the Arrernte people as Tharrarltmeme’ (p.418).

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Whilst *Rough Guide* frequently identifies Aboriginal tribal names, some tensions can be discerned particularly in relation to cultural accuracy. For example, *Rough Guide* says that the term ‘Anangu’ – in reference to the tribal group that ‘inhabit’ (but who apparently do not own) the land surrounding Alice Springs – is not the actual name, but the ‘more easily pronounceable’ (p.563) term. Certainly, English spellings of Aboriginal names and words are usually equivalents or approximations, and both *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide* readily describe what is, in fact, a common process of the Europeanisation of Aboriginal place names and tribal groups. The main difference is that *Rough Guide* tends to only provide the Westernised term, which is an example of Western cultural interpretations taking precedence over cultural accuracy. *Lonely Planet* also makes the point that some Aboriginal names have been changed for the benefit of non-Aboriginal people. But, *Lonely Planet* describes such a process as the ‘corruption’ of Aboriginal words and also gives the original Aboriginal name and meaning, often adding information concerning the name. For example, in reference to the well-known tourist site Nourlangie Rock in Kakadu it is stated that ‘the name Nourlangie is a corruption of *nawulandja*, an Aboriginal word that refers to an area bigger than the rock itself. The Aboriginal name of the rock is *Burrunggui*’ (p.395). As *Lonely Planet* is keen to position itself as being responsible and culturally sensitive it is not surprising that this particular guidebook demonstrates considerably more attention to the accuracy of cultural details, even though it utilises the generic term ‘Aboriginal’. In this respect, it is not surprising that there is some level of cultural inaccuracy considering all the guidebooks are written by non-indigenous people and, therefore, rely on second-hand knowledge and interpretative information about Aboriginal culture.

The third strategy used by the guidebooks to produce an ‘authentic’ destination and experience is the naming and description of Dreamtime stories. These stories are incorporated, in part, to articulate the Aboriginal spiritual connection to the landscape and consist of retelling ‘the activities of ancestral beings in the creation period and their role in forming key landscapes’ (Zeppel 2000). The inclusion of Dreaming stories provides a way for travellers to relate to the landscape through Aboriginal legends and potentially to access a less mediated experience of Aboriginal culture – less mediated in the sense that it lacks the obvious involvement of a middleman or third party other than their guidebook. Of course the guidebooks also act as mediators of cultural knowledge.
through the selection and interpretation of information. The authentication of sites by associating them with Dreamtime stories, however, is the least common strategy of authentication. Within the guidebooks, Dreaming stories are only told in relation to a limited number of sites, with Kakadu and Uluru being the two landscapes represented as being most closely related to Aboriginal spirituality. Perhaps there is a greater awareness and acknowledgement of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs relating to these places because both these National Parks are listed as World Heritage Areas because of their cultural as well as natural value. A further reason, particularly in relation to Kakadu, is that Aboriginal rock art sites are major attractions within this landscape and Aboriginal spirituality is used as an important selling point for these sites. The use of Dreamtime stories thus strengthens their status as destinations for travellers who seek not only the scenery of Kakadu but also an element of ‘authentic’ Aboriginal cultural heritage.

*Let’s Go* is more reliant on the description of Dreamtime stories to produce authentic sites than are the other guidebooks and rarely utilises naming strategies (see Table 4.4). By predominantly focusing on this particular authentication strategy, *Let’s Go* tends to distance itself from contemporary Aboriginal issues such as land ownership. By focusing on Dreamtime stories in isolation, *Let’s Go* demonstrates a tendency towards a more superficial utilisation of Aboriginal culture whereby discourses of Aboriginal spirituality are mobilised for their uniqueness to produce and promote destinations. As mentioned above, this guidebook overwhelmingly relies on descriptions of natural landscape to promote destinations partly a result of the absence of visual imagery. For instance, in a section entitled ‘Kakadu National Park’, *Let’s Go* references Aboriginal Dreamtime stories:

> When the Aboriginal spirit Warramurrungundji set out on her daunting task to create much of Kakadu National Park, she had an immense vision. At 19,804 square kilometres, Australia’s largest national park contains six distinct ecosystems, four river systems, abundant wildlife, dozens of Aboriginal outstations and sacred sites where Aboriginal lifestyle and ceremony are still vibrantly practiced and protected. (*Lets Go* p.257)
The reference to spirituality is somewhat superficial in that Warramurrungundji is mentioned as ‘creating’ Kakadu National Park (it is more obviously a ‘creation’ of the Australian Government) and the immensity of her vision is clearly associated with the size of the officially delineated National Park rather than the surrounding area. This quote can be seen as an example of Aboriginal spirituality being reproduced in a way that gives little information about the actual Aboriginal cultural elements and, instead, is attached only to provide an association between narratives of landscape and of Aboriginal spirituality. The passage also highlights how the landscape narrative takes precedence, with ecosystems, river systems and wildlife all being mentioned before Aboriginal aspects. In this sense, Kakadu’s ‘cultural richness’ is posited as secondary to its ‘natural grandeur’. Following this passage, Let’s Go dedicates an entire paragraph to discussing Kakadu’s ‘haunting landscape’ before a paragraph concerning Aboriginal people in Kakadu. It is stated that ‘Intimately intertwined with this awe-inspiring landscape is the living legacy of the Aboriginal community that resides and works in Kakadu’ (Let’s Go, p.258). The close relationship of the Aboriginal community to the land is emphasised in the phrase ‘intimately intertwined’, while the ancient-ness of culture is mentioned in ‘Aboriginal people have inhabited this land for an estimated 50,000 years’ (Let’s Go p.258). The close and long-standing relationship between Aboriginal culture and spirituality and natural landscape is presented as adding additional cultural elements to the park where the landscape is somehow imbued with ancient spirituality, for example, in rock art sites.

Rough Guide also mobilises discourses of Aboriginal spirituality and provides numerous examples of traditional Aboriginal culture in its introductory discussion of Kakadu National Park. The sites of Ubirr and Nourlangie Rock are prescribed as must-sees for a ‘short’ visit that will provide ‘a taste of the park’ (p.539). Ubirr and Nourlangie are locations of ‘ancient rock art’ (p.540) galleries where Dreamtime characters are represented (Figure 4.7). The Mimi spirits at Ubirr and ‘the dramatic figures of Nabulwinjbulwinj, Namarrgon (the Lightning Man) and his wife Barrkinj’ (p.540) serve to authenticate these ‘representative’ sites as emblematic of the Dreamtime and hence of Aboriginal spirituality. The paintings of these Dreamtime characters at Nourlangie are described as ‘unusually vivid’ and the text reveals them to be repainted recently, interestingly to preserve the ‘authenticity’ of this site. The ‘touch
up’ process itself is described as a ‘traditional and sometimes ritual practice’ (p.540). *Rough Guide* informs readers that these Dreamtime characters are ‘depictions of ancient and bizarre spirit-beings’ that are ‘partially understood at best’ (p.537), perpetuating representations of Aboriginal spirituality as complex and timeless, but perhaps most importantly, as inherently different to a European spiritual sensibility. *Rough Guide*, therefore, recognises the complexity of Aboriginal culture in its interpretation of this site.

Other than the presentation of some Dreamtime characters, there is a relative lack of spiritual associations with Kakadu in *Rough Guide*. *Let’s Go*, on the other hand, has a text box on Aboriginal spirituality outlining ‘Kakadu in the Dreaming’ (p.263). *Lonely Planet* also makes very little use of the spiritual association with Kakadu other than a reference to the Rainbow Serpent painting at Ubirr that is described as being of ‘major interest’ and is also allocated to a text box entitled ‘The Rainbow Serpent’ (p.395). The
placing of descriptive information relating to Dreaming stories in text boxes is interesting for a couple of reasons. The separation and isolation of such information from the general text serves to draw attention to them, thus highlighting the uniqueness and importance of the Dreaming stories and, in turn, raising the profile of Aboriginal spirituality in association with a particular site. At the same time, however, the separation of this information from the general text also serves perhaps to present Aboriginal spirituality as something of a novelty.

The use of Dreamtime stories to authenticate certain destinations can have the effect of silencing or minimising contemporary Aboriginal spirituality in that the Dreamtime stories are repeatedly located in the past. Thus, it can be suggested that while these traveller texts create new representations of Aboriginal culture, and thereby differentiate themselves from the dominant stereotypes of mainstream tourism media, the guidebooks, as traveller texts, still draw on familiar representations and meanings albeit in more subtle ways. Aboriginal spirituality is highlighted as a novelty mostly because of its uniqueness, and is often presented as taking the form of an awareness of a collection of stories and myths from and about the past.

There are several noteworthy instances, however, when Aboriginal spirituality is discussed in a contemporary context. Significantly, in representing Kakadu, Let’s Go states that there are ‘sacred sites where Aboriginal lifestyle and ceremony are still vibrantly practiced and protected’ (p.257, my emphasis). Likewise, in relation to Kakadu, Lonely Planet in recounting the aforementioned story of the Rainbow Serpent, states that ‘to the traditional owners of the park, Kurangali is the most powerful spirit. She spends most of her time resting in billabongs, if disturbed she can be very destructive, causing floods and earthquakes’ (p.395, my emphasis). These passages clearly present Aboriginal spiritual beliefs not merely as mythology but as continuing to inform and permeate contemporary Aboriginal cultures.

Although guidebooks are able to provide more detailed information than other forms of tourism and travel media, they must still also make selections and simplify detail. Thus, in the three guidebooks, the presentation of Dreamtime stories in relation to sites other than Kakadu and Uluru although mentioned are often lacking in any detailed
explanation. For example, *Lonely Planet* describes the destinations of Tennant Creek as ‘the intersection of a number of dreaming tracks’ (p.410) and Chambers Pillar as ‘the remains of Itirkawara’ (p.437). Possibly, the tendency for surface representation of Aboriginal spirituality in relation to landscapes can be explained by the practical limitations on guidebooks, particularly considering the absence of any indigenous writers or contributors to the texts. Indeed, any retelling of a Dreamtime story that comes from a non-indigenous source lacks a certain amount of cultural credibility and presents difficulties in transmitting contemporary spiritual significance. Ironically, therefore, the lack of detail could also be considered more culturally sensitive and respectful than a long-winded and erroneous retelling of a Dreamtime story from a non-indigenous perspective.

The representation of the Devil’s Marbles (located between Tennant Creek and Alice Springs) is an excellent example to highlight the simultaneous utilisation of narratives of natural landscape and Aboriginal spirituality to describe and authenticate sites. It is one of few examples where all three guidebooks utilise the narratives of landscape in conjunction with Aboriginal spirituality. The Devil’s Marbles Conservation Reserve is described as ‘one of the few places of interest on the trip south to the Alice’ (*Lonely Planet* p.412) that is ‘well worth a look at’ (*Rough Guide* p.562). The landscape narrative is evident in the description of this site as a ‘genuine geological oddity’ (*Rough Guide* p.562), a ‘haphazard pile of giant spherical boulders’ (*Lonely Planet* p.412). *Lonely Planet* then goes on to state that ‘According to Aboriginal mythology they were laid by the Rainbow Serpent’ (p.412) – a typical example of the mechanism of authenticating a site by associating Aboriginal spirituality with landscape. The brevity and lack of critical engagement in this quote is also typical of *Lonely Planet*’s relatively succinct representation of Aboriginal culture without obvious embellishment or, it could be said, interpretative thoroughness or, alternatively, Western judgments.

In contrast, *Rough Guide* demonstrates a tendency to undermine Aboriginal spirituality in its representation. In describing the Devil’s Marbles, *Rough Guide* states that they are ‘thought to be the eggs of the rainbow serpent’ (p.562, my emphasis). While the narrative of natural landscape describes what is physically present and what the traveller will actually see, the narrative of spirituality points to a set of meanings relative to a
culture that is outside the traveller’s own and, therefore, requires explanation and evaluation. So while informing the traveller of the cultural and spiritual interpretation of the Devil’s Marbles, Rough Guide uses the definitive ‘have been’ to assert the dubious fact ‘several UFOs have been seen around here in recent years’ (p.562, my emphasis). Surely it is the UFOs that should have ‘thought to be’ seen, as the Aboriginal cultural aspects possess and retain a truth not related to, or dependent on, the physical actualities of the site. This is a good example of how a subtle difference in language usage serves to position Aboriginal culture and contemporary spiritual beliefs as Other.

Let’s Go states ‘wind-erosion is a hardly satisfying hypothesis for the ethereal effect that the Devil’s Marbles give to the otherwise barren landscape: the giant orange orbs are alien wonders against the blue sky’ (Let’s Go p.278). It goes on to state that ‘the local Aboriginals say they’re eggs of the rainbow serpent’ (p.278, my emphasis). This Aboriginal interpretation is even supported by the statement that while wind erosion may be the Western scientific explanation for the existence of the Devil’s Marbles, the Aboriginal interpretation and association with Dreamtime spirituality is perhaps a more satisfying explanation for these ‘alien wonders’. Through such use of language, Let’s Go subtly affirms Aboriginal culture by recognising that spiritual interpretations exist as valuable even if they have no direct connection to empirical or scientific ‘reality’.

This section has explored how all three guidebooks mobilise discourses of traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality in constructing the travelled culture, and thus the traveller experience. This process serves to authenticate natural landscapes in the Northern Territory, and the production of authentic cultural sites places the traveller in a position to experience and interact with Aboriginal Australia. Whilst these experiences are mediated by guidebooks, they seemingly offer access to an understanding of Aboriginal interpretation of natural landscapes. In other words, travellers can go to these sites independently and access some measure of Aboriginal interpretation simply by reading and referring to their guidebooks. In this sense, ‘authentic’ experiences can ostensibly occur without any engagement with the commodified tourism industry – ignoring the fact that guidebooks are themselves mass-produced, and backpacking is a global and increasingly commercialised industry. In the following section, I explore another way in which the guidebooks reframe the authentic in relation to Aboriginal
Australia, this is through recommendations about which art and cultural objects to purchase. Authenticity in relation to the purchase of Aboriginal cultural objects is presented in the guidebooks as a central concern for the travellers and as a way of further authenticating the traveller experience.

**Souveniring Culture: Art and Cultural Objects**

Souvenirs are the ‘material culture of tourism’ (Hitchcock and Teague 2000). Described by Gordon (1986) as ‘messengers of the extraordinary’, souvenirs are tangible proof that one has travelled to a particular location and experienced a particular culture (Hitchcock 2000: 2). The production and consumption of souvenirs is a central feature of modern tourism and, as Hitchcock (2000: 1) contends, ‘different social worlds are connected through the production, sale and purchase of souvenirs and at each point of interaction meanings and identities may be negotiated’. For the traveller in Australia, aspects of traditional Aboriginal material culture can be taken home as evidence of experiences. For Aboriginal people, the production of cultural objects for tourism can contribute to the revitalisation of their culture through recognition and appreciation, and the subsequent production of arts as a significant cultural tourism product. Indeed, Power (1997: 54) recognises that ‘[t]oday it is the visual arts that offer Aboriginal Australia its greatest empowerment in our efforts to have our culture recognised locally, nationally and internationally’.

Notwithstanding these benefits, the commodification and appropriation of Aboriginal culture has underpinned the production and reproduction of much art and cultural objects for tourism, and the touristic interest in Aboriginal arts thus raises important questions about issues of authenticity. In relation to cultural tourists, Smith (2003: 131) points out that ‘the authenticity of arts and crafts is considered to be very important ... [they] want to be assured that the product they are buying is made by a local craftsperson, and reflects traditional methods and a design which is characteristic of the local area’. The significant presentation of cultural experiences as central to the experiences of the readers of the guidebooks constructs the traveller, to some extent, as a cultural tourist. While the cultural tourist and the traveller are not necessarily
synonymous they do share similarities in relation to the ideologies of alternative tourism (see Chapter 2). More specifically, in relation to backpackers, the importance of purchasing artefacts of Aboriginal culture is highlighted in a study by the Northern Territory Tourist Commission that found that 56 per cent of Aboriginal art sales in the Northern Territory are to young international visitors in the 20-24 year old age group (cited in Zeppel 2001: 237).

Throughout this chapter, I have suggested that in relation to representations of place and Aboriginal culture, the guidebooks tend not to use the term ‘authentic’. However, in their discussions of art and cultural objects, the guidebooks often use the term ‘authentic’. They inform readers of how and where to purchase authentic art and cultural objects and the reasons why they should. The didjeridu is regarded as the most popular souvenir item for backpacker travellers (Zeppel 2001).¹² The cultural importance of the didjeridu as well as its iconic status are illustrated in the following statement from Mandawuy Yunupingu, an Aboriginal man of northeastern Arnhem Land and a musician in the popular Aboriginal rock band Yothu Yindi:

The Yidaki is deeply entrenched in Yolngu spiritual existence. It holds a special place in the presentation of Yolngu art, music, dance and history … Yolngu understand the Yidaki has become an Australian icon and accept that non-Yolngu people throughout the world now use it for informal purposes and enjoyment. Be aware, however, that its origins are sacred and secret to Yolngu men. (Yunupingu 1997a: vii)

The appropriation of the didjeridu as symbolic of a mythological pan-Aboriginal culture has been addressed in much research on the representation of Aboriginal culture (see,

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¹² There are two common ways to spell the name of this Aboriginal instrument – didjeridu and didgeridoo, although neither title was used by the Aboriginal (Yolngu) people of northeastern Arnhem Land where, traditionally, this musical instrument was known only as the Yidaki (Yunupingu 1997a). The spelling ‘didjeridu’ (which I use throughout this thesis) is increasingly the more accepted within the academic literature (for example, in the collection of works in Neuenfeldt 1997) and is also used in the recent Lonely Planet publication Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait Island: Guide to Aboriginal Australia (Singh et al 2001), and this spelling recently accepted as the correct spelling by the Australian government and its related agencies (Australian Didjeridu Cultural Hub 2003). However, the most popular and ubiquitous spelling, didgeridoo, is still used in popular texts including all of the guidebooks that I analysed, and represents an appropriation of the word for an Anglo audience (as also discussed in relation to Aboriginal tribal and place names above).
for example, Neuenfeldt 1997). Gibson and Connell (2003: 167) examine such appropriation in relation to the backpacker subculture arguing that its popularity for travellers relates to a general sense of ‘neo-tribalism’ that is ‘central to backpacker subcultures, as a social practice and aesthetic stance’. A significant focus of the authenticity of cultural objects presented in the guidebooks is evident in discussions of the didjeridu.

Whilst *Lonely Planet* discusses the didjeridu as one of several Aboriginal cultural objects, *Rough Guide* and *Let’s Go* focus on the didjeridu to the exclusion of any other objects. As discussed earlier, *Lonely Planet* dedicates a 24 page ‘full colour feature’ to ‘Aboriginal Art’ in the chapter entitled ‘Facts about Australia’. Within this section, the importance of the didjeridu is clear as it is the first of seven cultural objects discussed in a section titled ‘Artefacts and Crafts’ (followed in order by boomerangs, wooden sculptures, scorched carvings, ceremonial shields, fibre crafts and ‘other crafts’). Here, didjeridus are described as ‘widespread’ and that there has been a ‘phenomenal boom in their popularity’ (*Lonely Planet* p.138). Following a brief description the origins of the didjeridu and its use in traditional Aboriginal culture (that addresses the Aboriginal name Yidaki), readers are warned that:

> Although they may look pretty, most didgeridoos these days bear little relation to traditional ones: they may be made from the wrong or inferior wood, have been hollowed out using mechanical or other means, have poor sound quality, and most have never had an Aboriginal person anywhere near them! (*Lonely Planet* p.139)

The reader is then referred to a section titled ‘Buying Aboriginal Art and Artefacts’ that advises that authenticity should be considered when purchasing didjeridus. The guidebook states that ‘much of the so-called Aboriginal art sold as souvenirs is either ripped-off from Aboriginal people or is just plain fake … you need to decide whether you want [a didjeridu as] a decorative piece or an authentic and functional musical instrument’ (*Lonely Planet* p.139). This association of the didjeridu as authentic based in its function as an instrument is discussed further, below. Further, *Lonely Planet* recommends that galleries and shops owned and operated by Aboriginal people are the ‘best’ outlets to purchase Aboriginal art and cultural objects and readers are informed
that by ‘buying authentic items you are supporting Aboriginal culture and helping to ensure that traditional skills and designs endure’ (Lonely Planet p.142). The presentation of a desire to ‘support Aboriginal culture’ is a recognisable aspect of Lonely Planet’s mobilisation of discourses of responsible travel and its construction of the responsible traveller.

Rough Guide and Let’s Go present information on Aboriginal Art within their Northern Territory chapters further reinforcing the idea that Aboriginal culture is largely confined to this part of Australia. In these guidebooks, the didjeridu is discussed to the exclusion of all other cultural objects. In Rough Guide, the didjeridu is first mentioned in the Alice Springs section of the Northern Territory chapter where it is discussed in a text box titled ‘Buying and Playing a Didgeridoo’ which follows a brief section entitled ‘Shopping for Aboriginal Art’. Similarly, the first mention of the didjeridu in Let’s Go occurs in the section on ‘The Red Centre’. In both Let’s Go and Rough Guide information is presented in text boxes which serves to separate or highlight the information. In Let’s Go the text box is titled ‘Didgeridoo 101’, the numbers alluding to the provision of information for beginners similar to the numerical coding used in, for example, foundational university courses. The first point relevant here, is that by positioning the information about didjeridus in sections relating to Central Australia, rather than in the section discussing the Top End (where the didjeridu is a traditional cultural object), the iconic status of the didjeridu as a homogenous Aboriginal artefact is perpetuated.

Indeed, Rough Guide fails to address the heritage of the instrument at all saying only that they are ‘considered to be indigenous to the Katherine region’ (Rough Guide p.572). Rough Guide does not report their correct origin in Arnhem Land or provide any information about the cultural importance of the instrument to the Aboriginal people. Rough Guide narrowly, yet colourfully, describes the didjeridu as ‘the simple wooden instrument whose eerie sound perfectly evokes the mysteries of Aboriginal Australia’ (Rough Guide p.572). In addition, Rough Guide continuously refers to this cultural object as a ‘didge’, a popular term used by Western backpackers. Let’s Go also refers to the instrument as ‘the didge’ and although it makes no reference to the traditional Aboriginal name it does make the point that it ‘is the traditional musical instrument of
the Yolngu Aboriginals of northern Australia, and has been used for thousands of years in traditional corroboree dance ceremonies’ (p.278). The informal naming of the instrument by these two guidebooks as ‘the didge’ could be seen as representing a form of subcultural appropriation – relating to the ‘neo-tribal’ ownership of the instrument by backpackers (Gibson and Connell 2003).

*Rough Guide* (p.572) advises readers that ‘authentic didges are created by termite-hollowed branches of trees’ (although it fails to note that they were only made from particular types of eucalypt trees) and, therefore, a ‘real didge is a natural tube of wood with a rough interior’. Rather than recommending that readers buy didjeridus from Aboriginal owned and operated shops to ensure authenticity, it merely advises them not to buy painted didjeridus which, apparently, ‘haven’t got any symbolic meaning; plain ones look less tacky and are less expensive’ (*Rough Guide* p.572). This comment serves to reinforce the association between the overpriced commodities commonly sold to tourists and the ‘tackiness’ that conveys a lack of authenticity and cultural capital.

Similarly, according to *Let’s Go*, in ‘Aboriginal tradition, painted didges are only played in formal ceremonies … but their beauty and higher prices make them ubiquitous in tourist shops’ (p.278). *Let’s Go* concludes with a discussion about choosing and buying a didjeridu but, unlike *Lonely Planet*, makes no mention of Aboriginal owned enterprises and does not discuss the benefits of purchasing ‘authentic’ cultural objects from Aboriginal people. In *Rough Guide* (p.571), readers are warned that purchasing cultural objects from Aboriginal owned outlets is more expensive and ‘you certainly won’t save money buying direct – usually the opposite – but you might feel happier about who benefits from the proceeds’. This point alludes to the tension that exists between the price of certain ‘authentic’ cultural objects and the limitations of the backpacker traveller’s budget.

While all the guidebooks discuss the didjeridu as an instrument, in *Lonely Planet* and *Let’s Go* its instrumental use is largely secondary to an emphasis on its cultural symbolism. In contrast, following a general description of the didjeridu, *Rough Guide* gives some instructions on how to play it and ‘master’ the ‘tricky bit’ of circular breathing (p.572). Readers are informed:

[R]emember that there is nothing magical about a didgeridoo; it’s your lips that make the sound which resonates through the tube, any tube. A length of grey 40mm PVC pipe from Mitre 10 may not have the same kudos but produces a similar sound at around $4 a metre. (Rough Guide p.572)

The above quote could be read as simply providing a cheaper option for some backpackers and, thus, maintaining the ideal of ‘budget travel’ that forms part of the guidebook’s avowed mission. It could also, however, be interpreted as contributing to the de-mythologising of the didjeridu. Rough Guide perhaps intends to draw the didjeridu from its realm as a tourist and traveller icon (as was the boomerang before it) by reminding readers that it is not in any way ‘magical’ but actually a very simple object that is quite difficult to play. In de-mythologising the instrument, the object itself ceases to have the same revered cultural status but at the same time it is revealed as a means to an end – it is the sound the didjeridu produces that is actually more representative and emblematic of Aboriginal culture and, potentially, more authentic than the actual tubular object. The means through which the iconic sound of the didjeridu is produced is regarded as being of interest to the traveller. The traveller seeking a truly authentic interaction with the cultural object is constructed as someone who purportedly intends to actually play the instrument and, thus, to experience the culture through a much more direct and personal form of engagement. The cultural object is presented as an instrument of contemporary Aboriginal culture rather than merely a timeless relic and collectable souvenir of the travel experience.

The amount of information provided in the guidebooks about the didjeridu reflects and reinforces its iconic status and popularity for backpackers who are known to be primary purchasers of these objects. With this in mind, the guidebooks, to varying degrees, make attempts to direct readers to purchasing authentic didjeridus and, by doing so, further constructs readers as travellers with an interest in Aboriginal cultures. In relation to souvenirs more generally, however, a tension emerges in that backpackers are somewhat similar to other (more commodified) tourists in that they desire to own or possess some component of the travelled culture. Through framing authenticity in relation to cultural objects, the overtly touristic nature of the impulse to purchase souvenirs is masked and, instead, seeking out authentic souvenirs becomes a legitimate

element of traveller behaviour. The traveller is told that avoiding mass-produced tourist souvenirs can be achieved through buying cultural objects from Aboriginal owned and operated shops and galleries. Authenticity in relation to the didjeridu is also presented as being a function of the object as an instrument rather than its exterior aesthetics. Although the individual guidebooks display varying levels of commitment to authenticity, the emphasis that the guidebooks place on informing their readers about how and why they should purchase authentic cultural objects reflects a dominant aspect of traveller discourse – the desire to move beyond commodified mass tourism. What occurs, however, is a further consolidation of the process of reframing authenticity away from direct cultural interaction and towards more available types of authentic Aboriginal cultural experiences.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined the ways by which the traveller and particular aspects of the traveller experience to Australia are represented and constructed within three guidebooks – *Lonely Planet, Rough Guide* and *Let’s Go*. Backpackers are constructed as independent travellers with a desire for authentic experiences and meaningful cultural interactions with the places and people that they encounter. Authenticity thus emerges as a central theme in the construction of the collective identity of independent travellers. Significantly, Aboriginal people and their cultures are central to the presentation of an authentic travel experience in Australia. I do not propose, however, that authenticity is necessarily achievable. Rather, I have argued that it is reframed by the guidebooks in response to an understanding that travellers desire a particular type of authenticity, and that this authenticity is predicated on interaction which, by and large, will not be available to them. The guidebooks construct an alternative set of meanings that partially redefine the authentic cultural experience.

Structured non-formal educational experiences are presented as the best way to learn about, and engage with, Aboriginal culture. Such educational pursuits include taking Aboriginal tours and visiting Aboriginal cultural centres. For those travellers seeking less mediated experiences, selected landscapes in the Northern Territory are

authenticated through their association with traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality. The guidebooks also recommend that travellers purchase authentic cultural objects, in particular, didjeridus. These traveller texts, therefore, reframe authenticity so that it is no longer about direct and intrusive cultural interaction but is achieved through more accessible experiences of Aboriginal culture. In so doing, the guidebooks contribute to the construction of the traveller as culturally aware and responsible, simultaneously mobilising and reinforcing ideals associated with being a traveller.

The construction of the backpacker (the traveller) as a particular gazing and experiencing subject, and of people and cultures (the travelled) as objects of the gaze is the central concern of this thesis. Guidebooks are predominantly read whilst travelling and, therefore, these texts have a significantly direct and situational impact on their readers. Whilst the guidebooks may seek to reframe authenticity, I suggest, in the chapters that follow, that, at best, they are a mediating influence on authenticity and that travellers actively define what they consider to be authentic experiences themselves. In the next chapter, I examine the ways by which backpackers engage with the guidebook texts during their travels and use them to negotiate their experiences with, and understandings of, Aboriginal Australia.
Chapter 5

Touring Aboriginal Australia: Backpacker Negotiations of Experience

Individuals, in a social world, negotiate their way discursively through the uncharted possibilities of mind and experience (in the sense of tackling an obstacle course), in the same way that tourists chart their course through the unfamiliar territory of their travels – in both cases armed principally with the socially provided tools of discourse. (Moore 2002: 58)

Introduction

The guidebooks used by the backpackers in this study have been positioned as traveller texts that draw upon and reproduce aspects of traveller discourse (see Chapter 4). As physical objects, guidebooks are carried in the backpacks of travellers and provide a lens through which backpackers come to perceive and know the travelled world, concurrently playing a role in helping to shape traveller discourse. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, guidebooks are significant and powerful mediators between the traveller, the travel experience and the travelled culture. They are ‘tools of discourse’ (Moore 2002: 58) that influence the way that subjects behave, assisting in the interpretation and, often, the creation of new and unexpected cultural situations. This chapter seeks to explore the influence of these texts on backpacker experiences with, and interpretations of, Aboriginal Australia. The empirical data discussed in the chapter are drawn from in-depth interviews with 28 international backpackers (see Appendix B for details of the backpackers interviewed) and from participant observation conducted in the Northern Territory and Northern Queensland during the fieldwork period from August to December 2000 (see Chapter 1 and Appendix A).

This chapter comprises six sections. The first deals with the diverse ways in which backpackers perceive, use and engage with their guidebook texts. In the second section, I explore how the particular characteristics of traveller discourse identified in Chapter 4
– authenticity, cultural interaction and cultural education – influence the ways that the backpackers define themselves as travellers, and structure the relationship between backpackers and Aboriginal people and their cultures. In the third section, the backpackers’ perceptions of Aboriginal Australia are investigated through a discussion of prior knowledges, preconceptions and expectations particularly as they relate to the information provided in guidebooks. The fourth section presents a further analysis of these themes by moving beyond the guidebooks to examine other sources of meaning that shape the traveller experience. I suggest that lived experience, particularly knowledge gained from verbal communications with other backpackers, either supports or contradicts the information in guidebooks; in the latter case, potentially challenging preconceptions and stereotypes. In the fifth section, I explore the extent to which backpackers draw upon and express aspects of traveller discourse, and examine how cultural interactions are interpreted, and experiences with Aboriginal cultures understood. In the final section I further explore the ways in which backpackers identify as travellers and differentiate themselves from mass tourists. This discussion takes into account the backpackers’ rejection of practices associated with tourism, whilst other travellers discussed under the term ‘anti-backpacker’ reject the practices associated with backpacking.

**Backpacking Australia: Travellers and their Guidebooks**

Travellers come to know about indigenous people and their cultures in various ways, and representations in numerous popular cultural texts (such as film, television and novels) play a significant role in shaping this knowledge. However, when the backpackers I interviewed were asked to discuss the media that had informed them about Australia generally, and about Aboriginal Australia specifically, the majority indicated that the two main sources of information that influenced their knowledge, both prior to and during their travel experiences, were their guidebooks and verbal communications with other travellers. Of the 28 backpackers interviewed, only three were not using a guidebook (see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4, above). One of these three, however, stated that even though she did not own a guidebook, she had ‘looked at the
Lonely Planet in bookstores’ (Simone, 19, from Canada) prior to travelling, and had travelled with a friend who had a Lonely Planet guidebook.

The decision of the other two backpackers not to use guidebooks is explored later in the chapter in relation to their subject position as anti-backpackers. These two travellers said that a guidebook was unnecessary because of the perceived ease of travelling in Australia, and the familiarity of a Western, English speaking country:

Look at Australia, it’s so comfortable, it’s so easy. You don’t need a guidebook when it’s so easy and everything is so common knowledge. You can always talk to someone. (Stefan 22, from Sweden)

For Stefan, the role of the guidebook was to provide educational information for backpackers to navigate and interpret cultural situations beyond their common experience. However, due to Australia’s status as a Western industrialised nation, he perceived that such information would be readily accessible from sources other than guidebooks – such as word-of-mouth – and cultural situations would be less likely to demand interpretative capacity beyond one’s ‘common knowledge’. A number of backpackers said they chose Australia as a destination precisely because they believed that travelling here would be ‘easy’:

I wanted to travel on my own. I wanted to go somewhere a long way from home and because it was the first time I was going to travel on my own I wanted to go somewhere quite easy and English speaking. (Melissa, 27, from England)

I just really wanted to travel. I wanted to go somewhere that was a bit easy … because I knew I’d be on my own for quite a while … [and so I chose Australia] rather than going somewhere where you don’t speak the same language. (Isobel, 24, from Ireland)

Despite the perceived ‘ease’ of travelling in Australia for Western backpackers, guidebooks were undoubtedly deemed a necessary companion for the overwhelming majority of the backpackers I interviewed. As outlined in Chapter 3, guidebooks may be
used at all three stages of the travel experience – that is, pre-trip, post-trip, and on-trip (Dann 1996a). Many of the backpackers purchased their guidebooks in their home country once the decision to travel to Australia had been made. Guidebooks were, from the outset, differentiated from mainstream tourism promotional material, and such media – which utilises the tourism image to elicit desire and attract potential visitors to a given destination – were rarely used by the backpackers. For the majority, the pre-trip purchase of the guidebook was often to the exclusion of any other tourism media or travel literature and only six backpackers said that they had referred to the Internet for information, and none of them had used tourism brochures.

A couple of backpackers also said that they intended to keep and use their guidebooks post-trip as a type of souvenir, as a memento and reminder of their travels:

I bought my guidebook before flying to Australia and I read it on the aeroplane … I like to keep my guidebooks because then that’s another source of memories for me. You look through and it’s like ‘oh yes I went there’. (Rachel, 28, from England)

In both these instances – prior to and after travels – the function of the guidebook as provider of information remains the same but the effect is different. Pre-trip the information is used to shape expectations, post-trip the same information is used to evoke and, possibly, shape and reshape memories. However, the overwhelming majority of the backpackers indicated that although they purchased their guidebooks prior to arriving in Australia, and some stated they would reflect on them afterwards, mostly they read their guidebooks whilst actually travelling. So while guidebooks may be used at all three stages of the travel experience (Dann 1996a), the dominant function is as an on-trip mediator. Therefore, these texts have a quite direct and immediate impact on backpackers and the interpretation of their experiences. The following statements draw attention to the use of guidebooks during the travel experience:

I got my guidebook before I came out here … [but] rather than reading that before I came out here I decided to read the appropriate bits before I moved on to the
right towns, because you can’t keep it all in your head. So I left all that reading till when I came out here. (Tommy, 25, from England)

I more or less read it as I go along. Especially, for instance, on travelling to different places, looking for accommodation, and looking at what is the best thing to do in that particular area. That’s more or less what I use it for. (Richard, 29, from Ireland)

I really enjoyed reading the Lonely Planet. And you can relate what you’ve read to what you’ve seen so far. (Natalie, 28, from England)

In other words, reader engagement with these texts is primarily situational. Sections relating to particular places tend to be read when arriving at destinations or when they are in transit between destinations. The third quote, above, also indicates that the information provided by guidebooks before arriving at a given destination is interpreted in light of other information and experience. Interestingly, the utilisation of the guidebook in these different ways whilst on-trip draws Dann’s three stages into a more micro-orientated understanding of pre-destination, at-destination and post-destination. Travel is experienced as fluid with continual reflection on past experiences serving to shape both present circumstance and future expectations. This more complex usage of guidebooks by the backpackers is extremely relevant to understanding the situational negotiations of text and experience explored further below.

The important on-trip role of the guidebook in providing information about Australia generally, and Aboriginal Australia specifically, was highlighted by a number of the backpackers. Guidebooks also played a major role in shaping their understanding of Aboriginal cultures, and they were often considered to be the single most important source of information for backpackers in the interpretation of cultural situations. As one backpacker stated ‘Most of my knowledge of Aboriginal culture has come through reading the Lonely Planet’ (Isobel, 24, from Ireland). Many backpackers indicated that prior to reading their guidebooks they were unaware of the social and political situations faced by Aboriginal Australians, such as issues relating to colonisation, assimilation policies and land ownership. Many also discussed the knowledge they gained about
traditional culture and Aboriginal art. Indeed, backpackers with the *Lonely Planet* often discussed in interviews the section on Aboriginal art (which, as discussed in Chapter 4, forms a significant part of this particular guidebook’s introductory chapters) when I asked about the types of cultural information they had gained through reading their guidebooks. For example:

The *Lonely Planet* has got a whole history section at the beginning and it’s got a whole Aboriginal art section … That’s probably where I’ve got most of my knowledge about the history and cultural side of things. (Claudia, 19, from England)

The backpackers who used guidebooks as their main source of information frequently offered positive interpretations of the information concerning Aboriginal Australia. In this sense, they used words such as ‘factual’, ‘informative’, ‘pro-Aboriginal’ and ‘politically correct’ to describe the information their guidebook provided:

It’s obviously very pro-Aboriginal the *Lonely Planet* guide which is quite interesting … I probably knew the basic history … that the Aboriginals\(^\text{13}\) were here, the British came over within the last few hundred years and basically wiped them out … But I didn’t know anything about that when they arrived here they decided that the Aboriginals didn’t own the land because they weren’t actually settled and what they said was that they were nomadic … That’s the sort of thing that I’ve learnt reading my guidebook. (Natalie, 28, from England)

The traveller desire for knowledge can lead to the attribution of positive value to the interpretative material provided in guidebooks because it can enhance their knowledge of Aboriginal Australia, either generally or specifically. Similarly, the mobilisation of particular ideals of travel in the guidebooks – based around cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and traveller responsibility – can lead to the belief that the guidebooks that promote these ideals are balanced in their representations of Aboriginal issues. For some backpackers, there was often little recognition of the limitations of these texts. For

\(^{13}\) The backpacker quotes presented in this chapter are verbatim. Any errors or inconsistencies in the terms they use to describe Aboriginal Australians (for example, Aborigines, Aboriginals) remain as they were in the interview data.

example, few recognised that their guidebooks were written from a non-indigenous perspective and, therefore, that information relating to political and social issues could potentially be skewed towards a Western interpretation of Aboriginal culture and history. A typical example of an uncritical judgement on the type of information in *Rough Guide* is illustrated in this backpacker commenting that ‘From what I’ve read so far it’s a pretty good representation, it’s pretty balanced’ (Cathryn, 24, from England). Such statements, however, probably indicate more about the background knowledge of individual backpackers rather than the extent or detail of information concerning Aboriginal Australia in the guidebooks. Thus, while the guidebook is used as a lens for interpreting experiences, the text itself is interpreted in the context of previous knowledge.

The extent of previous knowledge held by individual backpackers, to varying degrees, did mean that some demonstrated a reasonable level of awareness concerning the limitations of the guidebook information on Aboriginal Australia. Whilst there is information on socio-political history, some backpackers expressed disappointment with the lack of detail in their guidebooks that acknowledged or described traditional and contemporary culture. For instance:

My *Rough Guide* book has a little bit of information on Aboriginal culture. There’s a section at the back about history, but not so much about culture. Throughout it has small bits when you get to certain places like Uluru, so there’s a bit as you work through, but it doesn’t have a huge amount. I don’t think it’s particularly good. (Melissa, 27, from England)

I have the *Lonely Planet*. It does have a bit of information on Aboriginal culture but not enough. I think you would have to get a cultural guidebook [written by Aboriginal people] if you want to find out about things like that … But I don’t know if they’re supposed to put them [cultural information] in a guidebook anyway. (Helena, 23, from Germany)

These statements indicate two points relevant to the role of guidebooks as cultural mediators. First, these backpackers described a desire for knowledge of Aboriginal
culture which implied an acceptance of the traveller ideals of cultural and educational experiences. Second, the guidebook as a source of information enables the negotiation of their cultural experiences. However, in this regard, the ability of the guidebook to fulfil the desire for sufficiently detailed and relevant knowledge of Aboriginal Australia and, thus, its capacity to provide the means for negotiating a variety of cultural experiences, were evaluated relative to the extent of previously held cultural knowledge. What this means is that individual backpackers were inclined to judge the information in their guidebooks based on subjective and personal criteria. As the above quotes show, the limits of the guidebook to satisfy the desires of at least these two backpackers concerned both the quantity and the quality of the information that is (and can be) presented.

Descriptions of the limited cultural information involved words and comments, such as ‘bits’, ‘small bits’ and ‘doesn’t have a huge amount’, implying that these backpackers believed the quantity of information to be insufficient. Another perceived shortcoming in the guidebooks’ provision of cultural information related to its being dedicated to specific places which were not currently of relevance in their travels, reflecting the tendency of the guidebooks to frame Aboriginal Australia in close association with the Northern Territory (see Chapter 4). Accordingly, the evaluation by individual backpackers of a guidebook’s effectiveness is influenced by its situational usage and impact in relation to specific destinations and particular places (such as Uluru, identified by Melissa, above).

Furthermore, for some backpackers, the relatively few instances of culturally relevant material were deemed to be lacking in quality. Melissa, above, indicates that she found the historical material in her guidebook to be inadequate to allow her to understand and negotiate contemporary cultural situations. Similarly, Helena lamented the lack of information on Aboriginal culture. Yet, she also acknowledged that the depth and complexity of Aboriginal culture cannot readily be reproduced in a guidebook text. In referring to ‘a cultural guidebook … to find out’, Helena suggested that the richness of cultural nuance would be better provided in a guidebook specifically relating to Aboriginal culture or, perhaps more importantly, written by Aboriginal people.
Another backpacker, who had used more than one guidebook in her travels, compared
the types of cultural information provided and, indeed, the types of information she
considered as being cultural in nature:

The *Lonely Planet* actually does give more information about Aboriginal history,
but the *Let’s Go* wasn’t as good about it. Like the *Let’s Go* had a lot of stories,
like the story behind Kakadu and the Dreaming … But from what I read the *Let’s
Go* didn’t seem like it addressed issues as much as the *Lonely Planet* does.
(Jackie, 20, from the United States)

As well as demonstrating a desire for information concerning historical as well as
contemporary issues about Aboriginal Australia, Jackie apparently distinguished
between interpretation of so called ‘factual’ information and ‘stories’ associated with
elements of Aboriginal spirituality and the Dreaming. As discussed in Chapter 4, *Let’s
Go* focused more heavily on Aboriginal spirituality than did the other guidebooks
analysed. This focus on spirituality was to the comparative exclusion of historical and
contemporary socio-cultural and political material. Interestingly, she implies a belief in
spirituality as being separate from both Aboriginal history and contemporary issues.

Significantly, the role of the guidebook as a mediator of knowledge is ‘dynamic’
(McGregor 2000). This dynamic relationship between the guidebook and the individual
backpacker is clear when considering the numerous ways in which the texts are utilised
in a variety of different travel phases (Dann 1996a) and in relationship to different
destinations. The range of subjective and situational influences on the processes by
which guidebooks were evaluated were based on their perceived effectiveness at
providing sufficiently detailed and relevant cultural information as well as the means for
the negotiation of cultural experiences. The extent of previous cultural knowledge and
the situational requirements of specific destinations were both instrumental factors in
the development of a personally unique and yet shifting set of evaluative criteria.
Indeed, guidebooks can be many things to many people, dependent on an individual
backpacker’s personal history, their present circumstance, and their future desires and
expectations.

That the majority of the backpackers I interviewed carried guidebooks and depended on them as a primary source of cultural information indicates that the guidebooks did exert an influence on their expectations and experiences. The guidebooks analysed in Chapter 4 were found to promote authenticity, cultural interaction and cultural learning as significant aspects of the traveller experience in Australia. I now turn to an exploration of the more specific ways in which the information provided by guidebooks acted to frame the travel experience. For the majority of the backpackers interviewed, a desire to pursue ‘authentic’ educational and cultural experiences in relation to Aboriginal Australia was considered to be an important dimension of their Australian travels.

**The Quest for Authenticity: Backpacking Aboriginal Australia**

The backpackers’ expectations of themselves and their travel experiences in Australia included the desire to gain some knowledge of Aboriginal cultures. Also paramount was the pursuit of cultural interaction. Many backpackers viewed formal or informal educational experiences as an important motivation for travelling. Travel, as an educative pursuit, is related to personal development and often self-improvement – there is also significant ‘cultural capital’ to be gained from long-haul, long-term travel (Desforges 1998; Chapter 2). That a desire for learning is a central motivation for travel is evident in the following:

I’m always interested in learning about new things, and travel is a great opportunity for learning. (Linda, 24, from Canada)

Generally when I go travelling in any country I am interested in learning about different cultures. (Rachel, 28, from England)

This desire to learn was also discussed in relation to indigenous cultures generally, and Aboriginal cultures more specifically. I have argued throughout this thesis that opportunities for learning about and interacting with indigenous cultures is an important aspect of the traveller discourse reflecting the search for knowledge about an authentic Other:
In any country if there’s an indigenous people there it’s always interesting to find out and learn more about it, because … they’re the forefathers of each country, they’ve always been there. (Angus, 30, from Scotland)

Aboriginal culture is really interesting. I think you should know something about the indigenous people in the country that live here, and respect the way they live. And not just respect, you should also know something about what’s really going on. That’s important to me in my travels. (Peter, 25, from The Netherlands)

I wanted to find out more about Aboriginals when I came out here. Learn more about their life and culture. I mean it’s one of a lot of things that I wanted to do when I came out here … And I wanted to learn to play the didjeridu. (Tommy, 25, from England)

The significance of learning about Aboriginal cultures during their Australian travels was also evident in comments that prioritised learning alongside other aspects of the backpacking experience, including escape, fun and sightseeing. In this regard, it is clear that the desire for cultural education is one of many travel pursuits; however, it is significant because it constitutes part of the overall travel experience for backpackers in Australia. For example:

I travel because I want to know. I wanted to get to know Australia, I want to learn about Aboriginals, and, well, I want to have fun of course. (Johan, 31, from The Netherlands)

One of the thoughts I had when I was planning to [come] here was not only to see the beach, and not only to do the travelling, but you know, learning about the country and the Aborigine culture. (Saskia, 23, from The Netherlands)

Each of the guidebooks I analysed represented the Northern Territory as the pre-eminent place to participate in Aboriginal cultural experiences, citing reasons including the greater proportion of land ownership and higher proportion of Aboriginal people as compared to other Australian states and territories. Interestingly, it was predominantly
the backpackers who had been to the Northern Territory who prioritised Aboriginal cultural experiences, and many backpackers pointed out that it was not until they had travelled to this particular place that their desire to learn about Aboriginal cultures had been fuelled. For example, Natalie (28, from England) stated that before she arrived in Australia, she ‘didn’t really think of Aborigines’ and although she had ‘a curiosity about people and culture … it wasn’t at the forefront of my mind to come and find out about the culture’. When she started travelling through the Northern Territory, however, she became interested in Aboriginal culture. Natalie then repeated some of the reasons presented in her guidebook (Lonely Planet) as to why cultural experiences are more likely in the Northern Territory:

I have become more interested in Aboriginal culture coming up here, from Adelaide [South Australia] to Darwin [Northern Territory]. It has been really interesting for me. They have so much more land here that belongs to them, and you see more Aborigines coming up here. And I think the people you meet, like other backpackers, are more interested in the cultural side of it too. (Natalie, 28, from England)

What is of particular significance is that the desire for cultural learning and interaction can emerge as the traveller enters the specific destinations that are (re)presented as offering this potential. Certainly, the guidebooks used by the backpackers claim that there is something unusual about the Northern Territory in terms of accessibility of Aboriginal culture. Thus, the values attributed to different aspects of the traveller experience are not fixed but, rather, are in a dynamic process of continual realignment. Certain places in Australia offer opportunities for particular types of experiences (for example, scuba diving at the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland or partying at Bondi, Sydney in New South Wales), with the Northern Territory and the Outback promoted – and interpreted – as the primary places for Aboriginal cultural experiences. As Natalie explained:

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14 Six of the 28 backpackers were interviewed in Cairns in Northern Queensland. Of these six, two had been to the Northern Territory prior to the interview.
The types of things you do on the East Coast aren’t really that related [to Aboriginal culture], it’s not really a cultural experience. It’s more about scenery and adventure sports and going out drinking.

The backpackers I spoke thus negotiated the text relevant to their experience. As mentioned above, the reading of guidebooks is usually situational and not undertaken long before arriving at destinations. Therefore, various dimensions of information contained within the guidebook become meaningful at different times. Accordingly, different forms of desire and types of experiences become primary for the backpacker dependent on the context of their current situation. The guidebook plays a central role in both formulating the nature of this desire and facilitating the means for its fulfilment. Thus, for Natalie, her time spent on the East Coast prior to arriving in the Northern Territory was dominated by activities not associated with Aboriginal cultural learning or Aboriginal cultural interaction but, rather, by other aspects of backpacker culture in Australia including play, drinking and generally having fun. However, upon arriving in the Northern Territory, a realignment of interests and desires and the focus of her guidebook brought Aboriginal culture to the forefront. The primarily situational negotiation of text indicates that an increased interest in Aboriginal culture may be partially the result of the guidebook mobilising this aspect of the traveller experience in close association with this particular destination.

The capacity of the text to influence backpackers in different ways throughout their travels can be further illustrated through the desired experiences of Stefan (22, from Sweden). As noted earlier, this particular backpacker was not actually using a guidebook and, consequently, his day-to-day desires were less likely to be evoked by the ways in which these texts represent particular destinations. In contrast to Natalie (above) whose interest in learning about culture only developed when the potential for fulfilling this interest became apparent, Stefan indicated that learning is of central importance to his travel experience irrespective of his destination. He believed that his decision not to use a guidebook allowed him to move beyond the possible influence of the text, and gave him comparatively more freedom to negotiate and interpret his travel experiences. In other words, he was not seeking destinations predefined by a guidebook

as being likely locales for the pursuit and achievement of this goal. The centrality of Stefan’s desire for learning is illustrated in his statement that:

I’ve been travelling for a bit and I want to get off the beaten track and see more of the things that I haven’t seen. I want to see different people, different cultures. That’s how you take advantage of your travels. I see it as a way for me to learn as much as possible … You have to see outside your own backyard. That’s why I’m travelling. To get to know and to get to learn. To develop as a person, you know … When I’ve seen it I get the knowledge, and I know things because I’ve been there … My feeling about travelling is that I want to take part in the local culture. I just don’t want to be one of the crowd, you know, it’s easy to sort of hang round the tourist areas but that’s not my wish. (Stefan, 22, from Sweden)

Stefan considered learning to be the fundamental reason for travelling. He believed that experience is the best way to gain knowledge and spoke of his desire to experience ‘different’ people and cultures, and of the opportunities that travel can provide for fulfilling this desire. He believed that learning about different cultures through travel would contribute to his education and personal development. Although Stefan did not use a guidebook, he voiced all the characteristics of the traveller discourse embedded in the traveller texts. Stefan also emphasised his desire for cultural interaction and said he wanted to ‘take part in the local culture’. He also alluded to the traveller-tourist oppositional relationship prevalent in traveller discourse by stating that he didn’t want to be ‘one of the crowd’ or ‘hang round the tourist areas’. He wanted to separate himself from ‘tourism’ and thought that ‘getting off the beaten track’ would lead to the most authentic learning opportunities. Significantly, too, he wanted to separate himself from other backpackers, a desire that is explored in more detail, below.

In addition to a general quest for learning, another important aspect of traveller discourse was identified in the interviews – the desire for cultural interaction. Many of the backpackers believed that the best, and perhaps the only way, to learn about culture is to actually meet and talk to Aboriginal people. In this sense, they often expressed a desire to access the ‘backstage’ (MacCannell 1989) to experience authentic interaction with Aboriginal culture. For instance:
I was really interested … to find out more and to learn about Aboriginal culture … I was interested in meeting Aboriginal people and talking to them. That was one of the things I really wanted to do. (Isobel, 24, from Ireland)

Many of the backpackers suggested, however, that ‘true’ cultural interaction cannot easily occur even for independent travellers saying that the ‘backstage’ is somewhat difficult to access and that backpackers, like tourists, are most often only able to experience the ‘frontstage’:

I am really interested in Aboriginal culture, and I just want to know, to learn, more about it. … [But] it is hard to access [culture] on a non-tourism level, on a more one to one basis. I would get more out of interactions than going to a [cultural] centre … I would prefer to do it on a personal level, sit down and have a chat to somebody, but I believe this is difficult. (Andre, 22, from The Netherlands)

There was a belief that the most ‘authentic’ cultural experiences could only be achieved through long-term interaction, such as ‘living with’ or ‘working with’ Aboriginal people. Indeed, the guidebooks that were used by the backpackers advise them that it is potentially difficult for ‘short-term visitors’ to have ‘meaningful’ experiences (Lonely Planet p.363, Rough Guide p.518). Authenticity of experience, therefore, was sometimes deemed to be an immersion into local culture and this belief has resonance with the view of travelling that is epitomised, for example, by the original backpacker travellers such as ‘explorers’ and ‘drifters’ (Cohen’s 1972; 1973). In this light, some backpackers believed that cultural immersion was beyond the scope of a travel experience and that one needs to be more than a traveller to really learn about and experience Aboriginal culture:

I think if you want to experience Aboriginal life, to learn about Aboriginal culture, if you are interested in something like that then you’d have to go and live with them for months. You can’t just expect to turn up for a week and have the Aboriginal experience. (James, 21, from England)
I’m quite interested in the whole Aboriginal culture thing. I am actually keen to do something, maybe do something to get involved, like I volunteered in Nepal. That’s the best way to learn about [a culture], to get involved. (Cathryn, 24, from England)

I’ve been looking at various Aboriginal cultural tours … But I think what I’d prefer to do is to find a job somewhere … and get the experience through meeting people and getting to know them. (Melissa, 27, from England)

The above statements indicate that the transitory nature of travel itself works against the goal of cultural immersion and associated authentic cultural interaction. Whilst backpackers are considered, in the main, to be relatively long-term travellers, the large number of destinations of interest in a country the size of Australia means that they are constantly on the move and rarely in one place long enough to develop the necessary social contacts that would facilitate greater levels of involvement with Aboriginal people. Those backpackers I interviewed who had spent extended periods of time in particular destinations overwhelmingly chose to stay in the major cities of Sydney (New South Wales) and Melbourne (Victoria). In those destinations, the desire for cultural interaction with Aboriginal Australia was secondary to the dimensions of play and hedonism, perhaps because the guidebooks do not mobilise discourses of authentic indigenous cultural experiences in relation to these places.

The possible experiences described by backpackers as having the potential for cultural immersion all consist of overcoming the transitory nature of travel as backpacking. In this sense, proposed means for cultural immersion involved not simply getting beyond tourism but, indeed, getting beyond travel, for example by volunteering (as mentioned by Cathryn, above). These narratives draw upon other discourses of alternative tourism, such as volunteer tourism and the working holiday. The belief that cultural learning is hard to achieve outside long-term interactions means that backpackers often consider those experiences that can occur as somewhat superficial and often limited to those experiences that are prescribed by the guidebooks. Although the guidebooks do not state outright that travellers will not find these experiences, they provide a set of cultural
understandings that can be seen as actively producing limits on these kinds of opportunities.

The ideals and values of cultural learning and cultural interaction are represented by the guidebooks in association with particular destinations (notably the Northern Territory). Due to the backpacker’s tendency towards situational engagement with guidebooks, these desires potentially increase and decrease in prominence according to the place the backpacker is in. For example, the guidebooks describe the potential for cultural interaction as being most likely to be achievable in the Northern Territory and, as discussed above, learning about Aboriginal culture became a prominent desire for backpackers when they were in the Northern Territory. However, the ideal of cultural interaction was perceived as desirable only in relation to the authenticity of experiences. And ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ cultural interaction was understood as the ultimate means of cultural learning and, simultaneously, recognised as being somewhat unattainable. Thus, these perceptions reflect to an extent the representation in the guidebooks of the traveller ideals and the extent to which they may be fulfilled in relation to various destinations. It is, thus, important to examine the more specific expectations about Aboriginal people and their cultures that shaped the experiences of the backpackers in my study.

**Interpreting Texts: Preconceptions and Expectations of Aboriginal Australia**

In Chapter 4, I argued that the stereotype of the Aboriginal ‘noble savage’ so dominant in mainstream tourism media is, to an extent, challenged and offset in traveller texts by the inclusion of factual information. I suggested that a reason for the challenging of the dominant tourism stereotype relates to the construction of the traveller as someone who should seek experiences beyond the tourist gaze – to access and experience ‘backstage’ Aboriginal culture supposedly at a more ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ level. I also argued, that in so doing, the guidebooks suggested that Aboriginal culture in traditional cultural contexts is most accessible in the Outback of the Northern Territory. The traveller texts, therefore, generate and promulgate a particular image of Aboriginal people and their
cultures which can influence prospective interpretations, as well as backpacker experiences with Aboriginal people.

Considering that the guidebooks were the dominant source of cultural information for backpackers, it is not particularly surprising that the preconceptions of Aboriginal Australia voiced by the majority of the backpackers reflected the dominant images in their guidebooks. Of course, these images are not unique to guidebook representations. The image of Aboriginal culture as traditional, timeless and primitive is borne out of various constructions in other types of popular media, for example, film, television and literature. And these media forms also influenced the preconceptions held by international travellers to Australia. Interview data suggested that the backpackers had two dominant preconceptions of Aboriginal people which can be classified as the ‘known’ and the ‘imagined’ (McGregor 2000) (see Chapter 3).

The pre-arrival image of Aboriginal people that was often talked about by the backpackers was based on the stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ that is consistently reproduced in tourism and travel media. Despite the desire to avoid tourism stereotypes, ‘the known’ is seemingly unavoidable – these are the images of Aboriginal people that they had been exposed to before travelling to Australia. For example, descriptions of Aboriginal people as ‘traditional’, ‘primitive’ and ‘nomadic’, with painted bodies and playing the didjeridu or throwing a spear were commonly discussed:

Aboriginal culture summed up for me would be the war paint [sic], the spear, and the didjeridu. That is what you think of when you’re at home. (Rob, 23, from Wales)

The image I had of Aboriginals before I came out included the didjeridu and the spear with the body painting, and sort of uncultured as far as western ways are concerned, and living in the desert. That’s the portrayal that I get at home. (Tommy, 25, from England)

These backpackers clearly state that these are the images of Aboriginal Australia that they had ‘at home’ before embarking on their travels. The implication here is that their
image of Aboriginal Australia has changed, or been altered, as a result of their experiences. That travel can lead to the challenging and breaking down of stereotypes is an important aspect of backpacking experiences. The image of the ‘noble savage’ is often related to the belief that ‘traditional’ Aboriginal people still exist in places that have not been modernised or westernised. Backpackers referred to a desire to experience ‘traditional’ Aboriginal culture which they, uncritically, tended to describe as ‘real’ Aboriginal culture. Thus, there was a commonly held view that ‘traditional’ Aboriginal people and cultures still exist ‘in the desert’ and ‘in the Outback’. This belief was reflected in comments made in relation to where they expected Aboriginal people would be living and Aboriginal culture would be accessible:

When I was in Holland and [before] leaving, I thought that there were Aboriginals everywhere here [in the Northern Territory] still how they lived thousands of years ago … I saw myself walking in the desert and I saw myself going through all sorts of plants and sitting with them, and they’re making music. (Saskia, 23, from The Netherlands)

Indeed, not only did many of the backpackers suggest that ‘real’ Aboriginal people live in the Outback but that this place was where they expected Aboriginal people and culture to be ‘more visible’:

You’d imagine them to be in the Outback, well I always did. When we travelled up through the Centre we’d be in places that would be very remote and they weren’t around! I’d be like looking at the hilltops and it’s like I imagined I’d see Aboriginals standing all around the hilltops with their spears! (Rachel, 28, from England)

This particular perception was further compounded when backpackers talked about their surprise at seeing Aboriginal people in cities. Comments like ‘I didn’t realise they were in the towns or cities’ (Tommy, 25, from England) and ‘I wasn’t expecting to see Aboriginal people walking around the streets of Darwin’ (Jackie, 20, from the United States) were common, and further illustrate the popular belief that Aboriginal people are confined to the Outback. Whilst I suggested in Chapter 4 that the guidebooks can play a

role in generating this particular image of Outback Australia, the representation of Aboriginal culture as existing only in the Outback is common within various popular media forms such as film and television (see, for example, Langton 1993a). As Richard (29, from Ireland) noted ‘You think of Aboriginal people walking around in bush land like in [the film] Crocodile Dundee’.

The preconceptions voiced consisted predominantly of the more accepted and popular media-generated images of Aboriginal Australia indicating that prior to the travel experience expectations are shaped by the general media and, indeed, around half of the backpackers made some reference to the film Crocodile Dundee. Significantly, what these stereotypical expectations further suggest is that these backpackers do not engage with their guidebooks until they are actually in the process of travelling. Engaging with the text as a means of negotiating travel experiences led them to reassess the accuracy and appropriateness of this dominant stereotype. Indeed, Saskia (23, from The Netherlands) held a very romantic view of Aboriginal Australia prior to travelling (refer to her quote presented above) expecting Aboriginal people to be living ‘in the desert’ as they did ‘thousands of years ago’. However, she ended up questioning this imagined reality telling me that ‘It’s so strange that I thought that … that’s the wrong image [that] the media gave me’.

Like Saskia, many of the backpackers did indeed recognise that the representation of the ‘noble savage’ is a popular stereotype generated by the media. They talked about how such an image came from advertisements, films and books, often acknowledging the superficiality of the image and indicating these representations as the ‘images’, ‘pictures’ and ‘portrayals’ in ‘advertisements’ and ‘brochures’. For example:

In all the advertisements I’ve seen … you see them in full dress and performing a ceremony. That is generally the only pictures of Aborigines that I’ve seen. (Linda, 24, from Canada)

Aboriginals are always sort of made out like nomadic people living in the Outback. They’re portrayed that way. But I do know that there are still a few, or some communities that are still doing that, living off the land … You don’t sort of
imagine anyone could still be living like that, but apparently they do in areas that nobody can ever go to. (Rachel, 28, from England)

Rachel believed that the traditional image is incorrect in the sense that Aboriginal people are ‘made out’ to be living in such a way. However, she then echoes her *Lonely Planet* guidebook when she expressed her belief that nomadic and traditional lifestyles still exist in some parts of Australia but only in places that travellers cannot access. Indeed, she said that her awareness of the existence of communities ‘living off the land’ was something she had read in her guidebook. As discussed in Chapter 4, the ‘authentic’ Aboriginal experience is presented by guidebooks, such as *Lonely Planet*, as generally difficult to access even for the traveller who believes such an experience exists and who seeks that experience.

Although some backpackers recognised the representation of Aboriginal people as existing in traditional cultural contexts in the Outback as exactly that – a representation and popular image – other backpackers took this stereotyped image as constituting ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture. This belief became clear in statements by backpackers who used the term ‘real’ to describe Aboriginal people they believed to be still living traditionally. In this sense, contemporary Aboriginal culture is silenced, and ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture is considered to exist in traditional cultural contexts in particular parts of Australia:

I’ve met Aborigine people in the cities, but I’d like to have a conversation with a real one. (Karl, 24, from The Netherlands, my emphasis)

I haven’t actually seen a real Aboriginal. I mean the Aborigines I’ve seen in Perth they are Aboriginal, but I think the people in cities are too far away from the whole Aboriginal tradition. (Pierre, 23, from Switzerland, my emphasis)

The statements above introduce a second common preconception of Aboriginal people – of the less ‘real’ or less ‘authentic’ Aboriginal person living in contemporary Australian society. For instance, Pierre suggested that although he has ‘seen’ Aboriginal people in the city of Perth he believes that they are not ‘real’ because he believes that they are
removed from traditional Aboriginal culture. The second dominant stereotype, of Aboriginal people, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, is evident here – the more negative image of the Aboriginal person of the city. Backpackers discussed Aboriginal people who lived in city areas using negative indicators with common words and phrases being ‘drunk’, ‘beggars’, ‘lazy’, ‘impoverished’ and ‘down on their luck’. The backpackers who described Aboriginal people in such terms considered them not to be ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ because they believed them to have been removed from their traditional culture and not living on traditional lands.

This second dominant stereotype of the dispossessed Aboriginal person of the city was also commonly mentioned in the interviews as a pre-arrival image. Although many backpackers implied that this particular image came from word-of-mouth rather than traveller texts, some indicated that they had read about particular issues in their guidebooks. For example, as one backpacker who was using the Lonely Planet stated:

I’ve read [in my guidebook] about problems that Aborigines have, particularly with drunkenness and the crime that goes with it, and poverty problems … [that] there’s still a lot of problems between Aborigines and others. There is still some inequality and things like that. (Anne, 24, from England)

The above statement can be read as providing a more realistic account of contemporary life for many Aboriginal communities, and is certainly an image unlikely to be articulated by mainstream tourism media (or, indeed, by mass tourists). In this sense, the guidebook has provided the means for getting beyond the dominant stereotype and enabled a more critical perspective on contemporary issues to be made available. At the same time, this portrayal of urban Aboriginality can also be viewed as a simplified stereotype that fails to acknowledge many contemporary aspects of Aboriginal life, and which can exert considerable influence over the expectations and experiences of backpackers.

The power of the second stereotype to shape understandings of Aboriginal people and cultures for backpackers is all the more pertinent for the fact it was rarely acknowledged as a stereotype. As discussed above, the backpackers often recognised that the image of
the Aboriginal ‘noble savage’ of the Outback was a popular stereotype. It is perhaps because the ‘noble savage’ stereotype is so dominant in visual media that they believe there is a level of falseness to it. Contrastingly, because the second stereotype is discussed in their guidebooks, and often supported by verbal communications with other travellers, it lacks popular media associations concerning the construction and staging of images. The backpackers tended to engage more uncritically with this stereotype and repeated it to me as ‘fact’. For many, once they had commenced travelling in Australia, their reading of guidebooks coupled with lived experience and verbal communications served to reshape their expectations – the image of the Aboriginal ‘noble savage’ was replaced and challenged by the image of Aboriginal people of the city affected by alcohol and laziness; who were viewed as aggressive and dangerous, to be feared and avoided.

The pre-arrival images of Aboriginal people and culture, and expectations based on two dominant stereotypes, serve to set boundaries on the potential preconceptions. The stereotypical representations of Aboriginal people and cultures contained within texts, such as guidebooks, can result in backpackers looking in the wrong places for ‘authentic’ cultural experiences. As a result, Aboriginal people who do not fit into either stereotype are rendered invisible. Importantly, as noted above, backpackers display varying levels of agency and tend to make their own evaluations of the information presented in their guidebooks. Guidebook information is reinterpreted through lived experience and word-of-mouth. In the section below, I am concerned to investigate the traveller discourse in the context of word-of-mouth communication and, therefore, explore other sources of meaning that intersect with the guidebook text in constructing the travel experience.

**Beyond the Guidebook: Other Sources of Meaning in the Travel Experience**

Many backpackers place a very high value on the social interactions experienced during their travels, and long-term travel provides considerable opportunities for meeting other people. A desire for sociability means that the development of friendships is often a
fundamental part of backpacking, and bonds with others can form more quickly than they do in ordinary life situations (Murphy 2001; 2005). The sense of community that is sought by many backpackers and regarded as part of the collective identity of this type of travel sees ‘informal networks of information dissemination’ as dominant (Murphy 2001: 50), particularly ‘experiential sources’ and, most notably, word-of-mouth communication (Dann 1996a: 147). Guidebooks play an important role in mediating the relationship between the traveller and the travelled culture, and in constructing knowledge of the travelled culture. Yet, information gained through verbal communications is also very highly valued and, therefore, an important part of the negotiation of text and experience. As one backpacker pointed out in relation to her knowledge of Aboriginal culture: ‘I’ve been using the Lonely Planet [for information on Aboriginal Australia]… but word-of-mouth is really the best way to get information’ (Claudia, 19, from England).

The backpackers talked extensively about the knowledge passed on to them from other travellers. Despite the fact that many used their guidebooks for information about Aboriginal Australia, they frequently stated that of equal, or even greater importance, was information that they had been told or had heard. In this sense, word-of-mouth was often valued as being more ‘truthful’ than the text and information passed on from traveller to traveller was often questioned less and accepted as being more ‘real’ – more ‘authentic’. Information is gained through formal and informal conversations, overheard statements, offhand remarks, anecdotes and jokes. For backpackers, verbal communication is undoubtedly pervasive and mostly provided by like-minded people (other travellers) with apparently first-hand experience of certain situations and events. The prioritising of lived experience and verbal communication over the information contained in guidebooks is evident in the following comment:

The Lonely Planet covers a bit about Aboriginal culture, but nowhere near as much as you can find out by coming to the Top End [in the Northern Territory] … I think the best way to find things out is by actually doing them and talking to people. You’ve only got one man’s opinion in a book haven’t you? (Rob, 23, from Wales)
Here, Rob is pointing out his belief that guidebook information can be considerably one-sided and limited although, as discussed in Chapter 4, the device of the implicit narrator in guidebooks belies the actuality that it is more than ‘one man’s opinion’ being presented. By talking to people during their travels, be they other backpackers or Australian locals (such as tour guides, discussed below), the backpackers believed that they could gain a range of opinions. Word-of-mouth, in addition to the guidebook information, was used to frame and shape their own views and beliefs which, in turn, can influence their experiences. For the majority of the backpackers who discussed the role of word-of-mouth in contributing to their knowledge of Aboriginal Australia, the word-of-mouth view was, in many ways, described as negative. In particular, verbal communications with other travellers seems to reflect and reiterate an image of the ‘drunk’ and ‘lazy’ Aboriginal person based on perceived negative experiences in Australian cities. For example, one interviewee repeatedly voiced his negative preconceptions of Aboriginal people as presented to him through communication with friends who had previously been backpackers in Australia:

My friends told me a little bit about the Aboriginals. They told me they’re quite lazy, you always see them drinking. I heard also [that] they rob people, sometimes for money because they haven’t got a lot of money because they’re not working. I think they get some money from the government, but what these people told [me] is that they’re drinking it all and only a small percentage of Aboriginals are actually working, the rest is living off that money they get from the government. I don’t know if that’s true but that’s what they told me. (Anton, 25, from The Netherlands)

Although Anton questioned whether this view of Aboriginal people was ‘true’, his uncertainty did not prevent him from reproducing the position and repeating it to me. His comments indicate the strength of word-of-mouth where unverified ‘facts’ can be reproduced as ‘truth’. Negative word-of-mouth seemed to shape Anton’s expectations and led to him having negative opinions of Aboriginal people. In his words:

Back in Bundaberg a group of Aboriginals was always hanging round the backpacker hostel making a lot of noise. Probably they were drinking … They just
hang around and make a lot of noise … And yesterday I met an Aboriginal woman, she was hanging around in front of a store. And I think she probably hasn’t washed for half a year or something. That’s my experiences and that’s not a positive thing. (Anton, 25, from The Netherlands)

It was apparent that for many backpackers the stories they had been told about Aboriginal people were overwhelmingly negative, and many had been warned to avoid Aboriginal people. These narrow views positioned Aboriginal people as the ‘other’ to be feared. This fear was evident through the use of words such as ‘threatening’, ‘scary’, ‘different’, ‘the unknown’, ‘not friendly’ and ‘stand-offish’. For example:

I heard that meeting Aboriginal people was actually not that easy, that you’re not welcome, and that they are unfriendly and stand-offish. (Isobel, 24, from Ireland)

I heard stories that I shouldn’t go into the streets by myself that, you know, they just could attack you … [So the] first times I saw Aboriginal people [in Queensland], I … just walked by because of the negative things I always heard. (Saskia, 23, from The Netherlands)

In the above statement, the use of the word ‘stories’ does perhaps imply some recognition that what they had been told is debatable. Indeed, another backpacker stated:

I’ve heard a lot, you get a lot of rumours about some of the problems and so on, but you don’t get a lot written down. It’s all word-of-mouth on Aboriginals. (Tommy, 25, from England)

Tommy’s description of word-of-mouth as ‘a lot of rumours’ indicates that the stories circulating about Aboriginal people are perhaps often not based on first hand knowledge. Thus, these backpackers sought to develop their own opinions through experience. Certainly, direct experiences with Aboriginal people could further elaborate anecdotal evidence and fuel their desire to search for ‘truths’. Their travels, and the
lived experience of being in Australia, provided backpackers with opportunities for learning and the chance to negotiate dominant stereotypes that are circulating within the traveller discourse. For instance:

Other [backpackers] have said a lot of stuff. Like the problems in [cities], you know, that you get harassed in Alice Springs and things like that. But I chose not to listen to it and see what happens when I get there. [But] people said, you know, you’d get hassled, being asked for money and those sorts of things, and that [Aboriginal people are] running around drunk at night. I didn’t think it was anywhere near as bad as what people had described to me. (Melissa, 27, from England)

Interestingly, Stefan, a backpacker who takes up a position outside of the traveller discourse (in part evidenced by his rejection and condemnation of guidebooks), also voiced much criticism of word-of-mouth and the promulgation of negative stereotypes:

This is the problem … I’m just hearing views and opinions from other people, from Australians and from foreigners also, about the Aboriginals … [I] hear the view of what other people think, and like most of the people I have met are having a really bad opinion, and they tell me, so that’s a shame. (Stefan, 22, from Sweden)

It becomes apparent that the information backpackers gain from verbal communication overwhelmingly supports a more negative stereotype of urban Aboriginal people, serving further to challenge the popular media stereotype of the Aboriginal ‘noble savage’. Moreover, the written and verbal descriptions of Aboriginal people in city situations can also reinforce the idea that Aboriginal people living in the largely inaccessible Aboriginal owned lands do not ‘behave’ or ‘act’ in this way, thus, strengthening the belief that ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ Aboriginal people do still exist but cannot be met by the traveller who spends their time in cities. This particular belief is reflected in the following comments:

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Aborigines have their own country, their own land, that you’re not allowed to go in … Actually most people [that] you see in cities are not the real Aborigine people because due to alcohol they are not allowed any more in their own Aboriginal communities because alcohol is prohibited. (Karl, 24, from The Netherlands)

There’s possibly two types of Aboriginals … There’s the ones that are fighting for their communities and living in their communities and living as much as they can like traditional Aboriginals … [then] there’s another type of Aboriginal that’s moved into the city, or been forced into the city by their own communities. And they aren’t a very good portrayal of Aboriginals, but they’re the ones that I’m most likely to see. (Tommy, 25, from England)

Most of the backpackers I interviewed seemed to have arrived in Australia with very specific preconceptions relating to Aboriginal people and cultures that were then shaped by traveller texts and supported, and at times contradicted, by verbal communication with other travellers. To an extent, their experiences were shaped and framed by these expectations. The power of guidebooks is evident in the propagation of two conflicting images of Aboriginal Australia which were the two dominant stereotypes talked about by the backpackers. Indeed, when the backpackers spoke of their experiences with Aboriginal people in city situations many recalled what they considered to be negative encounters, with only a minority discussing what they defined as positive experiences.

Another theme that emerged in some interviews was that word-of-mouth and direct experiences could have a positive effect. In this sense, lived experience has the power to break down stereotypes and this is the case for both the popular tourist stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ and more negative traveller stereotype of the ‘city Aboriginal’:

The popular images that you get at home are of very traditional Aboriginals, because that’s like one of the main parts of Australia … that’s what everyone’s interested in. So the images that you’ll see are very traditional. But they’re not
really like that, you obviously don’t see many Aboriginals walking around like that. (Claudia, 19, from England)

I heard that Alice Springs [in the Northern Territory] was the most dangerous city to go out because of the Aborigines. But for me it was really a peaceful place, and I didn’t experience any negative things about Aborigines or whatever … I walked up … to the hostel and they were sitting outside, like five Aborigines were sitting outside, and I walked past them and they [were] friendly, asked me what time it was, like ‘excuse me sir, can you tell me the time’. I mean they’re just normal people, it’s not, they’re not different or whatever. (Peter, 25, from The Netherlands)

The challenging of stereotypes means the backpackers could learn about Aboriginal culture outside of the framework provided by the guidebooks, and explore other, less formulaic dimensions of traveller discourse. The adoption of preconceptions and stereotypes of Aboriginal people, along with the precept that ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture is not actually able to be experienced, led authentic experiences being pursued in the ways endorsed by the guidebooks. These experiences were primarily structured and relatively formal, and included visits to cultural centres and going on tours. It is these aspects of the backpacker experience that are explored in the next section.

**Experiencing Aboriginal Australia: The Pursuit of Cultural Knowledge**

The guidebooks I analysed certainly encourage the desire to pursue ‘authentic’ cultural experiences. As discussed in Chapter 4, these traveller texts reframe and redefine authenticity in terms of cultural education. The guidebooks suggest that personal interactions between travellers and Aboriginal people will be limited and, to this end, they promote more indirect, structured cultural experiences. Aboriginal cultural tours and cultural centres are promoted as important educational activities to be pursued by travellers seeking ‘authentic’ experiences with Aboriginal Australia. As discussed above, the desire to learn about Aboriginal culture was viewed by the backpackers as an
important and integral aspect of their experiences. Although formal learning and cultural interaction may have been incidental to a desire for more hedonistic backpacking experiences (for example, novelty and adventure), for many backpackers their travels within the Northern Territory seemed to lead to a more active quest for Aboriginal cultural experiences. The backpackers interviewed in Queensland who had not visited the Northern Territory indicated that they had had significantly fewer experiences with Aboriginal culture and, moreover, it was these backpackers who were most adamant in their expectation that the ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ cultural experience was only available in the Northern Territory. For example, a backpacker who had so far only travelled the East Coast made the following comment:

I suppose you have to go the Centre, to the Northern Territory, to see real Aboriginal culture more. (David, 19, from England)

When asked about the Aboriginal cultural experiences that they had pursued during their travels, most of the backpackers indicated that they had visited an Aboriginal cultural centre and, much less frequently, taken an Aboriginal cultural tour or visited an Aboriginal community. The cultural experiences pursued are illustrated in Table 5.1, below. Aboriginal Cultural Centres were the most frequently visited sites for cultural experiences with the majority of respondents indicating that they had visited such a centre. The two centres that had been visited by most of the backpackers are situated within the two Aboriginal owned national parks of the Northern Territory (the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park and the Kakadu National Park), followed by the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park in Cairns (as shown in Table 5.2, below). Zeppel (2001: 255) says the distinguishing educational features of Aboriginal Cultural Centres are the inclusion of historical exhibitions about local Aboriginal culture, the making and selling of Aboriginal artefacts and the provision of services such as cultural tours, bush tucker walks and didjeridu playing. Some of the backpackers also indicated that they had pursued other educational experiences, including backpacker ‘adventure’ tours or visiting museums and other interpretative centres that they considered would provide indirect opportunities to learn about Aboriginal culture. Visits to cultural centres were recommended in all of the guidebooks I analysed. Somewhat surprisingly, very few
backpackers had been on an Aboriginal owned and operated cultural tour, and the tours they took were backpacker ‘adventure’ tours.

### Table 5.1
Cultural Education Experiences Undertaken by the Backpackers

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal Cultural Centres</th>
<th>Aboriginal Cultural Tours</th>
<th>Aboriginal Communities</th>
<th>Backpacker ‘Adventure’ Tours</th>
<th>Museums/Interpretative Centres</th>
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<td>Troy</td>
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<td>Linda</td>
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<td>Simone</td>
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15 I have placed Peter’s experiences within brackets so as to differentiate his cultural tour and visitation to an Aboriginal community as being with a tour company that was not Aboriginal owned and operated. This tour is, however, promoted as an Aboriginal cultural tour and visits a community as part of its itinerary.
Table 5.2
Visitation to Aboriginal Cultural Centres and other Interpretative Centres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretative Centre</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Backpacker Visitors</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aboriginal Cultural Centres</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park Cultural Centre</td>
<td>Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park, NT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre</td>
<td>Kakadu National Park, NT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park</td>
<td>Smithfield (Cairns), QLD</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre</td>
<td>Alice Springs, NT</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalkadoon Tribal Centre and Culture Keeping Place</td>
<td>Mt Isa, QLD</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other Interpretative Centres</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>South Australian Museum</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Museum</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The backpackers who had visited Aboriginal Cultural Centres viewed the Aboriginal interpretation of culture presented at the centres very positively, describing these places as ‘informative’, ‘interesting’ and ‘fascinating’. These positive evaluations most often related to the types of information they learned, with many saying that cultural centres provided an important educational experience that increased their knowledge about particular aspects of Aboriginal culture. For instance:

I like going to the cultural centres. I went to the Aboriginal cultural centre in Kakadu. I like reading the different information and seeing pictures and seeing the different tools that they used over history. I thought it was really informative. Like the way they read the land, like when certain bulbs are ripe then they know when the wet season’s coming, or they can by what birds are in the area. And your learn about some of their beliefs about the Dreaming. That’s really interesting. (Jackie, 20, from the United States)

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16 I believe that this figure could be slightly overstated. Although 10 backpackers indicated that they had been to a cultural centre in Kakadu, there are two centres in the National Park, the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and the Bowali Visitors Centre – the latter is not Aboriginal owned and operated. Those backpackers who stated they had been to a cultural centre in Kakadu were often unable to remember and thus identify which of the two they have visited.
We went to the Aboriginal Cultural Centre here in Cooinda [the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Kakadu National Park]. It’s really informative … [I learnt about] bush tucker and the different types of seasons … when the fields should be burned, like knowing when the flowers are blooming it’s the right time to burn the fields, or when the crocodiles lay their eggs … It’s really fascinating. (Isobel, 24, from Ireland)

Some backpackers discussed how the presentation of information at the cultural centres was based primarily around aspects of traditional culture which they felt rendered contemporary Aboriginal culture invisible. In this context, they discussed how they only learnt about bush tucker and aspects of traditional culture:

I found the cultural centres at Kakadu and Uluru not so informative about what has actually happened over the last two hundred years. It’s mainly about (which I guess is also good about them) how Aborigines used to live, and what things they used to hunt, or what things they ate. But I think it’s important that they show what has happened, how the culture has been changed. (Peter, 25, from The Netherlands)

Negative evaluations of cultural centres also emerged in the interviews, and some interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with what, they considered to be, the superficial nature of the information. In this sense, they were critical because they perceived that certain cultural interpretations, such as performances and interactive displays, more staged for the benefit of tourists and, therefore, were considered less ‘authentic’. The selected representation of certain aspects of culture also led some to believe that the information was somewhat contrived and did not provide them with the extent or type of cultural education that they desired:

The cultural centre at Uluru to me was a big disappointment. I was not impressed at all because you see these three or four Aboriginal guys in their jeans doing the emu dance or something and I thought it was so ridiculous. (Johan, 31, from The Netherlands)
I think they try to make things as idealised as possible for the tourists, but I don’t think that’s the truth. (Jackie, 20, from the United States)

Johan and Jackie found their respective visits to cultural centres unsatisfying for the same general reason – a perceived inauthenticity – but came to this conclusion for two different reasons. Johan’s claim that ‘Aboriginal guys in their jeans’ were ridiculous indicates that his own experience was incompatible with his preconceptions of what an authentic cultural display would look like. Contemporary western clothing, such as jeans, did not mesh with his expectations of authentic Aboriginal cultural attire. For Jackie, the opposite was the case. Her experience of the cultural centre was ‘as idealised as possible’ connoting that explicit attention was paid to the details of the cultural display in order to provide an experience that would reflect, as far as possible, the dominant imagery and, therefore, meet visitor expectations of an authentic cultural display. Ironically, the carefully managed attention to detail made the cultural centre contrived and, thus, inauthentic. These two contrasting viewpoints highlight both the highly subjective nature of ‘authenticity’, and its precariousness – in danger of slipping into inauthenticity at any time and for any number of reasons.

Moreover, backpackers complained that there were few Aboriginal staff at the cultural centres. Such complaints relate to their desire for cultural interaction and their hope that it would be satisfied by going to Aboriginal owned and operated interpretative centres:

I’ve been to a lot of Aboriginal cultural centres, especially travelling up through the Centre [Central Australia]. But I was very surprised that no Aboriginals work there, that you don’t even see them in the Aboriginal cultural centres. (Rachel, 28, from England)

We stopped at the cultural centre in Kakadu … But there’s nobody really there to tell you stuff. I mean, I think when you go to these places you should be told by the Aboriginals what you need to know. (Rob, 23, from Wales)

Another popular travel experience that provided backpackers with opportunities for learning was going on tours and, as shown in Table 5.1, above, the majority of
backpackers had been on, what can be broadly defined as, backpacker ‘adventure’ tours. Despite suggestions that backpackers are averse to going on organised tours – primarily in an attempt to distinguish themselves from mass tourists and also due to the inherent nature of budget and independent travel – many backpackers do take tours during their time in Australia (Haigh 1995). Dann (1996a) notes that the distinguishing feature of such ‘adventure’ tours is that they are promoted as being oppositional to tours organised for mass tourists (see Chapter 3) and, therefore, are more appealing to the independent traveller. For the backpackers I interviewed, ‘adventure’ tours were the most popular way of visiting the Uluru – Kata Tjuta and Kakadu National Parks. Similarly, Slaughter (2004) found that backpackers typically take tours to areas that are difficult to access independently, particularly national parks. Whilst going on backpacker ‘adventure’ tours was common amongst the interviewees they were much less likely to participate on Aboriginal cultural tours. I believe this is a significant and interesting finding and their reasons for eschewing such tours will be explored in the next section.

For backpackers in Australia there is a plethora of tours that offer short-trip, small-group ‘adventure’ tours, for example, in the form of four-wheel-drive camping safaris. Such tours are aimed specifically at independent travellers on a budget and they promote aspects of the travel experience that are known to appeal to the independent traveller. Components of the traveller discourse are mobilised through offerings of ‘adventure’, ‘excitement’, ‘sociability’ and ‘flexibility’ and, importantly, the promise of an educational experience with a focus on Aboriginal culture. Whilst not providing too much information on individual backpacker tour companies, guidebooks describe these types of tours as providing ‘a memorable trip and value for money’ (Lonely Planet p.397). Adventure tours are promoted heavily at backpacker hostels in Australia with numerous pamphlets being available. Certainly, backpacker tours are designed and promoted to appeal to the traveller who is interested in learning about Aboriginal culture. For instance, the popular Northern Territory Adventure Tours (NTAT) promote their ‘camping safaris’ as follows:

[NTAT] … offer the most exciting and flexible way to experience the highlights of the Northern Territory. We specialise in small group touring … and pride ourselves on offering tours with a strong ecological content and emphasis on
Aboriginal culture of the area. Our tour guides are trained to the highest standards and possess vast knowledge of geology, botany and Aboriginal culture … [NTAT] are passionate about making the Northern Territory a destination every traveller can experience … Best of all, we capture the adventurous spirit of the Northern Territory. (Northern Territory Adventure Tours, undated, p.1)

Other popular backpacker tour companies offer similar experiences. A central promotional strategy is to highlight the ‘expertise’ and the ‘extensive knowledge’ possessed by their (non-indigenous) tour guides who are able to impart information about Aboriginal culture. As another popular company advertised:

Kakadu Dreams Safaris are … culturally active tours with the emphasis placed on learning and fun … Our guides are well versed in all aspects of the Top End … Learn about the Dreamtime and the mythology of the Aboriginal art-sites. (Kakadu Dreams, undated, p.4)

The tour guides and tour leaders play a very significant role in constructing and shaping experiences on these tours. The power of the tour guide as a mediator of knowledge might also relate to the priority given to word-of-mouth communication over the written text (as discussed above). The tour guides not only offer a local Australian perspective, but the tour companies position them as ‘experts’ on Aboriginal culture. The tour guides’ ‘expertise’ in being able to impart information on Aboriginal culture was discussed by many of the backpackers to whom I spoke. The popularity of backpacker adventure tours suggests that the guides play a very important role in their success. The backpackers who had been on these tours made assessments of the quality of the tour and their tour guides based on their knowledge of Aboriginal people and culture. In this context, ‘good’ guides were credited with having substantial knowledge of Aboriginal culture, and ‘bad’ guides were described as having a lack of knowledge and a lack of cultural empathy. Typical examples of both these judgements are illustrated in the following comments:

Our guide told us about Aboriginal culture as much as he could, as much as he knew. The guide was really good and he seemed to know quite a lot. I mean he
told us all about the songlines and beliefs about the land and some traditions. It was really interesting. (James, 21, from England)

I think I learned more about Aborigines of the area in the cultural centre there than what I learned from the tour guide. He wasn’t that good. I think he should first learn a lot more about Aboriginal culture and then do his job. (Saskia, 23, from The Netherlands)

The [backpacker] tour of Kakadu was pretty heavy on the Aboriginal knowledge and I learnt quite a lot really. So I suppose it was basically a cultural tour. (Rob, 23, from Wales)

Although some backpackers judged the level of knowledge provided by their tour guides, they tended not to question the ‘truth’ or ‘factuality’ of the information provided. In this sense, if the guide was deemed to have knowledge of Aboriginal culture as a result of their own experiences with Aboriginal people this was often considered as positive by the backpackers:

Our guide had spent a lot of time with Aboriginal people. He had a really good appreciation for their culture and he had a lot of respect for them. (Melissa, 27, from England)

Our tour guide was a guy from Perth with dreadlocks and everything and, basically, he should have been born an Aboriginal. He is so into the culture. And his van is just covered in books on like Aboriginal culture ... You could ask him any question and he’d be able to provide you with an answer. (Rob, 23, from Wales)

An issue that arises here is the politics of interpretation when cultural knowledge is being provided by non-indigenous Australians (see Chapter 3). Only three of the backpackers I interviewed had actually participated on an Aboriginal cultural tour, despite the fact that such tours are promoted by guidebooks as the best way to learn about Aboriginal culture. Two had been on Aboriginal owned and operated tours which
had been led by an Aboriginal guide, and these backpackers spoke positively of the insights they gained into aspects of Aboriginal culture of a particular area. Ironically, for both these backpackers, their participation on the cultural tour occurred in destinations not located in the Northern Territory. The tours were described as inexpensive and accessible, and as providing opportunities for cultural interaction and learning. Both backpackers saw these tours as making a positive contribution to Aboriginal people as they were small businesses providing employment and income to local Aboriginal communities:

I went on a one day Aboriginal tour in Mt Isa [New South Wales]. It was guided by two Aboriginal guys, searching for bush food, bush tucker, bush medicines and things. It was great. And it was very personal. You went with two guides, two Aboriginal guides, and four tourists, a really small group. (Karl, 24, from The Netherlands)

I went on a little walking tour in Fremantle [Western Australia] that was done by an Aborigine and he told us some of their Creation Stories. It was about Fremantle’s history from the perspective of the Aborigine people … It was fascinating. (Cathryn, 24, from England)

The other backpacker who had been on an Aboriginal cultural tour in Alice Springs went with the company ‘Rob Steinert Dreamtime Tours’. This particular tour company was recommended in his guidebook, *Rough Guide*, (as ‘excellent’ and ‘informative, educational and provocative’) to the exclusion of any Aboriginal owned and operated cultural tours around Alice Springs. Significantly, this particular tour was not owned or operated by Aboriginal people:

It was an Australian guide but he lived for quite a while with the Aborigines, he had his own Aborigine name. So I think he knows a lot about it … But I think the guide should be an Aborigine, because it would be much more natural if it’s an Aboriginal guide, because he’d actually know about it. I don’t know why there is no Aborigine guide. (Peter, 25, from The Netherlands)
As well as lamenting the lack of ‘authentic’ cultural interaction available from this tour Peter also suggested reasons why tours such as this are not popular with backpackers:

Aboriginal cultural tours are not aimed at backpackers … The Aboriginal tour I did in Alice Springs I was sitting there with mainly people of sixty years old. I was the only young one, you know, with thirty people or something. I think Aboriginal tour companies should focus a bit more on the backpackers as well, offer nice tours and not expensive. The Dreamtime tour was expensive … They should organise something for the backpackers. (Peter, 25, from The Netherlands)

Peter had sought a cultural experience and he believed that a tour in Central Australia would provide him with such opportunities. Lured by the offer of the ‘Dreamtime’ he was inevitably disappointed when the tour guide was not an Aboriginal person, and despite the guide’s credentials as ‘expert’ who had apparently lived with Aboriginal people, Peter did not think the experience provided an ‘authentic’ interpretation of Aboriginal culture. Although the tour had visited an Aboriginal community, he found the overall experience unsatisfying, as it did not provide the ‘authentic’ learning or interaction that he desired:

During the Dreamtime tour we went to a commune [sic]. You could ask the Aborigines some questions about their paintings while they were painting. But they don’t seem to be open to it. They always have got the same face, they don’t smile and you don’t see any expression in their faces. You don’t know if they really enjoy having the tourists visit which I think is a barrier for non-Aboriginal people to approach them. (Peter, 25, from The Netherlands)

With so many of the backpackers participating in organised backpacker tours, and the considerable value they place on the cultural learning component of these tours, it leaves open the question of why they did not participate on Aboriginal owned cultural tours. The guidebooks I analysed, particularly the *Lonely Planet* (which was being used by the majority of the backpackers), promoted Aboriginal owned cultural tours, describing them as the best way to learn about and experience the culture and, moreover, to contribute financially to the Aboriginal communities who run the tours.

Although many of the backpackers I spoke to expressed a level of interest in seeking out Aboriginal cultural tours they ultimately had chosen to avoid them. They offered two main reasons for shunning Aboriginal cultural tours (including those owned and operated by Aboriginal people). First, was their contention that Aboriginal cultural tours were too expensive and beyond their budget (and this point was highlighted by Peter, above). Second, they rejected Aboriginal cultural tours because they perceived them as being ‘touristy’ and, therefore, in danger of being ‘inauthentic’. In this sense, the backpackers were going against the advice of the *Lonely Planet* and their reasons for doing so are discussed, below, in light of broader arguments of the backpacker desire to be an anti-tourist and, therefore, an ‘authentic’ traveller.

### The Anti-Tourist: Travel and the Authentic Experience

A theme that emerged in the interviews in relation to travel and Aboriginal cultural experiences is the centrality of the traveller-tourist dichotomy to backpacker perceptions of themselves and their experiences. Backpackers take up the subject position of traveller and, in so doing, define themselves in opposition to tourists. They perceive their travel experiences as being more important and more meaningful than those of a tourist, and they consider tourism to comprise only superficial and commodified experiences. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 2, being an anti-tourist is ‘a central element of backpacker identity’ (Welk 2004: 77-91). In Redfoot’s (1984: 291) discussion of ‘tourist realities’ as they relate to an ‘intense search for ‘reality’ through travel’, he categorised tourists based on the extent of their attempts to seek out ‘authenticity’. The backpackers I interviewed can mostly be understood in relation to his description of the ‘second-order tourist’ who is ‘keenly aware of the inauthenticities of the touristic role and experiences’ (Redfoot 1984: 295).

According to Redfoot (1984: 296) these ‘tourists’ display an inordinate amount of touristic angst or shame – ‘this type of tourist is likely to disparage other ‘mere tourists’ and seek ways to distinguish ‘real’ experiences from their authenticity’. The second-order ‘tourist’ must, therefore, develop conscious strategies to avoid being a tourist, such as travelling alone, avoiding tours, and immersing themselves in local cultures.
These criteria seem to describe backpackers or, at least, the fundamental aspects of travel to which most backpackers aspire. What emerged from my study, however, was that the majority of backpackers I interviewed did not avoid structured tours completely and almost all of them had participated on backpacker ‘adventure’ tours. Interestingly, the tours that they did avoid were Aboriginal cultural tours even though such tours were promoted as providing significant opportunities for cultural learning and interaction, and were promoted by guidebooks. Consider, for example the following statements:

I’m very wary of going on an Aboriginal tour, it seems that it might be fake in a way. I don’t know how real it is. And they’re so expensive. It’s just like put on for tourists. (Melissa, 27, from England)

You can get these trips to Melville and Bathurst Island [in the Northern Territory] but they’re very expensive. And I can see straight away from the brochure that it is a really touristy thing to do. They bring you to the shop and then they want you to buy these baskets and stuff. I wouldn’t enjoy it at all. I would be sitting there with all these silly tourists. (Johan, 31, from the Netherlands)

These above two quotes encapsulate the commonly cited view that if Aboriginal culture is packaged for the benefit of tourism then these experiences cannot be ‘real’ – that it is commodified and, therefore, ‘touristy’. Another backpacker explained his understanding of ‘touristy’ in relation to Aboriginal tours and cultural centres:

It’s [for] tourists … They’ve adapted [culture] for tourists and they are like ‘oh yeah we have to show something’ … Maybe that’s the only way to see it but … I don’t really like those things because they are only made, only done, for tourists. Like if they’re doing a dance especially for tourists then that’s not real to me. (Karl, 24, from The Netherlands)

For another backpacker, being a tourist meant being part of a crowd and visiting places that are tourist attractions:

I was there [at the Oenpelli Open Day in Arnhem Land] … But like there were lots of people, lots of tourists, so it was really like it was an attraction or something. And I don’t like that. (Helena, 23, from Germany)

While a number of the backpackers voiced a desire to immerse themselves in Aboriginal culture, I would suggest that the ability to actualise or realise this desire could be, to an extent, thwarted by the limitations placed on backpackers by traveller texts. For instance, the guidebooks advise readers that such experiences can be difficult to attain due to the remoteness of Aboriginal communities on Aboriginal Land. This has led a number of the backpackers to believe that they are indeed unable to have ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ cultural experiences. It is important to note here, that the backpackers themselves define authentic experiences as idealised and unstructured direct face-to-face interaction with Aboriginal people or communities living in ways that reflect traditional lifestyles. The limited number of actual communities conforming to this idealised image, their remote location, and indeed their general unwillingness to have their day-to-day lives exposed to external cultures, are largely the reasons why I believe the guidebooks have embarked on the process of reframing authenticity towards indirect contact and cultural education. As part of this process, the guidebooks promote experiences such as Aboriginal owned cultural tours. However, a significant contradiction that emerged in the backpackers’ stated desires for the ‘authentic’ was that despite the guidebooks defining Aboriginal owned cultural tours as an opportunity to meet Aboriginal people and learn directly about their cultures, the majority of the backpackers chose to avoid them. The ability to pursue an authentic experience is actually thwarted by the backpackers themselves and their desire to be a traveller, and the backpackers I interviewed generally chose to avoid any experiences that they believed to be overtly aimed at tourists.

Interestingly, the backpackers also acknowledged on occasion they thought that backpacking has become a commercial and institutionalised type of travel. The traveller discourse constructs the travel experience in opposition to tourism, claiming to guide the traveller beyond what is perceived as the ‘tourist bubble’ of organised mass tourism. At the same time, however, a new version of the bubble is emerging – a ‘backpacker bubble’ – and the types of experiences these travellers pursue, and their interpretations
of these experiences, are mediated and relatively constrained by their guidebooks. For the majority of the backpackers (26 of the 28 interviewees), their experiences with Aboriginal Australia were shaped and framed in significant ways by traveller texts. These backpackers, all of whom had mediated experiences with Aboriginal Australia, were ‘going by the book’ in that their knowledge, expectations and experiences are framed and interpreted with reference to their guidebooks. A search for authenticity through cultural learning and cultural interaction is central to their definition of an ‘authentic’ traveller-self in relation to Aboriginal Australia; however, cultural interaction was mostly only pursued superficially, if at all. The extent of their cultural learning was overwhelmingly limited to reading their guidebooks and visiting cultural centres but, as their guidebooks point out, this is one of the best and most ‘authentic’ ways to experience Aboriginal culture. In general, these backpackers are satisfied that their experiences are more ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ than those available to tourists, and their long-term travels are ‘imagined as providing for the accumulation of experience, which is used to renarrate and represent self-identity’ (Desforges 2000: 942).

Two backpackers in my study, however, represented significantly different subject positions to the others through their rejection of traveller texts and backpacker culture. Unlike the other backpackers who position themselves as anti-tourists, these two travellers can be discussed in terms of the emergence of ‘anti-backpackers’ who not only deride and criticise conventional tourism but also attempt to separate themselves and their experiences from other backpackers (Welk 2004: 88). Stefan (22, from Sweden) and Troy (27, from the United States) indicated that getting ‘off the beaten track’ and avoiding other travellers including backpackers were paramount to their Australian travels. The most obvious way they did this was to spurn guidebooks. This rejection of guidebooks was indicative of a more critical perspective on the ‘authenticity’ of backpacking. This perspective tacitly acknowledges both the role guidebooks play in the commodification of independent travel, and the inordinate amount of power that guidebooks exert in shaping travel experiences towards the well-worn backpacker circuit. Moreover, they indicated a general disregard of, and disdain for, other travellers, and criticised the seemingly superficial experiences that backpackers engage in:

I don’t understand why people don’t want to see a bit more than the inside of a pub … I can do that at home … but I see no purpose for it when I’m travelling … They [backpackers] just come for the party they don’t come for the experience. (Stefan, 22, from Sweden)

It’s just senseless being around here [the backpacker hostel] you can smell the dope in the air and the booze all around … I just don’t understand these backpackers. There is so much more to experience. (Troy, 27, from the United States)

Troy was certainly the most exemplary anti-backpacker and his travel experiences were more closely aligned with those of the drifter (Cohen 1972, 1973) than the contemporary backpacker. His rejection of the traveller discourse had resulted in an avoidance of most tourist destinations and sites in Australia, including his decision not to stay in backpacker hostels for the majority of his time here. He stated that he had ‘ended up’ in Australia and it had not been his ‘plan’ but he couldn’t go any further south in Asia so Australia ‘just happened’ to be the closest choice. Upon his arrival at Cairns airport he ‘looked at the map’ to locate a ‘good fishing spot’ and immediately left Cairns to fly to Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsular in north eastern Arnhem Land. As he did not have a guidebook, he had no knowledge of Arnhem Land or its representation as a landscape where ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture is said to exist but which is ‘out of bounds’ and ‘inaccessible’. Nhulunbuy is actually the only Aboriginal community in eastern Arnhem Land that is accessible to visitors. Furthermore, he claimed to have arrived in Australia with no expectations or preconceptions of Aboriginal people. It was not until he subsequently arrived in Darwin that he started hearing stories about ‘how they’ve got big problems and this and that [but] I think that’s all just media bullshit, I don’t see it’.

Troy’s positioning of himself outside the traveller discourse meant that he could interact with Aboriginal people and culture more than any other backpacker in my study and, indeed, he did. Upon arriving in Nhulunbuy, he had met an Aboriginal man who invited him back to his community where he stayed for ten days. He had the archetypal independent traveller experience – an authentic experience with a contemporary
Aboriginal community that involved deeper learning and unmediated cultural interaction. Troy’s active choice to remain outside of the traveller discourse meant that he could access the ‘inaccessible’ and experience the ‘inexperienceable’. His interaction with Aboriginal people led him to conclude that ‘I’ve been doubled in my spirit since I’ve been with them … Their culture is beautiful’. Troy’s experience would seem to be tentative evidence that, while guidebooks position themselves as traveller texts and espouse traveller ideals, in reality, their position as a dominant source of meaning in a rapidly expanding mass market would seem to belie their ability to deliver on their stated aims, such as guiding and assisting readers to experience ‘authentic’ culture.

The possession of guidebooks, and a reliance on them for cultural information by large numbers of backpackers, tends to lead to certain destinations and experiences as being constructed within these texts as ‘authentic’. For the traveller interested in cultural and educational pursuits, particular destinations are inundated by backpackers seeking these ‘authentic’ experiences only to find them largely commodified in order to take advantage of large numbers of backpackers and, consequently, experienced as inauthentic due to association with mass tourism. Throughout this chapter, authenticity has been explored in relation to the backpacker experience and traveller identity. For the backpackers I interviewed, authenticity is about experiencing what they perceive as ‘real’ Aboriginal culture which, as I have suggested, is constructed by the guidebooks as achievable for the traveller who goes to the Northern Territory and seeks educational and learning experiences. For many of the backpackers, ‘meaningful’ experiences, such as cultural interaction with Aboriginal people, were limited to more structured settings (for reasons already discussed in this chapter) and, hence, their experiences with Aboriginal cultures were highly mediated and limited to cultural centres and backpacker adventure tours.

However, a theme that became clear from the interviews is that whilst an authentic experience may not be believed to be achievable, or even indeed searched for, the backpackers expressed a strong desire to take home an authentic artefact of Aboriginal culture – a memento or souvenir of what can be defined as ‘commodified authenticity’ (Noy 2004: 91) – to validate or authenticate the ‘real’ Australian experience. Certainly, the recommendation by guidebooks for backpackers to purchase authentic Aboriginal

artefacts and cultural objects was another way by which authenticity was reframed away from direct cultural interaction. As discussed in Chapter 4, the didjeridu is central to the images of traditional Aboriginal culture. The popularity of the didjeridu can, in part, be explained by its iconic status and, indeed, backpackers spoke of the notoriety of the Aboriginal musical instrument:

That’s the thing Aboriginals are most famous for back at home is the didjeridu. (Natalie, 28, from England)

The didjeridu as an indigenous instrument of Australia is something that Australia is really famous for. (Cathryn, 24, from England)

The extent of the information provided in the guidebooks about the didjeridu (to the relative exclusion of other artefacts) reflects and reinforces the popularity and acceptability of this particular cultural object within traveller discourse. Therefore, it is not particularly surprising that the majority of backpackers discussed their desire to buy a didjeridu as a souvenir of their Australian travels. Furthermore, the authenticity of cultural objects was considered to be paramount to their purchase. Most of the backpackers I interviewed were using the Lonely Planet which, as previously discussed, focuses on authenticity within a discourse of responsible travel providing detailed information on purchasing art and cultural objects. Indeed, when the backpackers were asked to discuss the sections relating to Aboriginal culture that they had read in their guidebooks, many spoke of the chapter on Aboriginal art and referred to the knowledge they had gained in relation to purchasing authentic souvenirs. As one backpacker stated:

I use the Lonely Planet … there is information about the art and it gives you stuff on boomerangs and didjeridus and they warn you about buying the fake ones … I want to buy a didjeridu and my Lonely Planet recommends an Aboriginal shop here in Darwin. The Lonely Planet says to be careful because they can be fake … and I won’t have a fake one … I want to have a real one and I [will] happily pay more for a real one than a fake one. I want to have the real handmade didjeridu from an Aboriginal. (Pierre, 23, from Switzerland)
Here Pierre demonstrates an awareness of the issue of authenticity and his desire to only purchase a ‘real’ didjeridu ‘from an Aboriginal’ is based on, and echoes the information in, his *Lonely Planet*. Also highlighted is Pierre’s knowledge and acceptance that authentic objects are more expensive, a fact that is pointed out in all the guidebooks. Furthermore, another backpacker indicated that based on the information in her guidebook she had learnt that:

> I found out things about the didjeridu … mainly that it was only in the northern areas that didjeridus were played up until maybe a hundred years ago. But all over the world didjeridus are portrayed as like the Australian Aboriginal thing. But most Aboriginal communities never even used them until very recently. And didjeridus weren’t very often painted unless they had a favourite one. (Rachel, 28, from England)

Clearly, the didjeridu is a prominent cultural object within the traveller discourse in relation to Australia, and was subsequently discussed by many of the backpackers. Other popular souvenir items discussed include boomerangs, art and books on Aboriginal culture. The importance of the authenticity of souvenirs was stressed in most interviews. They used words such as ‘tacky’, ‘touristy’, ‘not authentic’, ‘fake’ and ‘Made in Taiwan’ to describe the types of objects that they would not want to buy. As highlighted above, the backpackers’ definition of what they perceive to be ‘inauthentic’ were those objects that are made solely for the purpose of being souvenirs for tourists.

The purchasing of cultural artefacts as souvenirs, however, is a typically tourist practice. Thus, the process of reframing authenticity by guidebooks in a way that legitimates and endorses the purchasing of these objects regardless of their construction as ‘authentic’ is problematic for backpackers wishing to differentiate themselves as travellers rather than tourists. For the two travellers I have defined as ‘anti-backpackers’, the purchase of cultural artefacts such as the didjeridu was indeed considered symptomatic of the increasing commodification of both backpacker culture and Aboriginal culture. As such, the souveniring of Aboriginal cultures was something to be avoided. In this regard, Troy (27, from the United States) stated that the only souvenir he would purchase would be a t-shirt with the Aboriginal flag on it. Thus, unlike most other backpackers in this study,
he had no interest in purchasing a tourist object, such as a souvenir. This choice is consistent with his general rejection of the traveller discourse and his choice of memento further illuminates his different subject position. Rather than taking home an artefact of culture, he would choose to validate his experience by taking home a representation of culture that allowed him to project and display a political symbol of Aboriginal Australia.

The significance of this discussion regarding souvenir purchases is a further example of the multiplicity of traveller subject positions evident amongst the backpackers I interviewed. Furthermore, it demonstrates the highly subjective nature of the interpretation and evaluation of practices used to differentiate travellers from tourists. For those backpackers using guidebooks, the desire to purchase an Aboriginal artefact was interpreted as a means of further distinguishing themselves from mass tourists as long as their purchase was an ‘authentic’ artefact made by an ‘authentic’ Aboriginal person. The ‘authenticity’ of the object was largely evaluated according to a set of criteria supplied by the guidebooks. Interestingly, the anti-backpackers (who were not carrying guidebooks) interpreted the purchasing of such an object as being an indicator of a touristic mentality. Thus, their avoidance of this practice allowed them also to distinguish themselves from tourists (including backpackers) and position themselves as ‘real’ travellers.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored how the backpackers I interviewed engaged with guidebooks throughout their Australian travels. I have argued that guidebooks exert considerable influence over their readers through the construction of certain types of knowledge. In this sense, these texts make it possible for the backpacker to see the world and behave in certain ways. The backpackers indicated that the primary role of the guidebook was as a provider of cultural information. At the same time, the backpackers displayed diverse relationships to the guidebooks – the interplay between the traveller and the text is dynamic and primarily situational. Engagement with the information provided by guidebooks at any given destination is interpreted in light of previous junctures of text.

and experience. Travel is experienced as fluid with continual reflection on past experiences serving to shape both present circumstance and future expectations. These factors framed their interpretations of the guidebooks and, to an extent, shaped their experiences.

I also investigated the ways in which aspects of traveller discourse – authenticity, cultural learning and cultural interaction – are played out and negotiated through an examination of backpackers expectations of themselves and of their experiences with Aboriginal Australia. I explored the expectations of the backpackers in relation to Aboriginal Australia, and argued that their preconceptions of cultural authenticity were based on constructed images within traveller discourse. Many of the backpackers I interviewed seemed to have arrived in Australia with very specific preconceptions relating to Aboriginal people and their cultures. These expectations are supported, and at times contradicted, by traveller texts and verbal communications with other travellers. I also examined the backpackers’ expectations of authenticity in relation to themselves and their desire for interactions with Aboriginal people. In so doing, I explored the ways by which the backpackers position themselves within traveller discourse. By accepting particular messages and traveller ideals, and rejecting others, the backpackers construct themselves as travellers seeking authentic experiences with Aboriginal Australia through their quest for learning and cultural interaction.

Guidebooks are negotiated through the lived and imagined experiences of their readers. Rather than the text imposing a way of being upon the subject in a one-sided process, backpackers actively engage with guidebooks in order to define themselves as ‘authentic’ travellers. This process can most obviously be seen in the backpackers’ self-identification as ‘travellers’ rather than ‘tourists’ and in the choices they make based on such oppositional distinctions. For the two backpackers not using a guidebook, a further distinction of experience was found that located them outside of traveller discourse – as ‘anti-backpackers’. Individual backpackers actively take up particular components of the discourse to understand the objects of their gaze and their travel experience. The traveller gaze, whilst predominantly framed by guidebook texts, is still understood differently by different people. As McGregor (2000: 45) notes, travellers ‘may gaze in the same way, but this is different from saying that people see things in the same ways’.

What occurs, therefore, is a range of possible negotiations of text and, consequently, a diverse variety of backpacker subject positions. These issues are further explored in Chapter 6, below, in a case study of backpacker experiences at Uluru.
Chapter 6

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Backpacker Experiences at Uluru

No matter how many pictures you’ve seen, nothing will prepare you for your first view of Uluru. Even from a distance, across the rich red plains of The Centre, the power of its ancient spirit will overwhelm you. Once you stand at its base, touch it and explore the mysteries of its perimeter, you will understand why it’s not only a treasured icon to local Aboriginal people, but also one of the great wonders of the world. (Northern Territory Regional Tourism Association 2000: 49)

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how the guidebooks and the backpackers negotiate the collision between travel and tourism discourses at Uluru. Central to my analysis of traveller texts and backpacker experiences in the preceding chapters has been the construction of ‘authenticity’ in selected guidebooks, and the ways in which being an ‘authentic’ traveller are negotiated by backpackers in terms of this construction. In relation to the representation of Aboriginal Australia in these texts, and their subsequent use and interpretation by backpackers, a prevailing theme has been the discursive representation of the Outback as the ultimate destination for an ‘authentic’ Aboriginal experience. In this chapter, I examine the backpacker experience at Uluru, and I explore the attitudes and dilemmas and, ultimately, the actions of the backpackers in deciding whether or not to undertake the Uluru climb. I argue that the choice they make reveals the process of the production of an authentic traveller-self by drawing on and reinforcing characteristics of traveller discourse.

The chapter consists of four sections. The first introduces the case study and provides a brief history of the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park. In particular, I explore the contestations involved in the construction of this particular destination as an attraction for both travellers and tourists. In the second section, I further explore the conflicting narratives of Uluru – that is, of tourism, travel and Aboriginal culture – and examine the
ways in which guidebooks (as traveller texts) interpret and represent these narratives. The third section is an exploration of the unique experiences of the thirteen backpackers who had already visited Uluru in their travels. Specifically, I examine the various discourses they draw on to justify their decisions and actions in relation to undertaking the contested behaviour of climbing Uluru. The fourth section of the chapter consolidates the findings to further illustrate that the choices made by backpackers in relation to the climb reveals, to a great extent, the type of traveller they believe themselves to be.

**Destination Outback: The Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park**

As argued in Chapter 3, Uluru is the quintessential symbol of the Australian Outback – it is one of Australia’s best-known icons and, as an internationally renowned tourism attraction, is constructed as worthy of a ‘once-in-a lifetime-visit’. Uluru is promoted by the tourism industry as part of the unique Australian travel experience. Images of Uluru pervade Australian travel and tourism media with representations disseminated through visual and textual imagery in guidebooks, brochures, postcards, souvenirs, photography and travel programs, as well as through other popular cultural forms such as film, television, literature and poetry. Haynes (1998: 261) notes that ‘The Red Centre has been embraced so warmly by popular culture that it has become the most exported Australian landscape … Uluru has not only achieved international iconic status but become a site of modern pilgrimage’. Central to contemporary representations of Uluru is the link between the Outback landscape and Aboriginal culture and spirituality. The construction of the mythological Outback has long been central to the Western narratives of Uluru.

Uluru is clearly a popular traveller destination as well as a tourist destination – for the majority of the backpackers I interviewed Uluru was regarded as a ‘must-see’ and a journey to the Outback considered an essential aspect of their Australian travel experience. The importance of a visit to Uluru for the 28 international backpackers is signalled by the fact that 25 of them (that is, 90 per cent) would visit Uluru during their travels. Thirteen had visited Uluru prior to their interview and another 12 indicated that

they were planning to visit Uluru at some time following their interview. Only three backpackers were not visiting Uluru. Two of these backpackers stated that they would have liked to have gone to Central Australia but that they had ‘run out of time’. Both were interviewed at the end of their travels having spent between three to four months in Australia. The third backpacker said that he was not intending to go to Central Australia and indicated that he had no interest in visiting Uluru. In Murphy’s (1999) study of the image that international backpackers have of Australia, Uluru was emphasised by her interviewees as a unique and significantly defining element of Australia, along with kangaroos, the Great Barrier Reef, and Aboriginal culture. Uluru can be considered to be emblematic of backpacker perceptions of Australia and their desire to experience the Outback and, correspondingly, ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture (Murphy 1999).

Uluru is a single red sandstone monolith that rises 348 metres in height and extends 3.6 kilometres in length. Uluru and the nearby mountainous domes of Kata Tjuta visually dominate the arid landscape of the 1,325 square kilometre Uluru – Kata Tjuta (formerly Ayers Rock-Mt Olga) National Park. The National Park is situated in the Western Desert of Central Australia approximately 400 kilometres southwest of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory (Figure 6.1). The natural value of the landscape gained international recognition in 1987 when the National Park was included on the World Heritage List. Significantly, the World Heritage listing was updated in 1994 to include recognition of the ‘living cultural heritage’ of the area; therefore, making the rare acknowledgement of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the natural environment (Brown 1999: 680).

Until the mid-twentieth century, Uluru was relatively unknown except to the local Aboriginal people who have lived in the area for at least 22,000 years (Brown 1997; 1999). To the Central Desert Aboriginal people, the Pitjantjatjara-Yankuntjatjara collectively known as Anangu, Uluru and its surrounding lands are culturally and spiritually significant. For them, Uluru is at the crossroads of several ancestral groups of ‘Dreaming tracks’, and during the creation time, known by Anangu as the Tjukurpa, the landscape was created by powerful ancestral beings (Breeden 1994). As Burnam

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17 Anangu means ‘We People’ in the Pitjantjatjara language (Breedon 1994; Hill 1994)
Burnam (1988: 260) explains in his book *Aboriginal Australia: A Travellers Guide*, Uluru is ‘a living record of many hundreds of Dreamtime events, permanently retained within its huge body. Every crack, mark, stain and indentation has an explanation in the Dreaming’. Between 1920 and 1958 the area now known as the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park was part of the Petermann Reserve, also known as the Great Central Australian Aboriginal Reserve. However, in 1958, the landmarks of Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) were taken out of the reserve and were set aside within a Tourist and Wildlife Reserve. This area was subsequently declared a National Park in 1977 under the Commonwealth National Parks Act (Whittaker 1994).

![Figure 6.1](image)

**Figure 6.1**
Map of the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park (Department of the Environment and Heritage 2005)

In October 1985, following an historic and controversial Native Land Claim, the National Park was ‘handed back’ to the Aboriginal people of Central Australia and, consequently, its ownership was transferred to the traditional owners of the land (Breedon 1994; Hill 1994). Subsequently, the national park was leased back to (what is currently known as) Parks Australia (a division of the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage) for a period of ninety-nine years. Today,
Anangu and Park authorities jointly manage the National Park. Brown (1999) points out that majority representation of traditional owners on the management board ensures that Aboriginal culture is a central consideration in the management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Park as well as in the interpretation of the site for visitors.

Considered within non-Aboriginal discourse, Anangu are the traditional owners of Uluru. However, Anangu do not actually consider their relationship with Uluru as one of ownership but, rather, they see themselves as being part of the landscape and it a part of themselves (Hill 1994). The importance of the handing back of Uluru to Anangu is described by Burnam Burnam (1988: 264) as ‘an example of traditional people again taking responsibility for the symbols left to them since the Dreamtime’. In relation to the transferring title, Galarrwuy Yunupingu (1997b: 11), Chairman of the Northern Land Council, explains that:

Under the framework of the Land Rights Act, Uluru … [was] handed back to Aboriginal people who then leased these areas back to the Australian people through its Federal Government for all the world to enjoy, forever. It is important to remember these places are big tourist drawcards, bringing dollars into the Australian economy.

Each year, approximately half a million tourists visit the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park and around 50% of these visitors are international tourists (Bureau of Tourism Research 2000). Davidson and Spearritt (2000) provide an historical account of the development of tourism to Uluru noting that the first recorded tourist visit to Uluru was in 1935. They further note, however, that popular tourism to the area did not really develop until the 1950s when travel to Central Australia became easier and more appealing. Prior to this time, the wildness and harshness of the desert, and its isolation from civilisation, served as a deterrent for tourists (Haynes 1998). The beginning of organised tourism is marked by the appointment in 1957 of Bill Harney who was the first ranger to be employed at the National Park (Hill 1994). At the same time, an airstrip was developed there and in 1959 motel leases granted (Digance 2003). Visitation to Uluru continued to steadily grow throughout the 1960s, but there has been a rapid acceleration in visitor numbers since the 1970s (Davidson and Spearritt 2000: 215).
Roslyn Haynes (1998: 262) suggests a reason for the recasting of perceptions regarding travel to the desert was the ‘technological breakthrough’ of four-wheel drive vehicles that became readily available in Australia in the 1980s and allowed travellers to ‘negotiate the terrors and monotony of the desert’, either independently or on organised tours. Early tourism developments at Uluru, however, were managed poorly and resulted in numerous negative impacts. For instance, the crude construction of motels and camping grounds at the base of Uluru resulted in the desecration of the natural environment. Other negative impacts included tourists trespassing onto Aboriginal sacred sites and defiling Aboriginal cave paintings. In response, a government task force recommended the development of a new town located 20 kilometres away from Uluru. In 1984, the town of Yulara was opened (Cox 1986) which offers a range of accommodation styles including five star resorts, backpacker dormitories and camping grounds. Yulara is now the only site where tourists and travellers can stay.

Conflicts of interest between the Aboriginal owners and commercial tourism arise at Uluru particularly in relation to access and usage of the site (Digance 2003). Indeed, Brown (1999: 678) points out that ‘culture conflict’ results when ‘dominantly Eurocentric or Western tourism utilises indigenous heritage sites which are still occupied and controlled by the local host community’. Digance (2003: 144) describes Uluru as a ‘contested site’ which she defines as a:

Sacred location where there is contest over access and usage by any number of groups or individuals who have an interest in being able to freely enter and move around the site. There may also be elements of conflict between those who own and those who manage it on their behalf, or perhaps those who depend on it for their livelihood.

The primary issue of conflict at Uluru is the activity of climbing the Rock. Indeed, the contradictory discourses of tourism and Aboriginal culture, and the tensions between them, are exemplified in this popular activity that flagrantly contravenes the cultural and spiritual beliefs of Anangu. Climbing Uluru has long been promoted by the tourism industry as the reason for visiting the National Park (Davidson and Spearritt 2000; McKercher and du Cros 1998). Brown (1999) estimated that during the peak tourist
season around 1,500 people climb Uluru each day, and McKercher and du Cros (1998) have suggested that 90% of all tourists go to Uluru specifically to climb the Rock. According to McKercher and du Cros (1998), the average length of stay at the nearby town of Yulara is less than two nights, with many people visiting the National Park for less than a day on a package tour. As a result, the visitor experience at Uluru is usually reduced to activities that can be undertaken in a short period of time. The viewing of sunrise and sunset over Uluru at strategically situated viewing areas and climbing the Rock are the most popular activities pursued by visitors to the area (McKercher and du Cros 1998).

The visitor compulsion to climb and conquer Uluru is considered by Anangu as a sign of disrespect to their traditional culture and heritage (Norst 1999). Brown (1997; 1999) describes the climb as culturally inappropriate and insensitive behaviour. The Aboriginal owners of the land and managers of the National Park ask that visitors not climb Uluru, claiming it is ‘painful’ to see tourists climbing on the Rock (Whittaker 1994: 317). Anangu describe those who climb Uluru as minga, a word meaning ants (Figure 6.2). In a study of the Uluru climb by Brown (1997; 1999), it was found that there were limited persuasive messages in traditional tourism media aimed at discouraging people from the climb. He found that, overwhelmingly, the climb was promoted as a ‘must do’ activity and that brochures and newspaper travel articles promoted the climb as an appropriate activity. Brown (1999: 693) criticises the ‘cultural arrogance’ of these promotions, arguing that the tourism industry needs to incorporate the Aboriginal perspective in representations of Uluru and acknowledge the discouragement of the climb for reasons of cultural respect.

The conflict between the discourses of commercial tourism and Aboriginal culture was evident in media coverage of the decision by Anangu to close the climb for a period of twenty days in May 2001 – this was the first and only time that a ban had been enforced on climbing and it was put in place by Anangu as a mark of respect for the death of a traditional elder. The response to the closure was heated. The (then) Northern Territory Chief Minister, Denis Burke, was seemingly only concerned about the effect on tourism and was reported as saying that the closure of the climb would send ‘enormous shockwaves through the whole of the tourism industry’ (Toohey 2001: 3). The Chief

Minister’s narrow concerns for economic loss over the wishes of Anangu were further demonstrated in his statement that national and international tourists to the area expect, and pay for, a certain experience and that ‘they can sue if they don’t receive that experience’ (Toohey 2001: 3).

Figure 6.2
‘Minga’ climbing Uluru
Note the tiny black dots on top of the Rock

Ultimately, the dominant discourses of tourism and Aboriginal culture that frame and shape the visitor experience at Uluru are contradictory. According to Edensor (1998: 7), symbolic tourist sites are spaces where national, political, cultural and spiritual identities can be expressed and imagined. The various layers of meanings, therefore, can result in contradictory and contested notions of what these places mean (Edensor 1998). The sacredness of Uluru to Anangu is contrasted with the commercial interests of the tourism and travel industry. Uluru, on one hand, is an Aboriginal sacred site of cultural and spiritual significance but, on the other hand, it is a rock that seemingly belongs to everybody. Based on these opposing meanings the visitor experience at Uluru, and their

attitudes towards climbing it, are marked by ideals of ‘respect’ versus ‘conquest’. I will now turn to an investigation of the ways that these tensions are represented and negotiated in the three guidebooks analysed in this study. The positioning of guidebooks as traveller texts means that they aim to construct their readers as culturally aware and culturally sensitive travellers (see Chapters 4 and 5).

**Representing Uluru: Contradictory Narratives in Guidebooks**

The three guidebooks analysed – *Lonely Planet, Let’s Go* and *Rough Guide* – present Uluru as an important and appealing destination for independent travellers. Representations of Uluru within the guidebooks focus on its position as an iconic and definitive image of Australia, and highlight its significance as a natural landscape and tourist attraction. Uluru is central to the myth of the Outback, particularly to the extent that it is placed as a firm geographic location at which to experience this imagined landscape. The presentation of Uluru as a ‘must-see’ destination is illustrated in the following guidebook descriptions:

- *Australia’s biggest drawcard, the world famous Uluru (Ayers Rock) … Everybody knows how its colour changes as the setting sun turns it a series of deeper and darker reds before it fades into grey.* (*Lonely Planet* p.437)

- *The Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park … is the most visited single site in Australia … The Rock, its textures, colours and not least its elemental presence, is without question one of the world’s natural wonders.* (*Rough Guide* p.584)

- *To many travellers, the Red Centre represents the essence of Australia … at the geographic centre of the continent, rises Uluru (Ayers Rock), a celebrated symbol of the land down under … [Uluru has] magnetic appeal, and tourists flock to the Red Centre as if to an eighth wonder, prepared to brave endless distances and remote disasters to experience the ‘real’ outback.* (*Let’s Go* p.278)
Whether identified as ‘Uluṟu’, ‘Ayers Rock’ or simply ‘The Rock’, all three of the above passages describe Uluṟu as a representative and iconic image of Australia. Descriptors such as ‘world-famous’, ‘one of the world’s natural wonders’ and ‘eighth wonder’, present Uluṟu as a globally recognisable site that occupies a position amidst the highest echelons of internationally renowned natural landscape formations. As a world famous image synonymous with Australia’s global identity, its ubiquitous popularity is indicated through phrases such as ‘everybody knows how it changes colour’ and ‘without question one of the world’s natural wonders’. Further, Let’s Go directly refers to the symbolic status of Uluṟu describing it as a ‘symbol’ of the ‘land down under’ (a well-known colloquialism for Australia).

Uluṟu’s undoubted popularity as a tourist site is also represented. Let’s Go makes reference to its ‘magnetic appeal’ that attracts ‘flocks’ of tourists; Lonely Planet describes it as Australia’s ‘biggest drawcard’ referring to both its tourist significance and physical size; and Rough Guide identifies it as ‘the most visited single site in Australia’. Uluṟu’s status as a tourist mecca and icon is explained by its ‘elemental presence’, and its role as representing the ‘essence of Australia’. These quotes place Uluṟu within the surrounding landscapes by detailing its geographic position at the ‘centre of the continent’ and within the Uluṟu – Kata Tjuta National Park. Its nature as a single rock formation rising abruptly out of flat desert plains is part of its appeal. Significantly, Uluṟu is represented through its association with equally famous, mythological constructions such as the ‘Red Centre’ – conjuring images of deserts and the ‘Outback’ and, thus, evoking a wider array of meanings and related imagery (see Chapter 4). The Outback is presented simultaneously as the location, and surrounding environment, of Uluṟu, and upon reaching Uluṟu travellers have the opportunity to ‘experience the ‘real’ outback’ (Let’s Go, p.278). That Let’s Go places quotation marks around the term ‘real’ could be read as indicating that Uluṟu itself is the definitive Outback destination.

A significant tension that emerges in these representations is the positioning of Uluṟu as a tourist attraction. Uluṟu is positioned within tourism discourse – it is part of the Australian tourism product. Thus, although the guidebooks firmly position themselves within traveller discourse, many of the above-described guidebook representations of

Uluru are reproductions of meanings and imagery drawn from popular tourism discourse. Travellers are constructed by the guidebooks in opposition to tourists (see Chapter 4) and, consequently, many of the backpackers I interviewed voiced a desire to avoid places and situations that are ‘touristy’ (see Chapter 5). If travellers want to avoid tourism, then why would they want to visit this ‘tourist mecca’ that is so popular that it is overrun by ‘flocks’ of tourists? Indeed, Let’s Go (p.291) states that ‘Uluru and Kata Tjuta are so stunning that a visit is definitely worth it, even for tourists seeking the backroads’.

In order to overcome this tension, the guidebooks make Uluru appealing to the traveller by combining the natural landscape narratives with narratives of Aboriginal culture and spirituality. Although traditional tourism media also present Uluru as inextricably linked to Aboriginal culture using language that connotes a timeless and ancient culture (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987: 125) (for instance, see the quote at the beginning of this chapter), the guidebooks provide greater details in this regard because of their role as information providers and mediators of cultural knowledge. Within the guidebooks, Uluru, more than any other place in the Northern Territory or Australia, is represented as being the site for the ‘authentic’ Aboriginal cultural experience. Uluru is simultaneously described through a discourse of tourism that draws on popular representations and the iconic image, and also the traveller discourse that draws on, and emphasises Aboriginal culture and spirituality:

The mighty Rock offers much more than pretty colours – the entire area is of deep cultural significance to the local Anangu Aboriginal people. (Lonely Planet p.437)

These natural wonders are a centrepiece for the local Anangu Aboriginals [sic] who, for 22,000 years, have revered Uluru as a sacred site of the Dreaming. (Let’s Go p.291)

Uluru is authenticated as a destination for travellers through the use of all three strategies of textual authentication of landscapes that I elaborated on in Chapter 4. These strategies are the recognition of the Aboriginal place name, the naming of the Aboriginal tribal group of the area, and the description of relevant Dreamtime stories. In
the Northern Territory chapter of all three guidebooks the site is referred to as Uluru. The Eurocentric name Ayers Rock is also given in brackets following the Aboriginal name, however, indicating that the name Uluru is not well known enough to stand alone.\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, each guidebook recognises and identifies Anangu as the Aboriginal people who live in the area and who own and jointly manage the National Park in which Uluru is now located.

The incorporation of these naming strategies into guidebook representations of Uluru also serves to position the site as an authentic indigenous destination by mobilising narratives of traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality, coupled with the recognition and identification of traditional tribal names and beliefs in representing the site. As I have argued above (see Chapter 4), however, the discussions of traditional culture and spirituality are brief. For example:

The tjukurpa (traditional law) of the Mala (hare-wallaby people) is of great importance to the Anangu … The tjukurpa tells of the clash between two ancestral snakes Kuniya and Liru. (\textit{Lonely Planet}, p.439)

Uluru, Kata Tjuta and the surrounding desert are bound to a culture whose holistic cosmology sees the People – anangu – as having the Land and the Law – tjukurpa – as the central tenet of belief … the tjukurpa seeks to provide its adherents with a connection with the past, and a code of strict rules for behaving correctly … Uluru is a key intersection along many ‘dreaming trails’ … principally those of the Mala (hare wallaby), Liru (poisonous snake), Kuniya (python) and Kurpany (monster dog) … (\textit{Rough Guide}, p.588)

Whether discussing Aboriginal ownership or Aboriginal culture and spirituality, the guidebook representations reinforce the notion that Aboriginal culture is an essential aspect of the Uluru experience. More than any other site in Australia, Uluru is presented as offering opportunities for ‘authentic’ indigenous cultural experiences. Indeed, travellers are informed that ‘there are opportunities to delve into [Anangu] culture’ \footnote{McKercher and du Cros (1998: 384) explore the challenges of repositioning Ayers Rock as Uluru arguing that the name Ayers Rock is so firmly entrenched as a tourism destination that ‘it is unlikely to ever be able to reinvent itself as anything else’.

Lonely Planet (p.437) and that Uluru is ‘one of the finest areas to begin to learn about the Aborigines of the western desert’ (Rough Guide p.518). These statements, therefore, serve to further reinforce Uluru as one of the richest places to undertake cultural educational pursuits. Each guidebook advises readers that the best options for the learning experience are to visit the Uluru – Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre or to go on an Aboriginal cultural tour. Options for Aboriginal tours and interpretations of the landscape include some ranger-guided tours of the base of the Rock and organised tours with the company Anangu Tours which is owned and operated by the local Aboriginal community.

Thus, the reframed ‘authentic’ cultural experience at Uluru is further substantiated through association with the dimensions of traveller discourse I have discussed throughout this thesis, that is, cultural interaction and cultural education. As I have argued previously, however, the guidebooks provide travellers with caveats in regard to the extent and level of cultural interaction that they can expect and achieve.

For instance, Lonely Planet presents a paragraph of information in the section on Uluru relating to the issue of alcohol consumption by Anangu in a text box titled ‘Grog’. Thus, the second dominant stereotype of the ‘drunken Aborigine’ is alluded to and contrasts with the popular imagined stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ that is more closely linked with the site. Readers are advised that ‘alcohol (grog) is a problem’ for the local Aboriginal community and Anangu now live within a ‘dry community’. Furthermore, Aboriginal people are unable to buy alcohol at the bottle shop at Yulara and, as a consequence, travellers may be ‘approached at Yulara by Aboriginal people who want you to buy grog on their behalf’ (Lonely Planet p.437). Readers of this guidebook are informed that negative interactions with Aboriginal people are somewhat common and likely. On the other hand, though, when information such as this is provided by the guidebook it can be seen as an example of the ways in which traveller texts seek to distinguish themselves from mainstream tourism media. Lonely Planet is not shy about dealing with complex social issues; indeed, such discussion is a key mechanism by which guidebooks position themselves beyond tourism discourse. Arguably, information regarding contemporary issues is provided in order to facilitate a deeper and more nuanced understanding and interpretation for the traveller seeking to understand

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19 Indeed, Anangu promote their tours as ‘the only way to understand the real Uluru’ (Anangu Tours, undated brochure p.1).
Aboriginal Australia in contemporary contexts. Mainstream tourism media tends to downplay or ignore such problematic issues for fear of spoiling the ‘fun’ of the tourist who doesn’t want to be troubled by knowledge of such social problems. Further, by offering readers information on social issues, the guidebooks are contributing to the construction of the traveller as well informed and capable of making their own decisions and judgements on the basis of this information.

As part of the construction of the individual backpacker as being more informed than the mass tourist, the discussion of limitations on the types of direct interactions possible serve to provide a more realistic appraisal of the Aboriginal cultural experiences that are likely to occur. In response to these limitations, and as argued in Chapter 4, the authentic cultural experience is redefined by the guidebooks as being best achieved through structured and mediated educational pursuits rather than through unstructured direct contact and interpersonal interaction. For example, cultural centres are presented as a significant places for learning culture from an Aboriginal perspective.

Figure 6.3
Detailed Map of Uluru showing the location of the Cultural Centre
At Uluru, Anangu interpretations of the landscape are presented in the Uluru – Kata Tjuṯa Cultural Centre and visits to the centre are recommended in the three guidebooks. This Aboriginal owned and operated Centre, which opened in 1995, is located about one kilometre away from the Rock (Figures 6.3 and 6.4). The Cultural Centre is described as ‘superb’ and ‘excellent’ (Lonely Planet p.437), ‘informative’ and ‘enlightening’ (Let’s Go p.292). Lonely Planet (p.437) states that it is ‘worth putting aside one hour’ prior to visiting Uluru itself and Rough Guide (p.586) recommends ‘two hours to fully appreciate the place’.

Figure 6.4
Uluru from the Cultural Centre

In each of the guidebooks particular attention is paid to the issue of climbing Uluru. Lonely Planet highlights the issue in a text box separated from the general text titled ‘Climbing Uluru’ and, in doing so, draws reader attention to the topic and emphasises it as significant. Readers are informed that, although climbing Uluru has long been
‘considered a highlight of a trip to the centre … climbing Uluru goes against Aboriginal spiritual beliefs’ and ‘Anangu would prefer if you didn’t’ because the climb path ‘is associated with the Mala Tjurkupa’ (Lonely Planet p.439). While climbing Uluru is presented as having popular and historical precedent, the activity is clearly positioned as being culturally inappropriate through the relegation of the statement to the past tense, ‘For years climbing the rock was seen as a highlight’. Conversely, information concerning the request not to climb is framed in the present tense, ‘climbing Uluru goes against Aboriginal spiritual beliefs’. Similarly, the descriptor ‘the rock’ is used when referring to the past acceptance of the climb, while the more culturally appropriate Uluru is used when referring to the justification for not climbing. The association of the activity of climbing with the popular tourist name Ayers Rock, and its presentation in the past tense, places the climb as a popular tourist activity at a time in history before a culturally aware and respectful sensibility emerged in the form of the responsible traveller. Two further justifications are offered to provide a level of understanding for the request. First, is a level of Aboriginal concern regarding the safety and welfare of visitors to the National Park because the traveller is ‘a visitor to their land’. Second, is a seemingly disparaging reference to those who undertake the climb – as seen through the eyes of the local Aboriginal people – by describing them as ‘ants’ (‘Minga Mob’) (Figure 6.2). This text box in Lonely Planet emphasises the culturally sensitive alternative of not undertaking the climb. The presentation of this information within a text box also draws attention not just to the activity of climbing but also to the problematic nature of the activity. Further, Lonely Planet (p.439) mention an increase in the popularity of ‘ideologically sound’ t-shirts bearing the caption ‘I Didn’t Climb Ayers Rock’.

Seemingly contradictory, however, is that underneath the text box is a passage of general text that is presented under the same heading ‘Climbing Uluru’. This passage provides information regarding the actual physical activity of climbing Uluru. The physical risks involved are highlighted through the warning ‘those climbing Uluru should take care – numerous people have died while doing so, usually by having a heart attack but some by taking a fatal tumble’ (Lonely Planet p.439) The potential dangers of extreme environmental conditions are also emphasised such as, ‘Avoid climbing in the heat of the day’, and ‘It’s often extremely windy at the top’. This discussion of the
physical challenge involved in the climb can be read as accommodating those backpackers who may be interested in adventure activities, and is an acknowledgment that visitors do still regularly choose to climb Uluru against the wishes of Anangu. This passage can also be seen as providing a basis for the Aboriginal concern over the safety of climbers by informing the reader of the very real dangers involved. To further impart the risks involved the positions of emergency phones along the climb trail are given. Thus, rather than this passage in Lonely Planet undermining the request not to climb it may, in fact, strengthen the Anangu concern as being not just in relation to their cultural beliefs but also for the safety of all visitors to their land. Again, by providing information concerning both sides of the debate surrounding the Uluru climb, Lonely Planet is constructing the traveller as informed and aware, and capable of making their own decisions.

Let’s Go presents a view similar to that of the Lonely Planet, although it is not set out separately and, therefore, is less likely to stand out to the reader. Let’s Go mentions Anangu ‘attach spiritual importance to the path up Uluru and emphatically ask that tourists not make the climb’ (p.293). The strength of the language used and the association of climbing with ‘tourists’ and not travellers implies that this is primarily a tourist activity that is not pursued by the ‘authentic’ traveller. Yet, despite this positive alignment with cultural beliefs, it is also stated that hundreds of tourists undertake the climb each day. This statement is followed by information that says the climb is ‘no easy task’ and that there are plaques commemorating the people who have died on the climb. Hence, in a similar fashion to Lonely Planet, Let’s Go partially constructs the climb as a risky activity that has a certain physically demanding appeal. However, using the same descriptive terms drawn from discourses of adventure Let’s Go also describes the base walk as ‘ambitious’ and perhaps an even more challenging and demanding activity. Significantly, though, ‘Not climbing Ayers Rock’ is listed in the ‘Unforgettable Moments’ section in the preliminary pages of Let’s Go (p.xv).

In Rough Guide, although reference is made to the request that tourists not climb Uluru, the request is preceded by a sentence describing how long it takes to climb (‘less than an hour’) and a statement that it will be ‘the greatest exertion you will undertake during your visit to Australia’ (Rough Guide p.588). Following this is the comment that
‘seventy percent of visitors to the Rock come to conquer the summit’, which presents the climb as both a challenge and an opportunity that will test strength and willpower against nature. This construction of the climb as an adventure activity is a theme common to all three guidebooks; however, Rough Guide is the only one to emphasise this aspect over the more culturally sensitive option. By drawing on recognisable characteristics of traveller discourse (challenge and adventure) to legitimate the climb for travellers, the request to respect the Anangu sacred site is minimised. Emphasising this marginalisation of Anangu culture and spirituality is Rough Guide’s treatment of the alternative option. In direct contrast to the climb, the base walk around Uluru is described as not being ‘a triumphant achievement’ and as the ‘less strenuous’ option (Rough Guide p.588). Not making the climb is discussed primarily in terms of a way to avoid tourists rather than respecting the wishes and beliefs of Anangu. Thus, not climbing is presented as a traveller activity through recourse to the traveller aversion to tourists rather than by emphasising the more culturally sensitive option associated with responsible travel.

What emerges in the guidebook discussions of the climb is that climbing is presented primarily as a popular tourist activity. Therefore, for travellers who wish to avoid being a tourist (and also to avoid tourists), the pursuit of more culturally responsible and respectful activities is promoted, such as the walk around the base of Uluru and a visit to the cultural centre. However, the climb is also partially constructed as a traveller activity for those backpackers who are interested in adventure and the experience of physical exertion and challenge. The seeming contradiction present in this construction of the climb is reconciled when it is recognised that traveller discourse subsumes and draws upon a variety of different narratives and makes possible a diversity of subject positions that can be taken up (and put down again) by individual backpackers. Furthermore, in providing information about all the options available and justifications for the divergent perspectives regarding the Uluru climb, the guidebooks construct the backpacker as an autonomous independent traveller with the capacity to make critically informed decisions. Essentially, the guidebooks present readers with two main options: to climb or not to climb. In the subsequent sections, I explore the ways in which the backpackers I interviewed negotiated the contradictions and tensions involved between being a traveller and being a tourist at Uluru.

To Climb or Not to Climb?: Negotiating Cultural Experiences

The contradictory discourses of travel and tourism in the guidebook discussions of Uluru provide some of the knowledge informing backpackers of their choices in relation to the climb. I asked all the backpackers I interviewed to discuss their views regarding the Uluru climb and their decisions in relation to this activity. For the majority, the consensus was a decision not to climb. In this section, I focus on the unique and individual experiences of the 13 backpackers who had visited Uluru. Table 6.1, below, illustrates that, of the backpackers who had been to Uluru, 10 had not climbed. The table also shows that eight backpackers had been to Uluru with an organised tour group, while the other five travelled there independently. The organised tours can be broadly defined as ‘adventure’ tours and, as discussed in Chapter 5, these tours are a popular way for backpackers to visit National Parks in Australia. None of the backpackers had gone on the Aboriginal cultural tours of Uluru – Anangu Tours – with one backpacker eschewing these tours as a ‘token effort, put on just for tourists’ (Johan, 31, The Netherlands). The role of the tour and of the tour guide in influencing the backpacker experience at Uluru is explored later in this section.

Table 6.1
Backpackers at Uluru

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Using a Guidebook</th>
<th>Climb</th>
<th>Organised Tour</th>
<th>Cultural Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isobel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 During my fieldwork I went with Anangu Tours to both Uluru and Kata Tjuta. During my observations I noted that younger, independent travellers were not taking these tours and I followed up this finding with an employee at the Anangu tour desk at Yulara who advised that tickets were only infrequently sold to tourists staying in the backpacker accommodation.
For the 10 backpackers who did not climb Uluru, the most common reason they gave for their decision was ‘respect’ for Aboriginal people and their cultures. For example, Amy, Saskia, Melissa, and Peter stated that they chose not to climb because they wanted to respect the wishes of Aboriginal people. This notion of cultural respect is central to discourses of responsible travel and is evident in the following statements:

I didn’t climb it out of respect for them [the Aboriginal people]. (Amy, 24, from England)

I didn’t climb it out of respect for the Aborigine culture. (Peter, 25, from The Netherlands)

I didn’t climb because of the culture, because I respect. They just request that you don’t do it. I didn’t do it because of that. (Saskia, 23, from The Netherlands)

In these examples, a concern for respecting Aboriginal cultures was based primarily on their knowledge that Aboriginal people had requested that visitors not climb Uluru. They acknowledged that their awareness of the climb as culturally insensitive (and, therefore, disrespectful) came from various sources. For instance, Peter said that ‘I read it, our guide told us about it, and I saw it in the cultural centre there’. In other words, drawing on cultural sensitivity in identifying and reiterating the request not to climb provided them with what was, in their opinion, a sufficient justification not to undertake the climb and, therefore, a significant way of affirming that they are culturally sensitive travellers rather than mass tourists.

In further justifying her decision, Saskia also drew on a narrative of religion to explain her choice not to climb. She stated:

I always compare it with Catholic or Christian, you know, they don’t want you to walk over their church … it’s the same with the Rock, it’s the same with the sacred sites … that’s why I always compare it with the church, walking over the
church, you know, or taking something from the church with you. (Saskia, 23, from The Netherlands)

The evocation of this religious narrative is sometimes also used by Aboriginal people themselves who make this comparison between Uluru and a church in an attempt to explain the importance of Uluru to their cultural and spiritual beliefs (Whittaker 1994). For instance, Burnum Burnum (1988: 266) explains in his guide to Aboriginal Australia, ‘to Aboriginal people, Uluru is a cathedral and though the outside form is visible, the underlying spiritual concepts are not a matter of public record’. Whittaker (1994: 317) states that this ‘familiar parody’ of describing the Rock as analogous to a cathedral is used ‘to bring enlightenment to the reportedly phenomenally dense white tourist’.

Melissa also articulated the notion of cultural sensitivity in relation to her decision not to climb as evidenced by her use of word ‘appreciation’:

They don’t want you to climb it and there doesn’t seem to be an awful lot you can do when you’re a tourist travelling around to show an appreciation of the culture and support them. So if that’s just one thing, one small thing you can do, then why not? (Melissa, 27, from England)

Melissa interpreted the decision not to climb as an opportunity for her, as a traveller on Aboriginal land, to demonstrate ‘an appreciation of the culture’ and to ‘support them’. She sees this decision as ‘one small thing’ that can be done personally to demonstrate an understanding of the significance of Uluru to Anangu and, moreover, to value that significance. Melissa’s statement is also interesting because she implicitly (and, perhaps, unconsciously) recognises the increasingly slippery and fluid nature of various subject positions and descriptive categories within traveller discourse when she describes herself (and others) as a ‘tourist travelling around’. She recognised her separation from the local culture as a result of being a tourist and also, perhaps, the exploitation of culture by tourism. This belief is implied in her statement that ‘there doesn’t seem to be an awful lot you can do’ and she translates this into the desire to get beyond tourism through personal action. She implies that ‘as travellers’, backpackers are only ‘travellers’ if they can be visibly differentiated from tourists through their

actions and behaviours. In other words, she saw the dilemma relating to the climb as a crucial opportunity to differentiate herself from other ‘tourists’ at the Rock and to define herself as a ‘traveller’.

Isobel also discussed respect and cultural awareness as informing her decision not to climb. In contrast to the others discussed above, however, she gave a number of examples of what she believed she was respecting and justified her decision not to climb. In her words:

I didn’t climb it because I think people should respect traditions. The Aboriginal people don’t climb so why should we? It’s their land … It was amazing in itself just to walk around [the base]. You don’t need to be at the top of it to appreciate that … I think you have to respect. Like where they have signs asking you not to take photos because they’re sacred sites. I think if you don’t understand it totally, and even if you do understand it, that you should respect that these are their sites, they have sacred ceremonies there and traditional beliefs. Those kind of things should be respected. (Isobel, 24, from Ireland)

Traditions, land ownership, cultural differences, sacred sites and ceremonies are the ‘things’ she understands travellers should respect. At the same time as suggesting she doesn’t have a complete understanding of Aboriginal cultural beliefs, she mobilises a narrative of cultural understanding as a dimension of respect. This point is evident in her statement that ‘if you don’t understand it totally’ then you should have respect.

For another backpacker, Natalie, respect was considered to be ‘politically correct’ behaviour. She indicated that her awareness of the request not to climb came from her guidebook:

I didn’t climb it. I’d read before that you were encouraged not to climb the Rock. It’s not the politically correct thing to do. It’s obviously very pro-Aboriginal the *Lonely Planet* which is quite interesting. The way it’s talking about not climbing the Rock. You read that and you obviously think: right, the editors or the writers
of this book believe that you should not climb the Rock. (Natalie, 28, from England)

That she interpreted the writers of her *Lonely Planet* as encouraging her not to climb was an important influence on her decision and she, too, drew on themes of responsible travel and cultural respect to justify her decision. One reading of her use of the term ‘politically correct’ could be seen as implying an awareness of wider social issues in relation to the history of marginalisation of, and discrimination against, Aboriginal people. An alternative reading of the use of the term ‘politically correct’ could identify her as being somewhat sceptical and not really committed to a position regarding the climb. In this sense, she was perhaps willing to go along with her guidebook’s interpretation in order to conform to wider values and acceptable behaviour as related to being a culturally responsible traveller.

Andre also indicated that his knowledge of the climb came from reading his *Lonely Planet* guidebook, and it was this knowledge that influenced his decision not to climb:

> I didn’t want to climb the Rock, I expected to go and see other things. I read before that they don’t like it if you climb their sacred place … I was surprised that so many do it. I thought maybe just a few, you know. But no, whole lines. (Andre, 22, from The Netherlands)

To a degree, Andre’s surprise at the number of people undertaking the climb indicates his thorough adherence to the traveller discourses of cultural awareness and respect. His acceptance of the notion that one should not climb out of respect is so complete that he assumed it to be the self-evident and proper response to the situation. He expressed considerable surprise at finding that so many other visitors have a different evaluation of the significance and relevance of the Anāangu request.

Helena stated that her interpretation of respect for Aboriginal people goes past the fact that Uluru is a sacred place. She said that she had also learnt that Aboriginal people also ask tourists not to climb because they do not want visitors to be injured, or to die, whilst climbing. In this regard, she acknowledged the multiple justifications given by Anāangu in order to strengthen their moral position as stated in her *Lonely Planet* guidebook (as...
outlined above). She understood the issue as primarily concerning the safety of visitors, at the same time as drawing on some degree of cultural understanding in order to make her decision:

I did not climb, I didn’t want to … They don’t want anyone to climb the Rock because it’s dangerous … [and] they don’t want anyone dying up there … I first thought it would be because it’s sacred, but then I learnt that it’s not just about that, they are worried about the people. (Helena, 23, from Germany)

The reasons for deciding not to climb given by each of the backpackers discussed, above, are similar, particularly in relation to the reasons they gave to justify their decisions. Various traveller discourses were mobilised, primarily cultural sensitivity, cultural respect, cultural awareness and cultural understanding. That these backpackers chose messages of traveller discourse to become culturally responsible travellers meant that their decision not to climb Uluru was, for them, virtually unproblematic. Significantly then, their decision not to climb became actively incorporated into their self-perception as travellers, and a tangible experience (and memory) that they could call upon as evidence that they are travellers rather than tourists.

For Pierre, however, the reason for not climbing was not because of his knowledge that Aboriginal people ask tourists not to. He was, in fact, very disappointed as he had wanted to climb but was prevented by poor weather conditions that closed the climb on the day he visited Uluru. In his words:

It was closed because it was too windy. But … I did want to climb … I always say I would more respect the Rock when I climb and, yeah, probably some tourists they say ‘No I don’t climb, I have some respect’. (Pierre, 23, from Switzerland)

Although Pierre recognised the relationship between respect and the choice to climb or not to climb, he framed this dimension of the dilemma in a different way. He acknowledged that while some visitors may not climb because they ‘have some respect’, for him, respect is not related to the cultural and spiritual concerns identified by the other backpackers and by the guidebook’s through the use of the term respect.
Rather, Pierre displays a different interpretation of respect in relating it to his desire to climb in saying that he would have ‘more respect’ for ‘the Rock’ if he had been able to do so. Pierre alludes to challenge and adventure and a desire to conquer Uluru, and infers that a successful climb would perhaps represent a significant experience for him and that he would ‘respect’ Uluru for enabling this experience. This example, therefore, highlights the subjective nature of the term ‘respect’.

In contrast to those discussed above, three of the backpackers I interviewed – James, Johan and Sara – had climbed Uluru, and each talked about their decision to climb in different ways. Whilst these backpackers acknowledged an awareness that the climb goes against the beliefs and wishes of Anangu, they, nevertheless, made the decision to climb. It is interesting, therefore, to examine the ways in which these backpackers negotiated the personal implications of the dilemma, and the means through which they justified their decision to disregard the Anangu request and, in a sense, their own traveller selves.

James, in particular, was quite definite that he had wanted to climb, although he said that he ‘did think about not climbing it, but I decided for me that I wanted to’. He offered various reasons for making the decision:

I climbed the Rock and the reason was because I don’t agree with what the Aboriginals believe in. I’m a scientist and I look at the Rock and I think of it as an incredible geological phenomenon. But I do not believe that emu men climbed up it, the mala men or whatever it was. (James, 21, from England)

James decided to climb because his personal beliefs were different from Aboriginal beliefs. Although he expressed an awareness of Anangu spiritual and cultural beliefs in relation to Uluru he used phrases such as ‘I don’t agree’ and ‘I don’t believe’ to justify his decision. He draws on a rationalist Western scientific discourse to present a materialistic interpretation of the Rock’s value as an ‘incredible geological phenomenon’ and, further, he defined himself as a ‘scientist’. By drawing on scientific discourses he implies that humans are superior to nature and thus able to conquer and control it. And by rationalising his decision from a scientific basis he disassociated
Uluru from Aboriginal ownership. By not acknowledging any spiritual or metaphysical value in Uluru he diminished the Aboriginal claim which is based on their spiritual beliefs. Indeed, he demonstrated that he was aware of why visitors are asked not to climb, and he offered a literal interpretation of Aboriginal spirituality and relevant Dreaming stories. However, he challenges the factuality of these cultural beliefs by stating ‘I don’t believe that emu men climbed up, the mala men or whatever’. In relation to his attempt to understand the Anangu request he went on to say:

The reason they don’t want you to climb is because you’re walking on the footsteps of the mala men … When it comes down to it, that’s sort of their religion and I don’t believe in what they believe in’.

James interpreted his choice to climb at its most basic level – as concerning individual beliefs. He describes Aboriginal spirituality as a ‘sort of religion’ with no basis in reality in contrast to his scientifically proven ‘truths’. He consolidated this point by going on to say ‘I’m not a religious person’. Interestingly, however, he continued the religious narrative by comparing Uluru to Western churches:

I’m not a religious person but going into churches fascinates me because I love to see the way that other people believe … If you go to a church in the Western world they don’t stop you entering because you’re not the right religion and I see it [climbing Uluru] in the same way. I mean that [Uluru] may be thought of as almost like a temple of theirs … [but] the temples in the world you’re allowed into to experience … so that’s why I wanted to climb the Rock.

In comparing climbing Uluru to entering a church (in a different way to Saskia, above), James, consequently, perceived his Western-scientific identity as the reason ‘they’ wish to prevent his experience – on the basis that Aboriginal people see him as being of the wrong religion. In describing the Rock as ‘almost like a temple’, he acknowledges the spiritual significance of Uluru to Aboriginal people; however, he claims a right to access this place based on a precedent that ‘you’re allowed’ to experience ‘the temples in the world’. He also claims the right of an inquisitive scientific mind to ‘see the way that other people believe’ despite admitting that he is not a religious person.
Significantly, he seemed to imply that ‘they’ (Aboriginal people) are being culturally insensitive and discriminatory towards him in trying to prevent him from having the type of experience he desired. With the justification and explanation of his decision complete, James went on to describe the experience of the climb:

It’s incredible. It’s the most amazing view, absolutely amazing. I mean you can see the horizon 360 degrees.

The positive description of the view from the summit of Uluru as ‘incredible’ and ‘amazing’ served to further justify his decision to climb – as the ultimate reward for climbing. Indeed, the only negative part of the experience for him was that there ‘was so many people’ also doing the climb. James acknowledged the popularity of the climb as a tourist activity as well as acknowledging his own nature as a tourist. In his words:

The only thing that spoilt it was the fact that there were so many people but, at the end of the day, I was contributing to those so many people, so it was fine, I don’t mind.

Of the three backpackers who had climbed Uluru, James was the most definite that he had made the right choice. The certainty in his decision can perhaps be taken as a product of the power of the narratives and discourses he drew upon to justify his decision, namely Western materialistic-scientific discourse. Contrastingly, the other two backpackers who had climbed Uluru explained that their decision had not been an easy one to make. With hindsight, they both indicated that they were unsure that they had made the right decision and if faced with the dilemma of climbing again, then they would not. For example, Sara acknowledged experiencing uncertainty climbing and, in retrospect, felt that she made the wrong decision:

I did climb it ... I really was in two minds whether to do it or not. I was like, you know, should I or shouldn’t I? I don’t know. But, suddenly I thought ‘God, I shouldn’t have climbed it’ because I mean they don’t want you to … They’d rather you didn’t climb it and it isn’t right, and I don’t know why I did climb it. (Sara, 21, from Scotland)
Sara did not justify her decision to climb, nor did she describe the experience. But, having climbed Uluru she says that ‘suddenly’ she thought she ‘shouldn’t have climbed’. She was unable to reconcile her decision as she had already undertaken the climb and, hence, was experiencing some feelings of guilt and remorse following the climb. The ‘sudden’ return of doubt and uncertainty could imply that she ignored the ethical implications and based her decision to climb on a spur of the moment desire. By acknowledging that ‘they don’t want you’ to climb and ‘they’d rather you didn’t’, Sara points out that what is ‘not right’ about climbing is that it goes against ‘their’ wishes. She draws on themes of cultural sensitivity and respect to explain that her decision was wrong. Her guilt can be seen as symptomatic of an acceptance of traveller discourse and her self-definition as a traveller but, apparently, not to the extent of actually determining her actions or guiding her decision. In this regard, Sara’s experience could be an example of the capacity of individuals to negotiate and shift their subject position within traveller discourse. For Sara, the dilemma, and associated doubts over her self-definition as traveller, remained central aspects of the memory of her experience long after the climb was completed, as evident in her concluding remark ‘I don’t know why I did climb it’.

Johan interpreted his dilemma about climbing as an individual choice and a decision to be made based on the consideration of relevant information. He acknowledged he was aware of the Anangu request that tourists not climb from reading his guidebook. This knowledge, however, was counteracted by word-of-mouth from other backpackers he had talked to during his travels who had apparently presented the climb as a positive experience which, for him, legitimated the activity in backpacker culture. Johan described opinions in relation the climb as ‘kind of mixed’ and, therefore, he saw his decision as a personal dilemma and choice. He expressed uncertainty even after (or because of) exposure to contradictory perspectives by stating that he was undecided. He described his experience as follows:

I did climb … I’d read it [in my Lonely Planet guidebook] already that they’d rather not have you climbing it … [But] a lot of the backpackers say it’s a really good thing to do, so it’s kind of mixed … I hadn’t decided whether I was going to
do it or not. Then the guide herself said that she’d climbed it… [So] I made up my mind like that ‘ok I’m just going to climb’… I will not climb it again because there is probably some truth in it that it’s a sacred place. (Johan, 31, from The Netherlands)

What emerges in Johan’s justification is that his dilemma was solved by exposure to another mediating source of information – a tour guide who he perceived as culturally aware and, therefore, legitimate because she was ‘really into Aboriginal things’ (she was not, however, an Aboriginal Australian). His decision to climb was seemingly influenced by the fact that his supposedly culturally aware guide had told him that she had ‘climbed it’:

The night before [we went to Uluru] the guide, like I told you she was really into Aboriginal things … she had this story about [how] she knew some of the Aboriginals … [she told us that] they were forced to get this ninety-nine year lease and then give it back including that people were allowed to climb it.

Through information provided by his tour guide, Johan was aware of some issues relating to the ‘handback’ of Uluru to Anangu as he noted that Aboriginal people were ‘forced’ to lease the land back to the government for ninety-nine years. By drawing on historical and factual information, however, his interpretation of the dilemma relating to the climb is framed as a moot point. He believed that the very existence of the option to climb should be taken as evidence that Anangu have no legitimate basis for attempting to place restrictions on the activity. In this sense, Johan goes on to challenge the Anangu request:

If it’s that sacred to them I would think that they would never show their sacred site … [I] feel that if it’s so sacred to them they would never, [they] should have never agreed [to the] ninety-nine year lease … so by agreeing [to] that, or giving in to that … I thought, I made up my mind that ok I’m just going to climb.

Johan’s perspective on the ‘handback’ of Uluru shows little awareness of the extent of determination, socio-political or economic that Aboriginal people had over the closing
of the climb which has long been a tourist attraction. He draws on concepts of legality and Western interpretations of ownership to frame and attempt to understand the Anangu request not to climb. He questions the sacredness of Uluru by stating ‘if’ it is really ‘that’ sacred, and he used this as his evidence that the Aboriginal cultural claim to spiritual significance is dubious because if Uluru was ‘that’ sacred then ‘they’ would have acted differently and not allowed the climb at all. Thus, according to Johan, by ‘agreeing to’ or ‘giving in’ and allowing people to climb ‘they’ have themselves undermined any legitimate basis for making the request. It was on the basis of this logic that Johan decided to climb. He then, however, went on to state that:

I will not climb again because there probably is some truth in that it’s a sacred place … [It] was a magnificent thing to do, I really enjoyed it … We didn’t have time to do the base walk but if I ever go again I’ll just do the base walk.

Having climbed, and enjoyed the climb, he would not climb Uluru again. He framed his new position on the climb in a superficial acknowledgement of respect stating now that ‘there is probably some truth’ that Uluru is ‘a sacred place’, however, he still seems to exhibit a degree of scepticism.

The three backpackers who climbed Uluru all indicated some awareness of the Anangu request not to climb. As travellers using guidebooks, I would argue that each of these three backpackers were certainly aware of the ways that they as travellers ‘should’ behave, that is, with cultural understanding and cultural respect; however, they drew upon various other discourses to support and explain their decisions and actions. Rather than behaving as the culturally responsible travellers they are constructed by the guidebooks as being, they chose to pursue the tourist activity of climbing, with James and Johan citing discourses of Western culture – of science, religion, and legal-political – to legitimate and justify their decision to climb.

Interestingly, the three backpackers who made the decision to climb had visited the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park on an organised backpacker ‘adventure’ tour. Their decision to climb was influenced by various intermediaries including the tour guide, the tour itinerary, and the other tour participants. Each of these influences is evident in

Johan’s discussion of his experiences. He pointed out that the tour itinerary did not allow ‘time to do the base walk’; the tour guide advised him that she ‘had climbed it’ and the ‘other backpackers’ had said it was a ‘good thing to do’. For Johan, the decision to climb, therefore, was greatly influenced by his tour. Natalie (who did not climb) also discussed the influence of her tour guide who she regarded as a legitimate provider of information in relation to the climb dilemma. She said that her tour guide presented the option to climb as an individual and personal choice, he did not, however, prescribe a response, nor did he imply that climbing was an acceptable activity based on his own personal viewpoints and actions (as was the case with Johan’s guide). Natalie explained that:

Our tour guide, although he didn’t say that you couldn’t do it [climb Uluru], he gave the impression that you shouldn’t climb. But he left the choice up to you. (Natalie, 28, from England)

Brown (1999) has criticised the fact that tour itineraries still incorporate the opportunity to climb as an activity that can be undertaken at Uluru. Indeed, it appears that many of the popular backpacker tours also present the climb as an option (and, certainly, the guidebooks, to varying degrees, do as well). For example, the tours run by Northern Territory Adventure Tours present the following itinerary for their tour to Uluru:

One of the highlights of the tour [is] Uluru (Ayers Rock) sunrise. Overcoming the challenge of the optional Uluru climb is rewarded with the serenity of seeing the sunrise as we climb from the base. This spectacular visit is followed by a base tour, exploring its mysterious rock formations and Aboriginal art sites. A visit to the Cultural Centre offers the chance to view and purchase Aboriginal arts and crafts. (Northern Territory Adventure Tours, undated brochure p.4)

In this particular brochure, despite the climb being presented as ‘optional’ it is still promoted as a ‘challenge’ which will be ‘rewarded’. The climb is presented as a legitimate activity that is undertaken by the company’s representatives – the tour guides – in the statement ‘as we climb from the base’. The target market for this ‘adventure tour’ is backpackers, and whilst a reasonable proportion of the backpackers I
interviewed incorporated ideals associated with cultural respect and responsible travel into their self-definition as travellers, some did not. Considering that this tour company is explicitly promoted as providing adventure tours, it is perhaps understandable that other characteristics of the travel experience – such as challenge and fun – would be emphasised. However, no mention was made in this brochure of Anangu spiritual or cultural beliefs in relation to Uluru nor their request that people do not climb, even though this particular company positions itself as emphasising Aboriginal culture (see Chapter 5). Another significant point that can be raised regarding this tour itinerary is in relation to the cultural centre which is identified as a venue to ‘view and purchase’ Aboriginal arts and crafts rather than as an important site where an interpretation of Uluru from the perspective of Anangu can be explored. That the cultural centre is visited following the optional sunrise climb on this particular tour (and others discussed by the backpackers) means that the cultural and spiritual beliefs behind the request not to climb are encountered after a visit to Uluru itself. Thus, the decision has already been made and, in many instances, the tour participants have already climbed! The belated visit to the cultural centre on tours could be linked to Sara’s post-climb remorse, and to Johan’s post-climb acknowledgement that there may be some ‘truth’ that Uluru is a sacred place. Therefore, there is a structural problem with the way the experience tends to be organised in terms of convincing visitors that the culturally sensitive decision not to climb is preferable.

Another point raised by backpackers who had visited the cultural centre with a tour was the limited amount of time they were able to spend there. As I noted earlier, the guidebooks recommend that travellers visit the cultural centre before they actually visit the Rock, and that they spend at least a couple of hours there. Clearly, this option is only available to those backpackers who visit the national park independently. There is, therefore, a tension between the information provided in traveller texts and the ‘tourist machine’ operating at Uluru. The backpacker’s capacity to make a personally informed choice is diminished by the way in which the experience is structured according to rigid and predetermined tour itineraries. As Melissa noted:

We only got to spend about an hour and a half at the Uluru Cultural Centre. I could have spent much longer there. (Melissa, 27, from England)
Through the Uluru – Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre, Anangu make many attempts to project their message in relation to the climb.21 At the entrance to the centre, interpretative signage in five different languages (English, German, Italian, French and Japanese) quotes the traditional owners as saying such things as ‘[t]hat’s a really important, sacred thing that you are climbing … You shouldn’t climb. It’s not the proper thing’. Furthermore, painted across the ochre walls in red paint are such statements as:

Now a lot of visitors are only looking at the sunset and climbing Uluru. That rock is a really important sacred thing. You shouldn’t climb it! Climbing is not a proper part of this place. There is a true story to be properly understood.

The cultural centre is a site where Anangu attempt to teach their stories about Uluru through interpretative signage, cultural displays, films and videos. These interpretations offer the potential for exposure to much greater detail concerning Anangu cultural and spiritual beliefs in relation to Uluru and the reasoning and justification behind their request. Accordingly, in comparison with the recommended order of experiences presented by the guidebooks (visit the cultural centre then Uluru), the inversion of the sequence by the tour itinerary means that exposure to the request not to climb in the form of signage and pamphlets at Uluru is experienced as somewhat abstract and detached. Thus, the impact of the Anangu request is perhaps lessened because it does not evoke in the visitor the depth of meaning associated with an understanding of the significance that comes from a personal engagement with the reasons behind the request prior to visiting the Rock. Melissa, perhaps somewhat naively, identified the seeming incongruence of the reliance on the signage to get the point regarding the climb across to visitors:

I thought if it’s that important to them why weren’t they standing there saying to people ‘Don’t climb the Rock’? (Melissa, 27, from England)

21 Note: I have no photographs of the interior of the Uluru – Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre as signage at the entrance to the centre asks for visitors to ‘please respect the wishes of Aboriginal people and do not photograph or video’.

At the base of the climb there are three signs (Figure 6.5), the text of the largest sign is in English, with the two smaller signs in Japanese and German. On the left hand side is a warning regarding health and fitness and, on the right hand side, is the statement that ‘Due to cultural reasons, Anangu do not climb Uluru. Although Anangu have given permission to climb Uluru, they prefer that visitors participate in one of the many alternate activities’. The phrasing of this sign in stating ‘Anangu have given permission’ can be read as a potential justification for the decision to undertake the climb. All material distributed to visitors who enter the National Park contains the request not to climb.

Figure 6.5
Signage at the base of the Uluru climb

The choice made by individual backpackers in relation to the Uluru climb can reveal a great deal about the type of traveller they consider themselves to be. The decisions that they make in this regard are more than merely being about climbing or not climbing. Rather, their choices and actions provided opportunities for them to reflect on and reiterate their identity as travellers rather than tourists. For the backpackers who chose
not to climb, the decision was not too much of a dilemma as they openly accepted that, as travellers, they should be culturally aware, sensitive and responsible. Therefore, respect for Aboriginal people and their cultures was paramount to their travel experience. Those who did climb Uluru, whilst also displaying some acknowledgement of the ideals involved in being a (responsible) traveller, can be interpreted as facing more of a dilemma in their decision-making as they felt the need to actively deconstruct those ideals through recourse to alternate discourses to justify their decision. Thus, the decision to climb or not to climb can be seen as indicative of the process by which individual backpackers – based on their constructed collective identity – choose, articulate and justify the actions that they use to define themselves as ‘authentic’ travellers. The ways in which the authentic traveller-self is produced through association with the characteristics of traveller discourse is explored further below.

Reflections on Authenticity: The Experience and Traveller-Self

As I have asserted throughout this thesis, whilst the authenticity of places and experiences are of great importance to backpacker travellers, ‘authenticity’ of experience is often measured by the absence of the trappings of the tourism industry (Desforges 1998). Despite the construction of Uluru in the guidebooks as the most likely locale for the authentic Aboriginal cultural experience, the majority of experiences that actually take place there are encounters with the structured and commercially based tourism industry in operation at this destination. For the backpackers interviewed, the two main concerns regarding the authenticity of their experiences at Uluru were the commodification of the cultural experience and, relatedly, the lack of opportunities for ‘authentic’ contact with Aboriginal people. The construction of the ‘authentic’ traveller and the ‘authentic’ travel experience, discussed in previous chapters, coalesce in this section.

The construction of Uluru in guidebooks as the ideal destination to visit for the Australian Outback experience resulted in various contradictions in the backpackers’ expectations of what their experiences would involve, and the experiences that they actually had at this site. The representations of the Outback – and Uluru as its most

emphatic manifestation – as the ultimate site for the ‘authentic’ cultural experience, resulted in the expectation that Uluru is the destination where backpackers can, more than anywhere else in Australia, meet and interact with Aboriginal people, and learn about Aboriginal cultures. For example, two backpackers who had not yet been to Uluru made the following comments:

I would be surprised I think if I went to Ayers Rock and didn’t see any Aboriginal people or their culture there, because it’s such a big part of their culture. (Claudia, 19, from England)

I’ll be going to Ayers Rock and it would be nice to meet some Aborigines that are living out there … Definitely when I go to Ayers Rock I’d like to see actually how they live day by day out there. (Richard 29, from Ireland)

Indeed, even some of those who had been to Uluru expressed similar views:

I think what makes it [Uluru] quite an amazing place to go is this sort of mystique, and the fact that it’s part of the Aboriginal Dreamtime history and everything. (Natalie, 28, from England)

I think Ayers Rock, or Uluru, is probably what you mostly associate Aboriginal Australia with. (Amy, 24, from England)

However, what emerged also was that because of this expectation many of the backpackers expressed much disappointment that their experiences at Uluru had not involved any interaction with Aboriginal people (including not even ‘seeing’ Aboriginal people). For instance, the ‘invisibility’ of Aboriginal people at Uluru ‘surprised’ some who had visited the destination, and this included surprise at not ‘seeing’ Aboriginal people conforming to either of the two stereotypes they had been led to believe – by their guidebooks and verbal communications with other travellers (see Chapter 5) – existed in Australia:
It surprised me that I didn’t see any Aboriginal people at Uluru. (Melissa, 27, from England)

I was surprised, even when we were at Uluru you didn’t actually see very many Aboriginal people. I mean you didn’t even see that drinking on the streets type. (Natalie, 28, from England)

I expected them to be working in places, like you go to Ayers Rock, it’s Aboriginal, but where are all the Aboriginals? I think I saw one in the information centre there, and they weren’t even working, I think they were just passing through. (Rachel, 28, from England)

These examples illustrate my argument expressed in Chapter 5 about the two dominant stereotypes of Aboriginal people, particularly in relation to the point that if neither stereotype is experienced then Aboriginal people in contemporary contexts become invisible. In relation to the limited opportunities to meet Aboriginal people, Rachel further explained that during her stay at Uluru she had learnt that:

At Ayers Rock they were banished from the resort and they weren’t allowed to be there. It’s meant to be their land around there and I find it very sad that they’ve been given it back but they’re not allowed to live there, that they’re sort of chased out of there. (Rachel, 28, from England)

Whilst opportunities to meet and interact with Aboriginal people were desired but not necessarily achieved, opportunities for cultural education were certainly achievable at Uluru. Indeed, all of the backpackers who had been to Uluru had visited the Uluru – Kata Tjuta Aboriginal Cultural Centre either independently or with a backpacker tour company (see Table 6.1, above). As mentioned above, visitation to cultural centres as an educational pursuit was recommended in each of the guidebooks coupled with the caveat that unstructured personal interactions with Aboriginal people may be difficult. This reframing of the authentic experience in relation to education meant that, for the backpackers who had been to Uluru, the cultural centre emerged as an important and valued resource for cultural learning:

I thought it [the cultural centre at Uluṟu] was excellent. Information is really well presented visually, and the stories were really interesting, and it was good that they had stuff written in the words of the Aboriginal people as well as just sort of straight English prose. I mean you get a really good feeling about the culture from these places. (Melissa, 27, from England)

Despite many of the backpackers lamenting a lack of personal interaction with Aboriginal people at Uluṟu, for Helena, a film shown at the cultural centre gave her the ‘feeling’ of a certain level of ‘cultural contact’:

I think it [the cultural centre at Uluṟu] is quite informative. I thought the video that they have there is really good because that gives you the feeling that you do have contact with them, the Aboriginal people. (Helena, 23, from Germany)

Helena’s statement above highlights her desire for interaction and, arguably, this is the product of her construction and self-definition as a traveller. Her comment that the film was ‘really good because’ she got a ‘feeling’ of interaction meant that she has been able to fulfil this desire, on some level, in a way that she interpreted as educational and meaningful and, therefore, authentic.

As discussed in Chapter 5, backpackers often voiced anti-tourist sentiments and in an attempt to separate themselves from the perceived commercialisation of tourism some of the backpackers berated tourists for encroaching on their experiences at Uluṟu. They believed that the commercialisation of the Uluṟu experience made their own experiences less authentic, which was perceived as a negative aspect of their time there. The desire of some backpackers to avoid tourists is illustrated in the following statements:

We went to the sunset and there was like so many people. And I was like, I can’t enjoy it with so many people around! So I was like holding my hands so I wouldn’t see the people and just the Rock! (Helena, 23, from Germany)
Then the buses came in and a whole Japanese group with a Japanese tour guide. And I thought I just don’t want to be here, this is too commercial. The same with the sunset viewing and the sunrise viewing spot. I took pictures of people standing there taking pictures of the Rock! … I know I was there myself too and I wanted to see it myself, but it’s very commercial. (Saskia, 23, from Holland)

The above comments highlight the strength of the imagined traveller-tourist dichotomy. Despite the desire to avoid tourists, these travellers are at one of the most well-known tourist attractions in Australia. Yet they are critical of tourists and the commercial side of tourism at Uluru. Most of the backpackers described the experience at Uluru as ‘touristy’ and were keen to differentiate themselves from the ‘tourists’ who were often seen as those visitors who undertake the climb. This was especially the case for those who chose not to climb, as their decision became tangible evidence of their self-construction as traveller and, thus, adherence to the messages and ideals of traveller discourse. While three of the backpackers did undertake the climb, as argued above, James had recognised that this made the differentiation from being a tourist on which traveller identity is based as being somewhat problematic. In this sense, many of the backpackers saw the climb-or-not-to-climb dilemma as offering a further distinction between themselves as culturally sensitive and responsible travellers compared to culturally unaware mass tourists. For example:

A lot of people come here, get out of their car, climb the Rock, go for a sunset, go home, and that’s it, you know, that’s it. I really can’t understand that. (Saskia, 23, from The Netherlands)

Climbing the Rock is just one of those things that people want to do to say they’ve done it. It’s such a touristy thing to do. (Cathryn, 24, from England)

I don’t understand this Ayers Rock thing, because it’s meant to be a sacred thing, and now people are climbing it. It’s Japanese people with their big cameras. They don’t give a shit do they? They pay their money to come here and climb the Rock. That’s bullshit you know. It’s about respect, you know. (Stefan, 22, from Sweden)

Stefan was one of the backpackers who demonstrated considerable angst towards both tourists and travellers including backpackers (see Chapter 5). Certainly, his use of strong language in this statement above illustrated his anti-tourist sentiment to a greater degree than the comments made by others in this regard. Stefan was planning to go to Uluru at some time during his travels in the Northern Territory and, not surprisingly, he was very definite that he would not climb the Rock. Whilst I have argued that Stefan also displayed anti-backpacker sentiment, Troy was the backpacker who, more than any other, can be considered in the context of the ‘anti-backpacker’ (see Chapter 5). Interestingly, he was the only backpacker that I interviewed who said that he had no interest in visiting Uluru and that he would not be going there during his travels. Troy’s desire to avoid all facets of the travel and tourism industries, including popular and renowned destinations, is illustrated in the following:

Where’s that? Oh, Ayers Rock. I think it’s the one that changes colours and all this and that. Yeah I’ve seen it on TV. It’s like one of the hottest things you can see in Australia evidently. But no, I’m not going to get a bus, or I’m not going to fly there, or hitch a ride, or anything. It’s not in my itinerary. I don’t really have an itinerary but [if I did] it wouldn’t be on there! (Troy, 27, from the United States)

For Troy, the question of whether to climb or not to climb Uluru is not an issue as he has rejected this tourist destination altogether. Interestingly, he makes no reference to Uluru as a site of Aboriginal cultural significance and, indeed, he refers to it only in terms of his knowledge of its natural appeal. In this respect, he refers to an extremely popular image of the Rock prevalent in a wide variety of media forms describing it as ‘the one that changes colour’. The absence of any connection between Uluru and Aboriginal culture could be seen as the product of Troy eschewing guidebooks and avoiding other backpackers – both of which, from his perspective, connote an element of the mass tourist he is seeking to avoid. Neither the written text nor word-of-mouth (demonstrated throughout this thesis as being centrally important sources of meaning in the backpacker travel experience) had influenced Troy or had any obvious effect on determining his itinerary or expectations regarding his travels. As an ‘anti-backpacker’, Troy is less subject to the increasing commodification of travel, and his experiences less
likely to be mediated by tourism and travel texts. These dimensions of his subject position are exemplified by his complete lack of interest in destinations constructed as being of mass appeal to both travellers and tourists alike. And also in his capacity to pursue and attain the ‘off-the-beaten-track’ experiences that other backpackers claimed to be seeking as ‘authentic’.

Conclusion

This chapter explored backpacker negotiation of text and experience at Australia’s most famous natural and cultural attraction – Uluru in Central Australia. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the Australian Outback is central to the construction of the ‘authentic’ Aboriginal cultural experience in both traveller texts and backpacker narratives (and, indeed, in tourism discourses more generally). The construction and representation of this place in traveller texts relies on the notion that the Australian Outback is the ultimate destination for the achievement of cultural interactions and educational experiences with, and of, ‘authentic’ Aboriginal Australia. Through the provision of a brief history of Uluru, I highlighted that this place is a site of significant conflict, particularly in relation to the competing interests of commercial tourism ventures and the sacredness of the site to Anangu. The visitor activity of climbing Uluru is a prime illustration of the contradictory narratives that shape and frame the visitor experience at Uluru. The three guidebooks analysed firmly positioned Uluru as a traveller destination, but they also illustrate how traveller discourse draws upon and relies on broader tourism discourses to promote and sell this destination. In order to produce and construct Uluru as an authentic site for travellers, the guidebooks focus on its association with Aboriginal culture and spirituality, and inform readers that experiences involving cultural education and cultural interaction are located at Uluru.

Central to the analysis in this chapter was a discussion of the backpackers’ decision to climb or not to climb Uluru. The guidebooks ultimately place the decision to climb as an individual choice and, therefore, the climb becomes a personal dilemma that is made on the knowledge of the options, such as those that are presented in the guidebooks. Through discussion of the experiences of the 13 backpackers who had been to Uluru,
the chapter explored their attitudes and actions in relation to this activity. The exploration of their experiences at Uluru elucidated the extent to which individual backpackers adopt and actualise narratives of traveller discourse in order to define themselves as travellers rather than mass tourists. I argued that the reproduction of values associated with ‘responsible travel’ was evident particularly in the examples of those who decided not to climb. Using references to cultural sensitivity and cultural respect, these backpackers drew on traveller discourses to articulate the reasoning and influences behind their decision. This process demonstrated an acceptance and adherence of traveller discourse drawn in part from the guidebooks because those who did not climb most often stated that they chose not to out of respect for Aboriginal people and their cultures. For those who did climb Uluru, their self-definition as a traveller was most evident in the apparent need to deconstruct and articulate narratives of cultural sensitivity and cultural respect associated with the ‘authentic’ traveller. This questioning was largely achieved with recourse to other wider social discourses (scientific, religious, legal, political) which they mobilised to frame their decision to climb as being justifiable. The decision to climb or not to climb, represents the conflicting tensions structured between traveller and tourism discourses. In some ways, the difference between the traveller and tourist began to break down in the process of negotiating this dilemma.

Uluru has long been a tourist attraction and there is a thoroughly entrenched tourist industry operating at this destination. The construction of Uluru in guidebooks as a traveller destination based in its significance as a cultural site (alongside its natural appeal) is somewhat problematic for independent travellers due to the close proximity of large numbers of mass tourists sharing the same space. An adherence to the ideals and narratives presented by guidebook texts can, in fact, result in the self-construction and actualisation of a subject who visits the same places and does the same things as a tourist and, yet, still perceive themselves as a thoroughly different kind of person to tourists – a traveller. This distinction is seemingly not based on the kinds of activities they engage in and experiences they encounter, for there is often little objective difference. For example, a number of backpackers actively defined themselves as travellers and still undertook the climb. Thus, self-definition as a traveller is based upon the manner in which individual situations and experiences are interpreted, and the extent
to which certain narratives of traveller discourse are drawn upon to frame and articulate those interpretations. This case study of backpacker experiences at Uluru has demonstrated the fluidity and dynamic nature of the various subject positions taken up by backpackers. In particular, the intersection of the oppositional discourses of independent travel and mass tourism at a destination such as Uluru highlights the situational negotiation of text and experience by the backpackers I interviewed.

Chapter 7

Down the Track: Conclusions and Thesis Synthesis

I commenced this thesis with a reflection on my personal experiences at Uluru and, in doing so, drew attention to some of the central concerns that informed this study. I suggested that travel is often underpinned by contradictions, and that the travel experience can be understood as occurring in a state of tension between constructed images of places, peoples and cultures, and the reality of lived experience. In this regard, travel is not always effortless or predictable, and rarely does the traveller encounter experiences that entirely reflect preconceived imaginings and expectations. The impetus for this thesis came from an initial desire to interrogate the relationships between representation and interpretation in the context of tourism; in particular, the ways in which Aboriginal people and their cultures are central to the promotion of Australia to overseas tourist markets. I was also very interested to explore how international visitors to Australia experience and learn about Aboriginal cultures in their travels. In order to explore these issues, I narrowed my topic to look more closely at a particular type of tourist – the long-term, independent traveller or backpacker. Having spent some time backpacking through Europe before commencing my study, it became clear to me that guidebooks were a very significant mediating force between the independent traveller and the travelled destination. Guidebooks have a prevailing capacity to define and represent places, peoples and cultures, and, at the same time, present descriptive and prescriptive information that simultaneously constructs the traveller subject and shapes their perspectives and experiences.

I began by exploring academic interest in travel and tourism, in particular, the ways in which travel and tourism experiences have been conceptualised within the social science literature. Long-term independent travel is regarded by many commentators as an active quest for discovery, and has long been proclaimed by individuals and organisations, both within and outside the tourism industry, as having a social, cultural

and educative role. I pointed out that travel and tourism are often conceived and described within a dualistic oppositional framework, with conceptions of authenticity being drawn on to define travel experiences as more ‘real’ and, therefore, more meaningful than others. Particularly they are positioned as being more ‘authentic’ than those that can be achieved by the mass tourist. I suggested that backpacking, as a form of long-term independent travel, has become an increasingly popular and important sector of the travel market and hundreds of thousands of young people travel the world each year for extended periods of time. Long-term travel is considered as being more than mere leisure and recreation; it is a rite of passage, an accumulation of experience. Backpackers, therefore, display a variety of motivations for travel, undertaking various activities during the travel experience. They are often described and portrayed as being on a quest for the ‘authentic’, actively seeking out experiences with other cultures, and frequently demonstrating a desire to learn about, and interact with, indigenous people. Ultimately, however, the relationship between travellers and the travelled culture is mediated and, for backpackers, the guidebook as cultural text is a significant and powerful mediator of their travel experience.

The aim of this thesis was to explore the interaction between text, audience and culture in the specific context of independent (backpacker) travel. The central question guiding the study was: How are the traveller, and the travelled, constructed, mediated and shaped through guidebooks? In order to develop a nuanced understanding of interplay between text and audience, a qualitative study that examined traveller texts and traveller experiences was carried out. The study encompassed two broad areas of investigation. First, I wanted to understand the ways in which the traveller, and aspects of the travel experience, are represented in guidebook texts. Second, I sought to explore how travellers engage with these texts and negotiate their subsequent experiences. The study thus combined textual and content analyses of a selection of guidebooks with participant observation and an interview-based study of a sample of backpackers who comprise one of the primary audiences of guidebooks. In particular, I set out to examine the construction of the backpacker (the traveller) as a particular gazing and experiencing subject and of peoples and cultures (the travelled) as objects of their gaze.

Specifically, I analysed three guidebooks to Australia aimed at independent travellers that were being used by the backpackers I interviewed – *Lonely Planet*, *Rough Guide* and *Let’s Go*. To gain an understanding of travel experiences from the perspectives of backpackers, I conducted four months of fieldwork in Central Australia, The Northern Territory and Far North Queensland. During this time, in-depth interviews were held with 28 international backpackers which examined their reflections on the situational negotiation of text and experience. I also acted as a participant observer, engaging in informal discussions, participating on some tours, and visiting cultural centres and key cultural sites, such as Uluṟu. Whilst a substantial literature now exists on the representation of travelled cultures in tourism texts, the empirical study at the heart of this thesis is one of few studies that explores the complexity of the relationships between text and audience within a tourism (broadly conceived) context. Further, whilst some research has been conducted into the role of guidebooks in the construction of particular places, peoples and cultures, these studies have not examined the concurrent construction of the traveller subject; they have not been grounded in lived experience. The combination of methods employed in this study has enabled me to develop an understanding of the intersection between representation and interpretation as played out in cultural texts, such as guidebooks. Moreover, the study has allowed me to explore the construction of the traveller, and the types of experiences backpackers seek out and undertake as a result of their interaction with the guidebooks.

The guidebook analysis revealed a two-way process of construction involving the mobilisation of discourses of authenticity that promote and construct both the ‘authentic’ traveller and the ‘authentic’ travelled culture. Independent travellers are represented in guidebooks as seekers of experiences, both cultural and educational, that will assist them to move beyond the structured tourist gaze to have more meaningful interactions with the places, peoples, and cultures that they encounter in their travels. Authenticity emerged as a central theme in the construction of the collective identity of independent travellers, and as a central element of traveller discourse mobilised in the guidebooks. Discourses of responsible travel, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and cultural respect are also mobilised and, in so doing, the guidebooks contribute to the construction of the backpacker as being a culturally aware and responsible traveller who has a desire for authentic experiences. The empirical evidence demonstrated that the

backpackers I interviewed tended to acknowledge, accept and generally adhere to these particular ideals of travel. By reproducing particular guidebook messages and discourses of travel, and rejecting others, the backpackers generally perceived themselves as authentic travellers seeking experiences with authentic cultures through their quest for interaction and learning.

The representation of Aboriginal Australia, and the promise of education and interaction with Aboriginal people and their cultures, is central to the guidebook construction of Australia as an authentic destination for independent travellers. In constructing the travelled culture, the Aboriginal cultural experience is represented as being more accessible in the Outback areas of the Northern Territory. The Australian Outback is certainly presented as a central dimension of the traveller experience through the photographs in the guidebooks, with scenes of desert landscapes dominant in both *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide*. I argued that the fusing of Aboriginal Australia with the Outback is central to much tourism and popular media, and the guidebooks confirm that this place is where a traditional and ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture is located. Backpackers, therefore, are directed to particular places for an ‘authentic’ experience with Aboriginal people and their cultures, and advised to act in certain ways. The construction and representation of Aboriginal Australia in guidebooks is influential in arousing desires, shaping experiences and framing interpretations of cultural interactions.

The representation of Aboriginal Australia, however, is not without contradiction, as traveller discourse is at times mobilised concurrently with popular tourism imagery. For instance, the stereotype of the ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ Aboriginal experience as being located in the Outback is an image reproduced within much mainstream tourism media. This representation conforms to a romanticised and exoticised representation of the Aboriginal ‘noble savage’ in traditional cultural contexts that has long been central to the Western imagination of indigenous people. At the same time as seemingly reinforcing this stereotype, I argued that guidebooks can also challenge popular stereotypes as evident in the presentation of social, political and historical information not readily available in mainstream tourism media. By informing readers of social and political situations, the independent traveller is, to an extent, provided with the
conceptual tools to move beyond the superficial tourist gaze to a more informed and critical understanding of Aboriginal culture in contemporary Australian society. I argued, however, that another stereotype emerges from these representations of Aboriginal Australia involving an image of contemporary, but dispossessed, Aboriginal people living in the city and disconnected from traditional culture. The presentation of this second stereotype challenges the ‘noble savage’ which is often recognised as a ‘tourist myth’. Indeed, many of the backpackers I interviewed expressed that these two dominant stereotypes informed their pre-arrival expectations of Aboriginal people and their cultures. The myth of ‘real’ Aboriginal communities living traditionally, and untrammelled by modernity, was heavily associated with parts of the Northern Territory. The negative associations of the second stereotype meant that Aboriginal people in cities are, to an extent, avoided. As a result, experiences of Aboriginal culture that did not conform to either of the dominant stereotypes were often overlooked, and potentially ‘authentic’ personal interactions with contemporary Aboriginal culture were ignored or avoided by many backpackers. I suggested, therefore, that these two stereotypes are actually reinforcing. In this sense, the urban Aboriginal person was perceived as ‘inauthentic’ as long as the idealised and inaccessible fiction of the ‘noble savage’ was maintained.

Guidebook representations of Aboriginal Australia can shape traveller desire for the imagined (constructed) authenticity and can influence backpacker interpretations of their experiences. Conflicting and contradictory meanings and messages regarding the travelled culture produce the paradoxical situation in which the ‘imagined authentic’ is accepted as both ‘real’ and unattainable, and the traveller is constructed as desiring ‘authentic’ cultural interaction with this fiction. However, rather than promising that cultural interaction will be achievable, the guidebooks direct travellers toward culturally sensitive and less intrusive travel behaviours. For example, it is suggested within guidebooks that whilst more ‘authentic’ experiences are available in the Northern Territory, the Aboriginal people who live in these areas generally prefer not to interact with tourists, including backpackers. Therefore, the guidebooks inform travellers that although they might desire unstructured personal and direct cultural interactions these are, in fact, difficult to achieve. Arguably, this may be a strategy employed by the guidebooks to reduce traveller expectations of unstructured contact. Perhaps even more
significantly, the guidebooks may be attempting to protect Aboriginal people from being objects of the traveller gaze. Whatever the reason, I found that the guidebooks reframed the authentic experience with Aboriginal Australia away from direct, unmediated, unstructured cultural interaction and toward more accessible experiences, in particular those associated with education and the purchase of artefacts.

I identified three dominant ways that the reframing of authenticity occurs. First, the guidebooks promote structured educational experiences advising travellers to take Aboriginal cultural tours and to visit Aboriginal cultural centres. Second, for a less structured experience, particular landscapes in the Northern Territory are authenticated through discourses of traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality and in particular Dreamtime stories. Third, the guidebooks give advice on what, how, and why, to purchase authentic artefacts and cultural objects. The alternative meanings surrounding education as ‘authentic’ continue to construct the traveller as seeking cultural experiences. These are certainly ‘realistic’ appraisals of the Aboriginal cultural experience available to most travellers, and are related to the traveller desire to learn about Aboriginal Australia. Arguably, the reframing of authenticity can also be understood as the deconstruction and reconstruction of a central value of traveller discourse, one that is often used to differentiate independent travel from mass tourism.

 Whilst most of the backpackers I interviewed had visited cultural centres to learn about Aboriginal culture, most paradoxically had chosen not to go on Aboriginal cultural tours (including those owned and operated by Aboriginal people) as they perceived them as ‘touristy’. In this regard, there was a common belief expressed that these experiences would be contrived and inauthentic and, therefore, unfulfilling, despite the fact that these tours were endorsed by the guidebooks as part of the reframing of authenticity. However, ‘adventure tours’ which are explicitly aimed at backpackers were very popular and were described as providing some opportunities for learning about Aboriginal culture (albeit with non-Aboriginal tour guides). That the backpackers chose not to go on Aboriginal cultural tours is an interesting and important finding which says much about the interplay between the dualistic conception of travel and tourism. I found that the construction of the independent traveller in opposition to the mass tourist meant that backpackers avoided some experiences that they considered were aimed at

‘tourists’. This finding highlights the significant role that non-indigenous adventure tour guides play in educating backpackers about Aboriginal people and their cultures. Further research could explore more deeply the types of social, cultural and political information being passed on to tour participants through these non-indigenous interpretations of culture. Indeed, I found word-of-mouth to be of great importance to backpackers, with verbal communications serving to reinforce or challenge guidebook representations.

Whilst the guidebook is often considered to be the single most important source of information for backpackers in the interpretation of cultural situations, verbal communications with other travellers and tour guides also play an influential role in the construction of meanings and interpretation of experiences. It was demonstrated that the interplay between text and experience is dynamic. Guidebook information is negotiated and renegotiated at various times during travel through lived experience. The reading of, and engagement with, guidebooks is primarily situational in that sections relating to particular places tend to be read when arriving at destinations or when in transit between destinations. While guidebooks advise their readers of where to go, what to do and what to see at particular destinations and, as a result, many aspects of the backpacker travel experience are shaped and framed by these texts, backpacker engagement with the information at any given destination is also interpreted in light of prior knowledge and experiences at previous destinations. Travel is experienced as fluid with continual reflection on past experiences serving to shape both present circumstance and future expectations. Further, word-of-mouth communications allow travellers to move beyond the constraints of the text. Thus, a combination of experiences, texts and media can contribute to learning, knowledge and understanding during travel, leading to the possibility that dominant representations will be questioned, challenged and negotiated.

The negotiation of text and experience was explored in a case study of Uluru in Central Australia. The representation of Uluru in the traveller texts and traveller narratives relies on the notion that the Australian Outback is the ultimate destination for the ‘authentic’ Aboriginal cultural experience, and Uluru the most significant site within this destination. The guidebooks produce and construct Uluru as an authentic destination for travellers by representing its association with both traditional and contemporary
Aboriginal culture and spirituality. Uluru, however, is a site of significant conflict, particularly in relation to the competing interests of commercial tourism ventures and the sacredness of this site to Anangu (the local Aboriginal people). I argued in this thesis that the visitor activity of climbing Uluru is a prime illustration of the contradictory narratives that shape and frame the travel experience of this place. The decision to climb, or not to climb, highlights the tensions between travel and tourism discourses.

The conflicting discourses in operation at Uluru can complicate the backpacker decision of whether or not to undertake the climb and, in some ways, the difference between the independent traveller and mass tourist is broken down in the process of negotiating this dilemma. For the backpackers I interviewed, the process of defining oneself as a traveller rather than a tourist occurs in the context of the traveller-tourist dichotomy. In this sense, some of the backpackers believed that one is defined as much by the actions and activities that are eschewed as those that are embraced. The climb becomes a personal dilemma that is negotiated on the basis of the knowledge of options as presented in guidebooks. The construction of the traveller as independent and informed, and to a degree seemingly autonomous, encourages the consideration of various issues in order to develop personal justification for the choice. It became apparent that, for the backpackers, the Uluru climb dilemma is a means for them to consider a single traveller choice that reveals the type of traveller they believe they are, or desire to be.

With repeated references to cultural sensitivity and cultural respect, backpackers articulated the reasons and influences behind their decision not to climb; therefore, affirming their status as travellers by accepting and adhering to the discourses of travel as drawn from the guidebooks. The manner in which the tensions between being a traveller and being a tourist are approached and resolved by backpackers largely influences, not just the type of experiences that are pursued, but also, the traveller-self that is produced. The adoption of the subject position of traveller through an adherence to the ideals of travel presented by guidebook texts can, in fact, result in the construction and actualisation of a subject who visits the same places and does the same things as a tourist and, yet, still regards themselves to be a different type of visitor. The backpacker’s self-definition as a traveller is based upon the manner in which situations
are interpreted, and the extent to which certain narratives central to traveller discourse are drawn upon to frame and articulate those interpretations. The constructed differences between the independent traveller and the mass tourist break down at Uluru and there is considerable overlap and slippage between discourses of travel and tourism. Therefore, the collision between travel and tourism was starkly revealed through this case study.

A central theme emerging from this study is the differing subject positions of the independent traveller and the mass tourist. I found that the traveller-tourist dichotomy, discussed in the academic and popular literature, is played out in traveller texts and in the travel experiences of backpackers. Backpackers tend to identify and define themselves as ‘travellers’ rather than ‘tourists’ and, in doing so, they are very often critical of tourism. Therefore, the travel choices they make are often based on such oppositional distinctions. A perception of the discourses of travel and tourism as comprising a binary dichotomy is somewhat simplified. Indeed, I have found that the relationship between these two discourses is complex and dynamic. Whilst discourses of travel and discourses of tourism can be (and often are) treated as different at a theoretical level, my research suggests that at an empirical level it is not actually so easy to untangle and distinguish between them. The guidebooks I studied tend to construct travellers as being different from mass tourists but, as I have found, there are tensions and contradictions here too as discourses of travel continually draw upon and present aspects of the discourses of tourism in the construction of itself as oppositional and different. At the level of backpackers, while there is an explicit desire to see themselves as different from tourists, and at times this is a relatively easy thing to do, at other times it is, in fact, difficult, as the Uluru case study demonstrated.

Guidebooks have been studied in this thesis as an interpretative lens through which the constructed and mediated nature of both the traveller and the travelled culture can be examined and understood. Guidebooks, are mass-produced and used en masse and, therefore, are exemplary of the commodification of the independent travel experience. Guidebooks tend to direct backpackers to many of the same types of mediated activities at destinations inscribed in a well-worn tourism circuit. In this regard, backpacking can, in fact, be understood as another version of institutionalised tourism. In other words,
backpackers, regardless of their constructed position as traveller, are largely tourists by another name. Indeed, for the two backpackers in my study who were not using a guidebook, a further distinction of experience was found that located them seemingly outside of traveller discourse – as ‘anti-backpackers’. These independent travellers were critical of the practices associated with backpacking and they actively avoided not just the guidebook texts but many popular destinations and activities as well. In doing so, they were able to achieve the types of experiences resembling the constructed and idealised authenticity prevalent in the guidebooks.

Backpackers, in their desire to be independent travellers, seem to face largely the same conundrum, albeit manifested in various permutations. They all have to construct an existentially ‘authentic’ traveller-self in ideological and symbolic opposition to the mass tourist. The central contradiction between text and experience that must be negotiated is that this construction of the ‘authentic’ traveller-self occurs largely in relation to encounters with the commodified, contrived, ‘inauthentic’ and supposedly unfulfilling experiences associated with mass tourism. Modern long-term independent travel, in the form of backpacking, is a constructed and commodified experience that is underpinned by complex relationships between text, audience and culture. The majority of the backpackers in my study were ‘going by the book’ – their guidebooks were powerful mediators playing an essential role in constructing and affirming their traveller identity, and their travel experiences with, and of, Aboriginal Australia. The findings of this thesis thus make a significant contribution to debates in the social and cultural study of tourism and, specifically, to understandings of backpacker travel. The study raises important questions about the role that the text plays as mediator between the traveller and the travelled culture, and the ever present tensions, contradictions and negotiations that exist between text and lived experience.
Appendix A:
The Research Process and Data Collection

The empirical study undertaken for this thesis employs textual, content, and audience research methods to examine the relationships between traveller texts (guidebooks), travellers (backpackers) and travelled cultures (Aboriginal Australia). The textual and content analysis of three guidebooks (Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and Let’s Go) was coupled with an interview-based study of international backpackers in Australia. This combination of methods was chosen to gain a theoretically and methodologically informed understanding of the relationship between the text and the backpacker traveller and the travel experience. Central to this examination are the ways by which the texts mediate experiences with Aboriginal Australia, constructing the backpacker as a particular type of traveller. In Chapter 1, the methodological perspective and approach was outlined and explained. The purpose of the following discussion is an extended description of the research undertaken during a period of fieldwork in the Northern Territory and Northern Queensland from August to December 2000. The main research instruments employed during the fieldwork period were participant observation and interviews with 28 international backpackers.

As a qualitative method in the social sciences, participant observation is advocated when the research involves ‘learning about, understanding, or describing a group of interacting people’ (Neuman 2000: 345). During the four-month fieldwork period I travelled, as a backpacker, to the destinations of Uluru, Alice Springs, Darwin (in the Northern Territory) and Cairns (in Far North Queensland). I stayed at various backpacker hostels and travelled by coach between destinations. I conducted the fieldwork as a researcher/backpacker and, thus, as a member of the population of independent travellers under study. I shared a similar identity and subjectivity and was able to gain first hand experience and knowledge of the nature of backpacker travel experiences. Although I was a researcher, I was not completely an outsider infiltrating the backpacker scene. I found, therefore, that I did not have difficulty accessing or communicating with the study participants, particularly since, as a Western woman in my mid-twenties, I was of a similar socio-demographic status as the majority of

backpackers in Australia. Certainly, Prus (1996: 19) promotes participant observation as a method when the researcher seeks to gain an understanding of the lived experience of participants:

Participant observation adds an entirely different and vital dimension to the notion of observation … the participant-observer role allows the researcher to get infinitely closer to the lived experiences of the participants than does straight observation.

In order to gain a detailed understanding of backpacker experiences, I augmented participant observation with in-depth interviews. The interviewing method I chose was semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews (Fontana and Frey 1994). Interviewing is a very popular and widely used research technique in the social sciences and interviews can take on various different forms depending on the structure imposed upon its format, the number of people involved in the interviewing process, and the purpose and approach to the study (Fielding and Thomas 2001; Patton 1990). Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow me to gain insights into the backpackers’ point of view, particularly in relation to their thoughts, perspectives and feelings, and the meanings they attach to their experiences (Patton 1990; Rubin and Rubin 1995, Taylor and Bogdan 1998). The semi-structured interviews comprised a series of open-ended questions to ensure that a consistent range of topics was covered in each interview (Fontana and Frey 1994). An element of informality allowed flexibility in the ordering of questions (responding to the flow of conversation) and spontaneity in the inclusion of additional questions (Patton 1990). The use of the open response questions allowed the interviewees to choose their own words, terms and phrases in their answers. Where the majority of the interview questions were definite, in terms of each question being asked of each interviewee, I tended to vary the sequence in which specific questions were asked so as to follow the flow of the conversation. I encouraged the interviewees to speak at length and to illustrate their answers with personal experiences. A flexible approach allowed other topics to emerge during the interviews particularly those topics that the interviewee believed were relevant and important to their personal experiences.
The interviews covered a range of topic areas and were divided into five sections. The interview topics were developed so as to gain a nuanced understanding of the backpacker experiences. The first set of interview questions investigated each backpacker’s previous travelling experiences both within Australia and internationally. Amongst other things, their reasons for backpacking and for travelling to Australia, their itinerary details and highlights of travelling experiences were discussed. The next section of the interview sought to explore the backpackers’ previous experiences with indigenous cultures and their interest in Aboriginal cultural experiences. Within this section the backpackers were asked to discuss their knowledge of Aboriginal Australia, their experiences and interaction with Aboriginal people and cultures, and their views pertaining to climbing Uluru in Central Australia. The third series of questions related to the backpackers’ use of information sources, primarily their use of guidebooks and whether these, or other travel, tourism media or general media, had influenced their perceptions, expectations and experiences of and with Aboriginal Australia. The fourth section of the interview allowed the backpackers to reflect in detail about their knowledge of Aboriginal Australia gained through their travel experiences. The backpackers discussed what they had learnt in the travels and whether their travels had led to a greater understanding of Aboriginal Australia. At the final stage of the interview the participants were asked demographic information including their age, nationality, occupation and education. The interview concluded by asking the participants if there was anything they would like to add that they thought might be relevant to the study and to discuss their reasons for participation. Selected quotes from the interviews were used throughout the thesis to illuminate various aspects and issues raised by the study participants.

The backpackers who participated in the study had responded to a notice calling for participants. This notice was placed on the message boards of all backpacker hostels, youth hostels and internet cafes in the destination in which I was staying, that is, the towns and cities of Yulara (at Uluru), Alice Springs, Darwin and Cairns. Backpackers who were interested in participating in the study were asked to express their interest in the study by contacting me by email or mobile phone the details of which were provided on the notice board messages. Some backpackers in the study had not seen the actual messages but had heard about my research through word-of-mouth from other
backpackers who had been interviewed. Whilst I spent similar periods of time at each of
the fieldwork destinations the number of backpackers recruited at each varied greatly.
For instance, I received the majority of responses (and thus interviewees) in Darwin
(21), fewer in Cairns (6), only one at Yulara, and none in Alice Springs (Appendix B
provides details of where individual backpackers were interviewed). I can only surmise
that the lack of response at Yulara and Alice Springs relates to the much shorter periods
of time that backpackers stay at these particular destinations, a notion that was qualified
through observations and informal discussions with backpackers in Darwin.

The method of sampling is defined as non-random, non-probability sampling (Dane
1990; Jennings 2001; Nachmias and Nachmias 1981), and more specifically as
‘convenience sampling’ (Jennings 2001; Neuman 2000; Sarantakos 1993). As a non-
random method of sampling the focus is not on a systematic selection process, and the
selection of participants is based on their proximity to the researcher and the ease with
which the researcher can access participants (Jennings 2001). As a result, the sample of
backpackers discussed in this study cannot be considered as representative of the
population from which they are drawn. The data presented in this thesis are positioned
in the time and space within which the study was conducted representing the responses
of one small group of international backpackers at one point of time during their travels.
Due to the qualitative nature of the study, and my concern with gaining an
understanding of experiences from the point of view of the backpackers, I do not make
claims to generability or representativeness.

The interviews were conducted in an informal and relaxed style and each was of
approximately 1 hour in duration (ranging from 40 minutes to 2 hours). The interviews
were held at a time and place chosen by the participants and, generally, the interview
took place in the recreational lounge or outdoor area of the hostel where the
interviewees were staying. These locations were found particularly conducive for
conducting the interviews as they provided a relatively quiet, semi-private and non-
threatening environment. In the interviews, I was deliberately forthright about my
double role as a backpacker and researcher. It became clear in the interviews that the
sharing of information was important, with many backpackers indicating that they
wished to learn something from their participation in the study. The interviews were,
therefore, an interactive experience between researcher and interviewee and, as Lorber
and Farrell (1991: 241) have noted, qualitative interviewing provides opportunities for
the researcher and the study participants to ‘both to teach and learn through the course
of the study’.

Each interview was tape recorded with the permission of the participant. Upon my
return from the field I transcribed the interviews verbatim. I kept a fieldwork journal
and made notes about my thoughts, feelings and revelations as soon as possible after
each interview or observation. I got to know the study participants responses intimately
by transcribing the interviews myself, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and
listening to the tapes. The transcriptions were subjected to thematic, textual and content
analysis, with core themes and issues elicited from the data. According to Ryan and
Bernard (2003: 261):

Themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that investigators identify before,
during and after data collection. Literature reviews are rich sources for themes, as
are investigators’ own experiences with subject matter. More often than no,
however, researchers induce themes from the [data] itself.

Transcripts were coded by grouping together key topics or issues represented in the
individual narratives of each backpackers interview. I acknowledge that there are now a
number of computer programs that can assist with the coding and analysis of qualitative
interviews (for example the NUDIST program); however, as there were a relatively
small number of interviews, I immersed myself in the data and manually identified
themes and topics.

This research was subject to ethical clearance from the University of Newcastle Human
Ethics Committee. Fontana and Frey (1994: 70) discuss some of the ethical issues
facing qualitative researchers, particularly that when ‘the objects of inquiry in
interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them’.
Each backpacker who participated in the study signed an information consent form
before commencing their interviews. At this time permission was also gained to
audiotape the interviews. Participants were assured of confidentiality and of his or her
right to withdraw from the study at any time. The participant’s right to privacy is achieved through the use of pseudonyms in data analysis, reports and any other publications that may arise from the research. Confidentiality is also achieved by restricting access to all data to my supervisors and myself.

In Appendix B, below, I present some information regarding the individual interviewees particularly as it relates to profiling the 28 international backpackers who participated in this study.

Appendix B:
The Study Participants

This study focuses on the experiences of a group of 28 international backpackers in Australia. The Table A.1 below provides details of the age, nationality, occupation and place of interview of the 28 backpackers (participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity).

Table A.1
Details of the Backpackers in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Place of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Physiotherapist</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Retail Manager</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathryn</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Campaign Assistant CAA</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Market Trader / Chef</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisa</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>PR Consultant</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angus</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isobel</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Professional Golfer</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johan</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Student / Traveller</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>Mechanical Designer</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Seafarer / Boat Repairer</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>QLD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 28 interviewees, 14 were male and 14 were female. They ranged in age from 18 to 31, with an average age of 24. The minimum length of stay was three months, the maximum stay being twelve months, with an average of around 9 months. Over half of the backpackers were from the United Kingdom or the Irish Republic, being those who defined their nationality as English (10), Scottish (2), Irish (2) and Welsh (1). The other nationalities represented in this sample include Dutch (6), American (2), Canadian (2), German (1), Swedish (1), and Swiss (1). The high proportion of backpackers from the United Kingdom, particularly England, may be explained by the fact that many are in Australia with ‘working holiday visas’, a popular visa for British people travelling in Australia, and vice versa for Australians in Britain. Similar reciprocal working holiday arrangements (which allow a stay of up to twelve months) are granted to travellers from Canada, Japan, Korea, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Over half (18) of the backpackers held twelve-month ‘working holiday visas’, with other visa types being ‘tourist visas’ (7) and ‘student visas’ (3). Nationalities under-represented in the sample are those backpackers from Asian countries. I surmise that this could be due to the method of sampling whereby responses to messages on notice boards and word-of-mouth (see Appendix A) limited this sample to backpackers who were comfortable with being interviewed in the English language. However, during the fieldwork period I stayed in backpacker hostels and rarely observed Asian backpackers staying in these places.

Many of the interviewees had tertiary educations. Over half (16) held a Bachelors degree, and another five were currently studying at university or were commencing a degree upon the completion of their travels. A further three had a tertiary education other than a university degree, and only four of the backpackers had not studied at a tertiary level. Three of them indicated that their primary purpose of travel to Australia was for educational reasons and for a period of their stay they were studying in Australia. Although education was the main purpose of travel for these three, they were still spending extended periods of time ‘backpacking’ in Australia and taking weekend breaks to travel to destinations close to the place they were studying.

The majority of the backpackers interviewed were staying in backpacker and youth hostels for the majority of their stay in Australia. Many also stated that they would
spend some time camping, whilst others had at some stage rented accommodation in the
city in which they were working or studying. They used a wide range of transport types
with popular modes being: long distance coach or bus (the kilometre passes offered by
private bus companies such as McCaffertys and Greyhound were popular); private
vehicles (including personal cars bought in Australia, friends’ cars, or lifts offered by
other travellers); aircraft (for flights between major cities), and tours (in particular
backpacker adventure and four wheel driving tours). Three of the backpackers had been
on the popular ‘Oz Experience’ tour up the east coast from Sydney (New South Wales)
to Cairns (Queensland). The majority of backpackers (16) were travelling independently
(that is, by themselves) for the greater duration of their stay in Australia, with six stating
that they were mainly travelling independently but would also meet up and travel with
friends along the way. Six of the backpackers indicated that they were travelling with a
friend or friends for the entire stay in Australia.

The majority (25) had not previously visited Australia. The most popular Australian
states and territories visited (prior to the interview) were New South Wales, Queensland
and the Northern Territory. As the interviews were conducted in the Northern Territory
and Queensland there was bound to be a dominance of backpackers to destinations
within these states/territories. However, this figure is not surprising given that according
to the figures on international backpackers by the Bureau of Tourism Research (2000),
79% visit New South Wales, 66% visit Queensland, 42% visit Victoria, and 33% visit
the Northern Territory. Most of the backpackers had relatively extensive international
tourism experiences, with only one backpacker indicating that he had not travelled
outside his home country prior to coming to Australia.

Those backpackers who had grown up in the United Kingdom and Europe had travelled
and holidayed in many European nations. The most frequently visited countries were
France, Spain, Greece, The United Kingdom, Austria, Belgium, Germany and Holland.
Following Europe, North America/Canada were popular destinations previously visited
by the backpackers, with eleven having spent time there. A further seven had been to
countries in Central America (predominantly Mexico) and South America. Several (8)
of the international backpackers had also travelled extensively within Asia. The most
visited countries included Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Laos, India and Burma.
Travels in Asia were most often an extension of their visit to Australia. For example, three backpackers had been travelling in Asia for approximately 6 months before coming to Australia, and another three backpackers were travelling in Asia once they left Australia. Similarly, six backpackers had spent time in New Zealand, and for all of them this had been as an extension of their Australian travels.

Appendix C:  
The Guidebooks

The importance of the guidebook as a mediator in the relationship between backpacker travellers and the people and places of a destination has been established, theoretically, in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Guidebooks were discussed with reference to their role as ‘markers’ (MacCannell 1989) and ‘mediators’ (Bhattacharyya 1997), and as ‘dynamic texts’ (McGregor 2000) of ‘social control’ (Dann 1996a). In this study, three guidebooks were subjected to textual and content analysis, these were:


Initially I was going to analyse only Lonely Planet, and a preliminary textual and content analysis of this guidebook was undertaken prior to the fieldwork period. I found, during my fieldwork, that the above guidebooks were the publications that were being used by the backpackers I interviewed and, therefore, I chose to analyse the three guidebooks being used by the study participants. There are a number of other publishing houses producing guidebooks for Australia, however, the three listed above (and analysed in detail in Chapter 4) are very clearly aimed at and marketed towards the backpacker and independent traveller market. The surprisingly limited amount of empirical research that analyses guidebooks was discussed in Chapter 3, particularly in relation to the integral role that these texts play in mediating tourist experiences. Individual details pertaining to each of the guidebooks are provided below.
Lonely Planet

The Lonely Planet guidebook series originated in the ‘hippy heydays of the early 1970s’ (Butcher 2003: 41). The first Lonely Planet guide was written by Tony and Maureen Wheeler after they travelled across Europe and Asia to Australia and found that there was a lack of ‘useful’ information available for travellers on a budget. In 1973 their first guidebook ‘Across Asia on the Cheap’ was published, and this was followed a year later by the first edition of the, still popular, ‘South East Asia on a Shoestring’. By 1979, the Lonely Planet ‘travel guide boom’ (Evans 2001) was well underway, with 17 guidebook titles in the series. Today, the Australian based company Lonely Planet is still owned by Tony and Maureen Wheeler and is a ‘major international operation with millions of sales annually’ (Butcher 2003: 45). According to the Lonely Planet website (www.lonelyplanet.com) the company currently publishes over 650 guidebooks in 14 languages. The Lonely Planet guide to Australia was first published in 1977, and updated frequently with the 2000 edition analysed for this study being the 10th edition. According to an article in the Sydney Morning Herald (2000) the Lonely Planet guidebook to Australia has been the company’s best selling guidebook worldwide for many years.

The Lonely Planet edition analysed for this study is the 10th edition (subsequent editions have been published in 2002 and 2003). The guidebook is 1,055 pages in length, and its features include a table of contents, an introduction to the book’s 11 authors, a brief forward from the publisher about the book, and a one page general introduction about Australia. Following this, the first six chapters (about 170 pages) provide general factual information for the traveller, and are entitled ‘Facts about Australia’, ‘Fauna and Flora’, ‘Facts for the Visitor’, ‘Aboriginal Art’, ‘Getting There and Away’, ‘Getting Around’. Of these six chapters, two are glossy colour sections dedicated to photographs and descriptions of Australian Fauna and Flora (16 pages) and Aboriginal Art (24 pages). The bulk of the guidebook comprises 9 chapters. One of these chapters is a ‘special’ section on the ‘Olympic Games’, a feature of this particular edition due to the Olympics being held in Sydney in the year 2000. The remaining 8 chapters are dedicated to each of the 8 states and territories of Australia and are arranged alphabetically. Each of the state and territory chapters (which range from 21 pages for the Australian Capital...
Territory to 171 pages for Queensland), begin with individual sections on Aboriginal People (excluding the chapter on the ACT). Following the discussion of Aboriginal people there is information on ‘Geography and Climate’, ‘National Parks’, ‘Activities’, ‘Getting There and Away’, and ‘Getting Around’. Following this, the chapters are organised geographically, and each city and town description has sections on ‘history’, ‘orientation’, ‘general tourist information’, ‘things to see and do’, ‘places to stay and eat’, ‘getting there and away’, and ‘getting around’. Interspersed within the text are frequent maps, glossy colour photographic images, and some black and white photographs and sketches. There are a total of 171 photographic images in the Lonely Planet. The Lonely Planet state that their ‘main aim’ is to ‘make it possible for adventurous travellers to get out there – to explore and better understand the world’ (O’Byrne et al 2000: 16).

Let’s Go

The Let’s Go series was originally developed by Harvard University students as a resource for budget tourists travelling to Europe. The first book for the United States based publishing company was titled ‘Let’s Go Europe’ originally printed in 1960 and now in its 45th edition and published in 7 languages. The contents of Let’s Go guidebooks are still researched and written by ‘currently enrolled’ Harvard University students. According to the website (www.letsgo.com) the number of guidebooks published by Let’s Go expanded in the 1990s as they began to ‘focus on producing guides that showed how to get off the beaten path and experience destinations without hordes of tourists in the way’. As a result, new destinations were included in the Let’s Go series which now produces around 45 different titles. Clearly, this company publishes guidebooks on a significantly smaller scale that the Lonely Planet and Rough Guide series. The Let’s Go: Australia guidebook is a relatively new addition to the series, with the 2000 edition analysed for this study being a ‘revised edition’ of the first edition which was published in 1999.

The Let’s Go guidebook is published in the United States and the 2000 edition analysed is a ‘revised edition’ of the 1st edition of the Let’s Go guidebook to Australia. This
guidebook company, however, has been producing guidebooks for other countries since 1960. Its format is generally similar to that of the *Lonely Planet*. The book commences with a table of contents and information about the book and its authors, and information on how to use the book. There is a one-page section titled ‘Let’s Go Picks’ which details the authors’ suggested highlights. Thereafter, the first three chapters (about 70 pages) provide general information in chapters entitled ‘Discover Australia’, ‘History and Culture’ and ‘Essentials’. The remaining 8 chapters of the book are dedicated to the 8 states and territories arranged alphabetically. Each of the state and territory chapters (which range from 13 pages for the ACT to 156 pages for NSW) has general information on cities and towns which is arranged geographically, and includes sections on ‘getting there’, ‘getting around’, ‘orientation’, ‘practical information’, ‘accommodation and food’, ‘sights’, ‘activities and entertainment’. Interspersed within the text are frequent black and white maps. Compared to the *Lonely Planet* discussed above, there are no photographic images or sketches in the *Let’s Go* other than a photograph of the Sydney Opera House at sunset on the guidebook’s front cover. The target audience of the Let’s Go are ‘budget-minded’ travellers, and they promote budget travel through the statement that ‘We don’t think of budget travel as the last recourse of the destitute; we believe that it’s the only way to travel’ (Shepard *et al* 2000: v) and thus they represent themselves as ‘the bible of the budget traveler’ (back cover text).

**Rough Guide**

The *Rough Guide* guidebook series originated in 1982 when the first book ‘The Rough Guide to Greece’ was written by Mark Ellingham. According to the website (www.roughguides.com), Ellingham was disillusioned because he ‘couldn’t find a guidebook that really answered his needs’ and that guidebooks were either ‘heavyweight cultural guides’ or ‘student manuals that were too caught up on how to save money’. The publishers of *Rough Guides* thus set out to develop books suited to all independent travellers, and not just those on a budget, by offering ‘recommendations from shoe string to luxury’. Currently, they publish more than 200 titles. It is not clear when the first *Rough Guide* to Australia was published (as this is not stated in the book.
or on their website), however, the 1999 edition being analysed for this study is the fourth edition, with the company stating that they update every two to three years.

The *Rough Guide* is published in the United Kingdom. The *Rough Guide* has a slight, yet significantly, different format to those outlined for the *Lonely Planet* and *Let’s Go*. Composed of 1,046 pages of information, this book begins with information about the publication, and information about the authors, followed by a table of contents. Following this, is a general 2-page introduction about Australia, followed by the three ‘Parts’. Part One, entitled ‘The Basics’ (70 pages), provides general and practical information for the traveller, offering such details as ‘getting there’ and ‘getting around’, ‘visas’, and ‘insurance’ (to name but a few). Part Two is titled ‘The Guide’ and is separated into 11 chapters (920 pages). Nine chapters relate to each state and territory (the ACT is included in the chapter on NSW), with Queensland divided into three chapters (Southeast Queensland, Tropical Queensland and the Reef, Outback Queensland). The remaining two chapters are allocated to the cities of Sydney (and around) and Melbourne (and around). The final section of the book, Part Three entitled ‘The Contexts’ (46 pages), provides the reader with factual information about Australia. Within this final part are seven sections entitled ‘A History’, ‘Australia’s Indigenous People’, ‘Wildlife’, ‘Australia Film’, ‘Australian Music’, ‘Books’ and ‘Australian English’. In contrast, to the *Lonely Planet* and *Let’s Go*, the factual and contextual information about Australia is provided at the end rather than the beginning of the book. Throughout the guide are maps and some black and white sketches, as well as 35 colour photographic images. The *Rough Guide* states that it’s ‘mission’ is ‘to provide the most reliable, up-to-date and entertaining information to independent-minded travellers of all ages, on all budgets’ (Daly *et al* 1999: iv).
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