

**Accidentally tourism: Symmetry and object lessons from an  
urban design laboratory**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Sociology and Social Work  
University of Tasmania

July 2010

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## *Acknowledgements*

My conspirator in this research is Professor Adrian Franklin who not only authored the work that inspired the thesis, but also developed ‘strategies’ to ensure that it materialised without me knowing (I think). He is never boring and this translates to an innovative mind that I have consistently benefited from. To this end I also thank him for persisting with ‘telling me like it is’ regardless of what I think, and often knowing how I do, because eventually I discovered this was priceless.

Special thanks go to Associate Professor Rowland Atkinson for the opportunities and advice as well as the development of an appreciation that there are multiple versions of my research! Thanks also go to those in the School of Sociology and Social Work in particular Associate Professors Keith Jacobs and Bruce Tranter; Dr Max Travers and Dr Warren Sproule as well as Dr Barbara Stewart for her support and Philip Patman for his generosity and readings of the difficult chapters. It goes without saying that I am grateful to Andrea Michaelson; Della Clark; Denise Jones and Lynnette Devereaux for their constant support at central command. And from elsewhere I thank Professors C. Michael Hall, Trevor Sofield and Brian Wheeler for their encouragement of my work. After Michael, there are too many musicians to thank.

Special mention must also be made of the non-human participants including *Zero Davey*, Sullivans Cove and the design laboratory as well as those professionals who gave generously of their time and the intimate details of their working lives.

The friendships either begun or maintained along the way sustained this journey. Among these I thank Bianca Curtis; David Smith; Kelly Fitzpatrick; Helen Ford; Melissa Keikens; and Kevin Joshua. There are no substitutes for the nourishment of good humour; uninterrupted complaining; long walks; soy lattes; not caring; dragons; Frangelico and eating apples whole: thank you.

My continued gratitude goes to my family who by (mis)fortune of birth are stuck with me, to students who love to learn and to Miles Franklin whose ‘brilliant career’ still encourages the idea that I might be a writer one day.

Finally, I dedicate this work to Calypso, Hamish and Tom because they deserve to receive something from it, as well as the memory of Chloe, Sadie and Ivy ‘Evil’ Jane who kept me company through the long hours.

## *Abstract*

Tourism, like most social phenomena has tended to be studied and measured in terms of the intentions, meanings and actions of people. 'Humanist tourism theory' (Franklin 2003) is the norm and not until recently has there been any inclination to question this. This research begins by asking what tourism is when it is not assumed to be 'a purely human accomplishment' (after Haldrup and Larsen 2006) but when emphasis is given instead to the hybrid nature of social phenomena that is 'teeming with things' (Franklin 2003: 98). Using a 'symmetrical' (Serres 1991/1997) approach, it is claimed that tourism is a performance that includes humans and non-humans and this means some of the actors, according to human design, intention or understanding, are variously 'indifferent' to what they are supposed or meant to be (after Latour 1997a). This indifference retains a potential to 'misbehave' and then profoundly challenge humanist tourism theory so that when they intervene there is no longer 'reliable tourism theory'. Instead with a more inclusive list of actors 'tourism as an ordering' (Franklin 2004) begins to emerge and this research presents an ethnographic study of how this happens in a well-visited place called *Sullivans Cove* in Hobart, Australia.

The Urban Design Framework is one of the most intentional statements about the rebuilding and design of *Sullivans Cove* and in consolidating things like people, buildings, mountains and law it acts as an 'urban design laboratory'. A series of 'object-laden' lessons are taken from this laboratory by following two successive developments or 'experiments'. First, hotel accommodation *Zero Davey* carried tourism through the design laboratory where it was enrolled with various orderings only some of which 'care' about tourism. Here the laboratory acted as a largely indifferent 'means' to a tourism-related 'end'. However, in next staging an *International Design Competition* these 'means' and 'ends' became transferable when to achieve a 'winning design entry' and 'designer label' for *Sullivans Cove* the laboratory adopted many of established 'means' of the tourism industry. These experiments show *Sullivans Cove* is 'accidentally tourism' and that as an ordering tourism behaves in complex and sometimes opposing ways. When tourism research includes 'things' as conspirators, assumptions like 'tourism places are planned that way' are found inadequate for recognising or explaining the more transformative abilities of tourism because these are a virtue of heterogeneous compositions and the multiple competencies they allow. By viewing tourism as an ordering it is possible to see how developments such as those in *Sullivans Cove* result not from within a separable and coherent realm of tourism on the social margin, but from more distributed and post humanist agency.

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