Making Sense of Place

Exploring concepts and expressions of place through different senses and lenses

Edited by Frank Vancay, Matthew Higgins and Adam Blakeman

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA
Contents

Director's foreword
Editors' preface
The editors

PART 1: NARRATIVES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF PLACE

1. Place matters  Frank Vanclay
2. Understanding place through narrative: Using stories to change the places we love and who we are  Merrill Findlay
3. A personal account of place  Ursula de Jong
4. Rural women reclaiming their place through symbols, stories and rituals  Liza Dale-Hallett, Rhonda Diffey, Quentin O'Keefe and Kerry Wilson
5. River songs: A poetic response to Australia's wounded rivers  Brian Wattchow
6. Children's understanding of place: Discursive constructions of the environment in children's writing and artwork about the Murray–Darling Basin  Phil Cormack, Bill Green and Jo-Anne Reid
7. Reaching for the Reef: Exploring place through touch  Celmara Pocock
8. Places of silence  Mike Gulliver
9. Place as acoustic space: Hearing Australian identity  Ros Bandt

PART 2: UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS SENSES OF PLACE

10. Two thousand generations of place-making  Greg Lehman
11. An Anangu ontology of place  Diana James
12. Slowly down the Georgeina: Aboriginal cultural heritage and lineal complexes  Stephen Long
13. Losing place: Diminishing traditional knowledge of the Arctic coastal landscape  Scott Heyes and Peter Jacobs
PART 3: MAKING PLACES

14. Stop, revive, survive: The car-place  Barbara Holloway  155
15. ‘Your spot’: Marking place with roadside memorials  Jennifer Clark  165
16. Reconciling grief in suburban gardens  Ruth McManus  175
17. Planting natives: Gardening and belonging to place in Perth, Western Australia  Jane Mulcock  183
18. Experiencing ‘the Maze’: Official and unofficial interactions with place in post-conflict Northern Ireland  Laura McAtackney  191
19. Pieces of place: Exploring the personal souvenir  Jasmine Foxlee, Ursula Frederick and Nicholas Hall  199
21. Local lookouts as places of belonging and escape  Bec Tudor  221
22. Senses of urban character  Kim Dovey, Stephen Wood and Ian Woodcock  229
23. Sydney Opera House: What’s the point?  Natalie Smith  239
24. Affordable places  Roger Fay and Undine Sellbach  247

PART 4: ANALYSING AND UTILISING THE SENSE OF PLACE

25. A place for community: West Coast, New Zealand  Colin Goodrich and Kaylene Sampson  257
26. ‘I’m a rural person’: Sense of place for rural health care professionals  Anna Spinaze  269
27. Museum outreach programs promoting a sense of place  Frank Vanclay, Jo Wills and Ruth Lane  279
28. Touring the moral terrains of Uluru: Pathways of pride and shame  Gordon Waitt and Robert Figueroa  289
29. Place, belonging and nativeness in Australia  David Trigger  301
30. A pragmatic sense of place  Edward Relph  311
31. Place and human being  Jeff Malpas  325

Director’s foreword

The National Museum of Australia was delighted to be a partner in the Sense of Place conference held in Hobart during April 2006. The several days of discussion provoked great interest in how and what Australians and others mean by ‘sense of place’ and how this relates to the places that are important to us. The broad range of backgrounds of both speakers and participants illustrated how important ‘place’ is to humankind, and how many perspectives there are on place.

So it is with great pleasure that the National Museum of Australia Press has published this book, stemming as it does from the conference and representing a further development of the number of the presentations made in Hobart. The volume has been an excellent way upon a number of key lines of argument and dissertation.

The accompanying DVD captures, with extraordinary sensitivity, a number of the relationships with place, recorded in interviews with conference participants on the Hobart gathering. The interviewees’ spoken words complement the tone of the writing of this volume.

The National Museum, in exploring its three themes of land, nation and people, is aware of how individuals, societies and cultures are shaped by their environment and how place is in turn shaped by them. This relationship between people and place — a relationship that exists at a range of levels, from the theoretical and remote to the daily lived — is a rich and worthwhile area of study and research. I am sure that the book and DVD will make a major contribution to the way we think about and relate to place.

Craddock Morton
Director
National Museum of Australia
Editors’ preface

This book and its accompanying DVD are outputs of the Senses of Place conference held in Hobart in April 2006. The conference, with its by-line of ‘exploring concepts and expressions of place through different senses and lenses’, sought to expand understandings of place by broadening the basis by which it is usually considered. A sense of place can be in the form of a cognitive consciousness (or intellectual abstraction), but full appreciation of the meaning of place can only be experienced through the senses — the smell, taste, feel, sound, sight and spiritual dimensions of place that we experience, whether we are aware of them or not.

The reference to different ‘senses’ and ‘lenses’ was deliberately intended to encompass the multiplicity of possible ways of experiencing, embodying and manifesting place, as well as the different ways of looking at and representing place — at different scales, from different disciplinary perspectives, using different media, and from the perspectives of different ‘actors’. In the spirit of the conference, this book seeks to convey some idea of the significance that place has in people’s lives and the breadth of possible approaches to exploring and examining place.

The Senses of Place conference was a collaboration between four parties: the National Museum of Australia; the Place Research Network; the Community, Place and Change Theme Area of the University of Tasmania; and the Mountain Festival. Held during the Mountain Festival in Hobart, the conference was able to extend to delegates a wide array of place-inspired experiences, including musical performances, an art exhibition, multimedia installations, an interpreted tour of a sculpture trail, a facilitated discussion forum, as well as place-based food and wine.

Unfortunately, the medium of a book (even with an accompanying DVD) puts constraints on the dimensions of place that can be presented. Of course, all topics can be discussed in written form, but reading about the food of a particular place, for example, and enjoying eating it are slightly different experiences! Nevertheless, the abundance of colour illustrations as well as the rich and colourful descriptions of the authors has assisted in imparting something of the experiences and sensations associated with the places that are featured in this collection.

The book format also limited the number of contributions that could be included. While more than 100 presentations were given at the conference, it was only possible to include a much smaller number in this volume. The chapters were selected on the basis of a wide range of criteria, including that of maintaining a broad coverage of approaches to the topic, readability, and of enhancing understanding of place. We thank all those who offered their papers to us and we apologise to those who we had to decline.

A work such as this inevitably incurs debts of gratitude to many people. With them all, there are some that deserve special recognition. First and foremost, we wish to thank Julie Simpkin for her work in copyediting the book. We also thank Po Sung for designing the book. Denis French was instrumental in collecting permissions to use the many images. The other members of the Senses of Place Conference Planning Committee have also been supportive in the editing process. We thank Jeff Malpas, Jonathan Holmes, Blain Ian Coates and Chris Cooper. Ana Maria Esteves assisted in proofreading the final manuscript providing valued advice.

Finally, this book and the conference could not have occurred without the support of the National Museum of Australia. It is only fitting that Australia’s national museum plays a leading role in interpreting ‘place’, promoting an understanding of place, and stimulating debate around the issues associated with place and our sense of place.

Frank Vanclay, Matthew Higgins and Adam Blackshaw