



LOCATING SUBURBIA

MEMORY - PLACE - CREATIVITY

EDITED BY

PAULA HAMILTON & PAUL ASHTON

Locating Suburbia
Memory, Place, Creativity

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Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton



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INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS AND PASSIONS OF THE SUBURBAN OASIS

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

Murder in the suburbs isn't murder technically at all really is it? It's a justifiable reaction to aesthetic deprivation and golf.¹

Suburbia has been satirised and mocked by the best of them from George Orwell's 1939 caricature in *Coming up for Air* to Dame Edna Everidge from the 1960s and TV's Kath and Kim in twentieth-first century Australia. For many of the generation growing up in the twentieth century, suburbia is, on the one hand, the remembered nightmare from which the human chrysalis escaped to experience adulthood and its pleasures *elsewhere* – the stifling, conformist sameness which nonetheless hid evil deeds like murder. Others hold dear the wistful nostalgic memories about growing up in a domesticated cosy world of backyard games so effectively mobilised by conservative Prime Minister John Howard during the 1990s in relation to Earlwood, a suburb of Sydney.²

It is certainly the case that for the older generation who lived through depression and war in the twentieth century, the suburbs represented safety and peace – 'a roof over our heads'; 'a place to call our own'. Like the soldier who came back from Changi POW camp, kissed the ground at Narrabeen, a suburb in Sydney, and said: 'this'll do me'!, the expanding suburbs after the 1950s were the retreat for many men after

time abroad in global conflict; a place to replenish the spirit and build again – individual lives, families, homes, garages, sheds, gardens, lawns. Suburbs have also been long hated,³ and more recently loved,⁴ by writers and intellectuals. They have also been perceived with an uneasy ambiguity, as ‘being neither town nor country, but an unwilling combination of both, and either neat and shining, or cheap and nasty, according to the incomes of its inhabitants’.⁵ This was the ‘half world between city and country in which most Australians lived’ that architect Robin Boyd decried in his elitist work on Australia domestic architecture.⁶ Recently, however, there has been a strong and growing interest in delineating the complexities of the suburban experience rather than simply denouncing or defending it.

Over the last twenty to thirty years, suburbia has had a make-over. How it is remembered and what place it has had in our lives has also been reconfigured. Many now accept that the nostalgia relates only to a childhood dream of the white Anglo-Saxon part of the population that obscured a great deal more than it revealed. Certainly the historian Andrew May argued in 2009 that ‘the reliance of the twin fictions of the novelist’s pen and of baby-boomer nostalgia for our predominant images of post-war suburban history precludes the prospect of developing more sophisticated historical narratives’.⁷ Even before the impact of the massive post-war migration, the suburbs were more culturally and socially diverse than we have previously understood. Class and religious divisions, if not always race and ethnicity, have a long history within suburban communities.⁸ Nowadays, the articulation of that nostalgic memory in public forums is strongly contested, as suburban places are made and remade over time.

In March 2013, for example, Peter Roberts wrote a column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* which had the heading: ‘What happened to the suburb I used to know? His particular suburb was Greenacre near Lakemba in Sydney and his article juxtaposed a suburban past and present. He remembers a suburb where he grew up during the late 1950s and early 1960s as a place of peace, sparsely populated, filled with boys sports and games:

Lakemba? Sure that’s where we went to the Sunday matinee at the Odeon every week and watched such pearls as the Three Stooges, Jerry Lewis and Ben-Hur.

Roberts does not mention that Lakemba is now the site of a mosque and one of the biggest Muslim communities in Australia. But most of the *Herald* readers will have this in mind. In his (Anglo-Saxon) memory, there was no violence as there is now, which he blames on the ‘enclave of Little Lebanon’. Greenacre and Lakemba now, he says, have been ‘turned into a minefield, or a battlefield, or a refuge

of drug dealers, criminals, drive-by shooters and terror'. His elegaic tone is one of sadness and loss:

That was my home – the place where I once simply couldn't imagine living anywhere else – transformed to the place where I could never imagine living again.

There were several responses to this letter which seemed to strike a Sydney nerve and gave readers a sense of how the media mediates our collective memories. At least two letters accused Roberts of cloaking racism in nostalgia. Omar Sakr replied in the same edition of the *Herald* with an awareness about the public prominence of such views and how they need to be interrogated. Sakr is particularly critical of the assumption that all of the problems are the result of another ethnic group, as though murder and rape were not part of any other suburban culture. This view, he says, absolves one group for taking responsibility for the problems of the community as a whole. For him, growing up in this area probably twenty or thirty years later, the most important element was the camaraderie of his diverse delinquent friends.

One letter, though, was from someone who had lived for eighteen months in Lakemba until recently and also spent time there on a regular basis now. Con Vaitsas, now of Ashbury, claimed that Roberts' vision was 'way out of whack with reality' and very outdated. He argued that Greenacre and Lakemba were no longer predominantly the home of the Lebanese but a mixture of very different nationalities living peacefully side by side: 'my neighbours were Filipinos and Colombians on either side and Africans opposite us', he wrote. So his perception was one of a successful multicultural community.

Such an exchange does little to recognise the complexity of current suburban life but it does juxtapose the memories from different generations and cultures against one another as alternative experiences of belonging to particular suburban localities.

What is Suburbia?

Suburbs are geographically defined areas on a map, spatially located in our memories and also an idea: they colonise our imaginations as both inside and outside the pale. But beyond the government defined boundaries, how are they delineated? Are they anything beyond the city central? Inner city areas such as Surry Hills or Balmain are certainly not brought to mind by this term. Spatially the suburbs are seen as 'out there' away from the inner city which somehow don't meet the criteria for single story occupation on a block of land which we think of as characteristically suburban. But where does the inner city begin and end now? Redfern, Waterloo, Alexandria, Drummoyne,

St Leonard's? 'As a state of mind and a way of living', Humphrey McQueen has observed,

Suburbia is not confined to certain geographic areas but can thrive where there are no suburbs... It is pointless to lay down a criterion for suburbia that includes duplexes, but excludes a row of terraces. Where it survives outside its natural habitat, suburbia still aspires to the ways of living that are most completely realised by nuclear families on garden blocks with detached houses.⁹

The identity of suburbia, so far as it can be ascribed one, is shifting and insecure; a borderline and liminal space.¹⁰ Dominant stereotypes have listed it as 'on the margins' beyond edges of cultural sophistication and tradition' and the areas that make up 'sprawl'.¹¹ But in the twenty-first century this static view has to be modified somewhat. And it is evident from this collection that suburban dwellers themselves have redefined being cosmopolitan as house prices in the inner suburbs skyrocket and push people further afield.¹²

The study of suburbs is often viewed as separate from the city or the urban as a whole. But in fact not only are suburbs obviously integral; they are now part of the networked city, reinforcing much older electricity grids, transport and water services with contemporary communications networks, especially the internet and mobile telephony which has facilitated greater interaction between suburbs and across the urban generally. Suburbs are always relational in this sense and though we tend to throw a light on the local or the small concerns within the suburb as case studies, this collection does not argue for their isolation from the wider urban landscape, for we know that local knowledge too, has the power to change lives.

This collection was set up as a collaborative project by members of the Research Strength in Creative Practices and Cultural Economy at the University of Technology, Sydney, is in the first instance a testament to that range and complexity of twenty-first century responses to city suburbs, predominantly in Sydney, though with a nod to other suburban contexts on the most-populated eastern seaboard of Australia, such as Melbourne and Brisbane. Secondly, the collection showcases the lively engagement and interdisciplinary nature of the intellectual culture in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Technology, Sydney, from the more traditional scholarly approaches of Humanities scholars to the range of cultural forms which make up Creative Practice in the academy, especially in this

case, Creative Writing and Media Arts.¹³ We had many seminars and discussions which took place in 2011 and 2012 about the ideas for the collection. We began by viewing it from the perspective of lived experience, always believing it possible that new technologies can create different spaces for collaborative scholarship within the traditional frame of a book.

And so it proved. We found that the tension between representing how a world was experienced while keeping that detached critical eye on its form and nature could work very well through a range of artistic and scholarly practice that spoke to each other. Karen Till, writing about her own engagement with memory studies as an artist, argues that more traditional scholars have a lot to gain by heeding the work of artists 'who also acknowledge the ways that people experience memory as multi-sensual, spatial ways of understanding their worlds'.¹⁴

Three distinct themes emerged in relation to the central concept of re-imagining the suburban which people researched and made for this publication. As our title indicates these became remembered suburbs anchored either by our own personal past or those of others, suburbs as places that were made and remade across time and suburbs not only as the subject for various creative representations but also increasingly where creativity as an identified practice or industry takes place.¹⁵

Some of our essays take as their subject particular suburbs such as Bondi, Manly and Campbelltown. Others range across time and the space of the urban and suburban. Others focus on those inner city in-betweens, subject of urban renewal and consolidation, such as Marrickville, Pyrmont and Balmain. Some utilise the concept of the even more local through a focus on the park, shops, the backyard or the suburban house. And still others explore what took place in the homes of these areas there that came to be identified with suburban life.

Referring to the suburbs of England, Roger Silverstone previously commented in his 1997 book *Visions of Suburbia* that 'An understanding of how suburbia was produced and continues to be both produced and reproduced is an essential precondition for an understanding of the twentieth century, an understanding above all of our emerging character and contradictions of our everyday lives'.¹⁶ Whether his argument for the centrality of suburbia to historical understanding still holds for the twenty-first century remains to be seen given the many different shapes it now takes in our imaginations.

MEMORY



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REINVENTING MANLY

Theresa Anderson

REINVENTING MANLY

A SUBURB ON THE MARGINS OF A WORLD CITY

Theresa Anderson

If the travel guides are to be believed, Manly, with its beachside village atmosphere and stunning coastal setting, is an iconic must-see destination for any visitor to Sydney. This was, for example, the way I encountered Manly on my first visit to Australia when I made the ritualistic pilgrimage across the harbour by ferry on a day trip.

Now a resident of Manly, I have come to appreciate this suburb as a place between city and beach, ocean and harbour, work and play. It is a place where natural and built features of the landscape continue to be blended and branded to suit this ever-evolving suburb sitting on Sydney's fringe.

Manly's story is one of margins and transition zones making it the suburb that it is and shaping a unique contribution to the city. Its history as a suburb is a story of isolation at the edges of a city – and even the edge of the northern beaches. Lying as it does on the fringes of the city, Manly's isolation from disease, urban growing pains and industrialisation has long made it a place of escape and refuge. It is a place where cultural landscape intersects with, adapts and responds to the natural landscape. The natural environment – both on land and in the water – is nationally significant with a diversity of marine and land-based vegetation and associated wildlife unlike anyplace else in Sydney's metropolitan region.

Manly is unique in offering a harbour and an ocean foreshore within metres of one another. Almost entirely surrounded by water, all Manly's harbour and ocean shorelines are listed on the National Estate. Manly boasts the only Aquatic Reserve and Ecologically Sensitive Area in Sydney Harbour as well as a protected aquatic reserve oceanside – Cabbage Tree Bay – inhabited by four out of the eleven protected species of fish in New South Wales, including the Weedy Sea Dragon. There are not many suburbs that can lay claim to having ocean surf, ocean coves, a harbour, a lagoon, reefs, creeks, waterfalls, a dam, wetlands, mangroves and seagrass all within their borders. On land, the environmental riches are equally impressive (and fragile) with three National Park zones – North Head, Dobroyd and Bantry Bay – encircling the municipality. North Head, for instance, plays host to 586 different species of flora, more than in the whole of Great Britain, and is home to the long-nosed bandicoot, a threatened species that until the 1960s was abundant throughout the Sydney metropolitan region. It is also one of the few areas on mainland Australia that the little blue penguins call home.¹

While in many ways Manly is an early 20th-century suburb, natural and human elements have long intermingled to ultimately create the suburb we experience today. The 1986 heritage study by Blackmore and associates underscored how isolation and recreation have shaped Manly and transformed its natural environment.² The heritage items identified in that study incorporate topography and natural environment with views and features of the built environment. As Craig Burton puts it, the cultural environment of Manly has been created through the interaction of the natural landscape and 'those hopes

and aspirations which sprung from a transported European culture.³ But throughout its suburban history a particular image of Manly has been resolutely promoted. Manly is a place that has been invented and reinvented over time. The local economy has from the earliest efforts at European settlement struggled to balance the interests of commuters and residents – human and otherwise – with the desire to continue to appeal to visitors who wish to play in Sydney’s oldest ‘watering place’ and ‘pleasure ground’.

Manly’s Sense of Place

Even prior to the establishment of Manly village in the 1850s, the locality figured in the early history of European Sydney. Manly was sighted enroute as the First Fleet moved upstream and Cabbage Tree Palms from the south end of the beach were used in the initial European settlement at Sydney cove.⁴ The cliffs of North Head, a highly significant landscape type in Manly,⁵ have long served as a landmark at the entrance to Sydney Harbour. From such a vantage point it is easy to appreciate how Manly’s place in Sydney’s and Australia’s heritage has been crafted by the interplay between this very special landscape, the legacy of its resort origins and its relative isolation until it took off as a suburb in the 1920s. It is the combination of these three facets that make Manly’s heritage unique:⁶ the coming together of the harbour beach and the ocean beach provides two contrasting elements which, against the backdrop of North Head, engender a strong sense of drama, enclosure and safety unique to the Sydney region.⁷ The allure of Manly has since its early days drawn on and added to the strong sense of drama stemming from the natural assets of the area. Both the material culture and local economy of this place are characterized by a tension between its built and natural assets.

In his article exploring Australian attitudes to heritage, Graeme Aplin concludes: ‘We all need to be able to visit sites that have a “sense of place” and, in many cases, a “sense of time”. They represent part of what makes us who we are, on the individual level, and on the community and national levels.’⁸ What gives Manly its sense of place is that – more than any other suburb – it is a place where the dynamic interplay between built and natural features of the locality confront you in everyday life. Whether resident or visitor, ongoing struggles between esteem for the Manly of the past and visions of the Manly of the future are never far from view.

Manly as Borderland

Manly sits on the fringes of the city in a very special way as a borderland. Harbour side, you can see the city lights from the suburb’s foreshore, while surf side the Norfolk Pines act as a navigational

beacon from the sea for those seeking out the entrance to that harbour. The wild side of Manly, evident in its national parks and outstanding biodiversity, must somehow survive the challenges of a built environment, human settlement and an urban sprawl that seems to encroach ever more and threaten some of the very wonders that provide Manly's unique appeal.

Long before the natural vegetation communities of the Manly area were recognised as being historically, scientifically and aesthetically significant,⁹ the natural wonders of borderland Manly captured the imagination of Sydney-siders. Francis Myers, author of the popular text *Beautiful Manly*, wrote in 1885: 'Rocks and beach and promontory and cliffs beyond were made by nature for the use of mankind.'¹⁰ The fragility of this special borderland, however, makes this a suburb of transitions and compromises. Heritage and history must face off against calls for growth and new development. Where else in Sydney can the same little strip of earth take a battering from a stormy sea one day and then serve up great food, wine or jazz the next?

Sometimes both faces of Manly present themselves simultaneously, as was the case for the 2012 Food and Wine Festival when the weekend unfortunately collided with a terrible southerly and king tides. There are days when a ferry trip to or from work feels like an open ocean crossing and the walk home is accompanied by the sounds of a raging sea and howling winds. These contrasting qualities were flagged and praised in the early accounts of Manly. In 1885, one writer in the *Illustrated Sydney News* wrote:

We are proud of Manly, and justly so. Situated on a narrow strip of land, only a few minutes walk across, you have the peaceful waters of Port Jackson laving the shores as softly as an autumn breeze fans the cheek, but on the other the whole force of the South Pacific dashing in foam along the sandy beach, with which it wages perpetual noisy war – the giant breakers, crested with foam, expending their strength in vain, and then as if breathless, withdrawing to obtain fresh vigour and renew the fight again.¹¹

Today Manly is a suburb where a bush walk accompanied by nothing but the sounds of bird song, frogs and crashing surf can end in any number of stylish cosmopolitan cafes in the village. Manly continues to be promoted in this way.¹²

Isolation and Exploitation

Prior to the development boom of the early 20th century and the accompanying improvements to transportation, water kept Manly

isolated from Sydney's growing urban centre. But even now with better transport on land and on water, a sense of isolation is still a key part of the making and remaking of Manly's sense of place.

The North Head, a prominent natural feature of the suburb, remains a remarkable pocket of isolation in an otherwise urbanised environment. On 27 September 1839, Louisa Anne Meredith sailed through the Heads after a four-month voyage from England. 'The entrance' she wrote:

to Port Jackson is grand in the extreme. The high, dark cliffs we had been coasting along all morning, suddenly terminated in an abrupt precipice, called the South Head... The North Head is a similar cliff, a bare bluff promontory of dark horizontal rocks; and between these grand stupendous pillars, as through a colossal gate, we entered Port Jackson.¹³

A feeling of other-worldliness permeates this natural landscape and the historical artefacts one can discover within it. Both the military fortifications and Quarantine Station on North Head are illustrations of Manly's role as the last bastion/barrier between Sydney and 'others'/outsiders. These two cultural artefacts are very particular manifestations of an in/out borderland and reinforce Manly's place as the suburb on the fringe of the city – an outlier and last bastion against potential invaders, be they a presumed hostile force or unwanted diseases.

Military fortifications on North Head represent an effort to protect what was inside the Harbour and keep unwanted elements 'out', including Russians in the 1870s. Topography and communications were important factors in early European settlement. So the safe anchorage afforded by Manly cove and the prominence of the isolated North Head, as well as Dobroyd Point on the other side of what was to become residential Manly, meant they were natural for the defence network of the Sydney settlement.¹⁴

The Quarantine Station served as a transition zone for those waiting to be allowed 'in' to Sydney as unwanted disease, such as typhoid, was kept out of the rest of Sydney, the colony and the country. In 1839, Louisa Anne Meredith described it as follows:

Near the North Head is the quarantine-ground, off which one unlucky vessel was moored when we passed; and on the brow of the cliff a few tombstones indicate the burial-place of those unhappy exiles who die during the time of ordeal, and

whose golden dreams of the far-sought land of promise lead to but a lone and desolate grave on its storm-beaten shore.¹⁵

Its borderland position afforded it qualities that suited the isolation needed for such a facility that was a convenient distance from the city proper.¹⁶ Manly – or more specifically the Quarantine Station – separated Sydney from the epidemics of Europe. It was opened in 1832 because of Manly's isolation from the more populous areas of Sydney,¹⁷ which reinforced its continuing isolation.

The insulation afforded by this topography and distance from the city has also undoubtedly contributed to Manly's place as a refuge for the plants and animals in and around the municipality, securing the natural features so highly prized in colonial Sydney and still valued today. The biodiversity of Manly was important for the origins of Manly's life as a holiday destination. Excursions to pick wildflowers, especially around Christmas time when the Christmas bush which Manly became renowned for was in flower, were very popular in the early period of its resort history.¹⁸ The unique microclimate present in the evocatively named Fairy Bower and Shelly Beach zones 'captured the imagination' of visitors.¹⁹

From those earliest days as a leisure destination, visitors revealed an aesthetic appreciation of the landscape defined by a sense of isolation and introspection:

You may – if you have any soul within you, you always must – halt a while in the centre of the bridge, and look long and lovingly up the lagoon. It is a fair perspective always, but most divine on an afternoon with the sun well down the hills, and a silvery light upon all the broadwater.²⁰

The early cultural economy of Manly played on this aesthetic appreciation of the area's natural gifts. A series of Wild Flower Shows held in Manly in the 1880s and 1890s involved creating elaborate ornamental displays of the wildflowers and a festival atmosphere.²¹ The final show in 1899 included enhancements of the fern gully in the ravine at the back of Ivanhoe Park and gas-lit illuminations designed specifically for the shows.²² Ornamental displays featured native flowers freshly pulled from the suburb's lush bushlands. Special pavilions and facilities were constructed in Ivanhoe Park and thousands reportedly travelled by ferries to see the native flowers and creative floral displays. It did not take long after the first successful show, however, for critical voices to start raising the alarm about the potential threat these events posed to the very features needed for their success. Protests began slowly, but because the popularity of these Manly

shows, which were used as fund raisers, had prompted other areas to follow suit and hold shows of their own, the devastating impact on the surrounding bushland was hard to miss.²³

Concern increased to the point where by 1887 even early supporters of the shows were beginning to make their opposition publicly known, as the following extract from a *Daily Telegraph* account of comments made by Charles Moore, the curator of the Botanic Gardens, illustrates:

Mr Moore pointed out that there was a great danger of our natural plants being destroyed in some localities. He had been glad to see the first and second flower shows at Manly, but he would never encourage these exhibitions. Besides destroying flowers, they had become mere money making matters. The lady who stood in the highest position in society in the colony [Lady Carrington] would not in future patronize anything of the kind, but she would most willingly lend her support to the cultivation of these flowers. He regretted to see so much encouragement given by the mass of the people to these shows, which were not merely got up for the purpose of affording interest to lovers of the beautiful, but, as he had already said, for the purpose of making money.²⁴

There were clearly tensions developing between various community sectors. Those benefiting from the fundraising were eager to see the shows continue, as were those who wanted an opportunity to profit from the crowds attracted to Manly because of these special events. On the other hand, local residents for whom the destruction of the bush was something akin to destroying their own back garden, valued the assets of the natural landscape in a very different way.

There were also debates about noise related to the merry-go-rounds of Manly that were popular amusements around the same time that the Manly Wild Flower Shows were being held. Champion and Champion²⁵ report on a series of battles between operators of these entertainment venues and local residents frustrated about persistent noise. If present-day debates and discussions about the relative merits of various festivals and beachside events as sustainable entertainment is any indication, not much seems to have changed. Keeping visitors amused and entertained (and business owners satisfied with the volume of trade) cannot always come at the expense of resident rate-payers. On the other hand, keeping up the amenities that both residents and visitors can enjoy means ensuring Manly's leisure economy remains strong, which means ensuring sufficient attractions. This sentiment seems to be one that has persisted despite the ongoing debates about Manly the resort versus Manly the residential suburb.

Isolation from the city was never without its drawbacks for would-be residents and operators of the early amusements in 19th-century Manly. The ferries are tied closely to Manly's history and development. Soon after becoming a major landholder in Manly, Henry Gilbert Smith built a pier in 1855 for excursion visitors and by 1857 a daily ferry service began. By the 1870s there were three ferry wharves operating in Manly Cove and Little Manly Beach.²⁶ Ultimately the Manly wharf still in operation today predominated to become the focal point and iconic gateway to the suburb. Ferry transportation has become an essential part of the tourist experience of Manly, enabling a romanticising of visitors' experiences of isolation. For residents and daily commuters, their existence is a necessity for tempering that isolation. Preserving the romantic sense of isolation evoked in marketing which portrayed Manly as being 'seven miles from Sydney and a thousand miles from care'²⁷ while meeting the needs of a growing community and leisure industry has been essential for Manly's economic growth – and its suburban survival.

While the suburb is no longer as isolated from the city as it once was, a visit to Manly today remains closely tied to its landscape and its wildlife. Lessons of the past have thankfully been taken on board and we are unlikely to see destructive impact on the scale of those 19th-century festivals which decimated the region's unique wildflower habitat. The bushland hugging Manly's coast that early settlers found so troublesome in this outlier of a suburb has been recast as an ecotourism draw card. Campaigns to protect the fairy penguins and bandicoots and to establish aquatic and nature reserves are part of the ongoing effort to preserve the biodiversity that isolation permitted to thrive here.²⁸ These efforts are further enhanced by the recent decision to convert Manly's last remaining aquarium into a marine sanctuary.²⁹ There is nevertheless ongoing debate about the extent to which it is possible to preserve the isolation responsible for Manly's extraordinary biodiversity and inviting sense of otherworldliness given the seemingly inevitable economic growth needed to thrive as a 21st-century suburb.

Manly as a Place of Escape

The theme of escape runs through Manly's history as a suburb. The therapeutic qualities of the locality, with privileged access to invigorating sea breezes and natural landscape, are praised in promotions and guidebooks dating back to its earliest origins. The early advertising campaign that Henry Gilbert Smith used in the 1850s to promote the allotments he was offering in the area emphasised the natural beauty of a 'delightful watering place' that could suit the building of a holiday home or a permanent residence.³⁰ In naming the locality *Brighton* at that time, the reference to the allure of that well known

English seaside resort would have been unmistakable. As a leisure economy was taking hold in the mid 19th century, growing numbers of Sydneysiders had time and money to temporarily escape from the city. For those visitors eager to escape the dirt and noise, the trip to the seaside must have felt like a world away from their everyday existence.

The escape that Manly offered those early tourists was apparently not before its time, given the accounts of the ‘stinks and the slops’³¹ many residents of other crowded pockets of the city and emerging suburbs without the benefit of a stiff sea breeze would have been enduring in that period. Undoubtedly the ferry trip to Manly alone would have brought a welcome breathe of fresh air to many. In devising and giving shape to his property developments, Smith’s intention was to entice residents and visitors to Manly by developing amenities ‘ensuring health and amusement’.³² Further enticement would have been provided by suggestions from members of the medical profession that a stay at the seaside was therapeutic because it offered ‘special inducements’ for various health complaints and relief from the ‘odours of the city’ that, according to the miasma theory of that medical era, would have been the cause of illness.³³

By 1880, Manly – now a recognized Municipality – was a thriving seaside resort and pleasure ground offering entertainment, amusement and escape from both the everyday and a world-class city that was approximately the same size as Boston in the USA. Manly was presented in the media as a must-see destination:

For such excursions our noble harbour and its picturesque surroundings offer innumerable attractions but none greater than those of the beautiful seaside village of Manly beach. What Brighton and Margate are to the Cockney, Boulogne to the Parisian, Newport to the Yankee, Manly Beach is to us. Who has not visited Manly? A visitor to Sydney who has not been there is looked upon as a visitor to Stratford-on-Avon would be if he neglected to see Shakespeare’s home. We are proud of Manly, and justly so... Scenes of wondrous rugged beauty are also to be found amongst its rocks and nooks, affording lovers of nature numberless treats.³⁴

Such promotions played on notions of escape and refuge from the city.

The popularity of seaside therapy led to the development of entertainments and amusements, often instituted by the ferry companies and local entrepreneurs to enhance the seaside experience and attract

more visitors.³⁵ The entertainments introduced to Manly recounted traditions of a faraway land and the English seaside resorts some would have no doubt remembered. Additional entertainments added to the Wildflower Shows that supposedly showcased the area's natural beauty, for example, included a maypole dance with local school girls dressed as English peasants.³⁶ But soon these exotic imports would have taken on a local flavour of a suburb where increasingly natural and transplanted elements joined to create Manly's resort culture. The pools, camera obscura and aquariums could offer an enhanced insight into some of the natural wonders of this place, while dance halls, mazes and merry-go-rounds lent a 'cultural' flair to the natural attractions to fashion a popular pleasure ground reminiscent of England but with a character shaped by the locality.

The escape that Manly could offer had to do with more than taking a break from work and reminiscing about life in England. There was an egalitarian character to the seaside experience at beaches like Manly that would have also offered a temporary escape from standard social practice. While the cost of travel in the early period of Manly's resort history would have kept it an exclusive pleasure,³⁷ by the 1890s travel to and from this seaside refuge became more accessible to the working classes thereby contributing to a mingling of social classes at the beach.³⁸ Even prior to the relaxation of the daylight bathing rules, sitting on the seaside to take in the wilderness and wild seas, Ford suggests, aided sexual freedom and liberation from the norms of Victorian society that would have been hard to escape in the city and the workplace. She points to the doggerel verse recounting exotic – and sometimes erotic – adventures at the seaside³⁹ and the aquarium complexes and dance halls emerging in the 1880s to cater specifically to working-class visitors.

An accident of geography may have also contributed to the opportunity for temporary escape in Manly. Ford comments that while the origins of Australian seaside resorts took their inspiration from the British practice, the close proximity of resorts like Manly to the city meant that daytrips were more the norm than they had been back in Europe, where longer excursions to the seaside were in order.⁴⁰ And as transport options expanded to include a tram service via the Spit along with cheaper ferry tickets, escape remained reasonably affordable. The beach culture imported from England came to be fashioned into a uniquely Australian culture. At Manly, this was a uniquely Sydney experience.

By the early 20th century, escape to Manly also came to involve more than day trips as country visitors escaping the heat and drought of country towns and stations took extended holidays by the sea. Local

businesses actively pursued and relied upon this holiday trade. In the 1920s local businesses were eager to expand Manly's appeal as a resort looking for ways to attract visitors to the suburb year round. In an attempt to promote the suburb as a winter resort and not just a summer escape, the suburb's therapeutic qualities were once again invoked in promotions at that time. A publicity officer appointed by the local council promoted the qualities of Manly village by drawing attention to both its early European history and modern amenities.⁴¹ By this time there was also competition with other beachside suburbs such as Coogee where the completion of an ocean pier in 1928 stoked further interest in finding ways to promote and reinvent Manly as a premier holiday destination.⁴²

Beach culture became synonymous with Manly, especially with the relaxation of rules about daylight bathing in the early 20th century that saw the emergence of the new leisure pursuit of surf bathing.⁴³ A mythology surrounding the all-day surf campaign in the 1900s evolved around the role that a local personality, William Gocher, played in the process. A proud boast that Gocher was the first person to openly defy the law against daylight bathing and that Manly was the sight of this defiance persisted for decades after the event without much basis in fact.⁴⁴ It is, however, accurate to claim that the liberation of the surf did become an essential part of Manly's identity from those early pioneering days of daylight bathing. As early as 1910, Manly was popularised in the media as 'Surf City'.⁴⁵ Manly's historic association with surf culture acquired even more significance as a consequence of an event at neighbouring Freshwater Beach in January 1915 when a demonstration of board riding – as surfing was initially known so as to distinguish it from bodysurfing – by famous Hawaiian Duke Kahanamoku took place.⁴⁶ Surfing remains an attraction and important local industry. Contemporary promotions of Manly as Sydney's number one surfing destination play on that legacy and the long line of world-class surfers from the area.⁴⁷

The leisure economy remains an important part of Manly's economic survival, and even today local promoters continue to look for ways to encourage both the day trippers from the city and the extended holiday makers. Like a souvenir booklet from the 1920s proudly boasted, Manly 'invites the world to come and be happy'.⁴⁸ The 'thousand miles from care' tagline persists today not just in relation to drawing visitors to the area but as a source of inspiration for local artists.⁴⁹ The local council recently revived the Surf City label in its own branding of the suburb.⁵⁰ The debate about ways Manly might respond to the amusements and inducements on offer elsewhere, such as the varied responses to the opening of Coogee's ocean pier,⁵¹ however, also serves as a reminder that by the 1920s Manly was not just a place

of escape for holiday-makers but also a refuge for local residents. Today, while there may no longer be a need to escape the stinks and slops of Sydney's inner city, escape from the daily grind of modern urban life is still a draw card for residents and visitors alike.

Reinventing the Exotic in Manly's Past, Present and Future

Manly's existence as a place of cultural consumption is tied largely to a leisure economy that incorporates beach culture. But it also supports rich creative – art galleries, music, festivals – and alternative communities – for instance, the long-standing environmental activism that contributed to the MEC International Conference in late 2011.⁵² A seemingly unending cycle of adaptations and remixes of material and natural landscapes has crafted Manly as it is today and as it is appreciated by residents and visitors.

Since its very beginnings as a suburb, Manly has experienced ongoing tension between what is natural and built, between visitor and resident. As early as 1868, for example, well known Manly resident W.B. Dalley expressed anxiety about the impact that a thriving tourism industry, growing resident population and improved transportation links to the city would have on the 'simple life' enjoyed by residents of the day.⁵³ His fears would seem to foreshadow concerns raised in recent years by current residents. In every decade since those early years of settlement, in fact, it is possible to locate reports about resident concerns about an 'invasion' of tourist crowds or threats to the natural assets of the area.

Curby describes a debate in 1925 about the proposal for an ocean pier as one example of growing anxiety about Manly's future as a suburb at that time.⁵⁴ Some campaigned to preserve Manly's unspoilt, natural heritage and maintain the quiet, unspoilt appeal of the beachside suburb. Others worried that Manly's natural attractions were insufficient for preserving the leisure economy that had become so important for local business success. Manly, they argued, needed to offer new attractions – big, artificial and creative additions –⁵⁵ and reinvent once again if she was to continue to appeal as a holiday destination. In recent public documents, Manly Council acknowledges tourism as a major industry and employer for Manly that it is committed to growing and sustaining. At the same time, there is public support for the need to balance such planning with the needs of residents and the biodiversity and unique ecology of the Municipality.⁵⁶

On reflection, Manly's history is a tale of ongoing reinvention where exotic elements are naturalised to create what we come to appreciate as quintessential Manly. Since the earliest days of European settlement of this suburb by the sea, the natural Australian landscape has been

supplemented with exotic additions as a way to enhance the experience of the locality. A sense of the exotic has been present throughout Manly's evolving status as a place of recreation. Reinventing Brighton at the Australian seaside played on memories of England and going to the seaside whilst creating an exotic experience that embraced unique features of the Australian landscape. Exotic reinventions are also evident in the promotions of early property entrepreneurs like Henry Gilbert Smith and Henry Ferdinand Halloran when looking to lure potential residents to the area. Smith's plans for the 'New Brighton' on the Pacific included a maze, Vauxhall Gardens, camera obscura, Swiss cottage and stone kangaroo on nearby hills to attract and entertain visitors. The stone kangaroo (c 1856⁵⁷) on a prominent rocky outcrop overlooking the village on the flat below is an exotic introduction indeed for you are unlikely to see a kangaroo anywhere in the area. And yet, by virtue of becoming a notable local landmark this homage to the exotic entices one to take in the natural surroundings from a still spectacular vantage point. The exotic is naturalised.

Smith also planted the first Norfolk pines in Manly in 1855, with the newly formed Manly Municipal council following suit with further plantings of Norfolk Pines and Moreton Bay Figs as part of extensive landscaping in 1877.⁵⁸ Curiously, the Norfolk Island pines that were imposed on the landscape are now seen as such a natural part of the region that they now form part of the iconic image of the suburb, recreated in promotional material to symbolize Manly. Exotic imports recast as Manly locals, these plantings also set the standard for what many think of as a typical Australian seaside landscape.

In the same way that exotic plantings were used to enhance the natural features of Manly, special events and festivals (related to food, wine, jazz, performing and visual arts) were introduced in the 1980s as a way to reinvent Manly on Sydney's cultural calendar. Like the earlier amenities and amusements that came to typify Manly, these cultural activities introduced as part of a deliberate strategy to increase local revenue⁵⁹ have gone on to become naturalized features of the suburb appealing to residents as well as visitors.

Two recent tales of reinvention centre on the iconic gateway to this suburb: Manly Wharf. Incredibly, a small penguin colony maintains a very precarious hold under the wharf. Their presence draws spectators to the harbour foreshore near the wharf most evenings in hope of catching a glimpse of these little Manly natives. The attraction is proving increasingly popular with the colony playing a starring role in a children's book *The Little Penguins of Manly Wharf* released earlier this year.⁶⁰ The wharf has been reinvented as wildlife sanctuary. However, with three competing ferry companies once again using the

wharf and the growing popularity of the wharf as an entertainment venue in its own right, life is far from easy for these 57 endangered locals. Volunteers partner with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to close the beach area metres away from restaurants that have applied for permission to expand their premises as part of the push to reinvent Manly Wharf as a destination in its own right.⁶¹ Both the little blue penguin clambering to keep a toe-hold on their little part of Manly and the restaurateurs wishing to expand their premises are in their own particular ways contributors to Manly's character and to a potential reinvention of Manly wharf. While there is little debate that both contribute to Manly's economic and cultural life, how their respective contributions are valued is a matter of debate and ongoing contention. Can Manly Wharf be both a site of sanctuary and entertainment?

Conclusion

Reflecting on ways that the original innovators gave shape to the present town, the challenges of working with and transforming the land and the ever-present tension between natural and planned features of this place, reinventing Manly is an ongoing struggle to preserve and sustain its natural gifts and strike a sustainable balance between supporting resident population and encouraging visitors. Despite the inevitable struggles arising as a consequence of sitting on the fringes of a large city, Manly continues to survive and even thrive in that isolation.

Perhaps preserving the experience of isolation and other-worldliness made possible by living on the margins of a world city is the key to Manly's future. The reactions to the local landscape reported in 19th-century accounts of earlier visitors and residents could still resonate with first-time visitors today. Approaching Manly by ferry from cosmopolitan Sydney and experiencing the stiff sea breeze when passing the Sydney Heads in strong bright sunshine can conjure up a magical sensation similar to the recollection of Louisa Anne Meredith's 1839 encounter with this landscape reported earlier in this chapter. Reflecting on what lures residents to this suburb, perhaps this promotional statement in a souvenir booklet on Manly from the 1920s can provide an answer:

It is said that Sydney is composed of two classes, those who live at Manly and those who want to live there. There is only one drawback... that if one goes to Manly he never wishes to leave it.⁶²

Manly's nationally significant environment and cultural heritage and the intermingling of its naturally occurring and introduced assets are major draw cards. Manly is a suburb of continual reinvention, demonstrating a magical capacity to naturalise the exotic. Like the Norfolk

Pines that were once exotic species in this suburb, many have planted roots in this place they now call home. Let's hope Manly never loses its exotic charm.

Acknowledgements

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Robert Donaldson and his widow Anne Donaldson, who taught me to look for the exotic in the everyday.

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