

WEEK EIGHT

CHAPTER 11

Staging Difference

AESTHETICIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY CITIES

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tion of new intensities of difference (social polarization). I wish to render problematic these commonly held views of the aestheticization of urban life. I argue that these perspectives overlook the multitude of ways a local politics of difference might brush against processes of spectacularization and aestheticization in the city. My aim is not to deny that urban processes may have entered into a new regime of signification, nor to rebuff the observation that in many contemporary cities there has been an intensification of the distinction between those who have and those who do not; rather, I reconsider the assumption that the aestheticization of city life only ever marks the familiar, albeit now more instrumentally semiotic, appropriate force of postmodern capitalism.

I elaborate this argument by exploring the cultural politics of urban space. By this I mean the various processes by which urban dwellers articulate their identities and interests through and in the spaces of the city. In existing accounts of the spectacular city this alternate cultural logic of urban space is relegated to the explanatory fringes. It is undeniable that cities are caught up in accelerated processes of globalization and that part of the way this manifests in urban space is through a cultural logic of image making. Yet cities are also sites where difference is amplified and where a situated politics of difference is acted out in a multitude of ways. There are many vectors of power at work in cities that structure how identity is articulated and rights and privileges are distributed. These vectors are not outside or incidental to the workings of capitalism, but they are often as not shaped by relations of difference whose complexity cannot simply be reduced to a narrow script of capital accumulation.¹ This is especially evident in processes of racialization and racial difference that are not simply outcomes of the uneven workings of capitalism but deeply embedded in historically constituted structures of power.

Empirical flesh is given to this argument by examining the way in which a racialized politics comes into contact with processes of aestheticization in contemporary Australian cities. Australian cities, as with cities in other settler colonies like South Africa or Canada, provide distinctive and useful variants on the First World city. These cities display many of the hallmarks of what is understood as postmodernity: gentrification, events-led redevelopment, city boost-erism, self-conscious place making, and the emergence of various sites of spectacle (shopping malls, waterside developments, theme parks). Yet these same cities are also products of a colonial past, and they exist in nations that are struggling toward a postcolonial future. In the Australian context the various aestheticized formations associated with cities that might be thought of as postmodern also negotiate a

One of the features of contemporary cities often commented upon by analysts is the increased prevalence of the spectacle and processes of aestheticization. Urban transformations of all kinds are now understood to occur through the self-conscious exploitation of what might be thought of as cultural capital (Kearns & Philo, 1993, p. ix). Many types of urban change are taken into this ostensibly new cultural logic of city development: events-led planning, gentrification, the process of selling a city image, the expansion of sites of consumption, and even the rise of urban design as the new planning common sense. This transformation in the way in which urban development and change is understood to operate is regularly linked to the always voracious, but now more cleverly stylish, penetration of capital into the everyday lives of city dwellers. Relatedly, these processes of aestheticization and spectacularization are linked to the more complete grounding of capital accumulation in the sphere of consumption. Indeed, for many commentators the city of the spectacle is emblematic of postmodernity itself.

This chapter explores this specific understanding of the contemporary city in the context of postcolonial race relations. Aestheticization and spectacularization are often depicted as only ever working negatively: to override more real urban cultures (the appropriation of difference); as generating a proliferation of inauthentic diversity (depthless fragmentation); or as contributing to the produc-

more local inheritance of (post)colonialism.² In the Australian context, British colonization resulted in Aboriginal people being dispossessed of their lands and marginalized from the emergent settler society. Until the 1950s Aboriginal people were encouraged to live away from urban areas on designated reserves and missions. Only those Aborigines who were judged to be suitable for assimilation into mainstream Australian society were deemed appropriate urban citizens. During the 1960s and 1970s the indigenous rights movement ensured among other things, that Aboriginal people could become legitimate participants in urban life in Australia. Now small but politically vocal indigenous minorities live in most Australian cities. And while the more significant efforts to recognize Aboriginal rights to land have involved nonurban areas, as this paper will show, Australian cities have not been untouched by such postcolonial restructurings. To set processes of postmodernity into a context of postcoloniality necessarily and productively complicates the way each is understood. It challenges many of the assumed outcomes of processes of aestheticization by pointing to the unpredictable ways these come into contact with a situated politics that structures specific social differences.

RETHINKING THE HEGEMONY OF VISION³

In his account of the condition of postmodernity David Harvey (1989) elaborates the links between postmodernity, the restructuring of capital accumulation around consumption, and processes of aestheticization. As he so succinctly put it, "Postmodernism . . . signifies nothing more than a logical extension of the power of the market over the whole range of cultural production" (Harvey, 1989, p. 62). Of course, Harvey's depiction of the condition of postmodernity draws heavily on Fredric Jameson's (1984) thesis about the cultural logic of Late Capitalism. For Jameson the defining feature of Late Capitalism has been the way in which culture has been appropriated and set to work as the fuel for the now semiotic motor of capital accumulation.

This transformation to a semiotic society, regulated by new regimes of representation and image making, is almost routinely given flesh by referring to the space of the city. In the city of consumption the manipulation of desire is paramount. As Featherstone (1991, p. 99) notes:

The postmodern city is therefore much more image and culturally self-conscious; it is both a centre of cultural consumption and general consumption, and the latter . . . cannot be detached

from cultural signs and imagery, so that urban lifestyles, everyday life and leisure activities themselves in varying degrees are influenced by the postmodern simulational tendencies.⁴

There is a central irony in this understanding of postmodernity: at the same time that culture is placed center stage (as the new logic of transformation), it is also divested of a more wide-ranging and everyday role in the lives of city dwellers. For example, Jameson and other like-minded commentators place a predominantly negative inflection upon the aestheticization of city space. For Jameson a once "semi-autonomous" and authentic culture, is transformed into a hyperreality of depthless culture. Similarly, real histories become "a series of perpetual presents" (Jameson, 1984; see also Featherstone, 1992, p. 267). For Sharon Zukin, aestheticized urban transformation, such as gentrification or themed redevelopment, results in the dismantling of "older urban solidarities," which are then replaced with consumption spaces "shaded by new modes of cultural appropriation" (Zukin, 1992, p. 221). In this view, the new cultural logic of global capitalism simply works to estrange "real culture" from its more authentic, because more localized, origins. This now homeless vernacular is transformed into what Boyer (1992, p. 204) refers to as "the spectacle of history made false."

Culture is certainly not centered in a productive way in these accounts of the aestheticized city. Rather, here is a version of a far more familiar positioning of culture as "mask," false consciousness, or a "veil" over more "real" processes (Harvey, 1989, p. 87). For David Harvey the "urban spectacle" has been deployed to attract capital, to augment entrepreneurialism, to legitimate change—in short, to act as the more opaque face of new processes of accumulation and social and political regulation. The city has become a "city of illusion" (Boyer, 1993, p. 111), a giant theme park (Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1991). In this transformation, culture (understood as aestheticization) comes to serve a decidedly modernist grand narrative about the new logic of capital accumulation.⁵

There is a problematic relationship between the idea of the spectacular city of consumption and the notion of a politics of difference. On the one hand, difference and diversity are acknowledged as fundamentally important components in this new aestheticized urban logic. For example, it is acknowledged that new architectural and urban design forms celebrate difference, selectively harvesting the local and the past and reassembling the desired elements in an orchestrated pastiche. Similarly, cities wanting to court marauding capital often emphasize ethnic diversity or local character as a way of competitively marking their distinctiveness. And consumption industries

more generally intensify the diversity of their product in order to tap increasingly differentiated and discerning markets. Yet, on the other hand, this new diversity is often cast simply as a *play* of difference that is ultimately subordinate to the "cultural dominant" of consumption (Cooke, 1988, p. 479). In this sense the proliferation of difference is thought of as something which masks what is really a globalized cultural logic (King, 1993). Extending this argument, Jameson (1984, p. 61) has suggested that the proliferation of desires associated with this global culture of commodification has resulted in a "waning of affect" and a demise in "feeling . . . emotion, all subjectivity."

The emphasis that these accounts give to the *play* of difference as opposed to *abilities* of difference has not gone unremarked. Most notably David Harvey's account of postmodernity came under critical fire from feminist scholars like Rosalyn Deutsche (1991), Doreen Massey (1991), and Meaghan Morris (1992). Each argued that Harvey had failed to allow his account of the logic of the contemporary moment to come into contact with feminist ideas and political agendas or even, for that matter, alternately positioned articulations of difference. In particular, Morris' (1992, p. 258) response to Harvey is framed around the violence his account does to a productive notion of aesthetics and its role in meaningful polities of difference. As Morris notes, Harvey's meta-narrative of the cultural logic of capital [rewrites] as 'the same' all the differences" he sees as distinguishing postmodernity.

Such criticism might also apply to the way accounts of postmodern cities deal with other vectors of difference, including racialized difference. For example, Harvey's attempts to address race in the postmodern city demonstrate the assumption that "politics" has been transformed into "play," or that "affect" has become mere "effect":

The geography of differentiated tastes and cultures is turned into a pot-pourri of internationalism that is in many respects more startling, perhaps because more jumbled, than high internationalism ever was . . . [T]his produces a plethora of "Little" Italies, Havanas, Tokyos, Koreas, Kingstons, and Karachs as well as Chinatowns, Latino *bairros*, Arab quarters, Turkish zones, and the like. Yet the effect . . . is to draw a veil over the real geography. (Harvey, 1989, p. 87)

At the hand of the cultural logic of capitalism, racial and ethnic difference and the associated processes of racialization are reduced to festivals, costume dramas, and sanitized and exoticized ethnic enclaves. Harvey even goes so far as to suggest that aestheticization works to pacify more unruly articulations of racial difference. Drawing on the

example of the city of Baltimore, Harvey (1989, pp. 88–89) charts the way in which city officials invented a festival of "ethnic diversity" as a means of reclaiming downtown spaces that had previously been the site of less playful "urban spectacles" of "race riots."

For commentators like Harvey and Jameson, postmodernity has produced a political crisis. In these accounts, difference has no disruptive potential. It is only something that capitalism makes use of to give urban transformation an "accommodating face" (Kearns & Philo, 1993, p. 23). Difference is merely that which postmodernity disempowers by "ghettoizing . . . within an opaque otherness" (Harvey, 1989, p. 117). Dressed in the play of motifs and images that gesture to local pasts and celebrate other cultures, these new forms of urban transformation can guard against the "antagonism that might otherwise have surfaced from indigenous local populations" (Kearns & Philo, 1993, p. 23). Similarly, even as Soja (1989, pp. 74, 219) acknowledges new possibilities in a "postmodern politics of resistance" he, at the same time, despairs at the "numbing depoliticization" that has occurred in his beloved Los Angeles (see also Gregory, 1994, p. 307).

In his later work *Thirdspace* (1996), Soja self-consciously encounters theorists of difference in an attempt to elaborate his postmodern urbanism. At least part of *Thirdspace* concerns itself with processes of spectacularization in the "exopolis" of Orange County, California (1996). Soja, like Harvey and Jameson before him, comes to his views on processes of spectacularization under the influence of Jean Baudrillard (see especially 1983). Baudrillard's writings on the collapsed division between the real and the unreal and the emergence of the hyperreal, what he calls *simulacra*, has been undeniably important. At its most productive it contributes to uncoupling the chain of signification and revealing the often arbitrary alignments of signs and things. Yet his is also an undeniably cynical view of the consequences of this unsettlement of signification. While such an uncoupling might well stand at the brink of a subversive politics of difference, it is often taken to stand merely as a surprisingly uncomplicated indicator of capitalist mystification. Certainly Soja's analysis of Orange County wavers between these possibilities. He strives to replace cynicism with creativity. On the one hand he sees spectacularization as part of "creatively erosive postmodern urban geographies." On the other hand he still positions it as the mask of "corruption, deceit, greed, emptiness" (Soja 1996, pp. 278, 279).

Many of the preceding accounts of the postmodern city display an uncritical acceptance of the depoliticizing force of aestheticization. There is little sense of the ways in which the concerns of racial and ethnic minorities, say, might *not* be placated by the introduction of

ethnic festivals, nor is there any hint of how such groups might transform these new arenas of *play* into more familiar arenas of *politics*. Once having charted the displacement of politics by play, it is not surprising that these commentators on postmodernity display a certain nostalgia for the way it once was. They yearn for that time when there was "real" politics. They yearn for that time when they imagine an authentic local culture was better protected from the maraudings of global capital. They yearn for that time when, to coin the terminology of Raymond Williams, "residual" forms of cultural production could provide the ground spring for a counterhegemonic politics (see Jameson, 1984, p. 57). It seems that most commentators on postmodern urbanism have been quite at a loss when thinking about politics in this new regime of signification. For Harvey, postmodernity created a political dilemma based around the cleavage between the presumably always "reactionary politics of an aestheticized spatiality" and the now disempowered politics of "others" whose causes are articulated locally, whose political formations are fragmented, and whose struggles always risk being commodified (Harvey, 1989, p. 305).

This loss of politics is not a pre-given consequence of the aestheticization of contemporary society. It is, rather, a consequence of the way in which various commentators on postmodernity have conceptualized aesthetics, images, and signification. As both Deutsche (1991, p. 22) and Morris (1992, p. 265) have noted, these accounts of postmodernity refuse to see the realm of images and image making as meaningful practice: something which is socially produced, has politics, is material, and is productive. Moreover, there are still organized oppositions to urban redevelopment, no matter how clever their disguises. The logic of capital is regularly subverted by the everyday uses that urban dwellers make of their city spaces. In short, urban-based political processes continue at a variety of scales and around a wide range of issues. Indeed, the creation of spectacles and processes of aestheticization may even serve these other agendas in ways not envisaged in these existing accounts of the postmodern city.

Of course, playful appropriation is not the only framework through which race and ethnic difference are understood in contemporary accounts of postmodern cities. The discussion of the increasing levels of social polarization in postmodern cities also incorporates some attention to such vectors of difference. Lash and Urry (1994, pp. 145–146), for example, argue that "large numbers of immigrants" flow into the new and more sharply differentiated lower classes of the contemporary city. Within social polarization arguments, race and ethnicity become variant forms of class differentiation, an

outcome of new distributional frameworks of advantage and disadvantage. Social polarization debates do alert us to important racialized outcomes in the postmodern city. Yet they tend to set these outcomes apart from the complexly embedded structures of power which ensure that the new underclass is indeed racialized. Moreover, the accounts of social polarization rarely attend to the various ways in which racialized groups might negotiate and subvert their historically constituted marginalization. So while social polarization accounts remind us that race matters in a most material sense in the sociospatial pattemings of contemporary cities, they too deactivate the cultural politics of racialization. Keith and Cross (1993, p. 8), somewhat disturbed by the way in which race and ethnicity were being theorized in the context of the postmodern city, called for commentators to take more seriously the seemingly "taboo . . . architecture of power" associated with racialized differences. For them this adjustment would bring many so-called postmodern cities into contact with their colonial and neo-colonial underbellies. In a similar vein, Paul Gilroy (1987, p. 228) made a plea for urban analysts to take seriously the "cultural politics" of race and racialization "as contending definitions of what city life is about."

In the remainder of this chapter I will examine some examples of the way in which processes of aestheticization intersect with a (post)colonial urban politics. My purpose here is twofold. First, I want to demonstrate the variability of processes of aestheticization in the contemporary city. Sometimes the making of an urban spectacle is just that, spectacular: in scale, in capital outlay, in political will. But aestheticization also has more diminutive articulations in the contemporary city, being manifest in localized urban design projects, in community arts initiatives, and in government-led place making and place-enhancement projects. The political effects that might attend megadevelopments which quite instrumentally utilize image making may not necessarily be associated with these alternate processes of aestheticization and place making. These alternate transformations of urban space may entail complex partnerships between local groups, the state, and private capital investors. They may even be part of quite genuine initiatives intended to create more inclusive urban spaces. . . . Indeed, these more modest spectacles may even provide space for the articulation of those oppositional political forces for which so many analysts yearn. My second purpose in what follows is to demonstrate the unpredictable outcomes of processes of aestheticization at all scales. Be they the legitimating skin of capital accumulation or the result of a well-intended inclusionary planning, the political outcomes of the processes of aestheticization are by no means pre-given.

DISPLACING RACE

The Formula One Grand Prix encapsulates many of the features scripted into the logic of consumption characterizing postmodern cities. Here is a sports and leisure event that ranges across the globe, annually landing in those cities which have managed to woo Grand Prix organizers and convince them that they are adequately equipped to deal with such a prestigious event. The right to host the Grand Prix is fiercely sought after on the grounds that it brings enormous economic gains to the host city, increasing tourism and benefiting the service sector. Telecast worldwide, it is also an event that Grand Prix boosters claim can put a city "on the map." That the Grand Prix is a desired event was clearly illustrated in the recent struggle over which city should host the Australian race meeting. The city of Melbourne successfully wrested control of the event from the city of Adelaide, and this was cast by the conservative government of the state of Victoria as a economic coup of unprecedented proportions. Unlike many other Grand Prix circuits, the Melbourne circuit is located in the center of the city and uses existing road networks that run through a large park. Albert Park is now annually given over to the roar of Formula One racing cars.⁷

The Grand Prix meeting is an event that overflows into the urban spaces which surround it. In the case of the Melbourne Grand Prix it was anticipated that race goers would, at the end of the day, spill into the restaurant and club precinct of the nearby seaside area of St. Kilda. Like many seaside areas in contemporary cities, St. Kilda recently has been subject to efforts to revive and to stylize its image. Down-at-heel pubs have been transformed into bijoux restaurants and galleries, greasy cafés have reinvented themselves as "continental" cafés whose tables and chairs now spill onto the public pavements. The main street has been townscaped in ways that celebrate the diversity and "artistic" character of the community. The nearby Grand Prix event was not simply going to put Melbourne on the map but would also consolidate St. Kilda's role as one of the foremost entertainment areas of the city.

In the week preceding the inaugural Melbourne Grand Prix in March 1996, traders and local government officials in St. Kilda were busy preparing for the influx of race goers. In that week, in the early hours of one morning, a toilet block located in a small park at the end of the main restaurant street in St. Kilda was demolished. This was no ordinary toilet block. The building was covered with artwork depicting the Aboriginal flag, the important Aboriginal site of Uluru (Ayers Rock), and figures from creation stories of indigenous Australians and later defined by planners as a traffic island.

lians. The toilet block stood in a small open space that was used by a group of about 30–40 local Aborigines as a meeting place (Figure 11.1). It is here that this small group of Aboriginal people talked, drank, dried out, and slept. It was a mobile and fluid group consisting of Aboriginal people from Melbourne as well as visitors from other parts of the country. Many of the group were homeless or relied on temporary housing, many were welfare dependent, and many were alcohol and drug dependent. Local community service groups regularly dropped in—providing wood for the communal fire and checking to see if anyone needed food, medical attention, or assistance in dealing with welfare agencies.

The "parkies" of Cleve Gardens were an increasingly anachronistic sight in the rapidly gentrifying restaurant precinct of St. Kilda. For some years the local traders had been complaining to the municipal authority about the parkies, calling for the area to be "cleaned up." Local community service groups, including Aboriginal services, had also expressed concern about the parkies and had attempted to pressure the municipal authority into providing better facilities for them. There was also concern, expressed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community service groups, that the parkies presented a negative and undesirable image of urban Aborigines to the wider public.⁸

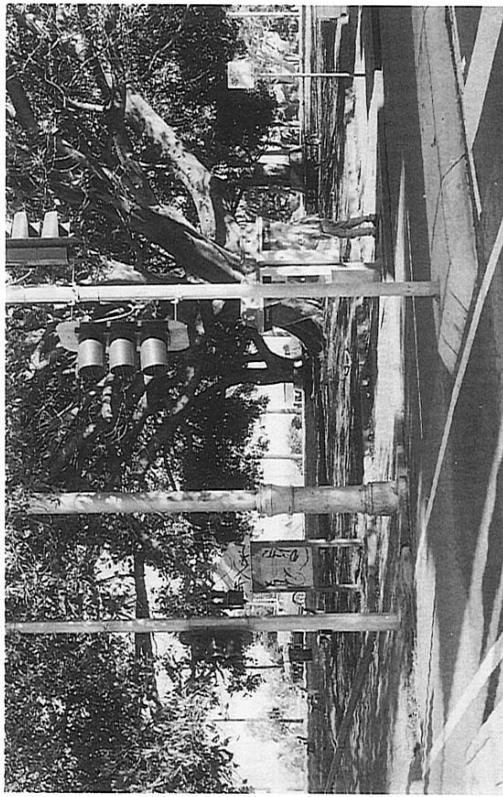


FIGURE 11.1. View of Cleve Gardens, St. Kilda, meeting place for local Aborigines and later defined by planners as a traffic island.

It was in the context of this mounting concern over the parkies that the local government passed a number of local "environmental" by-laws. The Environment Local Law No. 3, City of Port Phillip (1995), explicitly sought to "control activities which may be dangerous or unsafe or detrimental to the quality of life" in the municipality. The Streets, Roads and Other Public Places Local Law No. 4, City of Port Phillip (1995), enacted controls directed at keeping "peace, order and well being" in the foreshore area (including Cleve Gardens). Included in this local law was a provision that allowed the local authority to "regulate the use of reserves and other public places," including the power to "designate areas and times during which alcoholic beverages may not be taken into such areas." Although broadly applicable, these local bylaws had specific implications for the parkies. The provisions for the control of "nuisances and noise, odour and smoke emissions" directly implicated their use of open fires to keep warm and cook. The controls of drinking in public places was clearly a mechanism that could be used to regulate the current use of this open space by the parkies. If the parkies themselves were not "illegal," then certainly these local "environmental" laws ensured that specific aspects of the way they occupied this space were legislated to be so.

From 1994 to 1996 the local government established first a working group and then a task force to consider the fate of the parkies and of Cleve Gardens itself. Early initiatives did not envisage removing the parkies but proposed instead that Cleve Gardens be redesigned so that it might better serve their needs as well as ensure that a more "positive" image of Aboriginality was presented to the public. This plan did not assume that the parkies would be moved. It sought to improve facilities for the parkies by building a new toilet block, fireplaces, and even rudimentary shelters for those sleeping out. The initial scheme for Cleve Gardens also included landscaping and design features that were explicitly influenced by Aboriginal themes and motifs, albeit ones which drew solely from traditionalized versions of Aboriginal culture.

This relatively sympathetic approach to accommodating the parkies use of Cleve Gardens into the increasingly gentrified surrounds was short lived. This initial plan never eventuated and was ultimately shelved on the grounds that it was inappropriate; not only too costly but not necessarily in the interests of the parkies or the wider community. Included in the emergence of a less accommodating stance toward the parkies was the subtle redefinition of the open space in official discourses. Cleve Gardens transformed from a "park" to a "traffic island," a redefinition that not only justified claims that the area should not be overdeveloped but also that any human occupation of

the park was "unsafe" (Port Phillip Council, 1995, p. 3). A 1995 discussion paper commissioned by the local government noted that the park had "become associated with anti-social behaviour resulting mainly from excessive alcohol consumption. Some of these behaviours are drunkenness, begging, harassment, violence and public hygiene issues associated with homelessness" (Port Phillip Council, 1995, p. 3). The report was careful to specifically state that this antisocial behavior was not necessarily associated with the Aboriginal parkies but also with other non-Aborigines attracted to Cleve Gardens. Despite this careful delineation between behavior and a racially categorized group, there is little doubt that the "anti-social behaviour" of this site was publicly coded as "Aboriginal."¹⁸

The local authority finally decided upon a multipronged initiative to solve the "problem" of Cleve Gardens. It was agreed that the site was not appropriate for its current uses and that parkies should be encouraged to use other, more appropriate (and less visible) open spaces in St. Kilda. To this end, a new (and better equipped) toilet block was constructed in another nearby park. Hostel accommodation for the parkies was also provided in a street further away from the main restaurant precinct. Free of its troublesome dwellers, Cleve Gardens itself was then to be "beautified" (City of Port Phillip, correspondence, March 4, 1996, in minutes of the Cleve Gardens Task Group, June 26, 1995). Some \$A40,000 was allocated for the landscaping of the Gardens, which is to include market stalls for the sale of Aboriginal arts and crafts, Aboriginal-inspired pathways and walls featuring the artwork of a local Aboriginal artist, the replanting of the Gardens using native grasses and shrubs, and the construction of a "memorial and cultural marker." The "cultural marker," also to be designed by a local Aboriginal artist, is to pay homage to the Aborigines of the area, including some who had recently died.

In the local press much was made of the fact that the demolition of the toilet blocks at Cleve Gardens occurred in the week prior to the International Grand Prix. Although the synchronicity of these two events is remarkable, the demolition of the toilet block was simply one moment in a much longer history of local efforts to contain and regulate the Aboriginal presence in St. Kilda. In a context of the expansion and gentrification of this restaurant precinct, the parkies of Cleve Gardens had become increasingly anachronistic (Cresswell, 1996; Sibley, 1995). The pressure from local traders to "clean up" the area coalesced with the reformist visions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal bureaucrats who felt the parkies gave Aborigines more generally a negative image. Together these forces resulted in the Cleve Gardens parkies being constructed as aberrant, unclean, and dysfunc-

tional. The arrival of the Grand Prix in Melbourne, and the planned role St. Kilda was to play in servicing the entertainment overflow from the event, energized this incremental trend toward excluding Aborigines from the main restaurant precinct (Sibley, 1995). St. Kilda is a highly diverse urban area in a nation that envisions itself as both multicultural and postcolonial. In this context, the complete erasure of an Aboriginal presence would be inconsistent with such a politics of inclusiveness. The tension between a drive toward exclusion and the desire for inclusionary difference resolved itself in the making of a sanitized, planned, and most disembodied indigenous garden. Here unruly embodied Aborigines were replaced by native vegetation, Aboriginal designs, and—most tellingly—a “memorial cultural marker.”

PRODUCING OTHERNESS 差異性

In the example of Cleve Gardens urban Aborigines were displaced by the requirements of consumption-based industries, both local and global. Here embodied difference did transform itself into a playful, sanitized expression of inclusiveness. Here consumption-based development and urban Aborigines were cast as incommensurate things that had no business being proximate to one another. In this section I would like to turn to another example of the making of a site of spectacular consumption and the way it came into contact with urban Aboriginal interests.⁹ In this case a consumption-based redevelopment actually helped to produce a specific articulation of difference in the form of Aboriginal claims for the spiritual significance of the redevelopment site. Faced with this opposition developers sought to incorporate specific, but ultimately unacceptable, forms of Aboriginality into their scheme. This example shows clearly that processes of aestheticization do not operate in any simple way to deactivate politics and legitimate change. Rather, this example shows exactly how such developments can activate a cultural politics of difference in which signification and material rights are complexly entwined.

During the 1980s in the city of Perth, Western Australia, a development partnership between the state government and private investors proposed a scheme to redevelop an old brewery site. Like many inner-city redevelopments of this time, the scheme envisaged transforming now redundant brewery buildings into a shopping, restaurant, and gallery complex. It was precisely the sort of redevelopment that is associated with the postmodern city. The 19th-century buildings were to be restored and made into the architectural centerpiece

of the development. Initial plans included office space, a 450-vehicle parking lot, a 500-seat theatre, a museum display, a boutique brewery, various “multicultural” food outlets, and a “genuine Aussie pub.” The function of the building was to center entirely around consumption, thereby marking that familiar reinvention of now defunct sites of production into places to eat, to buy art, to shop, and to be entertained. The redevelopment was to improve the city’s attractiveness as a tourist destination, thus confirming that the economic survival of Perth, just like that of many other cities around the world, is increasingly reliant on service industries.

This redevelopment was actively opposed by local Aborigines who claimed that it would violate the resting place of the Wangal serpent, a dreaming creature responsible for the creation of many of the natural features over which the city of Perth had been built. In colonial nations like Australia the early development of cities had consciously sought to confine Aborigines to certain areas in the space of the city or exclude them from it. Aborigines were antithetical to the colonial project of creating familiar copies of home, to ordering these unknown spaces into knowable gridded plans, to making the colonial city the material embodiment of the pure idea of the imperial self. That such processes were only ever partially successful is evident in the modern-day claim by local Perth Aborigines to the spiritual status of this prime piece of city real estate. Not only did the descendants of the original inhabitants of the lands that became Perth survive (although often in the most marginal and economically deprived areas of the city), but so too did their sense of the spiritual significance of the land. For the non-Aboriginal residents of Perth and the development consortia, this claim for the spiritual significance of the brewery site was an unexpected return of an Aboriginal interest in lands that were presumed to be fully given over to urbanization.

In recent years Perth has, like many other cities, begun self-consciously to celebrate the diversity of the city. Under a local planning initiative called CityVision various planning experts have proposed a new city master plan that is to take Perth into the 21st century. This is, as the title of the plan suggests, very much an exercise in manipulating the visual qualities of the city. Historic buildings of the city’s colonial past are celebrated along side the more recent traces of the diverse multicultural population. Ethnic food precincts and festivals are planned, and the distinctiveness of the city and its various localities is to be enhanced through a sympathetic combination of building restoration and townscaping. It was into this more self-consciously multicultural, historically referential and decidedly visual city that the proposal to redevelop the brewery came.

It might be expected that the city's new emphasis on the celebration and enhancement of difference would readily accommodate Aboriginal claims and interests. But it is in the specific coincidence between the impulse to redevelop and the impulse to register difference that most unlikely articulations of a politics of difference were generated. The development boom in Perth had resulted in the initiation of a systematic program of identifying and registering sites of Aboriginal significance (Vinnicombe, 1989). Of course, all of these sites already existed, but many were known only to local Aborigines or to archaeological experts. That is, these sites were "known" within the confines of what were essentially local knowledge systems. The systematic program of site identification and registration transformed these locally-known-sites into *public* sites—giving them legal protection under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, placing them onto official registers and maps, and ensuring that they entered into the planning equation for development in Perth. In this sense, the redevelopment push of the 1980s actually helped to produce the *public* and *legally sanctioned* Aboriginal site of significance.

City planning authorities were faced with the dilemma of reconciling the increased number of officially registered and protected sites of Aboriginal significance with the intensified redevelopment pressures. It was decided that it would be impractical to save all Aboriginal sites and that only the "most important . . . most representative or most informative" sites should and could be preserved in the urban context (Strawbridge, 1987/8, p. 18). The precise mapping of sites of significance and the designation of "real physical boundaries" were crucially important strategies in ensuring that Aboriginal interests and redevelopment interests could happily coexist (Strawbridge, 1987/8, p. 21). This desire to map precisely Aboriginal sites responded to the spatial logic of planning for development. It ensured that Aboriginal sites of significance were neatly defined, discrete parcels of land that might then be kept apart from other incompatible land uses. The registration of Aboriginal sites was a strategy that, on the one hand, recognized difference but, on the other, sought also to manage that difference.

This neatly managed incorporation of difference was severely unsettled by the struggle over the redevelopment of the brewery, a struggle which turned explicitly on the fact that Aboriginal land interests and developer aspirations occupied the same space. Efforts were made to map the precise location of the Waugal site in the hope that it could be conveniently separated from the main development site. But all efforts to map the exact location of this Aboriginal site were inconclusive, and redevelopment and the Waugal remained as

promiscuous cohabitants of the same space: the former threatening to violate the latter, the latter threatening to halt the former.

The Aboriginal opposition to the redevelopment was intense and sustained. It included an 18-month reoccupation of land near the development site as well as various legal challenges to the legitimacy of a development that would place a registered, and legally protected, Aboriginal site of significance at risk. The developers attempted to placate the opponents by incorporating Aboriginal themes into their redevelopment plans. A new pathway, which was to lead from the parking lot to the main complex, was designed in the form of the Waugal serpent. It was proposed that an Aboriginal art collection be put on permanent display in the gallery. Both of these strategies to placate the Aboriginal protest worked through regimes of aestheticization. They were attempts to displace a racialized politics of opposition with a facade of inclusiveness. As such, these efforts to Aboriginalize the brewery redevelopment scheme accord well with current depictions of how culture and racialized difference are set to work within postmodern processes of legitimization. Yet in the case of the brewery redevelopment none of these strategies functioned successfully to dissipate Aboriginal claims over the site. Local Aborigines rejected these overtures of inclusiveness: their occupation of the redevelopment site continued, their legal challenges to the legitimacy of the redevelopment proceeded undeterred, and their resolve to see the area turned into a public parkland hardened. It was not the force of a clever capitalism dressed in the legitimating skin of an Aboriginalized aesthetic that finally defeated the Aboriginal protesters. It was, as has long been the case in Australia, the force of the law which finally found in favor of redevelopment and emptied the site of protesters.

This example of postmodern urban development both conforms with and deviates from the accepted accounts of how aestheticization functions in the contemporary city. Certainly, this redevelopment occurred under the logic of culture in the service of capital accumulation. It was a development that attempted to breathe new life into a dead industrial site by transforming it into a spectacular site of consumption. The spectacle was built most surely around a self-conscious incorporation of difference: ethnic restaurants, "Aussie pubs," and gestures to indigenous interests. And, certainly, there is evidence to suggest that the inclusion of signifiers of Aboriginality into the scheme was an instrumental attempt to pacify Aboriginal opposition. Furthermore, the way in which Aboriginality was incorporated into the development plans was limited to those dimensions which would supplement the main objectives of the development and augment its appearance of inclusiveness.

Yet none of these gestures worked to placate Aboriginal opposition to the redevelopment. Indeed, it is possible to read this redevelopment controversy, and the more general trends toward inclusiveness that were occurring in the broader revisions to the planning strategies for Perth, in exactly the opposite way. It may well be that processes of aestheticization and inclusive planning that gesture to difference actually work to produce an intensification of a politics of difference. For example, the efforts to map and plan for Aboriginal sites of significance actually ensured that Aboriginal claims over the city had a certain legitimacy which, even if eventually defeated, could not be entirely ignored. Similarly, the proposal to redevelop the brewery actually transformed locally held knowledges about the Waugal dreaming site into a highly politicized and uncompromising Aboriginal claim for that space. The efforts to map Aboriginal sites of significance in Perth and the proposals to symbolically Aboriginalize the brewery site did not do away with politics. They activated a postcolonial politics which had long been imagined as no longer of any relevance to the city of Perth.

TRACKING DIFFERENCE

An often unstated component of the arguments about the aestheticization and spectacularization of urban space is the issue of scale. It is those specific developments where grand spectacle combines with large-scale capital investment (the shopping mall, the theme park, and the spectacular event) that tend to provide the most secure evidence for the negative outcomes of aestheticization and spectacularization. This emphasis on developments and events of this scale overlooks the way in which processes of aestheticization and spectacularization are present at a variety of scales in contemporary cities. Nowhere is this more evident than in the growing importance of design and community arts in the sphere of urban planning. In this final case study I examine the way in which the aestheticized logic of urban design/community arts projects comes into contact with a postcolonial politics of difference. This is not simply a case of arguing that the smaller the scale, the more benign the effects. It is, instead, an acknowledgment that these other mechanisms of aestheticization can play a part in an activated urban politics. The example I draw upon to illustrate this point is a community arts/urban design project which was conceived and built in the central business district of Melbourne in the early 1990s. Like the other examples I have drawn upon thus far, this case study demonstrates the

way in which postmodern processes of aestheticization are complexly entwined with postcolonial political struggles.

In 1994 the City of Melbourne commissioned one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal artist to work together to produce what was entitled the "Another View Walking Trail." The Trail winds through the streets of the central business district, passing some 17 sites that include newly installed artworks as well as existing monuments and buildings. Many of the installations are quite modest in scale, and each site is marked only by a small plaque set into the ground. A guidebook with a detailed commentary about the Trail is available to the interested city stroller from tourist information outlets dotted about the city.

The Another View Walking Trail was devised and executed as a local articulation of the national goal of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reconciliation. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, established in 1991 in order to achieve this goal, seeks to improve non-Aboriginal understanding of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal experiences under colonialism (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993, p. 1). A major function of the Council is to establish frameworks for reeducating non-Aboriginal Australians so that the nation might be more at one with itself. The pedagogical aims of reconciliation focus specifically on rearranging what is known about the birth of the modern nation of Australia and those who live in it. It attempts to bring the nation into contact with the "truth" of its past in order that there might be a certain "healing" in the present. From the outset it was intended that the official national commitment to reconciliation articulate itself "in smaller, practical, localized terms" through community-based initiatives (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1994, p. 5). Local government authorities and community groups throughout Australia were encouraged to initiate projects that accorded with the goals of reconciliation.

The Another View Walking Trail was one of many attempts to articulate reconciliation on-the-ground. In accordance with national goals, it sought to reeducate the public of Melbourne about the "true" history of the city and the nation. The Trail also sought to (re-)Aboriginalize city space symbolically by introducing Aboriginal imagery into the streetscape of a city which, like many Australian cities, had managed to relegate Aborigines to its margins. It was to chart a new geography of urban Aboriginality by producing artworks and narratives that challenged the conventional understanding of the city. The way in which this community arts/urban design intervention worked to establish "another view" of the city was varied. In some instances new artworks were installed that spoke of the more violent

and less grand aspects of colonial settlement. One artwork, for example, memorialized the first Aboriginal hangings at the Old Melbourne Gaol (i.e., U.S. "Jail"; Figures 11.2 and 11.3). Another installation of a Perspex casket containing bones and bullets was placed at the foot of the statue of one of the nation's early explorers. Other installations celebrated those Aborigines who actively resisted colonial settlement. In other instances, existing structures associated with imperialism, such as statues of Queen Victoria (Figure 11.4) or of early explorers and buildings like the law courts, the jail, and the remand center, were given different histories in the accompanying guidebook. Under this "other" visualization and narration these grand monuments of imperial triumph were transformed into monuments of Aboriginal suffering and loss. Other artwork sought to insert into the city streets expressions of Aboriginal creation beliefs such as the Rainbow Serpent story, the Seven Sisters Dreaming, or the Aboriginal story of the creation of men and women (Figure 11.5). These traditionally inspired works sought to uncover the lost cultural substrata of the city. They were self-conscious and deliberate attempts to articulate traditions long displaced by the space of city. By means of this diverse set of aesthetic and narrative strategies, the Walking Trail afforded "views" that counteracted and subverted the "known" history afforded "views" that counteracted and subverted the "known" his-

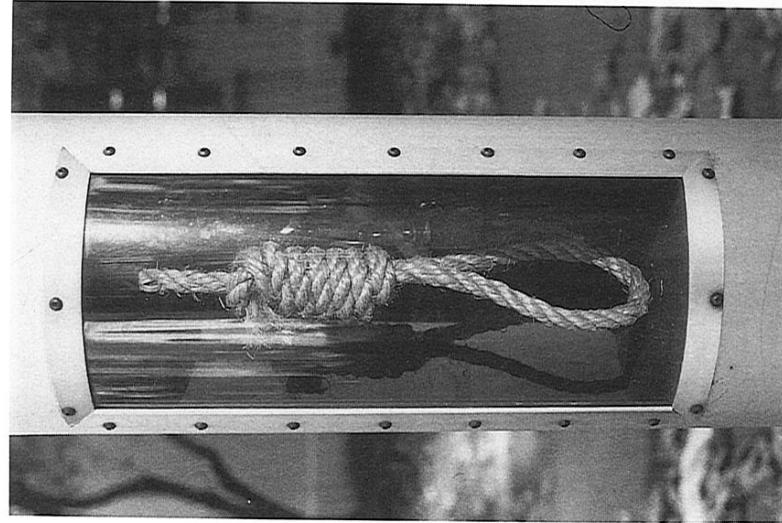


FIGURE 11.3. Detail of Aboriginal hangings artwork, showing noose.

tory and geography of the City of Melbourne. At some spots it took symbols of the dominant culture and destabilized their authority by presenting oppositional narratives of the events they represented. At others it reclaimed city space by inserting into the built environment strategic performances of Aboriginal tradition.

The Another View Walking Trail is an example of a quite different kind of aestheticization of urban space. It sought to create a legitimate space in which difference could be articulated. This was not simply in terms of traditionalized constructs of Aboriginality, although this certainly was one form that the artwork took. It also provided space for artworks with more troubled (and more clearly political) messages of Aboriginal suffering under colonialism. This example unsettles many of the assumptions that are associated with the processes of urban aestheticization. This spectacle served a nationally endorsed political agenda rather than the honed needs of profit

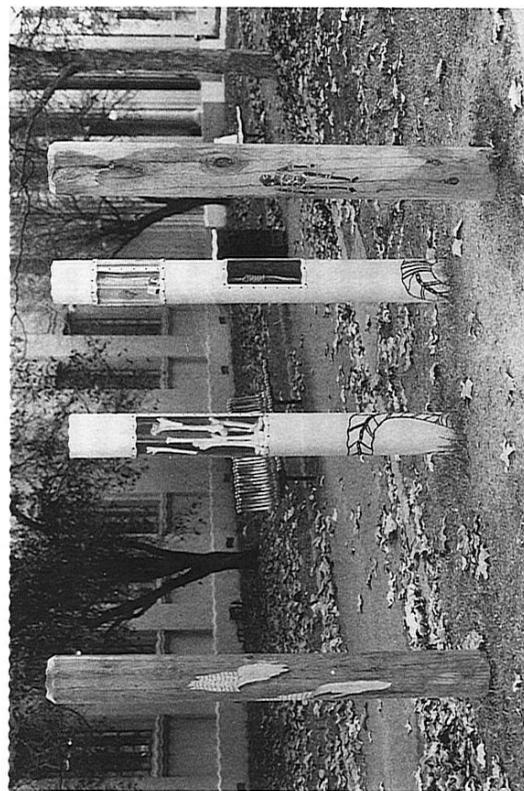


FIGURE 11.2. Totem pole artwork memorializing the first Aboriginal hangings at the Old Melbourne Gaol.



FIGURE 11.4. Statue of Queen Victoria that was incorporated into the Another View Walking Trail.

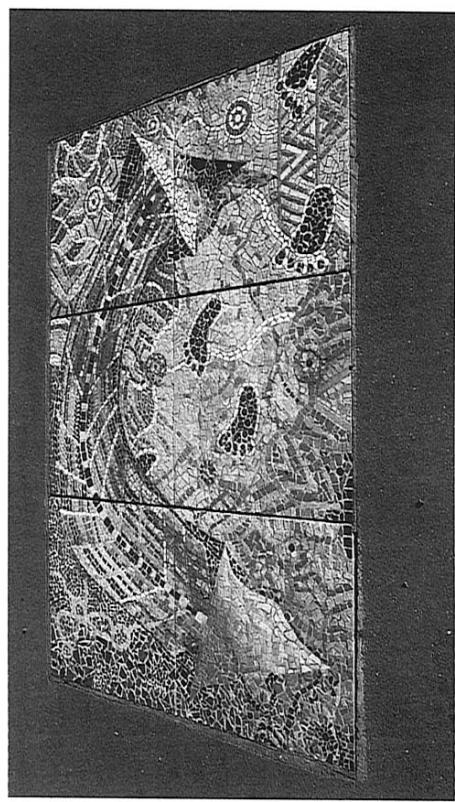


FIGURE 11.5. Mosaic of Rainbow Serpent inserted into Melbourne's street-scape.

as more spiritual than political. But those artworks which addressed the bitter history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal confrontations, or which sought to subvert the narratives memorialized in the grand monuments of the city, met with considerable hostility. Rather than opening a pathway to reconciliation, these artworks generated controversy precisely because they attempted to adjust the “truth” of the nation. One press report dubbed this the “guilt trail” (Stevens, 1996, p. A15), and even before it was completed five of the planned artworks were withdrawn on the grounds that they were “too controversial” and “extremely confrontational” (City of Melbourne public art officer quoted in McKay, 1996, p. 1). The remains of the censored artworks that came to be placed along the Another View Walking Trail do give an alternate view of Melbourne that both inserts Aboriginality into the space of the city and subjects city space to a postcolonial political agenda. But those artworks which never made it onto the streets of Melbourne speak of a far more familiar—less reconciliatory—view of the space of the city and the nation.

This final example is intended to radically unsettle the assumptions that attend those who cast aestheticization simply as an instrumental mechanism in legitimating capital accumulation and deactivating politics. These artworks were intended to operate as local manifestations of a national agenda of reconciliation; they were commissioned for this explicitly political purpose. Of course the intended political effect of the Trail was subject to arbitrary fortunes. Rather than producing a calm state of reconciliation, it activated anxi-

makers. Here the spectacle did not work as a “veil” but as a mechanism in the unveiling of a nation’s past. Of course, I am presenting a very untroubled reading of this alternate manifestation of the aestheticization of urban space. It is one thing to observe that this particular project did much more than simply use difference as a guise for processes of capital accumulation. But it is another thing to idealize this project as an example of how aestheticization might work to be unproblematically inclusive.

The response to the Trail suggests that this process of Aboriginalizing urban space succeeded less in its goal of producing a pathway to reconciliation than in activating non-Aboriginal expressions of resentment. Those artworks which were based around expressions of traditional Aboriginal views entered without controversy into the space of the city. These works conformed precisely to the ways in which non-Aboriginal Australians prefer to encounter their indigenous cohabitants—linked to a primitivized past which is viewed

ties and worries among influential Melburnians who were concerned that their view of the city, and the stories which gave them authority over the city, were being destabilized. This unsettlement was activated not by a spectacularly grand aestheticized event, nor even by a claim by Aborigines to have their sovereign rights to the space of the city recognized, but by what was a quite modest aestheticized intervention in the design of city space.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have endeavored to reevaluate the way in which processes of aestheticization and spectacularization are thought about in the context of contemporary cities. In the first instance, I have argued that existing accounts of the postmodern city have tended to position these processes negatively, as part of the more cleverly semiotic face of capital accumulation. If these processes are linked to a politics of difference, such as ethnic or racial difference, then it is generally assumed that these differences are only displaced by or appropriated into new modes of consumption. In short, it is assumed that aestheticization is a mechanism whereby markers of difference are incorporated as the legitimizing skin of capital accumulation. Understood in this way, aestheticization operates to disguise unfriendly, exclusionary, and undemocratic developments as just the opposite—friendly, inclusive, democratic. Moreover, it is often implied that this process of staging difference works to displace or pacify a more real politics of difference.

One way I sought to challenge this existing view was by identifying a variety of forms that aestheticization and spectacle making take in contemporary cities. It is true that many of the large-scale sites of consumption that are typical of the contemporary city depend upon mechanisms of aestheticization. But it also true that aestheticization operates as the logic of many more modest urban transformations such as streetscaping, place making, and community arts projects. Some of these transformations assist in the selling of cities, but some may be addressing alternate agendas such as building identity or facilitating political formations among severely marginalized groups. In this more diversely motivated visual logic, it is not only the interests of big capital that are served. Aestheticization may also be the way in which national and local political agendas (be they agendas of inclusion or exclusion) are manifested.

The case studies drawn on in this chapter also unsettle the notion that aestheticization and spectacle making only result in exclu-

sion and political pacification. As the case of the International Grand Prix event illustrates, this may well be an outcome of development that is more in tune with the aesthetic requirements of the international event than with obligations to local minorities. But equally, the case of the brewery redevelopment in Perth demonstrates that consumption-led spectacles which “play” with difference do not always succeed in deactivating a politics based around minority claims. It may well be the case, as in Perth, that such spectacular redevelopment activate political struggles that are fundamentally about how different interests should be registered (aesthetically and materially) in the space of the city.

Processes of aestheticization and spectacularization are not outside politics simply because of their scale, visual cleverness, or complicity with capital. Image making and processes of visualization are always also part of the way in which identities are formed, articulated, and contested. They are always open to reinterpretation and refusals. They may also operate in radically subversive ways, as part of political agendas that may effectively destabilize powerful interests. All processes of aestheticization are embedded in the material and political realities of city life that impart to them a productive instability. If these processes are prescribed as simply acting as the legitimating skin of capital accumulation, then these sometimes empowering complexities will be overlooked. But if the visual regimes of contemporary cities are thought about as activated spheres of practice in which various vectors of power and difference are meaningfully negotiated, then the story of the aestheticization of the city will unfold in ways that will defy the expected.

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NOTES

1. Kearns and Philo (1993, pp. 7–10) provide a useful historical explanation of this point in *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*, the volume they edited.

2. “Colonialism” and “postcolonialism” are complex terms whose meaning is still under considerable debate. I refer to colonialism as the processes of domination that were inaugurated during the imperial territorial expansion

sions of Europe in the 18th and 19th century but that may continue to shape structures of power and difference in the present. Postcolonialism in this chapter refers to far more than the formal state of sovereign independence from a colonial power. Nor do I use the term to indicate a sure state of being. Postcolonialism is best thought about as a set of diverse formations that work against colonial structures of power. They may be starkly oppositional (nationalisms, resistances of various kinds), but they may also refer to a range of formations (such as hybridity or mimesis) that work in subtle ways to subvert and unsettle colonial authority.

3. This heading takes the term "hegemony of vision" from a paper by Sharon Zukin entitled "Cultural Strategies of Economic Development and the Hegemony of Vision," presented at the Conference on Social Justice and the City: An Agenda for a New Millennium, School of Geography, Oxford University, March 14–15, 1994. (See also Zukin, 1991.)

4. While the current emphasis on consumption is regularly aligned with a distinctively different style of capital accumulation, it may be a process which is not that new. Featherstone (1992, p. 281) notes that a number of commentators on the 19th-century city had described the presence of "consumer culture 'dream worlds'" in the emerging arcades and department stores. Featherstone concludes that "many of the features associated with the postmodern aesthetization of everyday life have their basis in modernity."

5. As Janet Wolff (1992, p. 555) so astutely notes, "looking at culture doesn't guarantee a postmodern perspective," and this is certainly not the outcome of Harvey's encounter.

6. The data for this section were kindly provided by Bev Klinger and Kate Kerkin of the School of Landscape, Environment and Planning at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University), Melbourne.

7. The arrival of the Grand Prix in this normally quiet area of the city was not unopposed. Middle-class residents whose houses adjoined Albert Park protested openly about the noise, the traffic problems, the privatization of their public amenity.

8. It was precisely such a conflation of antisocial behavior with Aboriginality that resulted, a few years earlier, in one local restaurateur banning an Aboriginal customer from entering his premises. The restaurateur later discovered he had banned a man who had recently been designated as Australian of the Year and who held an Order of Australia Medal!

9. A more detailed account of this case appears in my book *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (Jacobs, 1996).

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CHAPTER 12**Whose City?**

**GENDER, CLASS, AND IMMIGRANTS
IN GLOBALIZING EUROPEAN CITIES¹**

Eleonore Kofman

- Sorkin, M. (1992). *Variations on a theme park: The new American city and the end of public space*. New York: Noonday Press.
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A number of authors have highlighted the development and increased intensity of social polarization and exclusion, particularly marked in the major cities that are the strategic sites of the global economy (Castells, 1994; Friedmann, 1986; Fainstein, Gordon, & Harloe, 1992; Sassen, 1991, 1994a, 1995). For some (e.g., Castells, 1989) the dominance of the global city has resulted from the emergence of an informational mode of development and a space of flows; for others (e.g., Sassen, 1991, 1994a, 1994b) it is the restructuring and the production of financial services that makes these cities the key sites of authority and power in the global economy. Whatever theoretical framework is followed, the core idea is a restructuring of capitalism that expels the middle strata from the city and leads, on the one hand, to the expansion of higher-level professional and managerial classes and, on the other, to increasingly precarious and informal activities at the lower end, filled disproportionately by women and immigrants. These processes are instrumental in increasing segregation within such global cities. However, for Marcuse (1989, 1993) the notion of the dual city is highly problematic in that it obscures the relationships of power and profit in the city. Divisions in society exist along many lines such that dual cities would be best described as many cities coexisting in time and space, and interrelated with each other to produce a quarreled city.

In this chapter I begin by outlining theorizations of the emergence of global cities and consequent social divisions and polarization. The literature is now so extensive that it is not possible to do it