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Author(s): Shanene Ditton
Institution(s): Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia
Email(s): s.ditton@griffith.edu.au
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Whose Place? Sustaining Cultural Conversations

SHANENE DITTON

Abstract: The notion of place is integral to any understanding of cultural sustainability. Present and future places are the product of the political negotiations of past places. How we recreate and represent the history and the stories of a place impacts the individual and collective cultural identities associated with it. Moreover, these representations help to determine who does, or does not, belong. When planning for the sustainment of cultures, we need to draw on our ethical responsibility to ensure that everybody and every culture enjoys the right to a sense of belonging. To do this, we must turn to questions such as, whose story is primarily being represented through the identity of a particular place? Or, whose place is being replaced and reimagined without acknowledgement or permission? And how will these communities and individuals, whose stories are not amplified, become sustainable? To respond to some of these questions, this article presents an analysis of placemaking on the Gold Coast. It sketches insights from cultural practitioners, industry leaders, cultural workers and the community-at-large, to expose heterogeneous Gold Coasts wrestling with the one identity. Most notably, it documents the emergence of a cultural voice that is developing via artist-run spaces involving joint collaborations between the academy and the community. By adopting transdisciplinarity alongside an historical approach to conversation, this article also suggests some alternative ways to develop policies that fosters and sustains multiple cultures, rather than just reproducing more of the same.

Keywords: Placemaking, place, cultural identity, Gold Coast, culture

1. The Surfers Paradise imagination

As visitors drive the M1 Pacific Highway south from Brisbane to the Gold Coast, there is a large reflective green road sign marked *Surfers Paradise* fastened to the Hope Island Road overpass. Travellers might be mistaken, due to the lack of clues otherwise, to think that Surfers Paradise is the centre of the Gold Coast, or worse, that it's the same thing. Tourists following their nose will recognize this beacon immediately as the address to their luxury beachfront accommodation (though it's not all luxury), and most likely, they will know of *Surfers* before they hear its city's name. They'll have seen the clean, sparkling beaches, sand lined with skyscrapers; they'll have read the crime stats in the paper. They'll have paid in advance for surfing lessons and a 'world pass' to the theme parks. They'll have consumed the Gold Coast before they even arrive. Such is the way it is designed: the Gold Coast reproduces itself.

The Gold Coast is Australia's largest non-capital city with half a million people sprinkled along fifty-seven kilometres of coastline in South-East Queensland. The city is also the second largest local government area in Australia. 'Famous for fun' (Tourism Queensland 2011), the Gold Coast has consistently drawn the holiday card with its 'sun and surf' and natural assets (Stimson and Minnery 1998, p. 194). From its colonial genesis as a timber-felling region in the 1840s, through to its 21st century guise as a cosmopolitan 'tourist mecca', the Gold Coast continues to sell itself as a leisure destination (Stimson and Minnery 1998, p. 194). Iconic images of bathing-capped youth splashing in the sea with bikini-clad ladies are etched into the nation's psyche. These cheeky, sexualized, utopic depictions continue to lure an annual crowd of 10.5 million people to the city (City of Gold Coast 2013). Politically, the Gold Coast has recently been appointed a new mayor who continues to reinforce the Gold Coast's stereotypes through traditionally neoliberal strategies.

These representations construct the Gold Coast as the quintessential ephemeral city, a place that continually forgets its own history. Wise notes,

'Perpetually replacing itself, the Gold Coast seems to ignore history, to play out its (by now) clichéd role as a paradigmatically postmodern city, dipping into multiple "semblences" taken from other cities to produce its next version of itself' (Wise 2012, p. 101).

Tanya, a young graphic designer, talks about the impermanence of the city, 'The thing that frustrates me most...is that everything that we have—like, in our lifetimes, that has been iconic on the Gold Coast—keep[s] getting bulldozed' (20 October 2010, Interview). As well as being conceptually difficult to pin down, the Gold Coast is geographically everted. It's is an 'exopolis', to borrow Edward Soja's (1990) term; it's an 'inside out' heterogeneous city where multiple narratives play out: it's decentred and missing the traditional 'downtown' or city hub, and lacking the concentric, centre-focused, formations of more traditional cities.

To make the Gold Coast even more challenging, 'moral panics' (Cohen 2002) about youth are constructed, primarily through narratives of place, which feed into, as well as being shaped significantly by, signature local youth events, such as 'Schoolies'. Baker (*et al.* 2012) acknowledge the 'stereotype of youth' as inextricably linked to 'Schoolies Week', where displays of violence and substance abuse are prevalent among school leavers during their final year vacation (p. 17). This image paints Gold Coast youth as deviant and tarnishes their image with violence, sleaze and excessive chemical abuse, even though many Gold Coast youth do not engage with Schoolies or the idea of it. Rather, Schoolies attracts a certain type of demographic to the Gold Coast. In contradistinction to these media discourses, research has shown that Gold Coast youth actually do not fit their stereotype,

'...I always felt like a lot of the Gold Coast's identity came from people that were outside the Gold Coast—like tourism. And like from being in Logan, like everyone would come down in their cars, with like some stupid exhaust, and like, and bloody wreck their tyres all weekend, spewing up on the road, and then that was like, Gold Coast is full of bogans. If you want to go hang out with bogans, go to the Gold Coast. And like, and no one, like no one would ever talk about Burleigh, Palm Beach, Mermaid. They're always talking about Surfers Paradise' (Dan, Drummer in Gold Coast Band, 20 October 2010, Interview).

The above quote is from Dan, a young drummer in a Gold Coast band. Dan articulates his cultural identity, acknowledging his own invisibility as a young cultural producer on the Gold Coast. Dan clearly expresses his rejection of the Gold Coast's grand narratives through a kind of belonging to a place, a keen desire to passionately resist the Gold Coast's cultural stigma. This rejection of the Gold Coast's grand narratives is echoed by many cultural producers on the Gold Coast. It is therefore useful here to frame the Gold Coast as the commodified city.

2. The Gold Coast as the commodified city

Recent surges in place competition are propelled by notions of the creative city, which in turn, recreate the neoliberal agendas and reaffirm the consumption of the city (see Peck 2010). For those economies built on tourism, the city becomes a singular, commodified product, firmly bound and sold to the world. The city's selling points, whatever they may be, are etched into national and international imaginaries, replicated and reproduced in glossy magazines and conversations. In this way, the city becomes a commodity. The commodified city adopts homogenous urban branding and place promotion strategies that inevitably shape the city's identity. Place branding, which is one aspect of the more formal processes of placemaking, often does not account for the multiplicity of narratives about place, nor does it reflect the complex identity projects particular to contemporary life. While the commodification of the city has been described as somewhat liberating for individuals, it is a negotiated space for pleasure and emotional release, for many young people, the commodification of the city is a point of resistance.

In places such as the Gold Coast, there is little wiggle room to imagine alternate realities—the city is stamped as having a singular, recognizable character. Further, this singular place identity is refracted onto individual identities, reflecting to some degree the selling points of the city back onto young people. For instance, if the city sells itself as the 'boob job capital' of the nation (as the Gold Coast Mayor intends), then this image is mirrored back onto young people associated with the city who are subsequently stereotyped as superficial, cheap and self-obsessed, even though they may not relate to the idea of plastic surgery or any of the associated stereotypes. The commodified narratives play out in young peoples' everyday lives, as they relate to, interact with, and attach themselves to, the commodified city in myriad forms.

Steve Miles (2013) notes that in an age of complicity, 'people are shamed in their belonging to consumption'. So effectively, people who outwardly consume to a large degree are publicly denounced as hopeless consumers lacking in agency. In this way those who identify with spaces of consumption are also shamed and culturally stigmatized as lacking agency. In the case of the Gold Coast, which we can usefully conceptualize as the commodified city, these two ideas come together to shame anyone who expresses a sense of belonging to the Gold Coast.

Leeman and Modan state that 'as post-Fordist cities have come to rely on commodified culture and experience to revitalize downtown neighbourhoods, the symbolic economy has become a driving force behind urban policies around the world, many of which are supported by public/private partnerships between municipalities and entrepreneurs' (2010, p. 185). In extending this, they state that,

‘Part and parcel of this trend is the growth of the travel and tourism industries, with cities increasingly carrying out marketing campaigns as they compete to attract local, national and international visitors. Cities put culture to use for economic development in a variety of ways; typical strategies include culture-based projects such as art museums and performing arts centers, as well as downtown arts districts with high concentrations of galleries and artists’ studios. Many cities have also sought to draw visitors via the construction of convention centers and/or major league sports arenas, as well as through the creation of specialized retail and entertainment districts’ (Leeman and Modan 2010, p. 186).

Leeman and Modan also note that ‘...material manifestations of language in the built environment constitute key elements in shaping *city spaces* as urban *places* imbued with social meanings’ (2010, p. 182). In their chapter ‘Selling the City: Language, Culture and Commodified Space’, they argue that the commodification of space is resultant and indicative of late modernity. They state that ‘material manifestations of language interact with other design elements in the built environment to construct commodified urban places—cities for sale’ (p. 183).

Finally, they claim that,

‘In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, there has been an international trend towards the commodification of culture and the commercialization of public space, a trend that has tremendous impacts on urban environments [and that], in the symbolic economy cultural symbols play a significant role in the selling of products and services, and entrepreneurs invest in projects that rely on cultural symbols to attract consumers. Further, culture, products and services are bundled together and marketed as *experiences*’ (p. 185).

Levine (*et al.* 2005) discusses the role of heritage in producing place as a commodity. By describing the unearthing of a heritage tourism site in Pennsylvania, they emphasize the refracted properties of a commodified place alongside an analysis of the complex nature of heritage and heritage tourism. Firstly, they acknowledge heritage as a pliable cultural commodity:

‘As the past and its meanings are ultimately intangible, the definition of heritage is malleable as it is constantly being moulded, shaped, interpreted, bought and sold by groups with varying interests. What remains constant, however, is the historical sense of place embedded in the concept of heritage’ (Levine *et al.* 2005, p. 401).

They also suggest that it is in this sense of place and its relation to consumption that is necessary to interrogate in order to further any research about heritage. This is because place and heritage are webbed together in processes of consumption that inevitably reflect and reproduce identities. Moreover,

‘Places have meanings that are in large measure created for consumption by individuals in communities; it is in consuming the meaning of a place that the individual is linked historically and immediately to the material and social worlds in which they are embedded. People thus consume heritage to create a sense of belonging, as the invention of heritage can empower people and their communities by shaping a sense of identity’ (*ibid.*).

Notions of belonging, then, can be produced through consuming the meanings of places, and places are inextricably bound to the past, present and future. Places communicate knowledge, ideas, ideologies, histories, cartographies, geographies, through lines of demarcation that separate one place from another. Necessarily, places produce their own narratives alongside the plights of human beings, with the natural world intervening from time to time. In this sense then, Levine (*et al.* 2005) argue that even nature can be commodified, as *something* that is bought, sold, and reproduced to a specific end, and that,

‘This process of creating identity relies on the interpretation of specific sites or material culture, interpretations that are manipulated for specific ends. After all, historic sites and trends in the interpretation of history do not merely exist for nostalgia’s sake, but have a distinct relationship to the creation of present social realities’ (Levine *et al.* 2005, p. 401).

Thus, the selling of place becomes a site for struggle between ‘new beginnings’ and ‘origins’, between authenticity and the new (See Zukin 2009). Because it is precisely these authentic or fictive narratives that have the power to reshape human lives, communities, and even nations. Levine (*et al.* 2005) surmise that,

‘In recent decades the tourism industry has co-opted heritage as a vehicle for displaying or showcasing cultural aspects of a particular nation, region or community. This trend towards the use of heritage has led to the recent attention many historic sites have received from the tourism industry, especially sites in areas of redevelopment and economic revival. After all, a heritage destination must have both a sense of place and a compelling narrative to sell’ (p. 401).

3. Compelling narratives of place

Rather than places surviving to provide communities with basic needs, as has been the case in agrarian communities, places are now subject to the condition of producing compelling narratives in order to survive in an increasingly globalized market. So the crucial point here is that the focus has shifted from place as the site for civic participation and belonging, to place as the site for a good story. The implications of this move are wide reaching. While I perceive the engagement with fictional narratives of place is both exciting and liberating on a theoretical level, the affective ramifications seem to outweigh the literary celebrations. Places are ransomed by those who trade, buy and sell them. As Levine (*et al.* 2005) note,

‘...while the negotiation of meaning is a process well known among historians, anthropologists, and literary critics, our intellectual debates over social meaning in the present and the past hold little interest to those wishing to sell or purchase a heritage narrative. When our work enters into public discourse, especially in the creation and interpretation of a heritage tourism site, we enter into an arena in which our interpretations can be commodified and sold as part of a broader heritage experience. In some cases, archaeologists are expected either to create narratives that can be marketed, or markets for our narratives’ (p. 402).

It is this creation of fictional narratives, tailored to, and for, specific markets, that sits uncomfortably with the reality that people’s identities are shaped by place. That fictional

narratives are imposed on people and internalized within them means that these fictions become truths or part-truths. And this is a sinister sense of belonging, to belong because you are told to belong, and to not belong because you are told not to belong.

Places are contested sites. Levine (*et al.* 2005) acknowledge that ‘...various interest groups may well struggle to control what aspects of a place’s landscape will be preserved, thus defining the sense of place that is retained or created’ (p. 402). This is a common story of struggle between ‘multiple players and stakeholders’ (*ibid*). Further, ‘the creation of heritage attractions is often part of a larger social and economic process by which investors, preservationists, and municipal and state governments negotiate the terrain between authenticity and profitability’ (*ibid*).

They also note that heritage tourism is particularly attractive for those places that do not have natural assets to sell. I suggest, likewise, that places that sell their natural assets often have little investment or interest in preserving heritage sites. In contrast to the ‘...reconstruction of historic cityscapes’, which has been a ‘...focus of urban renewal projects in the USA’ (p. 403), cities that have built their economies on the commodification of nature, exert little effort in reconstructing heritage narratives. Instead they tend to promote the natural surroundings with little regard to the culture of a place. Australia is one such place that has built its identity on the back of its natural beauty. Because Australia is a young colonized country and it is also home to the oldest living Aboriginal culture in the world, it is easy to see how in this instance, natural narratives overpower cultural narratives of place. This is absolutely the story of Queensland’s Gold Coast. Levine (*et al.* 2005) suggest that,

‘As city planners and other interested stakeholders continue to recognize that a distinct sense of place can draw tourists to a city, creating or re-creating a sense of historicism in the urban landscape will continue to be part both of urban renewal and the creation of heritage tourism attractions’ (p. 411).

While this seems to be true in parts, many cities are yet to catch up with this idea. Heritage has been exploited in some cities, and yet forgotten in others. While there seems to be general nostalgia for heritage sites, governments are yet to implement heritage tourism in many places, especially those places with strong tourism branding around nature narratives. Perhaps, as Levine (*et al.* 2005) suggest, this is likely to change in the future,

‘As more cities compete for the attention of tourists, cities will strive to create heritage narratives that distinguish them from others; newly defined and emerging heritage narratives will thus contribute to the constant reshaping of the urban experience’ (*ibid*).

As cities strive to keep up with the demands of compelling narratives, they are forced to draw on their full gamut of resources. Even those places reliant on commodified nature are pressed to offer alternate narratives. But again, this is a complex process of negotiation. It would be naive to think that tourism destinations built on the commodification of nature would simply start to even out their offerings of the city, drawing in and celebrating cultural tourism as well. And even if this was the case, determining the ‘right’ type of cultural tourism is a challenge to be negotiated. Further, the impact that all of these narratives of the city have on the production of culture is yet to be understood. Here it is useful to briefly turn to an analysis of placemaking.

4. The cultural politics of placemaking on the Gold Coast

‘Placemaking’ has been used as both a policy term and a way of thinking about the everyday making of place. Popularized in the sixties to describe a process of designing cities for people, the term ‘placemaking’ has since become a term more commonly associated with the building of a city’s identity, and ideas of place competition. Today, the notion of placemaking resonates more closely with ideas of place competition and cultural tourism. Hemingway notes that ‘...to many, placemaking and the branding of place has become synonymous with its cultural offerings’ (2007, p. 332). As a policy term, it is closely associated with ideas about cultural branding and the cultural identity of (mainly) urban conglomerations. According to Paulson,

‘The term *placemaking* generally refers to the processes by which a space is made useful and meaningful ... Placemaking may reflect the work of elites who steer the interpretations and uses of a place to support their own financial interests. Placemaking may also occur more routinely, as individuals live, work, and interact in a given locale, shaping its uses and associations through everyday activity. The degree to which these meanings persist over time reflects another element of placemaking, the struggle to associate particular memories or identities with a place’ (2010, pp. 600–1).

Each of these meanings is inherent in the placemaking process, although it is the latter sense of the term that is the most interesting for the purposes of this research: the struggle over cultural identity, belonging and sense of place. This is a useful point of departure for us here because it conjures for us placemaking as a temporal-spatial struggle for a place’s function and identity.

Gatens and Lloyd (1999), in their book *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza Past and Present*, discuss the past identities of places and the importance of recognizing those past identities. They argue that because places are constructed by various collective imaginaries, we need to recognize these past imaginaries in order for everyone to have a right to their own sense of belonging. Furthermore, they state that,

‘The feeling of belonging to this or that family, clan or nation, confers upon us both benefits and burdens or obligations. One of these obligations is to take responsibility in the present for the manner in which one’s constitutive imaginary harms, excludes or silences others’ (p. 143).

What Gatens and Lloyd are describing here is the responsibility we have in the co-construction of places in the present. In order to responsibly respond to Gatens and Lloyd’s challenge, it is clear that some serious questions need to be asked.

Zylinska (2005) takes up this ethical task to responsibly justify her place in the world, theorizing her own sense of place. To undertake this mission, Zylinska internalizes Gatens and Lloyd’s question of belonging, ‘my being in the world... requires justification; I need to keep asking myself if my existence is not already a usurpation of someone else’s place’ (2005, p. 12). This step is an important leap in the right direction towards the responsible reproduction of the past. And necessarily it is a move that could afford those less fortunate a sense of belonging.

Altogether, this collection of theorizations around space and place, point fiercely to a political juncture: place is produced politically through a multiplicity of ‘stories so far’ (Massey, 2005) and this is critical to understand if we are to responsibly reconstruct the past so that the everyone has the potential to belong in the present.

4.1 Cultural voices

Singh points to Paulo Freire’s concept of the ‘cultural voice’ (Freire 1972) as a kind of a ‘process of conscious-awakening’ (Singh 2007, p. 38) in response to oppressive representations. In his seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), Freire champions a way in which a community might articulate agency in the construction of their identity. Although Freire (1972) uses the term ‘cultural voice’ in a specific context of colonialism, Singh (2007) argues that the term could indeed be extended to include other developed social environments.

In line with this, I use the term ‘cultural voice’ to denote a similar kind of conscious-awakening, albeit a starkly Caucasian, middle class ‘conscientization’ propelled by a particular kind of cultural oppression. By this, I consider the emergence of a cultural voice in response to the commodification impacting young cultural producers on the Gold Coast. I argue that a cultural voice is slowly emerging on the Gold Coast, against a backdrop of oppression; the oppressive practices here, I argue, are to do with the way that youth culture isn’t done on the Gold Coast, the way it isn’t provided for or nurtured. I also argue here that such planning needs to be transdisciplinary in practice.

4.2 Transdisciplinarity

An approach to planning for sustainable and productive culture needs to be transdisciplinary. In what follows I will briefly summarize transdisciplinary thought, as it stems from complexity theory, drawing largely on the work of Edgar Morin (2008) in order to flesh out an ontological response to these politics within cultural planning. Edgar Morin, the French theorist of transdisciplinarity, describes an ontology that recognizes the fluidity of disciplines, and provides a clear foundation for sustainability. On Morin’s notion of transdisciplinarity, Montuori (2005) suggests there are two reasons for the necessity of transdisciplinary thinking. The first, as clichéd as it sounds, is that ‘the “big questions” are simply not asked and addressed anymore’; while the second, is that ‘action in the world cannot be confined to knowledge from one discipline’ (cited in Morin 2008, p. xxvii). Drawing on Morin’s work, as well as his own, Montuori summarizes transdisciplinarity as requiring:

1. ‘A focus that is *inquiry-driven*, rather than disciplinary driven. This in no way involves a rejection of disciplinary knowledge, but the development of knowledge that is pertinent to the enquiry for the purposes of action in the world.
2. A stress on *the construction of knowledge* through an appreciation of the meta-paradigmatic dimension—in other words, the underlying assumptions that form the paradigm through which disciplines and perspectives construct knowledge. Disciplinary knowledge [sic] generally does not question its paradigmatic assumptions.
3. An understanding of *the organization of knowledge*, isomorphic at the cognitive level and the institutional level, the history of reduction and

disjunction (what Morin calls “simple thought”), and the importance and contextualization and connection (or “complex thought”).

4. *The integration of the knower in the process of enquiry*, which means that rather than attempting to eliminate the knower, the effort becomes one of acknowledging and making transparent the knower’s assumptions and the process through which s/he constructs knowledge’ (Morin 2008, p. xxvii, original emphasis maintained)

The first point is important because, as aforementioned, the cultural is often mutilated in disciplinary discourses. Morin warns of the dangers of reductionism, and therefore, mutilation,

‘I strongly believe that the less a thought is mutilating, the less it will mutilate human beings. We must remember the ravages that simplifying visions have caused, not only in the intellectual world, but in life. Much of the suffering of millions of beings results from the effects of fragmented and one-dimensional thought’ (Morin 2008, p. 57).

It is then through a kind of process of mutilation, that a very big chunk of culture is not catered for in cultural policy. As the empirical research demonstrated, it’s very common to see cultural policy become arts or creative industries policy only.

The second point acknowledging the construction of knowledge is also paramount in relation to the cultural policymaker. This is because, as John Law states,

‘Reality is neither independent nor anterior to its apparatus of production. Neither is it definite and singular until the apparatus is in place. Realities are made. They are effects of the apparatuses of inscription’ (2004, p. 32).

Realities are engendered, put forth, created. Patterns are connected and reproduced, effortlessly, time and time again. The mess that forms these patterns is often considered irrelevant or useless, and quite literally marginalized, dissolving into peripheries. But peripheries connect to other plateaus, new worlds and knowledges. These peripheries bring with them different information and ideas: they bring the new. Without them, the old machine simply reproduces itself, because all it looks for is itself. Each reproduction may be slightly different because the machine is still plugged into the outside world, but change occurs at a slow pace. Because the machine is so intently focused inward on producing itself, it is not open to new imaginations, it is closed to wider possibilities, and cultural change is problematic, as in the broad case of the Gold Coast. The policymaker and community member needs to question their paradigmatic assumptions in order to be truly transdisciplinary.

Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this paper, the integration of the knower in the process is an element also particular to Morin’s (2008) work, which can be helpful in recognizing the cultural policymaker’s place in the process. By placing the policymaker in the process of enquiry, we might be able to unravel or at least understand some of the tensions in policymaking situations. But more than that, we might understand the importance of ontological thinking in cultural planning for sustainable cultures. In a review of Morin’s *On Complexity*, Wells surmises that ‘our disciplinary mindset is blinding us to these more

challenging issues at the core of life's processes and the human experience' (Wells 2010, p. 95).

What I therefore argue for in this paper is a transdisciplinary approach to cultural planning, transcending the barriers of slippery disciplines in order to plan for culture, which has no discipline. In a much broader way, this paper calls for ontology of policy. Most notably, such an approach stresses the importance of situating the policymaker in the enquiry and it champions inquiry-driven processes of policymaking. Here I turn to an example of transdisciplinary thinking in practice.

4.3 The Sold Coast Project

Throughout my doctoral research, creating critical conversations about culture have been a focal point. The idea of these conversations bleeding out into the community to effect change was the goal. While it is clear that these conversations had currency in the community, I have always been cognizant that they had a shelf life. What was missing from these dialogues was a sense of continuity and sustainability. Many conversations felt like they had ended prematurely, primarily because my research had to end somewhere. But the social and cultural capital produced through my research propelled me to find a way to sustain these conversations. I initiated a dialogue between *Rabbit + Cocoon*, the Gold Coast's independent creative precinct, and the *Griffith Centre for Cultural Research*.

As a board member for Rabbit + Cocoon, I've been privileged to see the precinct mushroom from a derelict deserted warehouse to a community space hosting 14 artist studios, a radio station, a café, creative markets, street food markets and regular cultural events. The precinct, which is run independently and largely funded philanthropically, serves now as a community hub connecting like-minded people from all over South-East Queensland. In my various roles as Chair of the Regional Arts Development Fund, PhD researcher and board member of Rabbit + Cocoon, I've been particularly privy to the monumental role that Rabbit + Cocoon has played in shaping culture on the Gold Coast. Through my research, I've also accumulated the social and cultural capital to understand the centrality of Rabbit + Cocoon in the broader cultural community. For this reason, I decided that this creative precinct would be a suitable venue and conceptual trail for continuing cultural conversations, this time more broadly between the academy and the community.

After negotiating a partnership between Rabbit + Cocoon and the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research, a committee organically formed. The committee comprised of a handful of local artists, community workers and researchers, spanning art forms and disciplines from design to coastal management. This gave us the immediate advantage of building upon multi-layered perspectives. We also started from a position of expertise as everyone on the committee held expert local knowledge. A transdisciplinary lens enabled us to create a project that spanned knowledge and disciplines, foregrounding our own place as knowers in the process. Together we created *the Sold Coast Project*.

The Sold Coast Project is a partnership project that seeks to create and sustain critical conversations about culture on the Gold Coast. The name 'The Sold Coast Project' is both a celebration of the fact that the Gold Coast sells itself to survive, and at the same time, it critically engages with this economical bottom line. As our website states:

The Sold Coast Project is about social change. It's about rupturing common ideas of the city and drawing up new frames. It's about disturbing the Gold Coast's myths to unearth the everyday plights of people. It's about taking a good hard look at our city, our lifestyle and our future (The Sold Coast Project 2013).

Our guiding principles qualify this mission. The Sold Coast Project:

- Exists to serve and advocate for the Gold Coast community,
- Commits to social, cultural and environmental sustainability, and
- Upholds the principles of social justice and social responsiveness (The Sold Coast Project 2013).

We realize here that 'the Gold Coast community' is a broad term and by this we mean all those who are marginalized in current processes of placemaking. For the initial event that would launch the project we proposed a symposium. We used the following as a visual hook for the symposium,

'It's 2063 and the Gold Coast is a ghost town. Crumbling resort facades and bleached neon nightclub signs hint of a place once as bright as its name. Iconic high-rises are mere shells of buildings, their apartments empty, their views obsolete. Cruise ships do not dock here anymore. Planes do not land here. Tourists do not visit' (The Sold Coast Project 2013).

We also tailored the symposium to an academic and general audience with the following pitch,

'This symposium asks the question, what does the Gold Coast look like in fifty years time? In a risk society, where stability is not guaranteed, how can we work together to provide for the future generations of our city? Are there more productive ways that we can collaborate to achieve social, cultural and environmental outcomes for the betterment of our society? This interdisciplinary symposium brings together academics, policymakers, practitioners and the community to respond to some of the key challenges that our city faces in the next fifty years. It is primarily concerned with amplifying the voices of cultural leaders in the community, and in doing so, engendering new narratives of place. The symposium is organized around three key panelled streams' (The Sold Coast Project 2013).

In projecting fifty years into the future, we expected that presentations would take us beyond reactionary projects and toward the key critical issues for the Gold Coast in the next fifty years. In doing so, we hoped to open up dialogues with groups of people who were under acknowledged in current cultural plans. The presentations were organized around four key themes:

1. (Post)-tourism: placemaking, spacemaking, urban renewal
2. Cultural borders: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and others— inclusiveness under whose terms?
3. Young people's voices: political participation and digital belongings
4. Local/Global Imaginaries: Disaster management, risk, adaptation, mitigation (The Sold Coast Project 2013).

In order to insert the committee as ‘knowers’ into the process, the committee felt it important to open the day by projecting their own biographies in 2063 to frame the symposium. Each committee member addressed the symposium with a design fiction. Through this design fiction, the committee were able to canvas their hopes, dreams and fears for the Gold Coast in 2063, warts and all. Some projections were grim, some were hilariously hopeful and all were absolutely plausible. Many participants expressed their appreciation of this opening session. From then, the sessions rolled on until dusk.

With 21 presenters over one full day, we launched the project with gusto. The symposium was well-received and succeeded in tabling an enormous range of topics for further discussion. The full event was broadcast via *Rabbit Radio*, enabling a wide audience to tune in and participate. Most significantly, a robust Twitter discussion extended beyond the singular event. Even more surprisingly, shortly after the event, *The City of Gold Coast* invited the Gold Coast Project to partner with them in producing the next event: a provocation on the new twelve-year culture strategy. For council, this represents a turn towards more risky, creative partnerships as well as more inclusive community consultation. For the Gold Coast Project this marks a shift towards more open, transparent lines of dialogue between council and community, and it enables the project to impact and feed into policy directly. The partnership has already proved fruitful and has opened up unforeseen, unprecedented community dialogues with council.

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