Chapter: Consuming our National Parks: Cultural Heritage in a Consumer Culture

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Abstract

This chapter will discuss how natural cultural heritage has been consumed by our neo-liberalist treatment of nature. In particular it will examine the case of our National Parks where the commercialisation of travel experiences has become a central tenant of management and income generation. Our relationship with national parks has always been complex and driven since the earliest days of the parks movement by economic use values and tourism interests, as much as by conservation and cultural preservation forces. The propensity for commodification of park environments by organised tourism industry forces means that ways must be found to align park marketing initiatives with the very cultural forces that they both seek to capitalise on and support. This chapter will conclude with some preliminary observations on this important topic.

Introduction

"Economics and aesthetics really do go hand in hand" (Daniels, 1915 in Sellars, 2008, p. 28)

Over the course of the 150 year history of the national park movement we have seen dramatic changes in humankind's relationship to the natural world based around the evolving interaction of two contradictory and also mutually reinforcing forces; environmental preservation and the altruistic motives of human society and industry. In the

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present paper we will suggest that landscapes such as national parks are best seen as "symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs" (Greider & Garkovich, 1994, p. 1). In short they are cultural spaces as much as physical spaces. What constitutes a person's perspective of a national park is a series of social beliefs and values that are in a constant state of becoming. As Denzin (2005, 2007, 2008) has noted in the context of the historically formulated position of Native Americans in the landscape of Yellowstone National Park; it is through the quoting of history with all of its inbuilt societal and cultural discourses that we are able to "expose those contradictions and ruptures that brought science, art, capitalism, railroads and tourism together" in the production of national park space.

In the present chapter we will focus on the manner in which the evolution of neoliberalist based cultures in national parks (see Sellars, 2009) has led to a reappraisal of human kind's relationship to our natural cultural heritage. Focussing in on the issue of tourism marketing we will show how capitalist based agendas have sat often sat uneasily with those aspects of the park space that sit outside of the expected tourist experiences. As Runte (1997) noted in his influential work *National Parks: The American Experience*, cultural nationalism is best pursued through the dramatization of what society may expect to lose through indifference and apathy. With tourism marketing often having been predicated first and foremost on tapping into the innate wants and desires of travellers; such altruistic concerns have often meant that as the power of the environmental movement has grown, tourism marketing has often come to be somewhat unfairly situated as one of the primary architects of capitalist consumption (Sharpley & Pearce, 2007). Denzin (2008, p. 453) has eloquently noted that it is:

> "Capitalists who build hotels and railroads pay artists to paint pictures of exotic settings. These paintings are turned into advertisement, and used to entice tourists … Soon the economic and cultural geographies of tourism take over. Pristine wilderness and the wilderness experience are quickly comodified … If tourism is a devil's bargain, then paintings … are part of the devil's toolkit".

In this chapter we will explore whether it is necessary fair to accept Denzin's analogy of the marketing industry as the devil's instrument. We will seek to achieve this aim with respect to a short case study of aspects of the representation of the Quarantine Station [hereafter Q Station] located in the North Head National Park, Sydney Australia. Bashford (1998) has described the quarantine line as a mechanism for the creation of national identity through the demarcation spaces as variously self and other. Over the course of nearly two hundred years of history, the Q Station line has been owned and disowned by generations of users. Whilst it was only in recent years with the arrival of Mawland's Pty Ltd. and the establishment of a formal boutique resort that the area has taken on an overt industrialised tourism focus; the long history of often forced human engagement with the site has left generations of imprints on the natural environment. In the present chapter we will explore some aspects of the historical formulation of the Q Station as a consumptive space, situated as it is within a range of wider cultural and environmental preservation forces.

National Parks, the Q Station and Cultural Heritage – The Natural as Sacred

In 1921 former Park Service Director Stephen Mather noted that "national parks are stabilizing and inspiring influences in times of national restlessness … And there is no finer opportunity in the Americanisation movement than to spread the gospel of the parks far and wide" (Ross-Bryant, 2005, p. 31). Like America, Australia is also a former convict colony. Settled a little over 200 years ago as an outpost of the United Kingdom; Australia has since the earliest years of its European occupation viewed the environment as a buttress of its cultural legitimacy. For instance the site of the earliest permanent European settlement in Australia, Sydney Harbour has variously served as the site for early agriculture and industrial endeavour (Beasley, 1996; Edwards, Griffin, & Hayllar, 2010; Endersby, 2000; Proudfoot, 1996), as a front line for national defence (Hoskins, 2009; Karskens, 2009), and as the backdrop for major sporting an cultural events. Covering an area of 392 hectares the Sydney Harbour Foreshore National Park has been created progressively since 1975 with the aim of preserving the natural and cultural history of the region. Managed variously by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service; the region

includes some of the most iconic tourism and cultural sites in Australia including Fort Dennison, Camp Cove, Bradley's Head, Mrs Macquarie's Chair, Goat Island and the North Head National Park. Over the course of its history the North Head National Park region has served as the home for the Australian Defence Force's School of Artillery and from 1828 till the 1980s the region also was the site for the North Head Quarantine Station.

The North Head Quarantine station site covers 31 hectares and includes 67 heritage buildings on the north head of Sydney Harbour and only a few kilometres from Manly, which was Australia's first tourism precinct (see Butler & McDonnell, 2011). The first use of the North Head site for the detaining of people suspected or confirmed as being infected with communicable diseases occurred in 1828 with the detaining of the convict ship *Bussorah Merchant* (Darcy & Wearing, 2009). Permanent facilities including hospital and accommodation blocks, processing facilities and administration centres were established progressively from the mid nineteenth century with the area forming the backdrop to Australia's historical bid to combat the effects of a range of medical crises including the 1830s European cholera epidemic and later the 1957 Asian Flu Epidemic. A less positive aspect of the site's history relates to its use as a location for the forced detaining of Asian and other migrants (Bashford, 1998; Bashford & Strange, 2002). Some of the last recorded arrivals at the site were Vietnamese refugees and Cyclone Tracy survivors in the 1970s (Department of the Environment, ND). When the area was finally closed in the 1980s more than 13,000 people from over 580 ships had been detained at the facility. From the time that the Q Station ceased to perform its historical disease preservation function and control of the site was ceded to the National Parks and Wildlife Service there has been consternation in the community over its sustainable usage.

Scholarship by Darcy and Wearing (2009) and Wilson et al. (2009) have discussed recent stakeholder conflict over the use of the North Head Quarantine Station site in the context of moves by the National Parks and Wildlife Service to establish public private partnerships. Recognising their responsibilities to maintain the site's cultural and environmental significance the NPWS had since the mid-1980s sought to encourage small scale commercial utilisation in the form of conferences, interpretive tours etc. (Stephen Wearing & Darcy, 1999). Wearing et al. (2016) have noted that due to limitations imposed by current state

government funding arrangements the NSW Government in the early 2000s put the site out to commercial tender, a process that led to the awarding of a 21-year-lease to the group Mawland Hotel Management Pty Ltd in 2006. Darcy and Wearing (2009) have noted that the Mawlands proposal for the Quarantine Station site was the only proposal that did not include provisions for a major hotel development. Preferring instead to pursue a future of adaptive reuse and restoration; Mawlands have sought to restore a number a number of historical buildings and to develop the site as a cultural tourism precinct with facilities developed to allow for the running of guided tours, boutique restaurants and conference accommodation (Brown & Weber, 2011). Redevelopment of the site as a commercial resort was essentially finalised by 2008 with the new operators subject to some of the most stringent operating regulations in Australia (see Wilson et al. 2009).

Wearing et al. (2016) have noted that "for all its potential as a site of conservation/tourism partnership, for years the Quarantine station redevelopment has been clouded by stakeholder contestation over its future" making it a wicked problem for tourism policy makers. Over 1340 written submissions were received in a public inquiry in the late 1990s (Darcy and Wearing, 2009). Today a range of stakeholder groups can be identified for the Quarantine Station including the self-entitled Friends of the Quarantine Station (FOQS), the Manly Greens, Friends and Residents of Manly and the National Parks Association of NSW (see Darcy and Wearing, 2009). The mission statement of the FOQS is:

> To raise public awareness of the rich heritage that exists at Manly Quarantine Station, to campaign to reverse the current privatisation plans of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and to work towards a sustainable management structure for the Manly Quarantine Station which would preserve the station intact for this and future generations. (Friends of the Quarantine Station, 1999)

From its earliest days the North Head Quarantine Station site has been characterised by consumptive patterns that are reflective of their time. Similar trends are observable in the broader scholarship on national parks (Goldstein, 1979; PBS, 2009; Alfred Runte, 1977, 1997; A. Runte, 2002; Sax, 1980). National parks are, at their core, "environmental management instruments created … to ensure that natural or near natural areas are set

aside for to protect large scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area" (International Union for the Conservation of Nature 2014 in S. L. Wearing, McDonald, Ankor, & Schweinsberg, 2015, p. 225). Notwithstanding the continued legislative responsibility of park managers to protect the natural world; national parks the world over have for many years now been characterised by evolving societal expectations of what our connection to the natural world should be. Much of the complexity in this area derives from the evolution of the sacred and cultural elements of national parks (seeRamakrisha, 2003). National Parks in the US have been described as nothing less than 'America's cathedrals' (Feinstein, 2006). Cronon (1996) has written on the overt religious imagery in the early environment writers including Muir and Thoreau. While the sacred imagery of the national park is often set apart from human reality, as something we can come back to – unchanging; Ross-Bryant (2005) has noted that increasingly the multiplicity of types of stakeholder engagement with parks means that it cannot simply be treated as abstract and separate from its reality. The sacred wilderness is inherently subject to change. As Klingle (2003) notes, consumption is spatial and historical in the sense that how we relate to the environment around us such as a national park is dictated by the historical evolution of what is deemed to be acceptable over time.

Consumer Culture and the North Head National Park - A Match Made in Heaven or a Devil's Bargain

Over the course of the 150 year history of the North Head Quarantine Station there is a dramatic shift observable in the way in which human kind has reacted to the same physical space. At a time in the early nineteenth century when steam ferries were first starting to traverse the 7 mile sea crossing from Sydney Cove to Manly pier, ferrying tourists to what was to become Australia's first ever tourism resort; a mile or so further around the headland other visitors to Sydney were facing a different kind of reality (Clarke, Frederick, & Williams, 2010, p. 80):

> Sky … Ocean
> I am very frightened of having the disease.

Moreover the doctor is helpless to control the sickness.

Feeling pessimistic and despondent

I am not used to maintaining hygiene yet.

If you asked me the feeling about the voyage

I shall persuade you never to come here for pleasure.

Wish you good health and a long life.

Xie Ping De, a resident of HE Country

Early summer, Ding Ji Year

People quarantined at the North Head Quarantine Station faced an uncertain future and a reality far removed from the opportunities afforded to contemporary visitors. The following quote is taken from the current Q Station website:

Leave the hectic world behind and experience the magic of Sydney Habour from the privacy of your own room. Wake up to the tranquil and wild beauty of Sydney Harbour National Park. Visualise a rich past while enjoying the comfort of contemporary conveniences. Q Station Sydney Harbour National Park Manly (Q Station) is one of Australia's significant heritage and environmental landmarks preserved within 30 stunning hectares of Sydney Harbour National Park.

It is the ultimate way to experience the unique grounds of Sydney Harbour National Park, with everything you could want in a getaway.

From swimming, snorkelling and kayaking to bush walking or simply just relaxing, you can experience the invigorating, restorative beauty of the Australian bush and the salt sea air. End the day by dining on the edge of Sydney's amazing Harbour at the Boiler house Harbourside Restaurant & Bar.

Powerfully inspiring and truly unique, Q Station is located at the historic site of the former Quarantine Station at North Head. There's nothing like feeling history's power with Q Station's expansive and historic surrounds. Host a meeting or a

conference; celebrate a birthday or an anniversary; or just get away for the weekend.

(Q Station, 2015)

Clarke et al. (2010) characterise early visitors to the Q Station as travellers; travellers that made the most perilous of journeys, before seeking to leave messages for others who would follow. The rock art that can be found throughout the Q Station site today, and which forms an important part of the modern tourism experience is a form of tourism marketing (Clarke et al., 2010). Much as Australian Aborigines used rock engravings as a form of cultural expression, so too did early visitors to the Q Station seek to leave their mark on the environment in which they travelled. In doing so they were essentially helping to define personally negative aspects of cultural heritage that paradoxically are so prized by consumers today. In the rest of this section we will consider the implications of this historically informed evolution of the national park cultural space for the marketing of culture in national parks.

In its most basic form the role of tourism marketing and the strategies that surround it are predicated on an "internally integrated but externally focussed set of choices about how a firm addresses its customers in the context of a competitive environment' (Clegg, Carter, Kornberger, & Schweitzer, 2011, p. 150). Mainstream tourism industry interests have historically placed the tourist at the centre of marketing endeavours. Whilst understandable in the sense that supporting the attainment of a desired tourism experience is central to all tourism industries throughout the world; the corresponding tendency for tourism marketing to thus be seen as the instrument of an inherently evil neoliberal and capitalist marketing system has we would suggest created barriers for the active integration of tourism into broader national park landuse planning (see arguements in S. Wearing et al., 2016). Donohoe (2012) has suggested in the context of a discussion of World Heritage areas that the power of the heritage brand is not defined on the basis of whether site x or site y makes a particular preservation list. Instead its power is derived from the way it is marketed and the ability of the marketer to tap into historically formulated links that a society sees in an area's preservation.

What value is there in the Q Station on Sydney's north head national park? Previous scholarship has answered this question by seeking to apply stakeholder theory to the study of public private partnerships in a contested cultural space. Darcy and Wearing (2009) established that much as stakeholder collaboration is key to sustainable development; so to do all stakeholders have immense pride in the formative effects of historical cultural institutions. Whether one sees the modern Q Station as an example of poor planning, or as a sustainable and responsible adaptive reuse of a cultural tourism site is in many respects irrelevant; there will always be ideological debates over the sale of public land to commercial tourism interests. As to whether such sales or leases are good or bad depends we would suggest on the ability of tourism industry interests to promote recognition of an all-encompassing and respectful notion of culture. Engelstad (2009) has argued that legitimacy is central to any individual or group being able to lay claim to a culturally accepted position of power. The processes whereby cultural based tourism industries can claim cultural legitimacy is contentious and is dependent on the ability of tourism managers to merge cultural preservation interests with product development interests (McKercher, Ho, & du Cros, 2005). In national parks, managers have often resorted to demarketing and other strategies designed to drive down tourism visitation numbers in an attempt to almost by default limit tourism's impact by limiting its size (Armstrong & Kern, 2011; Beeton, 2001; Beeton & Benfield, 2002; Kern, 2006; Kotler & Levy, 1971; McKercher, Weber, & du Cros, 2008).

Tools including demarketing have their place in an expanding lexicon of marketing methods that are available to park managers. Armstrong and Kern (2011, p. 34) noted in the context of future research directions that "diverse cultural and political contexts will have an effect on the use of demarketing". Such contexts have been evident in the recent work of Darcy and Wearing (2009). In this paper it was identified that the community action group Friends of the Quarantine Station were concerned over the potential loss of control of important parts of one's cultural heritage that may result from privatisation. At the time of writing it has been 9 years since Mawlands first signed the lease for the Quarantine Station site and people must evaluate on its merits whether Mawlands has been successful in achieving the sustainable management conditions it was prescribed by government. As such the question

of whether consumer culture at the North Head National Park is a match made in Heaven or a Devil's Bargain is still an open question.

Hall and Tucker (2004) noted that it is only through human valuing and interpretation that sites become significant. Over the last few decades a substantial body of literature has been published over the authenticity of tourism (Cohen, 1988; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Hillman, 2007; Hughes, 1995; Johnson, 2009; MacCannell, 1973; Pearce & Moscardo, 1986; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999); authenticity being important to the present discussion in the sense that what is valued by tourists may not necessarily be a true reflection of history. But what of the afore mentioned situation where it is the constituent parts of the living history of the site (specifically the early migrants and other residents of the Q Station) that have laid the groundwork for defining the cultural significance of the site through their engravings and other historical remains. To quote Stewart (1993, p. 50 in Clarke et al. 2010, p. 82:

> The inscriptions become souvenirs of these events by capturing the viewer into a reverie that restores a sense of the contexts and times of their creation

By opening ourselves up to the possibility that tourists can in some circumstances be the creators of authenticity for future generations, we are left with the prospect that consumer culture and heritage need not always be mutually exclusive and opposing forces. Instead there is the possibility that tourism and consumer culture can create and support the maintenance of cultural heritage; a point that the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2015) recently made in the course of advertising 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, where they recognised:

> "the importance of international tourism, and particularly of the designation of an international year of sustainable tourism for development, in fostering better understanding among peoples everywhere, in leading to a greater awareness of the rich heritage of various civilizations and in bringing about a better appreciation of the inherent values of different cultures, thereby contributing to the strengthening of peace in the world".

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