

Inside the Triangle: Images of a Capital

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is on understanding the tourist experience of Canberra, Australia's capital city, particularly within its main parliamentary precinct. This precinct possesses both political and touristic significance, as it encompasses a set of major national institutions amongst which are eight of the city's ten most visited sites. The tourist experience is theorised through a phenomenological approach that examined 598 tourist images taken within the precinct, and the response of four focus groups to those images.

The rationale for this approach is that photography is the medium through which most tourists' document and report their experiences to others, hence understanding these images helps to understand the nature of the tourist experience. Further, through photographs we engage vicariously with others' experiences – to reflect on our own experience in the same destination or to imaginatively engage in the possibilities for experience.

The chapter concludes with a phenomenological discussion that identifies the essential qualities of the experience and some associated theoretical implications.

THE BUSH CAPITAL

Canberra is a 'new' capital, purpose-built to be the seat of national government and centre of administrative and diplomatic activity. The need for a national capital arose from the proclamation of the Constitution Act of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, which brought together the hitherto six independent English colonies into one federated state. Section 125 of the Constitution prescribed that the capital must be located within the state of New South Wales (NSW) but at least 100 miles from its capital, Sydney. This provision was intended to assuage sensitivities arising from rivalry between the colonies of Victoria and NSW and constrain the potential influence of Sydney.

The search for a site for the capital lasted seven years (Drinkwater, 1998). Following the Seat of Government Acceptance Act (1909) and the ceding of 2368 square kilometres of land (300 km from Sydney) to the Commonwealth Government by the state of NSW, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) was declared on 1 January 1911. An international design competition was then launched. The winner was Chicago architect Walter Burley Griffin, with a design formulated in conjunction with his wife, Marion Mahony Griffin.

Griffin had worked in the architectural practice of the celebrated Frank Lloyd Wright and the design was influenced by the work of Wright and his Prairie School, itself a product of the City Beautiful and Garden City movements (see Howard and Thomas, 1985). The Griffins' plan for Canberra incorporated substantial greenbelts surrounding areas of settlement, wide boulevards, monumental public buildings, formal parks and water features.

The design took particular account of the topography. Central to the vision was a triangle formed by imaginary lines joining the three small mountains (Mt Ainslie, Black Mountain and Red Hill) whose contours give shape to the shallow valley in which the core of the city is now located. The creation of a lake within the triangle, formed by damming the Molonglo River, completed the Griffins' physical blueprint.

Inside the triangle, national buildings were grouped to the south of the lake (now called the *Parliamentary Triangle*) and municipal buildings to the north, with residential suburbs on both sides. While the Griffins made changes to their design, the original blueprint has largely been followed to the present.

CONTEMPORARY CANBERRA

Australians, and indeed many international visitors, are somewhat ambivalent about Canberra. While being acknowledged as 'interesting', 'well organized', and with 'lots to see and do', it has also been described as 'soulless', 'confusing', and 'boring'. Travel writer Bill Bryson (2000) encapsulates a popular view of the capital: 'It's a very strange city, in that it's not a city at all, but rather an extremely large park with a city hidden in it. It's all trees and lawn and hedges and big ornamental lake...' (p.91). Arguably, such dim views have diminished as Canberra has grown and diversified its economy and social make-up. It now possesses one of the highest standards of living in Australia and is above the national average on most socioeconomic indicators (www.act.gov.au). The much maligned urban and cultural life has evolved with the growth and diversity of the population. The capital now boasts over 300 dining venues, a vibrant entertainment scene and a regular calendar of festivals and special events (www.capitalcitytourism.com). Canberra receives over 3.5 million visitors annually, two-thirds of whom are domestic tourists (Ritchie and Dickson, 2007).

THE TOURIST IMAGE

For many tourists, the camera as an accoutrement, and photography as an act, is central to their experience. The tourist's acquisitiveness for experience is mirrored by the desire to capture and take possession of that experience. Sontag (1977, p. 3) notes that 'to collect photographs is to collect the world'. Moreover, photographs offer 'indisputable evidence that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had...they document sequences of consumption carried on outside the view of family, friends neighbours' (Sontag, 1977, p.9).

While recording or collecting experience is one aspect of tourist photography, Sontag (1977) also points to a more phenomenological dimension. Photography records but also shapes experience. Seeking opportunities for the 'shot' changes the nature of the

encounter – a change from the visual, aural and visceral toward a more technically mediated encounter. Sontag further suggests that doing something (a type of *working* at experience) also ‘appeases the anxiety which the work-driven feel about not working when they are on vacation and supposed to be having fun’ (p10).

A counter position to Sontag’s might rest in notions of photography as playful of itself. Rather than viewing the tourist experience as being a captive of the image seeker, the photographic act might be central to the playful experience of being a tourist. For example, the shifts in space and consciousness proposed by Sontag are evident in many of the influential writings on play theory – see Huizinga (1955), Bateson (1973), and Schutz (1975).

Bourdieu (1990) approaches photography from a structuralist perspective yet within his narrative vestiges of both Sontag’s perspective and that of play theory resonate. For Bourdieu (1990), the holiday provides the opportunity to broaden the range of photographic possibilities. Photography remains a social process of documentation yet the ‘touristic attitude’ sharpens our attention to both the world around us – the everyday lives of others become objects of our attention – and to the monuments, cultural sites and landscapes that symbolise the exoticism or extraordinariness of the touristic experience. However, for Bourdieu, the ‘touristic attitude’ is constrained by the expectations that attend tourist photography. The choice of what one must photograph, he argues, is informed by the aesthetic of the postcard (and presumably other visual media) and to this extent ‘doing’ photography becomes more extrinsically focused, and somewhat deterministic.

The notion of the influence of the ‘received image’ is fundamental to the ideas of Markwick (2001), who argues that postcards are not insignificant ephemera but one of the ‘central motivation structures of the tourism process’ (p.422). While these images may be decontextualised—of an experience, a place and its social milieu—they make the invisible, visible ‘the unnoticed noticed, the complex simple, and the simple complex’ (p. 420). It is the viewer who gives context, who reifies these symbols into a culturally formed picture of reality, which is then sought by the tourist.

Jenkins’ (2003) ‘circle of representation’ (after Urry et al, 1990) links theoretically to both Bourdieu’s (1990) and Markwick’s (2001) positions on the mediated reproduction of imagery. According to Jenkins (2003), images of a destination which are collectively projected by the mass media both inform the decision to travel and impact upon decision-making within the destination. Consequently, visitors become unwitting collaborators in this mediated circle by capturing similar images and projecting their personal representations back to others, ‘which begins the cycle again’ (Jenkins, 2003, p. 308).

It is clear that the production of images for both the personal representation *of* experience, and the potential *for* experience, is an important contemporary means by which a destination is indirectly experienced and interpreted, hence the choice of tourists’ photos as a means of interpreting the experience of Canberra.

AN APPROACH TO THE INTERPRETATION OF IMAGES

Photographs by their very nature reflect experience - of the image maker (the photographer), of the image observer, and oftentimes the interaction between image maker, subject and observer. This interplay is touched upon by Barthes (1984, p. 4) quoting what Lacan calls the *Tuche*, 'the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression'.

Experience is at the core of photography (Sontag, 1977; Markwell, 1997; Markwick, 2001). For the interpreters of tourist photography, a central question is how to understand the nature of the tourist experience through the projected images? To understand an assemblage of images inevitably involves some form of classification, grouping or filtering process to bring 'order' to a collection. Albers and James (1988) provide a workable analytical framework in their study of tourist postcards. Cohen (1993), Markwell (1997) and Jenkins (2003) similarly provide methodological structures from different philosophical perspectives. The latter two authors in particular acknowledge the subjectivities of classification and explicitly recognise that any form of understanding sought through an image is inevitably the result of a hermeneutic process. In this tradition, Edwards (2008) adopted a five stage semiotic analysis of tourist images of Sydney and used a series of questions to shape her classification and analytical processes. This process was informed by both the images and a limited interpretation provided by the individual photographers.

In developing our approach to examining the 'image projected' experience of Canberra, we have taken the phenomenological perspective foreshadowed by Barthes (1984). Barthes implicitly acknowledges the phenomenological approach of Husserl (1973) when he proposes to take himself as the mediator for all Photography. 'Starting from a few personal impulses, I would try to formulate the fundamental feature, the universal without which there would be no Photography' (1984, pp.8-9.) Seeking out the fundamental feature (s) or the essences of the tourist experience of Canberra is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

METHODOLOGY

A Phenomenological Approach

In this study we have adopted an approach grounded in hermeneutic (or interpretive) phenomenology. Husserl (1973) argued that to understand the nature of experience we needed to engage in *zu den sachen* – which is variously interpreted as 'To the things themselves' (Spiegelberg, 1982: 109) or the more contemporary interpretation, 'Let's get down to what matters' (Van Manen, 1990:184). Husserl believed that to understand reality one had to examine reality itself. The logical corollary is that the source of 'data' for all phenomenological studies is found in the experience of individuals.

Van Manen (1990:36) argues that the 'aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence - in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful'. Van Manen's (1990) methodological framework for phenomenological

research and his practices for the phenomenological analysis of text (see Hayllar & Griffin, 2005; Griffin & Hayllar, 2006), have guided the current investigation.

In this study there are four 'layers' of text. The first is the received image. The experience presented through an image has an embedded text or story, viz; 'this is my experience of...'. The second layer is that produced by others in response to these images. The question then becomes; how do we experience and interpret the experience of others through their images? The third layer is concerned with responses gathered through the interactions of others experiencing the images. The final layer of text is the prior experience of Canberra that each respondent knowingly and unknowingly draws upon within the interpretive process.

The Research Question

In accord with the methodology of Van Manen (1990) adopted for this study, data collection and analysis were guided by the overall phenomenological question: "What is the essence of the visitor experience to Canberra?" Embedded within this principal question was an implicit 'secondary question' around the experience of a capital. That is, is there a particularity, a unique quality, a special significance, or different forms of conscious and unconscious engagement that attend the experience of a visit to a capital city?

The Study

Stage 1

The objective of the overall study was to understand the spatial behaviour of tourists visiting Canberra. In order to capture tourist behaviour patterns contemporaneously with their experience, two principal forms of data collection were used: Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking (Edwards, Dickson, Griffin & Hayllar, 2009); and, central to this chapter, the collection of digital images.

Thirty-two study participants were recruited at three Canberra locations - two hotels and a youth hostel. Participants were issued with a GPS tracking device and a digital camera, and were asked to use the cameras throughout the day as they would their own. At the end of each day, data from the GPS devices were downloaded onto *Google Earth*, and the digital images archived to a laptop. Approximately 1100 images of Canberra were collected through this process. Having provided the raw data, this group took no further part in the study.

Stage 2

The second stage involved interpreting the images utilizing four focus groups. Before proceeding to this stage, the research team culled the images to eliminate those with obvious technical problems such as poor light or focus. The images were next grouped into five distinct sets based on a broad content analysis. The purpose of this was to focus on aspects of the visit which were related to the 'capital' - those images taken around the parliamentary precinct which formed approximately 50% of the total number. The initial classification was completed by one member of the team and then reviewed by the team as a whole, which led to images being moved and regrouped into the final analytical set.

In this grouping process, no images were removed from the overall collection, even when multiples of similar images existed; nor was the order of the images changed.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Four focus groups were conducted from a pool of 15 participants who responded to a request for participation in the study. The focus groups took place at the University of Technology, Sydney and were spread over a two week period in late 2008. Participants were aged between 24 and 54, two-thirds were women, and three were international visitors currently living in Sydney.

Each group viewed 598 images which were projected onto a large screen. Participants were asked to comment upon their experience of Canberra as reflected through the images, which were displayed for approximately 4-5 seconds each in the initial pass. As the discussion unfolded, images were viewed again as required. The ensuing group discussion was digitally recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Following the focus groups, each of the transcribed scripts was manually coded. In accord with Van Manen (1990) and Crotty (1996), the first 'level' of analysis was thematic. Definitions for each theme were established as the transcripts were worked. These were reviewed and modified by the research team as appropriate. Categories, or sub-themes, were then developed to capture the 'finer grain' of the overall transcript. Following the thematic analysis, a textual description (Moustakas, 1994) was prepared, which provided an experiential overview of the images and the collective response of the group. From this point, the analysis moved from description to interpretation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis

Theme development inevitably involves data reduction - the thematic concept is sifted, disengaged and 'manufactured' from the text. However, the developed themes and the discussion unfolding from them are not mutually exclusive but rather interpretive mechanisms for better understanding the nature of the experience.

The definitions for each of the major themes and categories are outlined in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Theme 1: Architecture and Landscape

The theme of buildings and landscape is concerned with the overall visual impression created by the images. The images were strongly focused on the external as suggested by Stephen (13-17) who also noted *a focus on the grandeur of the buildings and these buildings seem to be concentrated along the parliamentary triangle...you sort of get the impression that they haven't gone for the human side of the experience*. Reflecting a commonly held view, David (522-523) felt that *the images reinforced the negative image... of Canberra*. He added, *you just always see the same concrete to reinforce the*

impression I had of Canberra. A city built to be a city. Mostly built for being a capital city (531-532). Marika suggests a more experience-based dimension, depicting Canberra as always sterile. It does not seem to have a soul (762-763), or as Stephen opines - just look at the buildings, the whole thing is very bland (248).

The overall negativity surrounding the public buildings has its exceptions. The post-modern National Museum of Australia with its indigenous inspired features was described as *stunning architecture,[a] gorgeous building (Marika: 736), a work of art (Victor: 15) and a fascinating building to look at (David: 64).*

The setting for these buildings is shaped by both the natural topography and the substantial intervention of landscape designers. The Griffins' image of parkland interspersed with public buildings has theoretical visual appeal but in practice the buildings appear 'isolated' from each other. In a sense they stand apart from the visitor – there is no connectivity. This dominance of design appears to create a city to be 'seen', rather than a city to be lived in.

This disconnect was noted by a number of respondents – *there weren't a lot of people in the photos [which] were often about objects rather than about people (Linda: 174-175), or nearly all empty (Marika: 729).*

INSERT PLATE 1 here: NATIONAL ART GALLERY

Taken together, there is an overwhelming sense that Canberra's institutional architecture presents a rather austere image of the city. The buildings appear as objects of representation rather than as vehicles for engagement with the nation's cultural and political history. This image is magnified by their dispersed locations. They are buildings set in a landscape that visitors drive to or past.

Theme 2: Symbols of Nationhood

National capitals are intrinsically and manifestly symbolic – national monuments, administrative centres, parliaments, museums, and significant historic sites. In combination these symbols create what Maitland and Ritchie (2008 pers. comm.) call a sense of 'capitalness'. Only a capital can assemble such a collection of national symbols. Similarly, only a capital can imbue such structures with symbolic and existential meaning.

In Theme 1, the discussion focused on the physical presence and location of the various buildings. The perspective presented was one of building as object. However, the fact that these buildings are also symbols created other layers of meaning for respondents. While Sandra (451-452) noted that *it is full of monuments, monumentalism*, the notion of buildings as symbols of power moves beyond the structures themselves. As Steve commented, *somehow all these images sort of create this sense of power (46) and I think of the buildings but then I think what is underneath them in terms of what is happening there or what has happened there (57-58).* Linda, in reflecting on the images of the parliament, talked of the *significance I guess of the building itself (95).* Michael, an

international respondent, commented that *they are isolated buildings that have a sense of power to them. The buildings are so dominant by themselves – nothing around it. It is a very strong symbol for me* (541-543).

Beyond the notion of power per se, the buildings were also seen as symbols of Australia – a means of ‘reading’ Australia. One international respondent suggested that *the monuments express the culture of the country. With the national monument you read something into it. You read something about the country* (David: 583-584). Another international respondent noted: *for me it was looking for something that was unique, something uniquely Australia. For me, that was Parliament House... the one with the flag* (Phoebe: 362-364). Indeed, the flags on significant public buildings were seen as important markers of place. For one younger respondent (Belinda), the flags created a sense of pride while for others they reinforced the ‘Australianness’ of the experience.

Some discussion also centred on the differences between old ‘organically developed’ capitals, such as London, and newer planned capitals such as Canberra, Brasilia and Washington DC. Wendy noted that newer planned capitals are created as places to exhibit the nation and in essence the capital itself becomes part of the exhibit – part of that which is presented. As such, the ‘capital’ as a holistic entity is seen to symbolise the nation as a whole. As one international respondent noted: *In Europe the buildings in the old capitals were built around the existing buildings...whereas Canberra, because it was a new capital, needed to create those symbols...*(Michael: 568 – 571)

INSERT PLATE 2: PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Overall, this theme highlights the important role that significant public buildings play in creating the experience of Canberra. While the architecture and physical presence of many of these structures are somewhat cold and atomistic, for many respondents there was an underlying presence of power and ‘capitalness’. As Phoebe reflected, *there is so much more than just the buildings* (428-429).

Theme 3: Collections

While the first two themes focused on respondents’ experiences of the physical manifestations of the images, this final theme is concerned with the presentation of cultural symbols through the ‘collections’ contained within the institutions. In the sense used here, the notion of the collection is broadened to take account of both the formal presentation of artefacts – such as those located within the National Museum of Australia – and the more informal ‘collections’ of ‘democratic symbols’ of the type found in Parliament House.

All of the most significant national buildings have collections as described above. However, the images were primarily focused around the Australian War Memorial and the two Parliament Houses. There were no internal images of the National Gallery, *Questacon*, the National Library or the High Court. Internal images from the National Museum of Australia were limited and quite specific, as were those from Old Parliament House.

INSERT PLATE 3: GARDEN OF AUSTRALIAN DREAMS

The response to these collections had both similarities and differences. At the War Memorial three distinct components of the collection were identified. The first were artefacts of war – primarily static displays of weaponry including tanks, aircraft and guns. David’s response to these displays was typical of the group: *the tanks and those other things do not have much of an impact upon me – they are just the tools of war.* (652-653). However, the second component, comprising exhibits focused on the human side of war, provided an experience that was more overtly affective. The dioramas of battlefield scenes were particularly evocative. As Michael noted: *in the War Memorial we saw a lot of images with soldiers in defeat, people absolutely devastated. There is a human dimension, a contrast between what is in the building and what is on the outside* (625-627). The final component of the collection is its commemorative aspects, such as the Roll of Honour which contains the name of every Australian soldier killed in overseas conflicts. These commemorative features evoked similar responses to exhibits portraying the human side of war.

INSERT PLATE 4: ROLL OF HONOUR

The National Museum of Australia is a contemporary museum that thematically seeks to explore the Australian landscape, nation and people. While the museum has a broad range of exhibits, the tourists’ images presented and interpreted are narrow in scope. Indeed, there are significantly more images of the striking (external) architecture of the building than the collection itself! As with the War Memorial, respondents identified a similar two aspects to the collection - those focusing on artefacts and those presenting more emotional/contemporary themes. Unlike the War Memorial, the impact here was not connected with loss but rather to specific aspects of the contemporary Australian ‘story’ – *things that people relate to and can see themselves in it...parts of their lives* (Stephen: 128-130).

In Old Parliament House there is a similar dualism – artefacts, and emotional/contemporary themes, with the difference between the two sometimes blurred. For example, the Prime Minister’s office chair, which might at first glance be passed off as an artefact, evoked a significant ‘emotional’ response. This exhibit was not simply a desk and chair, but rather a place of power where decisions influencing the course of the nation’s history unfolded. Here the collection, not its external structure, emerged as a symbol of nationhood.

INSERT PLATE 5: SEATS OF POWER – OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

In the context of the overall discussion, new Parliament House presents a more complex picture. Completed in 1988 and sitting astride Capital Hill, it dominates the skyline at the southern apex of the parliamentary triangle. Looking northward across the lake, new Parliament House, Old Parliament House and the War Memorial are in perfect alignment

along a four kilometre axis of open space and grand boulevard. This position gives Parliament House a unique physical and symbolic presence within the city.

While the text of respondents clearly demarcated their experience of the external character and internal collections of other public buildings, the distinction between the Parliament building, its symbolic role and its 'collection' are blurred. Notions of history, tradition, nationalism, democracy and the Australian narrative appear to be symbolically woven into their responses to Parliament House. Interestingly such aggregated symbolism is shared across both Australian residents and international respondents.

DISCUSSION

The experience of Canberra is one of contradiction and tension. There are notions of psychological 'distance' or even alienation from the city. There is a consistency in the focus group narratives of this distance. The city is seen to lack an essential spirit. With some notable exceptions, its public buildings are perceived as sterile and lacking in character. The images are focused on structures not human interactions. It is a place for the other, the polity and its minions, not the visitor.

However, this perception of distance is multi-faceted. Canberra's isolation from the two most populous and influential Australian cities – Sydney and Melbourne - and its development as a 'new' capital provide a unique socio-historical context to the visitors' experience. This is especially so with Australian respondents who see these images through a particular cultural lens. For Australians there is a type of latent antipathy toward the 'privilege' invested in Canberra, with its superior services, wide roads, manicured garden suburbs and sweeping mountain vistas. For international visitors, particularly those arriving by road, Canberra gives no clue of an imminent arrival, no grand gateway to a capital – the city, nestled in a shallow valley, almost unexpectedly emerges from the rural landscape. Ironically, and perhaps appropriately, it could be argued that Canberra is a metaphor for Australia itself - isolated, privileged and culturally remote from the contemporary world and *realpolitik*.

This notion of distance is also characterised in the collections. For many, these collections are externalised and arcane. While clearly part of the Australian national story, there is often a disjunction between the exhibit and the visitor's experience of it. However, when there is an affective relationship within the experience – where the exhibition narrative engages with emotion, such as in the War Memorial, this distance diminishes.

The above argument notwithstanding, there are contradictions to this distal notion of engagement. As noted, Parliament House has a particular character or 'presence', an almost *de jure* recognition of implicit power and historical significance. In this case, there is a match for visitors between the external representation and the internal experience of the building.

In considering these tensions and contradictions within the visitor experience, there are theoretical links between this and our earlier precinct work (see Hayllar & Griffin, 2005).

There we argued that precincts present visitors with opportunities for layered experiences. That is, a visitor may engage at a superficial level – in the case of Canberra by driving from one significant site or attraction to the other without leaving the car – or at deeper levels, through a visit to a site or exhibit with intense engagement. Arguably, the layers of Canberra are more difficult to penetrate. The dispersed nature of the buildings, their lack of connectivity and minimal external interpretation hamper experiences beyond the superficial. At the specific exhibit level, where interpretation actively facilitates experience, the experiential layer is more porous and allows meaningful engagement. Such engagement enhances the overall quality of the visitors' experience. As one international respondent remarked:

In Old Parliament House we played in a room where you could put on clothes and have photos taken. My father did that and that was good. It helped my understanding. I got to understand more about Australia (Phoebe: 388-392).

It is difficult to know whether Australia's national diffidence (or indifference) toward Canberra is based on its historical relationships with the city or whether other factors around landscapes, design and transport impact upon the experience. There are also questions around the response to Canberra by international visitors and how their experience might have been shaped by prior experience or knowledge of the city. Heidegger's (1962) theorizing presents at least a partial explanation. He maintained that the conceptualisation of an experience is always grounded in prior experience, what he called the fore-structure. In developing this position he argued that whenever something is interpreted, the 'interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 191-192).

The Experience of Canberra

To answer the phenomenological questions posed for this study requires an epistemological shift from the experiential structures discussed within the thematic analysis, toward the essential characteristics or 'essences' of experience 'inside the triangle'. In the phenomenological context, there are 'particular essences' (Spiegelberg, 1982), which are underpinning experiences, and a 'general essence' which is the cumulative structure of the particular. In our analysis, two particular essences emerged. The first is the notion of *detachment*. *Detachment* captures the arguments relating to psychological distance and is linked to the experience of Canberra in three ways: as a tourist destination; as a symbolic national entity; and as a place of national representation. The second essence is that of *engagement*. *Engagement* is the antithesis of *detachment* and is concerned with experiences that rise above the 'constraints' imposed by *detachment*. Engaged experiences are deeper, multi-layered, and possibly quite profound encounters which have at their core substantial affective dimensions.

In considering these essential qualities, it is likely that there is an ongoing temporal dimension to the visitor experience. As a visitor's encounter unfolds, barriers to experience will emerge (*detachment*) while at other times hitherto unrealized opportunities for *engagement* will surface. These essential characteristics are in a constant interplay and state of flux. It is this enduring dialectic, along what might be

considered an experiential continuum, which helps construct the experience of the capital.

The cumulative structure or general essence requires further hypothesizing. The following questions therefore arise: is there embedded within the visitor experience a phenomenon that links and flows through the experience? Is there an essence without which the experience (as understood by the respondents in this study) would cease to exist? In considering these questions, Maitland's and Ritchie's (2008) notion of *capitalness* emerged.

Capitalness captures the essential characteristic of the experience. *Capitalness* encapsulates the affective experience of Canberra. Only a capital can provide national symbols in a context charged with existential meaning. Only a capital can tell the national story. Only a capital can encapsulate the triumph (or decline) of the nation state and imbue it with meaning. *Capitalness* also has a cognitive dimension. Engaging with the collections of a capital leads to questions and debate around the significance, place and role of artefacts in shaping the national temper. In so doing, *capitalness* is cognitively experienced.

The experience of *capitalness*, as described, presupposes *engagement* as a necessary prerequisite for the experience. However, *capitalness* is also about *detachment*. Here the tension within the experiential continuum is played out. A capital is not only a repository for the national story, which imbues or confirms a sense of national identity that has meaning for the individual (and hence leads to *engagement*), but it is also where the defining symbols of the nation-state reside. These are inevitably symbols of power and authority which conspire to keep the individual at bay (*detachment*). The latter is about being the capital *of* Australia, while the former is about being the capital *for* Australians.

CONCLUSION

Photography is a means through which touristic 'experience' is both captured and conveyed (Sontag, 1977). In this chapter we set out to understand the nature of the tourist experience of Canberra through a phenomenological engagement with tourist images. Arising from the multiple layers of text developed from the interactions with these images, was the overwhelming sense that capitals, as sources of national identity and power, imbue experience with an essential quality unique to the capital experience.

However, the outcomes from the study raise a number of theoretical, methodological and practical questions. Theoretically, further consideration needs to be given to the qualitatively different experience of a visit to a modern purpose-built capital, and a visit to capitals that have been historically anointed as a result of their geographic, economic or strategic importance. Do we experience the more established, organic capitals in quite different ways? If so, how might this experience be understood and theorized? Or, is it in essence, the same 'experience'.

Methodologically, the veracity of the techniques used in this study needs further development. Do they adequately explicate the experience? What of the image makers

themselves? Would interactions with them create more meaningful textual layers? Would a larger sample reveal a more segmented experience or would the experience as captured course through each of these segments?

Finally, the findings from this study raise a number of practical issues and questions. At the micro level, the interpretation of the city through signage and way finding mechanisms is problematic. The modernist exteriors of most of the buildings and their disconnectedness from each another also make it difficult for the visitor 'see' the attraction. The reliance on the motor vehicle for movement between attractions suggests that more creative, perhaps satellite/GPS sourced, information delivery systems are needed. At the macro level, the data suggest that the marketing of the city could be more vigorously directed toward the city as the capital of Australia, rather than the city as a collection of symbolic national attractions. The intent here is to foster engagement with the idea of capitalness as fundamental to the visitor experience.

INSERT PLATE 6: OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

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Table 1: Major Themes

Major Themes	Definitions	Categories
ARCHITECTURE/LANDSCAPE	Comments related to specific architectural and other physical features of Canberra	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buildings• Landscape
SYMBOLS OF NATIONHOOD	Comments related to the representation of buildings as distinct symbols of nationhood and/or national identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Power• Culture
COLLECTIONS	Comments related to the 'collections' housed within public buildings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotion• Artefacts