*Renee Wirth and Robert Freestone**

TOURISM, HERITAGE AND AUTHENTICITY: STATE-ASSISTED CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION IN SUBURBAN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Places are (re)constructed for tourism consumption through the promotion of certain images that have implications for the built environment. The act of consuming places itself is a place creating and place altering force. The visual and physical consumption of places also shapes the cultural meaning attached to spaces and places. New meanings of place emerge which often conflict with the meanings once ascribed by the local community. These processes of commodification are well known to cultural theorists and practitioners. This paper uses the broader literature to inform a more specific study revealing state intervention in a process now enveloping suburban centres in global cities. Newtown in Sydney, Australia finds itself being reshaped through a convergence of the market forces of gentrification and the entrepreneurial initiatives of government and in the process is seen to be losing some of the authenticity which was part of the appeal in the first place.

Introduction

> *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, 1975: 1).*

Culture in its many guises can transform the urban environment through city marketing campaigns, cultural led urban developments, festivals, and tourist promotion to encourage economic development. Urban places can be re-imagined and invested with new cultural meanings to encourage greater consumption, visual and physical, as 'landscapes of pleasure' (Hannigan, 1998). Central to the selling of places are recurring values of chic-liveability, heritage and cultural diversity. These attributes form a commodity that can be promoted, marketed and celebrated to help distinguish one place from another. Targeting cashed-up long-distance tourists and day-visitors, the fabricated re-acculturation of the urban environment effectively invents new leisure products for an unquenchable market place. The costs of the makeover, however, are often borne by local communities and expressed in at best superficial gestures toward genuine appreciation of a real sense of place.

This paper explores the transmogrification of places of cultural significance for tourism consumption. The aim is to provide a critical understanding of how such places are transformed into places of consumption by investigating the relationship and conflict between culture as a resource for social meaning and a touchstone for economic growth. These places, assuming the mantle of cultural districts, represent an unavoidable element in the evolution of the contemporary tourist-historic city (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 1990). The way in which the urban environment 'itself becomes a commodity to be bought and sold not only to corporate interests but also to individual consumers' (Meethan, 1996: 323) is now a well documented phenomenon. Moreover, there is now a fuller appreciation of the 'active participation by the state' in the making and re-making of places as tourist objects (Urry, 1995: 192).

Set against a review of this backdrop of culture, commodification and conflict, the intention here is to explore how cultural tourism is transforming suburban centres beyond the better known icons in a popular tourist city and to highlight the active roles of state and local government in this process. The city is Sydney, capital city of the state of New South Wales and the largest and best-known Australian city. In quantitative terms, it is the most important gateway or destination for Australian tourism. The Rocks is the city's best known example of a commercially-shaped heritage-retail-arts precinct but the forces which remade it as a tourist destination are also shaping suburban strips and localities. One neighbourhood now being promoted as an alternative tourism destination is the inner city suburb of Newtown, capitalising on the area's reputation for bohemian lifestyle and multicultural living yet converging with a sustained process of gentrification to paradoxically expunge these qualities.

Culture, tourism and urban policy

Culture and places of cultural significance play an important role in the development of contemporary cities. They represent not only sources of identity and meaning for individuals and communities but now constitute an important economic resource for post-industrial cities. There is an increasing link between culture and the economy, as cultural resources become strategic tools for economic growth and development (Scott, 2000). These resources represent new opportunities for urban revitalisation and entrepreneurialism. As cities adopt more 'creative' approaches to urban development, culture is actively being tapped to enhance city image and amenity.

While hardly a new phenomenon (Ward and Gold, 1994), the marketing of city images, cultures and experiences has emerged as one of the most important mechanisms of city governance in achieving economic transformation and growth (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). The growth in the importance of culture in the urban economy has seen the conscious formulation of policies and projects that use cultural industries and initiatives as centerpieces for revitalisation and repositioning strategies (O'Connor, 1998).

Popular culture is increasingly incorporated into these cultural strategies and image-making; it is no longer all opera houses and concert halls. Street cultures, ethnic celebrations and community traditions are an alternative mode of city culture that is providing a new avenue for promotion. In this context multiculturalism is becoming part of the promotional strategies of places to create that critical point of intra- and international difference necessary to attract new rounds of production and consumption (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Leisure and tourism are also central to this new age. Marketing the experiences of 'other' places and people has become a preferred strategy for encouraging employment and economic revitalisation. Places of cultural significance can become a highly sought after commodity by both domestic and international tourists.

The purposeful creation of new landscapes of consumption usually requires the active participation, partnering, brokering or at least facilitation of governments. This is not a self-contained policy area and a range of bodies and partnerships is usually involved. Entrepreneurial governments have to sough to create attractions and places for tourists through a range of avenues including large-scale redevelopment projects, strategic new facilities, capturing hallmark events, marketing and promotion campaigns, rehabilitation of heritage quarters, and cultural tourism (Davidson and Maitland, 1999).

Distinct cultural precincts have emerged as key elements of many broader place-based strategies for economic development. Cultural districts refer to sites of both cultural production and consumption. These can be places where cultural industries cluster to share infrastructure and a creative milieu, or more contrived entertainment zones self-consciously catering to the 'tourist gaze' (Brooks and Kushner, 2001; Scott, 2000). Cultural districts are not a new phenomenon, and while not coterminous with the geography of creativity, they are an increasingly popular spatial if not functional mechanism for organising public or private sector-led investment (Gibson and Freestone, 2002).

Underlying most cultural district policies is the belief that culture can act as a tool for urban regeneration through the promotion of tourist-led economic growth (Brooks and Kushner, 2001). Government has played a range of roles from active intervention through priming

investment to coordination, in so doing becoming an active shaper and participant in reconstructing and re-historicising the cultural identity of places. At the same time, policy is not autonomous, and efforts to revitalise old urban spaces are frequently intertwined in some way with broader market forces of residential revitalisation or gentrification (Smith, 1996).

Conflict and inauthenticity

The cultural appropriation of places through image-making and urban revitalisation strategies represents an area of conflict and contestation within the built environment. Tensions may arise between the use of culture for economic regeneration rather than for community expression (Bianchini, 1993). In the tourism sector, conflicts can surface between the local community, tourists, business and the government.

Contested notions of culture emerge in the representations of people and places projected by image-makers. Selective image-making in assembling places for tourism consumption has implications for local community stakeholding and cultural authenticity. 'Authenticity' itself is an elusive construct. Here its meaning is informed by the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity which responds to the homogenizing forces of economic globalization to value cultural diversity, multidimensional heritage, and an understanding based on careful research and sensitivity to different and often conflicting values. New meanings of place can be created that may directly contrast with the richness of collective memory. These images can also represent the domination of one group over another through the inclusion or exclusion of certain images (Zukin, 1995).

The construction of places for cultural tourism can have controversial cultural, social and spatial implications. As places evolve to meet the needs of consumers, culture and heritage are redefined as commodities that can be bought and sold. Whole environments can be restructured by development projects. If the urban landscape is taken to represent a storehouse of social memory (Hayden, 1995), then these changes to the fabric will affect the cultural meanings of these places.

In redeveloping places to make them more attractive for tourist consumption, seemingly 'undesirable' elements of places are removed and the fabric of the urban environment is 'enhanced'. Complementary marketing campaigns attempt to remould perceptions of the area. Promotion of places of enhanced cultural significance can present selective images of people and views to make a locality more attractive for consumption. 'Official' constructions of identity have the power to exclude elements considered undesirable or irrelevant for place marketing purposes.

Urban regeneration strategies which promote cultural attractions for tourism and other leisure activities create distinct landscapes of consumption within the city that are separated from the surrounding built environment. The proliferation of places centered on consuming has the effect of segregating landscapes due to the nature of consumption itself. Sack (1992) asserts that places of consumption emphasise only those activities directly related to the purchase and use of commodities or the consumption of vistas and experiences. This can sever the connection with surrounding environs as these places are concerned with individual gratification and placing the consumer at the central focus of the activity. Extending MacCannell's (1976) notion of 'staged authenticity', Judd (1999: 53) asserts that:

> *Tourist bubbles create islands of affluence that are sharply differentiated and segregated from the surrounding urban landscape … they are places of pure consumption for people who are more affluent than those living in the surrounding community.*

Tourist consumption is a place-creating and place-altering act. It is an economic activity that shapes the use, location and distribution of resources. The production and expansion of tourist spaces has consequences for the built environment, and so the promotion of certain images and the very act of consuming places can impact on the authenticity of environments. A paradox is that the commodification of culture often results in the heterogeneity of the city being diminished (Hubbard, 1998).

Tourism in Sydney

The promotion of tourism for Sydney's economic well-being coincides with broader strategies over the last decade by the State Government, City of Sydney Council and private interests to entrench Sydney's position as an financial, cultural and leisure city of global significance. Tourism certainly plays an increasingly important role in the growth of Sydney and Australia's economy, despite the periodic setbacks arising from regional economic downturns, global terrorist fears, and, most recently, viral pandemics. It injects in the order of $13 billion annually into Sydney's economy (Dennis, 2000).

Local, State and the Australian Government are involved in the development and promotion of the tourist sector. Sectoral strategies, action plans and advertising campaigns form elements of choreographed economic development policies intended to encourage tourism expenditure. Places of cultural significance and cultural products offering distinctive and unique 'experiences' are an increasingly important part of these campaigns. The marketing rationale is sound, with cultural tourists sending more money per visit than other tourists (Foo and Rossetto, 1998).

Over half of all international tourists to Australia visit Sydney. The Harbour, the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House continue to enjoy iconic status in the international promotion of Sydney. Other cultural attractions target overseas and domestic visitors, including art galleries, museums, libraries, animal and marine parks. For both markets, culture and consumption are intertwined and tourism expenditure is drawn to distinctive cultural facilities, attractions and districts contrived to offer an 'authentic' Sydney experience.

Nestled as part of a larger cultural-leisure precinct incorporating Circular Quay and the Sydney Opera House along the harbourfront of the central city, The Rocks is Sydney's textbook example of a commodified urban heritage precinct in the new cultural economy era (Freestone, 1993). The area has experienced a complex layered history as Sydney has developed from a convict settlement to a major commercial hub in the Asia-Pacific region. It is a site of significance for indigenous Australians, the place where white settlement began, and has been home to convicts, workers and merchants as well as the rise and fall of maritime industry and associated commercial functions.

The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (formerly the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority) as main land-owner and development consent authority has been able to control the way in which the area's history is interpreted, marketed and consumed. When community and union protest prevented comprehensive redevelopment into high rise tower blocks in the early 1970s, the Authority was forced to ameliorate its renewal mentality to prioritise conservation alongside the redevelopment of selected sites. Many buildings of historical significance were restored, destined to be recycled as shops and restaurants as the historical cultural appeal of the area was more widely appreciated. Tourism has taken a bigger than anticipated role in the economic success of the Rocks and over the last three decades the area has cemented itself as one of Sydney's top international and domestic tourist destinations.

But the historical appreciation has been selective. Preservation strategies and marketing campaigns have focused on the colonial era thereby conveying a rather one-dimensional sense of the past (Bennett, 1993; Morgan, 1991). It conveys a sanitised version of 19th century settlement that rarely intersects with other competing narratives – Aboriginal, industrial and working class. The struggle for the Rocks to be preserved from state government bulldozers is also significantly underplayed. Sant and Waitt (2000) argue that the version of history presented by the Authority is Eurocentric and at odds with academic histories and local stories. The slogans used to distil the Rocks experience have not strayed far from its status as 'birthplace of a nation' and the 'colonial town in a contemporary city'.

The adaptive reuse of historical buildings for uses which they were not intended (notably restaurants and shopping arcades) is best practice in conservation circles, but in the absence of any interpretive aids it can obscure any meaningful historical understanding of those buildings. The heritage buildings and token cobblestone lanes provide the mere backdrop for a range of tourist shopping, entertainment and dining

opportunities in an area that lacks a significant residential population. Duty free stores, souvenir shops, tourist information centres, restaurants and hotels predominate. Name Australian retailers like RM Williams and Ken Done are prominent. More recently the main commercial axis on George Street has become home to stores stocking European fashion such as Louis Vuitton, Prada and Gucci for the 'well-heeled' visitor.

In a festival-like atmosphere of consumption, the layered and contested history of the Rocks back to pre-European times is seemingly forgotten. History and heritage are subsidiary to the more important activities of shopping and dining. Heritage as a resource for social meaning is eclipsed by its role as a resource for economic growth.

Cultural tourism in the suburbs

Heritage and multiculturalism are being used to create new cultural tourist attractions. The market demands it - 'the limits of tourism consumption seem unreachable' (Fainstein and Judd, 1999: 15) – and there are only so many trips that can be made to the Rocks. Following on from the exposure of Sydney raised by the 2000 Olympic Games, the state agency Tourism NSW aims to expand the tourism market considerably. In a search for new tourist settings, recent domestic and international campaigns have focused on the more diverse cultural landscapes, experiences and districts of Sydney (Murphy and Watson, 2002; Tourism NSW, 2000).

Cultural experiences were the focus of an international campaign launched in the United States in 1997 which offered package tours of the cultural landscapes of Sydney and New South Wales, but the major efforts have been devoted to the Australian tourism market. The 'Experience It' marketing strategy aims to develop local areas popular with residents but largely untapped by the tourist market, especially weekend tourists from other Australian cities like Brisbane and Melbourne (Tourism NSW, 2000).

The most recent domestic campaign 'Sydney: Beneath the Surface' focused on the promotion of undiscovered cultural precincts where the visitor can 'live like the locals'. A 24-page booklet launched in June 2001 focused on an inner ring of gentrifying suburbs beyond the central city including Leichhardt, Balmain, Glebe, Paddington, Darlinghurst, Kings Cross and Woolloomooloo as alternative tourist destinations. Similar campaigns have targeted other retail centres like Double Bay, Mosman, the 'concentrated chic' of Parramatta, and Cabramatta, centre of Sydney's Vietnamese community and 'Sydney's day trip to South East Asia' (Lipari, 1999; Tourism NSW, 2002).

Difference and ethnicity represent key themes within these attractions as a way to provide a set of distinct tourism experiences within Sydney. Multiculturalism is celebrated as it provides an opportunity for tourists to literally taste different cultures within the city. Places are defined as distinctly ethnic - Italians in Leichhardt, Vietnamese in Cabramatta as well as the Spanish and Chinese Quarters within the city. This ethnicity is promoted to provide new images of places and to boost the local economy. Reimagined as 'culinary cultural districts', they become sites of consumption for the city's residents and the domestic tourist market (Gibson and Freestone, 2002).

In addition difference is caricatured in other inner suburbs - alternative living in Newtown and Glebe; gay and lesbian lifestyles in Darlinghurst and Paddington. Such cultural attributes, both real and imagined, have become the key to selling unique Sydney experiences, although gentrification has uniformly paved the way for the new tourist frontier in the inner suburbs (Forster, 1999). The image is cosmopolitan and multicultural but inevitably shallow, with the communication and appreciation of cultural diversity and history rarely extending past the main commercial facades. The premier tourist activity is shopping and cultural precincts within the city are marketed primarily as places to shop, eat and be entertained. Newtown – an unlikely tourist destination two decades ago – now finds itself represented in these terms.

Newtown as an emerging cultural precinct

Newtown, about five kilometres southwest of the Sydney central business district, is a typical inner suburb with a cyclical social history whose essential character was forged as a working class community

through the 20th century. The main commercial precinct along King Street and the fork into Enmore Road has been a significant activity centre since the nineteenth century. The convergence of roads, trainlines, bus services (and at one time streetcars) underlined its development as an important ribbon retail strip. By the late 1800s the surrounding suburb of Newtown had a mixed population of wealthy businessmen and tradesmen. King Street retailers came from diverse ethnic backgrounds - Italian shopkeepers, German tradesmen, and a large Jewish community who had jewellery and furniture shops (Meader, Cashman and Carolan, 1994).

Through successive waves of migration and social change, Newtown emerged as a place for a range of ethnic and socio-economic groups. After the second world war, attracted by cheap housing costs, immigrants from Europe, the Middle East, Vietnam in the 1970s, and the Pacific Islands in the 1980s left their mark on the urban fabric of the commercial precinct and surrounding residential area (Marrickville Council, 1999). This diversity was expressed in the shops and cafes which sprang up to serve the different communities.

Close to the city and major institutions like the University and hospitals, with good public transport access, and a solid medium-density housing stock, 'untrendy' Newtown began to change in the 1970s. The low rents of the rundown terrace houses close to Sydney University attracted migratory populations of students, artists and musicians. A more upmarket shift began in the 1980s in a second ripple of gentrification in Sydney following the transformation of more favoured precincts closer to the city centre like Paddington. Rents and house prices rose. The housing stock was renovated and new infill developments solidified the change in social character as middle class professionals moved in.

Today, Newtown remains a mixed community with a population that is ethnically and culturally diverse. There are still ties to the Greek and Portuguese communities who settled there in the 1940s and 1950s. There is a further mix of students, artists, musicians and alternative lifestyles, including gays and lesbians. This heterogeneous character really crystallised by the late 1980s and Newtown's status as a place of subcultures was reflected in a quirky retail mix, conversions of warehouses to residences, and growing population of creative home-based professionals. All the while, however, and in concert with most of inner Sydney, property prices and commercial rents were inexorably rising and from the 1990s Newtown began losing its tag as an affordable suburb. Gentrification, the residential bidding process which only the affluent win, emerged as a strong countervailing force and the character of the 'new' Newtown began to diverge from that of nearby areas (Murphy and Watson, 1997).

Yet by then the bohemian reputation and ethnic diversity that developed from its ethnic and social mix became a saleable commodity for creating a market for cultural tourism. The State Government and the local Marrickville Council seized and sought to capitalise upon these changes. The Council employed a Mainstreet Coordinator and a Cultural Development officer dedicated solely to the development of Newtown as a cultural precinct. Even the Federal Government has played a role. The development of Newtown and other areas inner of Sydney as tourist destinations has been supported by a grant to Growing Regional Opportunities for Work (GROW) Employment Council in 1999. This facilitated a major study, *Discover Sydney's Inner West* published in April 2001. Several local government areas were targeted, including Marrickville. The intention was to relate the tourism potential of these areas with long term employment opportunities. Key cultural attractions were identified including ethnic diversity, multiculturalism, heritage, and alternative lifestyles (Grennan, 2001; Sydney Scenes, 2001b).

In the last few years Tourism NSW in conjunction with the local community has developed a number of promotional campaigns based on Newtown's mix of subcultures. Tourism NSW provided the Newtown Mainstreet Committee with a sizeable grant to promote King Street as a state tourist destination. The money was spent on devising and distributing 80,000 copies of the *Newtown Map Guide* as part of a broader Newtown Tourism Plan complete with dazzling marketing blurb:

> *Like most major cities, Sydney has its Chinatown, its Little Italy and its Spanish Quarter. Newtown is its Everything Else. Eclectic Shopping, round the clock street*

> *life, and a sense of neighbour-liness has attracted strong Greek, Lebanese, Portuguese and Vietnamese communities. In turn they've brought a vibrant cosmopolitan-ness that's irresistible to anyone intent on spending energy just being themselves but with the time to learn about others. Attend a Greek Orthodox Church, stamp up a storm in a flamenco lesson, grind away your miseries in a belly dancing studio, explore your inner self at a Buddhist study group, broaden your horizons at an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art gallery, pick up some leading edge flair for your home at New in Town, take a side trip to the creative third world at Noo, Noo Tribal Gifts, summon the luck of the gods with candles and incense from Astra Collections, have a good old Aussie Flutter at the TAB, and the sleep it all off at the affable and affordable Australian Sunrise Lodge. You'll wake up wanting to do it all over again* (Tourism NSW et al, 1999).

The recent domestic campaign *Sydney: beneath the surface* caricatured Newtown as 'colourful, eclectic and endlessly fascinating':

> *Conversations start easily in Newtown and if you've never been there, then make the effort, because it's decidedly unusual and very bohemian! ... a stroll up King Street shows an extraordinary array of fascinating shops and cafes, retro stores, alternative eateries, avant-garde galleries and theatres. Any one of a dozen cuisines is available, or see genuine retro transformed into a new decorator spin … Bubbling beneath the surface of Newtown is a diverse and energetic streetlife with an intriguing mix of old and new, young and edgy, local and foreign … You'll find everyone very friendly and interested in where you come from. By the time you are ready to leave, you'll probably have several new addresses to add to your email list* (Tourism Sydney, 2002).

Based originally on a Canadian initiative to revive the flagging fortunes of traditional main streets in regional areas through a mix of heritage, urban design and business entrepreneurialism, the Mainstreet program in New South Wales has evolved into a standard policy formula for both country and suburban centres under the aegis of the NSW Department of State and Regional Development. The role of Marrickville's Mainstreet officer is to promote King Street and Enmore Road. The coordinator uses major projects to encourage the growth of Newtown as a business and tourist destination. *Feastability* was the first major event, an annual food and wine festival that has been running now for eight years. *Edge City* is a more recent parade of gothic, fetish and industrial fashion. The *Walking Street Art Project* is another cultural promotion combining art installations, shopping and heritage walking tours.

Marrickville Council's Cultural Development Officer is directly involved in the development and promotion of Newtown as a cultural precinct for seven theatres, including the Seymour Centre complex near Sydney University, the Enmore Theatre which specialises in cult rock and pop acts (the Rolling Stones played one of their boutique concerts here as part of their 2002 World Tour), and the smaller capacity Sidetrack Theatre. The local authority has received funding from the Australia Council, the Federal Government's main arts funding body, for a number of initiatives that will enhance the role of these theatres. Part of the grant is to be used for the development of a cooperative marketing campaign between the theatres and the restaurants in the area and a booking kiosk for theatres and restaurants is to be constructed on King Street to facilitate coordination and encourage greater visitation.

Marrickville Council sees tourism as an opportunity for long term employment growth so as to be 'equipped to address major social and economic issues facing us in the future' (*Newtown Times*, 1999: 4). Tourism can celebrate the diversity of the area and instil civic pride as well as boosting the local economy (Cotter, 1998). A detailed 2001 study into cultural tourism opportunities concluded there was scope for significant economic development in Newtown. The tourist market could be

expanded by the development of more specific packages and special events building on the key themes and experiences of the area. These included the establishment of cultural trails, expansion of the food experience, development of a heritage experience, and target marketing to gays and lesbians (Sydney Scenes, 2001a).

The coordinated entrepreneurial initiatives of local and state government are aimed at promoting local economic growth and increase visitor spending. Cultural assets are used to differentiate King Street in Newtown from other competing commercial precincts. Promotional campaigns, festivals and public art are being used to create a vibrant image that is a key Sydney experience. These campaigns sell culture to potential visitors. The shops, restaurants, street life and people form part of a product that is offered to consumers. But within these promotions, the culture of place is effectively simplified to what can be bought, eaten or seen. Newtown becomes a one stop culture shop where you can buy African tribal wares, Australian indigenous art, belly dancing lessons, and gothic fashion as well as sample a dozen different cuisines.

Newtown as a victim of success

While culture has become a commodity, celebrated and manipulated to encourage greater consumption, the real story(ies) of Newtown and the lives of the community are not part of the celebration. Selected lifestyles are offered up as a spectacle. Within Newtown there remains an alternative side that is not part of the marketing campaigns: signs of continuing poverty and homelessness amid the affluence. There have been efforts to remove undesirable elements to ensure King Street remains attractive to visitors. Local shopkeepers have organised community meetings to deal with the impact of street begging on Newtown's reputation (Wallace, 1999).

The bigger irony is that Newtown is distinctly less diverse (and politically more conservative) than is was a decade ago. Census statistics reveal an inexorable increase in the socio-economic status and a decline in cultural diversity. The number of people employed in trades and unskilled jobs has steadily declined, while the proportion with university qualifications has increased by almost eighty per cent. Over the last ten years the number of people born in non-English speaking countries has also decreased (Marrickville Council, 1998).

Along King Street this is represented in a subtly changing nature of the retailers who are catering to a more affluent population. First, the cultural authenticity of the experience has been diminished, as exemplified in King Street's status as a leading Sydney 'eat street'. It is now one of the major clusters of Thai restaurants in Sydney (Bridge and Dowling, 2001), yet the overall impression is of an 'aesthetisisation of cultural difference that emphasises the spectacular and visual …. quite removed from the evolving and diverse experience of Thai cuisine in Thailand and from any semblance of contemporary Thai life' (Embersic and Connell, 2002: 286). Moreover, even the food has been domesticated to a more generic if not bland Asian-Australian style.

Second, the very diversity of shops and people celebrated in the marketing campaigns is actually decreasing. The shops at the northern end of King Street that once catered for a diverse population have steadily been replaced by a multitude of restaurants and shops not dissimilar to those found in a suburban retail malls. The more specialised, eccentric and traditional community shops are being pushed further south into the less trendy end of King Street and Enmore Road where the rents are still somewhat cheaper – or out of the district altogether. Businesses which helped make Newtown's name as a place for subcultures can no longer survive in a more cut-throat, professional economic climate just as their traditional customer base can no longer afford to live locally.

Changing community and visitor consumption patterns have the ability to change the nature of a place. For Newtown the homogenising effect of residential and retail gentrification is already apparent as the middle class 'gaze' shapes the visual and functional character of the place. Within promotional texts, Newtown is constructed as an 'authentic' tourist destination, where visitors can experience the round-the-clock street life of King Street. This image making process has helped construct a romanticised and somewhat sanitised version of Newtown. 'Diversity' and 'bohemia' are

carefully packaged to be different but not so much as to harbour any truly unconventional behaviour. And the experiences offered do not attempt to provide any deeper understanding of the people or forces that have shaped the development of the place.

Like the better known Rocks beneath the Sydney Harbour Bridge, suburban King Street is already metamorphosing toward a 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell, 1976) and the early 1990s protests against the 'yuppification' of the suburb are but a distant memory (Carroll and Connell, 2000). The gentrification of the housing stock has had implications for the retail mix of the area, as does the continued promotion of the main retail strip as a tourist destination. And the place that everyone comes to see now, however meaningful and appealing as a cultural experience, is increasingly distant from the place that once was.

Conclusion

The commodification forces of tourism are relentless and exemplified globally (Judd and Fainstein, 1999). Here we have picked up on yet another expression where local and central government have joined forces to commercialise culture in order to promote tourism opportunities and economic growth.

The cultural landscapes of Sydney are now sold as places of leisure. Central to this image is the construction of these places as centres of consumption. In an attempt to provide new markets for tourism, places of cultural significance have been re-engineered as experiences for visitors to enjoy. Yet the consumption patterns of tourists themselves possess the ability to shape and change the nature of places firstly in attempts to make the places more attractive to tourists and secondly as the place itself adapts to meets the needs of tourists.

Government tourism and marketing campaigns have been criticised in the past for showing select images of Sydney namely the Harbour, the beaches and the Opera House (Murphy and Watson 1997; Sant and Waitt, 2000). These gave very little indication of the suburbs behind the Harbour and the diverse range of people who lived there. However the expansion of images to include not just the icons but the people and their cultures in attempts to broaden the tourism market are entrenching a new set of clichés. The culture of the city is limited to that which can be bought, tasted and packaged. As Embersic and Connell (2002) observe in relation to the homogenisation of ethnic restaurants, cultural experiences are inexorably being reconstructed as economic experiences.

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* ***Renee Wirth*** *is with the Housing Policy Section of PlanningNSW and completed her planning studies at the University of New South Wales in 2002.* ***Robert Freestone*** *is Head of the Planning and Urban Development Program at the University of New South Wales and is currently President of the International Planning History Society.*