

Beyond the everyday experience of place

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Our everyday experiences of the places we visit can provide us with comfort and reassurance. The familiarity of our home and our community help us to define how we see ourselves situated in the world. The papers in this collection begin with the everyday experiences of places in Sydney to draw out the unfamiliar from the familiar and thereby an understanding of the particular way that the social, cultural and political are conceptualised in our daily lives. By putting forward alternative readings of these places the authors in this collection show that issues regarding identity, heritage, consumerism, spectacle and knowledge are questions that still resonate with our times.

The intersection of gender and the construction of social places in society is the theme of Samantha Sperring's questioning of a local council's decision to continue to provide a space reserved for women. Sperring argues that restricting access based on biology places us in the position of asking, who is not a woman? She concludes that only by answering this question will we understand society's need for places of exclusion.

Amy Rathbone's interest in national identity leads her to interrogate the educational role of Hyde Park Barracks. Rathbone argues that as the Barracks has increasingly focussed on displays of pride in its colonial past it has also become a mechanism for concealing the classed nature of Australian society. Related to national identity is the idea of heritage and what gets inherited from earlier times. Lauren Perry examines the changes to the use of a heritage listed building to argue that over time a building becomes embedded with cultural, political and emotional significance that can create a sense of belonging through memories and experiences within the local community.

For Jasmina Dugalic inheritance of cultural memories can only go so far in our consumerist society. In order to retain the prestige that comes from associations with the monarchy, the Queen Victoria Building exploits a link between style from Victorian England and the material existence of the colonies while hiding the machinery of capitalism from public view. Sally Coleman finds a similar search for identity underway in the consumerism that occurs in community markets. She questions whether the idea of 'authenticity' represented by the qualities of the products on sale can survive the questioning of reality and representation being waged by postmodernism.

Cindy Hoang uses the idea of the carnival to argue that society has become a series of continually changing spectacles. This is particularly clear at St Stephen's Anglican Church where the spectacle can move from spiritual enlightenment to hedonistic oblivion overnight. Hoang argues that this raises the question of the relevance of spirituality when it is confronted with the material desires of the body. Antonio Panuccio weaves his own personal experiences of an ocean cliff in the eastern Sydney

suburbs known as “The Gap” with its strong associations of personal, social and historic tragedy. Panuccio plays with the form of the essay to argue that concepts like modernism and postmodernism are too large to capture the intuitive experiences of the everyday.

In our last two papers Mona Malamiri examines notions of Aboriginal tradition, culture and community within the Australian social context. For Malamiri the Riverside Walk along Parramatta river raises issues of multiculturalism and tolerance of indigenous culture rather than the hopes of reconciliation held by many indigenous and non—indigenous people in today’s world. Alyce Nelson also challenges us to rethink our views of indigenous knowledge by exploring contemporary indigenous artwork located in Sydney’s Botanical Gardens. Nelson argues that the Gardens challenge the relevance of the tradition and culture of Indigenous Australians for the modern nation state which continues today in denying the contemporary discourses of urban Aborigines by valuing a ‘traditional’ Aboriginal way of life lost through colonisation.