Urban Tourist Precincts as Sites of Play

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Introduction

This chapter examines the urban tourism precinct as an organised space for playful forms of leisure in the city. We argue that these spaces create an environment for leisured interaction where both visitor and host engage as mutual actors in urban 'playgrounds'. The chapter commences with a conceptual overview of the urban tourism precinct. It then considers the notion of play through an analysis of selected seminal discourses. These discourses are linked to the precinct in the context of a play 'space' within the city using data gathered from two studies conducted in The Rocks and Darling Harbour precincts in Sydney, Australia (Hayllar and Griffin 2005, 2006). The chapter concludes with a discussion on the implications for the design and management of urban tourism precincts.

Tourists and the City

Urban environments have for many years been amongst the most significant of all tourist destinations. Considering this phenomenon in the historical context Karski (1990) notes:

> People with the means and inclination to do so have been drawn to towns and cities just to visit and experience a multiplicity of things to see and do. Pilgrims in the 14th century were urban tourists visiting cities like Canterbury. The historic Grand Tour of Europe, in the 18th and 19th centuries was essentially an urban experience

> for the rich, taking in more spectacular towns and cities, usually regional and national capitals. These were the melting pots of national culture, art, music, literature and of course magnificent architecture and urban design. It was the concentration, variety, and quality of these activities and attributes ... that created their attraction and put certain towns and cities on the tourism map of the day (Karski 1990: 15)

The attraction of cities as tourist destinations has continued into contemporary times. The centrality of cities to tourism is primarily due to their inherent scale, locational attributes and opportunities for diverse experiences (Law 1996). Indeed the intrinsic attributes of modern cities – large populations, important cultural infrastructure, significant accommodation stocks, and highly developed transport services such as airports and rail connections, make urban destinations a focal point for both tourist and commercial activity. The scale of cities also provides opportunities for different types of visitors who may be seeking quite diverse experiences; from the younger groups who are drawn to sites of intense consumption such as entertainment quarters or major sporting venues, through to older and perhaps better educated groups who might wish to engage with the cultural life and heritage of a city (Hayllar *et al* 2008).

Sites of Experience

While the city and its services provide the overlay for urban tourist activity, in most urban destinations tourist visitation tends to be spatially concentrated rather than dispersed. These points of concentration may include iconic sights, shopping areas,

landmark cultural institutions, or places of historical significance. However, where a number of attractions of similar or differing types aggregate alongside a range of tourism related services, these areas take on a particular spatial, cultural, social and economic identity – now commonly (but not universally) recognised as a tourist precinct. As Stevenson (2003: 73) observed:

> Cities divide into geographically discrete precincts which rarely conform to imposed administrative or political boundaries. Rather, they form around the activities of commerce, sociability, domesticity, and/or collective identity. The resulting precincts have a vitality and a 'look' that marks each as unique.

However, these spaces are not just for visitors. Rather, they are typically spaces shared with others who are the majority – it is the residents and the aesthetic and culture of the city that greet the visitor. Given the diversity of urban forms and culture, precincts represent a pastiche of conflicting and complementary forms. They are modern and ageing. They are both part of, and apart from, the city. They are confined and open, colourful and plain, commonplace and unique. They are organic and highly structured. They serve different purposes and perform a range of functional roles. However, underpinning these diverse expressions of a distinctly organised city space is their fundamental human dimension. They are human spaces, where visitors and locals create places for civil interaction – to meet, eat, amble, spectate, shop, observe, or simply pass time.

Debates around terminology, and discussions as to what encapsulates a tourist precinct, have been ongoing. For our purposes we have defined an urban tourism precinct as:

> A distinctive geographic area within a larger urban area, characterised by a concentration of tourist-related land uses, activities and visitation, with fairly definable boundaries. Such precincts generally possess a distinctive character by virtue of their mixture of activities and land uses, such as restaurants, attractions and nightlife, their physical or architectural fabric, especially the dominance of historic buildings, or their connection to a particular cultural or ethnic group within the city. Such characteristics also exist in combination.
>
> Hayllar and Griffin 2005: 517

This definition has spatial, functional and embedded psycho-social dimensions. The latter dimension is suggestive of the view that one psychologically engages with a precinct. This movement is also recognition of how space, people, activity and architecture dialectically interact and shape the experience of the precinct visitor – an experience that may be qualitatively different for each of them.

Much research on urban tourism precincts has focused on describing the phenomenon and some its fundamental characteristics. There has been a particular preponderance of studies that have examined precincts from a geographic or planning perspective (Stansfield and Rickert 1970; Ashworth and de Haan 1985; Law 1985; Jansen-Verbeke 1986; Meyer-Arendt 1990; Burtenshaw *et al* 1991;Getz *et al* 1994; Fagence 1995; Pearce

1998). In a similarly descriptive vein, others have developed ideas around the economic development or urban regeneration role of precincts (Judd 1995; Stabler 1998; Montgomery 2003, 2004; McCarthy 2005) while a few studies have examined precincts from a sociological perspective (Mullins1991; Conforti 1996; Chang *et al* 1996). There has been some focus on particular types of urban tourism precincts, such as the festival marketplace (Rowe and Stevenson 1994) or revitalised waterfront (Craig-Smith 1995), but these studies have tended to deal with precincts in a development process-focused fashion. Some studies have emphasised the politics of precinct development (Hall and Selwood 1995; Searle 2008) and others offered cultural critiques (Huxley 1991).

More recently a new research direction has emerged that focuses on both the experience of tourists in urban precincts, and attempts to develop an understanding of the key attributes of such places that contribute to the quality of experience. Maitland and Newman (2004), Maitland (2006), and Hayllar and Griffin (2005, 2006) exemplify this new, experience-focused direction.

In the context of this chapter, Fainstein and Stokes (1998) and Fainstein and Judd (1999), were among the first authors to characterize and consider precincts as a specific leisure landscape for 'play'. In developing their ideas Fainstein and Judd (1999) describe various precinct forms such as resort cities, tourist-historic cities and what they label as 'converted cities'. The latter form is particularly apposite and is characterised as

> a type of tourist city in which specialized tourist bubbles are carved out of areas that would otherwise be hostile to or inconvenient for tourists. …The aim is to create an illusory world within an otherwise ordinary setting…giant billboards, movie multiplexes, superstores, and themed restaurants combine to create a kinetic environment that overwhelms the visitor. Its spectacular quality virtually insists that to be there is to participate in excitement, to stand at the crossroads of an exotic urban culture.
>
> Fainstein and Judd (1999:266)

In these spaces the city landscape is theoretically transformed into a 'playground' of colour, movement, complexity and engagement. The position of Fainstein and Judd (1999) is implicitly compelling. It recognizes that notions of play are not uniquely linked to the experience of children. It introduces the idea that these archetypal symbols of post modern urban culture are also sites for playful experience. Finally, their position intimates a relationship between consumption and adult 'play'. In the following we take Fainstein and Judd's proposition on precincts and play and develop it both empirically and theoretically.

Experiencing the Precinct: Empirical Studies

The authors' work in The Rocks and Darling Harbour precincts (Hayllar and Griffin 2005, 2006) set out to understand the precinct experience from the tourist's perspective using an approach grounded in phenomenology. As we argued, "understanding how the tourist experiences a precinct, and in particular the attributes, both tangible and

intangible, which engender a certain quality to that experience, can produce implications for the effective and appropriate planning, development, management and marketing of the precinct" (Hayllar and Griffin 2005: 518).

The two precincts are areas of substantial contrast. 'The Rocks' is located on the western side of Sydney Cove, directly opposite the Sydney Opera House and adjacent to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It is one of Sydney's most visited precincts, receiving over 13 million visits annually (Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority – SHFA –Visitor Snapshot: January 2007 – December 2007). Half of all international tourists to Sydney visit The Rocks at some time during their stay. This historic area contains some of Australia's earliest residential and commercial buildings. Tourism activities and land uses now predominate, with few residents remaining, although the adjacent area of Millers Point to the immediate west retains both its historic built fabric and a significant resident population. The Rocks retains an historic 'feel' by virtue of its narrow laneways, broken cobbled streets and its remnant colonial architecture.

The second precinct, Darling Harbour, is acknowledged as Sydney's most successful tourism precinct, hosting over 27 million visits annually (Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority – SHFA –Visitor Snapshot: January 2007 – December 2007). A former wharf and railway goods marshalling area, the area was transformed into a modern precinct to coincide with the bicentennial of European settlement in Australia. Formally opened in 1988, it has continued to grow and develop. It now contains a range of museums, including the National Maritime Museum, and commercial attractions such as the Sydney

Aquarium and IMAX Theatre. Darling Harbour also features extensive tourist shopping areas, restaurants and cafés, public open space, children's playgrounds, hotels, open air performance areas, the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre and is adjacent to the Sydney Casino.

Data for both sites were collected by way of in-depth interview. In The Rocks, 20 interview sessions, involving 31 participants, were held. At Darling Harbour 36 interviews were conducted involving 59 participants. Data analysis was undertaken in accord with the phenomenological methods recommended by Van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994) - see Hayllar and Griffin (2005, 2006) for a detailed explanation of the methodology. In the following, direct quotes taken from participants in the studies have been noted in *italics.*

Playing in the City

In the psychological sense, play implies a letting go of everyday reality, a psychological shift in consciousness from the confinement of the everyday to a sense of personal choice and freedom. In his seminal work, Seppo Iso-Ahola (1980) notes that play is arousal seeking behaviour and that "exploration, investigation and manipulation are at the heart of play" (p. 85).

Freedom and control are particularly important to the play context. Freedom implies the ability to make choices – to be with others or alone, to engage in one type of experience in preference to another; in essence to play or not to play. Control is related but subtly

different to freedom. Control is concerned with personally managing the play experience to ensure arousal is maintained at its optimal level. Optimal arousal is a key motivator of play. According to Iso-Ahola (1980) maintaining the "optimal level of arousal (stimulation or interest) ranges from person to person"….but due to this drive "an individual is in a continuous process of seeking and avoiding interactions with the environment, striving to maintain his (sic) optimal level of arousal….play is motivated by the optimal level of arousal both in childhood and adulthood" (p. 82).

Iso-Ahola (1980) goes on to define play as "behaviours which are intrinsically motivated and engaged in for their own sake" and which bring enjoyment and satisfaction (p. 86). He concludes, after Ellis (1973), that play spaces substantially influence the quality of these playful experiences. Iso-Ahola (1980) also notes the importance of the social context and social interaction as key influencers of play behaviour.

The ideas of choice, freedom, control, arousal, exploration, investigation, manipulation (in the sense of personally shaping experience), social interaction and all within a specified 'play space', noted by Iso-Ahola (1980) resonate with the type of experiences and spaces one might expect of tourists in an urban precinct. Indeed, data from both The Rocks and Darling Harbour support such a proposition.

The importance of others (social interaction) emerged as a significant theme in both precincts. Visitors to The Rocks acknowledge the social aspects of their experience in

general terms but in particular note the social context of their experience. Visitors recognise that The Rocks is an urban fusion of international tourists, domestic tourists, local residents, office workers and Sydney residents 'in town' for the day. One visitor noted that The Rocks is *like a community, not just like packed up when people leave at night; it doesn't just shut down.* The social aspects of Darling Harbour were particularly noted. It is seen as a place for meeting; a place for families; a place to 'do' things, together. *It's a people place* commented one couple.

The opportunity for 'play' provided in each precinct is a point of significant contrast.

The Rocks is a more 'urbanised' experience and is a place to meet, eat, drink and shop. In contrast, *Play it your way* is the SHFA developed theme for Darling Harbour. There are numerous tourist attractions, ongoing public events and open-air concerts (such as the annual Jazz and Blues Festival or Spanish Fiesta), children's play areas and open space to promenade along the waterfront – all in addition to the ubiquitous restaurants and cafés. As one respondent observed….*It is a big entertainment centre.* Differences between and within these sites give visitors the opportunity to manage and shape their experience.

Further support for the idea of managing and determining both the type and form of activity and levels of arousal to produce a playful experience, can be found in the work of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi's research set out to understand the nature of enjoyable experience. He argues that enjoyable experience, expressed through his notion of 'flow', is achieved when there is an optimal relationship between the level of challenge required for an activity and the level of skill of the

participant. These challenges are not necessarily of a physical nature but rather are experience-based opportunities presented to the individual. Accordingly, when there is a sense of 'match' (arousal is at its optimal) the 'flow' or enjoyable experience is manifested. Conversely, if an experience is not sufficiently challenging (or interesting) for the level of experience (or skill) of the visitor, boredom results. By way of contrast, if there is too much arousal, anxiety may be the outcome. Thus to be in the flow of enjoyable experience requires the visitor to constantly play an active role in managing the type of experience(s) they are seeking.

Support for the above reasoning is evident in the three visitor types – explorers, browsers and samplers - that were identified from the current data sets and in two subsequent studies (see Griffin and Hayllar 2007). The explorers are those visitors who want to move beyond the façade of a precinct, to find their own way and discover its inner complexities and qualities. An explorer in The Rocks described his way of moving through the precinct: *You're walking along one street and then all of a sudden without realising it there's a kind of this little alleyway off to the left that might take you to something a bit more interesting around the corner.*

The second group, the browsers, are more content to stay within the confines of the main precinct area and to follow the tourist routes – such as a walk along the main street in The Rocks or to follow the water's edge in Darling Harbour.

The third group, the samplers, are those who visit precincts as just another stop on their schedule of moving through the attractions of a city, and are often focused on visiting a specific attraction rather than experiencing the precinct for its own sake. The sampler may also use the precinct as a place of respite or refuge but will not move beyond the fringe or specified refuge point, a café for example. Indeed the theme of 'refuge' is consistent with earlier reasoning on managing arousal. For many visitors in these studies, precincts are experienced as places of refuge, typically from the cacophony of the city or the dissonance of the tourist experience itself. On average approximately one-third of visitors to both precincts use them as a place to 'kill time' or 'relax' (SHFA, 2008).As a visitor to Darling Harbour noted that when *you come down here and you've got the water there and it's a bit more laid back and a bit more, kind of 'ahh', a bit more relaxing. You can sit down and take a breath.*

The visitor typology also reflects the reality that different people can simultaneously experience a precinct in quite different ways. The extent to which people wish to explore, be aroused, seek points of contrast, or to seek the company of others can be dealt with at both the individual and collective level. Indeed the extent to which this can be managed is also a consequence of the precinct's morphology. Precinct design may limit the individual's opportunity for optimal experience, through less complex or simplistic presentation, or enhance it by the provision of interesting, engaging and multi-layered experiences. The experiential space is therefore critical in shaping the preconditions for play.

The importance of space as a facilitator of playful experience is integral to the work of Johan Huizinga (1955). In his influential work *Homo Ludens* (literally, *man the player*), Huizinga (1955) argues that play was, and is, central to the formation of culture. However, Huizinga was not interested in all forms of play. In language echoing the post-modern sensibilities of Fainstein and Stokes (1998), his concern was with "contests and races, of performances and exhibitions, of dancing and music, pageants, masquerades and tournaments" all of which can be located within a cultural context (Huizinga 1955:7).

According to Huizinga, play has six defining characteristics. The first concerns its voluntary nature that clearly delineates it from other forms of social activity. "Play is superfluous. The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need. Play can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task" (Huizinga 1955:8).

The second characteristic of play concerns its 'unreal' quality. Play is not real life, rather it is a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. However, the fact that there is a consciousness associated with this lack of reality does not prevent play proceeding with seriousness. While play is 'unreal', it has an important role as an interlude in our daily lives by complementing our ongoing seeking of real world 'satisfactions and appetites' (Huizinga 1955).

The separateness of play from the ordinary is Huizinga's third characteristic. According to him it is 'played out' within given limits of time and place. "Play begins,

and then at a certain moment it is "over". It plays itself to an end. While it is in progress all is movement, change, alternation, succession, association, separation" (Huizinga 1955:9).

In a specific reference to play spaces, Huizinga argues that all play takes place within a predetermined 'play-ground' either beforehand or as the play experience develops. "The arena, the card table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart" (Huizinga 1955:10).

The formation of a type of play community is Huizinga's fifth characteristic. He notes that following a game there is recognition that something mutually agreeable has been shared by those within the circle. '...the feeling of being "apart together" in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game" (Huizinga 1955:12).

The idea of being apart from 'others' is further enhanced within Huizinga's final characteristic, that of 'secrecy'. Some of these may be 'open' secrets such as particular types of dress, which distinguish the playing group, yet others are more secretive. Dress is particularly interesting in the tourist context. For example, clothing purchased as a type

of souvenir, or particular sartorial affectations of the visitor, both define the players and the play space. What may be appropriate and 'normal' within the 'playground' may be quite disconnected, inappropriate or pretentious when one leaves the play space or returns home.

Huizinga's spatio-temporal dimension of play, where experience is played out within a given time and within a given space, is consistent with the visitors' experiences of a precinct. Inside the world of play, a community that is 'apart together' shape and share meanings that are captured within the spirit of the playful experience. However, they are meanings that are bounded, and only have relevance to a given play space and given play time.

The temporal dimension of the play space also emerges within the work of the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1899-1959). Schutz's primary interest was in the ordinary; the day to day interactions between people and their social environments and how these interactions took place. According to Schutz, the *world of daily life* is the intersubjective world to which we are born and to which we now have to act upon. He argues that "all interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teachers, which in the form of knowledge at hand function as a scheme of reference" (1970:72).

Schutz argues that our experiences are not "a being that is discrete and well-defined but a constant transition from a now-thus to a new-thus" (1970:61). Schutz's notion of 'finite provinces of meaning' or 'multiple realities' (after James 1890/1950) conceptually links this argument. Reality for Schutz (and James) is situationally contextualised. Schutz identified the specific finite provinces of meaning as: "the paramount world of real objects and events into which we can gear by our actions; the world of imaginings and fantasms, such as the play world of the child; the world of the insane; the world of art; the world of dreams; and the world of scientific contemplation" (Schutz 1970:253). Each of these, he argued, has their own cognitive 'style' and it is this style which constitutes them as a finite province of meaning.

In the paramount world, the world of work and our everyday lives, we move in what Schutz calls the 'natural attitude'. Accordingly we remain in the natural attitude until we receive a specific 'shock' which compels us to shift the accent of reality. The shocks discussed by Schutz are transition points between the paramount reality and other finite provinces of meaning. For example, when the curtain is raised at the beginning of a theatrical performance or film, we suspend the reality of the natural attitude and reorient ourselves to this 'new' reality. Equally when the curtain comes down, there is another point of transition back to the paramount reality.

It is Schutz's world of 'imaginings and fantasms' that embraces among other things daydreams, play, fairy-tales, myths and jokes that is of particular interest to this discussion (Schutz 1973). In this world our mind undergoes decreasing "tensions of

consciousness" and withdraws from "certain of its layers the accent of reality…." (Schutz 1970:257). As a corollary, the playful world of Schutz is a world of freedom:

> We are free from the pragmatic motive which governs our natural attitude toward the world of daily life, free also from the bondage of "interobjective" space and intersubjective standard time. No longer are we confined within the limits of our actual, restorable, or attainable reach. What occurs in the outer world no longer imposes upon us issues between which we have to choose nor does it put a limit on our possible accomplishments (Schutz 1975:257).

While the free time or tourist experience itself is a point of contrast to the paramount reality of work and everyday life, precincts have the potential to provide clear points of transition to move visitors into the playful reality. As visitors move from the paramount world of the adjacent city into The Rocks, there are 'signs' which convey transition points: older buildings, a reorientation of scale; decreased traffic, and a slowing of pace. Once entered, visitors are suspended in this new reality by The Rocks experience – a place of pointed contrast to adjacent modernity. Here the *architecture is quite colonial and that you notice the kind of old fashioned buildings*. This old world site with its partially hidden walkways and colourful history is a place of imagination, arousal and exploration.

A similar transition awaits the visitor to Darling Harbour. Here, the contrast to the adjacent city is also important. *It's out of the city but it's in the city. Its got its own little*

atmosphere. However, Darling Harbour overtly invites the playful. Its character is *all leisure. People sort of passing through, sort of strolling through….It is a big entertainment centre.* As one international visitor commented it is also a site to distinguish the city itself. *I mean it is comparatively similar to an equal city in the US and so, but when I go, when I come here* (Darling Harbour) *I feel like I'm in Sydney, I feel like I am somewhere else.*

The maintenance of the experience in this non-paramount world, rests on the extent to which the precinct itself sustains its non-paramount character during the visit. An inappropriate architectural form or a cacophony of external noise in The Rocks, or an out of character social intrusion in Darling Harbour may challenge the flow of the experience and 'shock' participants back to the paramount reality.

Arguably the type of visitor might also affect the extent to which an experience is more playful. Perhaps the depthlessness of the browser'*s* visit in contrast to the 'depth' of the explorer may manifest itself in a type of liminal experience where one is engaged by the experience but 'on the edge' of the paramount reality.

The shifts in space and consciousness found in the theorising of Huizinga (1955) and Schutz (1970, 1975) are also evident in the work of Gregory Bateson (1973). Bateson's (1973) ideas on play arose primarily from his work in the area of communication and his hypotheses concerning the various levels of abstraction in which communication operates. For example the phrase, *this is serious*, could

communicate at one level the genuine ‘seriousness’ of a situation. Yet at another level (of abstraction), *this is serious* could imply quite the opposite - this is not to be taken seriously. For Bateson, both content and context were important.

Bateson uses the analogy of the picture frame to place boundaries around the context of play. He proposes that the notions of ‘frame’ and ‘context’ are psychological constructs. The frame bounds the play (somewhat similar to the ideas of Huizinga’s imagined or real ‘play-ground’); the players move into the frame, a type of psychological shift, and actions taking play within the context of the frame are subject to the real, unreal, paradoxes of metacommunication.

There is also a dialectic in the play frame of Bateson. At the level of player, the frame is both inclusive and exclusive. By including particular messages within a frame, others are excluded. By excluding some, others are included. Thus there is a form of metacommunicated negotiation about what is, and what is not, ‘play’. While the frame may be an unconscious arena for the players, it also has a type of functionality for observers. In the city context the precinct is understood to be an ‘unreal’ place, or equally, the players are ‘unreal’. To this end, normatively inappropriate forms of public behaviour may be tolerated in the precinct yet unacceptable beyond the play space.

While Bateson does not speculate as to how these movements from the play frame to the serious world move, there is perhaps some mutual recognition, some shift in

consciousness on behalf of the players, as to what these 'unframed' actions now represent. It may be there are subtle transitions or 'micro' shocks of the Schutzian type that signify movement in and out of the play frame.

Discussion and Implications for Management

The notion of play in the city has been explored through engagement with seminal discourses in social psychology, Iso-Ahola (1980), phenomenological sociology, Schutz (1970, 1973, 1975), sociology, Huizinga (1955), communication/philosophy, Bateson (1973) and phenomenological psychology, Csikszentmihalyi (1975). Each of these writers provide conceptual insights into the phenomenon of playful or ludic behaviour in the city.

The arguments of Huizinga (1955), Schutz (1970), and Bateson (1973) collectively embrace the idea of a shift in consciousness provided by the 'playground'. For Schutz (1970), this shift in consciousness is toward a different playful reality shaped by movement into different finite provinces of meaning. Huizinga (1955) too links a change in consciousness with theoretical and actual play spaces. Bateson (1973) encapsulates both ideas in his notion of a play 'frame' which is linked to the meta-communicated message - this is play – that passes between players and observers.

Feelings of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975), which are a response to the engagement of individuals in play-like experiences, are motivators for enjoyable and intrinsically driven

behaviour. However, there is also the potential for dissonant experiences in the playful domain of Csikszentmihalyi. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) believes that flow is experienced when there is a perceived psychological match between the demands of given tasks and an individual's skills to meet such demands. If the playspace does not provide the opportunity for 'match' visitors may find themselves dissatisfied with their city experience.

This theorising is also supported by the empirical data gathered in both study precincts (Hayllar and Griffin 2005, 2006). The reports of study participants highlight the roles played by precincts in both shaping and facilitating playful experience. This role is also acknowledged in the data of the managing authority (see Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority 2008).

As argued, precincts are sites for adult play. The challenge for precinct managers is to understand the foundations of this form of individual consciousness and collective action – and to act upon it. To maximise the potential for playful engagement, managers need to understand the nature of the experiences they help create and shape. Precincts are not a disjointed collection of attractions, buildings, walkways, pedestrian plazas, restaurants, cafés cinemas, or retail outlets. These characteristic forms are 'experiential architecture' which only takes on experiential resonance when they are acted upon, and in turn act upon individuals and groups of players. This interaction between people and space creates experience in its phenomenological sense – the meta experience of play.

Play is the experience of control, freedom, arousal, and intrinsically focused activity which bring enjoyment and satisfaction (Iso-Ahola 1980). In the context of a visit to a precinct, enjoyment and satisfaction are key outcomes for both visitors and managers. Satisfied visitors are implicit advocates for word of mouth recommendations, and are likely repeat visitors.

The challenge for precinct planners and managers is to enhance the opportunity for playful experience through thoughtful design and management practice. In terms of design, some important considerations include: the need for precincts to have identifiable boundaries or signifiers of place indicating the shift from one area to the other (Schutz 1970); a degree of complexity to design which facilitates the creation of multi-layered and explorative type experiences (Iso-Ahola 1980; Ellis 1973; Hayllar and Griffin 2005, 2006); quiet, respite or refuge spaces (Csikszentmihalyi 1975); and recognition of the specific needs and requirements of different user types (Hayllar and Griffin 2005, 2006).

While effective design provides the infrastructure for play, specific management practices also impact upon the potential play experience. These practices might include: the ongoing renewal of experience through the staging of events (Iso-Ahola 1980; Csikszentmihalyi 1975); 'soft' regulation to ensure that the experience is not being undermined by surveillance or over zealous intervention (Bateson 1973; Iso-Ahola 1980; Huizinga 1955); adequate security to minimise feelings of uncontrollability and anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi 1975); maintenance of consistent thematic or experiential atmosphere (Schutz 1970); provision of an environment where the tourist has freedom to wander and

explore (Ellis 1973); provision of opportunities for convivial encounters with other visitors (Iso-Ahola 1980); and enabling the tourist to experience a more distinctive sense of place (Huizinga 1955, Schutz, 1970).

Through an engagement with some of the foundational writers in play theory and reference to two empirical studies, we have argued in this chapter that urban tourism precincts present visitors with a landscape of opportunities for engagement in adult play. Further, it has been argued that design and management practices conspire to facilitate or bound the extent and quality of these experiences. However, playfulness in the city is not unproblematic. Invoking Batesonian sentiments, and the need for the subtle yet deliberate management of experience Kleiber (1999: 68-69) pointedly remarks:

> Play has a Dionysian character, entertaining the unbridled and the uncivilized in the interest of manipulating the world to its own design. While this tendency can be a source of creativity, it can also lead to deviance of one kind or another. Indeed, the tendency to idealize and romanticize play must be tempered with the realization that playful impulses may be "dirty", antisocial, degenerate and even destructive. Torturing the cat may be great sport for a couple of five year olds.

Hence questions of balance emerge in the management of such places. Engendering a sense of play is an important attribute of urban tourism precincts, but one that is not without limits.

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