

Douglas Booth

Nudes in the Sand and Perverts in the Dunes

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The trouble is that the nudists have no shame. They still think that they are in the Garden of Eden and have never heard of original sin. When my brother was six years old ... he came out of the bath with no clothes on. My father gave him such a whipping he still bears some of the scars, but at least he learned modesty. I believe the nudists should be horsewhipped until they bleed if necessary, so as they know the meaning of shame. A stint in the army would do them no harm, then force them to read the bible and give them a good sound whipping. That would instil some decency into them.

Balgowlah (Sydney) resident, 1991¹

In 1976 the New South Wales labor government declared clothes optional at two secluded Sydney metropolitan beaches. Over the next few years it designated several more clothes optional beaches. Although 'free' or nude beaches left public nudity confined to the geographic and social margins, they represented a major shift in official attitudes towards the public display of the body. For the next 17 years, sea and sun-bathers of both sexes and all ages flocked to nude beaches. But in 1993 the minority NSW liberal government inserted a clause in its new local government act which allowed local councils to reclothe nude beaches. Within six months there were no free beaches under council jurisdiction in NSW. This article analyses the undressing of bathing bodies in NSW and their redressing with particular reference to Sydney's Reef beach. It offers a case study in the politics of the revealed body and shows that bathing bodies constitute an historical site of struggle between pleasure and discipline.

Public bathing generated a tension within the middle classes in the eighteenth century. On the one hand, medical practitioners alerted them to the therapeutic benefits of bathing in cold water at a time of rising concern about public health. On the other, christian traditions located social order and stability in the renunciation and repression of hedonism: civilisation was synonymous with an asceticism and temperance that demanded 'denial of the flesh and the control of emotion'.² The middle-classes believed that the display of flesh in public was sinful and they confined public bathing to segregated and enclosed baths.³

In 1834 the *Sydney Gazette* described bathing as the town's 'favourite recreation'.⁴ Space and rudimentary baths initially shielded unclothed bodies from public view but naked bathing in the built environment soon prompted intervention. Governor Macquarie objected to this 'indecent and improper custom' and banned bathing at the government wharf and dockyard in 1810.⁵ Three decades later, the government prohibited bathing in all waters exposed to public view between 6.00 am and 8.00 pm.⁶ Nuisance inspectors policed bathing hours, although they took little action against unclad bathers before the 1890s. For example, in 1889 the

mayor of Manly instructed inspector Leahy to ignore naked bathers before 7.00 am.⁷ New bylaws passed two years later, however, required bathers to wear costumes at all times.⁸

The middle classes' obsession with health fostered what Christopher Lasch calls a 'therapeutic outlook': the body became exposed to endless private and public examination 'for tell tale symptoms of psychic stress, for blemishes and flaws' and 'for reassuring indications that ... life is proceeding according to schedule'.⁹ The therapeutic outlook helped legitimise the revealed body and supplant the reserved, modest, restrained and hidden Victorian body. But it also fuelled hysteria among moralists and led to a debate over daylight bathing and bathing costumes.

Ambitious middle-class groups, including health faddists, physicians, physical educators, utopians and property owners, endorsed bathing for their own financial and social interests. However, moralists, known as Mrs Grundies or more colloquially as wowsers, called it depraved and corrupt behaviour: bathing signified absence of restraint and self-control over bodily desires, and it stimulated desire for flesh, aroused erotic thoughts and encouraged sexual crimes.¹⁰

At the turn of the century, municipal councils in NSW regulated bathing under the local authorities act. Sydney's Manly and Randwick councils imposed an 8.00 am curfew; Waverley permitted bathing at Clovelly at all hours provided bathers were 'properly and becomingly clad'.¹¹ Police, however, prosecuted bathers under section 77 of the police offences act.¹² In October 1902 William Gocher, proprietor and editor of the *Manly and North Sydney Daily*, began the struggle to legalise daylight bathing. He bathed at midday in Manly waters on three consecutive Sundays. On approaching and leaving the sea Gocher covered himself with a mackintosh and he wore a neck-to-knee costume in the water. Gocher's dress and decorum proved that respectable gentlemen could discipline their desires and police inspector-general Fosbery declined to prosecute. Fosbery wrote to the chief secretary in November 1902 informing him that if 'bathers wear suitable costume and public decency is not outraged, I am unable to see that a practice permitted for so many years should be stopped'. The police would only intervene, he added, to ensure decency.¹³

In the early twentieth century, a science of bathing, part of the penetration of science into every social practice, lent credence to the therapeutic outlook of social reformers:

Sand, surf, sunshine and the free winds of heaven make up the prescription which is confidently recommended as a sort of universal medicine. This, if not the elixir of life, must surely be part of it, and is certain to tone up the system and lengthen the life. It is plain that he who wishes for a royal road to health and happiness should take the first step to it by getting sunburnt, it is well understood that a well-browned skin is much healthier than a white one. So the sun-worshipper looks with pity upon his pallid brother as one who stupidly neglects a most evident good.¹⁴

The new therapeutic and scientific techniques challenged nineteenth century christian notions about the correct presentation of the body. *The Australian Star*, for example, now recommended that readers search out those 'brown skinned specimens of manhood' who spend their weekends at the beach.¹⁵

Bathers' costumes and mixed bathing outraged Mrs Grundy who perceived a lowering of 'the common standards of propriety that prevail amongst civilised nations'.¹⁶ 'A mother of girls' said that the 'heaps of sprawling men and lads, naked, but for a nondescript rag around their middle' had forced her to leave Balmoral beach. The so-called bathing costumes 'might put an Aboriginal to shame', and she advocated flogging as just punishment.¹⁷ 'Daily dipper' denounced sun-bathers who 'put themselves on the same level as dogs'.¹⁸

Under pressure from Mrs Grundy, Manly, Randwick and Waverley councils and the department of local government drafted a new set of beach ordinances in 1907. They proposed that bathers wear an additional loose fitting tunic over the body-hugging neck-to-knee costume.¹⁹ Property owners, land speculators and a myriad of small business people including food, transport, souvenir and entertainment vendors, attacked the proposal. As one of their number lamented, 'but for prudishness and false modesty the waves breaking on the sands might have been rolling sovereigns into the pockets'.²⁰ Tunics, enthusiasts argued, would negate all therapeutic benefits. Member of the legislative council, R.D. Meagher said if bathing was to have a 'salutary effect on skin, nerves, and tissue', salt water and sunlight must strike the body. He accused wowsers of undermining the new woman:

Where is Mrs Grundy going to stop? Our Australian girls no longer consider it good to wear pale and uninteresting complexions like the heroine of the *Young Ladies' Journal*, but are devotees to Old Sol and Neptune — these bronze Venuses, with Ozone in their nostrils, and vitality in their constitutions ...²¹

Bathers protested against tunics and the government retreated, although restrictions on sun-bathing and mixed bathing remained.²²

In the 1920s and 1930s burgeoning consumerism propagated a new culture of pleasure and a new tolerance of the revealed body. Consumer culture 'required a new lifestyle embodied in the ethic of a calculating hedonism, and a new personality type, the narcissistic person'.²³ The beach was the most visible site of hedonist culture in Australia — a place where the attractive sons and daughters of the middle classes mixed freely in backless costumes, shorts and brassieres, and trunks, 'displaying their bodies with cheerful eroticism'.²⁴ Consumer culture helped liberate the body from Mrs Grundy's repressive regimens, although it too contained its own methods of discipline. Through advertising, consumer culture creates the desires it promises to satisfy, including the desire for, and loathing of, any deviation from mesomorphic bodies.²⁵ It manipulates people to adopt rigorous self-imposed regimens (diet and exercise) to achieve their desires. Moreover, under the gaze of public surveillance individuals feel compelled to conform to ideals redefined as normal.²⁶

Beach beauty contests, which began after the 1914-18 war, are a perfect example of the new permissive disciplinary techniques. While John Rickard describes them as a 'local adaption of glamorous Hollywood images for 'an audience of suburban voyeurs', exhibitionism contains its own method of discipline.²⁷ For example, the *Sunday Times*, an early contest promoter, reminded 'surfer girls' about the relationship between self-discipline and beauty:

The girl who wants to look charming in a surfing costume must be fastidious in all her habits and wise in all her exercises. She must dance and walk well. She must eat sensibly. She must avoid all excess. Otherwise, sooner or later, come all the enemies of beauty.²⁸

Briefer costumes gave women new freedoms but they also enticed them to reveal more of their bodies which were then subjected to new disciplinary methods to ensure they conformed to the 'correct shape'. The new methods included exercise, dieting and consumption of toiletries and accessories.

Manly mayor, A.T. Keirie, illustrates the shift in disciplinary methods. Under ordinance 52 bathers had to wear neck-to-knee costumes in the water and additional clothing over their costumes when on the beach. In the summer of 1916-17, Keirie urged the minister for local government to prosecute bathers who wore 'indecent' kimonos over their costumes. But a decade later he criticised this law: kimonos not only limited healthy exposure to the sun they also imposed unnecessary financial burdens on bathers. High standards of decency had been achieved at Manly, Keirie boasted, without recourse to the law.²⁹

One-piece costumes gave way to shorts and brassieres for women and trunks for men in the 1930s. Mrs Grundy deplored backless costumes and low necklines. Reverend Ebbs of Manly even recommended that 'wearers ... be hunted off the ocean and harbour fronts'.³⁰ But there was a more general recognition that ordinance 52 was obsolete and unenforceable. Following requests to clarify the law, the minister for local government, Eric Spooner in 1935 amended the ordinance.³¹ Bathing suits now had to cover the chest and front of the body between the armpits and the waist, and the whole of the trunk. Costume legs had to be at least three inches long and women had to wear 'half skirts'. The press lampooned Spooner who appeared in cartoons dressed in grandmotherly garb. He justified the new regulations citing complaints, including one from the Bega branch of the country women's association which urged 'rigorous' action against men wearing trunks.³²

Bathers generally ignored the regulations which were neither policed nor policeable. Even the conservative surf lifesaving association of Australia, which initially approved Spooner's ordinance, joined the protest.³³ Explaining its new position, the association expounded the dual doctrine of therapeutic benefit and self-discipline which permitted unashamed displays of the body: 'it should be our aim to encourage young men to take pride in their physique. This cannot be better encouraged than the opportunity to expose their rippling muscles to sunshine, fresh air *and public eye*'.³⁴ Broad public acceptance of trunks and shorts and brassieres partly reflected the failure of Mrs Grundy to prove that exposed flesh engendered moral decay. On the contrary, the Australian beach reflected the health, fitness and youth of the nation. As Adelaide's *Advertiser* put it, 'most people, even if they are not personally enthusiastic about trunks, see nothing seriously objectionable in the wearing of them, and, for this reason are not prepared to support a general ban on their use'.³⁵

Local councils immediately banned the bikini upon its arrival at the end of the second world war. Manly mayor Anderson called it 'a direct challenge to our sense of decency'.³⁶ Many women, too, expressed reservations. The secretary of the NSW women's swimming association thought few girls would be brazen enough to wear bikinis; beachgoer Ellen Parker doubted whether she would find a boyfriend

brave enough to escort her in a bikini.³⁷ In 1946 a crowd of several hundred followed Pauline Morgan as she walked along Bondi Beach wearing a bikini. In the excitement she was knocked to the ground and almost trampled. Eventually she reached the dressing pavilion where an inspector ordered her to change.³⁸ But the shock of the bikini soon wore off. As Peter Burger reminds us, 'nothing loses its effectiveness more quickly than shock; by its very nature it is a unique experience' which repetition fundamentally changes.³⁹ In the 1950s women bought the bikini *en masse*, although inspectors sent wearers of the briefest costumes from the beach for the next two decades.

Attitudes towards the presentation of the body underwent a radical change in the 1960s. Naked bodies appeared in films, on television and in weekly picture magazines such as *Australasian Post*, *Pix* and *People*. This nudity was partly a logical conclusion of growing tolerance. In the words of John Clarke et al, tolerance is a double-edged sword: when 'new social impulses are set free they are impossible to fully contain'.⁴⁰ Women began removing their tops on main suburban beaches in Sydney in the early 1970s. There was barely a murmur of opposition. When Father James O'Reilly, from St Patrick's church Bondi, co-ordinated two petitions against the practice, which he said was contrary to christian modesty, Waverley council refused to intervene.⁴¹

Two conditions precipitated these new attitudes: a narcissist consumer culture and the discourse of freedom propagated by the sexual revolution. During the 1960s the commercial press (notably weekly picture magazines and daily tabloids) and advertisers, increasingly utilised semi-nude, and later completely nude, bodies as objects of desire to capture new markets. They paved the way in commodifying the naked body, that is, in manufacturing and extending the naked body as a legitimate site of fantasy and pleasure. Commenting on the impact, *Australasian Post* observed: 'the past decade has seen nakedness steadily lose its power to shock. Now nudity is close to being accepted as an everyday happening in the entertainment world and the advertising field. Nudity is becoming ordinary'.⁴²

Public nudity was also a political act. Shedding clothes was as much a political expression in the 1960s as opposition to the Vietnam war. Young adults sought to invert the strictly formal, impersonal and neutral public world and transcribe into it the desires and emotions (hedonism, informality, affection, intimacy) traditionally confined to the private domain.⁴³ Citing the rise of sexually explicit advertisements in the alternative press, David Caute argues that at issue was 'the civil liberty of consenting adults to pursue their own inclinations in full light of day'.⁴⁴ Similarly, medical technology, notably the pill, facilitated the explicit expression of libidinous desire and new attitudes towards the display of the female body. Intended as a population control device for married women in the third world, single women in the west seized the pill for their own sexual liberation. In this sense, revealing sixties fashions such as miniskirts and string bikinis were part of the struggle for sexual equality.

Collectively these conditions eradicated the sin of private nudity. They did not, however, address moralists' concerns with public nudity and especially exposure of genitalia. Film, television and magazine depictions of full nudity were freely available but their consumption still took place in the private domain. If the broad population

accepted maximum exposure of the flesh, this did not extend to public exposure of sexual organs. Covering the genitalia remained a critical symbol of control over wanton desire.

Despite the trend towards briefer bathing costumes, the legacy of christian hostility remained: full nudity in public retained the taint of impropriety. Naturists⁴⁵ formed private clubs but devotees still attracted ridicule and scorn and, not surprisingly, they were 'as secretive about their activities as covens of witches practising primitive rites'.⁴⁶ Emboldened and liberated by the sexual revolution, naturists and hedonists occupied isolated and secluded beaches in the early 1970s. A few enlightened municipalities and state governments, with support from the tabloid press, legalised nudity at specifically designated 'free' beaches.⁴⁷ But the free beach, typically geographically secluded, was also an act of social partition which preserved and perpetuated the taint. Sensationalist reports of voyeurism and sexual deviance in the tabloid press discredited nudists further. Naturists, however, celebrated free beaches when they should have continued the struggle for access to all beaches. They confused winning space with winning legitimacy at a time when mainstream opinion barely tolerated nudity.

While public nudity would have exposed naturists to a disciplinary gaze, surveillance is not purely repressive. A dialectic of surveillance allows the observed to influence the observer. In other words, public surveillance offered nudists an opportunity to modify negative perceptions. Interestingly, some police spokespersons and councillors called for more clothes optional beaches, although they invariably fell silent when asked to nominate specific locations.⁴⁸ No doubt, however, they subconsciously recognised that surveillance is as powerful a disciplinary technique as confinement.

By the mid-1970s several beaches in Sydney were *de facto* nudist haunts including Reef (Balgowlah Heights) and Lady Bay (Watsons Bay) beaches. Although these beaches were hidden from private property, the NSW liberal government said that it had received complaints from local residents and it instructed police to prosecute unclad bathers. Newspaper correspondents ridiculed the police, while 67 per cent of respondents in a national *Age*-Saulwich poll supported designated nude bathing beaches.⁴⁹ The government backtracked and established a special cabinet sub-committee to identify a suitable nude bathing beach. The committee subsequently recommended Reef beach.

Local residents, councillors and church leaders condemned the government. But interestingly, only a handful of opponents claimed that nude bathing was indecent: repetition had fundamentally altered public perceptions of nudity.⁵⁰ However, if Mrs Grundy conceded that nudity was no longer indecent, this did not mean her acceptance. On the contrary, nudity assumed new connotations: nudists now attracted 'evil elements' such as 'voyeurs, exhibitionists and perverts'.⁵¹

Intense local reaction alarmed the government. A fortuitous decision in the district criminal court at the end of summer 1975-76 offered the government relief. Judge Melville upheld the conviction of one of three bathers arrested near Reef Beach the previous summer. He ruled that public nudity would affront the average person's sense of modesty and propriety.⁵² The liberals immediately abandoned their search for a nude beach: the government would not act, premier Eric Willis said, until the 'community as a whole' accepted changes in standards of conduct.⁵³

After Labor won the 1976 NSW state election, new premier Neville Wran criticised the ‘antediluvian troglodytes’ opposed to nude bathing. In October his office announced a six month trial of nude bathing at Reef and Lady Bay beaches.⁵⁴ The local community denounced Wran.⁵⁵ But it seemed to have lost all sense of geographic perspective. Reef Beach is over one kilometre from the nearest house and it lies in a national park surrounded by bush. All the evidence suggests that local critics manipulated and orchestrated their own ‘shock’ at nudity on Reef Beach. As the former chief justice of South Australia once wrote, people ‘have no right to complain about being shocked by something they deliberately seek out’.⁵⁶

Balgowlah moralists formed the Reef Beach action group (RBAG) which claimed that a nudist beach would attract sexual deviants who would molest their children and that nudists would despoil the fragile natural ecosystem.⁵⁷ Both claims were fallacious and the former verged on defamation. At the end of the trial period, Wran cited the absence of criminal and sex offences at the two beaches as evidence of the success of unclad bathing.⁵⁸ An investigation undertaken by Macquarie University, demonstrated that the RBAG had greatly exaggerated the environmental impact of naturism.⁵⁹ The RBAG turned militant. Members confronted naturists on Reef Beach in October 1976.⁶⁰ Throughout summer, clad residents held ‘protest’ picnics at the beach, staged several rallies and meetings and wrote submissions to Manly council. In April 1977, moralists descended on council chambers demanding that Manly councillors lead residents in a sit-in at the premier’s office.⁶¹ Some objectors allegedly scratched the duco and punctured tyres of naturists’ cars, vandalised the toilet, verbally abused visitors, littered walking tracks ‘with a view to accusing Reef sunlovers of despoiling the environment’ and ‘concocted incidents’ of sexual intimidation.⁶² The government dismissed Mrs Grundy’s ranting that nudity had encroached into the public domain. It maintained that Reef Beach was secluded. Nonetheless, it reaffirmed the policy of restricting public nudity to specifically demarcated beaches and threatened nudists with arrest if they strayed.⁶³

Why then did the minority NSW liberal government pass legislation in 1993 which allowed Manly council to reclassify Reef Beach? The liberal party defeated labor at the 1988 election. Before the election, senior liberals reassured naturists and moralists. The leader of the opposition, Nick Greiner promised naturists that a liberal government would not reclassify nude beaches.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the local member David Hay vowed to reclothe Reef Beach.⁶⁵ Once in power Greiner reaffirmed his position: ‘the government considers there is now a general acceptance within the community of nude bathing at appropriately designated beaches’.⁶⁶

Changes in the electoral boundaries determined the liberals final position. In 1988 the electoral commission transferred Balgowlah Heights from Mosman to Manly. Liberal party strategists believed that the new boundary would make Manly a safe liberal seat at the 1991 election. They reasoned that there was no need to intercede in the nude bathing issue because Balgowlah voters would not abandon their traditional ideological and political home over such a minor issue. The strategists were only partly right; moralists in Balgowlah Heights did not desert their ideology but they did redirect their votes to an alternative conservative candidate.

Prior to the May 1991 state election, the RBAG, now the Reef Beach and Gledhill Park progress association (RBGPPA) informed the government that if it did not

immediately prohibit nude bathing, the association would support the independent candidate and anti-nudist campaigner, Manly councillor Peter Macdonald.⁶⁷ The government ignored the ultimatum and MacDonald narrowly won Manly after the redistribution of preferences. He secured 38 per cent of the vote in Balgowlah Heights compared with the 8.5 per cent shared by the labor and democrat candidates. Reef Beach cost the liberals Manly.

Macdonald and several other independents held the balance of power after the 1991 election and he personally lobbied Greiner on the Reef Beach issue. In late 1991 the government appointed a committee, chaired by Brad Hazzard MP, to review nude bathing at Reef and Lady Bay beaches. Reversing his earlier position, Greiner said that Reef Beach was too open.⁶⁸ The Hazzard committee recommended banning unclad bathing at both beaches by giving local councils the power to designate nude bathing beaches.⁶⁹ Hazzard rejected charges of wowsersism: 'I have no problem with people going nude — it's just a matter of where, how, and making sure it's acceptable to the rest of the community!'⁷⁰

Transferring control over nude bathing to local government was the obvious solution. Indeed, this was precisely how Eric Spooner disposed of the topless bathing issue in the 1930s. But to avoid being labelled heavy-handed, the government had to shift the onus without recourse to legislation. After consultations with the crown solicitor, the minister for the environment, Chris Hartcher, informed Manly council that it could still prosecute nudists under ordinance 52. But the council would have to reclassify Reef Beach, allow a suitable transition period, and undertake an education campaign.⁷¹ Hartcher said that the government would contribute financially to the education program and the anticipated costs of prosecuting protesting naturists.⁷² Manly council accused the government of passing the buck but, despite its own legal opinion that 16 years of nudity had effectively nullified ordinance 52, councillors voted to redress Reef Beach. The council set 1 February 1993 as the date from which it would prosecute nudists.⁷³

Democrat MLC Richard Jones led 400 naturists in a protest on Reef Beach in early February 1993. He declared the ban an assault on civil liberties and warned that naturists would fight it in the courts.⁷⁴ Chairman of the pro-naturist free beach association (FBA), Bob Reed, vowed to face prosecution every week: 'It is worth \$40 a week to stand up to Manly council. I am not letting bigotry force me off Reef Beach. This is Australia and not a country for wowsers and bigots. We believe in freedom.'⁷⁵ During the protests Beach Inspectors took 70 names for the purposes of issuing summons. Despite a warning from local magistrate Thomas Cleary that its prosecutions would fail, Manly council proceeded with five test cases. Only one succeeded, after the defendant pleaded guilty.⁷⁶ The court dismissed the other four.

Summing up the cases against Jones and Reed, magistrate Henson said, 'according to my comprehension of the way in which society has ebbed and flowed [over the last 17 years], there has been no change which would lead me to conclude that according to contemporary standards nude bathing or sunbathing at Reef Beach is indecent'.⁷⁷ Unclad bathing at Reef Beach, he asserted, 'has become singularly matter of fact' and he accused Manly councillors of acting capriciously.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Henson reaffirmed that public nudity should be spatially demarcated: 'the contention that nudity is acceptable on any beach is wrong'. He said, 'community

standards demand that some degree of decency be observed on beaches and other locations of like pursuit'.⁷⁹

Macdonald continued lobbying during the court cases and the government finally acceded.⁸⁰ Section 633 of the local government act, 1993 gives councils the right to demarcate clothes optional beaches. Under this section, a person bathing unclad in a public place is guilty of an offence unless that place has been designated a nude bathing area by the responsible council. Premier Fahey described section 633 as a perfect compromise. On the one hand, it reflected the community view 'that it is generally not acceptable for persons to be unclad when they are in public'; on the other, it allows local councils to accommodate a range of styles and tastes.⁸¹ In reality, section 633 gives inordinate power to inherently conservative residents' groups over non-community based interest groups. Tens of thousands of NSW naturists now have no rights simply because their numbers at the local community level deny them an effective voice.⁸² Manly council invited precincts to propose nude bathing beaches within their boundaries but, as expected, there were no nominations. The council informed the FBA that, after consulting local communities, it had decided that there would be no nude bathing beaches in the municipality.⁸³ Other seaside councils followed suit over the following months and by early 1994 no legal clothes optional beach remained in areas under local government control in NSW.⁸⁴ The powerful historical taint of nudity as undisciplined desire had defeated naturists.

The public presentation of the body has changed dramatically this century; the revealed body is now normal. Why then does resistance to total nudity persist? Despite the sexual revolution, despite Madonna and Mapplethorpe, despite the unreality of the notion that nakedness depraves and corrupts, there remains in the general population a sense of uncomfortableness, embarrassment and shame about public nudity, especially exposure of the genitals.⁸⁵ Culturally, these feelings are remnants of ascetic christian traditions. But as Joseph Schumpeter reminds us, 'attitude is a coin that does not readily melt — once formed it may persist, possibly for centuries'.⁸⁶ Within this tradition total nudity still conjures images of debauched, chaotic and irrational behaviour and undisciplined pleasure. If contemporary society no longer rejects nudism *per se*, it remains confined to the private domain and has no place in the formal, impersonal and neutral public world.

Local communities are the bastions of traditional mores and values; it is no coincidence that they have been the principal site of struggle over the revealed body. By definition local communities consist of a narrow range of tolerances. The NSW liberal government and independent Peter Macdonald claimed that section 633 provides for social diversity in style and taste. But local communities resist acts which undermine their beliefs about 'correct' behaviour. In the case of Reef Beach, Balgowlah Heights residents opposed what they deemed the encroachment into public space of behaviour appropriate only in the private domain.

Liberal MP Brad Hazzard cited the history of daylight bathing and the evolution of briefer bathing costumes as evidence of the willingness of local communities to adopt new tastes and styles.⁸⁷ However, he overlooks three critical issues. First, rational scientific discourse about the health giving and disciplinary benefits of exposure to sun and sea, helped assuage moralists' concerns about daylight bathing. Second, briefer bathing costumes were a logical conclusion of that scientific discourse

and consumer culture. Third, if contemporary bathing costumes encourage maximum exposure of flesh they nonetheless symbolise control over wanton desire. In short, the modern revealed body is rational and disciplined; nudism is irrational and undisciplined.

The naturist movement has failed to transcend the powerful symbolism of clothing — irrespective of brevity. Paradoxically, free beaches in the 1970s contributed to this situation. While they signified new tolerances, unclad beaches effectively confined nudists to the geographic and social margins and thereby preserved the taint. Naturists will remain marginalised until they articulate and disseminate the virtues of nudism — the strict mastery of desire, care of self, companionship and friendship.⁸⁸ Ironically, these are the foundations of a good society. Here naturists can learn from Mrs Grundy: if section 633 was a victory for prudery it also highlights the importance of prudence.

Finally, while the redressing of bathing bodies illustrates the historical struggle between pleasure and discipline, it also offers a profound comment on political and social tolerance. Australians oppose public nudity but this does not mean that they support Mrs Grundy. Rather, they tend to tolerate her because she seems inoffensive and harmless. Mrs Grundy is neither. An interesting parallel emerges here between the arguments adopted by Australian moralists and those used by white South African racists in the 1980s to keep their country's beaches racially segregated. Just as white racists portrayed revealed black bodies as threatening the social order,⁸⁹ so moralists paint naturists as sexual deviants, even paedophiles.⁹⁰ Felicity Pulman, a spokesperson for the RBGPPA describes Reef Beach as 'a homosexual beach' with 'all sorts of perverts hanging around'.⁹¹ 'It is outrageous', she feels, 'that a small, primarily homosexual, minority group should have rights in our area'.⁹² The fact that a government which calls itself liberal accommodated such fanaticism and dogmatism exemplifies the real dangers of tolerating the 'harmless' and of confusing harmlessness with ineffectiveness.

Endnotes

- 1 Letter, Balgowlah resident (name withheld) to Peter Macdonald State MP, 3 December 1991.
- 2 B. Turner, *The Body and Society*, Oxford, 1984, p. 157.
- 3 G.R. Scott, *The Story of Baths and Bathing*, London, 1939.
- 4 V. Raseja, *A decent and Proper Exertion*, Sydney, 1992, p. 34.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 6 In 1833, Act 4 William IV, no. 7 prohibited bathing in Sydney Cove and Darling Harbour between 6 am and 8 pm (para.21). In 1838, Act 2 Victoria II, no. 2 extended the ban to all places in public view (para. 21).
- 7 Manly Pound Keeper's Book, 14 May 1889, Manly Municipal Library.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 27 April 1891.
- 9 C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, New York, 1978, p. 49.
- 10 According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, Mrs Grundy represents the tyranny of social opinion in matters of conventional propriety. The original Mrs Grundy was the neighbour in Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plough* (1798). (P. Fryer, *Mrs Grundy: Studies in English Prudery*, London, 1963.) C.J. Dennis defined a wowser as 'an ineffably pious person who mistakes the world for a penitentiary and himself for a warder'. (M. Clarke, *Nudism in Australia*, Geelong, 1982, p. 184.) Freud called moralists 'agents of disgust'. P. Stallybrass, A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London, 1986, p. 188.)

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- 11 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 June 1902.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 2 June 1902. At Federation the NSW government inscribed existing bans on bathing into section 77 of the Police Offences Act no. 5.
- 13 Letter, Inspector-General Fosbery to Chief Secretary, 14 November 1902. Legislative Assembly, Tabled Paper 1902/884, NSW Parliamentary Archives.
- 14 *Evening News*, 12 October 1907.
- 15 *Australian Star*, 14 October 1907.
- 16 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February 1907.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 12 February 1907.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 1 February 1907.
- 19 *Evening News*, 14 October 1907.
- 20 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January 1907.
- 21 *Evening News*, 14 October 1907.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 21 October 1907; *Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 1907; *NSW Government Gazette*, Ordinance no. 52, 14 May 1908.
- 23 Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-2.
- 24 J. Rickard, 'For God's Sake Keep Us Entertained', in B. Gammage, P. Spearritt (eds.), *Australians 1938*, Sydney, 1987, p. 348.
- 25 Muscular torso and limbs, small waist and broad shoulders for males and less pronounced musculature but well-built and well-proportioned frame, with a more rounded contoured shape, for females.
- 26 John Hargreaves, 'The Body, Sport and Power Relations', in J. Horne, D. Jary, A. Tomlinson (eds.), *Sport, Leisure and Social Relations*, London, 1987, pp. 151-2.
- 27 J. Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History*, London, 1988, p. 195.
- 28 *Sunday Times*, 22 February 1920.
- 29 *Daily Telegraph*, 20 January 1917; *Evening News*, 25 January 1926.
- 30 *Daily Guardian*, 6 November 1929.
- 31 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 October 1934; *Sun*, 13 December 1934.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 13 November 1936.
- 33 *Daily Telegraph*, 26 November 1936; *Sun*, 27 November 1936.
- 34 Emphasis added. Editorial, *Surf in Australia*, 1 January 1937, p. 1.
- 35 24 January 1938. Reproduced in, Gammage, Spearritt, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
- 36 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1945.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 21 September 1945; *Sunday Sun*, 23 September 1945.
- 38 *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1946.
- 39 P. Burger, *Theory of the Avante-Garde*, Manchester, 1984, p. 81.
- 40 John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Brian Roberts, 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class', in S. Hall and T. Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals*, London, 1976, p. 67.
- 41 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November 1978; *Sunday Telegraph*, 23 September 1979; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 1979.
- 42 Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
- 43 Clarke et al, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
- 44 D. Caute, *Sixty-eight: The Year of Barricades*, London, 1988, p. 48.
- 45 This article interchanges the terms naturist and nudist although considerable debate exists within the movement about the ideological and political appropriateness of the latter. (Bernard Mentink, 'Nudist or Naturist', *Sun and Health*, no. 44, 1993, p. 27; Fryer, *op. cit.*, p. 313, fn.34.)
- 46 Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 170, pp. 104-5 and p. 168.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90 and pp. 217-18.
- 48 *Sun-Herald*, 30 April 1978; *Daily Telegraph*, 1 May 1978.
- 49 *Age*, 10 May 1978.
- 50 *Manly Daily*, 16 January 1976.
- 51 *Sunday Mirror*, 11 January 1976; *Manly Daily*, 14 January 1976.
- 52 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1976.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 20 March 1976.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 20 October 1976.
- 55 *Daily Mirror*, 28 October 1976; *Manly Daily*, 21 October 1976.

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- 56 J. Bray, 'The Juristic Basis of the Law Relating to Offences Against Public Morality and Decency', *Australian Law Journal*, vol. 46, 1972, p. 108.
- 57 RBAG, undated letter to Balgowlah residents; *Sunday Mirror*, 11 January 1976; *Manly Daily*, 13 October 1976; *Manly Daily*, 20 October 1976. Claims about the environmental impact appeared in two superficial consultants' reports prepared for RBAG. Bruce MacKenzie, Reef Beach, November 1976, unpublished; Joan Bradley, 'Reef Beach', *National Parks Journal*, March 1977.
- 58 *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 1977. Police statistics record only 14 incidents of offensive conduct in the area around Reef Beach between October 1976 and mid-1992. This represents less than one per year and is probably no higher than for most clad beaches. (Letter, Terry Griffiths [Minister for Police] to Peter Macdonald MP, 20 October 1992.)
- 59 A. Correy, 'Dobroyd Head Environment: A Study of the Impact of People on Part of the Sydney Harbour National Park', Diploma in Environment Studies, Macquarie University, 1977, pp. 35-7; *Manly Daily*, 13 August 1977.
- 60 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 November 1976; *Manly Daily*, 2 November 1976.
- 61 *Manly Daily*, 21 April 1977.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 29 March 1977; Letter, former Balgowlah resident (name withheld) to Peter Macdonald MP, 21 October 1991; Magdelline Lloyd, 'Nude beaches: The facts', unauthorised question and answer sheet, October 1992.
- 63 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 1981.
- 64 Letter, Nick Greiner to A.L. Wheaton (Manly resident), 6 October 1987.
- 65 Letter, David Hay to Mr and Mrs Scott (Balgowlah residents), 10 March 1987; RBGPPA, Newsletter, 9 June 1989.
- 66 Letter, Nick Greiner to G. Gilbert (Balgowlah Heights resident), 26 April 1989.
- 67 Letter, RBGPPA to David Hay, 16 April 1991. Macdonald's wilful fabrications and omissions, exacerbated the conflict. For example, he claimed that Reef Beach 'draws busloads of voyeurs'. (*Northern Herald*, supplement to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 November 1991.) He also failed to release police statistics, gathered at his request, which showed that Reef Beach is essentially crime free. (See footnote 59.)
- 68 Office of the Premier Press Release, 26 September 1991.
- 69 *New South Wales Cabinet*, Report of the Working Committee to Enquire into Nude Bathing at Lady Jane and Reef Beaches, 1992.
- 70 *Northern Herald*, supplement to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December 1991.
- 71 Letter, Minister for the Environment to Mayor of Manly, 15 October 1992.
- 72 The government contributed \$91,000 in 1993. (*NSW Parliamentary Debates*, 1990, Legislative Assembly, p. 2303.)
- 73 Manly Municipal Council, Mayor's supplementary minute to the minutes of the ordinary meeting, 20 October 1992.
- 74 *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 February 1993; *Manly Daily*, 9 February 1993.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 12 February 1993.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 21 April 1993.
- 77 The Council charged the pair under Clauses 4 (a) and 5 respectively. Clause 4 (a) states that 'a person ... bathing in any waters exposed to public view shall, in order to secure the observance of decency, be properly and adequately clad'. Clause 5 says that 'a person shall not ... undress ... in any place open to public view'. Charges against the others were brought under Clause 4 (c) which concerned the suitability of costumes and did not extend to naked bathers. The successful prosecution was brought under Clause 5.
- 78 Magistrate Henson's summation, Manly Magistrate's Court, 24 May 1993, p. 5.
- 79 Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 80 The government allegedly introduced Section 633 after Macdonald agreed to support its proposal to privatise Port Macquarie hospital.
- 81 Letter, John Fahey to John Marsden (President, NSW Council for Civil Liberties), 7 October 1993.
- 82 Clarke estimates that naturists comprise just under one per cent of the population. Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
- 83 Letter, Manly Council to FBA, 23 November 1993.

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- 84 Several rural shires, including Bega, Byron Bay, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and Port Stephens subsequently designated nude beaches. Woollahra has legalised nude bathing at Lady Bay. Mosman Council is considering setting aside at least one beach in the Sydney Harbour National Park for naturists. (*Mosman Daily*, 29 June 1995.)
- 85 Madonna's book *Sex* (1992) contained a collection of erotic photographs of the popular singer, while American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's black and white homoerotic and sadomasochistic images have been widely exhibited and published in several books.
- 86 Cited in R. Milib and, *The State in Capitalist Society*, London, 1973, p. 9.
- 87 Personal interview, 26 November 1993.
- 88 Clarke, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-4; Fryer *op. cit.*, pp. 205-7.
- 89 Douglas Booth and Dennis Mbona, 'Leisure Relations on the Beach', *Indicator South Africa*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1988, pp. 39-42.
- 90 J.G. Schubert, *Northern Beaches Weekender*, 23 June 1995.
- 91 *Northern Herald*, supplement to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December 1991.
- 92 Letter, Felicity Pulman to Nick Greiner, 3 October 1991. Similarly, Michael Pulman condemned the Greiner government for sanctioning a policy which allowed 'open-air playgrounds' for 'sexually active homosexuals'. (Letter, Michael Pulman to Nick Greiner, 13 December 1991.)