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Tactile Landscape: Visitors at the Great Barrier Reef

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Notes on Contributor

Celmara Pocock is a postdoctoral research fellow at The University of Queensland with research interests in environmental anthropology, cultural history, museum studies, and representations of space and place. She has carried out research in tropical north Queensland and the temperate island state of Tasmania. She has a strong interest in social and cultural histories of the Great Barrier Reef.

ABSTRACT

The cliché ‘*Take only photographs. Leave only footprints*’ is employed to raise awareness and minimise visitor impacts on sensitive environments. The Great Barrier Reef is Australia’s premier tourist destination and included in the World Heritage List in recognition of its unique physical attributes. It is a location where tourists are strongly encouraged to look rather than touch. Even footprints are forbidden or washed away in this marine environment. But what have we lost in our experiences of the environment? This paper examines sensuous knowledge in visitor understanding and appreciation of the Great Barrier Reef through the twentieth century, and considers how a diminished sense of touch can lead to a loss of place in contemporary tourist experiences.

KEY WORDS:

Place; Touch; Visitors; Great Barrier Reef

INTRODUCTION

One of the natural wonders of the world, the Great Barrier Reef stretches for more than 2,000 kilometres along the northeast coast of Australia. The region is visited by millions of tourists each year and is known to countless more people through rich visual imagery of underwater coral gardens brilliant in colour, shape and form, and of idyllic islands abundant in lush vegetation. But to what extent do such tourist visits and visual imagery contribute to a sense of place?

This paper contrasts visual ways of knowing the Reef with more embodied experiences of the region. In particular it explores the role of touch in how visitors experienced the Reef through the twentieth century and considers how visitors have known this landscape as place and space.

PLACE, SPACE AND TOUCH

A useful way of distinguishing the concepts of space and place is to consider place a primary form of knowledge that originates in embodied experience (This follows Casey 1996, but see also Tuan 1997; Augé 1995; Ingold 2000).

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Knowledge of place is thus built from the sensuous experiences of physical space and its contents through time. The accumulation of information about landscapes is derived from a fusion of human senses; sight, sound, taste, smell and touch, brought together through the orientation and movement of the human body. When such sensuous encounters are repeated or become an everyday experience, they produce a local knowledge of place. A local knowledge of place is therefore based in sensuous knowledge of space and constituted through habit (cf. Bourdieu 1977). Consequently knowledge of place is often a taken-for-granted form of knowledge, and one that may remain unrecognised until it is lost, or perhaps until it is restored following a temporary loss. The habituated nature of local knowledge means that in many instances it becomes second-nature, and many sensuous experiences cease to provoke cognisant thought.

Our sense of touch is perhaps the most immediate and bodily of all our senses, and arguably our most important. Tactile senses are strongly related to the body and are a central characteristic of animality, and it is suggested that the skin is more vital to physical survival than the other senses (Montagu 1971; O'Shaughnessy 1989, 2003). In common speech we think of touch as those deliberate acts of reaching out to feel a particular being, object or substance. Rodaway (1994) therefore argues that 'touch' implies a sensuousness limited to the extremities, particularly the fingers and hands. He suggests the term 'haptic sense' is a more inclusive term for the many senses taken in by our skin. For touch is not only constituted by deliberate acts of reaching out. Our sense of touch extends beyond the skin to a broader relationship between space and our bodies as a whole (O'Shaughnessy 1989, pp. 37-58). As a consequence our sense of touch contributes to a broader awareness of the environment and plays a significant role in orientation which is a central characteristic of place and landscape. Hence touch is an everyday experience that contributes to local knowledge of place.

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However, touch is enhanced and complemented by visual and auditory information and is often overlooked as an important contributor to our sense of place (Rodaway 1994). Because the sense of having a body and the haptic sense are integral to one another, touch (the haptic sense) tends to be the most taken-for-granted of our senses. All human senses inform one another, but touch is the most difficult to isolate from the others.

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We primarily notice our skin when it is damaged (Montagu 1971), and the sense of touch is most significant for those who cannot see, or even more evidently among those who are both blind and deaf (Montagu 1971; Hull 1990). Consequently it is frequently only extremes like rough and smooth; hot and cold; hard and soft; that are noticed by the fully-abled. It is these kinds of haptic sensations that are most frequently articulated by Reef visitors but other haptic encounters can be identified through sources such as photographs.

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TOUCHING THE REEF

A sense of place as a form of everyday knowledge stands in strong contrast with tourist experience(s) which are constructed around notions of difference. The traveller makes very self-conscious comparisons and observations that contrast home with away; like and unlike; familiar and unfamiliar. These differences are often preconceived and tame in comparison with the radical contrasts brought about by the experiences of migration, exile or other more permanent shifts of location (Tuan 1977). By definition tourists' visits are impermanent and frequently short-term encounters that do not allow for the evolution of habitual knowledge.

And though senses such as smell, taste and sound contribute to the tourist's idea of being somewhere different, tourist experiences of space are primarily visual (Urry 1990, 1992, 1995). If we consider a definition of place to be a form of habituated knowledge acquired through long-term everyday experiences of a range of embodied senses, then it is questionable whether tourists can ever gain a sense of place.

This problematic is heightened in relation to the Great Barrier Reef, especially those celebrated parts of the underwater where terrestrial humans are out of place. In spite of an ever expanding range of technologies that allow people to dive the ocean depths, humans are not adapted to living permanently or even long-term underwater. Consequently tourist experiences are not constituted through everyday encounters with this environment. Tourist experiences of place are also limited by a bias towards visual quality and this is also heightened in the case of the Great Barrier Reef which is a landscape universally celebrated for its photogenic qualities – especially aerial vistas and coral gardens. [. \(file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/enduser/Local%20Settings/Temp/WindowsLiveWriter-429641856/4965CD3DD6F3/index.htm#_edn5\)](file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/enduser/Local%20Settings/Temp/WindowsLiveWriter-429641856/4965CD3DD6F3/index.htm#_edn5) [5] This paper considers the effects of these technological developments in underwater access and photographic reproduction on tourists' experiences of touch and associated sense of place.

Rodaway identifies four kinds of haptic sense: global touch being a general multi-sensual exploration of the environment; reach as an active process of touch analogous to the everyday use of the term; extended touch being the haptic sense acquired through the extension of our sense through aids such as walking sticks; and lastly imagined touch which is based in memory and expectation. The first three of these might be understood as physically interactive haptic experiences which contribute to a sense of place through reciprocity between the body and its surrounding physical environment (Rodaway 1994). Visitor knowledge of the Great Barrier Reef is based, at least in part, on such haptic experiences.

Early 20th Century Reef experiences

The way in which people experience the Reef has changed significantly since the beginning of the twentieth century, and is partly a reflection of the means by which people access the islands and reefs. These changes have had a particularly noticeable impact on haptic experiences.

Tourism emerged at the Reef as an adjunct to scientific expeditions in the early twentieth century, and experienced something of a heyday in the late 1920s and 1930s. Although there were a number of well-organised holiday expeditions, most notably those arranged by Mont Embury, there were few visitor facilities on the islands. Voyages and visits were lengthy in duration and visitors spent almost all their time outdoors, and slept in tents (Barr 1990; Pocock 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2009). Their sensuous experiences were therefore direct and unmediated encounters with the native environments of the islands and the sea.

The skin is receptive to characteristics of climate, particularly the air, its movements, heat and humidity as it envelops the body. The Great Barrier Reef is broadly characterised as belonging to the tropics and most of the region enjoys a warm, dry winter (Dry Season) and a hot and humid summer (Wet Season). Tactile sensitivity is mediated by clothing and in the heat people tend to wear less of it, exposing more of their skin to the environment. But for early visitors convention often prevented the kind of scanty dress that is acceptable today. Visitors were usually fully-dressed, out of modesty and to avoid sunburn, and wore long dresses, shirts and trousers (Figure 1). This clothing provided a barrier between the body and the environment but also intensified the heat.

The warm weather was promoted as an attraction for holidaymakers in the cold wet winters of Melbourne and Sydney. However, many expeditions were scheduled for

the summer holidays. For physically active visitors with limited shelter from the environment, the heat and humidity could be stifling. In November 1928 *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported on the experiences of the British Expedition to Low Isles including a graphic description of the heat the party endured:

[A]s men of flesh and blood they sank slowly into a sort of melting decay under the savage heat of a humid summer.

About 9 o'clock in the morning one begins to feel on Low Island as though one's spine is being slowly boiled away. Sydney people would call it hot....

It continues to warm until, at 10 o'clock, the temperature stands between 90 and 95 degrees. The humidity varies from 78 to 80. The trade winds have passed months ago. Everything is still and quiet, unreal, with the quality of a mirage. Only the heat moves. It bursts up in tangible waves from the sand. If a man wants to walk twenty yards across the beach he has to run the last fifteen. ... The air wraps him round in stifling veils of heat, till he feels as though he is tangled in curtains of heavy velvet.

warm in the water too

On shore a bathing costume makes him think he is wearing sealskin in a Turkish bath. He escapes into the water. The sea is like a neutral bath. Sometimes its temperature rises to 82 degrees Fah. Night is notable, because the temperature falls a few degrees. Still the lightest exertion melts the body into perspiration. Anyway, one escapes in the darkness the glare of the sun which cuts at the eyes with brazen blades of torturing light.

.... Of course, one does not find water on coral islands. A launch brings 800 to 1000 gallons from the mainland, and the whole party settles down to row it ashore, 200 yards across the lagoon and carry it in kerosene tins up a beach sloping 12 feet in 60. What that means in such a climate is easy to imagine.

(The Sydney Morning Herald 1928, 29 November)

As this description indicates, it was not simply the hot climate that made visitors uncomfortable, but the living and working conditions that exacerbated it. The lack of island infrastructure required visitors to manually cart scientific equipment, supplies and freshwater. There were few jetties, and the shallow tidal zone of the corals made it difficult to bring boats close to shore. It was therefore necessary to carry heavy loads through shallow water and across the sand; a particularly arduous task in the heat.

The heat produced further discomforts for the skin. Warm temperatures foster a proliferation of insects which are especially annoying to people living outdoors from the earliest encounters with the region. The nineteenth century naturalist and geologist Jukes (1847, p. 26) had to move camp to avoid mosquitoes and sandflies, and his complaints were echoed by British scientific expedition leader Yonge (1930, pp. 36-7) complained of the severe discomfort caused by these biting insects. Holidaymakers were just as vulnerable, and a report from the first Embury expedition to Hayman Island in 1933 told how:

A sudden [sic] descent during a breathless day by sandflies and mosquitoes left a trail of woe and drove many from shorts into long trousers.

(Wigmore 1933, 14 January)

While another visitor on the same excursion recounted that "a plague of March flies, which lasted about a week, worried us very much, as also did the sand flies, the worst pest of all" (Marks 1933, p. 6).

Occasionally trips were enjoyed because of the absence of mosquitoes and sandflies, but other insects such as wasps and green ants could also sting and bite, destroy equipment and food and generally be a nuisance.

In spite of the discomforts associated with the heat, the warmth of the tropics was still a novelty and an important part of a Reef experience. Warm sea water was enjoyed as especially unusual for those from southern regions. Bathing in the sea was a necessity because there were no bathrooms or freshwater for washing. But the related haptic senses gave considerable pleasure. During a visit to the Reef in 1925 naturalist Crosbie Morrison recorded in his diary that '[t]he sea was beautifully warm and [his] bathe very pleasant (Morrison 1925). Swimming in the warm ocean was a sought after activity. The possibility of attacks by sharks and other marine life saw netted swimming enclosures constructed on beaches near base camps, and a more permanent wooden enclosure was featured among the first tourist amenities constructed on Hayman Island in 1932. (file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/enduser/Local%20Settings/Temp/WindowsLiveWriter-429641856/4965CD3DD6F3/index.htm#_edn6) [6]

The sea was a source of entertainment for visitors who swam, bathed and rode turtles in the shallows (Pocock 2004, 2006b). The coral pools were a particular focus of holiday activities and produced exhilarating encounters between Reef visitors and underwater life. However, experiences of being in the water and viewing the underwater were not synchronous activities. The usual way of viewing corals and fishes was to peer into pools left on the exposed reef at low tide (Figure 2). This depended on the right tides, still weather and a large amount of patience because any surface disturbance spoiled the view.

In spite of the visual limitations, this method exposed visitors to a range of sensuous encounters, most notably touch. Early groups of visitors comprised professional and amateur naturalists, and holidaymakers played an integral part in scientific collecting and recording. Recording and observing Reef animals involved walking on exposed corals at low tide and fossicking among the rocks. It was only by bringing creatures to the surface that they could be viewed in any detail or be photographed. Collecting and preserving corals, shells and fishes were central activities in Reef holidays for a large part of the twentieth century and exposed people to a variety of tactile sensations, notably as they reached out to touch and handle the textures, movements, weights, forms and densities of reef life. Visitors recounted the feather heads of sea worms that 'disappear as one touches them' (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research 1926), the bech-de-mer that lets out long strings of cotton 'when touched with a stick' (Daly 1933) and 'the queer thrill of holding a little cat shark up by his tail' (Stainton 1933). Still images and motion films show young women sitting on dead sharks and hauling up large fish, groups of fishers holding their catches, dissections in progress and displays of coral that have been collected and grouped.

The intimacy required by this kind of touch also brought danger. In 1935 a young visitor to Hayman Island died as a consequence of handling a cone shell (*Conus geographus*):

Eye-witnesses said that on picking up the shell, which was covered with a thin skin, the finder held it in his palm and started scraping it with a knife.

...

A barb-like spike, about half an inch long, was thrust out by the animal, and penetrated his palm.

He took no notice of it for some time, but then complained that his eyesight was failing.

He next lapsed into a coma, and exhibited all the symptoms of snake-bite.

Rushed to the mainland, he died soon afterwards.

(The Telegraph 1935, 9 August)

In anticipation of their visit to the Reef in 1967 a Belgian scientific expedition sought "instructions for the treatment of such particular problems as snake bite, stings by venomous fish ... and wounds or irritation caused by certain corals, sea wasps and so on" (Prime Minister's Department 1966-1969). In response, the Prime Minister's Department wrote that although there was no specific guide:

Injuries that the expedition may possibly suffer would include sunburn, dehydration, cuts from coral, external otitis (file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/enduser/Local%20Settings/Temp/WindowsLiveWriter-429641856/4965CD3DD6F3/index.htm#_edn7) [7], stings from hydroids, coral and jellyfish, puncture wounds from fish in general and particularly from Stonefish, Butterfly Cod, Mai-Mai, Pearl Perch etc.

There is also the possibility of injury from sea urchins, seastars, stingrays, cone shells, sea snakes as well as attacks from sharks. In addition, certain fish may be poisonous when eaten in certain seasons of the year.

(Prime Minister's Department 1967, 25 May)

These and other dangers comprise a significant part of the way the Reef was portrayed in the first part of the last century. Giant clams were regarded as dangerous and deadly and visitors wearily sidestepped them as they picked their way across the coral rocks.

Some early visitors expressed the idea that the physical dangers and discomforts were the price of, and even heightened the pleasures of their Reef experiences. Nevertheless, many aspects of camping on islands especially for long periods, brought physical discomfort. Many haptic experiences recorded from these Reef excursions highlight negative or less pleasant sensations rather than everyday or positive ones. As the Reef was promoted as a tourist destination to overseas markets including the United States of America, it became an industry imperative to improve facilities.

Contemporary Reef experiences

Tourism infrastructure developed fairly rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s and continues to grow in the present. While warm weather is an attraction, its extremes and potential discomforts are ameliorated by modern infrastructure. Almost every resort and large tour today is fully air-conditioned. This makes it possible for people to enjoy the region at any time of year and for buildings to be closed and screened to keep out insects. While visitors are now protected from some of the discomforts, they are also cushioned from many senses that contribute to a sense of place. These include sounds and smells as well as the less extreme haptic experiences that might characterise the region.

Today, the vast majority of people who visit the Reef stay in one of the international-style resorts on the islands or adjacent coast of the Whitsundays or Cairns regions. These resorts provide air-conditioned accommodation, manicured gardens and other amenities. Swimming in the ocean is merely an option as almost all resorts have swimming pools. While something of a necessity during the Wet Season when life-threatening Irukandji (*Carukia barnesi*) and deadly box-jellyfish (*Chironex fleckeri*) are in the ocean (CRC Reef 2002; Seymour 2002b, 2002a), many more guests use the pool facilities than the beach even during the winter Dry

Season. Saltwater and sand can be irritating to human skin, and freshwater bathing is highly desirable. The enormous expansion of resorts and international hotels has made it possible for contemporary visitors to avoid what might be assumed to be key elements of a tropical island holiday – sea and sand.

The underwater living reef, however, continues to be a significant tourist encounter. The development of resorts on the islands has been paralleled by developments in technology to improve visual access to the underwater reefs. Early inventions included the water telescope – a bucket or paraffin tin with the bottom replaced by glass – which eliminated surface disturbance and provide a clear view underwater. This principle was furthered in glass bottomed boats which provide a kind of porthole through which corals and fishes can be viewed in less calm conditions and in greater depth of water thus providing greater access at high tide. In the 1950s underwater viewing chambers were constructed on Green and Hook Islands. Unlike the earlier means of viewing the Reef, the portholes of these submerged chambers provided visitors a side-on view of the underwater, rather than a perpendicular one. This was essentially a static way of viewing the underwater and one that also physically isolated the visitor from the water. Although the earliest visitors remained fully clothed and on the surface while viewing coral gardens, the activities of fossicking and netting fishes nevertheless brought them into contact with the warm water, corals and fishes. The underwater viewing chamber eliminated these haptic encounters – the viewers remaining dry and terrestrial and separated from the underwater by the physical construction of the chamber. It was not until the adoption of easy to use snorkelling and diving equipment in the late 1960s and 1970s, that visitors immersed themselves to view the reef. However, this was paralleled by conservation concerns which contributed to new haptic dissociation.

In the early twentieth century, the Reef was characterised as dangerous – threatening ships and human lives. Sharks, stingrays, giant clams and venomous fish all posed a threat to the human body. Conservation concerns have transformed these relationships of danger considerably. A 1990 film documentary shows Valerie Taylor, one of Australia's foremost advocates of marine conservation, spinning, touching and playing with Reef creatures in a way that encouraged similar interaction by others (Film Australia 1990). The emphasis in these activities and the associated commentary is that these creatures are not dangerous. In other words touch is used to create a perception that Reef creatures – or nature more broadly – is benign and harmless. In recent times this idea has been further transformed and it is now perceived that the Reef is in danger from our tactile exchanges. The impacts of human touch on the Reef have been considerable. Vast amounts of coral and shell were removed by visitors as souvenirs and even more significant damage came through reef walking which was actively encouraged well into the 1980s. Consequently visitors are now indoctrinated into thinking that touch is something more dangerous to the Reef than to ourselves. This is reflected in filmic representations, which no longer show the kind of Valerie Taylor interactions but show a humanless underwater environment. Although scientists continue to touch, play, kill and otherwise physically interfere with Reef creatures, this has become a hidden activity for a privileged few.

Contemporary tourist experiences have become primarily visual experiences. Many, but not all, (file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/enduser/Local%20Settings/Temp/WindowsLiveWriter-429641856/4965CD3DD6F3/index.htm#_edn8) [8] tourists will view some part of the Reef in person during a visit to the region. Of these some will snorkel or dive on one of the fringing reefs of the continental islands. But it is the Outer Reef which is promoted as the most authentic experience. There are numerous opportunities for tourists to snorkel and dive in one of the lagoons of the Outer Reef. The most common means of reaching these locations is by way of quick catamarans which anchor off semi-permanent pontoons. The amenities are similar to those of the island resorts and include restaurant, bar, sun lounges, souvenirs and some even offer showers. Snorkelling equipment is included in the cost and visitors of all ages and swimming abilities plunge into the ocean depths. In brightly coloured bathing costumes and

fluorescent snorkels, masks and fins that mimic tropical corals and fishes, visitors find themselves fully submerged among the life of these reefs. Patrolled areas are marked by ropes and buoys and the inexperienced and curious are offered guidance from the company marine biologist. The rest of the group is left with some basic instructions about where to go, how to signal for help and, most importantly, directives not to touch or remove anything from the Reef.

Even though conservation discourages touch, the experience of being submerged is a new haptic encounter for many. Immersion in saltwater also transforms the body's sense of touch. Many everyday skin sensations are altered by the aqueous surrounding; the skin tingles and becomes swollen, its usual sensitivity dulled and sluggish. Even though the water is warm, it cools the human body and further diminishes the sense of touch. Immersion also creates new haptic senses, brought about by novel forms of movement. In water, unlike on land, our bodies are less weighted and this allows us to float: three dimensional movements become possible. This three-dimensional movement and the vision that accompanies it, is likened to flying. These are unusual, not everyday experiences.

Three-dimensional movement is also disorienting. When considered in the context of disorientation associated with rapid transport, it can be seen to further diminish a sense of locality and place. The visits are relatively short, some allow for little more than an hour at the Reef location. On returning to the pontoon or catamaran, visitors swim onto a platform to remove their equipment before entering the comfort of the cabin. The arrival and departure from the Reef presents an abrupt change from underwater otherworldliness to the ordinariness of upholstered seating, air-conditioning, drinks and media entertainment. file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/enduser/Local%20Settings/Temp/WindowsLiveWriter-429641856/4965CD3DD6F3/index.htm#_edn9 [9]

This is much more comfortable than visitor experiences of the Reef in the past. But to what extent does it contribute to a knowledge of place, and how does it impact on an understanding of landscape?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The changing relationships of touch, or haptic encounters, evidenced at the Great Barrier Reef in the twentieth century present an interesting reversal in human knowledge of place. As the underwater has become more visually accessible and physical access to these watery environments has increased, haptic knowledge has been altered in a way that leads to a loss of sense of place.

People with limited or no sight depend on their sense of touch to establish relationships with space and place. Hull suggests that in blindness one loses a sense of anticipation, a forewarning of approach, and dissolution of space. For Hull, blindness limits his knowledge of space because it is an incomplete way of knowing (Hull 1990). For early visitors who tried to view the Reef through the water surface, their vision was impaired or imperfect. The distortion of the water surface limited their sight and they depended on haptic sensory knowledge to acquire a more fully informed knowledge of the underwater. In the quest to better view the living reef, other senses, especially our sense of touch, has been neglected and this too contributes to a diminished knowledge of place.

A consideration of the first three of Rodaway's types of haptic sense – global, reach and extended – leads to the conclusion that these have been diminished even as our bodies have gained greater access to the underwater. In spite of new ways of experiencing this environment, the body is suspended from its everyday sense of touch and of orientation. Even more dramatically our haptic senses of reach and extension have been curtailed. Thus vision is the primary sensual experience even for those who are fully immersed in diving.

Increasingly the Reef is experienced not through the embodied interactive forms of haptic sense, but through Rodaway's fourth category – that of imagined touch. We

now enjoy unprecedented visual access but it is dissociated from other senses. Diving is undoubtedly an embodied experience, but because the haptic sense is integral to body awareness and orientation the separation of vision from the sense of touch produces a disembodied form of sight. Consequently contemporary experiences of the Reef represent experiences of space rather than place. In moving underwater tourists are in a new medium of space, but with no knowledge of the particularities of place. The pontoons and catamarans visited by tourists are non-places (cf. Augé 1995) that further dissociate the relationship between different locations on the Reef. Consequently tourists fail to orient themselves or to create connections between the localities they travel to and from. This dislocation fragments the space of the Reef and leads to a dissolution of landscape.

Such disembodied vision is reinforced by photographic imagery which shapes visitors' anticipation and recollection of the Reef. The region is increasingly represented by films and photographs devoid of humans, and filmic representations in particular emulate the kind of disoriented movement characteristic of diving (Pocock 2004). Thus the imagination and anticipation of a Reef visit is foreshadowed by a disoriented vision that is realised in the three dimensional movement of a contemporary underwater experience. Photography also shapes the way in which the Reef is recollected. Conservation regimes have eliminated the interactivity of fossicking and collecting. Souvenirs of shell and coral once maintained a sense of contact with the Reef, but these enduring haptic reminders have been replaced by photographic recording (Pocock 2004, 2009). One of the most significant aspects of touch is it is an encounter of the moment. Even in considering forms of touch that do not involve interactions between bodies – the suggestion that the eyes can touch – these are encounters in time.

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[10] In contrast taking photographs anticipates memory. As with all tourists, Reef visitors spend a significant amount of time taking photographs. These are created for future enjoyment and are frequently at the cost of the emplaced experience. Thus the embodied experience of being at the Reef is often transformed into one of anticipating a future moment of recollection. This is not a direct encounter in space and time.

Without a strong haptic sense, tourist encounters with the landscapes of the Reef are encounters in space – dislocated, disoriented, visual and out of time. But perhaps the most dramatic effect is the loss of reciprocity between the environments of the Reef and the people who visit it. Through touch we understand the nature of other forms of life and understand them as living moving bodies like our own. Because in touching we are touched. It is this immediacy of reciprocal touch that has been lost, and which has diminished the connectivity between people, places and landscape.

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[\(/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/image1.jpg\)](#)

Figure 1: Fully Dressed Visitors arrive at Hayman Island circa 1932. © Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales



[\(/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/image2.jpg\)](#)

Figure 2: Postcard of Holidaymakers collecting shells and corals at Lodestone Reef, Great Barrier Reef circa 1920. © National Museum of Australia

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[1] This follows Casey (1996), but see also Tuan (1977), Augé (1995) and Ingold (2000).

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[2] This is illustrated by John Hull in his account of blindness and the pleasures of knowledge brought by touch when oriented to a daily routine and sense of space.

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[3] Humans are highly sentient. We rely on our senses for many aspects of our survival and our sensuous engagements enrich our daily encounters with our surroundings and others. Among the most noticeable or conscious of our senses are sight and sound. We give cultural expression to these through art, design and fashion; language and music. To a lesser extent our cultural awareness of smell and taste are marked by particular culinary and wine tasting practices. These are conscious performances and celebrations of particular senses. Our sense of touch is less frequently celebrated in isolation from other senses, though it might be argued that sports celebrate our sense of balance and orientation as much as they do sight and strength.

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[4] For a description of the methods used to identify these experiences see Pocock (2002a).

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[5] The inclusion of the Great Barrier Reef in the World Heritage List refers to these visual qualities as part of its assessment of the aesthetics of the region. See (Environment Australia 2002; Pocock 2002b).

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[6] Mont Embury ran a number of holiday expeditions to Reef islands in the 1920s and 1930s and subsequently established a more permanent base on Hayman Island when he obtained a lease over the island (The N.S.W. Freemason 1932; Wigmore 1932).

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[7] Inflammation of the ear.

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[8] Many visitors remain in the resorts, simply enjoying the relaxation of 'sun, sand and sea' except the sea is the pool or aquarium, and many fail to experience feel the sand beneath their feet – an experience linked with pleasures – the softness and fineness of some sands, the coarseness of other coral beaches, and the associated sounds of squeaking, crunching and distinguishing one location from another.

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[9] The many conveniences give many Reef resorts and dive locations the characteristic of Augé's non-places (Augé 1995).

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[10] While Rodaway suggests that touch extends beyond the extremities to include the body as a whole, Derrida and Marks take this idea further to suggest that the eyes can touch and that touch can be perceived through vision and film, but even these are instances of encounter in time (Derrida 1993; Marks 2000; Naas 2001; Marks 2002).