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‘TOO MUCH TO LOOK AT – SEA, SEAGULLS, ART!’: THE EXPERIENTIAL APPEAL OF ART EXHIBITIONS IN PUBLIC LEISURE SPACES

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ABSTRACT
It is no longer new to suggest that leisure spaces are increasingly designed around the premise of a visitor who is active, rather than passive and who seeks to participate rather than observe. Likewise, the liminality of some visitor spaces have been well observed, for their novelty and sometimes critique of established spaces and the norms that come to be associated with them. This is part of a context in which cultural institutions like museums and art galleries are under pressure to adjust to changing demands in the public sphere and to become more deeply embedded in a variety of other social institutions with which they share a cultural boundary. Through this new process of sharing, boundaries themselves are crossed, obfuscated or reinvented as both producing and consuming leisure experiences are better understood as negotiated, and less determined or predictable. This has become observable in established museums and art spaces, and can be expected to be even more pronounced when the gallery space is constructed at the most popular city beach in Australia.

For the twentieth consecutive year, Sculpture by the Sea has transformed Sydney’s iconic Bondi Beach and coastal walk into a sculpture exhibition. Commencing in 1997, the event in Sydney now draws over five-hundred thousand visitors across two weeks and has now extended its reach to include exhibitions at Cottesloe Beach, on the Australian west coast, and at Aarhus in Denmark. This paper examines how the recent Sculpture by the Sea exhibition at Bondi performs as a temporary art gallery. Specifically, we will examine how visitors experience the art through a setting that is not neutral, but intervenes as a physical, aesthetic and socialized place.

Bondi Beach is visually and viscerally ‘present’ and is open to the elemental forces at play where land meets the sea. As a social space, Bondi is one of the epicenters of Australian beach culture and is idealized as a place that is permissive, relaxed and free. Our observations are informed by fieldwork among the visitors to Sculpture by the Sea. In the field, we engaged the method of ‘captured’ or ‘casual’ conversations as a way of developing an understanding of visitors’ perceptions and experiences. Through this grounded approach to communicative, meaning-making and socio-cultural processes employed by visitors, we present our findings.

Key Words: Art, Public Space, Leisure, Seaside
INTRODUCTION: EXPLORING THE BEACH AS A GALLERY SPACE

_Sculpture by the Sea_ is an annual eighteen-day exhibition of local and international sculptures and art on Australia’s famous Bondi Beach and adjacent Tamarama coastline. Commencing in 1997, the event celebrated its twentieth anniversary recently. The event originated with a local man and a vision inspired by his awareness of the gradual erosion of free, accessible public events in Sydney and a wish to bring more art to the people. A self-described social entrepreneur David Handley orchestrated the first event on a shoestring budget of $11,000 Australian dollars and attracted 25,000 people. Today the event has multiple sponsors and donors and is hailed by Destination New South Wales as “the world’s largest annual free-to-the-public outdoor sculpture exhibition” with over 500,000 visitors (Visit Sydney, 2017). Furthermore, the event has now expanded to include Cottesloe Beach in Perth on the Australian west coast (since 2005) and bi-annual exhibitions at Aarhus in Denmark (since 2009).

The rationale for the event, an observable need to address the lack of support for free, public art, has relevance for how people have tended to think about public art in this part of the world: as something that is mainly found and observed in the formalized places of museums and art galleries. To contrast this normative experience of ‘experiencing art’ with an experience that takes place by the sea and playground of the beach presented too interesting a case study for us to ignore. Hence, our interest primarily began with observing the effects of enfolding two socially distinctive and well codified spaces of the formalized art gallery and the informalized beach. _Sculpture by the Sea_ is presented as the instigator of a new ‘ordering’, (Franklin, 2004) for the beach and ways to experience art. By adding the gallery to the beach, the space combines two distinctive and already culturally infused spaces into one that is more novel, or less predictable: the beach gallery.

_Sculpture by the Sea_ began, for us, as potential disruptor of the normative orderings noted to be produced by both of these established spaces and we anticipated findings that would reflect this. Our findings are developed mainly from our analysis of casual conversations and observations witnessed and recorded across the period of exhibition at Bondi in 2017. Additional research that informs parts of this paper includes analysis of reviews and news media, participation at seminars and conferences hosted by the organizers of the event and conversations with organizers and artists in attendance. Our analysis is framed around the rich conceptual field of liminality and leisure spaces and explored through a site that draws the culturally infused norms of the beach and the art gallery together. The exhibition is an opportunity to explore how this liminality is an effect of combined beach and art gallery, and how this provides the potential for new influences, modes of engagement and depths of affect around shared embodied experiences (Elkington and Gammon, 2013, p. 247).

Following this approach, our field-notes were organized across three interrelated inquiries into the influences of the setting, the modes of engagement with the art and the depth of affect.

Our findings reveal that the experiences that the visitors have of these works draws on the nuances of the coastal space to varying degrees, and is itself determined by the way that those visitors choose to engage with the art and how they let the art affect them. In this reorganization of space, play, carnival, memory and fantasy are evoked in a space that encourages both play and enhance perception. As an event that takes both the space of beach and gallery and reorganizes these, _Sculpture by the Sea_ expands the possibility for transforming the culture associated with each.
Our research makes a contribution to those many others that work to address the changing conceptual, practical and material conditions of public art and the leisure sphere. In performing an intersection, and a new kind of place, by enfold ing two highly symbolic and already well-codified spaces, *Sculpture by the Sea* has a valuable contribution to make. By examining this intersectional place, on the ground and among the people, sculptures, sand, waves and wind, we contribute towards the many ways that art is being reconfigured in public space by casting light on the way that in this case, visitors experience a place where the beach and art gallery come together to produce novelty.

**ART AND AGENCY: VISUAL ENCOUNTERS IN EVERYDAY SPACES**

Art has always been part of the everyday uses of public space and a component of social practice. In the form of memorials and monuments in parks and town centers, visual forms have reflected collective experiences, embodied community values and particular societal interests and tastes. During the 19th and 20th centuries, public art was aimed at educating the masses and contributing to civic formation as part of nation-building and advancing cultural economies. In more recent times, there has been a proliferation of both privately and publically funded art in shopping malls, hotels, banks, airports, subways and murals on commercial and privately-owned buildings have featured significantly in gentrification projects and “place-making” practices in towns and cities globally (Cartiere & Zebracki, 2016, p. 22). In the quest to engender inclusiveness, social interactivity and public participation, “populist visual culture” is now an integral part of both urban spaces and regional areas, suburbia and, with technological advances, cyberspace (Knight, 2016, p. 37).

This sense of community that public art has aimed to promote can be seen as reacting to sectors of the population who feel alienated and uncomfortable in the museum setting. Sculpture especially, is more accessible when situated in outdoor spaces, and viewed as less-exclusionary and elitist, having the ability to attract larger and more diverse audiences. This shift in thinking regarding the function of art in outdoors spaces as being a more active and participatory form of cultural and artistic appreciation is also part of the intersection of museums with other new and spectacular forms of visual culture that include the same sensory immersion as fairs, expositions and theme parks promote (Noordegraaf, 2004, p. 35, 36). However, many contemporary museums struggle for economic security when competing with other tourism economies and the need to rely on cultural tourism to ensure a viable future, experiencing an identity crisis as traditionally spaces where national identity was constructed and maintained, are now becoming places of “popular culture, consumerism and the pursuit of pleasure “… privileging experience, immediacy, and what the industry calls adventure” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 7).

In places outside museum walls where such museological dilemmas have less impact on art displays, many believe viewer agency is increased by creating an arena for the general public to express opinions and make judgments, especially for those who do not possess the ‘cultural capital’ that institutionalized art spaces are seen as demanding. With the inclusion of art in everyday spaces, there can be unexpected encounters with visual forms that can contribute to personal development, through invoking memories and pleasurable feelings and have the potential to become sites that “negotiate conflicting practices, stimulating social encounters, between audiences in shared moments of spectatorship” (Carttiere & Zebracki, 2016, pp. 26, 161).
Events such as Sculpture by the Sea embody this notion according to Australian sculptor Tom Bass who considers this ‘free’ form of public art as “a friendly art form that anyone can admire, understand … surprises, startles and amuses” that celebrates and enriches our towns and cities, connecting people to “things that raise our consciousness above the prosaic commerce of everyday life” (2016, pp. 8-12). Viewed through this social lens, the beach as a site for public art displays in events such as Sculpture by the Sea, can be understood as emanating from a past service to national and cultural identity formation and contributing to the current trend promoting visitor agency, experience and adventure.

**Bondi and the Art of Doing the Beach**

Bondi Beach is one of Australia’s best-known beaches both nationally and internationally. It stands as a symbol of the beach as a place that distinguishes Australia as an international tourist destination as well as contributes to a national culture. In both cases, scholars have recognized a dynamic yet discernible art of doing the beach and this includes what the beach represents, how it is engaged with, the social mores it espouses and the values and behaviours it encourages or permits.

Internationally, Australian beaches are linked to the global culture industry of tourism and leisure including relaxation, sun, sea and surf that is cultivated in the Mediterranean and Caribbean Seas, on the west coast of America, in the Pacific Islands and in the tropical beaches of South East Asia (Obrador, et al., 2009). This global beach culture (Pons, 2016) increasingly highlights a homogenized resort experience against the counter task of differentiating beach experiences against the same global culture.

Nationally, the beach has become an icon of Australian-ness and a central organizer of the ideological underpinnings of Australian national culture and way of life (Franklin et al., 2013). Historical analysis has tracing the beach rising to prominence in the post war period where it began to replace the bush as a quintessential Australian experience (Hosking et al., 2009) and the Australian surf and warm climate beaches served to separate a young, spirited and modern nation from its continued colonial relations with the UK (Moore, 2005). The role of the beach in defining Australian culture was also an outcome of a rapidly urbanizing and increasingly mobile population, replacing the previously dominant image of a rural nation that was centered on farming and agriculture. Since the mid 20th Century, a strong cultural narrative has developed around Australian beaches through their presence in literature, film, surf, swim and sun culture as well as rituals like courtship, family holidays and retirement (Craik, 2001; Taussig, 2000). Indeed, the beach has been successfully sown, mythically and in various cultural practices, fashions and more, as a proper ‘backdrop’ to immersion in Australian culture (Edwards, Skinner and Gilbert, 2003; Hartely and Green, 2006; Booth, 2012; Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 2016).

The formation of an Australian beach culture developed differently to that of the social norms and spatial presentation of UK seaside resorts in part because in Australia, resorts did not lead the popularisation of the coast as they did in places like Brighton. Instead, in national myth and practice, Australian beaches developed in accordance with a democracy of access and a more casual, laid-back social tone (Franklin et al., 2013). The beach itself, as opposed to seaside attractions and soft infrastructure, were the central focus of activity and spectacle. Not unlike the US National Parks movement, nature and natural processes dominated the cultural value of Australian beach practice. Following this, Australian beaches
maintain a symbolic freedom (from routine attire and environments) and claim to support various “hedonistic socio-cultural activities” (James, 2000, p. 496).

However, while the beach is espoused as a shared, ‘open’ space that offers freedoms not found in routine, everyday spaces, it is also a highly codified space with social norms and regulations. Freedoms on the beach have been won, at the beach, where it has been a site for negotiating social morality (White, 2005). Added to this is the tension between beach leisure and advancing coastal residential space, manifesting forms of “intolerance and close surveillance of behaviour” that sometimes pits residents against those values of democracy, freedom, leisure and play (Franklin, et al. 2013, p. 4). The beach is both a symbol of national identity and a place where this identity has been challenged, negotiated and crafted against a living backdrop of abundant oceanic nature. Noted as an artwork in and of itself and a devoted subject of contemporary Australian arts, it is less known as a space for exhibiting art and there is little understood about how this dimension will develop the imaginary and practices of Australian beach culture.

LIMINAL LEISURE SPACES

This re-ordering of highly codified and contested leisure spaces transformed into beach galleries by events such as Sculpture by the Sea can be considered as akin to Bakhin’s “carnival”, a world turned upside down, an inversion of the “dominant symbolic order” (Bennett, 1995, p. 243) that governs what are otherwise routine practices and norms. The beach gallery, like the carnival, operates in “liminal spaces” where everyday behaviours are transcended, inverted or suspended, replaced by diverse and novel activities that inspire “awe, wonder, exhilaration, fatigue, humility, and excitement” (Turner, 1969, p. 113) and where embodied, multi-sensory experiences and practices are desired and promulgated. Turner (1969) outlined the concept of ‘liminal space’ as an ambiguous, marginal and transitional state; where transformation is possible through a process of separation from one world and reincorporation into another. Liminal spaces are “threshold”, “marginal” or “in-between” spaces and the seaside and beaches where land meets sea are changeable and ambiguous “edge spaces”, constantly formed and re-shaped by natural processes and human agents, and are therefore archetypical liminal spaces (Andrews & Roberts, 2012, pp.1-2). Beaches are tourist places and ludic sites where everyday life is temporally suspended and normal behaviours open to transgression and the insertion of public art into this leisure space promotes the idea of freedom and accelerated personal engagement that is often limited in the traditional museum display space.

Useful for discussion of the beach gallery as a liminal space is Thomassen’s (2012) questioning of how can we employ liminality towards an understanding of the social, cultural and political processes in modernity. Following Turner’s (1983) notion of consumerist experiences in contemporary societies being largely exchanged for “liminoid moments, where creativity and uncertainty unfold into art and leisure activities” (p. 27), he maintains that the “temporal and spatial fixation of liminal conditions” has become a “permanent liminality” that can at any time “freeze” and becomes a structure (p. 28). In this scenario, rationality and institutionalization once produced “limiting experiences”, however, the modern world is now, somewhat, an endless carnival that is the “norm, a frenzy that never really cools down.” As there no longer exists a clear distinction between everyday and liminal spaces because of the close connection to “commercialization and intensifying social and political control” of these spaces, society is on a “constant and hopeless search for ‘experience’ ‘excitement’ ‘stimulation of the senses’: what Gieson (2009) calls a ‘lure to transgression” (p. 31).
Similarly, Franklin maintains: “… Tourism is consumerism in a globalizing modernity … Consumption, identity, belonging and social order, work on and through the body, as do their opposites, freedom, transgression and disorder” (2003, p. 26).’ Many agree with Franklin’s belief that tourism has provided both the capacity and desire to follow the never-ending creation of the new and has enabled us to cope more successfully with the rapid and changeable nature of modernity. The world exhibitions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the forerunners to current ‘crowd-pullers’ and novel temples to modern art with their focus on progress, new technologies and the future. Franklin argues this is a ‘particular form of consumerism, a curiosity endemic to modern cultures born in a constant state of change, novelty, progress and universal, overarching concerns.’ (2003, pp. 272-275).

The “lure to transgression”, experience and adventure, is why these public art events in liminal spaces are providing intense leisure experiences that can produce individual and group “flow” where immersion in an activity produces intense feelings of exhilaration and enjoyment (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990p. 3). However, behaviours and responses can equally involve sensations of displeasure and disgust as an individual or groups’ responses to an experience may be positive, negative or a combination of emotions that can manifest itself verbally, through gestures, body language or silences (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 181-6).

For example, exposure to some artworks displayed at Sculpture by the Sea provoked strong reactions for many viewers. Buried Rhino (fig. 1) produced positive emotional responses (“he’s so gorgeous!”,”“amazing”, “that’s so cool!”) with young children encouraged to interact with the sculpture despite “don’t touch or climb” signs (“kiss the rhino for good luck”, “did you give the Rhino a kiss and a cuddle?”) and several people examined or contemplated the construction (knocking to see if hollow, “black steel metal- now that’s interesting”). Also eliciting feelings of pleasure and positivity were The Golden Hour (fig. 2) (“cool”, “that’s cute”), Concrete Carpet (fig. 3) (“wow I like that”, “well yeah-nice”) and Pearly Gates (“so fine”, “every time you look at it you see something new”).

Sculptures related to human forms both stimulated and disturbed audiences, promoting discussion that engaged and extended interactions between people. The most controversial, in this sense, was the black marble Chronic Series (human forms wrapped in garage bags) (fig. 4) with comments ranging from confusion, dismay, enjoyment and repulsion: do you really think there are people in there?”; “are those bodies in the bag?”; “its creepy people all tied up in plastic bags like that”; “imagine how many bodies are dumped in the sea?”; “human garbage- that’s a bit much”; “its all garbage”; “I don’t know what it means- its good but bad”; “really good” “like it because it’s weird”, and “don’t like that one bit!”. An artwork depicting a human head (Boolaloo)(fig. 5) promoted contemplation with many liking the “realism”: “that’s good, really cool and lifelike” to “it’s creepy-like a big beetle with a head.” Other works that simultaneously engaged and confused included a sitting platform titled The Crossing (“Think that’s a sculpture- you better get off it”) and POP! BANG! BOOM! Little Poms Poms always turn into the mother of all POM encouraged one visitor to extend their thinking beyond the work itself: “probably made by some Bangladeshi person for twenty cents a day.”
Fig. 1: Buried Rhino Gillie and Marc Schattner

Fig. 2: Golden Hour Cave Urban

Fig. 3: Concrete Carpet Alice McAuliffe

Fig. 4: Chronic Series Zheng Yuan Lu

Fig. 5: Boolaloo Lou Lambert
METHODOLOGY

The discussions that follow are derived from a research project investigating Sculpture by the Sea, from the 20th October to 6th November 2016 at Bondi Beach in Sydney based on five separate fieldtrips and twenty-three hours of ‘captured’ or ‘casual’ conversations and observations. The event attracted diverse publics: both local and international visitors, composites of family, larger groups of friends, tour groups, single people, couples and school groups, all of whom were ranging across the age spectrum. Data gathering involved extensive recordings and written reports of dialogue elicited anonymously as visitors engaged and in observed the art on display and at other event venues (shops, café, indoor art show, resting places, beach areas) along the exhibition route, the Tamarama to Bondi beach coastal walk.

This method can be considered a form of narrative enquiry exploring and interpreting experiences, encounters and aesthetic/social interactions with public art over time in a particular place. The study is based upon but re-models the ‘captured/casual conversation’ technique, to advance this sociological methodology as a valid and robust form of qualitative empirical data that has often been underestimated and dismissed as illusive, diffuse and ‘ad-hoc’ (Tannen, 1984, p. 7). This ‘bottom-up approach’ to social meaning and interaction is not new, having been advocated by a variety of sociologists since the 1970s including Harvey Sacks (1972, 1974, 1984, 1992) and Emmanuel Schergloff and Gail Jefferson (1974, 1987) and is currently advocated by Rodney Jones (2016) who views spoken discourse as a semiotic, cultural and technological tool that mediates social actions and interactions of individuals/groups and enables/constrains identity and community formation. This natural and unobtrusive approach to observing social interaction bestows a ‘sense of meaning’ onto the experience, by capturing the thoughts and behaviours of visitors that can be a mixture of the profound and the trivial (Leinhardt, Tittle and Knutson, 2000, p.2-3).

Preliminary findings discussed in this paper trial a version of the ‘captured/casual conversations’ methodology and was endorsed by one of founding sponsors and supporting partner of Sculpture by the Sea was Sydney Water who confirmed their use of ‘captured/casual conversation’ methodology for gauging audience reactions, as surveys had proved unsuccessful in producing any significant empirical findings. Due to the labor intensiveness of the method, they had not continued with their research, suggesting this study’s results and analysis would be useful to organizations such as the new body for cultural events, an amalgamation between Screen Australia and Art NSW. Further investigations plan to involve the recording of larger data groups gathered from subsequent Sculpture by the Sea exhibitions in 2017 and 2018, using a computer-based evaluation program called ‘sentiment analysis’ for a more detailed and nuanced visitor profile.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sculpture by the Sea is investigated as a liminal leisure space that combines the beach landscape, public art and audiences. The works establish multi-faceted relationships with both the coastal setting within which they have been placed and with the visitors who pass through this space. The experience that the visitor has of these works draw on the nuances of the coastal backdrop to varying degrees, and is itself determined by the way that those visitors choose to engage with the art and how they let the it affect them. The components of this experience are analyzed in this paper, through the method of ‘captured/casual conversation’ and organized formally using Elkington and Gammon’s (2013) three related
concepts that collectively describe the range of ways in which the visitors, the art and the coastline each contribute to the experience.

1) **The setting** – (People and Places: The beach as context, content and conflict). The works interact with the coastal setting at various levels of intensity, ranging from mere neutral co-incidence to a closer more embedded coherence where the work alters the viewers perception of the space, and the space enhances the meaning and effect of the work. The degree of impact of the setting or environment on the audience reception of the art works is divided into four forms variations of influence: neutral, framing, context and conflict (Elkington & Gammon, 2013, pp. 6-15);

2) **The Mode of engagement** – (Performance and Desire: self-promotion, enhanced perception and challenging experiences). How the visitor chooses to engage with the works is a determining factor in the level of awareness, insight and appreciation they are likely to enjoy. A person who rushes through the space, or who is distracted or indifferent is unlikely to be strongly affected by it, whereas someone who is intent on discovering it’s meaning and endeavouring to understand the art and enjoy it is far more likely to have a long lasting and deeper experience. The ways that a visitor chooses to engage with the works is categorized under the following three possibilities: floating, focused and challenging (Leinhardt, Tittle and Knutson 2000, pp. 6-9).

3) **The Depth of affect**: (Psychological reactions/social responses - Playing Outdoors: memories, fantasies and lifestyles; A world turned upside down: Behaviours in experiential spaces). The visitor’s response can be assessed according to how deeply they engage themselves in a psychological and sociological sense. For example, the works might conjure memories of other experiences that the visitor then goes on to associate with their experience of looking at the artwork itself. At a deeper level, they might incorporate the work imaginatively into their on-going experience, through exploring the possibilities of the work in some other more personal context. Such responses, being essentially psychological, are largely constrained to the domain of thought, but a visitor could also respond in a more public, and socially accessible way, and in doing so, present their habits and preferences. In some cases, this social response might even reveal the deeply held values of the visitor and present aspects of a person’s way of being that they might not even be aware of. Tracking the psychological and social reactions to the public art event relies on dialogue demonstrating emotive responses and physical engagement with the art works and is codified here in terms of: memory, fantasy, behaviour and lifestyle (Silverman, 1995, pp. 163,165).

The table below illustrates the range of facets that are considered in this analysis, and summarizes the coding systems that were used to organize the ‘captured/ casual conversation’.

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The setting: People and Places: The beach as context, content and conflict

The beach gallery as conceived as a balancing act that negotiates pre-codified social spaces is most salient when the sculpture, or aesthetic cultural object, competes for attention (and sometimes survival) against an unusually spectacular, alluring and unpredictable environment. This experiential encounter produced a range of responses identified in the schema of Elkington and Gammon (2013) from across the spectrum of neutral setting; setting as context; as content (as part of the exhibit) and as conflict (a disruptive, confusing or impediment).

Many audiences considered the location itself (“context”) and surfing and swimming activities the purpose of visits and cause for reflection and enjoyment: “water beautiful”; “perfect location”; “more organic than a gallery space”; “the oceans just spectacular!”; “look at that swell and the discoloration and scum!”; “plants the best part” (Big Intentions); “lovely couple of hours before dark as no-one here”; and “what dangerous surf.” However, the “context” of the site as an experiential encounter with “the elements” also produced a “theme park atmosphere” where spectacle, novelty, the sea and wild surf (splashing spray was laughed at and wind pushing you along the path to Bondi exciting), was considered by both children and adults as “fun” and key attractions: “great coming and seeing the surf on a day like today”; “this wind is nuts”; and “great fun family day out!” Some parents and other adults did warn caution but the carnival/festival atmosphere predominated (fig. 6).

An effective bond between “people and place” where perceptual experience of total absorption is both an “aesthetic engagement” and “place attachment”, ascribing emotional and symbolic meanings to particular events (Elkington & Gammon, 2013, p. 208) was also evident at the beach gallery site. Visitors reactions to the “content” or juxtaposition of the environment and the art work was clear in the positive responses to the environment, its relationship to and impact on works included: the sand-blasted technique using water in Concrete Carpet-“clever”, “wow”, “like more natural works- more genuine”, and “cool- nice because its rock” (Oushi Zokei); “like it- the polished stone just beautiful” (woman touching the stone of Milieu), and “organic-ness, like the texture of it” (child playing mother watching); “I really like it- how it is around the rock” (A Weighted Embrace); “wow it is so smooth- it’s amazing” (mother and child touching The Window of the Future)(fig. 7); “I wanna see more metal-love the rust!”(Knucklebones);“level of liquid lines up with the horizon” (older woman viewing Untitled (Coral)(fig. 8); and a tour guide exclaiming “ too much to look at- sea, seagulls, art!” Even when not competing with the environment in the Inside Sculpture Gallery, many still commented on the “organic-ness” of works and their place in the environment of the outdoor sculptures (Three Vessels-Amphora, Pug and Torpedo, Dave).

An interesting and unexpected example of “content” and symbolic meaning/attachment was seen in the devastation caused by the wild surf that destroyed several artworks on October 24 (“it was like a tsunami- had to run to the grass area!” as one visitor commented). This event did increase awareness and significance of certain works that no longer existed as many visitors stood, reflected and took photographs of the spot where the Fair Dinkum Offshore Processing (fig. 9) and The Window of the Future (fig. 10) sculptures once stood: “all the poignant works have been washed away”; “so delicate –waves picked it up and dropped it back”; “like the effect of the environment on the destroyed art”; “and art life imitating life that’s for sure.”
Negative reactions of feelings of “conflict” relating to the environment included many comments on the use of washed up debris in works especially *A Weighted Embrace*: “look at that bag of rubbish- is it art? Who can tell!”; “lots of rubbish here- where’s the culture in it!”; “that’s really outrageous-like my garbage”; “anyone could put that there”; and “good or bad it gets the crowds in doesn’t it!”

Additionally, the effect of weather on the event meant that on windy and wet days as some sculptures and sites were closed (kiosk closed between Tamarama and Bondi selling catalogues and providing further information and food outlets) and caused “conflict” and expressions of disappointment.
Fig. 6: Bondi to Tamarama coastal walk

Fig. 7: Window Into the Future Sang Sug Kim

Fig. 8: Untitled (Coral) Alessandra Rossi

Fig. 9: After the Tsunami Fair Dinkum Offshore Processing Bronek Kozka

Fig 10: After the Tsunami Window Into the Future Sang Sug Kim
**Mode of engagement: Performance and Desire: self-promotion, enhanced perception and challenging experiences**

As previously suggested, liminal leisure spaces reinforce the role of “desire” as emotional and physical experiences attempt to make sense of the visual material through embodied practices or performances; where the individual encounters the world multi-sensually and multi-dimensionally (Crouch, 2001). Further, the embodied encounter is more than simply adding up the components of the sense. The individual is expressive, and this provides a useful orientation for investigations into the relationship between touch, gesture, haptic vision and other sensuality and the mobilization of feelings of doing (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Harre 1993; Radley 1995 cited in Crouch and Lubben, 2003, pp.11-12).

As mentioned in the theoretical framework discussion, Leinhardt, Tittle and Knutson (2000) suggest three categories: floating (“open to any experience and few pre-conceived ideas of what exhibit was about … to enrich the day or pass the time” p. 6); focused (“clear purpose in going to the show, usually to expand understanding of an art form or learn something …intensely focused and intellectual” p. 8); and challenging (“stretch themselves or force themselves into an unfamiliar situation … expansive… more to learn” p. 9).

The most prominent example of “floating” behaviour and embodied performances related to desire was the taking of ‘selfies’ with multi-media devices, mainly smart phones, which suggests that these visitors were more focused on their own social interactions than on the art works themselves. This could be regarded as an example of permanent liminality where the art is just a prop for the constant seeking of ‘experience’, ‘adventure’ and ‘excitement ‘that has become the everyday norm. Some novel and popular artworks that visitors happily queued for, such as the work-in-progress Havanna thong project, a series of stone tablets etched with emoji’s and other digital symbols (*Bye Gone*) (fig. 11) and the life-sized, mixed-media, pink lounge titled *Dearest* (fig. 12), were clearly designed as “photo opportunities” with staff actively encouraging visitors to pose for photographs. Other sculptures were considered ‘props’ by many; serving as both an activity and a record of their experience (figs. 13-18).

![Fig. 11: Bye Gone](image1.png)

*Fig. 11: Bye Gone Lucy Barker*

![Fig. 12: Dearest](image2.png)

*Fig. 12: Dearest Margarita Sampson*
A variety of boisterous statements were expressed from females in groups or parents with children: “OK we need a selfie together guys”; Asian girls yelling “selfie, selfie!” with one girl taking a ‘selfie-photo’ every minute while redoing her hair; “Want to take a photo so stop looking at it [the artwork]” (father to son) and “stand near the pebbles so I can get a photo” (mother to son); and at the Inside Sculpture Gallery a woman took photographs of the sculpture *Happy Gas* as was “going to send this one to my husband.” There were critics of this pastime, with two Australian women making the general comment, “it’s really bad all the people just taking photos of themselves.”

An alternative activity was a life-sized, cardboard photo frame created by the newest sponsor of the event, the Architectural firm *Aqualand*, that encouraged school children to take pictures of themselves and friends so they can “Be an Aquavist” (fig. 19). One couple who commented that they attend the event annually to another group, because they “like the outdoor space, can do your own thing, there’s free art, it’s more inclusive, but don’t like the inside sculptures as much as prices on things them changes everything; anyway most people are here for the photo opportunity!” In this sense, the beach is considered a public space where a hedonistic social and cultural encounter with nature through the aesthetic experience is paramount.
Conversely, there were several instances of a more “focused”, educational approach from audiences, especially those in groups. Responses to the *Weave the reef, Love the reef* highlighting the role of rubbish in the degradation of the Great Barrier Reef, included individuals explaining to family/friends that the white weaving- represented coral dying and a pairs/groups of older men inspecting and debating the construction/metalwork of several sculptures (*Metamorphosis-Inside Out no.29, Reality TV* [fig. 20], *Plant Form* and *Command Line*). While school groups (both primary and secondary) were numerous and daily, these were not self-chosen but many students were engaged in intensely focused learning activities that included direct interaction with art works and artists through workshops. There was also a *Tactile Tour* available to mainstream school groups and disabled young people in wheelchairs and their carers that were very popular. Students regularly asked guides and teachers questions, commenting, and engaging with the works: “would a house fall down like that miss?” (*Nomadic Winds: A Journey’s Rest*), prodding the work to see how it moves (*The Piper* fig. 21) and contributing to hair donations for *Mountain of Words* (regarded as “cool”). Niche tours (walking groups, corporate professionals) provided catalogues and private artist talks/ Q and A’s and involved lively and often loud conversations.

A variety of artist talks and works in progress produced a mixture of “floating” and “focused” audience responses. While some watched the artist in residence creating *Naturally Volatile* responded with “looks quite cute” and several people slept on beanbags or took ‘selfies’ as crocheted Stupa artist Mikaela Castledine discussed the background of her “making” and creative processes involved in making *Big Intentions* (fig. 22), forty people gathered to listen, ask questions and touch the sculptures. This was followed by a talk with Oliver Stretton-Pow, a New Zealand based artist created the shipwreck *Infrastructure 5* based on Plato and notions of Democracy through crowd funding and a small grant, who encouraged children to dismantle, re-make and play with the wooden pieces of the sculpture while answering a multitude of questions (“ this is the best! I like that”). Later in the day, an artist from the Cave Urban art collective discussed their tactile, nest-like, bamboo artwork *The Golden Hour* created by five hundred helpers, while allowing people to sit, rest, eat and take ‘selfies’ in his sculpture during his talk. While adults were not as curious or keen to ask questions of the artist as children were of *Big Intentions*, many were commenting and reflecting upon the work that indicated a deeper engagement: “amazing it involves both sunrise and sunset to glow” and “to think bamboo could be bent into a circle.”
Additionally, the *Inside Sculpture Gallery* was popular and seemed to engage audiences and promote concentration and many questions were directed at attendants: “It’s cool all these sculptures in one place”; “very tranquil and cooler”; “rather lovely”; “very arty”; “do they have a theme or is it just their imagination?”; ”some are still very heavy- even small ones.” However, visitors did not appear to question that all works were for sale and that all artists were asked to make miniatures, with many not initially realizing the works were miniatures of those outside and considering it as just part of the show. However, there was a focus on monetary value of works when this was realized: “I want to go back and see what’s been sold now”; “It’s worth $6,000- so it’s art?” (fig. 23-25).
Catalogues were selling “like wildfire” according to volunteers at kiosks (despite comments on the need for more information panels while acknowledging, “they want to sell catalogues”) and appeared to “challenge” the reader and promote deeper thinking. Some were reading catalogues out loud and were looking for meaning in works, questioning the value of interpretation over aesthetics when viewing the spiraling granite circle that was Oushi Zokei. A family questioned the artists statement of A Weighted Embrace (“not sure if I get it?” and “doesn’t look like a sculpture-maybe I need to see more”) but did not dismiss the work as “rubbish” as earlier respondents had. On the other hand, others “liked the concept of the work” (after reading description in catalogue) after deciding they enjoyed how the sculpture was “simple and designed to fit the landscape” (Being Now Here No Where).

Labeling and signage also encouraged involvement with artworks both physically and mentally. A group of older women were discussing materials and querying the creative process after reading the catalogue description and labels describing Naturally Volatile (“not sure what any of it means?” and “looks like a crocodile- don’t know what it is- and why is it still being done by the artist?”), a man took close-up photographs of engraved metal panels with another knocking the frame in various places of the sculpture Reality TV, a visitor counted all the bottles, paced the length of the work and noticed the label were removed in Memory Lane and Dynamics in Impermanence was admired by both young and old (“What is art and architecture? I like it very much and you can touch it and be in it”).

Deeper thinking was evident in a response to Infrastructure 5, (“this may be the only culture people will ever see”), akin to founder David Handley’s “I want the poorest mum, dad and kids to feel comfortable with art-not beyond them.” Further, an Aboriginal carving
along the coastline walk went unnoticed by most viewers except one visitor who exclaimed, “it’s a whale and a baby whale—should have a sign—now that’s art and nobody notices!”

Further, school children identified the texture of *Skin Cube* as replicating human form and understood the purpose of volunteers shoveling the sand mound every day around *Buried Rhino* because the “aesthetics of the work have to be maintained” and “it’s meant to be buried—must be like abstract art.” Many children were observed reading and discussing panel descriptions (“doesn’t look like sculpture” and “I like this—kinda weird though”).

*Depth of affect: Playing Outdoors: memories, fantasies and lifestyles*

As previously discussed, ‘flow’ can be experienced if feelings of pleasure and enjoyment are individually felt or collectively felt shared. (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990p. 3). However, behaviours and responses can vary dramatically as people reflect on their imagination, memories, life-experiences, opinions and fantasies (Silverman, 1995, pp. 163, 165). The promotion of imagination and memories was also observed in interactions between visitors. *The Golden Hour* (nest-like cave made of bamboo and steel) was on the tour itinerary of primary schools with teachers encouraging encounters inside the sculpture (“imagine being there at night camping—would be fun”) with a several French-speaking groups attempting to climb inside the sculpture. Memories of childhood and past experiences were common among all audiences: “it’s like Leggo” “that’s really good—I loved building things” (*Infrastructure 5*)(fig. 26); *Without a Beginning and With No End* reminded many of the popular mechanical drawing device/game Spirograph (“I remember this—shows how long my memory is”, “This is the best one—my friend has one of these”); “dreaming—everything you thought it would be?” (*The Window of the Future*); “Its cool-like a zip-line—looks far away but not” (*Link*...); “that’s cool—they should call it washed away—like the movie” (*The Pearly Gates*); “really nice-modern day totem poles” (*Place of Our Dream*) (fig. 27); “got a bit of a Gandhi feel to it” (* Boolaloo*); and “the works here make you remember what you saw” (recent memory of works outside of *Inside Sculpture Gallery* display).
Opinions expressed, often reflected a diversity of lifestyle choices and reinforced the beach gallery as simultaneously a residential, cultural, aesthetic, social and leisure space. The Bankstown Koori Elders Group Inc. *Place of Our Dream*, (Indigenous totem poles with Aboriginal/Australian motifs), for example, was a popular work in terms of heritage and home decorating: “it’s Australian”; “love the possums”; “just thinking something like that would look really good above the TV”; “wouldn’t mind one of those at home”; and “these look great.” Further, *Concrete Carpet* elicited the statement from an older Australian couple after reading the catalogue, “you could have done something like this for our verandah?” and “imagine sitting on the balcony watching this all day!” before moving onto an extended discussion of the coastal house behind them and possible window cleaning problems.

Another couple, while viewing *Many Many III* (a stringy bark wooden sculpture of a multitude of human faces near the Bondi headland), commented to another visitor that they came every year to the event and just “love it- the whole overall art event- it’s great stress relief for both of us.” Comments extended to relating to the lifestyle of a section of the local community, particularly in terms of dog walkers and joggers: “joggers and walkers wouldn’t be happy about their space being taken over”; “this really annoys the joggers” (several instances); and “the joggers wouldn’t like this. However, one resident had a more positive viewpoint: “I usually walk this in two hours- taking me four [hours] gives me time to stop and look at the ocean.”

The notion of “playing in the outdoors” and fantasies is a significant aspect of liminal leisure spaces, especially the use of humor in “captured/casual conversation.” Humor is closely associated with the carnivalesque experiences of liminal spaces. It is often confirmation of enjoyment as it is a conversational strategy/resource that allows a removal or distancing enables from the differences and contradictions many visitors are negotiating, “while making it look and feel as though they are not actually doing anything serious at all” (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 199, 313). In this case, there were references to actual sculptures such as *Chronic Series* (“they might smell - be careful” and “people inside??”), imagined art works (a flying bird-“didn’t you see some artist with a remote control” and a child’s sipper cup in bushes- “see that is art”), the material components of *A Weighted Embrace* (fig. 28)(“just someone throwing their rubbish away- we could have brought our kitchen rubbish” followed by “yeah would make us artists”), random and anonymous satirical artworks (bicycle and thongs scattered in a pattern) (figs. 29 and 30) and an abundance of comical self-portraits (‘selfies’) with or without sculptural backdrops.
Conversely, silence was a common response from both couples as well as individuals for several reasons. Some were observed consulting the catalogue, reflecting on the work, enjoying the environment or simply relaxing in the moment. Facial expressions were also part of silent activities and were often extreme (grimace to a smile) but many were passive. This behaviour is also indicative of interacting with a fluid space that is open to new and alternative social and aesthetic codification.
Finally, the re-ordering of codified legal and illegal regulations due the appeal of the experiential and the notion of events like Sculpture by the Sea as liminal leisure spaces where rules and behaviours are altered and suspended, were evident in visitor attitudes and behaviours towards the actual artworks.

Volunteers complained that too many visitors were touching and even damaging artworks, ignoring “do not touch and climb on” signs and that more staff were needed at certain sites. They admitted, however, that purposely-interactive sculptures (Green Room, The Golden Hour and Infrastructure 5) confused audiences and sent mixed messages in terms of appropriate behaviours. Some adults were cautious of children’s behaviours: woman concerned how close children were to the cliff edge and people aware of the “pathways”; telling children not to stand on them “protect is the name –see” (To Protect); and “last weekend saw so many inside-dangerous” (The Piper).

Others were more sympathetic and in-tune with the festival spirit “you can understand if the kids want to climb inside” and “I would have done it in a different shape if it didn’t want kids to climb over it” (The Piper); “I walked on the sculpture!” (in reaction to To Protect from a family in the middle of it having a picnic) and a child pretending to be sad for a photograph with Buried Rhino and school boys sitting, standing on the sculpture with teachers looking on despite signage forbidding the action. Further, the sculpture M.151201 (fig. 31) reinforced the ‘carnivalesque’ atmosphere and looking through the “funny mirror” with its distorted reflective surfaces.
Inside Sculpture Gallery attendants expected a change in protocol as a was replicating a typical “museum space”, however, inappropriate behaviours dictated an number of responses from organizers: the need for crowd control especially in rainy, overcast or humid weather; checked people at the entrances (large bags, food and drink a problem); limiting of crowds inside the exhibition area at any one time as many touched the objects on display and needed supervision (observed one visitor telling another not to touch the works). This was again despite people being generally aware of not touching works, with attendants commenting that children know the protocol and “behaved better than some adults.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has offered some preliminary findings and ways to think about a research project that seeks to understand the nature and shape of liminality produced at Sculpture by the Sea by exploring visitors’ experiences. In our view, the novelty and liminal nature of Sculpture by the Sea draws from the conjoining of two renown, but separate social spaces: the art gallery and the Australian beach. Drawing upon insights obtained through analysis of casual conversations and observations from the most recent exhibition, we have proposed that Sculpture by the Sea performs a liminal and intersectional space that produces both a unique kind of beach experience and opening up of the established orderings of art galleries. This represents the first phase of the research project, involving the development and refinement of a suitable method and trialing of analytical frames and theoretical horizons.

Both the beach and the consumption of ‘visual culture is associated with liminal spaces and with multi-sensory experience, whether it is encounters with art, the landscape or a destination activity (Crouch & Lubben, 2003, pp. 6-7). Within this broad, but flexible, framing, the paper has examined the data we have collected with attention to the unusual setting of the exhibit, visitor mode of engagement and depth of affect, illustrated through a range of visitor attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. In doing so, the paper responds to the, still relevant, call from Tannen (1984, p. 9) for studies that seek to explore the link between language, in our case ‘what people say’ with behaviours or ‘what people do’. Following Turner (1983), liminality is not conceived as especially extraordinary, especially within the context of the increasingly performative emphasis given to the planning and management of public space, and through which leisure, tourism and creativity play a decisive role. That said, it does provide a useful meta framework, even if this has become somewhat normative,
in understanding how spaces are performed when they are represent a reordering of, in this case, the beach and sculpture exhibit.

Among the visitors, distinct notions of casual or serious leisure (Elkington & Gammon, 2013, pp. 88 - 100) appear to overlap at Sculpture by the Sea and these reflect the distinctive social mores associated with both the beach and the more formal gallery spaces. We were able to uncover evidence of people responding as with more serious leisure pursuits (as with art and entertainment events) and responding as with casual experiences of leisure (including play, relaxation and active entertainment) that is associated more specifically with beaches. Aesthetically, the spectacle of sculpture is fused with the spectacle of the beach and, additionally, the spectacle made of the self (or ‘selfie’) while experiencing the event. In this place, visitors, artists, organisers and the beach itself conspire to write the rules of engagement and to explore the protocols of behaviour at a leisure event for which there is room for experimenting and setting new precedents.
REFERENCES

Visit Sydney (2017) ‘Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi’