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Reflections of a 'great port city': the case of Newcastle, Australia

Deborah Stevenson
Department of Leisure and Tourism Studies, The University of Newcastle, Callaghan 2308, Australia; e-mail: ltdms@cc.newcastle.edu.au
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Abstract. As the material form of the city and its symbols are negotiated and contested, the mobilisation of images and identities of place are central to the legitimisation of urban redevelopment. Frequently, these processes and their outcomes consolidate the status of those interests which have long controlled the urban agenda. In this paper I explore (with reference to the deindustrialising regional city of Newcastle, Australia) the extent to which powerful discourses of urban symbolism and the everyday meanings people attach to the places of their social and cultural worlds are implicated in the process of selling to local residents the 'ideal' of the redevelopment of the inner city.

Introduction

Through the critical lenses of urban political economy and feminist studies, cities have long been conceptualised as sites of oppression, discrimination, and exclusion. Studies from such perspectives have demonstrated repeatedly that the material implications of the private ownership of land, capitalist production, the global circulation of capital, and the sexual division of labour are made manifest in built environments which simultaneously establish and reinforce social inequalities and power differentials. More recently, interventions from the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies have repositioned the built environment and its study. Contributions from this tradition regard the city and its myriad spaces both as texts for the active interpretation and construction of meanings and as sites of resistance through struggles which might have only tenuous connections with material concerns. According to such perspectives, the cities of postmodernism are deeply implicated in the micropolitics of identity formation and the construction and celebration of difference (Keith and Pile, 1993).

Arguably, an urban sociology informed by cultural studies suggests that the effects of the intangible dimensions of space on the structuring of society cannot be ignored. Operating both at global and at local levels, space has a powerful symbolic dimension that is implicated also in the production and reproduction of social structures. These issues have been addressed by a number of commentators including geographer Doreen Massey (1992) and sociologist Sharon Zukin (1997). One important aspect can best be described as having been informed by the "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1975), or the interconnected configurations of meaning that result from individual and shared relationships to, and conceptions and experiences of, given spaces. Considering the transformative impact on the relationship of time to space that has occurred as a result of the development of new communication technologies, the structures of feeling associated with particular spaces need not involve situations of co-presence. For example, powerful sentiments of belonging to, or identifying with, particular spaces like nation states, having been shaped considerably by mass communications networks, can be held in common across populations. These sentiments exist also at the level of myth-forming networks of understandings, connotations, and meanings that, being particular to individual cultures, traverse time and space.

By combining the insights of traditional urban political economy coupled with those of cultural studies to consider the interconnectedness of the material and symbolic dimensions of space, I explore the extent to which powerful global discourses of urban symbolism can be implicated in legitimating the development of the built environment. Pivotal here is the *idea* of the city which operates on a number of discrete but reinforcing levels—the political, the economic, and the symbolic. These levels are constituted as much in terms of the existence of the idealised city as "myth" (Goodwin, 1993) and of how such an imagined city might look as in terms of what globally significant activities are actually undertaken there. The suggestion that the built form of any city can serve symbolically as a marker of the position or importance of that city in national and international terms is also canvassed here. My argument is premised on the understanding that many cities around the world—in particular deindustrialising regional cities (Watson, 1991)—have adopted strategies of reimaging and urban regeneration which were shaped by dominant perceptions of the symbolic and imagined form of the city. Consequently, these strategies have frequently endorsed the imposition of a built form based uncompromisingly on urban discourses of the global, rather than providing a mechanism for encouraging redevelopment processes that endorse the symbolic expression of local cultural identity and difference.

Through the use of Newcastle in Australia as a case study, I suggest that some notion of the existence of an imagined 'mythical' city (in this case a 'great port city') underscored the acceptance by residents of a plan to redevelop the abandoned waterfront of the deindustrialising regional city into a festival marketplace reminiscent of Darling Harbour in Sydney, Quincy Markets in Boston, and Harborplace in Baltimore. This process of endorsing the 'global' did not involve any consideration of the connection between the proposal and local cultural heritage and identity (beyond a manipulation of local inferiority complexes), nor was there any 'space' for a discussion of how local cultures might be nurtured through the act of reimaging. In order to provide an intellectual context for the discussion of this case study, however, it is necessary to consider the idea of the city as a symbolic, political, and economic entity and to suggest how this status was translated discursively into a redevelopment model for the deindustrialising regional city of Newcastle.

Exploring the mythical city

The idea of the globalisation of culture, the relationship between the global and the local, and the position occupied by a world network of cities within this understanding is complex (King, 1993). It could be suggested that representations of built space, as aspects of the globalisation of both material and symbolic cultural production, inform popular conceptions of not only which cities should be classified as 'world' or 'global' cities, but also of what such a city looks like. For example, it has been pointed out that Sydney Tower in the central business district of Sydney (the largest city in Australia) was erected as a symbol to represent that city's attainment of 'world' city status (Morris, 1990). The selection of a tower as the built form by which to denote this urban rank was not accidental. Rather, the tower was perceived to have a legitimacy that was drawn from the existence of similar structures in other major centres of the world, notably London and Toronto. The construction of Sydney Tower, therefore, can be seen as an example of the globalisation of a particular symbolically significant form of built space. Popular ideas about, and impressions of, the built form of certain cities, in particular New York, London, Paris, and Los Angeles, are most influential in defining the symbolic parameters of what is meant by the term 'urban'. These are the 'great cities' of the world celebrated by Philip Kasinitz (1995, page 3) in the following way:

> "The exhilaration we feel when we view a great city from one of those rare vantage points where one can 'take it all in' Paris from the Eiffel Tower, Lower Manhattan from the Brooklyn Bridge is the thrill of seeing in one moment the enormity of ... human work."

Despite the "exhilaration" that might be felt when viewing a 'great' city, however, it is doubtful that the impressions and stereotypes held by the majority of people about how a city might or should look have been constructed through personal contact with, or experience of, each city. Rather, central to the global imagining of urban form are the roles played by the international circuits of information and communication, most significantly the production and consumption of film and media imagery. Selected cultural representations of urban landscapes, packaged in the media in a variety of ways, are conveyed routinely to 'markets' around the globe.

Images of place presented in the texts of popular culture are influential in shaping the imaginations of the consumers of these objects of cultural production (Zukin, 1997, page 16). For example, popular culture provides people who have never been to the 'great' cities of the world, such as London, New York, Los Angeles, and Paris, with strong impressions of their physical form. Arguably, in this negotiation of image and imagination certain impressions become recursive. Courtesy of popular culture, particular images of place are positioned in the common imagination as quintessential features of the world's major cities. For example, Central Park, skyscrapers, and the wastelands created by elevated railways are prominent features of the imagined New York. Likewise, traffic jams and the featureless suburban sprawl of Los Angeles have salience. As Zukin (1997, pages 15–16) has suggested, "Images ... have not simply reflected real city spaces; instead they have been imaginative reconstructions – from specific points of view – of a city's monumentality". David Harvey (1993, page 27) notes that

> "Not all of this must be cast in a positive light, however. The stereotyping of other places is one of the more vicious forms of bloodletting within the media (one only has to read the Sun's descriptions of the French to get the point). Defining the other in an exclusionary and stereotypical way is the first step towards self-definition."

However, the serial construction of places other than so-called 'great' cities, such as the negatively imagined industrial city, also occurs within these symbolic limits. The semiotic hegemony or positively envisioned stereotypes of some cities and their built landscapes have become pervasive, and inform many of the dominant urban development discourses that have gained currency in places both within and without the multiplicity of urban centres worldwide. Such images include the harbourside festival marketplace development of places like Harborplace in Baltimore or Quincy Markets in Boston, which became a waterfront development cliché in the 1980s (Rowe and Stevenson, 1994). It has not just been the world's 'major' cities, though, which sought to assert urban status through the symbolism of the built environment and the development of monumental buildings and precincts (including festival marketplace developments). Rather, countless regional cities have also sought such status. In the quest to counter the perceived negative consequences of a history associated with heavy industry, and in a global climate of economic restructuring and deindustrialisation, many regional cities worldwide have adopted a range of city reimaging strategies (Watson, 1991; Zukin, 1996, page 45). Cities such as Barcelona, Glasgow, and Sheffield have undertaken programmes of urban redevelopment and city reimaging, often in conjunction with the hosting of a mega-event like the Olympic Games which have attempted to acquire the symbolic cache that supposedly accompanies the building of particular urban environments (Law, 1993; Whitson and Macintosh, 1993).

It was against this background that politicians and elite business interests in the deindustrialising regional Australian city of Newcastle began to formulate strategies intended to change the negative image the city was seen to have acquired because of its past as a centre for heavy industry (Dunn et al, 1995; Metcalf, 1993; Rowe, 1996). Pivotal to these strategies was a proposal to reconstruct a large tract of the city centre in such a way as to mark, materially and symbolically, the regional port city as 'great'. In this quest, popular—indeed mythological—ideas about what such a city should look like were central to the urban development proposal and to the public relations and media campaigns adopted to gain local support for this proposal. These strategies were successful at the expense of alternative reimaging proposals that argued for reimaging through the nurturing of local cultures (Stevenson, 1996).

A 'legacy of hard knocks'

Newcastle is the sixth-largest city in Australia and has long been an industrial centre. Recent economic changes, such as extensive restructuring (and proposed closure in 1999) of the BHP steelworks and the closure of the State Dockyard, prompted dramatic changes in the industrial base of the city, coupled with the severe stagnation of its central business district and a contraction of port activities (Metcalf and Bern, 1994). In 1989 Newcastle experienced an earthquake which destroyed large tracts of the urban fabric and seemed to provide the impetus for many to suggest that it was time to address the perceived and actual decline of the city through a reevaluation of the city's image, its built form, and its potential as a tourist destination (Rowe and Stevenson, 1994).

In a feature article for the local daily broadsheet newspaper *The Newcastle Herald*, journalist Terry Smyth (1991, page 16) uses the phrase "the Cinderella City" to describe the plight, or at least the perceived plight, of Newcastle at this time.

> "Newcastle has a chip on its shoulder ... a legacy of decades of hard knocks and of being labelled a dirty coal town."

This despondent city, he suggests

> "desperately wants to be noticed. Not as a mill town ... and certainly not as a quaint backwater, but as a city with distinct lifestyles, problems, resources, advantages and dreams ... A city with a soul."

The contrast implicit here between Newcastle as a 'town' and as a 'city' is significant. Demographically, Newcastle is classified as a city. However, discursively and in the imaginations of local residents it remains a 'town'. Sometimes this identification has been used positively, such as in the tremendously successful advertising slogan adopted by a local building society in the 1980s—"Hey this is Our Town"—which seemed to work as a statement of local solidarity, identity, and parochialism (Jordan, 1996, page 27). Just as often, however, this status as a town (particularly because of the implicit contrast with the nearby city of Sydney) is, as the Smyth quote exemplifies, an integral part of the negative image that locals feel needs to be overcome.

This time of reevaluation and change coincided with the announcement by the then New South Wales (NSW) State Government that an inner-city waterfront State Rail Authority site called Honeysuckle had recently been identified as redundant. At sixty-five hectares (the maximum assessment of available redevelopment land), the newly identified Honeysuckle site included over three kilometres of harbour foreshore land. In late 1990, the then NSW government announced the membership of the Honeysuckle Development Advisory Board (HDAB) [1], which was to oversee the formulation of a 'concept masterplan' for the redevelopment of the site. The Board consisted of seven members chosen by the state government, including the Lord Mayor of Newcastle,

[1] This Board later became the Honeysuckle Development Corporation.

the Secretary of the Newcastle Trades and Labour Council, and representatives of commerce and industry. It is noteworthy that the configuration of interests embodied in the HDAB were the very same tripartite interests of government, employers, and unions which Rosemary Pringle and Sophie Watson (1990, page 231) identify as being an aspect of the "fraternity" (Pateman, 1988) of male interests that currently comprise corporatist governments' approach to community consultation.

The announcement of the constitution of the board created a degree of local opposition for several reasons. First, all members, with the exception of the Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council, had some direct or indirect connection with the Newcastle Regional Chamber of Commerce. Second, there were no channels of communication in place that would facilitate community consultation or participation in the planning process. Third, all members of the Board were men. Fourth, it was argued that these familiar faces always seem to monopolise the memberships of appointed boards in Newcastle (see, for example, Sutton, 1992, page 78). The board attempted to deflect such criticism by constituting a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) in early 1991. This Committee consisted of twelve members chosen by the Board to represent selected, ill-defined interests, such as planning, community, culture, education, and the environment. Documentation dealing with the selection of members suggests nothing has been recorded that explains the selection process for the committee nor the criteria according to which people and groups were assessed.

Despite the existence of the CCC, much discontent marked the Honeysuckle 'masterplanning' process. Indeed, much of this discontent came from the members of the CCC. For example, despite frequent requests by members of the CCC to do so, the Committee never once met with the Board. It was claimed repeatedly (and my research supports these claims) that 'communities' other than the predominantly male 'business community' were able to do little more than react to decisions which were being made elsewhere by an advisory board that was perceived as insular and unrepresentative (Sutton, 1991, page 78). Many also claimed, both directly in CCC meetings and indirectly through the local media, that the CCC meetings simply provided a forum for the presentation of views which they argued were not heeded by the board (Vass, 1991). The evidence suggests that few local residents and interests outside those of the Chamber of Commerce had little, or no, control over the planning process and little, if any, input into the formulation of the 'concept masterplan'. The alternative views that seemed to be ignored pivoted, in particular, on the promotion of local identity, the maximisation of social concerns and a city reimaging process that nurtured local cultural activity (including its industrial image), and the work and priorities of local arts, ethnic, and indigenous communities, rather than the 'top-down' approach that seemed to be being adopted by the state government through its board (Stevenson, 1996; 1998; Wells, 1996). Despite objections, however, the power to determine the plan and make operational planning and development decisions rested entirely with the advisory board, the state government, and—to a much lesser extent—the city council, and it was the priorities of these interests which shaped their final plan.

In October 1991 the 'Honeysuckle concept masterplan' was revealed in a nine-minute promotional video that featured three-dimensional computer images of the familiar barren landscape of the Honeysuckle site transformed into a festival market-place development of enterprise, entertainment, and high-cost living (New South Wales Property Services Groups, 1991a). The video and the words and pictures of the glossy nine-page brochure accompanying the video both conveyed the same message: for the benefit of the people of industrial Newcastle, the state government was going to 'facilitate' the glamorous 'transformation' of the very 'heart' of the desolate city.

The artistic impressions of the reimaged Honeysuckle that appear in the video, the brochure, and the 'masterplan' depict manufactured water features, quaint replica sailing ships, high-quality marina spaces, and the integrative use of symbolic architecture. This festival marketplace urban style is described by Harvey (1989, page 91) as

> "[a]n architecture of spectacle, with its sense of surface glitter and transitory participatory pleasure, of display and ephemerality, of jouissance ... an eclectic mix of styles, historical quotation, ornamentation, and the diversification of surfaces."

Reimaged thus, Honeysuckle, it was claimed in the promotional literature, would afford Newcastle the opportunity to be placed alongside the 'great port cities of the world' like London, Boston, and Vancouver, and at the same time provide the key by which Newcastle could secure its economic, social, and cultural futures (New South Wales Property Services Group, 1991a). All that was required to turn the land-use 'opportunity' into a reality was the endorsement by the people of Newcastle of the 'concept masterplan'. It was hoped that an overwhelming demonstration of support would be achieved by the end of the two-month public display period that followed the plan's unveiling. It is this idea of Newcastle as a 'great port city' and the centrality of the festival marketplace images to the representation of such a city, which I suggest resonated with the residents of the "dirty coal town" and underscored their acceptance of the *concept* of Honeysuckle.

Supposedly, the 'masterplan' was not a detailed proposal; rather, it was a visualisation of preferred land uses. Despite the intricacy of the architectural imagery boldly being displayed in the promotional literature, such design issues were not to become relevant until much later, during the implementation phase (Devine et al, 1992, page 8); in other words, over the ten to twenty years that it was expected to take to turn the land-use dream into an architectural and urban reality. The point to be made can be summarised thus: the residents of Newcastle were asked to show consensus and support for the Honeysuckle 'vision'. This vision was represented in the form of images that appeared to portray the future shape of inner Newcastle. In reality, however, the future built form of Honeysuckle was an unknown 'detail' that would 'evolve' over time, on a site-by-site, building-by-building basis (Devine et al, 1992, page 8). Its evolution would be shaped by the contingent, volatile 'market forces' of property development, land speculation, and profit maximisation. It would come to fruition long after the two-month public comment period, and (given that the CCC was disbanded on the release of the 'masterplan') without any formal and public mechanisms to facilitate input from, or consultation with, communities outside those communities represented on the HDAB. The point is not that the planners should necessarily have known the future form of the Honeysuckle Development. Rather, it is to question the appropriateness and discuss the implications of marketing exercises that implied, misleadingly, that the planners did have this knowledge, and which sought to gain public endorsement of very specific urban development values, principles, and objectives, such as the sale of public waterfront land for private development. Central to the marketing process was the use of seductive urban imagery and symbolism which drew on global discourses of urbanism and manipulated local perceptions that the city was materially and symbolically inadequate.

Imagining Honeysuckle

The sale of any product requires the existence of a market, and where no such market exists, strategies need be devised to generate investment demand and interest in the product. In order to direct attention to the development potential of redundant urban space in deindustrialising cities and to refashion these spaces as marketable urban products, an intricate process of reimaging and place marketing is frequently set in

train (Kearns and Philo, 1993; Madsen, 1992; Stevenson, 1998). When selling the city, the commodity being promoted through place marketing and city reimaging campaigns is not just the city and the physical spaces of the city per se. Rather, concomitant with any attempted sale of urban space is the sale of the city's symbolic spaces. Selling and defining place is a complex transaction which requires also the sale of the idea of the city—what the city means, how it feels, what it looks like; both the tangible and the intangible attributes of particular urban spaces. These qualities must be identified and packaged, not just to potential investors and visitors, but also to local residents and communities of interest (Holcomb, 1993). In the example of Honeysuckle, place or image marketing was undertaken on two interconnected and mutually reinforcing fronts. The idea of the place and facets of its possible identity were 'sold' within and without the locality. This process required the use of different marketing strategies and the mobilisation of different discourses of urban symbolism. The necessity to generate local support for the spatial concept underpinned the marketing strategies that were adopted to sell Honeysuckle to developers and which include as pivotal the manipulation and sale of the idea of what Honeysuckle was to become.

Until the planning process was underway, the name "Honeysuckle" referred only to a redundant twelve hectare former goodsyard site. Even though this Honeysuckle had long existed as a place pervaded with a range of culturally constituted meanings that were encoded in its name, its form, its uses, and its past, prior to the 'masterplanning' process Honeysuckle did not exist as the spatial commodity or "brand" (Lash and Urry, 1994) into which it was to be transformed. Pivotal to formulating the plan for the sale and future redevelopment of the site was the creation from a desolate collection of linguistically unrelated urban spaces, a 'new' place called Honeysuckle. It is this place which became the object of subsequent image-marketing exercises.

In many respects, the symbolic unification of previously unrelated spatial fragments begins with the unified naming of the space. According to Paul Carter (1987, page xxiv), place naming is the act that transforms symbolically anonymous spaces into particular places for which a past can exist and an interrelated future is possible—this action is one which is central to the process of bringing a place into existence. Although there is an intricate connection between the naming of places and their encoded cultural meanings, these spatial meanings are not essential, nor are they fixed or stable. Rather, meaning is problematic, requiring through discourse continued definition, redefinition, constitution, and reconstitution. Equally, spatial meaning is vulnerable to manipulation by particular interest groups for a range of ends, be they political, social, or commercial. In other words, in order to market a place and its image, it is important first to invent the place through the act of naming and then to define and interpret this named place through the production of images and their promotion and sale.

As a named and lived space, the original place known as the Honeysuckle Goodsyard was the bearer of a range of historically constructed personal, social, and cultural meanings (see, for example, Barney, 1993). The 'masterplanning' process and the 'masterplanning' document extended the delineated space called Honeysuckle. In so doing, however, the name and the place "Honeysuckle" were treated as being unproblematic, and many of the meanings or imagined identities of place that may have defined the original Honeysuckle Goodsyard were appropriated as part of the definition of the new place. One aspect of this appropriation was the widespread use of historic photographs and a "memories of Honeysuckle" competition that was sponsored in cooperation with a local newspaper. The complex past of one place was simplified and symbolically grafted onto the new space.

The newly designated Honeysuckle, however, is a place about which the most potent meanings, although being justified in terms of the past, are of the future. Honeysuckle and its symbolic existence are metaphorically and physically also a part of another redefined place and future—the 'great port city of Newcastle'. In many respects, both of these futures were being legitimated and grounded symbolically in the cultural spaces of the past and the particular, and brought into existence through marketing and public-relations exercises.

The task undertaken by the NSW State Government was to stimulate commercial interest and imbue ostensibly worthless land with a market value. They chose to do this in a number of ways but an important aspect was the creation of a named unified spatial commodity. An important facet of the long-term marketing programme was to generate public support for the redevelopment and use this public support in commercial marketing strategies. For two months, displays consisting of sketches, photographs, and maps illustrating an architectural concept for the redevelopment of the Honeysuckle site were held in a number of locations in Newcastle and the adjoining cities of Lake Macquarie and Maitland. In the foyer of the Newcastle City Council Administration Building the centrepiece of the 'masterplan'—an architectural model of the proposed redevelopment—along with associated information was on display every day for two months from the plan's official public release. During this time, other visual displays were mounted in two regional shopping centres, public libraries, a city branch of the Commonwealth Bank, and at the Complete Business Expo that was held over two days at a local leagues club. Display periods for these locations varied in duration from several days to over a month and were advertised in the local print media.

Selling the 'vision'

An important aspect of the public display procedure was the distribution to the public of copies of the nine-page promotional brochure and, at some displays, the screening of the video that had been shown at the launch of the 'masterplan'. This brochure, the title of which is the slogan for the redevelopment *Honeysuckle, Newcastle: A Partnership for the Future* (New South Wales Property Services Group, 1991b), is an expensively produced publication that features a considerable amount of empty space interrupted by small photographs of Newcastle Harbour and the Honeysuckle site, past and present. Coloured design elevations of the area's proposed future are depicted along with sanitised editorial comment and, across the two centre pages, a detailed coloured map illustrating the land-use zones being proposed. Under headings like "The Catalyst", "The Process", "The Concept", and "The Potential", each page of this document deals with a different theme in a manner that reduces to a collection of unproblematic pieces of information the complex history of the site and its alternative futures, the politicised nature of the 'masterplanning' process, and the uncertainty surrounding both the redevelopment and the future of the city. For example, the brochure (New South Wales Property Services Group, 1991b, page 3) describes a planning process that was cooperative, unrestrained, and involved all local 'communities' equally, thus presenting as unproblematic a planning process from which the majority of elected representatives and bureaucrats of Newcastle City Council, women, and groups other than those communities represented on the Advisory Board were excluded. Also rendered unproblematic are consultative procedures that did not enable direct contact between the CCC and the HDAB, and which explicitly imposed stringent constraints on the agenda of the CCC (Morgan, 1991). In these ways, the promotional brochure ignores all interests and perspectives omitted or marginalised, and glosses over any opposition or friction that may have occurred during the planning phase.

The video entitled *A Partnership for the Future*, which was shown initially when the 'masterplan' was released and was used subsequently to accompany local information displays, was designed to 'sell' to the residents of Newcastle a place, a concept, a future, and an identity called Honeysuckle, a task which was undertaken through the utilisation of computer imagery, misty glimpses of prospective lifestyle opportunities, and enticing invitations for Newcastle to join New York, London, San Francisco, and Sydney as a 'great port city of the world'. The video aims to create specific needs in viewers, in particular the desire for Newcastle to have a future as a 'great port city', which can only be satisfied by the redevelopment of the Honeysuckle site in the way that is being proposed in the masterplan. The inference is that, with their endorsement, Honeysuckle will be the trigger which will transform the image and the visage of industrial Newcastle from that of a stigmatised, second-rate 'coal town' into a vibrant, attractive, and enviable 'great city' like Sydney (which, of course, has the Darling Habour festival marketplace development).

The comparison with Sydney is important here and the Sydney–Newcastle rivalry is a major theme in the 'concept masterplan' and the 'selling' of the Honeysuckle concept to local residents. This rivalry relates to the traditional social, economic, and cultural dominance of metropolitan Sydney over regional Newcastle. As a result of its proximity to Sydney, it is claimed that Newcastle has, historically, been disadvantaged; for example, numerous core Hunter Valley administrative functions have been 'lost' to Sydney in recent years. These losses have reinforced Newcastle's subordinate position of always being "in the shadow of Sydney's growth" (Devine et al, 1992, page 13). The implications of the perceived cast of Sydney's shadow have long been central to discourses of Newcastle, its image, and identity as a 'coal town' rather than a 'great port city'. It should be remembered, too, that Newcastle was settled initially in the early nineteenth century as a prison establishment that served Sydney in much the same way that Sydney had been settled by Britain as a penal colony (Cushing, 1996, page 21).

Having first set up the relationship between the two cities in a traditional way that positions Newcastle as the habitual loser, the Sydney–Newcastle comparisons which follow and which profoundly permeate the 'masterplan' and were promoted in the public relations displays (in particular through the central image of the festival marketplace) were, in fact, not those in which Newcastle is unfavourably positioned. Rather, the dominant themes of the text (which were highlighted in the public displays) seek either to espouse the attributes of Newcastle through comparisons with Sydney, or to explicate the advantages which the coal town will (with Honeysuckle) be in a position to claim over the state's capital. For example, it is said that Newcastle shares with Sydney a CBD that has close proximity to its harbour and beaches. The quality of the waterways is not compared—a harbour, by virtue of being called a harbour, is apparently equal to all others. Instead the claim is made that in Newcastle both the harbour and the beaches are more accessible to the CBD than they are in Sydney. For the land-uses recommended for the Honeysuckle site, an implication of the proximity of the business area to the water is that Newcastle is in the enviable position of being able to offer "affordable" waterfront housing to public servants, the equivalent of which this occupational group would find "prohibitively expensive in Sydney" (Devine et al, 1992, page 30)!

By way of contrast with dominant discourses of polluted cities, it is Sydney and not industrial Newcastle that the 'masterplan' positions as having the most pressing pollution problem. The environmental quality of Newcastle's glamorous long-time rival is represented as being under threat from uncontrolled urban growth and a continued increase in air and water pollution:

> "A major issue emerging is the continued growth of the Sydney Region and the possible adverse effects on the Region's air and water quality" (Devine et al, 1992, page 20).

In contrast, of pollution in the city of Newcastle the document says that

> "the environmental consequences associated with heavy industry have changed dramatically for the better over the years ... The city has the potential of becoming one of the most attractive in Australia, with its harbour, ocean setting and generally intact 19th century central core" (Devine et al, 1992, page 16).

A photograph appearing above a caption which reads "Industrial City" accompanies these words. Dominating the foreground of this photograph is a gleaming nineteenth century steam-powered ship moored at a wharf in Newcastle Harbour. Much less visible across the harbour through the web created by the mast and rigging of the historic ship is the form of the Newcastle Grain Terminal. The day is clear and hues of blue dominate the scene in a way that sets in sharp relief the dark hull of the ship in the foreground. The waters of Newcastle Harbour, the sky of the industrial city, and even the silos of the grain terminal appear to be washed in various shades of blue. The image being projected by the photograph is clean, still, and unquestionably maritime. It is not the image of an industrial landscape. Strikingly absent are the towering smokestacks of the BHP plant and the clouds of toxic smoke they spew. Equally, as a result of the dominant position afforded the historic ship, the photograph resonates symbolically to themes of leisure and times long past and these spatial signifieds overwhelm the contemporary places of work that are represented by the modern grain terminal.

In concert with the public displays, the local print media also played an important role in disseminating images and information about Honeysuckle to the public. Overwhelmingly, this media endorsed the proposal for Honeysuckle and did so frequently in terms of the popular view that Newcastle was a city that had been "ever second-best" (*The Newcastle Herald* 1992) and "burnt out with faded dreams of glory ... and other grand plans" (Ryan-Clark, 1991). For these reasons the embattled residents 'deserve' the Honeysuckle redevelopment and the future being promised in the 'concept masterplan'. This is a position well summarised by an editorial ("It's time—for this city") headline that appeared in *The Newcastle Star* (1991) soon after the plan's release. More recently the claim was made in *The Newcastle Herald* that "Newcastle needs ... the Honeysuckle redevelopment project" (1997).

Equally, the master-planning team was praised by the media as having a "keen perception of what is needed to make Newcastle a city of the future" (*The Newcastle Herald* 1991a). During the period following the release of the 'masterplan' there were no newspaper articles questioning the appropriateness of the Honeysuckle project as it had been proposed, and which in any way began to explore the detail of the 'concept masterplan' and its potential social, cultural, environmental, and economic consequences for Newcastle. None of the articles that were written could be described as examples of incisive investigative journalism. Rather, they were either explicitly in favour of the development or unanalysed reports of selected issues, such as those raised by speakers at a symposium on the Honeysuckle development hosted by the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Newcastle in November 1991 (Ryan-Clark, 1991; Ryan-Clark and Skellams, 1991; Stevenson, 1992).

Nowhere have local editorial policies on the Honeysuckle development ever explicitly been stated (when asked, one local journalist replied "it would be more than my job is worth" to tell) and in the absence of knowledge about the particular bureaucratic culture that shapes the texts that have been produced, conclusions must be drawn from the texts themselves. As a critical link between everyday life and the 'public sphere' of politics, the position taken by the media on any issue is important (Dahlgren, 1992, page 12). This is no less so with regard to regional media and the local issues dealt with by these media and the symbolic spatial communities and identities they constitute. It has been

argued too that as a result of the dissipation of boundaries between the media and powerful commercial interests editorial independence is tenuous and the possibility that the media will promote, either actively or by omission, particular interests over others is very real (Rowe, 1991). Clearly, these factors are important in informing the nature of the texts that have been written about Honeysuckle. However, given the ways in which Honeysuckle has been positioned in terms of the discourses of Newcastle and its identity, the most significant factors are undoubtedly symbolic. If the media simultaneously shape and are shaped by public opinion and the dominant ideas of a symbolic community, then the position being taken by the Newcastle media on the issue of Honeysuckle must surely be seen as one which is grounded in a belief that the city and its residents need, want, and deserve the Honeysuckle development, and that the role of the media is to be the voice of a unified and welcoming community.

In this light it is possible to see why any questioning or challenging of the plan is viewed as divisive and as a potential threat to the government's long-overdue commitment to the deindustrialising regional city. As one member of the CCC said in an interview for this research, being seen as taking a position against the 'Honeysuckle concept masterplan', or even as opposing or questioning aspects of the plan seemed to be taken as indicative of being 'against Newcastle' and 'against change'.

Given the support of the local media and the nature of the public relations campaign, it would have been very difficult for people to respond in an informed way to any of the 'opportunities' presented or to question their desirability. The media and the promotional material, therefore managed to conflate the design concept, the future of Newcastle as a 'great port city', and the future of the site in such a way that each became inseparable from the other and from the proposed land usages being described.

The market research

A one-page community response survey "Have your say" accompanied the promotional brochure distributed at the public displays. Notices in local newspapers giving locational information about the Honeysuckle displays invited people to "have [their] say concerning the proposed opportunities for Newcastle City" (see, for example *The Newcastle Herald* 1991b). By filling out the survey, the promotional rhetoric said, residents could demonstrate their 'support' for the planning team and become part of the 'partnership' for Newcastle's future. Significantly, the survey did not ask people to respond to the specific land uses proposed in the 'masterplan'. Instead, respondents were asked to endorse a set of undefined, unproblematic 'opportunities' which the 'masterplan' for Honeysuckle afforded the city of Newcastle. The ten all-encompassing opportunities identified include residential, retail, commercial office, marina, public areas, heritage buildings, recreation areas, entertainment, access to city, and access to suburbs. Complex and value-laden urban planning and development issues were thus simplified to a benign set of broad, uncontentious categories and represented in illustrations and architectural models; no explanation of the categories listed was given nor any detail as to what each of these 'opportunities' might actually mean in the Newcastle context. Nowhere in either the survey form or the promotional brochure were complex issues addressed. For example, what is or what should be meant by 'residential', and for whom does Honeysuckle present a 'residential opportunity'? Also during the public display period a local research organisation, the Hunter Valley Research Foundation, conducted an Omnibus Survey of residents' responses to the 'masterplan'. Since then this survey has been conducted quarterly. This survey, like the small "Have Your Say" survey, was an attempt to gauge reactions to the plan that were based on knowledge information gleaned from local newspapers (71%),

Honeysuckle public-relations campaigns (50%), and television coverage (20%)—all of which pivoted on the presentation of visual representations of the 'concept'. The result from both these market research exercises, according to the Honeysuckle Development Corporation, show that up to 85% of respondents support the Honeysuckle proposal (Honeysuckle Development Corporation, 1993, page 16). I would suggest, however, that this support is more for the image and the promise than for its detail.

Repeatedly, it was said that from the sixty-day public reaction period the master-planners wanted only an indication that there was 'consensus' supporting the broad zoning picture being set out in the draft master-planning document, which was summarised in the promotional literature and illustrated by the architectural model, along with an acknowledgement that they (the planners) were "heading in the right direction" (Zullo, 1992, page 22). Neither 'detailed' public responses to, nor any fundamental questioning of, the proposal were considered necessary or appropriate 'at this stage'. Significantly, an indication of this consensus was sought via market-research exercises that surveyed the public's initial responses to the 'concept masterplan' that had been informed through shopping-centre displays, promotional literature, and newspaper reports that featured intricate coloured illustrations of urban design 'detail'. A measure of the level of support felt by the residents of Newcastle for what were, in effect, a wide-ranging set of planning assumptions, principles, and practices was deduced from public reactions to some very attractive postmodern images of a vibrant inner-city festival marketplace development. These drawings of the proposed built form of Honeysuckle resonate with the familiarity that comes from replicating the urban design and architectural formula that has been adopted by the 'great port cities' of the world, in particular nearby Sydney. The images chosen to represent the imagined Honeysuckle were so predictable they could well have been traced from the design elevations of any other such waterfront festival marketplace development, including Sydney's Darling Harbour. But the familiarity was not accidental. Rather, its predictability was, symbolically, an important part of the concept that was being sold to the residents of Newcastle; that is, a resounding image of the 'great port city' which Newcastle at last had the opportunity to become.

That the festival marketplace formula being illustrated and recommended by the 'masterplan' was in actuality both uncertain and contingent was irrelevant. Festival marketplaces were presented as being risk-free developments which would guarantee economic, social, and cultural success. The evidence from elsewhere suggests, however, that the festival marketplace approach is highly risky, requires a huge input of public funds in order to prosper and has rarely proved 'successful' in social terms. In addition, even when such developments can be judged as being commercially prosperous, rarely have host governments been able to recoup their financial investment, and rarely have the redevelopments managed to generate net increases in employment opportunities for the city or the region (Stevenson and Rowe, 1998).

The irrelevance of this scenario for Newcastle, of course, is that at no stage has the NSW State Government actually promised to build a festival marketplace on the Honeysuckle site. Rather, the state government sought only to encourage the sale and private development of the site and to add value to its redundant land assets in inner Newcastle (New South Wales Property Services Group, 1993, page 32). Public support for this task was paramount and the process of selling Newcastle residents the idea of an inner-city festival marketplace and the symbolic urban status that was said to accrue from such a development was a central strategy in legitimating the land sale process. The promotional literature (New South Wales Property Services Group, 1991b) presented Newcastle with a glamorous package. This was a package which offered the 'town' the opportunity to secure a future which the state government did not undertake

to deliver (1991b, page 9). There are no guarantees or promises that the pictures illustrating the 'concept' will ever materialise as the built form of Honeysuckle. Through a public relations 'information' program, however, the 'masterplanners' sought public endorsement of their concept and in this, it seems, they have been spectacularly successful.

Conclusion

The global circulation of images—urban and otherwise—has had a profound impact on the built form of cities with certain features being reproduced both in metropolitan and in regional cities around the world with a regularity that has become serial (Boyer, 1990). From the example of Honeysuckle in Newcastle, I have argued that the idea and image of the global urban development strategy of the festival marketplace was one that, symbolically, seemed closely associated with urban prosperity and the attainment of urban status. Despite being dubious in social, economic, and cultural terms, the formulaic image of the festival marketplace appeared as a powerful symbol at the centre of the redevelopment strategy proposed by the NSW Government (through its Board) for an abandoned waterfront site in inner Newcastle. As the 'Honeysuckle concept masterplan' was in essence a planning manifesto that privileged economic concerns over all others and appealed to the 'impartiality' of free-market activity as the exclusive arbiter of value, the image of the Honeysuckle site transformed into a thriving festival marketplace in the centre of a revitalised city was little more than a highly successful public-relations construction.

The point which has been made in this paper is that the potency of the Honeysuckle proposal for local residents came primarily from the symbolic status believed to accrue to regional cities that adopt certain urban redevelopment strategies, such as the waterfront festival marketplace, in an attempt to respond to the material and symbolic challenges of deindustrialisation and reindustrialisation. The construction of a particular built form is deemed important if such a city is to gain a position somewhere within the global networks of cities—a position as a 'great port city'. These networks mesh the economic with the political and the symbolic in a competitive game of attaining and retaining urban status. For the regional city, such status is intimately associated with the symbolism derived from the connectedness of the imagined and material forms of the metropolitan centres and the global status which certain architectural structures (including festival marketplaces) are seen to announce.

Several years after the release of the 'concept masterplan' and the promises of Honeysuckle are yet to be fulfilled. Despite public endorsement of the concept, developers have been slow to show interest in the project and the government's land 'asset' remains redundant. Meanwhile, local interest groups continue to contemplate ways of rehabilitating the city's lingering negative industrial image (Rowe, 1996) and the question of whether Newcastle will ever really be a 'city' (and not a 'coal town'), let alone a 'great port city' continues to frame redevelopment and reimaging discourses. For example, a symposium held in November, 1997 and organised by the Department of Communication and Media Arts at the University of Newcastle was called "Icons of a *real* city". It is impossible not to speculate on how different Honeysuckle might have been had another future for the city of Newcastle been imagined. Perhaps this imagining process would have been one that enabled local communities to be involved actively in the planning process, to construct an urban form that resonated with the diversity and experience of the local rather than the predictability and seriality of the global.

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